if

WORLDS OF
SCIENCE FICTION

IN THIS ISSUE

The Most Original Story of the Year!

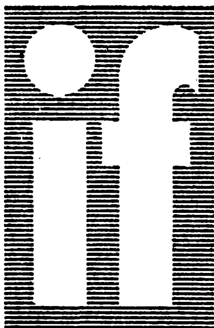
A QUESTION OF IDENTITY

by Frank Riley

THE SECOND WORLD OF IF

HERE ARE nine great novelettes from the first six years of IF Magazine! Like *The First World of IF*, which received such enthusiastic response from science fiction readers all over America, this is a volume of exceptional interest—distinguished examples of fine science fiction writing by outstanding writers. Stories that answer the age old question: "What would happen if—?" Stories that call into play philosophy, logic, facts and imagination to provide a diversity of entertainment that will appeal to all science fiction lovers, from astronomers to zoo keepers. Here you will find such authors as Charles Beaumont, James Blish, Phillip K. Dick, Gordon Dickson, Charles L. Fontenay, James E. Gunn, Raymond F. Jones, Bryce Walton and Robert F. Young in an exciting variety of mood, idea, theme and pace.

All newsstands—50 cents



WORLDS OF

SCIENCE FICTION

APRIL 1958

All Stories New and Complete

Editor: JAMES L. QUINN

Assist. Editor: EVE WULFF

NOVELETTES

POWDER KEG by James E. Gunn 4

A QUESTION OF IDENTITY by Frank Riley 38

SHORT STORIES

HOMECOMING by Miguel Hidalgo 59

CONSERVATION by Charles L. Fontenay 66

PASSPORT TO SIRIUS by Robert Silverberg 80

THE RAIDER by Don Berry 91

THE BUREAUCRAT by A. Bertram Chandler 104

FEATURES

EDITOR'S REPORT 2

HUE AND CRY 118

COVER

A Scene from "Powder Keg" by Ed Emsh

IF is published bi-monthly by Quinn Publishing Co., Inc. Vol. 8, No. 3.
Copyright 1958 by Quinn Publishing Co., Inc.
Office of publication 8 Lord Street, Buffalo, N.Y. Entered as Second Class Matter at Post Office, Buffalo, N.Y. Subscription $3.50 for 12 issues in U.S. and Possessions; Canada $4 for 12 issues; elsewhere $4.50.
All stories are fiction; any similarity to actual persons is coincidental. Not responsible for unsolicited artwork or manuscripts.
35c a copy. Printed in U.S.A.

EDITORIAL AND BUSINESS OFFICES, KINGSTON, NEW YORK

Next (June) issue on sale April 12th

Editor's REPORT

One of the most fascinating sciences in this super-modern world of today is still the study of human behavior: How will a man act at a crucial moment under a given pattern of circumstances? Will he follow the dictates of custom, a lifelong creed of family love and loyalty, a mold of heredity and environment? Is the law of survival predominant against any situation, no matter who or what is involved?

Just such a situation is posed in *Homecoming,* a taut, tense short story about a returning war veteran, with a truly "shock" ending. It's a story that might have come from one of America's more mature and experienced writers. Our assumption at first was that it did. But we were wrong. It's a "first published" story (in America) by a young man named Miguel Hidalgo who is all of 15 years old. At first we didn't believe it, but it was confirmed and we found ourselves with not only a "first" but one that was written by the youngest writer (to our knowledge) ever to break into science fiction.

Miguel Hidalgo is a story himself. Of Spanish ancestry, he is a descendant of Simon Bolivar and was named for the Mexican liberator, Miguel Hidalgo. Born in Caracas, Venezuela, Miguel came to the United States, in a basket, at the age of two months. He began writing poetry at the age of five and before he was ten he had published numerous short stories as well as poetry. Miguel has traveled the world over with his mother, who was one of the first women diplomats from Venezuela to the United States. A trained athlete and judo expert, he is now a senior at Lawrenceville School, preparing to enter Princeton next year in his quest for a degree in engineering.

Miguel is "thrilled" about the publication of *Homecoming* in IF —his first U. S. sale. Well, we were kind of excited ourselves; it isn't often a science fiction magazine gets a story that shows such stature from a world traveler of only 15 years!

Another "first" for IF is Frank Riley's exciting and suspenseful story *A Question of Identity.* The theme is something completely new to science fiction—one that dramatically pits a miracle of medical surgery against a court of justice. In reading the story you will find that *you* are the jury. It gets my vote as the most original science fiction story of 1958, and I'd certainly like to hear from you about your reaction . . . Incidentally, Frank has left his job as a radio-TV writer and executive and is now devoting full time to writing. And it was

good news indeed when he promised IF further stories, for he is not only a fine craftsman; he also puts unusual effort and patience into research work. *A Question of Identity* is such an example of fine writing backed up by careful medical and legal research.

Satellite news is still hot news, with more and more of the little moons being shot into their orbits—a prelude to space exploration, with perhaps the first manned satellite or satellite station a reality in our lifetime. All of which makes Jimmy Gunn's long novelette, *Powder Keg,* such a timely story. Here is a thrilling story of adventure, action and character study—one of the best by one of science fiction's best known writers . . . Emsh did the cover for *Powder Keg* and he came up with a beauty . . . Ed, by the way, started drawing when he was in the first grade and, with time out for WW II, took all the art courses he could, continuing at the University of Michigan, from which he graduated in 1949 with a major in art. After graduation he got married, went to Paris for a year's study and, when he returned, in 1951, started illustrating science fiction. Ed's wife, Carol, writes science fiction. They have two daughters who share their home movie hobby—16 mm fantasy films.

Aluminum in omne colores del iride va esser usate in le ornamentos del automobiles de 1958. Le coloration del metallo es permanente. Illo es effectuate per un processo de anodisation que aperi le poros e permitte le penetration del pigmento . . . You can see we're on an Interlingua "kick", but this new scientific language has such possibilities and is so easy to learn that we feel the search for a truly international language has finally borne fruit. If you're interested in Interlingua, drop us a note . . . The gals in science fiction circles are supposed to be few and far between. All we can say is "it don't look like it." According to our survey, the ladies form a goodly part of science fiction fandom. An example of how they feel about it can be found in "Hue and Cry"—all the letters but one are from the distaff side . . . Note to authors who would like to turn out more wordage: A new I. B. M. "gadget" has a transistorized tape with an input-output rate fast enough to read or write a full-length novel in 15 seconds! For just $35,000 a month in rental or a purchase price of $1,925,000 it's yours! . . . Got a "birthday" greeting (at least that's when it arrived) from Charles Fontenay (*Conservation,* in this issue) in the form of a painting of a Martian scene. For the sands of Mars he mixed Earth sand with his oils and got a really unusual effect! The more you look at it, the more it grows on you.

By the way, this is the second issue in which IF has been using a different kind of type for the logo panel on the cover and on the contents page. Have you noticed it? Do you think it says "IF" better than before? I'd like to know what you readers think. —jlq

BY JAMES E. GUNN

The crew on the Little Wheel had committed just about every offense in the book; and it was Phillips' duty to find out whether they were led by a patriot or a madman . . . .

POWDER KEG

PHILLIPS DID not like this room. Another man would have shrugged and let it pass, but Phillips, entirely aside from his profession, could not rest until the intuitive response had been isolated and analyzed.

Besides, he had been neutral, at least, when he had been here once before, when another man sat behind the broad, polished walnut desk.

It was a big room, even in comparison with rooms above. Here in the sub-Pentagon, it was gigantic, fully thirty feet long and twenty feet wide.

The three doors, one leading to the anterooms

Illustrated by Ed Emsh

through which he had been ushered quickly, the others in the side walls to Communications and to Plot, were imitation walnut—a good imitation which could be detected only by looking at the deep glow of the polished desk. Phillips had the feeling that if he touched it his fingers would sink in up to the first joint. The doors were two-inch armor plate.

The floor was covered from wall to wall by a deep-pile seamless gray carpet. Phillips' shoes had made no sound as he walked across it and stood at attention in front of the desk. The only noise in the room was the muffled whisper of the air-conditioning as it blew fresh, chilled air through ceiling ducts.

Phillips wondered if the General had forgotten he was here. Haven Ashley was sitting with his back to the desk—and to Phillips who was sitting beside it. He seemed to be studying the mosaic on the rear wall of his office, the only decorative touch in the room. The other walls were plain battleship gray.

The mosaic was an authentic art piece. It had been constructed from minute slivers of colored glass, each glued painstakingly into position to form a faithful reproduction of the appearance of Earth from 1,000 miles up. The continents were dull browns and yellows and greens overcast by a faint blue; the oceans were grayish-blue, almost black.

The mosaic was flat, but it gave the illusion of being a perfect half-sphere. Down here it was always night, but when the sun sank beyond the Potomac for the surface dwellers above, the disk darkened in Ashley's office and became spotted with the reddish patches that were cities and the single stars that were brighter concentrations of light. And in the velvet dark around the planet real stars came out, unwinking brilliants obscured until then by the glow of the daylit Earth.

There were no satellites in the sky. The scale was too small for the 24-hour orbit of the Big Wheel and too large for the Little Wheel to be more than a speck. In any case, the Little Wheel would not have appeared; that was where the artist had stood.

The mosaic was strategically placed. To Phillips, as he had entered through the front wall door, it had looked like a halo around the head of General Haven Ashley. Ashley made the most of it. He was no angel.

Phillips studied the back of the General's head for the third time. Ashley was not a tall man, but he was big. He filled out the padded desk chair from armrest to armrest, his massive thighs bulging the trouser legs of the Air Force gray uniform, his barrel chest straining the gilt buttons of the jacket.

But these were things that Phillips had observed as he entered. All he could see now was the stiff, stubborn set of the shoulders, the red neck creased with a roll of fat, the gray hair brushed firmly into place against its natural tendency to bristle, and he thought: *What's wrong with the room? It's identical with the room when Pickrell was here, even to the stainless steel model of a three-stage shuttle that*

stood on the desk as a paperweight. A little neater, perhaps, but I have no fetish for that.

He had an incipient tendency toward claustrophobia. Perhaps it was that. He could feel the weight of five hundred feet of reinforced concrete pressing down upon his shoulders and his chest. Even the air seemed stale, although he knew it was purer than he could breathe on the streets of Washington.

Perhaps it was the uncertainty of why Ashley had called him here. This was no courtesy call, as the other had been. This was business, and, for some reason, Ashley couldn't talk about it.

The General hadn't called to his office an obscure Air Force psychologist to discuss the psychologist's opinion of the Air Force. Nor had he summoned help for his neuroses; for Ashley that was impossible.

It had to be the job.

Ashley had inherited it six months ago. On his shoulders, like a modern Atlas, rested the sky. If he weakened, if he stumbled, the sky would fall, and humanity would be obliterated.

Or perhaps, Phillips thought, it was the uncertainty of the world situation itself, which had worsened, certainly, in recent months.

As Phillips leaned over the desk to stab out his cigarette in the spotless ash tray, Ashley swiveled in his chair, smacked the desk with the flat of his hand, and said violently, "Intolerable!"

Phillips froze, his hand poised above the tray, the cigarette burning close to his fingers.

"Not you, Captain," Ashley growled. "Put that thing out. You'll have to give up smoking anyway."

Phillips stabbed twice and leaned back tensely. "Yes, sir?" *What did he mean by that?*

Ashley scowled at the shiny paperweight. "What do you know about the world situation? Never mind; I'll tell you in one word: desperate. It's been desperate for forty years, but now it's worse. Every puny little nation has a stockpile of atomic and hydrogen weapons; every last one of them is ready to blow your head off if you speak to them without the respect they think is their due."

"We're sitting on a powder keg," Phillips said boldly, "and everybody has a fuse in one hand and a piece of smoldering punk in the other. If one of us goes, we all go. You'd think they'd decide, eventually, to stamp out the punk and tear out the fuses."

Ashley's bushy red eyebrows drew closer together, deepening the creases between them, and he asked sourly, "And how can you be sure everyone does it at the same time? Idealists! The last nation with a lighted match is the master of the world."

Phillips said slowly, "I thought that was the function of the Little Wheel—to keep everyone honest."

Ashley said gloomily, "It's an edge. But what good is an edge in a situation like this? It's like having a machine gun when the other guy's got a .45. If the shooting starts, you're just as dead."

"What about the satellite's in-

spection facilities? Each two hours every spot on Earth comes within view."

"That! How do you see under the ground? You don't. And that's where the factories and IBM pits are now."

"Then there's espionage—"

"And we're right back where we started twenty-five years ago." Ashley was solid and impassive in his chair, but his eyes brooded over the rocket-shaped ornament. "Have you ever been up there? Or *out there*, as the space nuts say."

"Yes, sir. Training cruises, and a weekend on the Big Wheel."

"The Little Wheel."

"No, sir."

"No. They won't let you up there. They won't let any psychologist up there." Ashley's voice dropped to a monotone, and he stared at the front door blindly. "When I took over command of the Air Force, I inherited a standing order that no psychologist would be allowed inside the Little Wheel. Why, Captain?" His voice grew stronger as he went on without waiting for an answer. "They were afraid of what a psychologist would find. They're afraid he'd break up their playhouse.

"Pickrell tried to get me to go along with his little game. 'The witch doctors had their shot at my men in the Academy,' he would say. 'I won't have them messing around with my men on the job.' Well, I'm in command now, and I'm running things my way."

Phillips said reassuringly, "There's no doubt that the men out there are stable."

"Stable *how?*" Ashley demanded fiercely. "As spaceman, maybe. But are they stable as executioners? They've got their finger on the trigger up there, man, and there's no one to tell them when to shoot except a lunatic. Don't interrupt me! We're in communication, sure —for twenty minutes every two hours. And radio can be jammed. If that's too obvious, an enemy can wait for sunspots. That fouls everything up but good! And astronomers have no nationality.

"Men have been up there for twenty years with their trigger fingers crooked. Not sensible men, Captain, not men trained in responsibility and careful decisions, but men who must be more than a little cracked in the first place to go up there and stay." There was an indefinable note of horror in Ashley's deep voice. "Why there's a man up there who hasn't been back for twelve years—who hasn't set foot on Earth since he went up! And he's in command up there!

"How stable is a man, Captain, who replies to an order from his superior officer: *In my opinion this is impractical* or *We respectfully suggest that you consider possible alternatives?*

"That's all, Captain. Pick up your orders as you go out. You will make a thorough survey of the psychological situation in the Little Wheel and report back when it is completed. When you come back, you will have an answer to this question: Is every man up there competent to exercise mature, unerring judgment in cases involving the welfare of the entire Earth; is

every man up there incapable of cracking under the constant strain of sitting on a powder keg?

"Oh, yes. Another thing. They're building something up there behind the Wheel where we can't see it. I want to know what it is."

Phillips looked at the General's hands. The rocket model was between them, and beneath the red hairs the hands were white with strain. The paperweight snapped. The sound was startling in the silence. Ashley looked down at his hands, surprised, and then contemptuously tossed the pieces away.

"Yes, sir," Phillips said, thinking about the question he would have to answer when his job was done. There was only one possible answer: no. There was no group of men anywhere uniformly competent to exercise mature, unerring judgment, no man who would not crack under the stress of responsibility, if the responsibility were great enough.

He could give Ashley his answer now, but that wasn't what the General wanted. He wanted the odor of legality; he wanted evidence to present to the Secretary of Defense or the President or Congress.

He was determined to break the Little Wheel just as he had broken the rocket model on his desk.

"What kind of a man is the commander of the Little Wheel?" Phillips asked curiously.

Ashley stared at him, his eyes large and angry. "I told you. He's a madman. He's utterly insane."

Phillips took his courage in his hands and said, "Why don't you order him in?"

Ashley hesitated for a moment and then said in a voice that was almost inaudible, "What if he refused to come?"

CAPTAIN LLOYD PHILLIPS, M.D., U.S.A.F., sat in the leather-and-tile waiting room of the vast concrete spaceport at Cocoa, Florida, and watched *Swan Lake* on the wide, flat television screen against the far wall. The performance was impossibly graceful, unimaginably beautiful; never had human dancers looked so much like swans as they made long, flowing swoops through air that seemed as buoyant as a crystalline pool.

The program was coming from the Big Wheel, poised eternally in its 22,000 mile orbit above the United States. The performance was taking place in a low-gravity studio of the fabulous Telecity not far from the commercial satellite, and reception was flawless.

This was something Phillips could appreciate, something that the conquest of space had given him that repaid, in part, the sacrifices in human life and labor and agony and Earth's resources that could have been expended more profitably and more realistically.

Phillips had nothing against spaceflight or the Big Wheel or the Little Wheel, either. He was intensely interested in them—as psychological phenomena. They had brought him into the Air Force, and they had kept him there.

He wanted an answer to his own question: *why?*

Why did men join the Air Force's Space Corps? What drove them into a brutal, alien environment where the best they could expect was hardship and a sterile life shortened by the physical damage of bad food, poisoned air, and the destruction of heavy primaries, the cumulative toll of acceleration pressures, and a fifty percent certainty of insanity or violent death?

And why did a race expend its substance on a grand but futile gesture?

Spaceflight was impractical; that was certain. It could never return half the investment of thought, sweat, blood, and money put into it.

One day there would be a thick, scholarly book with Phillips' name on it. Perhaps he would call it: *Those Who Went Out,* subtitled, "The Psychological Factors Involved in the Career Decisions of Space Corps Volunteers, with case histories."

Or maybe: *The Influence of the Broken Home on Twenty Space Corps Volunteers . . .*

Or, more simply: *Spaceman—A Study of the Space Corps . . .*

After that would come the sociological treatise: *Why Space?—A Consideration of the Sociological Necessities Behind the Development of Spaceflight.*

Phillips looked around the big waiting room. It was bare and almost antiseptically clean. He was alone except for a second lieutenant asleep in a far corner, his space helmet tilted forward to shade his eyes.

Phillips looked back at the human swans on the screen, but there were more urgent and immediate demands on his thoughts—for instance General Haven Ashley.

His orders had included only twenty-four hours delay, but he had put them to good use. There was no one to say good-by to: his mother had died many years ago, his father wouldn't give a damn, and he had played the field too carefully for any girl to wonder why he didn't call. In a locked compartment of Phillips' blue, nylon spacepack were the results of his 24-hours' work: microfilms of the service and medical records of the Little Wheel's entire personnel, from a newcomer of five months to an incredible veteran of twelve years, a Colonel Danton whom General Ashley had insisted was "utterly insane."

Phillips had gone over them several times during the continually delayed take-off of the shuttle, but a thorough analysis would have to wait until he had met each man individually and could correlate his observations with the impersonal details recorded in the emulsions. He did not want to prejudge anyone.

It was a trait of conscientiousness that was a little annoying under the circumstances. The situation had been prejudged for him. But it was the way he worked, and he would have to endure it again, as he had suffered with it before.

Phillips had used his orders as authority to dig into a more private file, that of Ashley himself. He knew more about Ashley now than Ashley knew about himself. He

would have liked confirmation, absolute certainty; a Rorschach blob test would have provided that. But he was as likely to get that from Ashley as Danton was to get a promotion, and he had enough. He knew why Ashley wanted to destroy the Little Wheel, had to destroy it. He had the key, a small notation on Ashley's service record: *Disqualified for space duty, spacesickness.*

Ashley was one of that small minority of men who can not go weightless without complete sensory disorientation and a violent, unrelenting nausea.

A lesser man would not have cared; a greater man would have forgiven himself. But Ashley could do neither. He had sublimated it, and the defeat had become a driving ambition that had carried him to the top of the Air Force through an incommensurable amount of unrelenting labor, constant politicking, and plain backstabbing.

He had seen space heroes promoted over his head, and he had waited and worked and plotted through the commands of such space pioneers as Beauregard Finch and the recently invalided Frank Pickrell, through an era when spacemen could do no wrong.

And he had clawed his way to the top.

There were published articles in Ashley's file subtly emphasizing the necessity of civilian control and of a balanced attack upon the military problem of defense against aggression.

Phillips could hear Ashley's voice growling through such phrases as "the tail wagging the dog" and "promotion policies should be influenced by considerations of all-around executive ability rather than spectacular and essentially meaningless feats of personal courage or mere physical agility. The balanced man with his feet planted firmly on the ground and his primary concern for the welfare of all the people must take precedence over visionaries and impractical idealists."

Ashley would be the first to deny that he harbored any hatred for the Space Corps of his command, and he would be telling the truth. But his subconscious mind had decided long ago that spaceflight was worthless. It was equated with a terrible experience of physical and psychic distress; imprinted on an inaccessible area of Ashley's mind was the article of faith: *Men are Earth creatures.*

The combination of genes that had determined Ashley's inability to tolerate no-gravity had doomed the Little Wheel, and perhaps the whole future of spaceflight, almost fifty years ago. Chance. Just as it had been chance that the first man into space had been unable to return, and his plight, capturing the world's sympathy, had fueled the great psychological surge that had put the Little Wheel into space.

To recognize the subconscious factors behind Ashley's decision, however, was not to invalidate the decision itself. There are subconscious factors behind every decision. Ashley might be correct in spite of his prejudice. Phillips thought it very probably that Ashley was right.

But it rankled a little that he

was going on a fool's errand. No answer he brought back—except an outright and unacceptable lie—could save the Little Wheel. Still, to Ashley and the world the trip was essential.

The Little Wheel was going to die and spaceflight was going to die, but they had to die for a very good reason and with all due rites and ceremonies or they wouldn't stay dead.

"I beg your pardon, sir," the voice repeated.

Phillips looked up, his thoughts shattered into shards that could never be quite pieced together again. A second lieutenant in the Space Corps stood respectfully in front of him, his blue space helmet dangling from one hand. Phillips glanced quickly at the far corner of the room, but it was empty, and looked back at the lieutenant.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the lieutenant for the third time, "but I was wondering—you don't seem to be watching the screen"—he motioned boyishly toward the far wall—"if you'd mind if I switched channels."

He was a young man—slim, tall, broad-shouldered, and blond, his hair trimmed almost scalp short in the latest spacecut and he wore the most delightfully engaging grin. The kind of young man, in fact, for whom a uniform did the most and who did the most for a uniform. His face had sunburned and peeled and sunburned and peeled again until it was a light tan, but he would never develop any real immunity to ultraviolet. His blue eyes looked directly at Phillips without wavering. He was a completely normal young man, a Space Corps recruiting poster come to life, and Phillips' irritation collapsed.

"Go right ahead," Phillips said.

In a moment the swans gave way to an amazing exhibition of acrobatics in zero gravity, but the young lieutenant, after he had returned and taken a pneumatic, leather chair next to Phillips, gave the performance none of his attention. He turned immediately to the psychologist and said eagerly, "Are you going out, sir?"

"Yes."

"Your first?"

Phillips smiled involuntarily. "To the Little Wheel."

"Then you have an experience in store."

"I expect you're right." Phillips smile broadened.

"We'll be going out together," the boy said with great enthusiasm.

"Fine." Phillips grinned.

The lieutenant looked sheepish. "I beg your pardon, sir. I talk too much, don't I? It's just that I'm returning from a short leave, and I can't wait to get back. My name is Grant. Jack Grant."

Grant, Phillips thought. *Both parents living, happily married. Normally affectionate family relationship. Older brother a solar power engineer. Younger sister in high school. Normal adolescent sexual experiences. Six months service outside. Well-adjusted personality for his age when he left the Academy.*

Phillips frowned. He didn't fit into the pattern at all. *Why had*

he gone out? "Lloyd Phillips," he said.

Grant went on chattering unabashed, telling Phillips about the Academy, about the Wheel, about his recent leave and the girl he had met and what they had done—stopping just short of the fine line between gentleman and jerk. His appetite for experience and his unquenchable good humor were infectious. He reminded Phillips of a playful puppy, bounding violently, his stub of a tail shaking his body all over with its gyrations. Phillips thawed once more in spite of himself and gave the boy a verbal pat on the head occasionally.

"What kind of man is Colonel Danton?" Phillips asked casually.

Grant's smile faded. He looked serious for a moment and said, "A very good officer, sir. A brilliant commander, completely loyal to his men and gets their loyalty in return. Dedicated, sir. Works harder than anyone."

Phillips smiled encouragingly. "You can speak frankly, Jack. I'll tell you something. Can you keep it under your hat?" He went on in a confidential murmur without waiting for an answer. "I'm a psychologist assigned to the Little Wheel. One of my jobs is to determine whether Danton is emotionally qualified for a position whose responsibility is almost beyond comprehension." That was true, certainly, although not in the sense that Grant would take it. "You can help me."

"You put me in a difficult position, sir. I'd like to help you, but I just can't."

Then there was something to tell. "This isn't tattling, Jack. It's much more important than that."

Grant shook his head grimly. "I'm sorry, sir. You'll have to find out for yourself."

Phillips nodded. "That's all right. I understand how you feel."

Grant could not stay withdrawn for more than a few moments. Soon he was baring his normal young soul as freely as ever.

Fifteen minutes later Lieutenant Kars came through the broad, glass-doored entrance. He wore blue coveralls, a webbed flight belt across his chest, and a somber expression on his dark face.

Joseph Kars, 23, only child of a widowed mother—Phillips had time to think before Kars said curtly, "Let's go, Captain. We can't wait all night."

"About time," Phillips said gently. "I've been waiting for two days."

Kars looked at him out of cold, black eyes. "It's never about time, Captain. It's time or it isn't. Pick up the Captain's spacepack, Grant," he snapped. He turned on his heel.

Phillips turned quickly to pick up his own luggage, but Grant already had it in his hand. He grinned at the psychologist.

Phillips looked at him helplessly and back at Kars as if comparing the two and then followed the unrelenting back into the night.

THEY WALKED across the pitted, concrete landing field toward the skyscraper-tall three-

stage rocket, broad-finned at the bottom, its wings even broader at the top. Grant was some twenty yards behind. Phillips didn't look at the shuttle. He was looking at Kars.

There is a sameness to them, he thought. *A dedication, a mania that molds their features, a look to the eyes as if they were fashioned for seeing more distant vistas than other men. There were all shapes and colors and faces, but the differences only emphasized their kinship. They came from identical molds labeled: "Experiment—Homo Spatium."*

All except Grant. He was too normal. He didn't belong. Phillips felt a surge of affection for Grant, as if they were brothers who had just recognized that they were among aliens.

"What held us up, Joe?" Phillips asked casually.

"If you don't mind, Captain, call me Kars or Lieutenant."

"All right, Lieutenant. What was the trouble?"

"No trouble, Captain."

"Two days delay, and you call it no trouble?"

Kars glanced at him silently as if weighing Phillips' powers of understanding. Then he pointed at the shuttle, standing tall and partially illuminated on the otherwise dark field. But there was life around. Somewhere animals roared in their testing frames, spitting flame and power, shaking the ground. It was like walking through a zoo at night, wondering if the bars are strong enough.

"That's a beast there, Captain," Kars said flatly, "a savage, viciously unpredictable beast straining at a leash, waiting to kill me if I overlook one small item in an endless list of precautions.

"I'm in command of that thing. It doesn't move until I'm satisfied that it's ready. Every relay, every pump, every gauge must be working perfectly; every connection must be solid; every line must be clean. Or blam! No more crew, no more Joseph Kars, no more Captain Lloyd Phillips. And no cargo for the Wheel.

"We inspect every part personally, Captain. Does that surprise you?"

"No. Something was wrong then?"

"We weren't sure everything was right."

"I'm glad you told me. I would hate to be forced to report that there was deliberate delay in the execution of my orders. General Ashley wanted me on the Little Wheel yesterday."

Kars told Phillips what he could do with General Ashley. "Besides," he concluded mildly, "there's always the possibility of sabotage. One of the crew must stand guard over the shuttle at all times."

"Enemy sabotage?" Phillips said, surprised.

Kars' unreadable black eyes looked at him. "After the red tape you went through, you think an enemy agent could get in here?"

"Did Colonel Danton tell you that? What's wrong with him?"

"Captain," Kars said icily, "we didn't have to be told. As for the Colonel—he's the greatest man

who ever lived!"

As they climbed up concrete steps onto the takeoff platform, the ship had grown so tall that it seemed about to topple over on them. They approached the giant hammerhead crane beside the shuttle. Grant's footsteps clicked behind them.

There was a smell of old fire to the platform mingled with the sharp odor of acid and the mingled stench of old chemicals and oil. "You don't like me, Lieutenant," Phillips said bluntly. "Why?"

"I don't dislike you, Captain," Kars said without expression. "I don't feel anything about you at all except for a general distaste for all witch doctors. I had enough of them at the Academy. They ask the wrong questions, Captain.

"If I resent you, it's because you're taking up space that might be occupied by someone useful. If we didn't have to lift you, we could lift another bottle of oxygen. We can breathe oxygen, Captain."

"And I'm dead weight," Phillips said cheerfully. "Okay, Lieutenant. Man proposes, but the Air Force disposes. I've got my orders, too, and I can stand it if you can."

Grant joined them in the elevator that was part of the crane's framework. It lifted them up the side of the ship, and they climbed through the thick, square doorway. Kars swarmed up a ladder toward four helmeted heads; Phillips followed more slowly. Grant stowed away Phillips' spacepack before he ascended.

Kars motioned Phillips into a gimbaled chair. "That's yours," he said, and went on to the pilot's chair above.

With quick, sure competence, Phillips buckled himself in, chuckling softly. So this was the way it was going to be: a test for the psychologist.

Let them have their fun, he thought. *They'll need it.*

After the interminable drone of the check-off, the lifting of the shuttle took him by surprise. Kars gave no warning on the intercom; there was suddenly more than half a ton of lead sitting on his chest, squeezing the breath out of his body, refusing to let him draw in more.

His head was turned slightly to the side, forced deep into the cushions, and he could not move it. Outside the night flamed red and yellow and white, until he had to shut his eyes against the brilliance. The ship trembled and shuddered and shook, and the roaring of the rocket motors was everywhere, pervading every tortured cell of his body.

After a brief surcease, in which Phillips noticed that the light outside had disappeared and his blinded eyes could see only a sooty blackness, the weight descended again. This time, as the second stage took up the job of acceleration, the pressure lasted for almost a minute.

As the second stage cut off and dropped away, Phillips took a deep, rasping breath. By comparison, the third-stage acceleration was almost unnoticeable.

Suddenly, then, the all-pervading vibration was gone. The motors

were silent, and Phillips was falling.

He gripped the chair arms with clawing hands. *This is illusion,* he told himself desperately. What sent his senses reeling into the eternal night was the absence of acceleration pressure, was the release of the ear's otolith organs from the tug of gravity . . .

His stomach rebelled. Bitter acids spurted into his mouth . . .

Free fall, he told himself. *In that sense I am falling, as all men fall when there is no resistance to the pull of gravity. But in actuality I am coasting upward into the abyss of night, protected from its hungry vacuum, from its extremes of heat and cold, by sturdy metal walls and the power of man's engineering and craftsmanship.*

Falling, true, but falling—up!

Phillips took a few deep breaths and a sensation of unusual well-being spread through his body. He was one of the lucky ones. After a few uncomfortable moments of transition, zero gravity was a delight to him.

Phillips looked around. Grant was beside him, on the other side of the ladder, but the boy was having more difficulties. His face was white, and his jaw was set grimly.

The earphones popped, and Kars' sardonic voice came to Phillips clearly. "Okay, Captain?"

"Very nice, Lieutenant," Phillips said cheerfully. "Best lift I can remember." *And that,* he thought, *should end the hazing from that quarter.*

Then there was no time for talk: the crew was too busy with problems of navigation and determining the final burst of acceleration which would stabilize the ship's orbit at 1,075 miles out and locating the Little Wheel.

For Phillips the time passed swiftly. Grant was still in no mood for conversation, but the psychologist watched the stars through the clear, plastic canopy. They had always fascinated him; they were so different from the twinkling, filtered, untouchable fireflies of Earth's night. Out here—Phillips recognized the transition in his vocabulary—they were clear, steady, many colored, and almost within reach.

That, too, was illusion. As a psychologist he knew that Ashley's article of faith was fact: Men are Earth creatures. Nowhere else could Man exist in more than a marginal, half-starved sense. No other soil would nourish him; no other world would ever be home.

