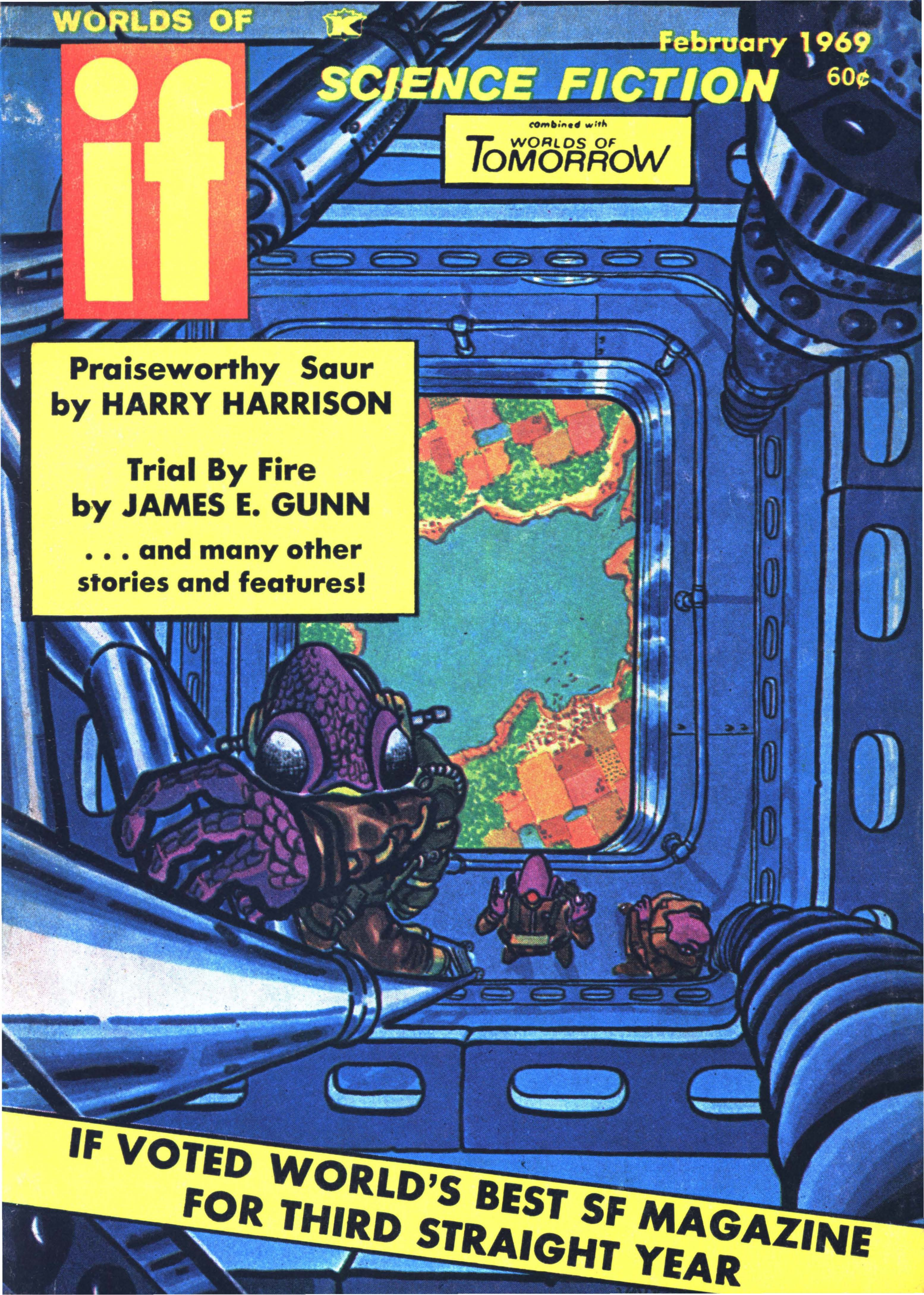

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The "Hoax" Story

by H. L. GOLD

Once a hoax has been established, it becomes the next worst thing to immortal. Years ago, for example, I reported — with a straight face, as befits the telling of a whopper — that parents bought their children baby alligators, which soon outgrew bowl, sink and bathtub and were flushed into the New York sewer system, where they flourished on the warmth and abundant food. Now the publicity department of that estimable system has a printed form refuting the "fact" that refuses to die.

But confession doesn't kill hoaxes. H. L. Mencken spent 20 minutes inventing, and a lifetime disowning, the story that winter bathing was illegal in colonial Boston, yet you still keep encountering it.

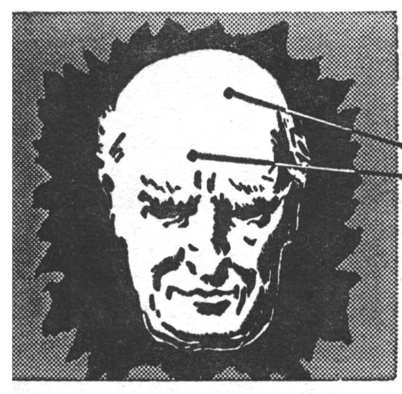
Every year, too, someone will declare that Jules Verne described the periscope so accurately that the subsequent inventor of it was denied a patent. It's not so.

Neither is the ever-repeated complaint of professional fans that today's science fiction is lacking in science. This charge is much more elderly than you might think, going back to the late 19th century, when Verne, the elderly engineer of sf, bitterly attacked young upstart H.G. Wells, the basic researcher of sf, for not having *Science* in his fiction.

There is room in this field for both kinds of writers, of course. But Verne lived to see most of his work become obsolete while Wells, with a handful of novels and a few dozen shorter stories, originated very many themes of modern sf. Serious people are working on Wells's antigravity, which Verne denounced as fantasy, but who is working on Verne's spaceship shot out of an enormous cannon, not to mention such funny ideas of his as clockwork machine guns and underwater bikes?

This division of scientists and authors into basic researchers and engineers is a practical one. Insisting on either to the exclusion of the other is not practical.

Naturally the engineer authors have more success in forecasting, working as they do on applications of existing knowledge. Sf is glad to accept applause for such successes,



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but forecasting is not the primary function of sf. If it were, we'd have stories about the perfect clothes hanger and the like, exclusively.

To paraphrase a phrase-monger, the idea is the hero of sf. Here are some examples:

It's a commonplace statement that da Vinci invented the auto, airplane and air conditioning. Lacking motive power, he used what was available — springs and sails, human and animal muscle power. They were not good enough, though nothing was cheaper, and da Vinci, stuck fast to the knowledge of his time, as his followers were to theirs and we to ours, could not envision electricity and the internal combustion engine. Even if he had, how well could he have described them, much less work out the math and metallurgy, the chemistry, physics and geology — the great number of disciplines that produce and move these everyday wonders? Could he then have gone a step further and predicted how these wonders pollute the air and water, the extinction of whole species of life, the forced migration from farm too small to be machine-worked to the city strangling with people and machines, the paving of more and more of our land so more and more vehicles can go murderously from one congested city to another?

Thomas More's *Utopia* had telephones, generations before they were invented. Instead of electric wires, however, he used something that the science of his day considered workable: hollow tubes. Just imagine what a tangle that would be!

Perhaps you remember Baron Munchausen's tale of the Russian winter being so cold that it froze voices, which were heard when spring came. Nobody believed him, of course. Yet we freeze voices all the time, and music as well, and do not have to wait till spring to hear them.

George Washington's passionate plan to link up the vast new United States with an equally vast network of canals seemed entirely reasonable to his contemporaries, and it was pushed even more fervently a couple of decades later, when the Louisiana Purchase doubled the size of the infant country. The most optimistic citizens estimated that it would take 25 generations — until 2400 A.D. — to tame and colonize the additional 3,000,000 square miles. At that moment, in England and in New Jersey, two inventors were developing the steam locomotive.

Just about that time, the King, having inspected Faraday's laboratory, asked: "Of what earthly use, Sir, are all these toys?" Faraday replied: "Of what earthly use, Sire, is a newborn baby?" Within their lifetimes, Faraday and Volta saw more progress than the millennia since electrical phenomena were first observed. Yet even they could not foresee, however dimly, the civilization built by electricity.

Malthus predicted that population growth would always outstrip food production. It's hard to say which would astonish him more, a world of three billion people or a nation

that bribes farmers to prevent glut. A doomsman, he'd no doubt point to the underfed parts of the globe, and, tragically, he would be right. But they could support their populations with modern methods — and huge areas of the world, like the interiors of South America, Africa, Australia, even Canada, are desperately under-populated.

Berlioz was considered mad because he scored his music for thousands of voices and instruments, believing that the resulting sound would be that many times louder. It wouldn't. But how was he to suspect that a neighbor, with just the touch of a heavy hand on a small dial, could drive us out of our homes with a volume that Berlioz could only dream of?

Coming down almost to the present — to 1957, in fact — we sf writers casually had spaceships built by updated Wright brothers, never knowing that only a world power — and a big, rich one at that — could put a man on the Moon by spending so much of its treasure for so long a time.

For that matter, whatever became of the spaceships we wrote about so knowingly, shiny on one side to reflect heat, black on the other to absorb it?

If you date back as far as I do — I sold my first story (at a very early age) in 1934 — you may remember a greatly respected author suggesting that we develop "science secretaries" to cue in people of one science with the knowledge of another. Luckily, before the planet had to be scoured for such phenomenal minds, computers came along — lots of them, improving all the time, with memory banks able to hold all the sciences of all of mankind — and retrieval time in microseconds.

What point am I trying to make? Just this: that the idea is the message both in science and science fiction, and that explaining future discoveries in terms of current knowledge must always prove as laughable as the examples I've given.

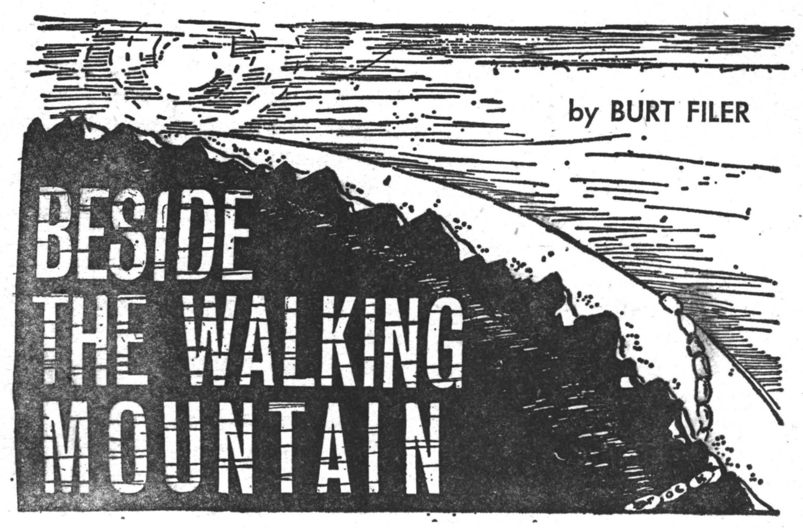
But that must not stop the ideasters. Their job is to get the idea written *and* published *and* read.