The two artificial satellites were special cases. They were Earth environment canned and transported at incredible expense into orbits around the home world, and whenever the psychological pressures grew unbearable, a man could look out and see the warm, fertile bosom of his mother only hours away.

A new voice broke into Phillips' reverie. It wasn't one of the crew members; he had become attuned to them. This voice was carefree, almost chuckling.

"Okay, Joe," it said. "You've got your bearings; don't spare the hydrazine. And be careful with the supercargo." It laughed. "We wouldn't want anything to happen

to the General's errand boy."

The freed third stage had slid into sunlight. The glare was dazzling, blotting out the stars. The Earth—below? above?—spanned half the sky. It recalled to Phillips the mosaic in General Ashley's office. The difference was that this was real, and he was Outside, floating 1,075 miles above the world beneath with its blue-black oceans, its thin-cotton clouds covering almost half the planet, its dull, brownish-yellowish-greenish continents distorted almost beyond recognition at the edges of the hemisphere, all framed by a whitish haze. This was real, and it was majestic and frightening.

On the other side, the gleaming-white, two-spoked Wheel, spinning slowly, was a triumphant thing, dazzling the eyes where the sun burned back from its rim. It was a silver ring for a giant's finger waiting on the black-velvet cushion of the night.

Phillips waited in his spacesuit for the sausage-shaped taxi that would take him to it. Not far from the Wheel was a vast circle of coated metal, shining mirrorlike in the sunlight. But it could not be a mirror—not a weapon for concentrating the sun's rays on an enemy city like a burning glass on an ant hill nor a reflector for lighting the friendly night or warming the polar ice. It was pointed at right angles to Earth.

Beyond the Wheel was another structure. Phillips couldn't make out what it was supposed to be; the Wheel concealed much of it. But it was an ungainly contraption of rocket motors and spherical tanks bolted flimsily together.

A man was waiting in the zero-gravity Hub to help Phillips out of his cumbersome suit, a man with a hard, deeply tanned face and snow-white hair—cosmic ray damage to follicles did that. He wore the loose-fitting coveralls of an ordinary spaceman. They were ragged at cuff and neck, and there was no insignia.

Non-reg uniform, Phillips noted. *Sloppy at that.*

The man was slim and a little over medium height as near as Phillips could judge without his accustomed yardsticks of perspective and familiar surroundings. The contrast of his colorless hair and eyebrows with the dark face was dramatic. In fact, the man looked surprisingly like ailing General Pickrell, even to the cataract-flecked eyes, but then he grinned and the resemblance vanished.

"Captain Phillips?" he said easily, floating without a handhold in mid-air. "Colonel Amos Danton at your service."

Phillips gave a start of surprise and tried to cover it by shooting out a hand to meet Danton's. But it overshot its mark and had to fumble its way back with an air of embarrassment. Muscles don't learn quickly, Phillips noted.

"Glad to meet you, Colonel Danton," he said, "but I want to correct one misapprehension. I'm a little too old to be an errand boy."

"I hadn't thought there was any age limit on it." Danton grinned. "But seeing you now, I'm inclined

to agree. Don't mind me. I'm frank to the point of brutality."

"Then I hope you'll continue to be frank with me, Colonel. I have a difficult job to do, and I'll need all the help I can get."

"I know."

"You know what my job is?" Phillips asked sharply.

"Shall I quote your orders?"

"Spies?"

"Call them spies if you like." Danton's face hardened. "There are spies around me, now. Saboteurs. Enemies." He took a deep breath and brought his voice back to its original lightness. He shrugged. The gesture spun him gently, but he stopped it almost without effort. "We think of them as grounded spacemen. Once a spaceman always a spaceman."

"What would you call me?"

"Neither fish nor fowl, Captain. You're an ocean dweller with air sacs capable of absorbing oxygen from the atmosphere, but you haven't made up your mind whether it wouldn't be better, after all, to crawl back into the secure, buoyant womb of the sea."

"I disagree with your analysis and your analogy, Colonel."

"That's your privilege. But all this formality makes me nervous." Almost as he spoke, his eyelid jerked. "We don't worry much out here about spit and polish. My name is Amos. I'll call you Lloyd. Okay?"

Phillips nodded agreeably and began a series of lazy somersaults that he didn't try to stop because he didn't know how. Perhaps it would not be as difficult as he had imagined, he thought. Danton might be as cracked a pot as Ashley believed him or as great a man as Kars had called him or as tainted as Grant had suggested, but he had no obvious chip on his shoulder. Phillips had a shrewd idea how to turn him into an active ally. Feeling a little silly about the somersaults, he said, "If you know my job, then I hope you'll see that I get the cooperation it demands."

"Sure," Danton said. "You came out to tear down the Wheel. Go to it. If you can do it, the Wheel doesn't deserve to be out here. You'll get cooperation. And if any of the boys give you trouble, come to me. They don't like you, you know. Not only are they rather attached to this old Wheel, but you're going to slow down a job they know is important, and you're going to occupy premium space and consume valuable oxygen and food." His eyelid jerked. "But they'll cooperate—or else."

As if he had suddenly tired of the conversation, he caught Phillips' hand as it came around and gave it a quick pull which stopped the somersaults and shot Phillips into one of the pipelike spokes. Phillips reached out just in time to catch a rung of the rope ladder that lined the side of the tunnel. Danton, rebounding from the other side of the Hub with bent knees thrusting, was beside him immediately.

"Danton coming through on B with one hundred sixty pounds of witch doctor," he said into a microphone. To Phillips he added, "Let's get you settled. I'm giving you the cabin next to mine. It's small and

uncomfortable, but it's the best we have. And you'll want the privacy, I imagine. Out here that's our scarcest commodity."

"Not too much privacy," Phillips said quickly as they pulled themselves along the ladder, their weight increasing as they approached the rim. "I'll want free access to every part of the Wheel. I'll set up a schedule of private interviews for everyone out here, but I want to eat with the men."

"They've endured a lot of things. I guess they can survive that, too. You're free to go wherever you wish, but the weight control officer has orders to search you if you leave your room. Saboteurs, you know."

THE CABIN was small beyond belief. Beside it the third-class quarters of the Big Wheel were models of luxury. Here there was space for a bunk, a table, and a chair; when the bunk was folded against the wall, the table and the chair could be let down. When all of them were out of the way, a man could take two paces if he didn't step too freely.

If the legend on the door were to be believed, it had housed the missile-control officer.

For all its privations, it was a room with a view. When an outside viewport cover was lifted, the universe was Phillips' neighbor, a dark infinity scattered lavishly with friendly, many colored lanterns to light the way, or alternately, as the Wheel turned, the great, beautiful disk of the Earth was before him, close enough to grasp in a man's two hands if there were not thick glass in the way.

Occasionally, beyond a thin, metal partition, Phillips heard Danton moving softly in what must have been a twin cabin to his. *Privacy!* Phillips thought wryly and was glad he had an ear mike for his recorder.

If his cabin was tiny, the crew's quarters were impossible. Like flophouse patrons that rented louse-ridden beds by the hour, the crew slept in "hot" bunks, and when they slid into them their faces were no more than six inches from the bulging canvas of the bunk above.

There were, at least, no lice.

The food, chiefly frozen meals to save shipping space, the services of a cook, and the room necessary for a kitchen, was surprisingly good, but even eating in shifts couldn't prevent continual overcrowding of the minute dining hall. It was almost necessary to eat in unison to avoid an inextricable tangling of arms.

An eternal line waited for a chance at the shower or the sanitary facilities, and recreational opportunities were practically non-existent. Occasionally there were swift games of no-gravity handball in the Hub—against all regulations, but even Danton joined in—and riskier games outside in spacesuits or the two-jet taxis. Inevitably, there were card games, checkers, and chess in the bunks, and probably bull sessions.

The last was surmise. The men didn't talk when Phillips was around. They glanced at him coldly or ignored him.

Even when he called them to his carefully prepared cabin—the Rorschach clay on the table, the recorder fastened underneath—they were sullen and monosyllabic. They knew what he was there for, and they resented him violently. Only Danton's explicit orders made them report at all.

Phillips got it all down on tape. Ashley would love it, he thought. They all sounded like depressives on the verge of becoming manic. None of them realized that the clay they were working in their fingers—since they were all compulsives they picked up whatever was available to keep their hands occupied—revealed them more surely than anything they could have said.

Alumbaugh, Baker, Chapman, Dean—straight down the roster, Phillips diagnosed them by the blobs they left behind. Psychology had taken giant strides in the last quarter century; Rorschach blots interpreted by the patient had become Rorschach blobs manipulated unconsciously by the patient, and Phillips could classify the crewmembers with certainty: schizoids, cycloids, paranoids, homosexuals, sadists, incipient homicides . . . psychopaths all.

In a sense, part of it was unfair. Morale was better than it should have been among men working, many of them at manual labor, for twelve to sixteen hours a day and living under conditions that would have been considered cruel and unusual punishment for the most hopeless criminal. On the other hand, it was not as good as it could have been under the guidance of an experienced psychologist.

Even then Phillips would not have trusted them with decisions involving the safety of a small city. There was no longer any doubt in his mind: they were unstable personalities in an artificial and unnatural environment.

If there was any powder keg, this was it—waiting for a spark to set it off and blow up the world it was supposed to protect.

There was only one way out: the conquest of space would have to be sacrificed to the security of the race of man.

The taped interviews, his own notes and observations, the minipictures of the blobs—kept under tamperproof lock when he was out of the cabin—were perhaps enough to satisfy the jury that would decide the Wheel's fate, although laymen looked on the blobs with the suspicion illiterates had once had for books.

Phillips wanted more—the casual conversations of the crew when they thought they were alone, for instance, but he wasn't electrician enough to rig bugs in the sleeping quarters and the mess hall. In any case, they were never clear.

Phillips prowled the Rim with his problem, looking for something overt, for something he could point to and say, "See? Here a man has cracked under the pressure. Here he has done this or forgotten to do that in an unconscious dramatization of his paranoid aggression wish or his suicidal impulse. Here, but for chance, might be the act that destroyed every living thing on Earth."

But there was nothing to point to.

As neurotic as the crew members certainly were, as psychopathic as many of them seemed to be, on the job they did only those things they were supposed to do and forgot nothing. The areas of the Little Wheel vital to the welfare of the men within—and what wasn't?—were kept in show-room condition, more immaculate and in better repair than the men who tended them.

The power room, supplied by solar radiation focused on a mercury boiler by a troughlike solar mirror, was spotless. The air-conditioning system, which extracted moisture and carbon dioxide from the air, fed in fresh oxygen, and maintained pressure throughout the satellite, was tended as solicitously as a baby. The pump room gleamed, and the water recovery plant gurgled contentedly at its job of making wastes potable.

Then Phillips reached Earth-observation.

The screens were alive, but the telescope had been allowed to drift off-center. The view of the area beneath the Wheel was blurred and meaningless.

There was only one crewman on duty, and he was asleep in a chair near the bulkhead that separated Earth-observation from what had once been the weather room and was now sleeping quarters for thirty-two men.

Phillips grasped the man roughly by one shoulder and shook him awake. As soon as the man's eyes fluttered, Phillips snapped, "Name and rank!"

Dazedly the man sprang to his feet. "Spaceman First Class Miguel Delgado, s-sir!" he stammered. Then he recognized Phillips. He jerked his shoulder free and settled back into his chair. "Oh, it's the witch doctor," he said insolently.

"Are you on duty here?"

"Yes, Captain."

"Just you?"

"You don't see nobody else, do you?"

"Do you know the penalty for falling asleep on watch?"

"Whatever the Colonel says."

"The Colonel has nothing to do with this. The penalty is automatic: courtmartial, followed by whatever the court decides is appropriate, up to and including death."

"The Colonel will say," Delgado repeated stubbornly. "Whatever the Colonel says is right."

"Your loyalty to Colonel Danton is admirable. It's too bad it isn't matched by an equal loyalty to your country and the Air Force."

"What's the use making a big fuss over a little nap?" Delgado shrugged. "It ain't like it was important."

"There's nothing more important. What if you didn't see a missile base below because of your little nap? By this time those missiles could be over Washington or your own home town."

Delgado looked amazed. "Who'd want to do anything like that?"

Phillips gave up. "Where's the missile-control officer?"

"The who?"

"The missile-control officer. Ac-

cording to your table of organization, he's in charge of Earth observation."

Delgado shook his head stupidly. "Never heard of him. You better ask the Colonel."

"I'll do that!" Phillips swung away, trying not to see Delgado's smothered yawn.

It was time to see Danton.

Phillips had only a few steps to go. Beyond the next door was the little-used celestial-observation room. Sitting motionless in front of one of the magnifying screens was Danton.

Phillips closed the door carefully behind him. "Colonel!" he said sharply.

Not looking away from the screen, Danton gestured for silence. "Shhhh!"

Phillips took two quick steps toward him. "Amos! This is important!" He glanced at the screen. On it was a vivid enlargement of a quadrant of Mars, rosy and sharp, the long-disputed canals clearly delineated.

"Oh, it's you, Lloyd," Danton said casually. He swung around in his chair. "What can I do for you?"

Grimly Phillips said, "A better question is: What can I do for you?"

"Okay," Danton said agreeably. "What can you do for me?"

"I can report a disrespect for authority in your command, a deteriorating morale situation, and a possible disaster in the making."

"Well, now," Danton said lazily, his eyelid jerking, "I guess that's not new. There never has been much respect for authority on the Little Wheel. Out here a uniform and an insignia aren't enough; a man must earn respect on his own. The morale has always been deteriorating. And there's always a disaster in the making. Anything else?"

"I just found a crewman asleep on watch." Phillips watched Danton closely. The reaction, for once, was appropriate.

Danton came out of the chair in one fluid movement. "Where?"

"Earth-observation."

Danton sank down again. "Oh! That's too bad."

"Is that all you can say—it's too bad?"

"Who was it?"

"Miguel Delgado—a resentful, unstable personality who should never have been given such responsibility in the first place."

"Well, Lloyd, we have to use what we've got. I don't think we should be too hard on him. He's just put in eight hours at hard labor on construction work outside, and he's got a six-hour stretch in a boring, unimportant job—"

"Unimportant?"

"Unimportant to him."

Phillips snapped, "In the Air Force I belong to enlisted men aren't judges of the importance of their jobs."

"I suppose he knows it's unimportant to me, too."

Phillips studied the tanned face under the white stubble. It was a face aged beyond its years. Phillips wished he could get behind it, wished he could get Danton into his cabin with the recorder underneath the table and the Rorschach

clay on top, wished he could be certain that Danton was as paranoid as he seemed.

The martinet approach hadn't worked. He would have to proceed on the assumption of paranoia. "I don't understand you, Amos. Out here you're got the toughest job a colonel could hold in the Air Force, maybe the most responsible job anywhere, and you don't seem impressed at all."

Danton said dryly, "Maybe my values are a little different."

"The only possible conclusion is that twelve years out here without rest or leave has affected your judgment." Danton started to speak and Phillips held up a hand as he hurried to fire the thunderbolt he had been saving for this moment. "You needn't be surprised that I know about the standing orders General Pickrell left in your file. But you should know this: those orders have been torn up. You can go home whenever you wish."

For a moment Danton stared blankly at Phillips, and then he started to laugh. The laughter was not insane; it was not even hysterical. It was the laughter of a man who has just heard something indescribably funny.

FINALLY DANTON wiped the tears from his eyes and asked weakly, "You think you can buy me, do you? You think for a few lousy weeks on Earth you can get my help to break up the Little Wheel?"

"That wasn't—" Phillips began, but Danton's hand was raised.

"I listened to you; now you listen to me. Sure the Fish—I beg your pardon—General Pickrell put those orders in my file, and for a good reason, a reason I may tell you some day. Later it became our own personal joke. But he never offered to remove them, and I never asked him to. Why should I want to go home? My mother died two years after I came out—yes, Lloyd, I came from a broken home—and there's nothing left there I'm interested enough to cross the Wheel for. Go home, Captain? I am home."

"And for that reason, Amos, you aren't a good risk."

"Explorers have never been good risks."

"I'm not talking about insurance risks; I'm talking about the risk to Earth."

Danton grinned. "Don't go on! I can repeat everything Sackcloth told you. God knows he's sent it to me often enough: 'Under no conditions will you initiate independent action, no matter what the provocation or the state of communications. You will wait for orders from superior authority. I don't need to tell you, Captain, that I am not satisfied with a situation that includes the possibility of ultimate decision by man qualified for it neither by character nor by training.' "

Danton's voice dropped. He stared blindly at the lighted screen in front of him. "Ashley has a nasty way of projecting his own desires and character into his mental concept of his subordinates. Who does he think is going to fire a missile without orders from Inside, and confirmation of those orders, and

reconfirmation?"

"A neurotic man might. Anyone out here might crack under the strain of sitting with his finger eternally on the trigger. Even you, Amos—as certain as you are that space is your home—you might crack. And you have the power here to make yourself the dictator or the destroyer of the world."

That seemed to cheer Danton up. "Dictator, perhaps—but for how long? There are neuroses and neuroses, Lloyd; some are dangerous, and some are functional. A fear of heights, now, has kept a lot of people from taking the long plunge. I happen to think that our kind of neurosis is only dangerous when it is penned up."

Carefully Phillips said, "Unfortunately, you aren't a trained psychologist. My own opinion is that the Little Wheel is dangerously close to instability. You take great pains to make every part of the Wheel balance with the part diametrically opposite. It's even more important that the men inside, who must make the decisions, are carefully balanced.

"In a command distinguished by slovenly watch procedures, insolence, and disrespect for authority, you have managed to inspire great personal loyalty among your men. Perhaps you can keep them under control. But I ask you to consider this: what would happen if you were killed or suddenly recalled?" Phillips suddenly remembered Ashley's haunted eyes as he had muttered, "What if he refused to come?"

Hastily Phillips went on, "These men are nervous, irritable, and unstable. The Wheel is a powder keg waiting for a spark."

Danton turned his head to look squarely at Phillips, his lips smiling but his flecked eyes hard. "Nervous, sure; irritable, maybe; but unstable, unh-unh! A force released is always stable. It's only a force contained that is unstable, and only that force will explode.

"Sure we're nervous, but we've got a right to be. We're prey to a dozen hazards men Inside never know. We're eternally conscious of our environment, because we have to bring it all with us. We live in a hollow world two hundred and fifty feet across; its walls are not much more than an inch thick, and most of that is air. We face imminent death from such exotic causes as sunburn, meteoric missiles, asphyxiation, and radiation poisoning.

"If I don't die violently, Lloyd, I won't live to be sixty years old. To me it doesn't matter. I wouldn't be anywhere else for a lifetime twice as long. This nervousness you speak of—I call it awareness of danger, and as long as we stay nervous, we'll stay alive, most of us.

"They don't need to be afraid of us, Inside. We're trying too hard to stay alive ourselves."

The timing was perfect. Too perfect, Phillips found time to think as the alarm went off with a clamor of bells and a blinking of overhead lights.

Danton stiffened, and Phillips stared with startled eyes at the too-thin walls. By the time he had released his breath, instinctively caught in his lungs, and assured

himself that the walls separating him from vacuum and death were still imperforate, Danton was at the wall phone.

"Where is it?" he snapped. "Okay. I'll be there in two seconds. Get the air pressure up, and release the marker."

Danton had the door open and was through it before Phillips moved. The next few minutes for Phillips were a kaleidoscope of confusion that somehow achieved swift results.

The automatic doors of the air-testing lab were closed. The walls within had been pierced by a meteor which had burst through the bumper that stopped 99 percent of those hitting the Wheel. Emergency air blowers were building up air pressure inside the room to give the men within time to adjust emergency oxygen helmets, locate the holes by means of the harmless colored gas that had been released into the section, and plug them.

But something had gone wrong.

"What's the delay?" Danton demanded.

From a cluster of men performing incomprehensible jobs outside the airtight door, a sweaty face turned. Phillips recognized Lieutenant Chapman, the air-control officer.

"I don't know. They should be out by now. I can't raise anybody. Fred's in there and young Grant. All I can pick up is a low moaning noise. Somebody's alive. I've got two men outside trying to plug the leaks from there. Until then we can't open the door. Hold on!"

He turned to the crewman beside him who had a self-powered hand-set to his ear. "Air pressure is climbing. Yes, here comes the report now. The leak is plugged. It'll be a couple of minutes."

"Leak?" Danton said softly.

Chapman looked at him and said, "Yes, sir. One."

The minutes passed leadenly. "Okay," Chapman said. "Open it up."

The door came open. Red fog drifted through. Phillips sniffed at it gingerly, but it was odorless. Within seconds two men were brought into the room, one bare-headed and limp in the arms of a rescuer who carried his one-third normal Earth weight without effort, the other helmeted and stumbling.

Danton said impatiently, "Well, what are you waiting for?"

Phillips looked up. Danton was frowning at him. "You're an M.D. Take care of that man." He pointed to the unconscious man who had been laid gently on the floor.

"The other one's in shock," Phillips objected. "He needs help, too."

Danton said grimly, "He'll live. Not that I care much. But Fred is important." When Phillips still hesitated, Danton shoved him roughly toward the man on the floor. "Get busy, damn it!"

Phillips started his examination. Danton, the emotion gone from his voice, said, "You don't understand, do you, Phillips? When that meteor hit and the air began whooshing out, Grant forgot everything he ever learned. He froze. Fred wasted precious seconds getting a helmet onto him. By that time it was too

late to get into his own."

Phillips glanced up. Grant's helmet had been stripped from his head. His young face was no longer animated and open. His nose had bled down over his upper lip and chin. His eyes were wide and unseeing; his lips moved but no sound came out.

Suddenly Phillips was angry. The only normal man on the Wheel, and Phillips couldn't help him. "He was in shock," he snapped.

"Spacemen don't go into shock. We can't afford to. All our lives depend upon the ability of each one of us to be able to act swiftly and correctly in an emergency when other men might go into shock. If men can't do it—every time—they don't belong out here."

Phillips got up slowly.

"What are you doing?" Danton demanded roughly.

"He's dead," Phillips said.

Before Phillips could move, Danton's hand slapped viciously against Grant's cheek. The boy's head jerked, but his eyes remained blank as the cheek slowly reddened.

Danton screamed, "You dirty spy!"

When Phillips started toward Grant, Danton swung around to glare at him with mad eyes. Phillips stopped. In a moment Danton's breathing had slowed. He said, almost calmly, to Chapman, "Take him to first aid. When he comes around, tell him to get his personal belongings together. He's through."

"He needs immediate attention," Phillips said, his teeth clenched. "Serum and—"

"He'll get them. Come with me."

Reluctantly Phillips followed Danton's square back to weight control and down the spoke of the Wheel to Phillips' cabin. Danton shoved open the door as if it were his own. He went in and put his back against the covered viewport.

When Phillips had followed and closed the door, Danton said casually, "You think I was hard on the kid."

Phillips ran his hand behind him under the table and turned on the recorder. "You make hard rules."

"This is a hard place; we have to be hard to stay out here. I'm not blaming the kid for being foolish. I was a young, foolish kid, too, and I almost got sent in for it. The reason he's going in is that he didn't do the right thing instinctively: he held his breath instead of releasing it—you saw his nosebleed. The expansion of gases in his lungs did that; it could as easily have been his lungs that hemorrhaged. I'm blaming him for not getting into his emergency helmet. I'm blaming him for killing a man, a good man, a man we couldn't afford to lose."

"You shouldn't have hit him."

"Did I hit him?" Danton said, surprised. He must have read the answer in Phillips' face. "I'm sorry I did that."

"And calling him a spy?"

"That, too, eh? I shouldn't have done that, either." Danton grinned but there was no mirth in it. "I don't know why I'm arguing with you about sending a boy in. You're the one who wants to send us all in."

"Not me. General Ashley."

"Oh, yes. General Ashley. We're going to have a time with him." Danton took a pace forward and absently picked up the blob of clay from the table. "We've read your papers up here with a lot of interest."

"You get the psychological journals?"

"Microfilms of things that interest us. A lot of us would like to know why we had to come out. But you haven't found the answer with your inquiries into broken homes and insecurity and neuroses."

"What makes you so certain?"

"Too easy. Men aren't that simple. It's like Neanderthal noticing a rainbow every time it rains and deciding that the rain makes the rainbow. The rain is part of it, but the sun is more important. It provides the energy. You can't reduce all the impulses to be different—the adventurousness, the criminality, the greatness—into cause and effect. After all the causes are fractionated off, you will still have an indefinable something that makes Man a man—a questioning, seeking animal."

"You can't argue away the fact that you are children playing explorer, too immature to tackle the everyday problems of life inside."

Danton didn't take the bait. He grinned. This time he almost meant it. "Is that how we look to you? Well, maybe we are. But it would be a sad commentary on the human race if all its progress had to be traced to the children of the race who ran away and found something new and wonderful beyond the hill.

"Did you ever ask yourself, Lloyd, why General Ashley picked you to do his field work—a capable officer we will quickly agree, but certainly a minor Air Force captain."

"I'm a young man. My adjustment rating is good."

"Could it be," Danton asked gently, "that he was sure, beforehand, what kind of a report you would bring back, that he knew your reputation and your convictions—?"

Danton let the question die in Phillips' silence. Finally Phillips shrugged and said, "It doesn't matter. I'm going back on the next shuttle. I've got everything I need. And I'm going back with the same report any competent psychologist would make." He looked defiantly at Danton.

Danton chuckled. "Don't worry. We won't stop you. We could, but we won't. Sackcloth would just send up somebody else, and he might not be as easy to get along with. What are you going to tell Ashley?"

Phillips studied Danton for a moment. The question of paranoia was settled. What he had to decide was whether he had enough evidence or whether he could take the risk of pushing Danton to the cracking point. He took the risk. "The Big Wheel has taken over all your nonmilitary functions: weather observation, scientific research, radio relay—"

"And is making money at it."

"If the Little Wheel has no other function than observation and missile guidance," Phillips continued

steadily, "it has no reason for being. It can't do these things satisfactorily, and the very existence of the functions is a constant temptation to fulfill them. I can't guarantee the soundness of the men out here."

"Whose soundness can you guarantee?" Danton asked, letting his weariness show through. "You've seen General Ashley, and you've seen me. Whose finger would you rather have on the firing button?"

"The people chose General Ashley."

Danton's eyelid jerked. "What people? The only person who chose General Ashley was General Ashley."

Phillips insisted stubbornly, "He was chosen through the proper functioning of a democratic government. Nobody can be permitted to substitute his personal preferences or his own decisions."

"Even when 'the people's choice' is obviously a megalomaniac afflicted with agoraphobia?" Danton hesitated; when he spoke again his voice was apologetic. "That was unfair. I brought it up only to prove that you would trust General Ashley out here—even if he could endure it—even less than you trust me. Ashley sent you out with a question that had only one answer: no one can be trusted."

"Well? Isn't that a good reason for bringing you in?"

"If that were our only purpose out here, and we really could serve that purpose as everyone believes—yes, certainly. But it wouldn't do any good, because there's ten times the firepower stored Inside, waiting for a nervous finger to unleash it."

Danton looked straight into Phillips' face, his eyelid twitching. "You know the real reason Ashley doesn't want us up here. He's not afraid that we'll shoot without orders. He's afraid that he'll tell us to fire and we won't obey."

How much of Danton's argument was truth, how much casuistry? Phillips wondered. And then he remembered "What if he refused to come?" and thought: *Yes, Ashley was worried about that.*

That put a new and revealing light on Ashley, but it didn't change the basic premises of the situation: there were still men up here who could destroy the world if they weren't more than men can be expected to be.

The knock at the door was like punctuation for his thoughts. When Danton opened it, Chapman was there, tossing a slim length of tubing in his hand.

"Got it, eh?" Danton said, without surprise.

"Still reeks of gunpowder."

"No one tried to sneak it away?"

Chapman shook his head. "Can't figure it."

Phillips looked from the tube to Chapman to Danton. "What are you trying to say? That the lab wall was pierced by a bullet instead of a meteor?"

Danton shrugged impatiently. "Of course. A meteor that size would have gone clear through. Two holes. The missile had to come from inside. And where does that knock your theories, Mr. Freud?"

Phillips didn't pause to think. "It supports my belief that the men up

here are unstable—unstable enough to attempt murder—or suicide."

Danton said mildly, "You think a spaceman did that? Unh-unh. We have too great and natural a respect for meteors to create artificial ones. Besides, where would an unstable spaceman get a bullet? No. This was sabotage."

"Whose?"

"You figure it out. We've fought it before—for almost six months, as a matter of fact." Danton looked at Phillips suddenly with hard, frozen eyes. "As a matter of fact, Captain, you were the last one out."

There was a moment of awkward silence as Phillips leaned forward, incredulous, and Danton's suspicions filled the room. The flat, tinny voice of the wall speaker was loud: "All hands to emergency stations. The taxis are loose. Drifting. All hands—"

Danton's expression changed instantly. "Maybe I'm wrong." A wry smile twisted his lips. "Here, Captain, here's your Rorschach blob." He put the clay gently on the table and was gone.

Phillips stared at the door through which Danton had vanished. Did Danton seriously suspect him? Or was it only his paranoia peeping through? There were no grounds—

But there were. The tub smelling of freshly exploded gunpowder. If it did smell of gunpowder, and if it was found in the air-testing lab, and if it had not been planted there by Danton himself.

The thought had occurred to him when it happened that the timing was perfect. But that would imply an acting ability far beyond the self-limitations of paranoia. If Danton had planted the tube, he was not paranoid. If he had not, then someone was trying to sabotage the Wheel.

Phillips realized, as he should have realized before, that the whole case against the Wheel rested or fell on the sanity of the commanding officer. He looked down at the table and froze.

The clay that Danton had put there was no longer a blob. It was a figure, the figure of a child standing sturdily on his feet, looking up. Deftly, as he had talked, Danton's fingers had worked, shaping, creating—a work of art. As such it should be judged, not in psychological terms. With a few skillful touches Danton had created what he had been describing—the child who ran away and found something new and wonderful beyond the hill. But there was more than that—there was the concept of greatness here and the questing . . .

But Phillips had to judge it on his own terms, and there was where his distress was greatest. Because in this figure was understanding and compassion and belief in mankind —and not a trace of paranoia.

That meant—it could only mean —that Danton was surrounded by spies. He had a right to be suspicious. His neurosis was functional.

The difficulty was—Danton knew too much. What was it he had said as he left? *Here, Captain, here's your Rorschach blob.*

But that would imply that Danton knew himself so well, and his psychology so well, and was so con-

summate an artist, that he could create—this!

It was too much. Phillips' head whirled. Nausea churned his stomach like a touch of spacesickness.

Deliberately he picked up the figure and squeezed it back into shapelessness.

Only moments later did he recall why Danton had hurried away. The taxis were loose. Drifting. And if the taxis were gone, he was marooned.

Phillips threw himself through the doorway.

PHILLIPS SCRAMBLED down the spoke to the Hub. It was empty. Only two spacesuits were hanging from their supports. He struggled into one that was too large. He squeezed through an airlock and then, carefully snapping the hook of his safety line to a ring just beyond the cagelike entrance, slipped outside.

He floated slowly out from the Hub, spinning in the black immensity of night, the pinpoint holes of the stars making streaks past his eyes like a poor astronomical plate. With a short tug on his line, working with an instinct he had never known he had, Phillips slowed his spin.

He saw one—a plump sausage with a plastic window—floating gently away from the gleaming rim of the wheel. Gently—and yet the taxi diminished with alarming swiftness. Then he saw another and another. All drifting away. As far as he could see, there were none left tied to the wheel.

There should have been chaos here, with suited men pouring out of the Wheel without plan or precedent for an emergency whose scope Phillips could only guess. But there was a crazy kind of order in the silence.

Men were snapping their safety lines to each other's suits instead of the Wheel. One man, in the lead, was clambering with incredible speed along the spoke until he reached the rim. Then he jumped, his bent legs thrusting him away from the satellite spinning beneath, his safety line trailing behind. As that line almost reached its limit, the man to whom it was attached jumped after him.

One after another they jumped, forming a living chain of spacesuited men linked together by almost invisible strands of cord, working together as a unit with the social instinct of army ants, reaching toward the stars, throwing a thin bridge across the impassable river of space.

Flame spurted from the suit at the head of the chain. It curved slowly toward the nearest taxi.

For Phillips it had all the potency of a major symbol. Men would die, but others would take their place, and one day men would cross over the bridge their comrades' courage and sacrifice had made, and reach the stars.

The taxi was still receding swiftly—swifter, it seemed to Phillips, than the chain that reached toward it. Would the chain be long enough?

He caught a ring on the spoke of the Wheel and swung himself out

toward the rim. Suddenly he was stopped. Something had caught him from behind. He swung his head around inside the helmet to look back. There was a spacesuited man behind him, the hook in his sleeve-ending caught somewhere in Phillips' suit beneath his range of vision. With the hook in his other sleeve, the man held himself to a ring on the Hub. Easily he pulled Phillips back toward him.

Phillips could not see who it was. The helmet viewplates were dark to keep out ultraviolet. Then he recognized a faded eagle on the chest of the suit.

His helmet bumped gently against the other helmet. Transmitted through that contact came the metallic voice, "Where do you think you're going?" It was Danton.

"It may not be long enough."

Danton did not have to ask what he meant. "If it isn't, you can't help. That takes teamwork. Something you have to learn. Something you have to live. When everybody's life depends on the actions of everyone else, that comes easily."

The implication was clear: he wasn't a part of the team, not even a player on anyone's team. "But it's serious—"

"Of course it is. If they don't reach that taxi, we're stuck. We can't get supplies over from the shuttles. We can't finish our—work."

"Until they send out replacements?"

Even through the helmets, Danton's voice was ironic. "And that's something Ashley can veto."

"You think this is Ashley's—?"

"That's for you to decide."

"We'd better help," Phillips said, trying to struggle free.

"How much help would you be?" Danton asked. He let Phillips swing away a little to see his safety line still clipped to a ring on the Hub. Then he pulled him back. "You'd just get in their way. They'll get it."

The two of them, clasped together like misshapen and amorous starfish, had floated around until the lengthening chain had drifted back into view. The first suit, its rocket jets blazing in brief spurts, was farther ahead of the second link than it should have been. It had cut its safety line, Phillips realized. It was heading out, alone, into the black, bottomless river.

But it was catching up. It reached out a stubby arm toward the taxi. And missed! No, it had caught a hold. The suit and the taxi drew together, became one . . .

For the first time Phillips wondered: *Who had cut the taxis loose? And why? And what had he been doing while everyone was outside.*

Suddenly he knew the answer to all of them.

He turned, but Danton was gone. He had gone, Phillips realized, even before the taxi had been caught.

Would Ashley go this far? Phillips asked himself. And he had to answer, *Yes*. How much farther would he go to destroy the Little Wheel? The answer to that was: as far as he had to go.

Phillips was swinging into the Hub. As he slipped through the cage, he saw the captured taxi blasting toward another sausage-

shape against the black-velvet curtain of night. Around the edge of the Wheel, like a giant moon, came that enigmatic circle of mirrorlike metal. Descending on the other side of the Wheel was that flimsy, impossible contraption of rocket motors and spherical tanks.

By the time Phillips had extracted himself from his suit, Danton had disappeared. Phillips followed, calling, "Danton! Amos!"

The words echoed in the empty Wheel. There was no answer. The weight-control room was deserted. So was the first-aid room, the pump room, and air control. Phillips went back through weight control and into celestial observation. Danton was sitting in a chair staring calmly at the closed air-tight door that separated him from Earth-observation.

"You'd better come out, Grant," Danton said gently. "You'll get hurt in there." He was talking into a wall speaker.

From the speaker came a burst of hysterical laughter. "You're the ones who'll get hurt, Colonel, you and those stupid animals Inside." It was Grant's voice, Phillips recognized. "The missiles are set and armed, Colonel, and I've got my finger on the firing button. Try to get me out and blooey! there goes the world! And blooey! there goes the Wheel!"

"Grant?" Although Phillips had known it logically, he still found it hard to believe. "But he was in shock!"

With Phillips' first word, Danton had slapped off the speaker. "So we thought," he said, turning slowly toward the psychologist. "Evidently we were wrong. The cutting away of the taxis was a diversion. If it succeeded, fine. If not, it still gave Grant time to take over Earth-observation."

"What's he going to do?"

Danton shrugged. "You heard him."

"He's insane!"

"You're the authority on that."

"Can't we sneak in on him another way?"

"Before he can hit that button? Not a chance, even if he didn't have the other door locked. And even a madman would do that."

"Haven't you got gas? Can't you knock him out?"

"Before he realizes what's happening?" Danton shook his head impatiently. "We can't stock items up here unless we have a probable use for them."

Phillips sought desperately for a straw. "Someone cracked! It was what Ashley was afraid of!"

"Was it?" Danton asked, smiling gently. His eyes drifted back across the wide, flat photographic projection screen where Mars still glowed redly, to the sealed door.

"Keep talking, Danton," Phillips said quickly. "In his condition, if he's alone too long he'll work up his courage to press the button."

"You're the psychologist. You talk him out."

"Me?" Involuntarily Phillips took half a step backward. "Who's your missile-control officer? He should know how to cut the firing circuit, disarm the missiles . . ."

"We had one once, but he got transferred five years ago. We never

replaced him."

"He's in your T/O—"

"We've got no use for a missile-control officer. Look!" Danton swung around in the chair. It squealed a complaint. He punched a button beside the viewport. The outside cover swung away, letting in the night. "See that?"

The great circle of shiny metal slid past the window. "That's an anti-missile screen," Danton said somberly, "and it's worthless. It's set squarely ahead of us in our orbit, sweeping space. But the first thing an aggressor would do would be to send up a missile without a warhead of weak gunpowder and fine lead particles. When it reached our orbit—going in the opposite direction—it would explode and leave in our path a cloud of eight billion tiny missiles. Every hour we would run into that cloud. The first time the anti-missile screen would intercept them, maybe even the second, but then it would look like a cheese grater. After that, we would be the cheese grater."

"You could strike back—"

"How? Even if we spotted the missile taking off and knew where it came from, it would take us hours to get a missile into the atmosphere without burning up. No, Lloyd, in a new war, we'd be the first casualties. This is a powder keg, all right, and we're sitting on it. We know it. We live with it every minute of every waking hour. But the fuse is down below, and the only way you can save this powder keg is to go in and stamp on it. Or make sure it is never lit."

"Then there's no reason at all for the existence of the Little Wheel! The Big Wheel has taken over all your other functions: weather observation, television relay, research . . . All that's left is military observation and missile guidance. You ignore the first and can't fulfill the second. Your presence here is a constant temptation to resolve your problems by destroying their source."

"And thereby destroy ourselves. We aren't that stupid. We can't exist independently of Earth—not yet."

"Decisions aren't always logical. Not even usually. Grant is your best example. Give me that speaker!"

Danton said softly, "I think maybe he has his reasons." He hit the speaker switch. "But go ahead."

Phillips said urgently, "Grant! This is Dr. Phillips."

"What do you want, headshrinker?"

"Listen to me, Grant. Don't press that button! You don't have to. I'll guarantee that the Wheel is destroyed."

FOR A LONG moment there was silence in the little room where the red image of Mars glowed from the screen. Phillips was suddenly aware of the Little Wheel's odor, a compound of oil and human sweat, like a machine shop inside the steam room at the local YMCA. On top of it all was the acrid odor of fear. Phillips could feel drops of sweat collecting on his forehead and trickling into his eyebrows.

Danton was looking at him. Phillips turned his head to meet Dan-

ton's half-tolerant contempt with cold eyes.

Grant's breathing came harshly through the speaker. "Don't make me laugh, headshrinker. Nobody's gonna trick me. When I get ready, I'm gonna push this button. Nobody can stop me."

Phillips spoke coldly, swiftly, "Listen to me! General Ashley sent me up here to make a report to him, and the report I'm going to make, Grant, will blast the Wheel right out of the sky. If you push that button, the world will die, Grant, and you'll die, too. You don't want that. You don't have to die, Grant. The Wheel is finished."

"Even if you were telling the truth, you couldn't do it, Phillips. Danton would stop you somehow. He's too tricky. He'd find a way out. But he can't stop me from pushing this button!"

Phillips pleaded, "For God's sake, Grant—"

"No use, headshrinker. I think you're lying. Because Ashley sent me up to do this job, and I'm gonna do it. 'If you can't do it any other way,' he said, 'send down a missile. That'll be the end of the Wheel.' I'm really gonna do him a job." Grant laughed insanely. "I'm gonna send 'em all down."

Phillips whispered, "He's too far gone."

Danton leaned toward the speaker. "It's no use pushing the button," he said quietly. "There aren't any missiles." He switched off the speaker and leaned back in his chair.

Phillips said quickly, "That won't do any good. He'll push it just to make sure."

"To men who have made up their minds the truth is never any good."

"What do you mean—the truth?"

"There aren't any missiles. Earth is in no danger from us. Too bad we can't tell them that. But we can't. And therefore we must live in constant expectation of a moment of madness Inside that will send up a missile to destroy a threat that doesn't exist."

"No missiles?" Phillips shook his head incredulously. Droplets of sweat flew from his face. "What happened to them? You had them!"

"Oh, we had them. But, as Ashley feared, their existence was a constant temptation. So we used them for a better purpose."

"What are you talking about? What better purpose?"

"In a moment." Danton looked through the viewport at the stars wheeling past, steady, many-colored, and available. "You talk of powder kegs. I'll tell you something about powder. It's only dangerous when it's imprisoned. Spread it out in the open air, set it off, and it makes a fizzling sound and a bright light. Look, there's Earth!" It rotated beyond the window, brilliant in reflected sunshine, an incredible jewel set against the velvet of the night. "That's your powder keg, masses of humanity penned up in unyielding containers, more people every minute. If you don't give them some outlet, an explosion is inevitable. Anything might set it off: an unguarded fire, an acci-

dental spark, spontaneous combustion . . ."

"And you're the outlet?"

"Symbolically. Oh, there's no practical way of relieving population pressures except by birth control. We can't export our excess millions to the planets or the stars. But we can give them a vent for their excess energies, for their frustrated aggressions, for their unused dreams. The existence of a frontier is enough; everyone doesn't have to go there."

Danton paused, his eyes fixed on the viewport, for a moment the tic in his eyelid stilled. "Look there! Now!" The ungainly contraption of rocket motors and spherical tanks floated past. "There's our outlet. There's where the missiles have gone: their motors are units for that ship, their warheads have been converted into atomic powerplants. They were designed with that purpose in mind."

Phillips said slowly, "That just about covers every offense in the code: disobedience, insubordination, dereliction of duty, misappropriation of material, mutiny . . ."

Danton dismissed them with a wave of his hand. "Words. They aren't important. Survival is important. And that ship is the key to survival."

"Where are you going in that thing?"

Danton looked past Phillips toward the photographic enlargement on the projection screen. "Mars."

Phillips studied the hard, blackened face. *Madman or prophet? Traitor or something greater than patriot?* He had to decide, and soon. He looked back at the viewport, but the flimsy structure was gone. "In that?"

"The Vikings crossed the Atlantic in their tiny dragon ships."

"How are you going to get away with it?"

"We were going to wait until we could announce a successful trip, but it's too late for that. Ashley is getting desperate; next time he might not fail. We might not be here when the ship returned. Instead we'll release the news that the ship will start soon." Danton grinned unexpectedly. "Then let Ashley deny it if he dares."

"He'll never rest until he drags down the Wheel."

"Let him try that, too, when the world knows what we're going to do. That's our hole card, the aroused dreams of the world's billions. Go on back, Lloyd. Tell them we're all neurotic, all crackpots, and we'll tell them they're in no danger from us. We've beaten our swords into dreams. We'll show them the Wheel, and we'll show them the Mars ship, and we'll invite them, vicariously, on the first trip to another world. They'll come. They can't refuse. They're men like us; they're dreamers."

"Out here isn't far enough," Phillips said softly. "You're running farther away."

"Call it 'running' if you like. Another man may call it conquest or adventure. Words. What makes a man run doesn't matter; it's where he runs and what he does when he gets there and what his running means. What makes you run, Lloyd?"

"What do you mean?" Phillips stiffened.

"You've been analyzed. What drove you to be a psychologist? What made you enlist in the Air Force? What forced you to investigate the submerged motives of spacemen? What was it: a broken home, an overprotective mother, a disinterested father? What complex was it? Give it a name!"

Panic raced through Phillips' veins. *He can't know. He's guessing—*

"Give it a name," Danton continued without pausing, "and I won't give a damn. What matters to me is that you're good spaceman material gone to waste. You're one of the rare ones, one of those first air breathers, and you won't climb out upon the land because there's something left out of you. That's a pity. We need men like you. You could help us put it over—this little thing with Ashley and the big victory over Mars and the fantastic distance that lies between."

"We could use your knowledge of psychology to help pick the men who could make the trip and stay sane and come back to report their success to us and the world. You could help us phrase our releases to the imaginations of men, releases that will open their hearts and shape their dreams. You wouldn't have to go back; I could declare you essential and keep you here until Sackcloth or I died of old age."

"Help you do what? Defraud the people as you have defrauded their government and their defenses?"

"The exploration of the unknown is always a fraud," Danton said, his eyes distant, remembering. "Because we can't know, by definition, what we are going to find, we can't have the right reasons for finding it or even for going where we can find it. And the reasons we give ourselves will always be the wrong reasons, because the only real reason is that there's something unknown to be discovered.

"Fraud," Danton repeated, his eyelid jerking again. "I'll tell you about fraud. When I came out my eyes were filled with visions and my head was swimming with dreams. And I found out that the visions were false, and the dreams were the wrong ones.

"That was when I ran. I ran to the S.1.1. You know what it is—the ship in the same orbit as the Little Wheel, one hundred miles ahead, in which Rev. McMillen first conquered space, in which he died because he couldn't get back.

"Do you know what I found? A hollow shell. No one was ever inside. It wasn't built for a passenger. They couldn't build one to carry a man—not with the funds they had—and Bo Finch and Pickrell and a few others perpetrated a fraud on the people so that space could be conquered. And it was conquered—for the wrong reasons and in the wrong way.

"The visions were wrong. Men never find what they are seeking. That's what keeps them seeking. Men will never find out here what they're looking for—not peace or wealth or the thrill of final conquest.

"I learned then, as every man

must learn if he is to become a man, that he must be stronger than his dreams, that he must be able to watch them shatter and go on. Call it childish. Call it what you will."

Danton's voice dropped wearily. Now he looked like an old man instead of a man this side of forty with prematurely white hair. "The fact remains that it is the soul of man and his salvation. He is a dream-maker, and the latest dream is the best, no matter how many have been shattered before.

"Go Inside, Captain Phillips. Go Inside if you wish and tell them what I have told you, all of it. And I will lie and call you a liar, and the lies won't matter, just as the shattered dreams don't matter.

"The people will believe me, because I am a dreamer, and they understand dreams. This is the latest dream in the oldest dream of all —the conquest of man's environment, the universe.

"And that dream is invincible."

THE DOOR to Earth-observation opened. Grant stumbled through the doorway. His face was blank. His eyes stared, but they saw nothing.

"I pushed it," he said tonelessly. "I pushed it and nothing happened."

Danton had stood up as the door opened. Grant walked right into him. At the contact he collapsed. He hid his face against Danton's chest. A sob broke from his throat.

Danton patted the boy's shoulder. "That's all right. It's all right. The truth is hard to find, and when you find it, it always hurts. I know. I found it."

He looked at Phillips. "You see," he said gently, "it isn't the neurotic men out here you have to be afraid of, not the men who had to come out. The dangerous ones are the men who come out for something else, for money or for glory."

Phillips looked at Danton for a moment and then turned his eyes away, turned them to the open viewport and the stars. They were too bright, but they were not as bright as Danton.

Danton was right.

Phillips could not decide when he had first known it. Perhaps it had been just a few minutes ago as he had pleaded with Grant, not a spaceman but a displanted Earthman, to spare the Earth. Perhaps it had been earlier as he watched the spacemen building a bridge toward the stars and he had moved to help. Perhaps it had been when he had seen the compassion and understanding in the Rorschach blob.

But he thought it was much earlier, when he had realized that he himself was a spaceman, one of the air breathers who had crawled out upon the land and found the experience so satisfying that he could never go back to the mother sea.

If a man is lucky he has one such time in his life when he knows himself. But it meant that his entire concept of the human animal had to change.

The basic quality of life is movement. An immobile animal is a dead animal. Carnivore and prey know

(Continued on page 120)

What is a Man? . . . A paradox indeed—the world's finest minds gathered to defend a punk killer . . .

A QUESTION OF

BY FRANK RILEY

Illustrated by Virgil Finlay

IDENTITY

EVERY PAIR OF eyes in the hushed courtroom watched Jake Emspak walk slowly toward the prospective juror.

Around the Earth, and above it, too, from South Africa and Franz Joseph Land to the satellite stations adrift through the black morning, two hundred million pairs of eyes focussed on the gaunt figure that moved so deliberately across the television screen.

In the glass-fronted TV booth, where the 80-year-old Edward R. Murrow had created something of a stir by his unexpected appearance a few moments earlier, newsmen stopped talking to let the viewers see and hear for

themselves what was happening.

Jake halted in front of the witness stand, both hands cupped over the gold head of the cane that had been his trademark, in and out of court, for most of a half century. The shaggy mane of white hair, once as black as the coal in the West Virginia mining country of his birth, stood out like an incongruous halo above the bone ridges of his face. The jutting nose, the forward hunch of his body accentuated the impression he always gave of being about to leap on a nervous witness. The magnificent voice, which could thunder, rasp, weep and persuade in all the registers of eloquence, now phrased his first question with disconcerting softness:

"What is a man?"

The prospective juror, a Bronx appliance distributor with sagging jowls and perpetual tension lines around his mouth, started visibly.

"I—I beg your pardon?"

Again Jake Emspak gently phrased his question:

"What is a man?"

The distributor, who could wake up out of a sound sleep and address a sales meeting of unhappy dealers, opened his mouth and closed it again. Jake waited patiently, rocking a little on the point of his cane.

Finally, the distributor said:

"I can't answer that—right off . . ."

"Thank you," Jake said mildly.

He turned to Judge Hayward and nodded his acceptance of the juror.

Up in the TV booth, Murrow smiled to himself and listened to his colleagues chew over the familiar questions: Why had Jake Emspak, the "million dollar mouthpiece", taken a cheap case like this away from the Public Defender? Who would possibly pay him enough to defend a punk like Tony Corfino—a bungling hoodlum who had killed two bystanders in a miserable attempt to rob a bank?

The Judge noted acceptance of the juror, then brusquely recessed court until 10 a.m. Monday.

The timing was excellent. Jake smiled with satisfaction, and his smile was like the slash of a paring knife across the skin of a dried apple.

He walked with Tony Corfino and the bailiff as far as the prisoner's gate.

"Don't worry," Jake said.

Tony's eyes were wide and bewildered, like the eyes of a confused child—or of an old man not quite certain whether he is awake or dreaming.

"I ain't worried," Tony replied. As he walked, there was the crackling sound of a bone twisting in a stiff joint.

From under his shaggy brows, Jake studied him carefully, and was content with what he saw. Tony could have been very young, or very old. Undoubtedly he was both, with a lot of in-between, Jake thought suddenly. The tangle of black, curly hair was the hair of youth. The cameo-smooth skin had the waxed perfection of an expensive doll. But the mouth and lips were still puffy, sensuous. And the eyes—Jake Emspak, for all his knowing, couldn't

be sure about the eyes. Silently, he addressed a memo to himself: Check on the eyes.

At the prisoners' gate, Tony faced him.

"I ain't worried," he repeated. "It's just—well, I don't see why you're takin' my case—I can't pay anythin' . . ."

The thin smile slashed again across the wrinkled harshness of Jake's face.

"I'll be paid," he chuckled drily.

The District Attorney brought up the same question when Jake sat in his office two hours later. They had been studying each other across the desk, thinking of all the years that were gone, the good years dying with the new quarter of the century.

How many times had he sat here just like this, Jake wondered. How often had he come into this office to bargain and to deal, to cajole and plead—and always hovering like a hawk to pounce on any bit of information that could fit his case.

Now the D.A. was old, too. Older than Jake, if you measured a man's life by the inverse proportion of his distance from the grave. Even the limitless possibilities of medical science had about reached their limit with the D.A. He was heavier than Jake, and his skin was smoother, yet somehow it looked much older.

"I don't get it," he wheezed, with the shortness of breath that the latest bronchial replacement had not substantially relieved. "I just can't see Jake Emspak taking a case without a fee! Why, in the old days, you wouldn't defend your mother without a cashier's check in advance!"

Jake accepted the taunt without blinking.

"I'm touched by this solicitude for my fees," he retorted.

"Tony Corfino's guilty," said the D.A., moving up another pawn in the never-ending chess game between them. "He's a punk, and he's guilty. You know that, don't you, Jake?"

"Do I?"

"You know it—and damn well! I've got six witnesses who saw Tony walk into the bank with that sawed-off shotgun! I've got four more who saw him get panicky and start spraying lead! And there are a dozen others who helped load him on a stretcher after his getaway car went over the curve on the Parkway! . . . Hell, Jake, this is a two-bit case. Why are you taking it away from the Public Defender?"

"Now, Emmett," Jake mocked, "you know it's not ethical for me to discuss my client's case."

"To hell with your client!" The D.A. breathed deeply for a moment, then pressed ahead: "I don't care about that punk—I'm talking about you, Jake. What's this case mean to you?"

The chuckle started again, then died in Jake's throat.

"It means a lot, Emmett," he answered soberly. "For one thing, it's my last case . . ."

"What?" The D.A. looked stunned.

Jake nodded.

"I've been around the circle enough times for any man, Emmett."

Both of them absorbed this thought in silence, and the long years walked between them. The D.A.'s lips set, and the steel of his jaw showed beneath the soft folds of his skin.

"I guess it'll have to be my last case, too, Jake," he said quietly. Then he banged his fist on the desk. "But what a helluva case! What a helluva two-bit case! We've had some good ones, Jake—I've got the scars of them all over me! But why do we have to go out on something as cheap as this?"

Jake Emspak stood up, all six feet of him, and he brushed back his long white hair with a gesture that was fierce and strong.

"It's not a cheap case, Emmett! It's big—bigger than any case we've ever fought out!"

The reporters were waiting for Jake outside the D.A.'s office.

"Is it true you're retiring, Jake?"

"This is my last case."

"Why are you representing Tony Corfino?"

"You couldn't keep me out of a case as big as this."

"Can you tell us why it's so big?"

"I can, but I won't. Not until I get before the jury."

"Is robbing a bank and shooting two people so important?"

"Not particularly."

"What else did he do, then?"

"Nothing that I know of."

"Jake, this isn't some kind of a joke, is it?"

"It's the most serious case I've ever handled."

"Mr. Emspak, it was reported that you received $100,000 from your last client. Are you being paid for defending Tony Corfino?"

"I never discuss my fees."

"Would you object to a televised interview with Tony?"

"Certainly not. How about tomorrow morning?"

The reporters left, baffled and intrigued. That night, Jake Emspak sat alone in his apartment high over Central Park West, chuckling with satisfaction as he read the headlines in the first editions:

FAMED CRIMINAL LAWYER
IN MYSTERY CASE

The other headlines were substantially the same. Jake grinned. Things were working out fine, just fine. Publicity was a wonderful tool, if a lawyer knew when to use it, and how. He showed one of the headlines to his wife, whose picture was in a mellow gold frame on the stand beside his window chair. Marge had been dead since '67, but he still found it a quiet comfort to share things with her. She didn't have to answer, because words weren't necessary after you'd lived and loved with a woman for forty-three years. His thin smile became warmer as he turned toward her.

"Mystery case!" he chortled. "Mystery! The only mystery is why someone hasn't tried a case like this before!"

He paused, looked across the park at the spangle of lights, and added softly:

"But I'm glad no one did."

Ed Murrow called just before Jake went to bed.

"Sorry you got into this?" Murrow asked.

"You know better than that, Ed. I'm deeply grateful to you for tipping me off on this case."

"Well, don't forget to tip me off, too, Jake! I'm not too old to appreciate a scoop now and then!"

"Don't worry, Ed . . ."

Next morning, Jake was rested and ready to meet the challenge of Tony Corfino's TV interview. He knew there was a danger Tony might say too much, but it was a calculated risk that had to be taken. The case needed build-up, plenty of build-up.

The interview took place in the open square between the towering cell-blocks of Manhattan's new jail. When Jake and Tony came out, the TV cameramen and reporters had already taken their places. The city's crack newspapermen were seated on folding chairs in front of the cameras, along with two men from the District Attorney's office who self-consciously tried to look like members of the working press. Jake sat down beside Tony and hunched forward watchfully over the gold head of his cane.

Bert Brown of the *Tribune,* whose pipelines into the D.A.'s office had brought him many an exclusive, shot out the first question. It came with a whiplash crack:

"Tony, are you paying Mr. Emspak to represent you?"

Tony looked uncertainly toward Jake, and when the old lawyer didn't answer, Tony said quietly:

"No—I'm not."

"Is the Syndicate paying Mr. Emspak?"

"I don't know why they should —I never got into the Syndicate." Tony's answer was expressionless, yet his voice had a strangely subdued quality for a Tenth Avenue kid who had grown up fighting for crumbs from the tables of underworld kingpins.

Cassidy of the Times interjected:

"Do you know who *is* paying Mr. Emspak to represent you?"

"Nope."

Now the sun broke through the morning overcast and gleamed on the polished perfection of Tony's waxlike skin. A woman reporter from the Mirror asked in an abrupt, mannish voice:

"Tony—what happened to your face?"

"The Doc says it's some new kind of plastic surgery. I got burned in that accident . . ."

"When you were driving away from the bank?" Bert Brown snapped out.

"Yeah."

Brown grinned in triumph. It had been a neat double play. The two investigators from the D.A.'s office scribbled furiously. Jake Emspak continued to stare into the TV cameras without blinking.

From the back row, a *Daily News* man boomed out:

"Then you admit the shootings, Tony?"

Jake lifted one finger from the gold head of his cane. It was a small gesture, but it silenced Tony's answer and immediately commanded the attention of everyone present.

"My client," rasped Jake, neither denies nor admits any connection with the crimes for which he is being tried."

Bert Brown grinned sardonically at him.

"Do you expect to win this case, Mr. Emspak?"

"We'll win it," Jake answered, in a voice so cold and certain and hard that the reporters involuntarily joined the TV audience in a collective gasp.

Jake stood up and motioned to the deputies. It was time to end the interview. Precisely the right time.

The reporters left without further questions. They knew from long experience when Jake Emspak would and would not talk.

By that evening, speculation—without the ballast of facts—was soaring to dizzy heights. Even the communist angle came in for its share of limelight. Was Tony Corfino somehow of value to the resurgent Red underground? Could Jake Emspak's fee be traced back to Peiping, new headquarters for the Comintern? But not even the most skilled commentator could adequately sustain innuendo on innuendo alone. Not by the grossest distortion of facts could any Communist connection be twisted out of Tony's record of juvenile delinquency, pimping, pick-pocketing, petty thievery, dope peddling, armed robbery, and—since the grain and sugar restrictions of '70—bootlegging.

But one of the more perceptive reporters had noted Tony's strangely quiet manner of speaking. Inquiries at the jail disclosed that Tony had apparently developed an interest in reading.

Here, indeed, was a fresh angle! By mid-afternoon, "Gentleman Tony" had been conceived and given birth. His sordid record was reinterpreted in a picaresque light, and he became something of a Tenth Avenue Robin Hood. A nation squeezed between the twin problems of mounting population and tighter food rationing took "Gentleman Tony" to its fancy. It was like a case of 24-hour flu.

In the midst of all this, as Jake Emspak sat in his office Sunday morning, behind a mound of microfilmed court records dating back to the mid-fifties, he received a more serious-minded interviewer. The visitor was John O. Callihan, well-publicized sportsman, art connoisseur, world traveler and No. 1 man in the Syndicate. His mistresses, and a few old friends like Jake Emspak, called him Johnno.

"Greetings, Jake," he said, easing his athletic, tastefully dressed frame into the chair in front of Jake's desk.

"Hello, Johnno," Jake rasped. "I'm busy."

"I know. That's why I came."

"I can't talk about this case, Johnno."

"I'm not asking you to."

Johnno lit a long, pencil-thin cigarette, and continued reflectively:

"Jake, I've given you some big cases, paid you well—and always let you handle them clean, in your own way. Right?"

"Right enough."

"This is the first time I've ever come for a favor, Jake."

"Yeah?"

"Who's paying for Tony Corfino?"

"Nobody you have to worry about, Johnno."

"No other Syndicate—or anything like that?"

Jake shook his head, and his caller stood up.

"Thanks, Jake."

"Now, will you get the hell out of here!"

"Sure, Jake—give my love to Marge."

Jake lowered his head to hide the mist in his eyes. Johnno had sent a simple corsage of blue violets to Marge's funeral. And he sent one every year, on the anniversary of her death.

Jake went back to Gould v. Gould, 243 App. Div. 589, and stayed with it until nearly six o'clock, when he turned wearily to People v. Gibbs. This looked like an interminable case, even on microfilm. His eyes were strained from staring at the viewer screen, and his big hand was stiff from spinning the reel crank. He opened his fingers, and the knuckles cracked. Jake stared disgustedly at them. You could take a boy out of the coal mines, but not the coal mines out of the boy. His hand was too big for such a small crank. Someday, he'd have to buy an automatic viewer, or even one of those electronic brains they demonstrated at the last Bar Association meeting. But then, he wouldn't need anything after this case. And besides, he didn't trust such impersonal help. Leibowitz had taught him a good lawyer should do his own preparation. Leibowitz! The Vera Stretz case . . . That was forty years ago! Jake shook his head to chase away the memories, and started People v. Gibbs, patiently searching for points of law to help him prove that a punk named Tony Corfino . . .

WHEN COURT reconvened on Monday morning, the weekend's publicity showed its results. A bailiff whispered to Jake that people had been waiting for the doors to open since five A.M. Thousands had gone home disappointed. The fortunate who did get seats filled the courtroom with babble and shrillness as they waited impatiently for something to happen. A new note of excitement sounded when Tony Corfino walked in beside a Sheriff's Deputy. Jake had insisted that Tony be carefully groomed and dressed each morning before coming into court, and the women among the spectators buzzed with appreciation.

Promptly at ten, Judge Hayward stepped out of his chambers and looked, gimlet-eyed, over the courtroom. The hubub quieted, then faded to stillness. Jake was glad to have Judge Hayward on this case. At forty-seven, he was the youngest Superior Court judge and least wedded to precedent. He was impatient with legal sleight-of-hand, painstakingly insistent on a structure of evidence. "Any mule can kick a barn down; it takes a good carpenter to build one," he had once told Jake.

Selection of the jury proceeded at a creeping pace, which court reporters had come to expect with both the D.A. and Jake Emspak

in the same courtroom. In their last clash, they had meticulously examined one hundred and fifty jurors before accepting twelve. But this time, the District Attorney was responsible for most of the delay. Not knowing why Jake had taken the case, the D.A. proceeded nervously and cautiously in questioning each juror: What is your feeling about capital punishment? Would you credit the testimony of an eye witness? Do you believe that a criminal must be punished as decreed by law?

Jake's questions were fewer, and less orthodox. Sometimes he asked: "What is your attitude toward science?" Or, again: "Are you a religious man?" But most frequently he came without preamble to what seemed to be the key to his case:

"What is a man?"

And while this went on in the courtroom, Jake continued his tireless preparations. Research, subpoenas, talking to witnesses, taking depositions, then more research and more subpoenas. Bound the case on the east, the north, the south and the west. Lincoln had said that. Jake's stomach rebelled, and he took to eating a bowl of baby cereal before going to bed in an effort to still its growling and grumbling. Those who knew how hard he worked continued to ask: Where's the money coming from? Why is this important anyway?