In sf, that means presenting it entertainingly. And I submit that doubletalking characters in and out of time machines, starships and other standard themes of sf are not entertaining. For of what earthly use, dear critics of modern sf, are repetitions of tired old analogies that even now sound as hollow as telephone tubes; formulas and equations taken from textbooks and detailed just as thrillingly — while the reader is impatiently saying: "Okay, okay, so you've got robots (or androids or espers or whatever) — now what's the story?"

Certainly I exempt the fresh new idea, which comes along more often than sf is credited with and needs explanation, or even "explanation" — but with two reservations: a) it should be woven into the story instead of dumped in a lump in the reader's lap; b) it should be taken for granted when, or if, it becomes a standard sf theme.

That's not much to ask, is it?

— H. L. GOLD



It was a crazy world where the mountains chased the Janes. But it was a world Hatch had to save!

Illustrated by BROCK

I

From two hundred miles out she looked like a cheap plastic beachball, the mottled kind, mostly green but swirled with the dregs of every dyepot in the factory.

From a hundred miles you could see the mountains, a strangely smooth ridge tracing a great circle through the poles. Stranger was the fact that they exactly followed the day-night shadow line. But strangest was that they *stayed* there, despite

the planet's steady rotation, one turn every fourteen months.

From five miles you could see that the swirls of color were vegetation. The planet was completely immersed in an ocean of moss. Layer lived upon layer, with the upper strata rootless, flowing as freely as colored water. The only bare earth to be seen anywhere was at the top of the mountains. Near the equator, great sweeps of the moss were sun-charred.

From two miles you became aware of her piddling gravity. Though twice the size of Mercury, she pulled barely three-quarters as hard as earth. Radar soundings would show her to be nearly coreless, a recently formed, loosely packed dustball. But what was that silver necklace that ran around the equator, in a great circle perpendicular to the mountains?

Dropping to a mile, you could make out individual beads in the necklace, sausage shaped and gigantic. Every now and then one would be prune-wrinkled or completely flat, like inflatable cells of some kind.

And down there next to the necklace, barely in front of the mountains, was a dot. The dot was mobile; it moved against the planet's rotation to keep itself in the sun.

The dot was Hatch's barge.

She shouldered her way across the landscape like a junkyard in search of a home. But there was majesty in her messiness, the sort that's inspired by old ships in high seas, alone among the elements. Mossy swells groaned under her hull on their way to the mountains behind, which hung there in a dust-capped tidal wave forever threatening to break.

The moss varied in more than color; there were a thousand textures and tastes, a million smells. Marjoram or something like it vied with minted marijuana and a dozen subtler scents. From every crest the wind tore fragrant spray. From every trough the salamanders fled like startled herring.

The barge plowed along just just ahead of the twilight line, keeping a permanent sunset dead over the bow. From the planet's dayside a sweaty gale panted in over the gunwales, on its way over the mountains to the nightside, where it would subside to a frozen breeze. Yet for all its turbulence, the air was eminently breathable, moist, supercharged with oxygen. Hatch liked the air there. But what about everything else?

He didn't particularly like the planet's speed of rotation. He spent half his time wishing the silly dustball would spin faster; the other half, that it would stop dead. If it didn't move at all, he wouldn't have to, either. He could sit on the twiline or the dawnline living in ease. Or if it whirled around as fast

as old earth, the day-night temperature differential would equalize and he could be comfortable anywhere.

But a seven-month day could get surface temperatures up near four figures; and a seven-month night lowered them to the sub-thinkable.

This temperature span, combined with the looseness of the crust, had another implication. Where the cold side of the planet met the hot, some truly remarkable thermal stresses built up. The crust bulged to relieve them. The result was a smooth wave of mountains that forever chased the dawnline and twiline and, incidentally, Hatch himself. Galloping alps, he called them.

So Hatch daily told himself he hated the place, a sort of perverse prayer.

But he loved it, really, and knew he did. It was a dizzy hell but it grew on you. And it was all his. He'd bought it from GS with his severance pay, the very day they'd stripped him of his uniform.

His uniform at the moment was a pair of shorts. He'd set a course parallel to the abandoned silver sausages of the T-belt, locked in the autopilot, and had just begun the "day's" work. Coming down from the bridge, he headed toward the starboard side, picking his way through the clutter. At one time this hoverbarge had been a mining craft and her deck was a maze of external piping, lockers, deckhouses, and radio masts.

But the whole starboard side had been cleared off. Amid the general disorder, it stood out as plainly as an aisle. It was empty of mossmen too, which was unusual; not a Joe or Jane in sight. Frowning, he went over to a control box on the rail, opened it, took out the headphones, put them on.

Just as he thought, the taped message he'd programmed for broadcast wasn't coming through at all. He didn't know what had done it, but suspected the swivel connections up on the antenna itself.

Which meant he'd have to climb up and have a look. It was the tallest mast aboard, forty feet, and it waved in the wind like a reed. He went aft, put on his tool belt, and shinnied up.

Yes, that had been it. A few minutes' work put it right again. Holding his giddy perch with knees and safety harness, he plugged his phones into the test circuit, and heard:

"— to the square floating object at the top of the moss. Don't be afraid of the big hairless one who will meet you. He will show you where to lay your eggs. Remember, every egg you leave with him will have twice the chance of hatching. Why should you leave your eggs at the mercy of the mountains —" It droned on but he listened to it no more, knowing it by heart despite its length, since he'd composed it.

It went on in the repetitious man-

ner of a sound truck trying to get out the vote, repeating the same message a dozen different ways. It was simple-minded, but Hatch was not about to change a word. The translation had been done at the rate of a word a day; and then expressing it all in radar frequency blips so that the Joes and Janes could even hear it had taken him equally long. He climbed down.

Almost to prove the thing was working again, a black shape clambered up out of the moss to greet him when he returned to the work area.

A mossman is about the size and shape of a husky twelve-year-old. Detail differences included: fur (black); spatulate fingers and toes for navigating in the moss (three in a bunch and ten inches long; and a small-eared, small-eyed head that could have been Alley Oop carved out of a coconut.

She was a Jane, clumsy with the eggs she carried, and somewhat afraid of Hatch. He began a rather gross charade of egg-laying, led her over to a small deckhouse with a canvas flap for a door, and pushed her through. While she was busy, he started up a relatively quiet radar recording which gave instructions in their language for what he'd just done in gestures, for subsequent visitors.

Even as he worked, another head appeared at the rail, and another. Big day, it looked like. He went over to the rail. He must have hit a school. At least a hundred furry heads bobbed just off the beam. Hatch never lost his fascination for the sort of climbing swim by which they stayed afloat and moved about. Waving, he got hesitant waves in return. They had a close-to-human intelligence and other anthropomorphic habits along with it. Waving was one. Almost any human could communicate with any mossman by sign language, given a little practice.

Well, no need to hang about. The recording would keep the operation going. As he turned back inboard he found his first customer waiting rather self-consciously for his attention.

"What is it, Jane?" he gestured.

"Your voice," she pointed to the smaller bitchbox, "said he would be rewarded, and also be able to rest a while."

"By all means." He clapped a comradely hand on her shoulder, and with no more than a startled wince of just-understanding, she returned the gesture.

Another habit of theirs. Hatch laughed. She aped it, silently of course, incapable of anything more than a hiss. Mossmen normally communicated by radar frequency yelps, generated by an auxiliary diaphragm, tucked behind their sternums.

By now he'd led her back to the

still. He made a note to fill the hopper with more moss when he had the chance. Beside it was an array of fifty-gallon drums. Hatch considered.

He'd been on the white stuff lately himself, but didn't know how the mossmen would react. While it didn't come out as clear as the blues or greens, it had better manners. The sweet, oregano-tainted milk picked you up off the deck all right, but put you back gently.

Still, no point in experimenting, not with the crowd he expected today. Better stick to the blue. He pried the bung from a barrel that smelled heavily of bayberry and mint, stuck a finger in, licked it. It tasted as it smelled, and gave him a blip of nirvana that lasted half a minute. Definitely good stuff.

He tipped the barrel into a ten-foot trough. Jane didn't know what to do right off — she got most of her water from the food she ate, like old earth Koalas — but he showed her.

One slurp sent her shuffling giddily away in search of a place to sleep. And as she left, numbers two and three came around the corner. At this rate, in two hours there wouldn't be a square foot of deckspace without a sleeping mossman.

Next chore on the list was raking the decks clear of moss that had sprayed in while he was sleeping. He'd been at it for fifteen minutes when something caught his ear.

II

A boom and then a thin whine. He squinted upward. The red sun had a mote in its eyes, which was growing bigger.

Hatch hmm'd. A few tourists had been by in the last six years, whose company he'd generally enjoyed. But the landing sled dropping toward him now looked too big. He hurried inside to turn on the guide beacon, and to put on a shirt.

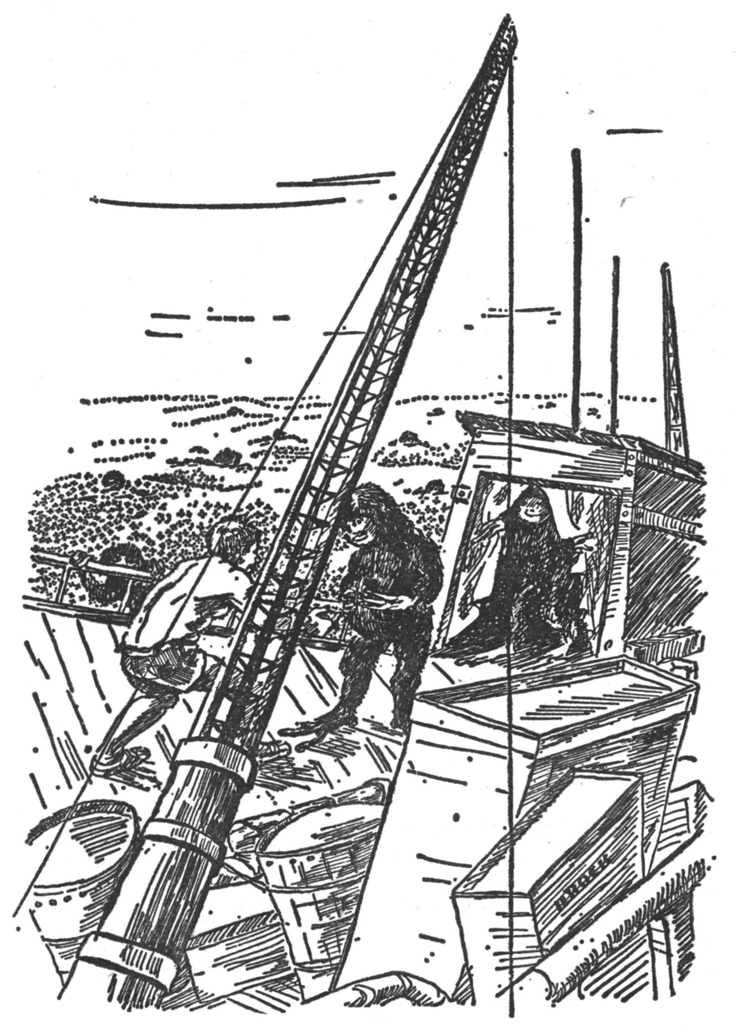
He reappeared at the rail in time to see the sled drop to deck level some thirty yards off his beam, and match speeds. Noisy thing, it had sent the mossmen stampeding overboard to the security of the depths. The sled's well painted hull had GS written all over it, literally and figuratively. He grimaced and went over to the line gun.

But the sailor at her open hatch waved him off. No indeed, *they'd* shoot *their* line over to him. Shrugging, he stood back and watched the shot.

The plastic blank looped over, dragging the string, got caught in the wind, fell short. Even from where he stood Hatch could hear the sarcastic berating being handed the sailor by someone inside. The voice was hauntingly familiar.

A second shot made it over the rail, but would have dribbled back into the moss if Hatch hadn't pounced on it.

He pulled the string which pulled



the rope which pulled the cable from their sled to his hoverbarge. In ten minutes the pod had made two trips, depositing a nervous young sailor, and a female civilian on his deck.

But the pod's third load was one hundred and thirty pounds of bad luck. Richard J. Handy, Cdr., GSN — Hatch's old Commanding Officer — climbed out and saluted. Hatch half raised his arm, remembered he was a civilian, dropped it. It drew a rather nasty grin from Handy.

"Hello, Hatch," the thin man said. "How have you been?"

"Well enough. You?"

"Well enough. This is Miss Holloway of the Board of Estimate, and Personnelman McIntyre."

He nodded, shook hands, smiling dutifully but never taking his eyes from Handy's. "What brings you here, Commander?"

"Oh, we'll get to that." He glanced around the deck with pointed curiousity. "How's this little operation of yours going? Why don't you show us around?"

He could see that Handy was going to keep him on the hook for a while. Okay. He took them over to the work area. It was deserted. He ran through an explanation of how he was collecting the eggs. Handy's interest was the gloating kind, it seemed. McIntyre was too nervous to react at all. Obviously the sailor knew the score. Obviously the girl civilian didn't. She was fascinated.

"What are the eggs like?" she asked. He took her over to the laying den, thrust open the flap. Mossmen smells billowed out.

"They bury them in the dust on the floor here — see — which is what they normally do on the bottom of the ocean." As he spoke, his quick hands sifted through the moist dust, coming up with handful after handful of black, pimply bullets.

"But there're so many?"

"Right. They survive like rabbits, only because of their prolificity." He flashed a glance at Commander Handy, but the thin face was inscrutable. Hatch stood up. "You see, the mountains move across the entire face of the planet, killing everything but the moss, every seven months. They also destroy all but a hundredth of one percent of the eggs."

"And what do *you* do with them?" she asked. Blue earnest eyes.

"Fly them over the mountains."

"Why? Why can't they handle the survival of their own species naturally? After all, didn't they evolve here?" She had no notion of the sort of bomb she'd just dropped.

For a long moment Hatch studied the egg in his hand, rolling it between two fingers. He didn't trust

himself to look at Handy. "Well, it's like this, Miss Holloway. Some time ago, a bunch of men opened up a transmutation plant down here, and the radiation almost killed them off."

The blue eyes widened. She pointed at Handy. "But he wants to —"

Hatch's turn to be startled. So that was it.

Handy smirked. "Well, Hatch, I guess we can talk business now."

Hatch led them up to the observation tower he used for living quarters. He had chairs enough, just. McIntyre set up a recorder, mumbled into it, nodded to the Commander.

Throat being cleared. "Very well, then. Hatch, we're going to buy back your planet. GS has decided to reopen the T-belt."

Are going. Has decided. Hatch swallowed. Handy must be holding some pretty high cards. He'd forgotten what it was like to fear a man like this. But it all came flooding back, as vividly as the day of his Court Martial.

Still, his guts weren't jelly, he was no quivering McIntyre. Hatch shifted in his chair, almost physically pulling himself together.

"There was a time when you could say things like that to me, Handy. But I'm not in the service any more — thanks to you. And this isn't government land any more. I'm a civilian and legal owner of this place. And I say — no sale."

Handy's birdlike face was getting white around the beak. "Read, McIntyre."

The nervous sailor hopped erect, a five-by-eight in his hand, and began to recite. "Definition: Eminent domain is —" He looked like a school kid *sans* homework, and at any other time Hatch would have laughed. Across the room, Holloway looked for a second as if she might too.

"Definition: Eminent domain is the superior dominion of the sovereign power over property within the state, which authorizes it to appropriate all or any part thereof to a necessary public use — reasonable compensation being made."

Hatch looked puzzled.

McIntyre turned the card over. "Eminent Domain, Reference 311: The People vs. the colonists of Tillman, GS Circuit Court, Sixth Arm, Third Quarter. 2674.

"It was established that, despite private ownership of the Planetoid Tillman, the colonists thereon must deliver same to public ownership for a reasonable price. Necessary public use was invoked since the core of said planetoid was the only known source of radioantigen 4-A in the galaxy, and an epidemic of intestinal cancer had broken out in the sixth arm, affecting humans and many other denizens thereof.

"Precedent set: It was recognized

that surrender of this planetoid *would mean the death of the fourteen colonists,* who had developed environmental, adaptive and other physiological dependencies on it.

"While the court strongly deplored the implications of such action, it was deemed just, in light of the disproportionately high number of GS citizens who might otherwise die of cancer."

McIntyre sat down. Hatch stood up, pointing angrily through the transplas wall at the string of silver beads resting out on the horizon.

"That's no goldmine of 4-A. That's a broken down T-belt that makes ordinary fuel, and not very efficiently either. That's a T-belt that should never have been opened, and wouldn't have been if you hadn't been so goddam stubborn. Just who decided *it's* so necessary?"

Handy's face contorted, but to his credit; his voice was soft. "I have news for you, my friend. I've been reassigned. Do you have any idea what my new billet is?" Even softer now, the jaw quivering with malice. "I'm Adviser to the President on Fuel Resources. I've declared a shortage. I'm going to reopen that belt. I'm going to get you, Hatch. I'm going to get —" There were tears in the man's eyes.

Hatch's face was rigid, stark white. McIntyre forgot to breathe. Holloway's face filled with revulsion. Finally, composing himself, the Commander got to his feet.

"Miss Holloway will remain here a few days to assess your belongings and determine 'reasonable compensation.' " He did an about face and walked out. McIntyre snapped the recorder shut, sprang up, scampered after. In five minutes they'd both cabled over to the landing sled, and in ten it was a dot against the sun once again. Hatch squinted after them.

"I'm sorry, Hatch," said a timid voice beside him.

"Sure you are," he snorted, turning to her, rubbing his eyes.

"Oh, but I *am*. I had no idea of this vendetta of his." She said a lot more, which while not making him feel any better, succeeded in convincing him she was sincere. He looked her over.

She was cheerleader cute, almost a prettiness. Wide-set blue eyes he'd already noticed. Lips full and so nicely bowed that there was a little part in the middle, even with them closed. The face was, naturally, heartshaped; the hair blonde; and the blouse crowded. Her name had to be Jill, he thought.

When she'd talked herself out, he asked her.

"Nadine," she said. "What's so funny?"

"Nothing. Well look, Nadine. I was in the process of raking up when you came down. So why don't

you go back inside, and later —"

"No, no, I'll help."

She was quite a circus. Not having the best sea legs in the world, she did a lot of grabbing and leaning — on her rake, the bulkheads, Hatch himself — and even then managed one beautiful sprawl. But she got a kick out of the smells, though not digging the salamanders which lived in the stuff.

They'd been working twenty minutes when Nadine met her first mossman. She was back near the work area, picking moss from the jungle of stays and antennae that made up Hatch's communications masts. He was midships at the time, but her screech had no trouble making the trip.

Nor did Hatch. Galloping back, he found her backed up against the deckhouse, waving her rake at the Jane. The loudspeaker was still on, and now that Handy's sled had left, they were filtering back toward the barge. This was the first to climb in over the rail, however.

Hatch laughed. "Relax, Nadine. Hey Jane — that's right — over here." With broad gestures he led her to the laying den. When she was out of sight behind the flap, Nadine said, "I need a drink."

They were standing right next to the still. Hatch offered her a cup and a warning. She took the cup but not the warning and got lifted off in two swallows. Hatch decided what the hell, he had as good a reason to blow his mind now as ever, and followed suit.

They ended up sitting with their backs to the deckhouse, within an arm's length of the spigot.

He told her the one about the trisexual rigelian cabbage, and she responded with the limerick that began, "There once was a fruit-bat named Freddy." Hatch told her she didn't look the type for that kind of joke and she said oh yeah.

The conversation drifted in a more serious direction. Whatever had gone on between himself and Handy?

Hatch considered. The sun was where it belonged, the speed about right, the old T-belt steady off the beam. No need to check the autopilot. Hatch took a big swig, a deep breath, and began.

III

He'd been a First Class Petty Officer. Rating: Transmutation Technician. A T-tech's work was the upgrading of stable elements into fissionables by first gasifying the base metal and then irradiating the hell out of it.

It sounded hairy to Nadine but Hatch said no, not really. The process wasn't that complicated but required two things: a base ore with both lead and actinium in it, and a whole lot of energy to pour into the beta beam. This planet had both, so GS had sent his old outfit

down to exploit it. And yes, Handy was the C.O.

There were several hundred men at first, to get the T-belt built. He waved toward the horizon where it floated on the moss like a string of gigantic silver sausages. Girding the entire planet, their thermoelectric skin produced energy from the hotside-coldside temperature differential. Except for a central conduit, the sausages contained only a few gallons of sealant and a small pump to keep the boron-fibred, plastic skin inflated.

In spite of its simplicity, the T-belt had been hard to build. Most of the materials had to be mined from the planet itself. Actually mining was hardly an appropriate word for the screwball operation they carried out.

They started at the dawnline. Laser-drilling a vertical shaft in the moss, they quickly dropped in a crew and equipment. As the mine rotated out into the hotside, then, they had the thermal insulation of the moss itself. Oh, it helped; but temperatures approached one-sixty. Men had to wear suits. You can imagine how the T-crew envied the mossmen, whose tolerance made them comfortable right up to boiling water temperatures. Sometimes a mossman would show up with bits of charred vegetation in his fur, indicating he'd been as close to the surface as the flame area.

Anyway, the heat was just part of it. The mine was actually a dust sifting operation — since the upper strata of the crust had been pulverized by the galloping alps.

Then, just after they'd got things going, seven months would be up and here came the mountains at the twiline. There was a mad scramble to get out in time, and more than once someone didn't make it.

Finally, since the mountains obliterated their digs each half-rotation, it was necessary to go through the whole mess from scratch, each time.

In short, the project was almost impossible. But Handy never quit. Not when GS was currently putting four stripes on the sleeves of successful T-Group C.O.'s. The man was crazy.

They both drank to that.

But whatever the engineering problems might have been, Hatch's planet was a natural scientist's paradise. Ever since man had broken free of the solar system, he'd been disappointed at how little life there was in the galaxy. Plants were rare, animals rarer, and intelligent beings — fellow citizens of the Galaxy — well, there were exactly two species. To find life in as inhospitable and bizarre a place as this had been quite a surprise.