Whenever speculation started to sag, Jake shrewdly needled it by leaking a fact here, a rumor there. From Los Angeles, the ebullient old television commentator, George Putnam, still indefatigable in his late sixties, reported that a noted brain surgeon had been subpoenaed to testify at the Corfino trial. In New York, Ed Murrow asked the probing, provocative question: Why has Jake Emspak personally invited one of our great religious philosophers to appear as a defense witness?

"I suggest," hinted Murrow, "that you won't find the gold in this case by panning the mainstream. Or, as Plato said . . ."

The D.A. and his deputies sat up half the night studying an aircheck of the Murrow broadcast.

By the close of the fourth day, selection of the jury had been completed and the trial was ready to begin. That evening, Jake worked on his notes until ten o'clock, and then went out for his customary walk through the memories and quiet of Central Park. As he paused at a crosswalk to watch a satellite platform sweep like a new planet across the sky, a long, black car drifted silently to a stop beside him.

The door swung open, and the District Attorney's tired voice said, "Get in, Jake."

Jake got in, and neither of them spoke for awhile.

"Couldn't sleep," the D.A. said finally. "Can't even sleep with them damn pills anymore."

Jake didn't say anything. He stared at the back of the chauffeur in front of them. What could you say when an old friend was wearing out?

"Look, Jake," the D.A. continued, "do you really mean this is your last case?"

"You know I do."

"Then, how about a deal— You

cop a plea, and Tony gets off with life . . ."

"Why, Emmett?"

"I don't want to see you wind up this way, Jake—losing a penny-ante case like this!"

"You know how I feel about this case."

"No deal, then?"

"No deal."

The D.A. wheezed angrily:

"Then I'm going to whip you, Jake—and that punk's going to burn!"

Jake didn't answer, and they drove slowly along the endless, winding roads of Central Park. The tires of the great car murmured over the pavement like a boat in the ripples of a lake, and the silent motor gave them a sensation of floating through the night.

ANGER STILL fired the D.A.'s voice when he made his opening address to the jury. His final words were brutally to the point:

"We've all heard rumors about what the defense may or may not attempt to prove in this trial, but let us not forget that in the law of our land there is no place for medical quacks, parole panderers or all the bleeding hearts who drip sympathy for a killer like Tony Corfino! The chair is the only thing he and others like him will ever understand!"

The courtroom stilled to breathlessness as Jake Emspak stepped forward to deliver his own opening remarks. He moved, then paused, with a great dramatist's sense of timing. Ghosts of a thousand courtrooms and fifty years of practice moved and paused with him. Impeccably dressed, his long silver hair artfully disheveled, he folded his blue-veined hands over the gold head of his cane and swayed for a moment in silence, thoughtfully contemplating the jurors. When he spoke, his voice had a quality of remoteness that was peculiarly compelling:

"I would like," he began, "to quote from a Supreme Court Justice who died before some of you were born. It was Benjamin Cardoza who said—'Law in its deepest aspects is one with the humanities and with all the things by which humanity is uplifted and inspired. Law is not a cadaver, but a spirit; not a finality, but a process of becoming; not a clog in the fullness of life, but an outlet and a means thereto; not a game but a sacrament' . . ."

He waited fully a half-minute before continuing, and not a person in the courtroom stirred.

"The defense," Jake went on quietly, "will rest its case on two major points:

"First, we will prove that the law has not kept pace with the progress of science and the forward march of human thought.

"Second . . ." here Jake paused again, while he looked slowly from the jurors, to the judge and finally to the District Attorney. "Second," he continued, with a ghost of a smile on his thin lips, "we will prove that *Tony Corfino is not Tony Corfino!"*

Jake stood for a moment in silence. Then, with a slight, almost

curt nod of his head, he turned away and walked back to his seat beside Tony Corfino. Tony stared at him wordlessly, with a look in his eyes that Jake had not yet fathomed.

The courtroom exploded into bedlam. Judge Hayward gaveled peremptorily for silence, and motioned to the District Attorney to begin presentation of the People's case.

If the D.A. was puzzled by Jake's opening remarks, he gave no sign of it. His marshalling of the evidence was grimly efficient. There was a quality of the inexorable about the way he moved up his witnesses one by one. It was like the maneuvering of a skilled boxer who seeks to take his opponent out, not with one punch, but with a carefully executed combination of punches.

Tony Corfino was not Tony Corfino? The D.A. smiled sardonically as he pointed to the pale defendant and asked the witness to identify him.

"And is this the man who entered the bank on the morning of last October 17?"

"Yes, it is," replied the nervous, overly plump young woman.

"Were you in a position to observe him closely at all times?"

"Yes."

"Where were you?"

"In—in the Note Window . . . right next to where he—he came up and pointed his gun."

"Thank you."

With elaborate courtesy, the D.A. turned to Jake:

"Does the distinguished defense counsel desire to cross-examine this witness?"

Jake nodded gravely, and advanced toward the witness stand. The young woman watched him apprehensively. In the TV booth, the regular court reporters leaned forward with anticipation. Many a time had they seen Jake Emspak take the most positive witness and reduce him to a quivering, stuttering symbol of uncertainty. "Show me an eye witness," Jake had once observed, "and I'll show you a liar."

Now, as Jake began, there was a note of friendliness in his voice:

"You say this is the man who entered the bank on the morning of last October 17?"

"Yes—yes, sir . . . It is!"

Jake nodded understandingly.

"Suppose," he continued, "we look at it another way for a moment: Is the man who entered the bank on the morning of last October 17 the same man who now appears as defendant in this trial?"

The young woman bit her lip, smearing some of the lipstick on her large front teeth. She hesitated, thinking through the question, then nodded firmly.

"Yes—of course!"

"How do you know?"

"Why—he—he *looks* the same!"

"*Exactly* the same? I suggest you look him over carefully before you answer."

The young woman stared at Tony, then dropped her eyes in confusion.

"*Exactly* the same?" Jake pressed.

"Well . . . I'm . . . I'm not sure . . ."

Jake teetered on the point of his cane, thoughtfully contemplating the now flustered witness. Then, unexpectedly, he turned to Judge Hayward and said,

"No further questions, your Honor."

The D.A. blinked in surprise. It was not like Jake to stop once he had a witness in full retreat. The court reporters looked at each other disappointedly. Maybe the old man should retire!

Jake continued to treat prosecution witnesses with similar restraint. He would lead them up to the brink of uncertainty, then leave them there. As a result, the District Attorney was able to complete presentation of his case by the middle of the second morning.

"The People rest," he announced, with grim satisfaction.

JAKE EMSPAK'S first defense witness was a youthful looking man of about forty who quickly identified himself as a well-known authority on fingerprints, an expert who had many times been called to assist the police in major criminal cases.

"Is it not true," Jake began, "that in the tradition of modern law, fingerprints are regarded as the most positive method of identification?"

"That is correct."

From a mass of data on his desk, Jake extracted a single sheet of photostatic copy and handed it to Judge Hayward.

"I have here," he said, "a certified copy of one Tony Corfino's fingerprints—taken at the time of his arrest and conviction five years ago on a charge of Grand Theft, Auto . . ."

The Judge accepted the photostat and handed it to the clerk for entry into the record. Jake then retrieved it, and gave it to his witness.

"Now, Sir," he went on, "will you please take the defendant's fingerprints and compare them to this photostatic copy."

The jurors craned forward curiously as the fingerprint expert opened his kit and went methodically about the business of fingerprinting Tony Corfino. When he had finished, and returned to the witness stand with the new prints, Jake Emspak demanded:

"Is there any similarity between those fingerprints and the fingerprints of one Tony Corfino?"

The expert looked from one set of prints to the other, and quickly replied:

"There can be absolutely no doubt about it—these are *not* the same prints."

Red-faced with anger, the District Attorney heaved himself to his feet and strode toward the bench.

"Objection, your Honor!" he stormed. "This is the most outrageous deception I have ever witnessed in a courtroom. Frankly, I am astounded that opposing counsel would stoop to such tactics!"

Judge Hayward's voice had the bite of steel drill as he directed:

"Will you please explain to the Court exactly what you mean?"

"It's a matter of record," the D.A. snapped, "that the defendant was seriously injured in the accident that resulted in his capture. Massive burns were part of his injuries . . . Bone and skin grafts were necessary to repair the damage to his hands—as well as to other parts of his body. Naturally, his fingerprints would be different! The Defense Counsel knows that!"

Jake smiled, and replied mildly:

"Of course the Defense Counsel knows that, and will certainly make the full extent of the defendant's injuries a part of the trial record. However, I have called this particular witness to show that Tony Corfino cannot be identified as Tony Corfino by what is still regarded as the most infallible method of criminal identification."

"Your Honor," retorted the D.A., "This so-called testimony is totally irrelevant and immaterial. I request that it be stricken from the record!"

"It is most relevant to our case," Jake shot back. "Furthermore, the Defense will prove that Tony Corfino cannot be identified as Tony Corfino by any known method of criminal identification!"

Judge Hayward's eyes narrowed speculatively. He thought the matter over for a moment before stating, with unconcealed interest:

"This may well be a legal situation without precedent. The Court will withhold ruling on the objection for the time being."

The next defense witness was a specialist on agglutination of the blood.

"Agglutination," he explained, adjusting his glasses pedantically, "is a biological reaction consisting of the mutual adhesion of the red corpuscles. It is also a method of establishing individualization of blood."

"I see," said Jake. Now, tell us—how has this method been used to establish identification in a criminal case?"

"It is sometimes used where the victim's blood leaves stains on the murderer's clothing—as well as the victim's own clothing. If both blood stains produce the same biological reaction, the murderer is either guilty—or has a great deal of explaining to do!"

Jake meticulously selected another exhibit from the material on his desk.

"Will you identify this, please?"

"It is a piece of cotton stained with the blood of this—this defendant."

"When was it stained?"

"In the test I made last week."

"Did you compare it with the stains on garments worn by a certain Tony Corfino at the time of his accident?"

"I did."

"What did you find?"

"The two samples were entirely different?"

"Could we assume, then, that the blood of a man known as Tony Corfino does not flow through the veins of this defendant, who also bears the name of Tony Corfino?"

The witness rubbed his hand thoughtfully over the high, polished dome of his forehead.

"You *could* put it that way," he conceded.

With the skill of a symphony conductor calling upon the diverse instruments under his baton, Jake Emspak continued to bring forward a bewildering variety of witnesses to prove that in the identifiable details of his physiology, Tony Corfino indeed was not Tony Corfino. The D.A. watched in furious silence. Once, when Jake passed near him, he muttered:

"This is contemptible!"

Imperturbably, Jake turned back to the witness stand, where a radiographer from Scripps Institute was taking the oath. Patiently, he led the witness through a description of how the radiographies of the nasal accessory sinuses and mastoid processes could be used to establish the identity of an individual. Jake then produced medical records from a juvenile correctional institution in eastern Pennsylvania, where Tony Corfino had sojourned during his seventeenth year. Comparison with recent hospital records showed a striking difference between the two radiographies.

The opthalmologic method of Capdevielle was next explored by Jake to show that the eyes of Tony Corfino were not the eyes of Tony Corfino. The technique of Tamassia and Ameuille was employed to prove the same point about Tony's veins. The umbilicial method of Bert and Vianny intrigued the courtroom and TV audience with structural dissimilarities of Tony's navel. By means of projection on a large screen, Jake demonstrated to the jurors and Judge Hayward that Tony Corfino, defendant, had an entirely different electrocardiagram from the Tony Corfino whose crushed body had been pulled, more dead than alive, from the wreckage of a burning automobile.

Late that afternoon, Ed Murrow commented to his news audience in the cadence that had been his trademark for more than forty years:

"We know not yet where this trial is taking us, though Jake Emspak is beginning to show the direction. Perhaps, we, too, could ask ourselves the question: *What is a man?*"

Less philosophically, a space-weary young captain, sending in his nightly report from the satellite station, Vanguard VI, queried:

"If this Tony Corfino isn't Tony Corfino, who or what in the hell is he?"

PART OF the answer to this question was on display the next morning when the jury filed into Judge Hayward's courtroom. Before them, and angled toward the TV cameras, was a chart nearly eight feet tall. It showed, in outline, the figure of a man. The figure was covered with small black dots, each bearing a white number. In all, there was seventy-two dots.

As soon as court was in session, Jake called a short, squarely-built man of about fifty to the stand. There was a bulldog set to his jaw and mouth. He identified himself as Dr. Theodore Clendenning, Chief of Staff at City Hospital.

"Dr. Clendenning," said Jake, "I assume you are familiar with the medical and surgical care received

by the defendant at your hospital?"

"Quite familiar," the doctor retorted, impatiently.

"Then, may I direct your attention to this chart. It indicates areas in which artificial parts were used to replace the damaged or destroyed natural parts of a certain Tony Corfino's body. Will you name them, please, as I point them out with my cane."

Tapping the chart like a schoolteacher signalling for the attention of his pupils, Jake Emspak started at the outline of the head.

"Vitallium skull plate," snapped Dr. Clendenning.

Jake's cane touched the nose.

"Vitallium nose plate."

Swiftly, the tip of the cane moved around the outline of the body, pausing only long enough for the doctor to name each part:

"Plastic tear duct . . . vitallium jaw bone and implanted dentures . . . paraffin and plastic sponge to fill chest after removal of lung . . . plastic esophagus . . . tantalum breast plate . . . tantalum mesh to patch chest wall . . . vitallium shoulder socket rim and shoulder joint bone . . . vitallium elbow joint, radius bone, ulna bone, wrist bone, finger joint . . . spinal fusion plate . . . vitallium blood vessel tubes."

Jake put down his cane, and turned conversationally toward the doctor.

"Dr. Clendenning, is it true that this Tony Corfino's reproductive organs were destroyed in the accident?"

"Virtually so."

"And is it not also true that the defendant in this case is now capable of becoming a parent?"

Dr. Clendenning glanced at his watch and sighed.

"What you are referring to," he answered, "has been rather elementary surgery for the past ten years."

"But the children of Tony Corfino would not then be the children of Tony Corfino?"

Dr. Clendenning looked toward Judge Hayward with a pained expression. Receiving no sign of any kind from the Judge, he turned back to Jake Emspak.

"I have given you the medical data," he said angrily. "You can draw your own conclusions."

Jake nodded, and replied with emphasis:

"I am sure this Court and the Jury will do just that."

He studied the chart for a moment, then tapped the outline figure in the area of the eyes.

"Tell us, Dr. Clendenning, what did your staff do about Tony Corfino's eyes? I understand the flames had reached them.

"Cornea transplants were necessary."

"And where did you obtain the corneas?"

"Mr. Emspak—I'm sure you know that most people nowadays will their eyes to the Cornea Bank!"

"Can you tell us anything about the corneas that were transplanted in Tony Corfino's eyes? From what type a person did they come?"

"I'd rather not answer that?"

Jake turned to the Judge.

"Your Honor, unless there is a legal reason why the good doctor should not answer, I ask the Court to direct that he do so."

Judge Hayward hesitated, then directed the witness to answer.

"They came from the eyes of a priest," growled the doctor.

Jake Emspak raised his cane to the chart once again, then apparently changed his mind and lowered it.

"Dr. Clendenning," he asked quietly, "am I correct in believing that the construction of parts for the human body is now an important industry?"

"That's right," the doctor said grudgingly. "It's grown tremendously in the past twenty years—from a $160-million-a-year business in 1957 to nearly a billion today . . ."

"One further question, if you please, Doctor," said Jake. "What is *your* definition of a man?"

The doctor thought for a moment, and smiled coldly.

"I'm afraid it would not assist your case," he replied.

"We are only looking for some basic truths."

Dr. Clendenning bunched his square shoulders and leaned forward aggressively.

"I can think of no better definition," he snapped, "than one given by a distinguished physician in the earlier years of this century. He defined the human body as an animal organism, differing in only a few respects from other animal organisms, and fitted for the performance of two main functions: The conversion of food and air into energy and tissue; and the reproduction of other individuals of its species!"

So coldly, with such an air of finality did he speak, that his words brought an audible gasp from two women in the jury box. Jake Emspak remained impassive.

"And this is all you see in a man?" he prodded gently.

The doctor's jaw set stubbornly.

"As a philosopher," he retorted, "I may engage in some speculation in the company of Plato, Schopenhauer or the Archbishop of Canterbury, but my speculations would themselves be based upon speculations and not upon any scientific data resembling observed facts!"

"Then, from your point of view, the defendant in this courtroom is not *the* Tony Corfino—the same man—whose broken body was brought into your hospital eight months ago?"

"Obviously not."

"Thank you, Doctor."

Jake walked slowly from the witness stand to the jury box, and then back to the bench.

"Perhaps," he said softly, "a ten-minute recess would be in order . . ."

Judge Hayward drew a long breath, exhaled and nodded. With the sound of his gavel, tension ran out of the courtroom like water from a punctured barrel.

WHEN COURT reconvened, Jake began bringing to the witness stand a parade of educators, religious leaders and philosophers who kept the courtroom alternately fascinated and bewildered for the next two days. They came from London, Rome, Johannesburg, Philadelphia, Tokyo and Chicago. They came from every oasis of

learning where men could still find profit in thought, without relating the profit to the cash register or the thought of technology. They spoke in words and symbols that sometimes soared beyond space itself, and left the world's TV audience groping for stability in earthbound cliches. The paradox was incredible: All this thinking, all this culture—all of everything brought into a courtroom to defend a bush-league hoodlum. Reporters ceased to ask who was paying for this display; they simply marveled at the pyrotechnics. Through it all, Jake Emspak moved deftly, surely, extracting from each witness the pure essence of relevant thought:

Man is a creature destined to live in two worlds. He is surrounded first by the realities of this world—and he is called to live with eternal realities that transcend this world . . .

The human person is a body, and therefore subject to the laws of matter, to spatiality, temporality and opacity. As such, he is a meeting place for passing forces, a crossroads of contacts and reactions. But the human person is also a spirit, that is to say a reality that transcends apparent reality. There is within him the wakened or nascent ability to comprehend space and surpass time . . .

The human self is an object, of a sort—and, as such, can be described as the empiricists have described us. But the human self is also, and more essentially, a subject, which never appears to the view of others or even to the most determined introspection. The self as object is finite, but the self as subject touches the infinite; it is the meeting place of time and eternity, of man and God . . .

For all its advances, the 20th century is still a child of the 19th, when the impact of the developing sciences of physics and biology produced a change in the concept of nature and Man's place in it. From Malthus and Darwin, Spencer and Feuerbach, Vogt, Buchner, Czolbe and Haeckel evolved a reductive naturalism in which the spiritual quality of man is ruled out and he becomes a unique emergent of a blind natural process—a creature who must make of nature what he can . . .

The next five million years of evolution will be in the human brain, where Man must ultimately be defined. Until Man appeared, evolution strove only to produce an organ, the brain, in a body capable of protecting it, and carrying out its will. The ancestors of Man were irresponsible actors playing parts in a play they did not understand. Man continues to play his part but wants to understand the play . . .

Man is a blending of the rational and intuitive processes. Ethical conclusions reached by logical thinking were attained several thousand years ago by the religions, which proves that man's rational processes are strangely slower than his intuitive processes . . .

Jurors shifted impatiently in their seats, yet their attention would inexorably be drawn back to the witness stand. Courtroom spectators, who had come to be titillated by the sensational, stayed to grope

with concepts they could not understand. The TV audience, spoonfed for so many decades, tried doggedly to chew and digest adult foodstuffs. Sets were turned off in anger or despair—and then turned back on again.

"What is a man?"

The pivotal nature of this question became steadily more evident.

If Tony Corfino was not Tony Corfino, was he then not more of the real personality, the human entity, than the original Tony had ever been.

"In restoring the damaged areas of the brain," a surgeon testified under Jake's skillful prodding, "we thought it wise to perform a lobotomy at the same time, thereby relieving anti-social tensions and pressures."

(The body is at once a means of expression for the soul, and a veil; it reveals and it hides . . .)

"During the convalescent period," a consulting specialist informed the courtroom, "we recommended treatment with sodium dilantin and electroshock therapy, thereby producing a change in this patient's electroencephalograph."

(The body presents all the problems of matter: It is a limitation, a weight, a force. It seems almost a miracle when it is overcome, penetrated and ordered by thought and spirit . . .)

"Subsequently," the psychiatrist stated, "this patient underwent extensive therapy, aided frequently by hypnosis and sodium pentathol. His respiratory, vascular and circulatory systems began to show increasing stability."

(Released from its warped framework, brought into balance with instincts inherited from our animal ancestors, the body becomes, in a way, an image of the soul, a sign conveying something of our personal mystery . . .)

And then Jake called the hospital Administrator to the stand. Speaking with great deliberation, so that each word registered, Jake asked:

"Is this type of medical care ordinarily given to a prisoner-patient?"

"The type of care depends upon the case, Mr. Emspak. In a case such as this, I would regard the treatment as routine. You see, in the past decade our approach to any patient has become one of total therapy. . ."

"And in the case of a prisoner, what do you do when the therapy is completed?"

The Administrator looked surprised.

"Why, we return him to jail—in accordance with the law."

Jake Emspak stood in silence, contemplatively staring down at the blue veins on the back of his hands. At length, he announced:

"Your Honor, the Defense will conclude tomorrow morning, after one more witness—a man who goes by the name of Tony Corfino . . ."

THE SWEAT on the pale, polished skin of Tony's forehead stood out like drops of summer rain; they seemed to have fallen there rather than seeped out through the pores.

A polygraph lie detector had

been set up under Jake's direction and wheeled close to the witness stand. A technician opened the front of Tony's shirt and made fast the pneumograph tube with the aid of a beaded chain. Next, a blood-pressure cuff, of the type used by physicians, was fasted around Tony's right arm. A set of electrodes was attached to the palmar and dorsal surfaces of the hand of the other arm. The recorder showing the graph lines had been specially constructed so as to be visible throughout the courtroom, and to the television cameras.

The technician had already been on the stand to explain the simplified and easily read graph lines of the modern polygraph: A shallow breathing line denoting suppression; a heavy breath line denoting relief; the respiratory block, fast pulse and slow pulse lines; the rise in blood pressure tracing . . . It was all there on the screen—the emotional picture of a man testifying at his own trial for murder.

"Objection, your Honor!" shouted the D.A. for the tenth time that morning. "This procedure is definitely irregular and immaterial! Defense Counsel has been making a mockery of the Court for days, but now he has stepped completely out of line!"

Jake clucked soothingly.

"What," he inquired, "is irregular or immaterial about a defendant voluntarily taking a lie detector test? I believe that I have heard the District Attorney challenge clients of mine to do so on several occasions! Now, we are merely permitting the Court and the Jury to view the test in progress . . ."

Once again, the Judge withheld his ruling, and the D.A. sagged dejectedly in his chair. The strain of the last few days—sitting in the courtroom and listening to witnesses he knew not how or why to cross-examine—had taken its toll. His eyes were bloodshot, and fits of wheezing seized him spasmodically, but the set of his jaw was still unyielding. Jake grieved for him.

Tony Corfino's reactions, as he sat in the witness chair watching the final preparations, would be difficult to catalogue. He looked both aloof and nervously concerned. His curly black hair was damp from the way he constantly brushed the sweat back off his forehead; his puffy lips seemed in constant need of moistening. But his hands were folded quietly in his lap. He seemed to Jake like a man lost to the past, adrift in the present and unrelated to the future.

"Will you give us your name, please?" Jake asked casually.

"Tony Corfino."

"Where were you born?"

"I ain't—I'm not sure . . . On the West Side, I suppose . . ."

On the recorder over Tony's head, the graph lines rippled in smooth patterns.

Suddenly changing his manner, Jake rasped:

"Have you ever committed a crime?"

Tony frowned in bewilderment.

"I *know* that I have, but sometimes . . . Well, I kinda wonder . . ."

"Do you remember what happened last October 17?"

"You mean the bank . . . the

shootin'?"

"That's right."

"I've read so much—heard so much talk—that I ain't sure just what I remember . . ."

Tony's eyes—or the eyes of the dead priest through which Tony had vision—reflected his torment. Jake moved around so that Tony would be facing the jury when he answered the next question.

"Tony," directed Jake, "think about this question before you answer it: Are *you* the man who tried to rob that bank—then got excited and killed two people?"

Jake knew this question was the one element of gamble in his entire case. The way it was answered could be a summation or refutation of all the evidence and testimony he had so painstakingly assembled.

The jury sensed this, too. So did Judge Hayward. His keen eyes flickered alertly from the defendant's face to the lines on the polygraph recorder.

Now Tony's hands were no longer folded quietly in his lap. They were locked together, and the new veins in his wrists stood out under the new skin. His lips worked silently as he groped for words.

And then the words burst into an anguished outcry:

"No! I couldn't! . . ."

The polygraph lines leaped into jagged peaks. Blood pressure, respiratory block, pulse and breathing—all climbed and dropped wildly, recording their damning message for the world to see.

The D.A.'s lips twisted in a mirthless smile of triumph. Up in the TV booth, reporters sputtered, split infinitives and shattered syntax in frantic efforts to describe and interpret what had happened.

Jake Emspak stood and waited, a sear and wrinkled leaf hanging motionless in the wind.

(If the self is merely a node in a complex casual series, if self is solely energized and motivated by the sovereign need of survival and security, then the idea of a bridge between Man and the infinite is a pious illusion . . .)

Tony Corfino stared down at his twisted hands, and slowly they unlocked. He looked up at Jake, and the doubt and fear and bewilderment were gone at last from his eyes.

"That ain't so," he said quietly. "I did it . . . I know I did it . . . an' I know it was wrong . . . I deserve the chair!"

(Thus Man escapes himself in freedom, and is therefore never a fully predictable or manipulatable object—only a window through which we peer with blind eyes into the reaches of the universe . . .)

THE District Attorney's summary to the jury was a model of legal craftsmanship. Boldly disregarding the broader issues raised by Jake, he hewed firmly to the line of criminal responsibility and punishment.

Point by point he reviewed the facts of the crime. Witness by witness he retraced the eye-witness testimony. He produced photographs of Tony's body being loaded from the wreckage of the car into the ambulance, and from the am-

bulance into the prison ward of City Hospital. He proved beyond any reasonable doubt that Tony had never been out of custody from the moment of his apprehension.

"Even the defendant admits to his responsibility for the crime," the D.A. continued coldly.

Only in his concluding remarks did the District Attorney make reference to the defense presented by Jake Emspak.

"I wonder," he asked, smiling for the first time, "if any of you tried—as I did—to carry through to its ultimate conclusion the line of reasoning presented with such detail and admitted virtuosity by the defendant's counsel? If the fabricating of replacement parts for the human body has already become a billion dollar industry, if psychiatry continues to achieve new miracles, how many people in this world could now—or in the near future—seek to escape their responsibilities by taking refuge in the argument that they were no longer themselves? At what point would we draw the line? If fifty-percent of a man's body has been replaced is he neither himself nor a new person? If fifty-one has been replaced, is he no longer the husband of his wife or the father of his children? Can he then walk blithely away from his responsibilities, proclaiming 'I am a new man'?"

A titter went through the courtroom. Judge Hayward gavelled immediately for silence, but the D.A. winked at the TV cameras. His point had been well made.

When Jake Emspak stepped up to the jury box to deliver his own final plea, he promptly picked up the challenge.

"I have known the District Attorney too well, for too many years," he said, "to believe that he has considered only the superficial aspects of this case. If you should find the defendant guilty, I am sure he would be the last to oppose consideration of all the matters I have raised in the determination of a just sentence.

"And I grant you that if a verdict of guilty is reached, the letter of the law will be fulfilled, and an eye for an eye can be paid.

"Likewise, if the verdict is not guilty, the letter of the law most unquestionably will be violated—but its spirit will be vindicated!

"I am asking you to take a bold step, across a new frontier . . . Yes, down through the ages, law has become a living, meaningful instrument of human dignity because—at each crossroad of decision—men and women were not afraid to depart from precedent!"

Oldtimers in the court had never before heard Jake Emspak summarize a case in such dispassionate, objective tones. Usually, his voice and argument ranged the gamut of emotional and semantic appeals, plucking at each member of the jury like the strings of a harp. Today, he seemed to be making an effort to hold himself in check.

"This is the trial of a living man for the crime of a man who no longer exists," Jake continued quietly. "Science destroyed that man—completely and with absolute finality! In his place is a man with

(Continued on page 117)

What lasts forever? Does love? Does death? . . . Nothing lasts forever . . . Not even forever

HOMECOMING

BY MIGUEL HIDALGO

Illustrated by Ed Emsh

THE LARGE HORSE plodded slowly over the shifting sand. The rider was of medium size, with huge, strong hands and seemingly hollow eyes. Strange eyes, alive and aflame. They had no place in the dust-caked, tired body, yet there they were, seeking, always seeking —searching the clear horizon, and never seeming to find what they sought.

The horse moved faster now. They were nearing a river; the water would be welcome on tired bodies and dry throats. He spurred

his horse, and when they reached the water's edge, he dismounted and unsaddled the horse. Then both man and horse plunged headlong into the waiting torrent, deep into the cool embrace of the clear liquid. They soaked it into their pores and drank deeply of it, feeling life going once more through their veins. Satisfied, they lifted themselves from the water, and the man lay down on the yellow sand of the river bank to sleep.

When he awoke, the sun was almost setting. The bright shafts of red light spilled across the sky, making the mountains silent scarlet shadows on the face of the rippling water. Quickly he gathered driftwood, and built a small fire. From his pack he removed some of the coffee he had found in one of the ruined cities. He brought water from the river in the battered coffee-pot he had salvaged, and while he waited for it to boil, he went to his horse, Conqueror, stroking his mane and whispering in his ear. Then he led him silently to a grassy slope where he hobbled him and left him for the night.

In the fading light, he ate the hard beef jerky and drank the scalding coffee. Refreshed and momentarily content, he sat staring into the dying fire, seeing the bright glowing coals as living fingers clutching at the wood in consuming embrace, taking all and returning nothing but ashes.

Slowly his eyelids yielded. His body sagged, and blood seemed to fill his brain, bathing it in a gentle, warm flood.

He slept. His brain slept.

But the portion of his brain called memory stirred. It was all alone; all else was at rest. Images began to appear, drawn from inexhaustible files, wherein are kept all thoughts, past, present and future . . .

It was the night before he was to go overseas. World War III had been declared, and he had enlisted, receiving his old rank of captain. He was with his wife in the living room of their home. They had put the children to bed—their sons—and now sat on the couch, watching the blazing fire. It was then that he had showed it to her.

"I've got something to tell you, and something to show you."

He had removed the box from his pocket and opened it. And heard her cry of surprised joy.

"Oh, a ring, and it's a diamond, too!" she cried in her rich, happy voice which always seemed to send a thrill through his body.

"It's for you; so long as you wear it, I'll come back, even from the dead, if need be. Read the inscription."

She held the ring up to the light and read aloud, "It is forever."

Then she had slipped the ring on her finger and her arms around him. He held her very close, feeling the warmth from her body flowing into his and making him oblivious to everything except that she was there in his arms and that he was sinking deep, deep into a familiar sea, where he had been many times before but each time found something new and unexplored, some vastly different emotion he could never quite explain.

"Wait!" she cried. "I've something for you, too."

She took off the locket she wore about her neck and held it up to the shimmering light, letting it spin at the end of its chain. It caught the shadows of the fire and reflected them, greatly magnified, over the room. It was in the shape of a star, encrusted with emeralds, with one large ruby in the center. When he opened it, he found a picture of her in one side, and in the other a picture of the children. He took her in his arms again, and loosened her long, black hair, burying his face in it for a moment. Then he kissed her, and instantly was drawn down into the abyss which seemed to have no beginning or any end.

The next morning had been bleak and gray. The mist clung to the wet, sodden ground, and the air was heavy in his lungs. He had driven off in the jeep the army had sent for him, watching her there on the porch until the mist swirled around her feet and she ran back into the house and slammed the door. His cold fingers found the locket, making a little bulge under his uniform, and the touch of it seemed to warm the blood in his veins.

Three days later they had landed in Spain, merged with another division, then crossed the Pyrenees into France, and finally to Paris where the fighting had begun. Already the city was a silent graveyard, littered with the rubble of towers and cathedrals which had once been great.

Three years later they were on the road to Moscow. Over a thousand miles lay behind, a dead man on every foot of those miles. Yet victory was near. The Russians had not yet used the H-bomb; the threat of annihilation by the retaliation forces had been too great.

He had done well in the war, and had been decorated many times for bravery in action. Now he felt the victory that seemed to be in the air, and he had wished it would come quickly, so that he might return to her. Home. The very feel of the word was everything a battle-weary soldier needed to make him fight harder and live longer.

Suddenly he had become aware of a droning, wooshing sound above him. It grew louder and louder until he knew what it was.

"Heavy bombers!" The alarm had sounded, and the men had headed for their foxholes.

But the planes had passed over, the sun glinting on their bellies, reflecting a blinding light. They were bound for bigger, more important targets. When the all-clear had sounded, the men clambered from their shelters. An icy wind swept the field, bringing with it clouds which covered the sun. A strange fear had gripped him then . . .

Across the Atlantic, over the pole, via Alaska, the great bombers flew. In cities, great and small, the air raid sirens sounded, high screaming noises which had jarred the people from sleep in time to die. The defending planes roared into the sky to intercept the onrushing bombers. The horrendous battle split the universe. Many bombers fell, victims of fanatical suicide planes, or of missiles that streaked across the sky which none

could escape.

But too many bombers got through, dropping their deadly cargo upon the helpless cities. And not all the prayers or entreaties to any God had stopped their carnage. First there had been the red flashes that melted buildings into molten streams, and then the great triple-mushroom cloud filled with the poisonous gases that the wind swept away to other cities, where men had not died quickly and mercifully, but had rotted away, leaving shreds of putrid flesh behind to mark the places where they had crawled.

The retaliatory forces had roared away to bomb the Russian cities. Few, if any, had returned. Too much blood and life were on their hands. Those who had remained alive had found a resting place on the crown of some distant mountain. Others had preferred the silent peaceful sea, where flesh stayed not long on bones, and only darting fishes and merciful beams of filtered light found their aluminum coffins.

The war had ended.

To no avail. Neither side had won. Most of the cities and the majority of the population of both countries had been destroyed. Even their governments had vanished, leaving a silent nothingness. The armies that remained were without leaders, without sources of supplies, save what they could forage and beg from an unfriendly people.

They were alone now, a group of tired, battered men, for whom life held nothing. Their families had long since died, their bodies turned to dust, their spirits fled on the winds to a new world.

Yet these remnants of an army must return—or at least try. Their exodus was just beginning. Somehow he had managed to hold together the few men left from his force. He had always nourished the hope that she might still be alive. And now that the war was over he had to return—had to know whether she was still waiting for him.

They had started the long trek. Throughout Europe anarchy reigned. He and his men were alone. All they could do now was fight. Finally they reached the seaport city of Calais. With what few men he had left, he had commandeered a small yacht, and they had taken to the sea.

After months of storms and bad luck, they had been shipwrecked somewhere off the coast of Mexico. He had managed to swim ashore, and had been found by a fisherman's family. Many months he had spent swimming and fishing, recovering his strength, inquiring about the United States. The Mexicans had spoken with fear of the land across the Rio Grande. All its great cities had been destroyed, and those that had been only partially destroyed were devoid of people. The land across the Rio Grande had become a land of shadows. The winds were poisoned, and the few people who might have survived, were crazed and maimed by the blasts. Few men had dared cross the Rio Grande into "El Mundo gris de Noviembre"—the November world. Those who had, had never returned.

In time he had traveled north

until he reached the Rio Grande. He had waded into the muddy waters and somehow landed on the American side. In the November world.

It was rightly called. The deserts were long. All plant life had died, leaving to those once great fertile stretches, nothing but the sad, temporal beauty that comes with death. No people had he seen. Only the ruins of what had once been their cities. He had walked through them, and all that he had seen were the small mutant rodents, and all that he had heard was the occasional swish of the wind as it whisked along what might have been dead leaves, but wasn't.

He had been on the trail for a long time. His food was nearly exhausted. The mountains were just beginning, and he hoped to find food there. He had not found food, but his luck had been with him. He had found a horse. Not a normal horse, but a mutation. It was almost twice as large as a regular horse. Its skin seemed to shimmer and was like glassy steel to the touch. From the center of its forehead grew a horn, straight out, as the horn of a unicorn. But most startling of all were the animal's eyes which seemed to speak—a silent mental speech, which he could understand. The horse had looked up as he approached it and seemed to say: "Follow me."

And he had followed. Over a mountain, until they came to a pass, and finally to a narrow path which led to an old cabin. He had found it empty, but there were cans of food and a rifle and many shells. He had remained there a long time—how long he could not tell, for he could only measure time by the cycles of the sun and the moon. Finally he had taken the horse, the rifle and what food was left, and once again started the long journey home.

The farther north he went, the more life seemed to have survived. He had seen great herds of horses like his own, stampeding across the plains, and strange birds which he could not identify. Yet he had seen no human beings.

But he knew he was closer now. Closer to home. He recognized the land. How, he did not know, for it was much changed. A sensing, perhaps, of what it had once been. He could not be more than two days' ride away. Once he was through this desert, he would find her, he would be with her once again; all would be well, and his long journey would be over.

The images faded. Even memory slept in a flow of warm blood. Body and mind slept into the shadows of the dawn.

He awoke and stretched the cramped muscles of his body. At the edge of the water he removed his clothes and stared at himself in the rippling mirror. His muscles were lean and hard, evenly placed throughout the length of his frame. A deep ridge ran down the length of his torso, separating the muscles, making the chest broad. Well satisfied with his body, he plunged into the cold water, deep down, until he thought his lungs would burst; then swiftly returned to the clean

air, tingling in every pore. He dried himself and dressed. Conqueror was eating the long grass near the stream. Quickly he saddled him. No time for breakfast. He would ride all day and the next night. And he would be home.

Still northward. The hours crawled slower than a dying man. The sun was a torch that pierced his skin, seeming to melt his bones into a burning stream within his body. But day at last gave way to night, and the sun to the moon. The torch became a white pockmarked goddess, with streaming hair called stars.

In the moonlight he had not seen the crater until he was at its very edge. Even then he might not have seen it had not the horse stopped suddenly. The wind swirled through its vast emptiness, slapping his face with dusty hands. For a moment he thought he heard voices—mournful, murmuring voices, echoing up from the misty depths. He turned quickly away and did not look back.

Night paled into day; day burned into night.

There were clouds in the sky now, and a gentle wind caressed the sweat from his tired body. He stopped. There it was! Barely discernible through the moonlight, he saw it. Home.

Quickly he dismounted and ran. Now he could see a small light in the window, and he knew they were there. His breath came in hard ragged gulps. At the window he peered in, and as his eyes became accustomed to the inner gloom, he saw how bare the room was. No matter. Now that he was home he would build new furniture, and the house would be even better than it had been before.

Then he saw her.

She was sitting motionless in a straight wooden chair beside the fireplace, the feeble light cast by the embers veiling her in mauve shadows. He waited, wondering if she were . . . Presently she stirred like a restless child in sleep, then moved from the chair to the pile of wood near the hearth, and replenished the fire. The wood caught quickly, sending up long tongues of flame, and forming a bright pool of light around her.

His blood froze. The creature illuminated by the firelight was a monster. Large greasy scales covered its face and arms, and there was no hair on its head. Its gums were toothless cavities in a sunken, mumbling mouth. The eyes, turned momentarily toward the window, were empty of life.

"No, no!" he cried soundlessly.

This was not his house. In his delirium he had only imagined he had found it. He had been searching so long. He would go on searching. He was turning wearily away from the window when the movement of the creature beside the fire held his attention. It had taken a ring from one skeleton-like finger and stood, turning the ring slowly as if trying to decipher some inscription inside it.

He knew then. He had come home.

Slowly he moved toward the door. A great weakness was upon him. His feet were stones, reluctant

to leave the earth. His body was a weed, shriveled by thirst. He grasped the doorknob and clung to it, looking up at the night sky and trying to draw strength from the wind that passed over him. It was no use. There was no strength. Only fear—a kind of fear he had never known.

He fumbled at his throat, his fingers crawling like cold worms around his neck until he found the locket and the clasp which had held it safely through endless nightmare days and nights. He slipped the clasp and the locket fell into his waiting hand. As one in a dream, he opened it, and stared at the pictures, now in the dim moonlight no longer faces of those he loved, but grey ghosts from the past. Even the ruby had lost its glow. What had once been living fire was now a dull glob of darkness.

"Nothing is forever!" He thought he had shouted the words, but only a thin sound, the sound of leaves ruffled by the wind, came back to him.

He closed the locket and fastened the clasp, and hung it on the door-knob. It moved slowly in the wind, back and forth, like a pendulum. "Forever—forever. Only death is forever." He could have sworn he heard the words.

He ran. Away from the house. To the large horse with a horn in the center of its forehead, like a unicorn. Once in the saddle, the spurt of strength left him. His shoulders slumped, his head dropped onto his chest.

Conqueror trotted away, the sound of his hooves echoing hollow-ly in the vast emptiness. **END**

STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION OF

Of *IF—Worlds of Science Fiction*, published bi-monthly at Buffalo, New York, for October 1, 1957.

1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: *Publisher*, Quinn Publishing Company, Inc., 17 Pearl Street, Kingston, N. Y.; *Editor*, James L. Quinn, 17 Pearl Street, Kingston, N. Y.; *Managing editor*, None; *Business manager*, None.

2. The owner is (if owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a partnership or other unincorporated firm, its name and address, as well as that of each individual member, must be given); Quinn Publishing Company, Inc., 17 Pearl Street, Kingston, N. Y.; James L. Quinn, 17 Pearl Street, Kingston, N. Y.

3. The known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. Paragraphs 2 and 3 include, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting; also the statements in the two paragraphs show the affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner.

5. The average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the 12 months preceding the date shown above was: (This information is required from daily, weekly, semi-weekly and tri-weekly newspapers only).

James L. Quinn, Editor

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 23rd day of September, 1957.

(SEAL) Charlotte K. Lapine (My commission expires March 30, 1958)

CONSERVATION

BY CHARLES L. FONTENAY

THE YELLOW SANDS of the spaceport stretched, glaring and empty, in every direction. There was no sign of life from the little group of buildings a mile away.

In the control room of the tall, round-nosed starship, technicians labored and officers conferred while the red needles that showed rocket tube temperatures sank slowly toward zero on their dials.

The people of Earth had every means of power at their command, yet they used none of it. Was it due to lack of knowledge and technique; or was there a more subtle, dangerous reason?

"Maybe Earth's depopulated, Tom," suggested John Gray, the executive officer. He ran his fingers through close-cropped red hair and peered through the port with thoughtful gray eyes.

"Hardly, John," replied Commander Tom Wallace, frowning. "The scout rockets showed some good-sized cities, with smoke."

Illustrated by Paul Orban

"I was off duty then and haven't had time to read the log," apologized John. "What gets me is that they should have a robot-controlled space relay station orbiting outside the atmosphere, and a deserted spaceport. It just doesn't jibe."

"That's why we have to be just as careful as though we were landing on an alien planet," said the commander. "We don't know what the conditions on Earth are now. How long has it been, John?"

"Two hundred and fifty-eight years," answered John. "Ten years, our time."

"Pick three for briefing, John. This is going to be a disappointing homecoming for the crew, but we'll have to send out an exploration party."

The landing ramp slid out from just above the rocket tubes, and the armored car clanked down to the sand. John steered it across the wide expanse of the spaceport toward the group of buildings. Above and behind him, a woman swept the terrain with binoculars from the car's observation turret. In the body of the car, another woman and a man stood by the guns.

The buildings were just as lifeless when they drew near, but there was an ominous atmosphere about them. They were windowless, of heavy concrete. Through slits in their domed roofs, the noses of a dozen cannon angled toward the ship.

"John, there's someone there," said the girl in the turret, tensely. "You can't see it through the windshield, but there are some smaller guns poking out near the ground and they're following us."

John stopped the car and switched on the loudspeaker.

"Hello, the spaceport!" His amplified voice boomed out across the sand and reverberated against the buildings. "Is anybody there? We come in peace."

There was no reply. The big guns still angled toward the starship, the little ones focussed on the car.

"They may be robot-controlled," suggested Phil Maxwell, the gunner on the side of the car toward the forts. "Any sign of an entrance, Ann?"

"Nothing but the gunports," replied the girl in the turret.

"Don't fool with them, John," said Commander Wallace, who was tuned in from the ship on the car's communications system. "If they're robot-controlled, they'll be booby-trapped. Move out of range and continue with your exploration."

Two days later, the car emerged from the desert into comparatively fertile country. The four explorers found a broken concrete highway and followed it between rolling, treeless grasslands. Near dusk, they saw smoke on the horizon—and ran into a roadblock.

A segment of the highway had been thrown up into a ten-foot wall, barring their progress. Over the edge of the wall, the muzzles of heat-guns pointed at them as they brought the car to a halt some distance away. John got the commander on the car radio.

"We could swing around it, but we don't know whether they have

vehicles that could outrun us," he reported. "And my conception of our mission is to establish contact."

"That's right," agreed Tom. "But stay in the car until you get a friendly reaction. Then you're on your own—and I'm afraid you're expendable, John."

John switched on the loudspeaker and made overtures to the roadblock. After a moment, a lone figure stepped around the edge of the mound of earth and concrete and approached the car slowly. The man was dressed in the drab, baggy uniform of a professional soldier.

"If you come in peace, leave your vehicle and identify yourself," called the soldier. "You will not be harmed."

"Take over, Phil," ordered John. He slipped from the driver's seat and climbed through the turret. Jumping to the ground, he approached the soldier, his arms swinging freely at his sides.

"John Gray, executive officer of the starship Discovery, returned from a colonizing mission to Deneb III," said John, holding out his hand.

The soldier ignored the outstretched hand, saluting formally instead.

"Arrive in peace," he said. "If you will leave your vehicle here, you will be escorted as deevs to Third Sarge Elfor, commander of the town of Pebbro."

John returned to the car and held a brief consultation with his companions. Although he was in command of the exploration party, planetary operations of the starship's personnel were conducted on a somewhat democratic basis. The commander listened in, but left them to their own judgment.

"Communications blackout for a while then, commander," said John. "I see no reason to let them know about the personal radios right now."

The quartet emerged from the car wearing small packs of emergency rations and equipment. Behind the roadblock, the sight that met their eyes was unexpected.

The robot-controlled space relay station, the heavily armed pillboxes at the spaceport and the heat-guns poked across the roadblock at them, all had made it logical to anticipate a powerfully equipped task force. Instead, they found a troop of 19th century cavalrymen, armed for the most part with 13th century weapons. There were no more than a dozen heat-guns in evidence, and their bearers also carried short swords and long-bows with quivers of arrows.

The four from the starship were given mounts and, with no outward indications of hostility, were escorted to the town whose smoke they had seen.

The town was another surprise. They had expected either a fortress or an outpost of brick and log buildings. It was neither. The buildings were tremendous cubes and domes of steel and concrete, sleek and modern, windowed with heavy glass bricks. Skeins of cables, coils and loops of aerials bespoke the power that must be at their command.

But the people walked

Not a car or a truck was to be

seen. Men and women in the gray military uniforms walked or trotted up and down the broad paved streets. Occasionally a horse-drawn wagon passed, hauling a load of vegetables or manure. It was as though a cavalry post of the old West carried on its slow-moving duties in a super-modern setting.

THIRD SARGE ELFOR was a middle-aged man of military bearing, with a sandy handle-bar mustache. He sat behind a huge desk in one of the town's biggest buildings. There were elevators, open and deserted, in the lobby, but they had to climb ten flights of stairs to reach his gleaming office.

"The Topkick sends you greetings from Kansity, capital of the Earth," he said. "We have watched your ship since it approached the outer atmosphere. We have listened to your communications since you left your ship, and have been interested in the indications that you are of Earth but unfamiliar with it. We are interested also in your use of a vehicle that can travel for three days without refueling. But we do not find a record of any ship named Discovery, and we do not know what you mean by Deneb III."

"The Discovery left Earth 258 years ago," replied John. "We established a colony on Deneb III, the third planet of the star Deneb, before returning to Earth."

"You are the descendents of the ship's original crew, then?"

"No," said John. He explained as well as he could the extension of subjective time at near-light speeds.

"Mmm. And you have left a colony on a planet of another star." They could not tell from the Third Sarge's tone what he thought. After a moment's meditation, he said:

"We shall talk again tomorrow. Tonight you are our guests and will be accorded all courtesy as deevs. Are you husbands and wives, or shall we billet men and women separately?"

"However it suits your convenience," answered John. "You may billet us all together if you prefer."

Third Sarge Elfor took them at their word. They were conducted to a single room, evidently in the heart of officers' quarters. Here again they ran into the same anomaly that had impressed them since they landed.

There were gleaming electric fixtures, but orderlies brought them tallow candles as dusk fell. There was plumbing of the most advanced order, but when they turned the taps no water came. The orderlies brought buckets full of hot water for their baths in the bright-tiled tub.

"I don't understand this at all, Ann," said John. He was towelling himself vigorously, while she brushed the quartet's clothing clean of the dust of the road. Phil lolled in luxurious undress on one of the four beds, reading a book from the well-stocked bookcase. Fran, preparing for her bath, was binding up her hair before a full-length mirror. "Even the cold water doesn't run a drop."

"Plumbing gets out of order in the best of families, John," Ann re-

minded him with a smile.

He glanced affectionately at her. Blue-eyed, black-haired Ann had been John's companion in the six-months exploration of Deneb III, and their seven-year-old son now was learning to read in the starship's school. John and Ann clashed like flint and steel in the crowded confines of the starship and consequently maintained no association while aspace. But they were a happy team in the free, challenging atmosphere of a planet.

"Electricity, too, at the same time?" he asked. "And it's not just that. The whole place reeks of latent power and high science, but they use an absolute minimum of it."

"I've got a partial solution to the garrison state of affairs and the military set-up, anyhow," said Phil from the bed. "They've had a war since we've been gone."

"That's no surprise," commented Fran. Chubby, blonde Fran and dark, stocky Phil had been companions for a year aboard the Discovery. They had volunteered jointly for the exploration mission. "They should have had several of them in 250 years."

"This was an interplanetary war," retorted Phil mildly. "Or rather, it wasn't war, but occupation of the Earth by the enemy. The Jovians were smart enough not to attack Earth directly, but threw their strength at the crucial moment behind the weaker side in the war between Eurasia and the American Alliance. Then they moved in to take over the war-weakened victors."

"The classic role of the strong neutral," commented John drily. "What were the Jovians like?"

"Evidently everybody on Earth knew from first-hand experience when this book was written a century ago. There are no descriptions and no illustrations. There are some hints, though: methane-breathing, cold-loving. They had domed, refrigerated cities."

"What are you reading—a history book?" asked Ann curiously.

"Yes, it's the newest book of the whole lot, and the only one that isn't brittle and dog-eared. At that, it's the worst-made book of them all. It looks like it was printed on a hand-press and bound by hand."

"Pioneers, oh pioneers!" trilled Fran softly. "But what are they doing in the midst of all this technology?"

Supper in the officers' mess was a glittering affair in the military tradition. Their conversation developed some new revelations. Third Sarge Elfor was commander of the whole area that surrounded Pebbro for hundreds of miles, including the abandoned spaceport. The Topkick was ruler of the nation, and the nation was the top echelon in a co-operating hierarchy of countries of the world. For some reason, the simplified terms for enlisted men's grades had replaced higher ranks in Earth's military systems: such titles as "sarge" and "topkick." Inquiry developed that none of the officers was familiar with such designations as "captain" and "commander."

"But why is the spaceport de-

serted?" asked Phil. "Is space travel at such a low ebb on Earth now?"

"You are mistaken in thinking the port deserted," replied Elfor. "The big guns in the pillboxes are zeroed on your ship. If it tries to blast off, it will be destroyed."

There was no enmity in his tone, no threat. It was a simple statement of fact. He didn't elaborate, and the four from the starship discreetly asked no more about it.

After the meal, they retired with Elfor and several members of his staff to a quiet lounge. Like every other place they had seen in the building, it was lit with candelabra. They relaxed in comfortable, leather-covered chairs and the men enjoyed the long-forgotten luxury of good cigars. White-aproned servitors brought them wine in fragile, long-stemmed glasses.

"You asked about space travel from Earth," said Elfor. "Yes, you might call it at a low ebb. Yours is the first ship to blast down in fifty years, except the scout ships in the Jupiter sector.

"It is such an unusual occurrence that the Topkick is being informed daily of developments. When the men of your starship have been assured of our peaceful intentions, it will be hangared underground and the personnel quartered here until further orders from the Topkick. Meanwhile, you are the deevs of the hour and we shall drink to your return to Earth."

He stood and raised his glass. They all arose. The glasses clinked together.

"Conserve!" shouted the Third Sarge and gulped his wine.

It was a warm moment. For the first time, John felt the genuine glow, the thrill of homecoming, as he and Phil drained their glasses and performed the ancient rite of the spacemen when he sets foot on Earth once more. As in one motion, they hurled the empty glasses through the open door, to smash to pieces against the farther wall of the adjoining corridor. There was a second crashing tinkle on the heels of the first as the glasses of the women followed them closely.

It was only when he turned back to Elfor, his face alight, that John realized something was wrong. The Third Sarge stood with his mouth open in astonishment. There was something of horror on the faces of the other Earthmen. Dead silence hung in the room.

"Sleep in peace," said Elfor at last, in a strained voice. He turned on his heel and left the room. The staff members followed, coldly.

"Well, what do you make of that?" asked John, turning to the others with outspread hands. "Do you suppose those glasses were valuable heirlooms or something?"

"They looked like ordinary wineglasses to me," said Fran. "I don't get it, but it looks like we slipped up somewhere."

The orderly who escorted them to their room cast an occasional sidelong glance, full of awe, at them. Their heat-guns had been taken from their room.

"I don't know what we're in for, Tom," John said gravely into his pocket transmitter when he had tuned in to the ship. "This place is the biggest mess of contradic-

tions I ever ran into. You'd think from the way they live that it's a decadent society living on the ruins of a former civilization.

"The perplexing thing is that they obviously have power and know how to use it, but don't."

"Your job is to find the motivation, John," replied the commander. "Remember, we couldn't understand the underground living habits of the Deneb IV natives until we lost half a search party in one of their semi-annual meteor showers. Do you have any recommendations for the ship?"

"I'd advise you blasting off and taking an orbit," answered John, "but every gun at the spaceport is trained on the ship. I wouldn't take any chances that they don't have atomic weapons. Despite these swords and spears, we've seen several regulation heat-guns around here."

"It might interest you to know that they're keeping us awake aboard with a battery of spotlights on us all night," said Tom drily.

"Spotlights." John swore softly. "And all we have to see by are candles!"

They didn't sleep well that night. They had the distinct impression that armed guards clanked by occasionally outside in the corridor.

THERE WAS NO indication that they were prisoners the next day, however. Third Sarge Elfor and the other officers were cordial at breakfast and lunch, although they caught some quizzical glances directed at them from time to time. Their movements were not hampered. They were given the run of the town.

After noon their armored car was brought in, hauled by four teams of horses. Flanked by a troop of soldiers, it was pulled around a corner and vanished from their sight.

"If they're so curious about how it runs, why aren't they quizzing us instead of letting us go on a sight-seeing tour?" wondered Ann, staring after the disappearing vehicle.

"I've built up a theory on these Earthmen . . ." began Phil. But he was interrupted as an officer and a squad of soldiers approached them. The officer saluted smartly.

"Deev John Gray, Third Sarge Elfor sends greetings and desires that you confer with him. The others will be free to continue their inspection of the military city of Pebbro."

"Very well," agreed John. "Ann, you'd better come along with me to take notes on the conference. We'll see you two tonight, if not sooner."

He motioned to the officer to lead the way, and the group went up the street, leaving Phil and Fran standing in the shadow of a towering building.

"What's your theory, Phil?" asked Fran.

"Simple," he answered. "The Jovian war wiped out civilization. They've just climbed back up part of the way, but they still don't know how to operate the machinery and use the power they have available."

"I don't know about that," said

Fran doubtfully. "They seem to know how to handle those cannon and searchlights at the spaceport all right."

"Automatic control, probably, or —" Phil paused. He was peering through a barred window at street level. "Say, Fran, look here! Unless I miss my guess, this is a central power station!"

Fran stooped to look.

"I think you're right," she said. "But it's deserted."

"Proof of my theory," he said triumphantly. "Now, if we can just find a door somewhere . . ."

John and Ann had been back from a very routine conference with Elfor for more than an hour, and were enjoying the informality of the officers' cocktail lounge in their building. They were aroused by a commotion in the street outside and, along with several off-duty officers in the lounge, ran to the window to see what was up.

Phil and Fran, seated in a military jeep, were surrounded by excited soldiers. Some sort of argument was in progress, and John and Ann heard the word "credentials" mentioned.

Just as several of the soldiers, with drawn swords, dragged the couple from the jeep, one of the officers from the lounge hurried to the scene. The soldiers stood aside and saluted. There was a heated discussion, with much gesticulating, then Phil and Fran were released and headed for the lounge.

The officer got into the jeep and shifted gears. All the soldiers whipped out their swords and stood rigid, presenting arms, as he drove it to the curb at the opposite side of the street. Then he turned off the engine and got out. A guard was posted around it, and a little later a team of horses arrived to pull it away.

"How did you people get into such a predicament?" asked John when the show was over and the four of them were enjoying drinks.

"Oh, I don't think it was as serious as it looked," said Phil lightly. "We ran across a whole garage full of jeeps. We drove that one all over town before this gang stopped us and wanted to see our written authority for driving it. Everybody else saluted us. That's the military mind for you."

"Didn't it occur to you that their objections might be something other than mere military regulations?" asked John in some asperity.

"Phil has a theory—" began Fran, but Phil silenced her with a shake of the head.

"My theory can wait until I have proof for it, and I expect that in short order," said Phil, winking at Fran. "We've made good use of our time while you and Ann were in conference."

Phil and Fran were eager to know what John and Ann had learned from their conference with Elfor.

"Not much," he confessed. "Elfor is pretty close-mouthed. He's more anxious to learn about us than to give us information about their set-up.

"We did find out, though, that they've located the records of the Discovery's departure in the ar-

chives of Kansity. There seems to be something irregular about it, but I couldn't get Elfor to go into detail."

The first hint John and Ann had of Phil's method of proving his theory was when he quietly stripped and went into the bathroom as they were preparing for supper that evening. Ann was about to remind him he had forgotten to get the orderly to bring his bath water, when they heard the sound of a shower roaring. All three crowded to the door, to find Phil luxuriating under a steaming downpour.

"What goes on here?" demanded John. "Phil, how did you know they'd started the water pumps?"

Phil smiled triumphantly.

"Try the lights," he suggested.

The others trooped back into the bedroom and Ann flicked the switches. White light blazed in the room, overpowering the feeble gleam of the candles.

"What is this, Fran?" asked John. "You were with Phil."

"We found proof of Phil's theory that these people just don't know how to operate their own machinery," replied Fran happily. "We found their main pumping station. It was in good shape, and it didn't take us long to get the engines started and the main switches thrown."

The electric lights suddenly faded and died, leaving them in candlelight again. At the same time, the sound of the shower gurgled to a stop in the bathroom. Phil appeared at the door with a towel, dripping.

"Don't tell me their machinery's given out so soon," he growled.

"Phil, this is no time to talk about discipline," snapped John angrily, "but you and Fran probably have pulled something a lot worse than the jeep this time. Neither of you is qualified in social psychology, but even so you should have been able to read the signs that they do know how to operate their machines. For some reason, they just don't operate them."

In less than five minutes, Third Sarge Elfor appeared at their door with a squad of armed men. All of these soldiers carried heat-guns.

"Two of you were observed in the vicinity of the power station today," said Elfor. "You are warned that you are suspected of having activated the power supply of the military city of Pebbro."

"We don't deny that," admitted John carefully. "We are ignorant of your customs, and hope no harm has been done."

"Your claim to ignorance will be determined at a formal hearing," retorted Elfor sternly. "We have given you the benefit of every doubt and treated you as honored deevs. I regret that this makes it necessary that all of you be placed under arrest. Your meal will be served to you in your quarters."

As soon as Elfor had gone, leaving armed guards outside their door, John tuned in the starship on his pocket transmitter.

"I would have advised against Phil's action, in view of our lack of understanding of the situation," he reported to Commander Wallace. "But I confess I wouldn't have anticipated that the result would

be so extreme.

"I can't fathom their reactions, Tom. In a crazy sort of way, I suppose they fit in with all the other contradictions of their social set-up. Have you had any luck with the ship's calculator?"

"Not enough data," answered Tom. "Maybe this new stuff will help, and you might scrape for everything else you can transmit. I'd hate to try a rescue operation, because that might force us to head back for Deneb III. But if they don't decide to blast the ship in the next hour or so, there's a chance we can pull out of this trap at our end."

John did not ask for details, for he knew their conversation probably was monitored.

THE FOUR OF them sat up half the night poring over the books in their room. They gleaned nothing except from the "history" Phil had been reading the night before. Unfortunately, it was not a general history, but the flowery story of a high military family. The sort of references they found were, "after the Jovian invaders had been driven from Earth" and "Second Sarge Vesix participated in the bombardment that destroyed the Jovian tyrants." No details.

What did emerge from their study was a picture of the rise of a military aristocracy on the ashes of an earlier civilization which had been ground to pieces under the heels of alien rulers.

There was good news from the starship at dawn.

"We're orbiting," said Commander Wallace with quiet pride. "Shortly after I talked with you last night, they called on us to surrender or be blasted. I asked time for a conference of officers and promised to fire a rocket from the nose if we decided to surrender.

"I fired the rocket all right, but it was an instantaneous smoke screen rocket. I still don't know whether their guns are manned or robot-controlled, but I gambled that their firing was keyed to the sight of the ship blasting off instead of to vibration. We were half a mile up before they could swing into action, and we didn't get a scratch."

A rescue mission with one of the scout rockets was too risky against the strong forces of the Earthmen. Tom mentioned that fast planes had followed them into the stratosphere. But one thing was done for the imprisoned four.

Soon after breakfast, they were taken under guard to a Spartan courtroom, presided over by Third Sarge Elfor.

"We have received a warning from your colleagues," Elfor said grimly. "They broadcast to us a short time ago that if harm came to you, this city and others will be destroyed before they leave the solar system. In case you knew of this and it has in any way raised your hopes, I wish to remind you that Earth's cities have been destroyed before. This threat will not affect our decision to mete strict justice to you.

"You are charged with being enemies of the people of Earth,

and with having landed on Earth under false colors with the intent of sabotage and espionage. Your prosecutor will be Fifth Tech Jatoo, representing the nations of Earth. You will be permitted to speak in your own defense."

Jatoo was a slender, thin-faced man with the air of an experienced attorney.

"The governments of Earth make these charges against the joint defendants," he began matter-of-factly: "That they are members of a rebellious and traitorous group who are allied with the Jovians and maintain an illegal, secret base on some planet or moon of the solar system; that they came here under the guise of strangers, with the specific intent of espionage and sabotage of Earth's defense against the Jovian enemy; and that they actually began such operations.

"We shall present the following major evidence in support of these charges:

"First, that the defendants did travel from the Numex spaceport to the military town of Pebbro in a vehicle, the motive power of which is still unknown but which obviously must utilize fuel, in violation of the conservation laws;

"Second, that the defendants' colleagues did not approach the peoples of Earth in peace, but remained enfortressed in an armed space vessel;

"Third, that the defendants Phil Alcorn and Fran Golden did throw the switches activating the electrical system and powered water system of the military town of Pebbro, that the above-named two defendants did utilize a military power vehicle for pleasure purposes and that all the defendants did unnecessarily destroy glass drinking vessels, all in violation of the conservation laws;

"And, fourth, that the starship Discovery, listed in ancient records as having departed on a colonizing mission to the third planet of the star Deneb, was not scheduled to return to Earth for another seventy-five years and therefore could not be the ship in which the defendants arrived, as claimed."