And what adaptations! The mossmen, for instance. They began as eggs laid at the twiline. When oncoming mountains engulfed both

parents and eggs, the parents died but one egg in a thousand lived through it. Because of the cold, the surviving eggs simply sat on the bottom as the planet made its ponderous, seven month half-turn. Then they were hit again, this time by the dawnline mountains. What few survived this onset usually hatched. All it took was two hours of dayside temperatures.

They popped out of the shell as miniature adults, and started eating. Salamanders, mostly. And moss.

They reached full size and maturity in less than a month. Instinctively, they always moved against the motion of the planet, just as did Hatch's hoverbarge. Their language was also instinctive, as was a strong social sense and a gentle mortality that was almost oriental. They were good, Hatch said.

Nadine nodded. Hatch went on.

Well, flesh and blood isn't a hoverbarge, and sooner or later the mountains caught up with all of them. They got old and couldn't keep up. Finally, they fell back to the twiline — where Hatch was right now — and spent their final weeks laying eggs on the bottom before the mountains got them.

As they spoke, a procession of Janes had come aboard, left their clutch, and wandered past on their way to and from the still. They lay all about, sleeping off a fraction of what must be perpetual exhaustion.

Nadine pointed to one, asked how old she was and how much longer she could keep up. Hatch said, oh, maybe five years, with a month or two to go. About average.

Nadine was visibly upset by this, so he hurried on with his story.

It began when the construction crew began putting mossmen to work in the mines. No, it wasn't slave labor. The Joes actually liked being near the creatures that fascinated them so. And they liked learning things, such as what clothes were and how a wheel or a shovel worked. But the mines didn't move against the planet. A lifespan which any normal mossman could stretch to six or seven years was chopped off in seven months. Handy got away with it because he hadn't ever reported the mossmen's existence to home base.

This, Hatch had decided right off, was a rotten thing to do to someone nearly as smart as yourself. He was among the minority of crewmen who regarded the mossmen as sub-humans rather than super-animals. And being the sort of man he was, he decided to do something about it.

When he formed a committee and appealed to Commander Handy, he found himself in the brig. Handy hadn't even spoken to them. When Hatch had finished his little speech, the Commander had simply nodded to the Master at Arms and gone on

sipping coffee and reading reports. Six days.

He got a month — and was busted to Second Class — for writing his GS Rep.

Then he was busted right down to SR for smuggling a spool back earthside to the newstapers. After *that,* Hatch got smart and went underground. He smuggled a smart old Joe into his section of the crew's barge and began training him. A Personnelman buddy of his swiped an IQ test for aliens — which GS gave to determine how humanity would subsequently treat them. It was mostly non-participatory as such tests had to be, and it measured reaction to various stimuli. Joe passed. The mossmen were legally intelligent and had full GS citizenship.

So he'd sent the test earthside, to SPCA-E, and got the mossmen out of the mines and a hero's status for himself. But Handy swore he'd kill him, just as soon as he faded from the limelight. For the moment however, he couldn't even put him in the brig.

Then two things happened. For one, the T-belt was finished even without the mossmen's help; and the galloping alps began to systematically wreck it, for another. Handy needed every T-Tech he had. Hatch was the best there was. His competence prevented the terminal accident his Commander had dreamed of, over and over, late at night.

Hatch almost felt secure again. The construction crew went home and only sixty men ran the T-belt and barges. Despite the continuing stream of repair work, their output of suburanic fuel was passable. It began to look like the station might be a success.

"Until?" asked Nadine.

Until the radioactive ash from the process began killing off the mossmen. Trouble was, the processing barges hovered right over the twiline where the Janes laid their eggs, and sterilized a lot of them. The yield began to drop.

So Hatch had stowed away in a supply ship, gone back to earth, and taken it to the SPCA-E. The T-belt was shut down. Handy remained a Commander. But Hatch was court martialled. If Handy could have gotten him in the brig, he'd have been a dead man. But all this happened at the Arctic Naval Base back on earth, so he was powerless.

IV

Nadine had been listening so closely that she'd forgotten her cup. Hatch had been talking too much to bother with his, and they were both back down.

"So you bought the place and moved in. Why?"

Hatch eased her off his lap — a little embarrassed now — and

stood up. "Because a lot of irreparable harm was done before I could stop Handy. The mossmen were cut down so far that they can't maintain their number. They're dying out."

They went into the obs tower to eat. Hatch was talked out, brooding. Nadine rummaged through the mess of his food prep locker and put the semblance of a salad together. They drank water. She let him take his time.

"I guess you'll want to start assessing things," he said finally.

"Forget it for now." She came around behind his chair and put her hands on his shoulders. "Richard J. Handy, Rat, GSN. He must have re-directed his entire career in the service to get the job he's got now. To get you."

Hatch laughed. "But for all that, he *got* me. Public domain seems to be the biggest single hole in the bill of rights. In the final analysis, the majority has the power of life and death over the minority."

"And it's not really applicable," she said. "There's no *real* fuel shortage."

"But what court is going to refuse the word of the President's Advisor on that count? No, he's got me."

Hatch checked his watch, got up, stretched, turned to her. "Day's half shot, and I haven't done a thing. Not that it'll make much difference now, but what the hell."

Nadine was surprised at how quickly she got used to the mossmen. She worked together with Hatch now, directing the Janes to the nests, placating the Joes, collecting the eggs when the nests were full.

Hatch was sweating in the sun, half naked, walking among them. Patting, smiling, a continuous charade of goodwill and congratulation. She saw him as an Indian, a latter-day noble savage, holding a dying tribe together for its own sake.

Finally, he turned off the recordings, and the newcomers diminished to a trickle. They, had only to transfer the eggs to the storage holds, Hatch said, and then wrap it up for the day.

She helped slide them down into four huge refrigerated holds. All four were nearly full. Thirty billion souls, he told her. Enough to repopulate the galaxy.

"Why such a backlog?" she wondered.

Well, because only recently had he developed a method of ferrying them over the mountains. But he had it now and would probably stop collecting soon and concentrate full time on that phase of the operation.

"And how *do* you get them across?" she asked.

"Would you like to see how it was done?" he answered.

"Yes."

So when all the eggs were stored, he led her to what had been a lifeboat locker, back near the stern. They had to pick away among the bodies of several hundred sleeping mossmen.

Hatch went in and turned on the light. The small shed had been converted to a hangar.

Eighty percent of the room was filled with boron plastic silk. Hatch poked at a control board near the door and the roof slid open. A compressor whistled to life and the jumbled fabric began to shape into a flabby cigar.

When it tightened into a blimp, she could see that a nacelle had been at the bottom of the pile. It bore what seemed to her like much too big an engine, a laser, and a rudimentary bomb bay and doors.

They loaded it with about ten thousand eggs. Hatch got the motor started, and cast off the cables. They watched it lurch up into the hot wind.

"Come up to the bridge," he said. "The radio control panel's there."

Like everything else on the barge, Hatch's RC equipment was a real kitchen job. He combined Ford's ingenuity with Goldberg's total lack of regard for symmetry. Amid the mechanoelectrochemiphysical mess of it all was a screen, and on that screen was the blimp. It was being swept rapidly astern toward the mountains.

Hatch motioned her to sit beside him as he brought up power to the antenna, and then plunged into lip-biting concentration. It was as if they rode with it.

He directed the thing by a dummy stick and half a dozen toggles. The blimp began to pick up altitude, but slowly. He gave it more throttle and steeper flaps. She nosed up more quickly now.

The mountains rolled ever closer in the background, and the violence of all that moving earth was a frightening thing. Nadine said she was glad she couldn't hear it.

It didn't look at first as if they'd make it. The engine was a monster, but the wind was more monstrous. He cranked on full throttle, full flaps. The screen flashed black as the tracking radar went out of sync; and Hatch fumed to get the picture back. When he did he heard Nadine gasp.

Not a hundred feet separated the lurching limp from the hell-storm of dust and moss below it. But an inch would have been enough. Hatch let out his breath loudly and smiled.

The nightside stretched out before them like a burnt, black blanket. You could almost feel the cold. Hatch slowed to a hover. All around them the dust settled down through the moss, perpetuating the the same weird ecology it had since this particular world had begun.

He fired the laser, tunneling into the moss at a very shallow angle, perhaps ten degrees, and counted silently to himself, to twenty. They were quite low. The surface of the freezing moss lay only fifteen feet away. The hole was ten feet wide now. Hatch couldn't miss. He dropped a thousand eggs, and they rolled on down the shaft.

"Bravo," Nadine said, and mimicked one of the faces he made when congratulating the mossmen. He grinned. They repeated the process until the eggs were gone.

He got back the altitude more easily coming back unladen, and they cleared the mountains by a thousand feet. In an hour the blimp was hissing out its helium in the hangar.

They went down and tucked it in. He could see the girl was tiring, though she didn't complain. It had been eight hours since she'd come down from Handy's orbiting cruiser, and she'd been working most of them. His suggestion of a break drew a nod and quick imitation of a bear woofing and collapsing on the deck.

"Do you always made faces?" he asked as they went up.

"Yes."

Hatch cooked this time. In the midst of his typically misdirected pan rattling, Nadine commented that he was perhaps the worst organized human she'd ever seen.

Hatch chuckled but he was hurt. "I don't know. Take what we did today. It's pretty systematic, isn't it?"

"Yes, but we only did half the job. Too bad you can't get them over the *far* twiline too," she mused. "Though halfway around the world's some blimp trip —"

"Right. And no gasbag would stay buoyant in that cold."

She sat up. "Still, I'll bet there's a better way. You could —" But then she wilted and looked apologetically at Hatch.

They ate, carrying on a glum but realistic conversation. When would Handy be back down for her? In a few hours. They discussed what various things were worth. Nadine made a few notes. Would he come back to earth with them? No, he'd stick around. Even with the T-belt running, there might be something he could do for the mossmen. She suggested that Handy would probably kick him off as soon as the transaction was complete.

Hatch shrugged. "Eminent domain," he sighed. "Majority be served, minority be damned."

Twenty-three seconds of silence.

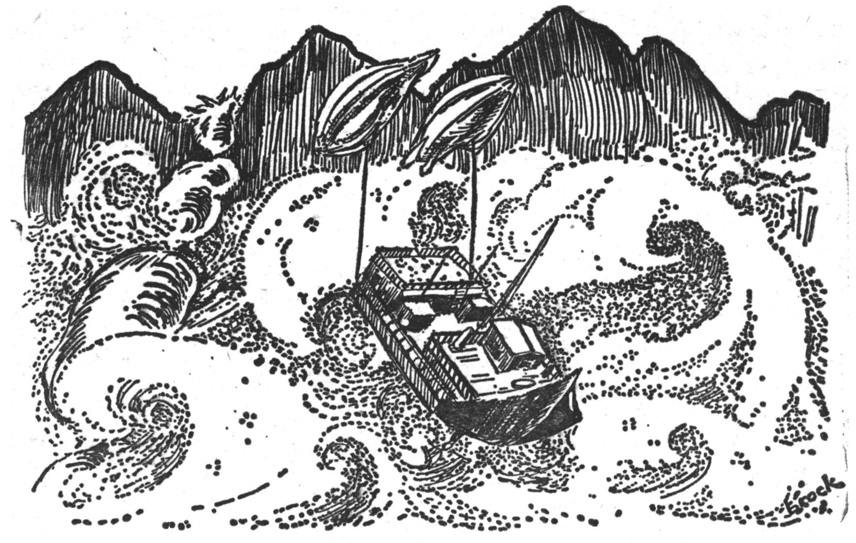
"Hatch?" She pointed down. "This barge."