Elfor inclined his head toward the quartet from the starship, who sat behind a long table on the side of the room opposite Jatoo.

"You may state what your defense will be," he said.

"Our defense to the first three items of evidence," answered John, who had been taking notes, "is that we have been absent from Earth for more than 250 Earth-years and that we were, and are, ignorant of your laws and customs. Thus, we are innocent of intent to violate them. Our defense to the fourth item of evidence is that certain improvements were made in the engines of the starship Discovery while colonization of Deneb III was in progress, making it possible for us to return to Earth ahead of schedule. Our defense to all three charges made against us is that they are false."

It was a monotonous trial, with a parade of witnesses brought to the stand by Jatoo, all of whom testified to seeing the defendants perform one or more acts of "unconservation."

"In the courts of Earth, a case

can be decided only on the evidence presented," said Third Sarge Elfor when John had offered his brief defense for the quartet. "The defendants have presented no evidence, only argument. The fact that the defendants' clothing corresponds to that in use two and a half centuries ago cannot be considered competent, as it could be copied easily.

"For the safety of Earth, the defendants are found guilty and remanded for immediate execution. In view of the existence of doubt as to their treasonable intent and their previous status as deevs, they are accorded the honor of death by power weapons. Conserve!"

Shocked and silent, the four were led to a courtyard outside. As they walked, John switched on his pocket transmitter with a casual, almost unnoticeable gesture, and murmured a report to the ship.

"I'm sorry, John," said the commander, his voice tense with emotion. "There's no possibility of rescue, and I know it's small satisfaction to you that your deaths will be avenged."

The quartet's hands were bound behind them and they were lined up against a wall. The Third Sarge, attended by a good-sized retinue, stood at ease nearby, smoking a cigar, to direct the execution personally.

" 'Power weapons' to them apparently mean regulation heat-guns," remarked Phil, almost jocularly. "That's what the fellow has."

A soldier was standing square in the center of the courtyard, a pistol dangling from his grip. At a signal from Elfor, he lifted it.

"Looks like I'm first," said John, bracing himself. "Be seeing you, somewhere."

He gritted his teeth for the wave of unbearable heat that was sure to come. Instead, there was a silent explosion in the midst of the courtyard and the soldier who had held the gun writhed on the ground, incinerated.

"John! The gun exploded!" cried Phil in amazement. "I've only seen that happen once before! —Remember that crewman who wouldn't take the trouble to keep his gun clean?"

John was thinking fast.

"I remember," he said in a low voice. His heart was still racing from the reaction of his near brush with death. "There's a pattern here. If I could only get a chance to talk over things sensibly with this Third Sarge . . ."

There was great excitement among the soldiery. Several of the men were crowded around the corpse of the marksman. Elfor stood nervously, his hand on his own holstered gun.

"They're concealing weapons," he barked to his aides. "Search them!"

A squad of guards swarmed over the four prisoners. There was an excited twitter when they discovered the pocket transmitters. They removed the little packets, snapping the aerial wires, and carried them to Elfor. He glanced at them, took one in his hand, and ordered:

"Execute them!"

Another guard with a heat-gun took his position in the center of the

courtyard. He handled the weapon somewhat gingerly, but checked its mechanism and prepared to follow orders.

He waited for the command from Elfor. But the Third Sarge now was staring hard at the little transmitter in his hand. Instead of ordering the guard to fire, he strode across the courtyard and thrust the tiny radio before John's face.

"Is this true?" he demanded. He pointed at the well-known symbol stamped on the packet, the red diagram of an atom that warned against opening the lead-shielded mechanism without precaution.

"You mean, is it atomic-powered?" asked John. "Yes it is."

"It is a weapon?"

"No, it's a radio transmitter."

"But it operates?"

"Certainly it operates. Why in thunder do you think I'd be carrying a useless transmitter?"

"It has been many years since this sign was seen on a working mechanism on Earth," said Elfor soberly. "You are familiar, then, with atomic power?"

"I'm not an atomic technician," answered John carefully, "but there are several on the Discovery who can build anything from one of these little transmitters to the engines of a spaceship, with the proper equipment."

The Third Sarge stood in silent thought for several minutes. He was high in the councils of his country, or he would not have been commander of the zone that guarded Numex spaceport. He knew the reason for the basic slogan "Conserve!" and he knew, as 99 per cent of his subordinates did not, what circumstances would make that slogan meaningless.

"Guard!" he growled. "Unbind the deevs! John Gray, come with me in peace."

"You'd better give me back that transmitter, first," suggested John drily. "I'd hate to escape execution just to get H-bombed by my own ship."

It was the next afternoon that the four were escorted by a trim-uniformed guard of honor across the flat spaceport to the Discovery.

"The Jovians wanted to reduce Earth to colonial status, to be exploited for its natural resources," John explained to his companions as they walked. "All atomic installations were destroyed, all technicians and scientists exterminated systematically and all scientific books burned. They were very thorough about it.

"The successful revolt was accomplished with a concealed stockpile of atomic weapons. Since that time, they've been garrisoned against the return of the Jovians. But atomic power was gone and so were the scientists who could bring it back and the books from which new scientists could learn.

"It's because they can't replace even so small a thing as an electric light bulb that destruction or unnecessary use of any sort of equipment is the rankest sort of treason. They've been saving all their technological capital for a last-ditch stand against the expected invasion.

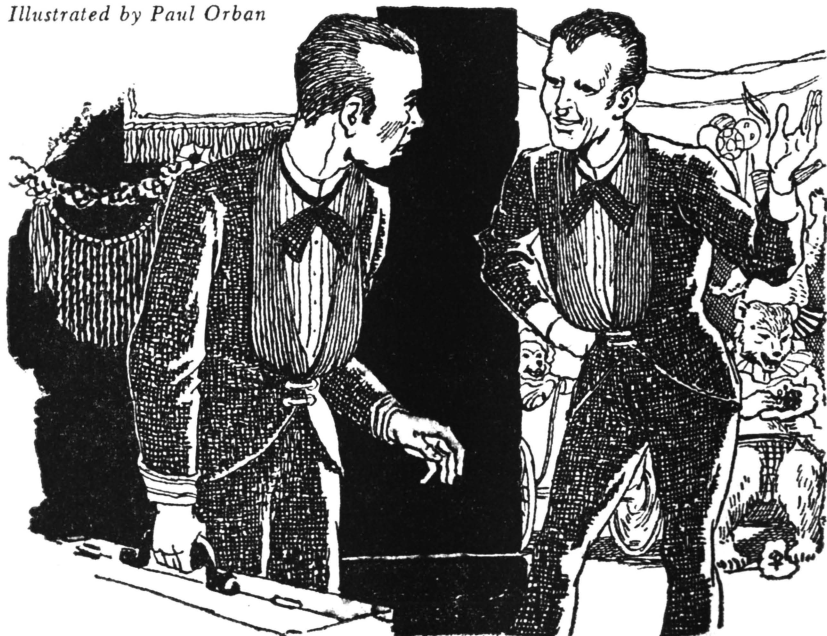
(Continued on page 116)

PASSPORT TO SIRIUS

Carman should have known better. Tilting at windmills is a most unrewarding affair—you just can't win . . .

BY ROBERT SILVERBERG

Illustrated by Paul Orban



CONSUMER SIXTH Class David Carman watched the yellow snake that was the morning telefax sheet come rippling from the wall slot of his bachelor flat. The folds of plastic-impregnated tape slithered into the receiving tray, and Carman surveyed them glumly. He knew there would only be more bad news—more tales of defeat in the Sirian war, more heralding of price increases on the consumer front.

After a moment of hesitation Carman gathered up the telefax spool and slipped it into the scanner-reader. He shuddered as the first news appeared on the screen.

COSTLY SETBACK IN SIRIUS

War Sector, 14 Nov (via sub-radio) — A Sirian pitchfork maneuver hurled Earth lines back today in the battle for Sirius IV. The sudden alien thrust cost Earth eight destroyers and more than a hundred casualties.

The push began, according to a front-lines communique, when eleven Sirian battle cruisers initiated diversionary tactics in orbit around the Earth base on Sirius IV's seventh moon. Bringing in a battalion of mosquito-ships next, the aliens successfully—

Morosely Carman thumbed his weary eyes and moved the scanner further along. All these war stories were pretty much alike, he thought. And the telefax revelled in detailed descriptions of each offensive and

defensive tactic. Carman knew nothing of war-making; the details bored him.

But the next item was hardly more cheering.

PRICE INDEX TO JUMP AGAIN

Lower Urb-district, 16 Nov— Consumer prices are due for another increase-spiral as a result of the severe setback suffered by Terran forces in the Sirian sector. Economic Regulator Harrison Morch revealed this morning that a down-the-line 5% increase is likely.

"We tried to hold the line," commented Regulator Morch. "The inflationary trend was too strong to buck, however. It is to be hoped that conclusion of hostilities will soon bring about a reversion to peacetime living standards and—"

With an angry, impatient gesture, Carman blanked the screen. There was little sense spending good money subscribing to the 'fax service if it only brought bad news.

Things hadn't been this bad a year ago, before the war started, he thought, as he dialed breakfast and took his seat by the dispensall. He had even been thinking of applying for a marriage permit, then. Now, of course, it was out of the question; his economic status was totally altered. And Sally, who worked for the Bureau of Extraterrestrial Affairs, had received a pay-boost that put her entirely beyond Carman's aspirations. She was Third Class, now, and would soon marry a wealthy Bureau official.

Carman broodingly munched his somewhat dry algae-omelet. He was thirty-three, and not getting younger. He was too pale, too thin, his eyes too close-set, his hair growing sparse. And it seemed that whenever he got some money saved and looked around to better his position, along came some war to send prices shooting up and cripple his savings. Five years ago there had been that thing in Procyon, and then a year or two of peace followed by a scuffle out near Proxima Centauri. And now Sirius.

You can't win, he thought. He finished breakfast mechanically, dropped the dishes in the disposall, and selected his second-best suit with a quick, bitter jab at the wardrobe control buttons.

It came issuing forth: grey crepe, with dark blue trim. The jacket was getting tattered at the elbows.

I'd better buy a new suit, Carman decided, as he stepped out on the pickup platform to hail a jet-cab. *Before clothing prices get astronomical.*

He reached the office at 0700 that morning, with dawn barely brightening the late autumn sky. Carman worked as a sorter in the permit-processing department of the Confederation Passport Office, and so as a government employee had little recourse when the periodic inflation-spirals came; he could hardly go on strike against the Confederation.

A good-sized batch of passport-applications had already accumulated at his receiving-tray. Carman slid easily into the seat, flashed

bright but hollow smiles at the five or six fellow-workers nearest him, and grabbed at the top sheet of the stack. He estimated quickly that a hundred eighty applications had arrived so far. They would be pouring in at a rate of seven a minute the rest of the day.

He computed:

If I process one form every six seconds, ten a minute, I'll gain three per minute on them. Which means I'll catch up with them in about an hour.

If he kept up the ten-a-minute pace, he'd be free to take short breathers later on. This was one of the games he played to make his dreary work more palatable.

The first application was from Consumer Second Class Leebig D. Quellen and family; Consumer Second Class Quellen wanted to visit the Ganymede outpost next summer. Carman plunged the application into the bin stencil-labelled *14a* with his left hand, and with his right took another from the waiting stack. Sort with the left, grab with the right; sort with the left, grab with the right. Carman swayed rhythmically in his seat as he fell into the pattern of the day's work.

After a while he began hitting them twelve to a minute, sometimes thirteen. By 0757 his tray was empty. He sighed. Eight seconds of free time, now, until the next permit reared its ugly head.

Sort, grab . . . sort, grab . . . it was dull but essentially simple work, in a mechanical way. It scarcely taxed his brain. But he was paid accordingly: $163 a week, barely a subsistence wage before the last spiral. And now—

1030 came. Break-time. Carman stretched and rose, noticing angrily that the girl in the upstairs receiving room had slipped three applications in after break-time sounded. She was always pulling tricks like that.

Carman had long since reduced break-time to a ritual. He crossed the office to the cleanall and held his hands in the energizing bath until his fingertips were wiped clean of their accumulation of stylus grime; then, he glanced out the single big window at the crowded city, turned, and smiled at Montano, the heavy-set fellow who had occupied the next desk for the six years Carman had worked for the Passport Office.

"Nice day," Montano said. "For November."

"Yes."

"See the morning 'fax? Looks like another upping for prices."

Carman nodded unhappily. "I saw. Don't know how we'll manage."

"Oh, we'll get along. We always do. The wife's due for a raise soon anyway." Montano's wife pushed buttons in a car autofactory. Somehow she seemed to be due for a raise almost every other week.

"That's nice," Carman said.

"Yeah."

"Does she think cars are going up?"

"Damn right," Montano said. "Ford-Chrysler's boosting the stock model to six thousand next month. Need turbogenerators for the war effort, they say. We already got our order in at the old price. You better

buy fast if you want one, Carman. Save five hundred bucks now if you're smart."

"I don't need a new car," Carman said.

"Better get *anything* you need now, anyway. Everything's going up. Always does, wartime."

The bell-tone announced the end of break-time. Carman reached his desk just in time to see a passport application come fluttering down, followed seconds later by another.

"Demons take that girl," he muttered softly. She always cut her break short to plague him with extra work. Now she was six—no, seven—ahead of him.

Justin C. Froelich and family, of Minnetonka, wished permission to visit Pluto next July. Wearily, Carman dropped Justin C. Froelich's application in the proper bin, and reached for the next.

He was seething inwardly, cursing the Passport Office, the girl upstairs, inflation, Economic Regulator Morch, and the world in general. It seemed to be a rat-race with no exit from the treadmill.

I've been pushed around too long, he thought. *I ought to fight back a little. Somehow.*

Consumer Sixth Class Carman was on the verge of changing the course of his life. An hour more passed, and 193 additional passport applications disappeared into bins. Finally, he made up his mind to act.

THE RECRUITING officer was a spade-faced, dark-complected man with angular features and bright white teeth. He wore the green-and-gold uniform of the United Military Services of Earth. He stared levelly across his shining bare desk at Carman and said, "Would you mind repeating that?"

"I said I wanted to fight. Against Sirius."

The recruiting officer frowned ponderously. After a long pause he said, "I don't see how I can guarantee that. We enroll you; the computer ships you out. Whether you get sent to the war zone or not depends on a variable complex of factors which certainly no civilian should be expected to understand." He shoved a form across the desk toward Carman. "If you'll fill this out, Mac, we can—"

"No," Carman said. "I want a guarantee that I'll see action in the Sirius sector. Dammit, Lieutenant—"

"Sergeant."

"—Sergeant, I'm thirty-three. I'm as close to being nobody as anybody can get. If I'm lucky I'll get as high as Third Class someday. I've saved ten thousand bucks, and I suppose the new inflation's going to knock my savings in half the way the last one did."

"Mr. Carman, I don't see how all this—"

"You will. For thirty-three years I've been sitting around on the home front going up and down with each economic spiral while Earth fights wars in Procyon and Proxima C and half a dozen other places. I'm tired of staying home. I want to enlist."

"Sure, Mac, but—"

"But I don't want to enlist just to wear a uniform and police the

frontiers on Betelgeuse. I want to go to Sirius, and I want to fight. Once in my life I want to engage in positive action on behalf of a Cause." Carman took a deep breath; he hadn't spoken this many words in succession in a long, long time. "Do you understand now? Will you guarantee that I'll be shipped to Sirius if I sign up?"

The sergeant exhaled deeply, unhappily. "I've explained twice that the matter's not in my hands. Maybe I could attach a recommendation—"

"A *guarantee.*"

"But—" A crafty light appeared in the recruiting sergeant's eyes; he drummed the desktop momentarily and said, "You're a very persistent man, Mac. You win; I'll see you get assigned to the war zone. Now, why don't you just sign your name here—"

Carman shook his head. "No, thanks. I just changed my mind."

Before the sergeant could protest, Carman had backed warily out of the office and was gone. It had abruptly occurred to him that a recruiting officer's promise was not necessarily final. And there were more direct methods he could use to get into the war.

He returned to the Passport Office at 1313, and the robot eye at the office door took note of it, clicking loudly as he passed through. Ordinarily Carman would have groaned at the loss of thirteen minutes' pay, but, then, ordinarily he would have been at his desk promptly at 1300 anyway.

Everyone else was busily at work; heads bowed, hands groping madly for the incoming applications, his fellow sorters presented an oddly ludicrous sight. Carman resumed his place. Nearly a hundred waiting permits had stacked themselves in the receiving tray during his absence—but this, too, hardly troubled him now.

He went through them at a frantic pace, occasionally hitting as high as twenty per minute. Plenty of them were going to the wrong bins, he realized, but this was no time to worry about that. He caught up with the posting department in less than forty minutes, and made use of his first eight-second breather to draw a blank passport application from his desk drawer; he had always kept a few on hand there.

He filled out the blank patiently, in eight-second bursts between each of the arrivals from above. Where it said *Name and Status,* he wrote *Consumer Sixth Class David Carman.* Where it said, *Intended Destination,* he inscribed *Sirius VII* in tidy cursives. Sirius VII was outside the war zone, and so theoretically within reach of commercial traffic, but passports to anywhere in the Sirius system were granted only by special dispensation since the outbreak of hostilities, and Carman knew he had small chance of receiving such dispensation.

Which was why, after the form was completely filled out, he thoughtfully scribbled an expert forgery of the Secretary of Extraterrestrial Affairs' signature on the bottom of the sheet, okaying the application. Humming gently, he dropped the completed blank into the bin labelled *82g* and returned

his attention to the labors of the day.

The passport took eight days to come through. Carman had some uneasy moments while waiting, though he was ultimately confident of success. After all, the workers who processed the sorted applications and issued the passports probably handled their work as mechanically and hastily as he did in the level above them—and *he* never had time to check for possible forgeries, so why should they? Never-ending cascades of passport applications descended on them; probably they cursed him for working so fast, just as he in turn scowled up the chute at the girl in the top level.

Five seconds after the passport to Sirius dropped out of his mailchute, Carman was on the phone talking to the secretary of the Personnel Chief at the Passport Office.

"Yes, I said Carman. David Carman, Sixth Class. I've enlisted in the Services and my resignation is effective today. Yes, *today*. My paycheck? Oh, burn it," Carman said impatiently, and hung up. So much for past associations.

Carman withdrew his entire savings—$9,783.61. The roboteller handed the cash over without comment. Carman took the thick pile of crisp bills, counted slowly through them to the great annoyance of the people behind him in line, and nudged the *acknowledge* stud to let the teller know the transaction was complete. Outside the bank, he signalled for another copter and took it to the Upper Urbdistrict Spaceport, far out on what had once been Long Island.

"A ticket to Sirius?" the dispatcher asked, after the robot ticket-vender had passed Carman on to him in perplexity. "But the war, you know—we've curtailed our service to that entire sector."

"I don't care," Carman said stolidly. He was growing accustomed to being forceful now; it came easily to him, and he enjoyed it. "You advertise through transportation to Sirius VII. I've got a passport that says I can go there, and I've got six thousand dollars to pay my way. Cash."

"This is very irregular," moaned the dispatcher, a short harried-looking little man. "We discontinued passenger service to that system eight months ago, when—"

"You could lose your franchise for this," Carman snapped bluntly. "Sirius VII is non-belligerent. I have money and a passport. I demand transportation."

IN THE END, they diverted a freight run bound for Deneb, and put Carman aboard with the promise that they'd drop him at Sirius VII. His passport was in order, and he had the cash for the payment.

The trip took three weeks of steady hyperdrive travel. Six other humans were on board, all bad-smelling crewmen, and the crew of a space-freighter is hardly pleasant company on a three-week journey. Carman kept to himself, inventing a form of solitaire he could play making use of hundred-dollar bills, of which he had more than thirty left even after paying passage.

The ship's cargo consisted of steers slated for an agrarian colony orbiting Deneb, and Carman lived in a cramped cabin just aft of the cargo hold. He got little sleep.

They put him down finally on the concrete landing apron at Zuorf, crown-city of Sirius VII, on the fifth day of 2672, having first radioed the Terran consul there to let them know he was coming. Biggest and muggiest of the twelve planets that circled the dog-star, Sirius VII was a vast mountainous world with ugly sprawling cities crammed between the jagged peaks; its people were brawny ursinoids, not long escaped from their neolithic culture-stage.

As it happened, some sort of local celebration was in full sway when Carman, a solitary figure with a solitary suitcase of belongings, left the spaceport. Great heavy-set creatures were whirling up and down the streets in each other's arms, looking like so many dancing-bears clad in tinsel and frills. Carman stepped hastily back into the shadow of a squat yellow-painted building while a platoon of the huge shaggy aliens came thundering past, to the gay accompaniment of distant tootling music composed in excruciating quarter-tone intervals.

A hand fell lightly on his shoulder. Carman turned and jumped away all in the same nervous motion. He saw an Earthman behind him, clad in the somber black vestments of the Terran diplomatic corps.

"Pardon me if I startled you," the stranger said in a soft, cultured voice. He was a neatly-turned out, mildly foppish-looking man in his forties, with elegant features, well-groomed dark hair, delicately-shaven brow ridges. Only the startling brass ring through his nostrils marred his otherwise distinguished upper-class appearance.

"I'm the Terran consul on this world," he went on, in the same gentle tones. "Adrian Blyde's my name. Am I right in assuming you're the man who was just dropped off by that freighter?"

"You are. I'm David Carman of Earth. Want to see my passport?"

Consul Blyde smiled serenely. "In due time, Mr. Carman. I'm sure it's in good order. But would you mind telling me precisely *why* you've come to Sirius VII?"

"To join the armed forces. I want to take part in the Sirian campaign."

"To join the armed forces," Blyde repeated in a faintly wonderstruck voice. "Well well well. That's very interesting, Mr. Carman. Very. Would you come this way, please?"

Blyde seized him firmly by the fleshy part of his arm and propelled him across the wide, poorly-paved street, between two pairs of madly careening bear-like beings, and into a narrow doorway in a building constructed of purple brick.

"The autochthones are celebrating their annual fertility festival today," the Consul explained. "The couples dance through the city from morning to night without rest. Those that keep on their feet the whole day without collapsing are entitled to mate. The weak ones have to try again next year. It's quite a neat genetic system, really."

Carman glanced back through the doorway at the hordes of spinning aliens weaving wildly down the broad street, locked each to each in a desperate grip of love.

"The nose-rings denote masculinity," Blyde said. "Terran males who stay here have to wear them too; the natives are very, very fussy about that. When in Rome, you know. I'll give you yours tonight."

"Just a minute," Carman said worriedly, as Blyde unlocked an office door and gestured within to a cluttered little room lined with booktapes and scattered papers. "I don't plan to stay here, you know. The military action's on Sirius IV. That's where I'm going as soon as I've seen the authorities and enlisted."

Blyde dropped heavily into a well-upholstered pneumochair, wiped perspiration from his brow with an obviously scented cloth, and sighed unhappily. "My dear Mr. Carman: I don't know what motives impelled you to come to this system, nor by what chicanery you wangled your passage. But, now that you're here, there are several things you should know."

"Such as?"

"For one, there are no hostilities currently taking place anywhere in the Sirius system."

Stunned, Carman gasped, "No—hostilities? Then the war's over?"

Blyde touched his fingertips lightly together. "You misunderstand. There never *was* any war between Earth and Sirius IV. Care for a drink?"

"Rye," Carman said automatically. "Never—was—a—war? But—how—"

"Economic Regulator Harrison Morch of Earth is a great man," Blyde said with seeming irrelevancy, putting his head back as if studying the reticulated pattern of paint-cracks on the office ceiling. An air conditioner hummed ineffectually somewhere. "Economic Regulator Morch has devoted a lifetime of study to examining the motives governing fluctuations in economic trends."

Carman's throat felt terribly dry. The moist warmth of Sirius VII's atmosphere, the additional drag of the heavier gravity, the calm blandness of the Consul's manner, the sheer nonsense he was talking—all these factors were combining to make Carman thoroughly sick.

"What does all this have to do with—"

Blyde raised one manicured hand. "Economic Regulator Morch, through his studies, has reduced to a formula the general economic principle known to theorists for centuries—that spending increases in direct proportion to adverse military news. Consumers go on buying sprees, remembering the last cycle of shortages and of rapid price increases. Money flows more freely. Of course, when the war situation lasts long enough, a period of inflation sets in—making it necessary that an equally virulent peace be waged."

Dimly Carman sensed what was coming. "No," he said.

"Yes. There is no war with Sirius. It was a stroke of genius on Economic Regulator Morch's part to take advantage of the uncertain-

ty of interstellar communication to enforce a news-block on the entire Sirius system. It's a simple matter to distribute fabricated war communiques, invent wholly fictitious spaceships which perish gorily on the demand of the moment, arouse public interest and keep it at a high pitch—"

"You mean," Carman said tonelessly, "that Morch invented this whole war, and arranges Terran victories and losses to fit economic conditions back home?"

"It is a brilliant plan," said Blyde, smiling complacently. "If a decline in spending occurs, word of severe losses in space reaches the home front, and the bad news serves to unloose the purse-strings. When the economy has been reinflated, Earth's legions forge on to victory, and spending drops off again. We spend heavily in times of stress, when we need consolation—not in peacetime."

Carman blinked. "I spent six thousand dollars and forged a passport to come here and find out *this!* The one time in my life I decided to *do* something, instead of sitting back and letting things happen to me, I discover it's all a hoax." He flexed his fingers experimentally, as if wondering what he might do with them.

Blyde seemed to be sympathetic. "It is, I realize, terribly awkward for you. But no more so than it is to us, who have the strenuous task of preserving this beneficial hoax and protecting it from would-be exposers."

"Are you going to kill me, then?"

Blyde blanched at the blunt question. "Mr. Carman! We are not barbarians!"

"Well, what *are* you going to do with me?"

The Consul shrugged. "The one completely satisfactory thing. We'll find you a good job here on Sirius VII. You'll be much happier here than you ever were on Earth. Naturally, you can't be permitted to return home."

But the man who can forge a passport to Sirius can also find a way home. In Carman's case it took him seven full months—months of living in the sticky endless heat of Sirius VII, dodging the playful ursinoid natives, kowtowing to Blyde (whose secretary he became, at $60 a week) and wearing a brass nose-ring through his nostrils.

It was seven months before he had mastered Blyde's signature to his own satisfaction, and knew enough of local diplomatic protocol to be able to requisition a spaceship from the small military outpost just outside Zuorf. A messenger—there were no phones on the planet, for obscure religious reasons—came to the Consulate to announce that the ship was ready.

"Wait outside," Carman told the boy.

Blyde looked up from behind his desk and said, "What ship does he mean?"

"The one I'm taking back to Earth," said Carman, and released the sleep-capsule. Blyde smiled sweetly as he slipped into unconsciousness. Carman followed the boy to the spaceport.

A slim, trim two-man ship waited

there, sleek and golden-hulled in the bright sunlight. The pilot was an efficient-looking space-tanned man named Duane.

"Diplomatic pouch," Carman said, handing over the leather attache-case he had prepared for the occasion. Duane stored it reverently in the hold, and they blasted off.

"Sirius IV first," Carman ordered. "I'm supposed to take films. Top-secret, of course."

"Of course."

They circled the small pockmarked gray fourth planet at 50,000 feet, and Carman took enough cloud-piercing infra-red shots to prove conclusively that there was not and never had been any war between the amiable amphibious aborigines and Earth. Satisfied, he ordered the pilot to proceed immediately toward Sol.

They reached Earth nineteen days later, on 3 August 2672. A squad of security police was waiting for them as they landed at Upper Urb-district Spaceport, and Carman was swiftly conveyed to a cell in Confederation Detention House in the tunnels far below Old Manhattan. Blyde had sent word ahead via subradio concerning Carman's escape, it seemed.

In his cell, later that evening, Carman was visited by a parched-looking, almost fleshless man in the blue cape and red wig of high governmental office.

"So you're the culprit!"

"That's what they tell me. Who are you?"

"Ferdan Veller, Administrative Assistant to Regulator Morch. The Regulator sent me to see who you were and what you were like."

"Well, now you've seen," Carman said. "Get out."

Assistant Veller's melancholy eyes widened. "I see you're a forceful man, Mr. Carman. No doubt you're full of plans for escaping, recapturing your confiscated films, and letting the world know what a dastardly hoax is being perpetrated in the interests of a balanced economy. Eh?"

"I might be," Carman admitted.

"You might be interested in this morning's telefax sheet, then," Veller said. He extended a torn-off yellow strip.

The headline was:

NEW AGGRESSION
THREATENS EARTH!

Government City, 3 Aug 2672—Word reached Earth today of yet another threat to her peace, coming hot on the heels of the recently-concluded police action in the Sirius sector. Forces in the Great Andromeda Nebula have issued statements inimical to Earth, and a new conflict looms—"

"You killed off Sirius because you were afraid I'd expose it," Carman said accusingly. "And now you're starting up a new one."

Veller nodded smugly. "Quite. The Great Andromeda Nebula happens to be 900,000 light-years away. The round trip, even by hyperdrive, takes some twenty years." He grinned, showing a double row of square tartared teeth. "You're a

(Continued on page 120)

Illustrated by Virgil Finlay

He was a hunter with a Cause that transcended all law.

But, now, could the Cause forgive him his service?

THE RAIDER

BY DON BERRY

THEY DROPPED the raider on the night side, less than thirty miles from Thanlar, the capitol city. The dark, slim ship drifted silently to the ground, discharged its passenger and lifted again, moving slowly like a great shark in the night. On the way out into space, it was caught by the defense screens of Thanlar and disappeared in a gout of flaming energy that lit up

the entire night sky.

The raider did not see it; he was already asleep.

He slept, and his dreams were troubled by images of a familiar face. Strong cheekbones, the mane of white hair, the famous half-smile of Mayne Landing, Earth Commissioner to the Colony Planets. Mayne Landing, the gentle representative of Terra to her children, the kindly old gentleman with the fist of steel, the benevolent despot over a hundred Colony Planets.

Mayne Landing: victim.

The raider woke with the dawn, a dawn that was slightly more red-tinged than the sun he was used to. He gathered his small store of equipment together and cached it in the low scrub of the surrounding forest. By a clear, sparkling stream he washed, wincing slightly from the shock of the too-cold water against his face.

He wore clothes indistinguishable from the other farmers of this district, slightly shabby, a uniform dun color. They did not fit him well, but they could not hide the wide shoulder and slim waist. Well, it didn't matter: the farmers of this planet, like all the Colonies, had to work hard to scrape their meager living from the rocky soil. They were all in good condition; he would not be conspicuous.

He finished washing and dried himself on the sleeve of his jumper. Then he began to walk down the rocky hill to the village that stood in the tiny valley below. In the early sun, the tiny assemblage of white clean houses sparkled like a handful of sand-polished shells clustered on a beach. He stopped for a moment, halfway down, looking at the village.

It was a nice little place, he thought. Peaceful in the early light, calm. There were a few people moving about the streets, probably farmers early on their way to the fields. It was a pastoral scene, like something he had read in a book a long time ago.

Nice, he thought. *Quiet. I wonder what it will be like when I'm finished here.*

It didn't pay to think about things like that. Not in his business.

He let his eyes shift slightly to take in the tall towers of Thanlar, just visible over the crest of hills on the other side of the valley. Thanlar, the capitol. That was his concern. That was what he had to think about, not the village.

He sighed once, started down the hill again, walking slowly, picking his way through the loose rocks with care.

As he neared the village, he passed several crews of men going out into the fields. He greeted them in Interlingua, and they replied shortly, without curiosity. He knew he was a stranger to them; they did not recognize him, but they showed no curiosity. These days, curiosity was not much advantage to anyone, he thought. The farmers had probably learned long ago not to show too much interest in any stranger who suddenly appeared from nowhere.

He came into the village and walked quickly to the faded wooden sign that announced, TAILOR. Entering the little shop, more a

general dry-goods store than a tailor, he moved to the rear, to a small counter. No one was there, and he rang the bell on the counter.

After a moment, a man appeared, hastily buttoning a tunic, his hair still tousled, sleep in his eyes.

"Yes, yes? What is it? You are too early."

"My apologies, old man," said the raider. "I am looking for a hunting cloak."

The small man's eyes narrowed. "Ah," he said. "A hunting cloak. I have several. What did you have in mind."

"Something in gray. To suit my name."

"Ah. And what might you be hunting, Mr.—Gray?"

"An animal of my home planet. It is called a jackal."

"Ah."

The old man suddenly turned from the low rack of cloaks and stared directly at his customer. His mouth compressed in a thin, bitter line.

"So. You are he. The Mr. Gray who hunts the jackal. Come."

He turned and led the way into his living quarters behind the counter.

"I will tell the others you are here," he said. He left through a rear door, leaving the raider to wander about the tiny room, inspecting it without interest. He had seen too many like it in the past five years to be interested. Dingy little rooms in the back of a store, insect-ridden chambers in public lodgings, shack in the backwoods outside a city, too many, too many. And never a place to rest.

After this one, he promised himself. *After this one.*

Soon the little tailor came back, and there were two others with him. One was a ferret-eyed little man with a suspicious stare, the other a heavy-set farmer. The heavy-set man had a scythe in his hand, he had apparently been on his way to his fields when the tailor found him. He held the scythe tightly, and the raider could see he was very nervous. It was probably the first time he had ever come into contact with one of the raider's—profession. He didn't like it.

Extending his free right hand, the farmer said, "My name is Carroll. Joseph Carroll. You are—Mr. Gray?"

The raider took the proffered hand warmly, trying to gain this man's friendship. He would need all the help he could get.

"Gray is my given name, Mr. Carroll. My last name—" he laughed embarrassedly, "—well, they call me Wolf, for the time being."

"Appropriate," said the man bitterly.

"I'm sorry I have to meet you under these conditions, Mr. Carroll, very sorry."

The other shrugged, keeping his eyes fixed on the raider's lean, brown face, trying to guess what sort of mind lay behind it.

"In these times," he said finally, with an air of discouragement, "one cannot choose either one's friends or the conditions of meeting."

The ferret-eyed man had been

watching the exchange closely, and now he sidled up to the raider with his thin, white hand extended. "Please forgive Joseph," he said smoothly. "He is not happy about this affair." His voice exuded a sort of artificial charm, and Wolf found himself repelled by the man.

"None of us do," he said. He turned to the farmer again, who was standing uncomfortably, his eyes on the floor. Wolf watched him for a moment, just long enough for the farmer to know he was being watched.

"Perhaps," said Wolf slowly, "we had better straighten this out right now."

The heavy-set man looked up defiantly. "All right," he said. "I admit I do not like this business, I do not like what you are here for, I do not like what will happen to our village when you are gone."

The thin man laughed. "The old man means to say he is a coward."

"No," said the man stubbornly, without taking his eyes away from Wolf. "I am not a coward. But your mission means death for many people, people I call my friends. I do not like that."

"There is a necessity," said Wolf, quietly.

"Perhaps, perhaps," said Joseph Carroll, shaking his head dubiously. "I do not pretend to understand the political complications. I know only that, whether you succeed or fail, our village is lost. Our people will suffer for what you do. Many will probably die. You cannot expect me to like that."

"No," Wolf agreed. "We do not expect that of you, Joseph. No one expects you to like this. But, tell me—"

"Yes."

"What was your tax the past year?" Wolf asked.

The old man laughed bitterly. "Seventy-nine percent."

"Enough to live on?"

"Barely," said Carroll, leaning heavily on the scythe. "It means we must work many hours, sixteen or more a day, in order to survive."

"That is what we fight," said Wolf simply. "That, and the near slavery of many of the Colonies. Do you know what happens to the money you pay the Terran Federation in taxes?"

"No," admitted Carroll. "No one has dared ask."

Wolf laughed. "And yet they say the Federation is a republic? When the citizen does not dare ask what happens to the taxes that are ground out of him? I'll tell you, my friend Joseph. It is used for administration. Simply that. Administration of a space empire is an expensive project, and you must pay for it. It costs a great deal of money, our treasured Empire. And what does the administration consist of? Machinery to collect taxes. It is like a snake that feeds on its own tail, Joseph. Taxes are increased in order to have enough money to collect more taxes. It never ends."

"This is one thing," said Joseph. "The killing of people is another."

"How many do you know who have died in Debtor's camps, or died because they could not work hard enough? Joseph, this is no life for a man. The Colonies cannot de-

velop under the Federation. They must be free to govern themselves. Otherwise, we have simply a great, cancerous tumor, spreading through the universe, calling itself the Terran Federation."

Joseph sighed. "All right," he said. "In principle I agree. The colonies must be free. But is there no other way than murder and assassination? This violence—what can come of it? And if the revolution succeeds eventually, how can we know the Federation will not be replaced by the same thing under another name?"

"Because you will govern yourselves," Wolf said. "Every Colony will be autonomous, trading as a sovereign nation with the other Colonies. The idea of a Galactic Empire is self-defeating, Joseph, it is unhealthy, vicious. The only way man can go to the stars with his head up, is without dreams of infinite power blinding him."

"You are an idealist," said the ferret-eyed man, with surprise.

"A man must live for something," said Wolf, quietly.

"Certainly, certainly," the thin man agreed quickly. "I was surprised to find an idealist in your—trade."

"My trade is as distasteful to me as it is to you," said Wolf, speaking more to Joseph Carroll than to the pale, thin man.

"What will the death of Mayne Landing accomplish?" Carroll asked.

"Confusion. He is the Administrator of over one hundred planets. He is a strong man, a focal point. Without him, without his personal strength, the administration of those planets will falter, and stop. It isn't that he carries on the routine work, of course. But decisions come from him, the decisions that cannot be made by routine, the decisions that require a man's creative spark. Without that, the routine itself cannot stand."

"It rather sounds as if you respect the man," said Carroll.

"Respect him? I—" Wolf hesitated, uncertain. "Yes," he finished. "I respect him. He is doing what he thinks is right, as I do what I think is right."

"And you would kill a man for whom you hold no hatred," Carroll muttered. "This thing is making beasts of us all."

If you only knew, thought Wolf, *if you only knew.*

"Sometimes it is necessary," he said aloud. "Sometimes bad things are necessary, that good may follow."

Carroll sighed. "Well, we are committed now. We must go ahead."

"I will need detailed information on Landing's plan of inspection," Wolf said.

"You will have it," Carroll told him. "Daimya has been in the city for five days, listening and watching."

"Good," said Wolf. He felt better now, getting into the operation. This he knew, this he could handle. It was what he was trained for. It was the other things that were bad, the thinking, the wondering, the long nights spent sleepless, uncertain.

"When will he be back?" Wolf

asked. "This Daimya."

"She. Daimya is my daughter," Carroll said. "Even our children must have blood on their hands. She will return this evening."

DAIMYA CAME, just after dark. Wolf was startled. He had expected a child, from the way Carroll spoke, and Daimya was far from a child. She was a slim woman, in her early twenties, he estimated. Her body was sleek and fit, and her long black hair was tied behind her head, where it flowed over her back like a waterfall carved from ebony. She had large eyes, slightly almond shaped, that regarded him solemnly as she gave the information she had gathered.

"He will come to inspect this village in two days," she said. "He will visit four farms, picked at random, and then there will be a procession down the main street."

"That would be our time," Wolf mused. "Crowds about."

"Some will be killed," Daimya objected. "His guards will not take this thing lightly."

"I am sorry," Wolf said sincerely. "It is our best chance of success."

Daimya shrugged. "You are the killer, not I," she said, with obvious distaste.

Wolf felt an impulse to explain, to justify, to make this slight girl see that he hated this. Angrily he fought it down.

It doesn't matter what she thinks, he told himself. *It doesn't matter. What matters is to get the job done and get out. That's all.*

"Tell me," Daimya said curiously, "how do you come to be mixed up in a thing like this? You don't act like a hired killer."

Wolf laughed shortly. "No," he said. "I'm an amateur. I was a Captain of the Security Patrol once. My whole family was in Federation Service, as a matter of fact. I was on Colony Patrol for three years. In that time I saw so much suffering, so much injustice, so much simple cruelty that—well, never mind. When I was contacted by a member of the revolution underground, I deserted. It almost killed my father. Since I was familiar with the Federation's higher echelons, I was assigned the pleasant job of assassin."

"How many men have you killed in that job?" Daimya asked, almost casually.

Wolf watched her for a long moment before answering. "You don't want to know that," he said slowly.

The girl dropped her eyes. "No. No, I guess you're right. I'm sorry."

She stood and went to the door. She stopped there and turned, looking at Wolf. He met her eyes and held them with his own, frankly, without embarrassment.

"I'm sorry," she repeated. She closed the door softly behind her, and Wolf bent to study the map of the village she had provided.

THE VILLAGE lay in a cup-shaped valley. The main street was also a direct highway out of Thanlar. On either side of the highway, the farmer's fields

stretched, checkered brown and green, to the foothills. The entire valley was not more than a mile wide, and the fields extended only a quarter of a mile on either side of the main road. The foothills added another quarter of a mile, and then, abruptly, the mountains started.

Though one of the principal highways to Thanlar, the main street was fairly narrow, bordered closely on either side by the small business district, composed mostly of single story buildings constructed out of native lumber from the hills.

Wolf decided the center of the business district would offer the most concealment. Any group of men at any other place would be viewed with suspicion by Mayne Landing's bodyguards, and their chances would be proportionately diminished.

It remained to determine the most effective weapon. Explosive? No, too many villagers would be killed. Yet that would certainly be the most certain way, a grenade thrown from the roof of one of the low buildings. He wondered how thoroughly the Administrator's men would check the village before the procession.

Joseph Carroll told him the check was cursory; except for the spasmodic attacks of the revolution underground, the Colonies were submissive enough, and the precautions taken were in the nature of routine.

It looked to be easy, Wolf thought wryly. The easiest of them all, since the planet was fairly distant from the scene of previous underground operations.

They wouldn't be expecting it, he thought. Down the main street in procession, the Administrator standing in the little ground car, smiling and waving to his subjects, genial, effusive. And then—

"Joseph," said Wolf suddenly. "How many men can I depend on?"

"Perhaps thirty," said the farmer. "Perhaps a few more."

"Are they completely dependable?"

"Within reason," said Carroll. "They are farmers, not soldiers. Plows are more familiar to them than guns."

"How many can you get me that will obey me without question, no matter what?"

Joseph Carroll tugged absently at his ear. Finally, he shrugged. "Perhaps five," he said. "Including myself."

"All right," sighed Wolf. "It will have to be that way, then. But the others can be depended on 'within reason?' "

"Yes," Carroll said. "Do not expect too much. They do not like this business."

"Neither do you," Wolf said. "But you count yourself among the five trustworthy."

Carroll didn't answer, and Wolf took his silence as a declaration of faith.

"All right," he said. "Leave me now. At sunset, bring your men to me, all of them. I will work out the attack."

"Very well," said Carroll, and started to leave.

"Joseph," said Wolf softly, and

the older man turned at the door.

"What is it?"

"What about Daimya?"

"What about her?"

"Where will she be during—this attack?"

"At home, I expect," said Carroll. "Where she belongs."

Wolf toyed for a moment with the map that lay before him.

"Joseph," he said. "What *will* happen to the village?"

"You don't know?" asked Carroll in surprise.

"No," Wolf admitted. "I have never stayed behind."

Carroll laughed bitterly. "One of two things," he said. "They will either demolish it from the air, including the populace, or they will put everyone in one of the forced labor camps." The farmer made a small gesture of resignation.

"I didn't know," Wolf said, almost under his breath. *Can I be responsible for that?*

"They don't like Colonists cooperating with the revolutionaries," Carroll continued. "Did you expect they exempted us all from our taxes as a reward?"

"No," Wolf said. "But I didn't know it was so—complete."

"They are thorough," the old man shrugged. "Any village where an incident occurs is made an example. Before long, you people will not find much welcome in the Colonies."

"I suppose not," Wolf mused. "Perhaps by then—"

"You really believe you're going to succeed in overthrowing the Federation, don't you?"

"I must," said Wolf. "Without that, all this—" he gestured to the map before him, traced with arrows, notations, ideas, "—is meaningless slaughter."

"So it seems," Carroll said flatly.

"Joseph," said Wolf suddenly. "With luck, there will be a ship waiting for me in the mountains when I've—finished here."

"That's your good fortune," Carroll said grimly.

"Will you come with me?"

"And join the revolutionaries?"

"You—and Daimya."

Carroll considered it slowly. "No," he said finally. "Not I. I have gotten my people into this, I must stay with them. All were against it when you first contacted us. All but me. It is my fault. I have to stay with them."

Wolf felt a sudden surge of affection for the old man. Reluctant he might be, but he knew what he was doing and he knew the consequences and was willing to accept them.

"And Daimya?"

"That is a different matter," said Carroll. "It is not right that she should suffer for her father's folly."

Or that a father should suffer for his son's folly, thought Wolf. But he said nothing.

"You would take her?" Carroll asked.

"If I am—able," said Wolf.

"All right," said the old man. "I will see to it. Better she should be alive than dead. That is all that matters."

Wolf's final plan was simple. He had not enough men to count on a direct attack. The major work

would be performed by the dependable five, of which Carroll assured him. The others would be used to create a diversion to cover the actual assault.

There was a slight bend to the highway just before it entered the village. When the procession passed this point, they would see a group of men disperse quickly into the low scrub at the side of the road. This would put them on their guard, they would be apprehensive, watching.

When the procession had entered the village itself and was within the short commercial strip, there would be an explosion back of them. Grenades, perhaps some shooting. If Wolf's prediction were accurate, this would divert the attention of at least the major portion of guards for long enough.

Long enough for the five men in the crowd to do what they had to do—

"This must be timed perfectly," he told the man who was to head the diversionary squad.

"I understand that."

"Too soon or too late, either will destroy us. It will take us too long to reach the Administrator. He must be exactly opposite the tailor's shop. It must be done right."

"It will be done right."

"If it is not, all the sacrifices are for nothing, you understand that? The consequences will be as bad, or worse, for the village, and we will have accomplished nothing. If the Administrator is dead, there will be time for most of the villagers to escape into the hills before the Federation can take action against them."

The man left, after Wolf had provided him with the weapons his group would need from his cache on the nearby hillside.

The dependable five were instructed in their parts, and then there was nothing to do but wait.

The next morning dawned clear. The air was cool, a slight breeze ruffled the fields around the village. As the sun rose higher in the sky, it glinted sharply from the towers of Thanlar.

It had been impossible to keep the entire operation a secret from the villagers. They knew something was to happen, and they knew it concerned the inspection trip of Mayne Landing to the village. It was not hard to guess what it was.

As the day drew on toward noon, the tension of the people grew. Small knots of farmers gathered on the corners, their fields forgotten for the day, talking low.

Wolf didn't like it, it was too obvious. The village was primed, ready to explode, and he was afraid the tension would make the guards *too* alert. They had to be just tense enough to respond to the diversion, not enough so they would be watching *everywhere.* He was counting on an instinctive, rapid response.

He sat behind the tailor shop, talking to his men with a confidence and calm he did not feel. He spoke as if the success of the mission were a foregone fact, and the escape of the villagers into the hills. But he knew it was tenuous.

Perhaps he had planned it too

critically. Perhaps a simple direct attack would have been better. Perhaps, perhaps—

Any number of things were possible, he thought. But it was done now. If he had made a mistake, they would know soon.

On the contraband comset behind the tailor shop, Wolf had called the mother-ship that hovered just out of detection range. All right, they confirmed, there would be a shuttle in the hills back of the town. Did he know the shuttle that had brought him had been lost? No? Well, it had. With the whole crew aboard.

That many more, thought Wolf. *If anybody's keeping a list, I've got a lot to my credit. Or damnation.* And, bitterly: *More friends than enemies.*

Don't think about it. Do your job and get the hell out. If you can.

He spoke to Daimya, but on her father's advice did not tell her of his plan to take her along.

"She won't go voluntarily," the old man said frankly. "We will have to pretend we are all going to the hills. After that—" he nodded slowly, "—the problem is yours."

"I will take care of her, Joseph," Wolf had promised, and the sun-browned farmer had clasped his hand tightly in a mute gesture of hopefulness.

"You understand—a man and his daughter—you understand?"

More than you probably know, Joseph.

"Yes," he said aloud. "I think I understand."

And then came the word that the Administrator's procession was in sight.

Wolf looked at his five dependables. He passed each face slowly, as if he had never seen them before. They were young, and old, and middle-aged. They were dark from the hours in the sun, strong from the work that pulled their muscles for the long hours each day. They smiled at him, grimly, nervous, but they were good men.

The faces of freedom, Wolf thought. *These are the faces and the bodies of freedom.*

Then it was time.

THE STREETS WERE lined with silent people when the procession came into view around the slight curve.

Then there was a tentative cheer from someone. It was taken up by someone else, and soon the crowd was roaring its synthetic appreciation of Administrator Mayne Landing. Wolf breathed easier.

Craning his neck in the crowd, Wolf spotted the other five, standing dispersed in the crowd, but all near the spot on the street opposite the tailor's shop. They made no acknowledgement except meeting his eyes, then turning away to watch the procession near.

As they came closer, Wolf noted with satisfaction that several of the guards occasionally glanced at the street behind them.

Good. They had seen the knot of men outside town, then. If they expected anything, they were expecting it from behind them.

He could see the tall, straight figure of Mayne Landing in the

ground car. He took in the familiar face almost hungrily, the great shock of white hair moving gently in the slight breeze, the characteristic gesture, a half-salute, the slight smile, the kindly eyes of the old man—

He tore his eyes away from the dignified figure and glanced behind him, down the street. He saw a figure move on a roof-top, and wondered if the guards saw it, too.

Then the ground car was opposite, and Wolf had a wrenching sensation that the diversionary squad was not going to go through with it . . .

An explosion rocked the street a block away, shaking the ground underfoot, shattering windows in the adjacent stores. A billow of dirty black smoke began to drift toward the sky. There was a scattering of small, explosive fire.

The tone of the crowd's roar changed. It deepened and became a mass cry of confusion and fright.

Quietly, Wolf edged forward to the street, automatically noting that his men were doing the same. Several of the guards had turned, were running back toward the source of the excitement, and others were turned toward it. But those around Mayne Landing had not responded. They were keeping their eyes fixed on the crowd. They were too well trained to be drawn off, and Wolf cursed under his breath.

He stopped his forward motion and waited, rocking on the balls of his feet. This was the part he hadn't told his five about.

Suddenly there was a flurry in the crowd on the opposite side of the street. The nearest guard whirled, in time to draw his hand gun and fire. The first of the five sprawled in the street, a bloody stump where his head had been. But the guard's blast had not been in time to stop the long mowing knife that buried itself to the hilt in his throat. He lurched forward, dropping the hand gun. His momentum carried him almost into the edge of the crowd, and a woman screamed hysterically.

Wolf's other men had been only a fraction of a second behind the first, and the street was now a chaos of shouting and the sharp, flat reports of the guards' hand guns. The crowd milled frantically, adding to the confusion as the attackers leaped at the procession.

Wolf waited, waited, watching for the single split-second when the guards were fully engaged with the crowd.

Then it came, and their heads were momentarily turned away from Mayne Landing.

Wolf sprinted from the crowd, the short stiletto cradled in his hand. He leaped to the side of the ground car just as Mayne Landing turned toward him.

He saw the old man's face clearly in that moment. It held no fear, but only an unbelievable surprise, an astonishment beyond understanding. Then the stiletto slid gently into the throat, severing the jugular, and all surprise and emotion was lost in the implacable blank agony of death. The still-pumping heart forced a pulsing stream of bright arterial blood

around the blade of the knife.

Then, as quickly as he had come, Wolf was gone. He slipped back through the crowd, into the door of the tailor shop. Seconds later, Joseph Carroll was there, one side of his gray farmer's tunic turning brown-black from the blood that soaked it.

"Come on!" Carroll snapped, running for the back.

"What about the others?"

"Gone," said the old man shortly. "All of them." He dashed out the door of the tailor shop into the back and Wolf followed him.

"Daimya!" Wolf shouted.

"She's waiting for us in the foothills."

The sound of the crowd and the blasting of hand guns was loud behind them as they began their dash across the checkered fields. For a few moments, nothing followed. Then Wolf heard a faint shout behind them, and a huge gout of dirt erupted from the field beside him, almost knocking him down.

He regained his balance and started to run low, crouched and zig-zagging while the tiny explosive pellets pocked the field around him. It seemed an eternity before they had crossed the field, but he knew it was not more than a couple of minutes.

Joseph Carroll was ahead of him, already beginning to tear through the scrub growth of the foothills, making his way up. Just as he entered the undergrowth, Wolf saw the old man joined by a smaller, slighter figure.

There was a roar in his ears, and he fell, a searing pain across his back. Numbly, he realized he'd been hit, but somehow it didn't seem important. He picked himself up and followed Carroll into the scrub. Soon he was out of sight of their pursuers, though the explosions of their weapons still followed them with uncanny accuracy.

He caught up with the old man and his daughter in a small clearing. Carroll lay with his head cradled in Daimya's lap, gasping for breath.

"We've got to go on," Wolf said. "Come on, I'll help."

"You're hurt!" the girl said.

"Not badly. Come on, we've got to get your father out of here!"

The old man put his arms around the shoulders of the other two, and they struggled up the hill, breaking their way through the brush, slipping, sometimes falling. Behind them, there was still the occasional sound of the explosive pellets, and infrequently, one came very near.

"Close," muttered Wolf as an explosion showered them with dirt. "They're on the path now."

They went a few steps farther, and Joseph slumped between them.

"Dad!" called Daimya. "Please! Please try to go on!"

Wolf's hand slid down the old man's back, came away warm and wet.

He was silent for a moment, then gently lowered the suddenly limp body to the ground.

"Come on," he said to Daimya. The girl was standing over the inert form of her father, not understanding what had happened, words of encouragement still on her lips.

"Dad?" she said, bewildered.

Wolf took her arm. "Daimya, he's gone. Come on."

"No—Dad—" She knelt beside him on the ground.

"Sorry, Daimya," Wolf said under his breath. He swung, hitting her cleanly behind the head. The girl collapsed soundlessly, and he slung her over his shoulder and started on up the hill.

Finally, he cleared the crest. Just beyond it, lying in a tiny meadow lay the black, unmarked shuttle ship. As he came in view, the port opened and a man ran toward him. Wolf stumbled, caught his balance, went on.

"Here," said the crewman, "let me take her."

Silently, out of fatigue, Wolf relinquished his load and stumbled toward the port. It slid shut behind them, just in time to keep them from being covered with dirt blown from a hole that suddenly appeared a yard behind. Wolf caught a glimpse of men appearing at the crest.

Inside the ship, he could hear the thud and clang of the explosive cartridges detonating uselessly against the permalloy hull. Then the drives roared their song of power, and the shuttle lifted clear.

The crewmen were more than curious.

"Who the hell's the girl?"

"Got me. Never heard of such a thing."

"Well, I suppose a Raider has a right to pick up a little booty now and then," another laughed. "They don't have the easiest job in the world."

"Bet she's going to be mad when she wakes up."

"Yeah. Looks like the Raider might be worrying a little about that right now."

Wolf stood at the forward screen, silently watching the shape of the mother-ship grow larger and larger until the screen held nothing but the great black hull.

The crewmen were wrong, he wasn't worried about Daimya's waking. He could take care of that when the time came.

He was thinking about other things, the things that came to him when he slept, the faces, the names, the actions, the right and wrong of living according to what you think is right, no matter what the cost.

But the cost, the cost . . .

It was so high sometimes, so terribly high.

This trip, he thought. A shuttle crew. Five good men, probably the whole village, eventually. Those who did escape into the hills would lead a life of fear and pursuit, foraging as they went until finally they were caught. And worst of all, this was worst of all, and mentally he saw the list, the list of his responsibilities, the list for which he would someday have to account.

The bright name of Mayne Landing: victim.

His mind shied away from it.

Can that be forgiven? Can such a thing ever be forgiven?

Gray Landing, called Wolf in the underground, turned away from the forward screen and began to prepare to board the mother-ship.

END

PASTOR LANVIN entered the control room at an inopportune moment, being in time to overhear the greater part of an acrimonious exchange between Captain Triggs and Calder, his Mate. A faint smile flickered over the missionary's lean, deeply lined face as he listened to the richly embroidered invective.

"Call yourself a navigator!" bellowed Triggs. "It breaks my heart when I think of all the better navigators that I've flushed away!"

"Well, we're here," said Calder sullenly.

"Yes, we're here. Only three million odd miles from the damned planet, and God knows how many tons of

The Bureaucrat

reaction mass we shall have to waste chasing it round in its orbit! If you had some big, fat blonde waiting for you there you'd have slid into normal space-time only half an inch from the surface."

"If you'd kept your big, dirty paws off the drive controls—" flared Calder. "Of all the pests in space, there's none worse than a master who can't mind his own business. The drive was running perfectly until you wrecked it. Why the bloody hell can't you leave things alone?"

"The drive was not running perfectly, and you damn well know it, Mr. Calder. If I hadn't taken charge we'd have finished up away to hell and gone outside the Galaxy!"

Calder made the only possible reply—the monosyllabic one. Then he saw Lanvin. He flushed.

"Good morning, Pastor," he said.

Captain Triggs hastily smoothed his rugged features into an expression of amiability.

BY A. BERTRAM CHANDLER

Illustrated by Paul Orban

It has been said that if God didn't exist, it would be necessary to invent him. And that's just what someone had done on backward Gerak.

"Good morning, Pastor," he echoed. He gestured towards the wide viewports, which now showed the normal blackness of space, the normal bright, unwinking stars, instead of the distorted swirls of multicolored light that were all to be seen when the interstellar drive was in operation. "We got you here."

"So I see," said Lanvin. "So I heard."

"Just letting off steam," explained Triggs. "You will appreciate that interstellar navigation is rather a strain on the nerves. Look!" He pointed. With the slow rotation of the ship the sun of this planetary system was swinging into view, a blazing disc, its corona giving it an oddly winged look. Hastily Calder operated the dimmers, reducing the light striking through the big ports to a tolerable intensity. "Look! There she is—and that ball, just to the left of her, is Gerak."

"How long before we land?" asked Lanvin.

"About three days—although it may be longer. There's no spaceport, of course, and we may have to waste time looking for a suitable landing place."

"Time spent in the service of my Master is never wasted," said Lanvin gently. "Besides—the Society is paying you generously for your services."

"No more than the usual charter rates," pointed out Calder sourly.

"They're helping to keep *you* in a job," snapped Triggs. "Anyhow—we are wasting time hanging out here admiring the scenery. Get her lined up for Gerak, and get the rockets started as soon as you can!"

Calder started barking into the microphone. "All hands prepare for acceleration! All off-duty personnel to acceleration couches! All hands prepare for acceleration!"

"You may stay here if you wish, Pastor," said Triggs. "The Second Officer will not be coming up, and you can take his chair."

"Thank you, Captain," said Lanvin.

The surge of acceleration pressing him deeply into the padding of the chair was a reminder to Lanvin of the gravity to which he would soon have to become accustomed once more. Always, at the conclusion of a voyage, was there this feeling of regret, almost of loss. He did not subscribe to the theory, now widely held, that only in deep space is Man close to his Creator—but he would have hesitated to denounce it, as it had been denounced, as yet another addition to the long list of heresies.

He focussed his attention on the little, glowing ball—Gerak—that the ship was chasing. He reviewed in his mind the data that had been placed at his disposal by the Directorate of the Society. Mass, atmospheric pressure and content, humidity and climate were so close to Earth normal that he did not anticipate inconvenience or discomfort on that score—and he reproved himself for having allowed himself to consider that aspect of his mission. The people were humanoid, intelligent—but, according to the reports available from the Interstellar Survey Commission, living in a state of savagery. They were

pagans. They had a loose framework of superstitions but no religion, no God.

It was all to the good, he thought. He would be able to build without having first to destroy. It was all to the good, too, that Gerak was a protected planet—which meant that it was out of bounds to traders and prospectors. He smiled as he remembered the long and bitter war between the Society and the Bureau of Interstellar Affairs, at the conclusion of which permission had been granted to the Society to send its missionaries to the protected worlds—at their own risk.

There was risk, of course; there is always risk. The Society already had its roll of martyrs—but the price paid in blood was not, weighed against the successful spreading of the Word on four score worlds, a heavy one.

The tenor of his thoughts was interrupted by Calder's voice.

"I'm cutting to one G now, Pastor. If you like, you can return to your cabin."

"Thank you, Mr. Calder," replied the Pastor, "but I think that I shall stay here awhile. There is something inspiring in the spectacle of the Hosts of Heaven."

"I know what you mean," said Captain Triggs. "I often think that it would be a good thing if all the atheists and agnostics could be shown the stars as they really are—shining bright and clear with no atmosphere, no mist, no cloud to dim them . . ."

"Why?" asked Calder.

"Well . . . How can I put it? As the Pastor said—the Hosts of Heaven . . ."

"I'm sorry," said Calder, "but they're just stars to me. I know that each one is a sun, and I know that most of them have families of planets, and I know that if I do thus and thus and so and so I can proceed from one to the other."

"Mr. Calder!" snapped Triggs, "I'll thank you not to be blasphemous!"

"I don't think that there was any blasphemy," said Lanvin softly. "Mr. Calder is entitled to his own opinion—just as you and I are, Captain. He's a spaceman, doing his job—and, on this voyage at least, he is acting in the direct service of my Master."

"It's a pity, Pastor," growled Triggs, "that you won't have time to do any missionary work aboard this ship! There are some people here who need it!"

"Perhaps there are," agreed Lanvin. "Tolerance is one of the virtues, you know."

"It all depends what you're tolerating," said Triggs.

THE LANDING on Gerak was more spectacular than orthodox—and even Triggs could not blame his Mate either for the near-crash or its disastrous consequences. Triggs himself was at the controls, and ignored Calder's warning about the possible effects of the wind sweeping across the plain towards which the ship was descending, balanced on the column of fire that was her interplanetary drive. The plain was almost featureless, that was the trouble; it was just a huge

sea of grass or something so like grass that it made no difference. Calder got the sights of the drift indicator on to a low hummock and was able to get a rough estimate of lateral speed, but Triggs ignored his findings, snapping: "You can't do any more than guess over this sort of terrain."

"Then let me fire a smoke rocket," said Calder.

"And start a prairie fire? What sort of welcome do you think the Pastor will get if his coming devastates half a planet?"

"We'll start a fire when we land in any case," pointed out Calder.

"Not if the foam-flood apparatus is in working order—and it's your job to see that it is."

The foam-flood apparatus was in working order—but it might just as well not have been. As soon as the ship touched, as soon as the tips of her vaned landing gear dug into the soil, the weight of the wind on her bows tilted her. The steering vanes, set as they were in the exhaust, were useless; the servo-mechanisms whose job it was to maintain equilibrium gave up in despair.

Triggs did the only possible thing—fed power into the rockets to drive his ship up and clear from the treacherous surface, but the rocket thrust added its quota of energy to the coupling moment that was already almost uncontrollable. The ship tilted, and went on tilting. With a crash that smashed instruments and apparatus she toppled, toppled and rolled, and her incandescent exhaust cut a wide swathe of blazing destruction through the dry grass, well outside the range of the foam-flood ejectors. Triggs retained consciousness long enough to cut the drive, but then it was too late, much too late. A raging sea of fire, stretching from horizon to horizon, was racing down wind.

Pastor Lanvin offered thanks to his God that none of his shipmates had perished in the crash. Indeed, casualties had been surprisingly light, nobody had suffered damage more severe than contusions and abrasions. Calder, of course, was more inclined to give the credit for this to the manufacturers of the acceleration chairs and couches than to the Almighty, and earned a rebuke from his Captain for voicing his thoughts aloud.

"At least, sir," said Calder nastily, "I wasn't giving the credit to you."

Triggs ignored this, but in such a manner as to make it clear that the subject would be reopened later.