Raised eyebrows.

"Could it survive a run over the mountains?"

"Never in a million years. Why?"

"Well, suppose it could. Suppose you could carry all thirty billion



eggs over the mountains, across the coldside, across the dawnline mountains — and lay them in the dayside. Thirty billion mossmen would hatch, right?"

"I don't dig."

"Majority. There aren't that many *other* intelligent beings in the galaxy, don't you see? Handy couldn't invoke public domain."

V

The barge sidled closer to the T-belt. Nadine was nervous about handling the controls, but there was no other way. Hatch had spent the entire trip over explaining them to her. The ship handled like a pig, and he impressed this on her. Course corrections came with agonizing slowness.

From this distance the T-cells loomed like *Enterprise-sized* gray elephants, stumbling along trunk to tail. Nadine kept saying she felt she was going to get stepped on any minute. Hatch pinched the meagre fat of her waist reassuringly, and left the bridge.

Down on deck, he prepared to board the T-belt. Just like the old days. He'd used some of the same procedures, too. Since both the wind and the roughness of the moss diminished as you moved further away from the mountains, he'd driven them thirty miles out into the hotside. But if it was less stormy here, it was hotter.

The sun was orange, not red, and Hatch's twiline-oriented pupils had shrivelled to pinheads. He could barely see through the tears, or think through the headache. He had on a full complement of T-Tech gear too, from tool suit to back pack, and the unaccustomed weight smothered him.

He waited as Nadine piloted them in. He wished they could skip this whole operation, but he knew that the barge wouldn't have enough power for the trip up the mountains, not by herself. So he was forced to run a power cable to the T-belt. They'd make the run like an electric toy at the end of a cord.

He stood by the line gun, arm upraised, one eye on the bridge, another on the approaching gray T-cells. She angled them in ever closer. Now they were actually beneath the great rising curve of one of them. He dropped his arm, and saw the barge straighten out to parallel the chain. They were really too far out, but he was being conservative on her account. Go too far in, and a chance swell could lift the barge up against the T-cells and crush them.

He waited until they'd drifted up to the junction between two cells, then told her to cut forward motion. They'd have about an hour before the mountains overtook them. He aimed the line gun, made the shot, and put on the climbing harness.

The line ascended at about thirty degrees to the joint linking two of the huge sausages. It was a tough climb, even for him. He was sweating so much that his hands slipped, even with gloves. Twice he lost hold and dangled heavily from the safety harness.

He made it. Sitting on the two-foot central cable, he wiped his eyes, caught his breath. Down on the barge, Nadine waved encouragement from the bridge.

The junction box was scarcely more than a black boulder of corrosion. It took twenty minutes of torching and chipping to get the thing open.

There were four hundred terminals in a twenty by twenty array Half were positive, half negative. Most were dead. Six years of disrepair. He ran through seventy-three of the plusses before hitting one that was live. He kept on going, getting one more as an alternate if he needed it.

Then he went through the minuses, and got three. After bolting in the cables, he fused the insulation and shut the box.

Getting back down was easier, because down *is* easier than up in the first place — and because half an hour had passed. They'd drifted back toward the mountains and things were cooler and dimmer.

And rougher. The moss was breaking in over the bow in dark

streams as he touched down, and the wind turned each tendril into a whiplash. He was glad for the tech-suit. They were drifting closer into the belt, too. He sprinted up to the bridge.

As he burst in, Nadine wailed, "It won't go —"

"Yes, it will." He took the stick.

"Your face is bleeding."

"You're crying."

"I'm scared."

So was he. The barge yawed violently, and the bow rose within yards of the cell above. He crabbed the rotors like mad, lifted the port-side apron, and prayed nothing would blow.

They got out. The moss was just as rough, but with the T-belt a thousand yards away, they wouldn't get mashed. He gave her back the controls.

This time the deck was murder. They'd fallen back to the foothills. He'd put on a helmet, but the wind-driven moss howled up under the faceplate, into his sleeves, up his cuffs. He was getting high from the scent too, which didn't help. He waded back to the blimp hangar.

Inflating the thing in a gale like this was something he decided he would never do again. The blimp finally bobbed a hundred yards behind and above on her tether cable. But he had to do it again, to the auxiliary blimp on the starboard side.

He staggered back up to the bridge, a tight hand on the lifeline all the way. Inside, he nearly collapsed.

She gave him water and thirty seconds of attention, like a prize-fighter's trainer between rounds. He got up, walked to the transplas wall, looked back aft.

The blimps shuddered on their tethers like fishing bobs dragged by a demented muskie. But they had the desired effect, that of weather-vanes. They dragged the stern of the barge around and aligned it with the wind. With the wind and straight up the mountains — backwards. At least they wouldn't have to worry about holding a heading with the barge's rudders.

There was one final job, and barely time to do it. Hatch had to unreel as much power cable as he could, to allow them to get as far as possible from the T-belt, as it stampeded over the mountains. The mountains. Here they came. It looked like the whole world was rearing back to stomp them. Hatch put the helmet back on.

He was back down on deck now. Not only moss but dust fouled the air now. And an occasional dark shape that went thump. The whole barge shuddered. The wind must have been sixty knots. The roar of it was deafening. A lot of the top-side gear had been carried away. There was the rising howl of more moss getting chewed in the rotors.

Hatch made his way to where the cable over to the T-belt arced off into the portside darkness. Tension in the cable told him his connections were intact. He opened the shorepower junction box which was set into the deck, and connected the T-belt's cable to the spools inside it.

Under the box was a hatch. He went belowdecks. Belowdecks in a hoverbarge is a shallow crawl space full of things that make noise. He loaded the reels with every last foot of conduit on the barge, and pulled out the pins. They sang free. Then he climbed out again, and for the last time, returned to Nadine.

They didn't say anything. No point; you just couldn't hear. Hatch piloted them as far from the T-belt as the cable reels would allow. Now, to cut it in. He flashed her a grin, held up crossed fingers, and threw four switches. Sixty thousand extra kilowatts from the T-belt poured into the support rotors and tried to make a helicopter out of a hoverbarge.

It was a typical, Hatch-style kitchen job in that it worked — barely. She'd surge ponderously up to the full height of her aprons, and kept on going for five or six feet. While up in the air her pitching and rolling ceased, but she tended to rise high at the bow, reversing the slope of the deck.

Then she'd fall back slowly, plunging the apron into the moss until the cushion built up again. While in the moss all kinds of horrible noises issued from the rotors as they hacked into — everything. Heavy moss with treetrunk tendrils, cast up from the lower strata; dust and gravel from the bottom; and, most horrifyingly — mossmen and other fauna.

It was like being in an elevator on a starship during warp-out. No human gut can take it. Nadine got sick; Hatch got sick. Nadine collapsed, but Hatch wedged himself erect and did what little he could to control the ship.

They rolled giddily up the mountain wave. The incline increased. They spent less and less time in the air and more and more in the rubble, which was killing for the rotors. There was no more power, nothing he could do.

Up ahead he saw the T-belt go booming over the crest, link by link. One burst even as he watched, and the thunderclap it made could be felt as well as heard.

Now there was nothing he could see. Dust obscured everything. It filtered in through a defective vent. It stank of earth and burning moss and burning hair. As if the planet was compensating for its fragrance at the twiline.

Hatch found himself standing on nothing. The deck dropped out, came back, dropped out again. They'd lost one of the blimps and

now crabbed up the mountain at a weird angle, whipsawing back and forth on the single tether.

He felt it first, then heard it. One of the four support rotors had sheared. The drive motor wound up to an astronomical speed. He tried to get to the console, but somebody kept shaking the world. He felt like an ant in a matchbox. He heard the motor blow, and gave up trying to do anything but hang on. Nadine slammed against him on her way to the ceiling. He grabbed her.

The transplas shield blew in. Hatch blacked out.

VI

He woke up, cold, in six inches of fine dust, under two feet of moss. Nadine was shaking him.

"Thank God," she said.

One collarbone, an ankle — though that still worked — and a mild concussion for her. A hole in the head for him, some ribs, and a back.

As for the barge: one blimp, one rotor, and everything that wasn't welded to the deck. He looked out on a barren metalsquare, punctuated only by the major tanks and houses. The outside temperature was sixteen degrees and falling. They were a hundred miles into the coldside.

Item: turn around, get back closer to the mountains, and get warm. Two hours.

Item: repairs, human and otherwise. Twenty-four hours.

Item: check supplies, power connections to the T-belt, environmental units and so on. Prepare to dive. Ten hours.

Item: Dive: The first thing needed here was a hole to dive into. They ran up the blimp and tried to burn a shallow angle tunnel not far from the barge. But the moss, recently uprooted by the mountains, was like water. It wouldn't hold a tunnel for six feet before caving in.

So they had to run farther into the coldside, where the moss was frozen solid. The shaft was sunk within a few hundred yards of the T-belt, so that they could bury themselves as deeply as possible and still keep the power cable connected. They'd need it for the heaters.

Their passage down the long, shallow tunnel was uneventful, except that Nadine got claustrophobia from the closeness of the reedy walls.

When they reached the end of the power cable, they were about a mile down. Hatch wished it was deeper. But while the cold of the surface might get more quickly to them, they would at least have power to combat it.

He scoured out a flat-floored cavern with the laser, put the barge in the middle, and — for the first time in six years — shut her down completely.

They stood there on the bridge with the self-absorbed smiles of people straining to hear distant music. First the main rotors stopped. Not that they were loud, but they'd been constant. And when Hatch stopped the auxiliaries, his ears almost hurt. He was aware of Nadine's breathing.

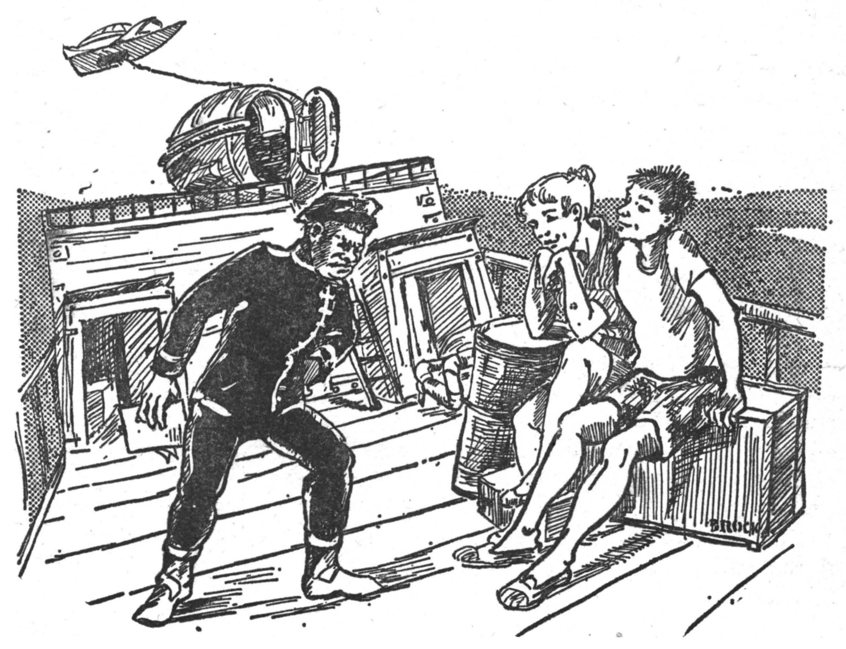
Finally, the hissing of air from the support apron — accompanied by the slow sinking of the barge right down to its frame — stopped. Even his own breathing seemed loud then.