He said to the Pastor, "I've inspected the baggage hold. I'm afraid that your helicopter is smashed beyond repair, so are your solar batteries. About all that remains in good condition is your tent."

"Then I still have greater worldly possessions than many of those who spread the Word in the past," said the Pastor. "Tomorrow morning I will start to walk to the east—it seemed to me that there was a forest in that direction as we landed."

"If there's any forest left," said Calder. "The wind is from the west." He added, with a real sympathy, "I'm afraid that this has

rather started you off on the wrong foot, Pastor. By your coming you have caused considerable damage—and, it may well be, loss of life. The people of this world will be more inclined to regard you as an emissary of the Devil than of God . . ."

"Who can say how their minds will work?" asked the Pastor.

"I shall send an officer with you," said Triggs. "He will take one of the spacesuit radio sets with him, to keep in touch. He will report on the state of the forest—when you reach it. He will let me know if it is possible to recruit native labor to bring heavy spars to the scene of the wreck."

"Heavy spars?" asked Lanvin.

"Yes. The ship, I am sure, can be repaired with what we carry in the way of spares and plant. But she has to be up-ended before she can take off—and the only way to do that, on a primitive planet such as this, is by rigging a sheerlegs. All hands will be busy on repairs—if native labor can bring the spars to us it will expedite matters considerably."

"I see," said the Pastor. "Frankly, I shall be glad of company, even though it may be only for a short while. May I choose my companion?"

"Certainly."

"Then," said Lanvin, "I should like Mr. Calder to come with me."

"A rather surprising choice," said Triggs at last.

"A logical one," replied the missionary. "Do you think that we could step outside, Mr. Calder, so that we may assess the magnitude of the task that lies before us?"

"Certainly," said the Mate.

The two men groped and stumbled through the compartments and shafts of the wrecked rocket, each of them feeling the strangeness of walking on what should have been vertical plating, of seeing what should have been decks reared upright before them like walls. They came to the airlock, the doors of which had already been opened. They jumped down to the charred stubble, which extended as far as the eye could see on every side; the flames had worked back against the wind as well as running before it.

The sun—huge and ruddy behind the pall of smoke—had almost set. Swiftly it dipped, and then was gone. The darkness came fast—they were not, Lanvin remembered, far from the equator of this world. The darkness came—but it was not a true darkness. All around them, lurid, ominous, was the glare of the fires. Above them, reflecting the ruddy light, was the smoke.

"It'll be a long walk," said Calder, "and a dirty one."

"At least the wind has dropped," said Lanvin.

"If it had dropped before, as we were landing, it would have been more to the point," said the Mate. "Did you ever read Gibbon, Pastor?"

"Of course. Why?"

"One point he raises. A good one. At what precise date did the Church lose the power to perform miracles?"

"Did the *Church* ever have that power?" asked Lanvin.

"It'd be a handy power to have right now," said Calder, ignoring the counter question. "Nothing fancy—just a little fire-fighting."

Lanvin was staring towards the east.

"It may be my imagination," he said, "but I think that the fires are going out."

"You're right," said Calder at last. He added, almost fiercely, "But there must be a natural explanation."

"Of course," agreed the Pastor.

THEY SET OUT at sunrise. They were as well equipped as was possible. They had the Pastor's tent, which was big enough for the two of them. They had a transceiver, removed from one of the spacesuits and packed into a not too uncomfortable makeshift haversack. They had a good supply of concentrated food tablets—borrowed from the lifeboat stores. They had water, and both of them hoped that it would be enough. They had a shotgun and a fair supply of ammunition. They had a compass.

When they started, Calder took the lead. He strode ahead purposively, not deigning to look back at the ship. Lanvin followed at an easier pace. By noon it was the missionary who was always a few steps ahead of his companion. Lanvin took no pride in this—after all, he was used to covering long distances with no other means of transportation but his feet. Even so, he was enjoying the walk no more than was the ship's officer. His eyes were red-rimmed and smarting and his throat and nose were clogged with ashes.

It was at noon that Lanvin called a halt.

Calder helped him to set up the little tent—it afforded some protection from the pitiless sun. The two men sat in the tiny patch of shade, nibbling their food concentrates, washing them down with tepid water.

"I suppose," said Calder hopefully, "that we can't afford any for a wash . . ."

"No," said the Pastor. "And even if we could, we should soon be as black again as we are now."

"Cleanliness has never been a strong point of the Church, anyhow," remarked Calder. "In my own private code of ethics it comes a long way before godliness."

"Why are you so hostile?" asked Lanvin.

Calder grinned, his teeth gleaming whitely in his blackened face.

"I'm just a natural anti-clerical, I guess. I always have been."

"And yet," said the Pastor, "in your profession you are in a position to see all the wonders of Creation." He pointed. "Look there!"

"I see a calcined skeleton," said the Mate. "I see the remains of some poor beast that was caught in the fire."

"But look at it. Here we are, the two of us, sitting on this world thousands of light years from Earth—and yet that skeleton could be that of a Terran ungulate. You can't deny that there's a Divine Plan."

"Was it part of the Divine Plan that the coming of a missionary

should bring fire and death and destruction?" asked Calder. "But let's get back to the skeleton. Its late owner, as you say, could have been something built and functioning on the lines of a Terran antelope. But what does that prove? Have you never heard of parallel evolution, Pastor? Have you never considered how two such unrelated species as the shark and the porpoise, living in the same medium, have become almost identical twins insofar as external form is concerned? Furthermore, if you grant the validity of Arrhenius' theory, it is logical to assume that all Earth-type planets will produce approximately the same life forms."

"Arrhenius," said the Pastor softly. "The seeds of life, drifting through the Universe, driven by the force of light itself, tangling in gravitational fields like thistledown in a spider's web . . .Who sowed the seeds, Mr. Calder?"

"I don't know," said Calder. "Neither do you."

There was silence for a few minutes.

Then: "We will sleep for three hours," said Lanvin.

The pressed on through the late afternoon, through the fast gathering dusk. It was not quite dark when they came to the line—sharp, clearly defined—where the fire had died. On the one side of it there was the charred stubble—on the other, the long grass.

"What do you make of this?" asked Lanvin.

"A miracle, perhaps," scoffed Calder. Then his voice became serious. "I've seen something like this before."

"Where?" asked the missionary.

"New Wyoming—or, if you prefer it, Deneb IV. It's a rich planet —and all its wealth is on the hoof. Cattle. Most of the land surface is prairie, like this. They have occasional prairie fires. They have very efficient fire-fighting robots—helicopters with built-in intelligence and the wherewithal to swamp huge areas with carbon dioxide."

"No machine can be intelligent," said the Pastor automatically.

"That remark was the typical, machine-like reaction that one expects from one of the cloth," said Calder. "But we're getting away from the point. If there are such robots here, it argues a high level of technological civilization. But we saw no cities. There's no spaceport. According to all the data we have, this world is uninhabited save for its savage aborigines."

"God put out the fire," said a new voice.

"Of course," agreed Lanvin. Then, startled, "Who are you?"

"I am the priest of God," came the reply. "You are the demons whose coming he foretold."

"Come out of the grass!" shouted Calder, "and let's see you!"

"Lay down your weapons," came the reply.

"Put down the shotgun, Mr. Calder," whispered Lanvin.

"Like hell! I don't like this."

"Put it down, I say! After all—this priest, whoever he is, speaks English. I'm afraid," he went on, his voice rueful, "that I am not the first, after all, to labor in this

vineyard . . ."

Calder ignored this last.

"I still don't like it. He's a priest, and he speaks English—but neither fact is a guarantee that he won't have us slaughtered out of hand."

"If his people have bows or blowpipes they coud do it now," reasoned Lanvin. "Lay down the gun."

Reluctantly, the Mate put down the weapon. Slowly, he and the missionary backed away from the weapon. Its burnished metal caught the last of the daylight, held it, so that all around was very dark.

The men who stepped out from the long grass were tall, and black, and could be distinguished only as vague shadows against the dark background of vegetation. They carried weapons. Spears? Blowpipes? Lanvin could not be sure. One of them came slowly forward, advancing cautiously to meet the two Terrans. He, like his companions, was naked.

Lanvin blinked. The priest was not, after all, naked—but his only article of clothing made his nudity an affront to the missionary. It was white, apparently of some stiff plastic, and was worn around his neck. It was a mocking parody of a Roman collar.

"At least," said Calder, "they don't intend to sacrifice us right now."

He and Lanvin were lying, not too uncomfortably, in the long grass. Their wrists and their ankles had been bound—skillfully, but not so tightly as to interfere with circulation. The warriors lay all around them, sleeping. None of them, Lanvin was reasonably sure, could speak English. The priest, as befitted his superior rank, was sleeping some distance from the others.

"We have no reason to assume that they are going to sacrifice us," said Lanvin quietly.

"All right. So we haven't. But just what is this set-up, Pastor? You're the expert."

"I wish I knew," said Lanvin. "The priesthood—I assume that there is more than one priest—speaks English. It could well be that English is the language of the Church here, just as Latin was on Earth, centuries ago. But why? How?"

"I can guess," said Calder. "The survivor of some shipwreck— or, perhaps, some unscrupulous trader—has set himself up as a local deity. He must have seen our landing—and sent out his parties of warriors, led by his priests, to take us all prisoner." He muttered a curse. "And I never had the savvy to use the radio before that blasted priest took it from us, just as he took everything else that would be of value if we escaped. He knew what to look for, all right. Someone put him up to it."

"It can't be a trader," said Lanvin. "Such a thing could never be hidden from the Bureau of Interstellar Affairs. They're far too thorough. It can't be a survivor from a shipwreck. As you should know, if any vessel is reported missing every inch of her route is searched."

"I still say that it could be either," insisted Calder.

"We shall find out in the morn-

ing," said Lanvin. "Meanwhile, I suggest that we emulate our captors and sleep."

They slept.

WITH THE FIRST light they were awakened by kicks from broad, horny feet. While the priest supervised, two of his men, working nimbly with their three fingered hands, removed the bonds from the Earthmen's ankles. Then, while the others stood around, blowpipes poised and ready, the lashings were taken from their wrists and they were given foul-tasting water from a skin, a handful each of something that could have been sun-dried fruit.

While they broke their fast Lanvin and Calder studied their captors with interest. All of seven feet tall they were, and thin, and their noses were like elephant's trunks in miniature. The teeth that gleamed whitely in the glossy black faces were widely spaced. Yet—they were men. There was no denying that.

"We came in peace," said Lanvin to the priest.

"You came to destroy our world," replied the priest. "You set fire to the prairie. But God warned us of your coming, and God sent his angels to put out the fires."

"Who is your God?" asked Lanvin.

"There is only one God, and he is God," came the answer.

"One would almost think," said Calder, "that your Moslem rivals had got here first. But we shall get nowhere with theological arguments." He asked, "Why do you speak English?"

"English? I do not understand. We—the priests—speak the God language. We can write it, too. But God warned us against too much talking with the demons." He snapped an order to his men in his own tongue. The two who had removed the bonds from Lanvin and Calder now replaced the ropes on their wrists. There was a trail through the long grass, and the party followed it, the priest well in the lead.

At first Lanvin and Calder tried to take notice of all that they saw—the gaudy insects, the things like flying lizards, the tracks, at right angles to their own path, that showed that something huge had passed that way. They tried to observe, and they tried to pass comments on what they saw—but, after less than an hour, they could no longer afford to waste breath on talking, could not afford to let their attention wander from the ground, with its tough, treacherous grass-roots, beneath their feet.

There was a halt at noon—a brief rest and a pause for refreshment. The priest kept well away from the prisoners and refused to answer Calder's shouted questions. There was another halt in the middle of the afternoon—and, after this one, neither Lanvin nor Calder thought that he would be able to get to his feet again.

They did get to their feet—the point of a knife (Calder's own knife, and that hurt him almost more than the physical pain) judiciously applied ensured that. They kept on marching; they had no

option. They reeled and staggered and, at the finish, each of them had to be supported by a pair of the natives.

It was dusk when they came to the edge of the forest. They hoped that the priest would order a halt, but he did not do so. The path through the wood was worse than the path through the prairie had been; it was uneven, and on each side were the viciously spined branches of man-high shrubs. Lanvin could have sworn that the things had motility, that they reached out with malicious intent to rend the skin of the passer-by.

Then there was a light ahead—pale and steady.

It could not possibly be the glare of fluorescent lamps, the missionary told himself—but it was. It came from only one building of the large village that stood in the clearing—a village that was improbably neat and clean, far too well laid out. Oil lamps burned in the houses, women and children stood in lighted doorways and stared curiously at the Earthmen. Other black figures stood in attenuated silhouette against the harsh illumination from the . . . the temple?

Yes, thought Lanvin. It must be the temple. There'll be a screen on the roof to collect solar power, and there'll be batteries to store it, and there'll be some fat ruffian sitting on a throne and impressing these poor children of nature with his puny, man-made miracles . . . And he has brought us here to jeer at us and to impress his flock still more by killing the demons. I feel rather sorry for Calder . . . After all—being martyred is part of my job, it's not part of his. And he's not ready . . .

The temple was built of stone. It was severe in its design—a severity that contrasted with the ornate eaves, the elaborately carved lintels, of some, but not all, of the houses. Some of them aped the functional architectural style of the . . temple?

It must be the temple, thought Lanvin again.

With Calder, he stumbled up the broad stone steps. With Calder he stood, dazed and dazzled, in the glare of the lights. He heard a rhythmic tapping, the occasional tinkle of a tiny bell. He heard a dry rustling sound. He heard a sharp, imperative buzzing.

That must be an altar, he thought. But it's not. It's a desk—and there's a native woman operating an electric typewriter . . . And that's another priest coming to meet us, and he has a bundle of papers in his hand, and they look like printed forms . . . And there are more desks, and more typewriters, and some people filling in forms . . .

He said to the Mate, "Mr. Calder, I must be delirious."

"I thought that I was, Pastor," replied Calder. "It seems that this God of theirs has to be approached through the proper channels."

"Gant!" the priest of the temple was saying, "why did you bring the demons here? They could have been taken just as easily to Merum's temple. You knew very well that I'm behind with my returns and you know that God rarely accepts excuses!"

"He will be pleased that we have captured the demons," replied Gant. "I think that the situation carries priority, and that the telephone should be used rather than the post."

"He does not like us to use the telephone unnecessarily," replied the other. "He said, 'A word spoken is gone with the wind, a word written endures forever.' "

"I agree that the correct forms must be filled in," said Gant, "and I would like to say that some of your staff would be better employed so doing than in staring at the demons. Meanwhile, I should like to use your telephone."

"This is my temple, Gant, and nobody but me talks to God from inside these four walls."

"As you please," said Gant. "After all, he knows who made the capture."

The other priest vanished towards the far end of the big room. Gant ordered a junior priest—he wore a very thin collar—out of the chair that he occupied behind a desk. He took the seat himself, pulled a printed form from a rack of such stationery, a stylus from its holder. He motioned to Lanvin and Calder to stand before him.

"Now, if you please," he said in a dry voice, "I will take note of your vital statistics."

"We want food first," croaked Calder. "We want a drink. We want a rest."

"Address your complaints to God," said the priest, "through the proper channels."

"Have done with this blasphemy!" cried Lanvin.

"Blasphemy? You must, indeed, be a demon. The only blasphemy is the neglect to fill in the forms properly."

"Gant!" The other priest was back. "Get out of that chair. Fill in your forms in your own temple."

"Oh, all right."

"I have talked with God. He says that the demons are to be fed and watered. He says that he is sending an angel to pick them up and to carry them to Heaven, where he will interrogate them."

"So be it," said Gant.

Neither Lanvin nor Calder was surprised that the "angel" was a robot helicopter. It dropped down from the night sky, landing in the village square with a heavy thud. It stood there, its vanes slowly rotating, making impatient noises. As soon as the passengers had boarded it shot up like a rocket, levelled off and then flew eastwards.

Heaven was the snow-capped summit of a mountain all of three miles high. Heaven was a warren of tunnels and chambers, the entrance to which was so cunningly concealed as to be invisible either from space or from the air. Heaven was a paradise of filing cabinets and electric typewriters, of desks and electronic calculators, peopled by beings of a type all too familiar to both the Pastor and the spaceman. Heaven had as its device, shining on walls and ceilings, glittering on the neat but otherwise drab uniforms of the men and women, the six pointed star of the Bureau of Interstellar Affairs.

God was a little man sitting be-

hind a big, polished desk. He was in a bad temper. "God" was a good agnostic, and made this quite clear to Lanvin in the first five seconds of their conversation. "God" did not like missionaries.

"There will be trouble about this," he prophesied. "Big trouble. The fool who gave you permission to land here will be demoted. This is an experimental planet. We are giving the people a religion that will allow them to regulate their lives in a sane manner, that will leave behind an enduring framework when the need for superstition has passed."

"The same," said Lanvin, "can be said for my Society—but we never encourage superstition."

"To hell with you and your Society," he flared. "You will be returned to your ship in the morning. You will stay there until she has been repaired. I will give whatever aid may be needed."

"Having failed in my duty," said Lanvin softly.

"That is the good fortune of the natives of this world."

"Mr. Godfrey," said Calder, "I used to think that I was of the same religious persuasion as yourself. I used to take pride in my atheism. But you've done more to convert me than the good Pastor could—converting me to religion, I mean. It's your arrogant blasphemy that sticks in my throat. It's the way in which you, a confessedly godless man, take to yourself the attributes of a deity . . ."

"But he's not godless, Mr. Calder," said the Pastor. "He's not godless—and that's the worst part of it. This place is as much a temple as was that bleak, efficient shrine in the village.

"You have a God, Mr. Godfrey—and It has made you Its own image. But when you blunder—as you will, as you must—It will never have mercy upon your soul."

"Amen," said Calder. END

CONSERVATION

(Continued from page 79)

"And it was their faulty, groping sort of maintenance that saved our lives, because even a heat-gun deteriorates in 150 years. That gun hadn't been fired since the Revolt!"

"Then we can be their salvation?" suggested Phil.

"Yes. The scientists who built the Deneb colony can rebuild the technology of our own Earth. It will take a long time . . . there'll have to be schools and we'll all have to work hard . . . but maybe some of us will be able to go back, in 30 or 40 years, say, when the Discovery can return to Deneb."

They were nearing the ship, and John saw the officers crowding the main port, watching them come.

"It's sort of inconsequential, I know," said Ann then. "But several times the Third Sarge referred to us as 'deevs.' Did he mention to you what a deev is?"

John smiled.

"It's an ancient military slang term, just like 'sarge' and 'top-kick,' " he replied. " 'Deev' is just plain old D.V. Distinguished Visitor. And I suppose we are, at that."

END

A QUESTION OF IDENTITY

(Continued from page 58)

a new body, new thoughts, new blood and new reproductive capacity. The fact that this new man can be brought to trial violates justice in its deepest and truest meaning! It points inescapably to the fact that the law must be revised to bring it up to date with present reality . . ."

Jake paused and was silent for so long that he appeared to have forgotten his surroundings. When he finally continued, his voice was so soft that the jurors unconsciously leaned forward to catch his words:

"There is still another dimension to this case—one that transcends science . . . and the law. It is one I approached with great uncertainty, because it leads down a path I am walking for the first time . . .

"Some of the testimony brought out in this trial may not have been new to all of you, though it was new to me. Perhaps you have all formed your own conclusions with regard to the relationship between the spirit or soul of Man, and his outer shell . . . the house in which man lives. But if this house becomes a prison for the real man, and science releases him to live in a new dwelling, then did the man ever actually exist until his release? And if the man who lives now did not exist at the time of the crime for which he is tried, can he then be judged guilty?

"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury—we await your answer."

TWILIGHT faded, and across Central Park the skyline of the city changed from steel and concrete to a gossamer web of light and shadow. Jake Emspak sat in peace by his window, the fingers of his right hand resting gently on the gold frame of his wife's picture. He touched a button on the arm of his chair, and in a moment Ed Murrow's features came into focus on the wall-screen.

"The jury in the Corfino case is now locked up for the night," Murrow began, his 80-year-old voice more vibrantly alive than ever. "Tomorrow we may—and very likely will—have a verdict.

"But whatever the verdict, this case has served an epochal purpose —to our time as well as to the law. We have paused for an instant in our frantic drive for technological advancement to ponder the essential meaning of man—and the worth of the human entity.

"It may take years to evaluate and appreciate all of the complex testimony Jake Emspak put into the trial record, for each of us will see in it only what we want to see or are capable of seeing . . .

"But we may be assured that in the generations to come this case will be footnoted throughout the opening worlds of space by serious students of the law, the sciences and the humanities.

"For tonight, it should suffice to say: Thank you, Jake Emspak—Well done!"

Jake touched the button again, and the screen went dark. Between old friends, there was much that words left unsaid. END

hue AND cry

I like the range and scope and imagination of science fiction. There are no clear-cut rules, and the author is given a chance to do a good bit of real thinking about our future and where the human race is going and why. He can create a world of magic and mystery, a situation that can be dazzling or depressing. He can, if he is skillful, project his readers into something different and exciting. But, besides just giving the readers escape, he can make them think. The science fiction I don't like disregards all these things and just uses a strange setting to battle out the same old problems (usually with a "blaster" or a "death ray"). These stories have little serious thought behind them and are aimed at the less intelligent reader who doesn't want to think.

IF's stories are usually credible within the limits set up for them and are entertaining. Also, they are not so loaded with scientific philosophy that they lose their appeal as stories and become lectures. You have hit a happy balance and therefore have a good magazine.

—J. Marx, Jr.
Waterbury, Neb.

In my opinion, science fiction can be and is good literature. In every field there are bad and good examples. Many critics, however, come up with the bad stories and unfortunately pass judgement on all science fiction on the basis of these. One attack that has been used is that science fiction fans are all idiots and escapists. As an example of the error of such statements, let us look at Dr. Asimov, who certainly is no idiot. I think this one case refutes the whole theory of imbeciles in the field. In my high school graduating class, more than one half of the members of the National Honor Society were science-fiction readers and had from two to four years of science courses to their credit. The readers are educated people just as the authors are. I wish someone in the critical world would start a campaign to hit the readers of sportscar, hi-fi, mystery, girlie, movie, confession and boating magazines. This sort of reading is childish too, certainly more so than science fiction.

—B. Lex
Clarence, N. Y.

Defend science fiction? Sure I will! My gambit with detractors is a simple statement of fact. There are two things I read—the newspa-

pers for today's news, and science fiction for news of the future.

—Mrs. R. Bessette
El Paso, Texas

More people should be made to think, introduced into new channels of thought; they should be shown the world from new perspectives. All too many see only their own narrow horizons. It is just such attitudes which cause shameful affairs like that at Little Rock. People must learn that the world exists beyond their little niches. They must be forced into other people's shoes. They must be shown the human-ness of people they have never seen whether they are on Mars or in Russia. If we cannot concede that our own planet's inhabitants are all of the same blood, bone and flesh, how can we admit it in the face of aliens from outer space? That there is hope is patent, when we look at history and discover what cruelty was rampant . . . Today, people in the Western hemisphere generally proclaim the brotherhood of Man, and ostensibly, we believe in peace and freedom and justice for all. Somewhere it began and grew; surely someday it will encompass the Earth. And how much science fiction can do to help it along! It can educate and indoctrinate the blind and inhibited so that they may grow intellectually and spiritually. This is more than a duty—it's our one chance. Others are doing what they can, through writing and radio, by example and by personal endeavor. Science fiction is in a position to do its small bit and it's worth the effort. We may not live to see the result—but it will come and science fiction's part will be a vital one in the end. A reward worth the doing.

—Gwen Cunningham
Oakland, Cal.

Your pleasant questionnaire deserves an answer. I am a housewife, wife and mother, 54 years old. I have a Ph.D., speak four languages and have travelled all over the world. Why do I read science fiction? It is my only hobby, and it satisfies all my needs. If there were enough science fiction I would need no other reading matter. It has everything from patent law to mysticism; from symbolic logic and logical symbolism to pure mathematics and technology; from love and adventure to politics and sociology; from psychiatry to zanieness, from biology, medicine, chemistry to foreign languages, ancient history and prophecy; painting, music, farming—what's the use, it is impossible to enumerate them. It widens one's horizons immeasurably, gets people interested in things they would never have thought of, shows youngsters what they really are interested in when they are ready to choose a career, and keeps oldsters from becoming rigid, narrow and discouraged. Of course, I have to defend it when caught reading it, it's difficult to make converts because we are taking many premises for granted in the really good stories. And the bad stories are, of course, bad.

—A Housewife
Buffalo, N. Y.

NEVER, EVER BEFORE, ANYWHERE!

7000 fantasy and science-fiction books and back-issue magazines at 50% to 90% under what they've cost you before, here or anywhere, while they last! LIST FREE.

WEREWOLF BOOKSHOP

7055 K Shannon Road

Verona, Pennsylvania

PASSPORT TO SIRIUS

(Continued from page 90)

forceful man, Mr. Carman. You may very well escape. You may even reach Andromeda and return with evidence once again unmasking us. If you live long enough to return, that is. I think our economic program is in no immediate danger from you."

He left, smiling gravely. The cell door closed with a harsh metallic crash.

"Come back!" Carman yelled. "You can't hoax mankind like that! I'll let everyone know! I'll get out and expose—"

There was no answer, not even a catcall. No one was listening. And, Carman realized dully, no one was going to listen to him at all, ever again. **END**

POWDER KEG

(Continued from page 37)

this instinctively.

And man is a dissatisfied animal. Satisfy him and he ceases to be a man. Quiet him and he stops being alive.

Phillips stood with his feet planted against the centrifugal force that simulated one-third Earth-normal gravity, knowing where he was with a spaceman's sure instinct. He was 1,075 miles above the surface of the Earth, in a two-hour orbit, in a satellite spinning once every 22 seconds.

The Earth was Inside. He was Outside, and with boldness, with courage, and with infinite sacrifice, he could stay Outside.

He was moving. He was alive. By being alive here, by outfacing the eternal enemies—heat, cold, and airlessness, distance, acceleration, and the ever-present missiles of space itself, and other men—he kept humanity alive.

Once in his life, if he is lucky, a man finds something worth doing. He had found it.

The long journey to the stars was the most human thing that men could do. It would keep the whole race human.

The first trip would fail, he felt sure, and perhaps the second and the third. But one day men would come back from the long trip out, if the men who were born equipped to do the job did not lose faith.

He was one of them. **END**

—continued from Back Cover

THE BEST SCIENCE FICTION
THE END OF ETERNITY
the dragon in the sea
SATELLITE!

Yes—$1.00 Brings You Any 3 of These Great Books WITH MEMBERSHIP

Values Up to $12.85 in Publishers' Editions!

Each Book Packed from Cover to Cover with thrills of Top-Flight Science-Fiction . . . and Science FACT!

THE ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION ANTHOLOGY. A story about the first A-Bomb . . . written before it was invented! Plus a score of other best tales from a dozen years of Astounding Science-Fiction Magazine. (Pub. ed. $3.50)

THE BEST FROM FANTASY AND SCIENCE-FICTION. (New edition) 17 thrilling stories selected from *Fantasy and Science-Fiction Magazine*. Adventure in other worlds...mystery, intrigue, suspense! (Pub. ed. $3.50)

TREASURY OF SCIENCE-FICTION CLASSICS. 4 famous novels; a complete play; scores of all-time great S-F stories, including H. G. Wells' "Invasion from Mars," made famous by Orson Welles' hoax newscast. (Pub. ed. $2.95)

REPORT ON UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECTS *by Edward J. Ruppelt*. At last! The first authoritative report on hitherto hushed-up facts about "flying saucers" . . . by a former Air Force expert in charge of their investigation. NOT fiction, but amazing fact! (Pub. ed. $4.95)

OMNIBUS OF SCIENCE-FICTION. 43 classic stories by top authors. Wonders of Earth and Man. Amazing Inventions. Space Travel and Visitors from Outer Space. Adventures in Dimension. Worlds of Tomorrow. (Pub. ed. $3.50)

BEST SCIENCE-FICTION STORIES AND NOVELS: 1956, *Ed.by T. E. Dikty*. 14 top-notch short stories and novelettes by such well-known writers as Robert Bloch, Frank Robinson, Mark Clifton, many others. (Pub. ed. $3.95)

DRAGON IN THE SEA *by Frank Herbert*. You're on a 21st-century undersea mission from which no human has ever returned. Now, 8000 feet down, *an unknown crewman wants you DEAD!* (Pub. ed. $2.95)

SATELLITE! *by Erik Bergaust & William Beller*. Top experts reveal full FACTS on the first man-made Satellite—information not even available in technical journals! (Pub. ed. $3.95)

THE END OF ETERNITY *by Isaac Asimov*. You *look* like other men, but you're an *Eternal*—sent from a timeless realm to change history. But you decided to travel through time and space to find *forbidden love*. (Pub. ed. $2.95)

• • •

NOW—THE BEST NEW SCIENCE-FICTION BOOKS FOR ONLY $1.00 EACH!

IMAGINE — ANY 3 of these full-size, brand-new science-fiction books—yours for just $1! Crammed with thrills . . . written by top-notch science-fiction authors. An $8.85 to $12.85 value, complete in handsome, permanent bindings. Each month the SCIENCE-FICTION BOOK CLUB brings you the finest brand-new full-length books FOR ONLY $1 EACH (plus a few cents shipping charges) — even though they cost $2.50, $3.50 and up in publishers' editions! You take ONLY those books you really want—as few as 4 a year.

SEND NO MONEY

Take your choice of ANY 3 of the new books described here—at only $1 for ALL 3. Two are your gift books for joining; the other is your first selection. Mail coupon RIGHT NOW to:

SCIENCE-FICTION BOOK CLUB
Dept. IF-4, Garden City, N. Y.

WHICH 3 DO YOU WANT FOR ONLY $1.00?

SCIENCE-FICTION BOOK CLUB
Dept. IF-4, Garden City, N. Y.

Please rush me the 3 books checked below, as my gift books and first selection. Bill me only $1 for all three (plus few cents shipping charges), and enroll me as a member of the Science-Fiction Book Club. Every month send me the Club's free bulletin, "Things to Come," so that I may decide whether or not I wish to receive the coming selection described therein. For each book I accept, I will pay only $1 plus shipping. I do not have to take a book every month (only four during each year I am a member)—and I may resign at any time after accepting four selections.

SPECIAL NO-RISK GUARANTEE: If not delighted, I may return all books in 7 days, pay nothing, and this membership will be cancelled!

- ☐ Astounding Science-Fiction Anthology
- ☐ Best from Fantasy & S-F
- ☐ Best S-F Stories and Novels
- ☐ Dragon in the Sea
- ☐ End of Eternity
- ☐ Omnibus of Science-Fiction
- ☐ Report on UFO's
- ☐ Satellite!
- ☐ Treasury of S-F Classics

Name____________________ (Please Print)

Address____________________

City____________ Zone______ State______

SAME OFFER TO RESIDENTS OF CANADA: Address Science-Fiction Book Club, 105 Bond St., Toronto 2. Offer good in U. S. A. & Canada only.

The Most Generous Offer Ever Made By

The SCIENCE-FICTION BOOK CLUB

TAKE Any 3

OF THESE THRILLING SCIENCE-FICTION BEST-SELLERS

Yours for Only $1.00 WITH MEMBERSHIP

AN $8.85 TO $12.85 VALUE—
YOU PAY JUST $1 FOR ANY 3!

HERE'S AN offer just as amazing as the thrilling stories crammed between the covers of these books! These nine volumes contain not only "top-drawer" science-fiction, but science FACTS as well. Handsome, permanent bindings. Any 3 of them would normally cost you $8.85 to $12.85 in publishers' original editions — but you pay only $1.00 when you join the Club!

This generous offer is made to introduce you to the SCIENCE-FICTION BOOK CLUB, a wonderful new idea in bringing you the best of the new science-fiction books—*at a mere fraction of their usual cost!*

Omnibus of SCIENCE FICTION

THE BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES AND NOVELS 1956

THE END OF ETERNITY

ASIMOV

the dragon in the sea

HERBERT

SATELLITE!

See Other Side for Full Details...