"Hatch," she boomed. "Isn't this weird?"

They grew used to it in the months that followed, and to each other. There were no problems, and nothing to do except turn up the heat every few days to compensate for their distance into the nightside. They ate, played cards, slept, talked, made love, and grew pale from lack of sun. Hatch sometimes took a torch and walked around out on the deck for exercise, but soon it grew too cold for that.

Soon, in fact, they were forced to block off all but the most essential compartments of the barge to keep the heat. The outside temperature fell to sixty below. Hatch guessed it to be more like a minus one hundred-ten on the surface.

Finally, the point was reached when they were living on the bridge



and in the obs tower — and drawing every watt their T-belt cable could put out. Yet still the temperature fell. The hoverbarge had never been meant for this; its insulation was nowhere near thick enough. Hatch was barely able to keep their living quarters above freezing.

And then he wasn't able. The morning she woke and found both the taps frozen, Nadine got scared.

When they were forced to stay in bed all the time, even Hatch got scared. They'd been under six months. As a last ditch effort, he started up the barge's auxiliary pile, to augment what they got from the T-belt. They celebrated by dancing barefoot on the warm metal deck.

But it might well have been a funeral dance, and they knew it. They started saying dramatic things to each other. Last words, I love you, if I had it all to do over, and so on. It was in the midst of one such maudlin tirade that Hatch noticed the red blade of the recording thermometer was *above* the black blade. They'd made it.

When the barge crept up from the tunnel, when the sunlight poured over the shoulder of the mountains ahead of them, Nadine cried. Hatch was surprised; she'd never broken before, not during the worst of it.

Crossing the mountains was infinitely easier this time. Because the moss was frozen solid, it cushioned the heaving planet underneath. It was like riding a glacier as opposed to their previous salmon-run, upstream, through the rapids.

Not that glaciers don't roar and crack; there were a few tense moments. Actually, they went up on a glacier and came down the other side on a smallish iceberg.

But they came down intact, to the dawnline of the dayside, with thirty billion eggs.

They sowed the eggs. They had more than enough time before Handy found them. The GS sled descended with unwonted speed. They watched it fall toward them.

The cablepod disgorged McIntyre on the first trip, whose immediate comment was, "Gee, we thought you were dead."

Then came Handy, who said only, "Where have you been?"

So they took him up to the obs tower, sat him down and told him.

"So you came across the nightside. Why?"

"I had a boatload of eggs, Commander."

"Mossmen's eggs?"

"Naturally."

"Hmp." Handy looked thoughtful, cocked his head, sloshed his wineglass gently around and around. "So. I guess this was a last ditch stand to save the species before we open the T-belt, eh?"

"Something like that."

"Do you think you're succeeded?"

"Sure. In fact, we'll have some overpopulation for a while — despite the size of the planet — until the bears come down to accommodate the available grazing area. After all, we increased birth expectancy from, oh, roughly less than a millionth of a percent —"

"To?"

"Over ninety."

"So?"

"Tell him, McIntyre."

"Sir?" asked the flustered sailor, looking at Hatch.

"That public domain thing. Read it."

Questioning spaniel gaze shifting to the Commander, met with an irritated nod.

McIntyre hopped erect and began to recite. "Eminent domain is —" He looked like a freckled sixth grader. "Eminent domain is the superior dominion of the sovereign power over property within the state, which authorizes it to appropriate all or any part therof to a necessary public use, reasonable compensation being made."

The sailor sat down.

"Now, Commander, what's the sovereign power? The majority, right? And what's the galactic population right now?"

Handy looked briefly thoughtful. "Twenty seven-six or so. But —"

"Wrong. Fifty seven-six, thirty of which are mossmen. So you're outvoted." As Handy reached angrily for his hat, Hatch lifted a restraining hand. "Wait now — don't leave yet. I assume that while we were gone you've been working on the belt?"

"Yes."

"And you've brought down barges and everything?"

"Yes, damn it."

"Good. We're going to open up a school for the mossmen, and we'll need facilities. When you go — any time in the next ten hours — leave the barges." END

This Month in Galaxy —

TO JORSLEM
by Robert Silverberg

KENDY'S WORLD
by Hayden Howard

THE WAR WITH THE FNOOLS
by Philip K. Dick

NOW HEAR THE WORD OF THE LORD
by Algis Budrys

Plus regular columns and features — February *Galaxy* on sale now!

PRAISEWORTHY SAUR

by HARRY HARRISON

"Our race is greater than yours. You can serve in only one way — die, and let us succeed you!"

"We are there; we are correct. The computations were perfect. That is the place below."

"You are a worm," 17 said to her companion 35, who resembled her every way other than in number. "That is the place. But nine years too early. Look at the meter."

"I am a worm. I shall free you of the burden of my useless presence." 35 removed her knife from the scabbard and tested the edge, which proved to be exceedingly sharp. She placed it against the white wattled width of her neck and prepared to cut her throat.

"Not now," 17 hissed. "We are shorthanded already, and your corpse would be valueless to this expedition. Get us to the correct time at once. Our power is limited, you may remember."

"It shall be done as you command," 35 said as she slithered to the bank of controls. 44 ignored the talk, keeping her multicell eyes focused on the power control bank, with her spatulate fingers in response to the manifold dials.

"That is it," 17 announced, rasping her hands together with pleasure. "The correct time, the correct place. We must descend and make our destiny. Give praise to the Saur

of All who rules the destinies of all."

"Praise Saur," her two companions muttered, all of their attention on the controls.

Straight down from the blue sky the globular vehicle fell. It was round and featureless, save for the large rectangular port, on the bottom now, and made of some sort of blue metal, perhaps anodized aluminum, though it looked harder. It had no visible means of flight or support, yet it fell at a steady and controlled rate. Slower and slower it moved until it dropped from sight behind the ridge at the northern end of Johnson's Lake, just at the edge of the tall pine grove. There were fields nearby, with cows, who did not appear at all disturbed by the visitor. No human being was in sight to view the landing. A path cut in from the lake here, a scuffed dirt trail that went to the highway.

An oriole sat on a bush and warbled sweetly: a small rabbit hopped from the field to nibble a stem of grass. This bucolic and peaceful scene was interrupted by the scuff of feet down the trail and monotone whistling. The bird flew away, a touch of soundless color, while the rabbit disappeared into the hedge. A boy came over the shore. He wore ordinary boy clothes and carried a school bag in one hand, a small and homemade cage of wire screen in the other. In the cage was a small lizard which clung to the screen, its eyes rolling in what presumably was fear. The boy, whistling shrilly, trudged along the path and into the shade of the pine grove.

"Boy," a high pitched and tremulous voice called out. "Can you hear me, boy?"

"I certainly can," the boy said, stopping and looking around for the unseen speaker. "Where are you?"

"I am by your side, but I am invisible. I am your fairy godmother — "

The boy made a rude sound by sticking out his tongue and blowing across it while it vibrated. "I don't believe in invisibility or fairy godmothers. Come out of those woods, whoever you are."

"All boys believe in fairy godmothers," the voice said, but a worried tone edged the words now. "I know all kinds of secrets. I know your name is Don and — "

"Everyone knows my name is Don, and no one believes any more in fairies. Boys now believe in rockets, submarines and atomic energy."

"Would you believe space travel?"

"I would."

Slightly relieved, the voice came on stronger and deeper. "I did not wish to frighten you, but I am really from Mars and have just landed."

Don made the rude noise again.

"Mars has no atmosphere and no observable forms of life. Now come out of there and stop playing games."

After a long silence the voice said, "Would you consider time travel?"

"I could. Are you going to tell me that you are from the future?"

With relief: "Yes I am."

"Then come out where I can see you."

"There are some things that the human eye should not look upon."

"Horseapples! The human eye is okay for looking at anything you want to name. You come out of there so I can see who you are — or I'm leaving."

"It is not advisable." The voice was exasperated. "I can prove I am a temporal traveler by telling you the answers to tomorrow's mathematics test. Wouldn't that be nice? Number one, 1.76. Number two — "

"I don't like to cheat, and even if I did you can't cheat on the new math. Either you know it or you fail it. I'm going to count to ten, then go."

"No, you cannot! I must ask you a favor. Release that common lizard you have trapped and I will give you three wishes — I mean answer three questions."

"Why should I let it go?"

"Is that the first of your questions?"

"No. I want to know what's going on before I do anything. This lizard is special. I never saw another one like it around here."

"You are right. It is an Old World acrodont lizard of the order Rhiptoglossa, commonly called a chameleon."

"It *is!*" Don was really interested now. He squatted in the path and took a red-covered book from the school bag and laid it on the ground. He turned the cage until the lizard was on the bottom and placed it carefully on the book. "Will it really turn color?"

"To an observable amount, yes. Now if you release her . . . "

"How do you know it's a her? The time traveler bit again?"

"If you must know, yes. The creature was purchased from a pet store by one Jim Benan and is one of a pair. They were both released two days ago when Benan, deranged by the voluntary drinking of a liquid containing quantities of ethyl alcohol, sat on the cage. The other, unfortunately, died of his wounds, and this one alone survives. The release — "

"I think this whole thing is a joke and I'm going home now. Unless you come out of there so I can see who you are

"I warn you . . . "

"Good-by." Don picked up the cage. "Hey, she turned sort of brick red!"

"Do not leave. I will come forth."

Don looked on, with a great deal of interest, while the creature walked out from between the trees. It was purple in color, had large goggling eyes, was slightly scaley, wore a neatly cut brown jumpsuit and had a pack slung on its back. It was also only about seven inches tall.

"You don't much look like a man from the future," Don said. "In fact you don't look like a man at all. You're too small."

"I might say that you are too big. Size is a matter of relevancy, And I am from the future, though I am not a man."

"That's for sure. In fact you look a lot like a lizard." In sudden inspiration, Don looked back and forth at the traveler and at the cage. "In fact you look a good deal like this chameleon here. What's the connection?"

"That is not to be revealed. You will now do as I command or I will injure you gravely." 17 turned and waved towards the woods. "35, this is an order. Appear and destroy that growth over there."

Don looked on with increasing interest as the blue basketball of metal drifted into sight from under the trees. A circular disk slipped away on one side and a gleaming nozzle, not unlike the hose nozzle on a toy firetruck, appeared through the opening. It pointed toward a hedge a good thirty feet away. A shrill whining began from the depths of the sphere, rising in pitch until it was almost inaudible. Then, suddenly, a thin line of light spat out towards the shrub which crackled and instantly burst into flame. Within a second it was a blackened skeleton.

"The device is called a roxidizer and is deadly," 17 said. "Release the chameleon at once."

Don scowled. "All right. Who wants the old lizard anyway?" He put the cage on the ground and started to open the cover. Then he stopped — and sniffed. Picking up the cage again he started across the grass towards the blackened bush.

"Come back!" 17 screeched. "We will fire if you go another step."

Don ignored the lizardoid, which was now dancing up and down in an agony of frustration, and ran to the bush. He put his hand out — and apparently right through the charred stems.

"I thought something was fishy," he said. "All that burning and everything just upwind of me — and I couldn't smell a thing." He turned to look at the time traveler who was slumped in gloomy silence. "It's just a projected image of some kind, isn't it? Some kind of three-dimensional movie." He stopped in sudden thought, then walked over to the still hovering temporal transporter. When he poked at it with his finger he apparently pushed his hand right into it.

"And this thing isn't here either. Are you?"

"There is no need to experiment. I, and our ship, are present only as what might be called temporal echoes. Matter cannot be moved through time, that is an impossibility, but the concept of matter can be temporaly projected. I am sure that this is too technical for you . . ."

"You're doing great so far. Carry on."

"Our projections are here in a real sense to us, though we can only be an image or a sound wave to any observers in the time we visit. Immense amounts of energy are required and almost the total resources of our civilization are involved in this time transfer."

"Why? And the truth for a change. No more fairy godmother and that kind of malarky."

"I regreat the necessity to use subterfuge, but the secret is too important to reveal casually without attempting other means of persuasion."

"Now we get to the real story." Don sat down and crossed his legs comfortably. "Give."

We need your aid, or our very society is threatened. Very recently — on our time scale — strange disturbances were detected by our instruments. Ours is a simple saurian existence, some million or so years in the future, and our race is dominant. Yours has long since vanished in a manner too horrible to mention to your young ears. Something is threatening our entire race. Research quickly uncovered the fact that we are about to be overwhelmed by a probability wave and wiped out, a great wave of negation sweeping towards us from our remote past."

"You wouldn't mind tipping me off to what a probability wave is, would you?"

"I will take an example from your own literature. If your grandfather had died without marrying, you would not have been born and would not now exist."

"But I do."

"The matter is debatable in the greater plan of the universe, but we shall not discuss that now. Our power is limited. To put the affair simply, we traced our ancestral lines back through all the various mutations and changes until we found the individual proto-lizard from which our line sprung."

"Let me guess." Don pointed at the cage. "This is the one?"

"She is." 17 spoke in solemn tones as befitted the moment. "Just as somewhen, somewhere there is a proto-tarsier from which your race sprung, so is there this temporal mother of ours. She will bear young soon, and they will breed and grow in this pleasant valley. The rocks near the lake have an appreciable amount of radioactivity which will

cause mutations. The centuries will roll by and, one day, our race will reach its heights of glory.

"But not if you don't open that cage."

Don rested his chin on fist and thought. "You're not putting me on any more? This is the truth?"

17 drew herself up and waved both arms — or front legs — over her head. "By the Saur of All, I promise," she intoned. "By the stars eternal, the seasons vernal, the clouds, the sky, the matriarchal I . . ."

"Just cross your heart and hope to die, that will be good enough for me."

The lizardoid moved its eyes in concentric circles and performed this ritual.

"Okay then, I'm as soft-hearted as the next guy when it comes to wiping out whole races."

Don unbent the piece of wire that sealed the cage and opened the top. The chameleon rolled one eye up at him and looked at the opening with the other. 17 watched in awed silence and the time vehicle bobbed closer.

"Get going," Don said, and shook the lizard out into the grass.

This time the chameleon took the hint and scuttled away among the bushes, vanishing from sight.

"That takes care of the future," Don said. "Or the past, from your point of view."

17 and the time machine vanished silently. Don was alone again on the path.

"Well, you could of at least said thanks before taking off like that! People have more manners than lizards any day, I'll tell you that."

He picked up the now empty cage and his school bag and started for home.

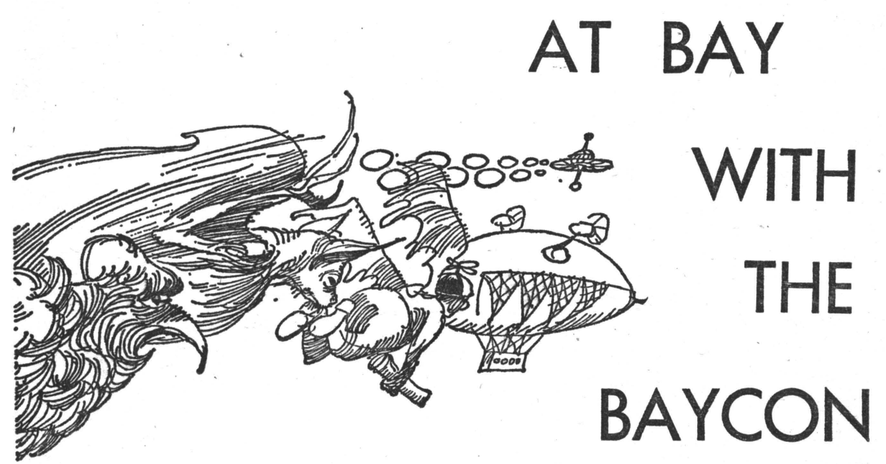
He had not heard the quick rustle in the bushes, nor did he see the prowling tomcat with the limp chameleon in its jaws. END

YOUR POSTMASTER SUGGESTS:

Make Those FASTER Connections

yours truly, Jack the scribbler

AT BAY WITH THE BAYCON



by ROBERT BLOCH

Our Man at Conventions tells us what went on at the other riots in Berkeley — the sf convention!

The doctor is gone now.

He really behaved very nicely, and I don't mind all those tests he gave me, or the way he tapped my knees with that rubber hammer before he stuck the needles into my arm. At least he listened to what I had to say, and he agreed that it could be possible; such things *might* conceivably have happened.

"I understand," he told me, as he strapped me into this rather unusual little Nehru jacket which doesn't have any sleeves and fits a bit tightly about my neck and waist. "I have heard about the Loch Ness Monster and the Abominable Snow Man. So who am I to say that a Harlan Ellison doesn't exist?"

He shuddered slightly as he said it, but he *did* say it. And then he mumbled something about the "cathartic method," and I hope that doesn't mean he's going to give me a laxative; not in *this* jacket.

But I think he was suggesting to

me that I write everything out, just as it occurred, and I'm going to try. Even if I can't use my hands, I may be able to type with my nose — it could even help me to make scents that way.

I don't really care much for typing, anyhow. As a wise old editor once told me, "You can always spot a drunken science-fiction author. The only part of the typewriter he likes is the space bar."

But I digress.

And the time has come to gress — about the Baycon, the 26th World Science Fiction Convention, held in Berkeley, California, from August 29th through September 2nd, 1968.

It really took place, you know. That's why I'm wearing this jacket. And in order to comprehend what happened, perhaps I'd better sketch in a brief background.

Four score and seven years ago "that's 1939, according to *my* arithmetic" the *first* World Science Fiction Convention was perpetrated, in New York. Some two hundred odd — if that's the term I'm looking for — science-fiction fans writers, editors, artists and publishers gathered together in a meeting-hall to listen to speeches and panel discussions on science fiction. There was much socializing, even more antisocializing, and a *finale* in the form of a lavish banquet, at $1 a head. Only 32 of the attendees could afford this expensive luxury in those faroff depression days, but the affair was voted a success. Since that time, with the exception of a hiatus during World War II, these Conventions have continued on an annual basis — and most of them have exceeded World War II in their impact. Each year, the affair has moved from city to city, sponsored by a fan-group which bids for the privilege on a competitive basis. The winning masochists then undertake to put on a Convention, and these put-ons have occurred throughout the United States. Once a Convention was held in Toronto, and twice it took place in London, but always the concept has continued to grow and expand. Now a Science Fiction Convention is a four-day affair, frequently attracting upwards of a thousand guests, to say nothing of those it repels.

Baycon co-chairmen Bill Donaho, Alva Rogers and J. Ben Stark, together with their committee members, selected the Hotel Claremont for this year's affair. The Claremont is a huge, rambling, old-fashioned place set against a picturesque hillside background, which has often been recommended by opthamologists as a site for sore eyes.

But the attendance proved so large that guests were eventually scattered about in three other hotels in the Berkeley area, thus producing a full-scale Berkeley riot.

The rumble began on Thursday

as the fans assembled. Not just science-fiction fans, mind you, for seemingly the Convention is becoming a convenient vehicle for other groups to hitch a ride on — a sort of surrey with the fringe-fans on top.

There's First Fandom, composed "or decomposed" of elderly types who entered fandom thirty or more years ago, led by such stalwarts as Bob Madle, Dave Kyle and Lou Tabakow. There's the Burroughs Bibliophiles, spearheaded by such lovers of bibliofilth as Verne Coriell, Stan Vinson, Russ Manning and John Coleman Buroughs. They sponsored a special luncheon for their group and also put on a panel discussion which I attended. To my horror, I discovered they were not honoring William Burroughs, or even Abe, but some obscure character named Edgar Rice Burroughs.

Then there was a sizeable group of comic buffs, also on the program; devotees of science-fiction and monster-film fans had their own session featuring Forrest J Ackerman, Bill Warren, and Eric Hoffman of the Count Dracula Society. Another large segment of attendees were dedicated fans of *Star Trek;* producer Gene Roddenberry addressed them at a session with remarks as pointed as Leonard Nimoy's ears. The NFFF, the Order of St. Fantony and other fannish groups participated in the proceedings.

And just to complicate things more, a considerable number of attendees were on hand merely to patronize the daily auctions — where original manuscripts, teleplays, film stills, first editions, old magazines and original artwork sold to eager bidders, proceeds of this donated material being alloted to defray Convention costs. Chief Auctioneer Walt Daugherty knocked down one item for $160, an all-time record. This is somewhat more than he obtained when he auctioned off Harlan Ellison and myself to fans who sought exclusive interviews. (That's what *my* bidder got from me; what Harlan's bidder got is one of those secrets Men Are Not Meant To Know).

At any rate — or, at least, at the rate this magazine is paying for the article — there was a lot more going on at this Convention than just straight-line, old-fashioned science-fiction fanning.

By the time I arrived on Friday afternoon, there had already been a movie session, a fan revue, two official parties, eight unofficial parties, and nineteen feuds. The Convention was officially opened at noon, with keynote speeches by British writer John Brunner and American author Randall Garrett, together with rebuttals by various fans and pros.

After I was conducted through the winding corridors to the spider-infested ruins of my room by the

bellboy (Dwight Frye) I wandered down to a Wine-Tasting Party to meet the authors. Here, for the first time, I encountered the legendary E. Hoffman Price — a renowned name when I was a boy, a personal friend of H. P. Lovecraft whom I'd had the pleasure of corresponding with over thirty years ago, but had never met. He seemed every bit as much at home at this affair as Larry Niven, Joanna Russ or the other comparative newcomers to science-fiction circles.

The next event, for authors at any rate, was the Science Fiction Writers of America Banquet, at which I noted such notables as Jim Harmon, Miriam Allen deFord, Tom and Terri Pinckard, Sam Moskowitz, Ed Wood, Philip K. Dick, David Gerrold, Sam and Florence Russell. (I didn't actually see all these people at the dinner, but it's a sneaky way to drop a few names, and believe me there's more name-dropping at a Convention than pigeon-dropping in Central Park).

While *Star Trek* episodes played and the Order of St. Fantony conducted its esoteric rites, I wandered from private party to private party, encountering Guest of Honor Philip José Farmer, his wife Bette José Farmer, *Galaxy* Gal Judy-Lynn Benjamin, and the charming couple responsible for the 1954 San Francisco Convention, Les and Es Cole. Such fannish figures as Ruth Berman, Ed Meskys, Walt Leibscher, Leland Sapiro and last year's Guest of Honor, the little-known Lester del Rey, were very much in evidence. But, unable to keep up with such inveterate swingers as Leigh Brackett, I retired at the respectable hour of 3 a.m. and fell into a deep, dreamless sleep which lasted all of twenty minutes.

Saturday I inspected the Art Show, the Photo Exhibit, and the Book Room, where hucksters such as Don Day and Earl Kemp peddled books and magazines to collectors and unwary passersby. Then it was time to hear Ray Bradbury deliver his talk in the Convention hall. Ray really turned on.

Immediately thereafter I found myself in exalted company, on the platform with a panel consisting of Edmond Hamilton, Emil Petaja, E. Hoffman Price, Jack Williamson and Alva Rogers, with Fritz Leiber sitting at my elbow to keep me in line. Fritz and Harlan Ellison later delivered a sensational reading of their works to the accompaniment of a psychedelic light show background. Somewhere along the line I met up with Bjo Trimble and John, Al Lewis, Poul and Karen Anderson, Wendayne Ackerman and a supper group consisting of the Kyles, publisher Bob Guinn, Carol Pohl and her lovely daughter, and her husband (whose name I can't recall).

And then it was time for the

Masquerade Ball and Galaxy of Fashion — one of the top events of any Convention. That is to say, the Ball is one of the top events, and the Fashion Show is rapidly becoming topless.

This particular Ball will be bouncing around as a topic of discussion for a very long while to come, for the Convention committee augmented it with the performances of three "name" rock bands and a light show by Great Northern.

Those under 30, including a conspicuous number of hippies, really were digging the mind-blowing sounds and the visual array of psychedelicatessen. But for those who don't grok rock or like psych, the deal was an ordeal. And the 225 costumed contestants for prizes were jammed into a narrow outer corridor during the three 45-minute decibel-shattering sessions between parades while the judges deliberated on their choices. Jack Chalker, Chuck Crayne and others responsible for staging this affair were vindicated when next year's Convention-bid winners pledged a repeat performance, but I predict that amongst the older generation who will attend, one of the most popular costumes will consist of a pair of dark glasses and a set of earplugs.

Some of the costumes were imaginative and outstanding; Bruce Pelz, Quinn Yarbro, Don Christman and Lin Carter were among the winners, and I can only apologize to those whose names I didn't catch from Hal Clement and the other judges — I was too busy talking to Evelyn del Rey. But no one present failed to be impressed by Walt Daugherty and Elaine Ellsworth, whose "Android Rejects" costumes and pantomime are probably the all-time standout presentation in my memory of masquerades.

Then it was private party time again, but while such youngsters as Frank Dietz, Honey Wood and Barbara Silverberg reveled, I crept off to bed at the respectable hour of 4 a.m. and didn't wake up until almost 7.

Breakfasting with Peg Campbell and her husband (John, isn't it?) and Lester del Rey, I then wandered about through a maze consisting of Louis and Bebe Barron, JoAnn Wood, Donald Wollheim, Roy Squires Lois Lavender, Paul Turner, Jean Bogert, George Price, Mary Alice, Arnie Katz, Dick and Pat Ellington, Joe and Roberta Gibson, and a dozen others. For the benefit of completists, the dozen others consisted of the Goldstones, Sid Coleman, Ian and Betty Ballantine, Ross Rocklynne, the Busbys, Boyd Raeburn, Daniel Galouye, Dirce Archer and Vera Heminger, the No. 1 STAR TREK fan. I could also mention Len Moffat and Elmer Perdue, but that would throw me

off my count. And counting-time was about to begin. The Business Meeting took place, with Columbus and St. Louis competing for next year's Convention. St. Louis won the bid, and Missouri pharmacists are already laying in an extra supply of aspirin and tranquilizers.

Messrs. Pohl, Campbell, Silverberg and Spinrad were among the hardy souls who manned a panel discussion after Gene Roddenberry's talk; the auction went into action, and I drifted off to tape a radio program discussion with Fritz Leiber. When we emerged, it was precisely twenty minutes before the start of the Banquet and we decided to drift down into the dining room.

We drifted no further than the lobby — there encountering a waiting-line which extended from the dining-room doors all the way out into the parking lot. A staggering 725 banquet guests (some of whom never stopped staggering throughout the entire Convention) were queued up for admission. If it hadn't been for the kind offices of Norman Spinrad, I'd never have found a seat. But he saved me a place, and quicker than you can say *Bug Jack Barron,* I was esconsed across the table from Terry and Carol Carr and several other people whose names were impossible to catch in the deafening din. The dining room at the Claremont is a maze of pillars, cleverly designed to block the view of the podium while at the same time trapping every whisper of sound, and I spent most of the time trying to outguess Norman Spinrad regarding our banquet fare.

It was I who predicted that as a sentimental gesture we would be served some of the peas left over from the first Convention Banquet in 1939. But it was Norman who anticipated the chicken, with the tell-tale tire-marks. True, I did tell him we'd also be served rice — but the only reason I knew it was because I'd noticed a wedding ceremony at the hotel earlier in the day. Neither of us guessed the dessert, which had been donated, apparently, by the property department of the old *Dr. Kildare* television series.

But one doesn't attend a Science Fiction Convention Banquet to eat; the meal is just a toughening-up process to insure a strong stomach for the program itself.

Toastmaster Bob Silverberg took over in fine form as a series of awards were bestowed; the First Fandom Award to Jack Williamson, the E.E. Evans "Big Heart" Award to Walt Daugherty, the Little Men's "Invisible Man" Award to J. Francis McComas, and — at intervals — special Baycon Awards to Harlan Ellison, Gene Roddenberry and Silverberg. Randall Garrett and wife Alison, in full

costume, performed a calypso-type ballad based on a Poul Anderson Novel. Fan Guest of Honor Walt Daugherty spoke warmly and nostalgically of his years in science fiction.

The Trans-Oceanic Fan Fund, which annually imports a foreign fan to an American Convention or sends an American fan to a foreign convention, had brought the illustrious Takumi Shibano from Japan; he was introduced, honored for his fanactivity across the Pacific, while other foreign fans beamed up at him from the tables.

Then the Guest of Honor, Philip José Farmer, took over the platform to a standing ovation. The ovation was repeated, and deservedly so, at the conclusion of his address — in which he pledged himself personally to the principles of the "Triple Revolution" sociological concept and movement after an incisive analysis of the problems plaguing both science-fictional and actual society.

Following came the "Hugo" Awards, presented by Harlan Ellison. It was a great night for Harlan, who walked away with two trophies himself — Best Drama *"City On The Edge of Forever"* and Best Short Story *"I Have No Mouth But I Must Scream."* Harlan, who first appeared at a Convention in 1952, as science-fiction's answer to Tiny Tim, has really risen to the heights, and such recognition may have to some extent compensated him for smashing up his car earlier in the course of his stay.

Best Fanzine Award went to George Scithers, for *Amra,* a notable publication which represents only one aspect of his fan-activity. George Barr took a trophy as Best Fan Artist, and Ted White received a Hugo as Best Fan Writer.

Jack Gaughan won Best Pro Artist Award, to much acclaim; he will be Guest of Honor next year.

The Hugo Award for Best Pro Magazine went to the publication you are now clutching in your hot little hands. It was presented to Frederik Pohl (the guy whose name I couldn't remember) and accepted by publisher Robert M. Guinn. And it will probably end up as a doorstop for Judy-Lynn Benjamin.

Best Novelette Award was bestowed on Fritz Leiber for his *Gonna Roll The Bones,* and the Hugo for the Best Novella went to two winners: Anne McCaffrey for *Weyr Search* and Philip José Farmer for *Riders Of The Purple Wage.* The Best Novel Hugo was presented to Roger Zelazny, for *Lord Of Light.* After an SFWA Award was given to retiring president Bob Silverberg, the 725 guests arose from the five-hour-long session and made a mad stampede for the washrooms.

I made a brief, five-hour token appearance at the *Galaxy* suite and then bedded down with the spiders.

While the Tolkien Society of America convened the next morning, as is their hobbit, I breakfasted with Alan Nourse and his wife, then dashed off to visit with Richard Wade, who had "bought" me at the auction. Then I packed, looked in at the party which had just started in the Farmer's suite, and made a chauffeured dash for the airport in the company of Harry Harrison and his diminutive darling, Joan.

My last backward glimpse showed the Convention still going on — a concert of medieval music on the greensward beyond the hotel, preliminary to a full-scale Medieval Tournament. What happened there I'll never know; did Frank Robinson demolish T. Bruce Yerke with a broadsword, did Sid Rogers clout Art Widner with a pikestaff, and did George Nims Raybin get clobbered by Bill Rotsler's mace? The mayhem continued until midnight, but by that time I was back home, safe in bed with my *own* spiders.

Before drifting off to sleep, I spent a little time reflecting on Science Fiction Conventions, past and present, and soon began to dream of a few conclusions.

Conventions, no doubt about it, are bigger than ever. But bigger is not necessarily synonymous with better. There are, perhaps, a few changes which might be made to improve procedure and faciliate festivity.

For one thing, there's the matter of the banquet. Admittedly the high spot of the Convention, it has now reached a length where additional Hugos may have to be awarded for bladder-control. Five hours is a long time to sit still under optimum conditions; not only for diners but for the dignitaries and indignantaries on the podium.

In the early days, the Guest of Honor delivered his address at a special session in the Convention hall — until, somewhere along the line, it was decided that if he spoke at the Banquet, more ticket sales would result. Then the Hugo Awards became a part of Convention tradition, and this stretched the Banquet program to its present length. Inasmuch as Banquet attendance no longer constitutes a problem, I'm inclined to recommend that the old order be reinstated. Let the Guest of Honor appear for his talk before the entire Convention in the hall; it's no "honor" to sit and wait for three and a half hours of dining and din before facing an already restless audience.

Several years ago I put forth another suggestion, and I'd like to state it again. Now that Conventions have emerged from the small-scale attendance-problems of the depression years, there's no reason why membership fees couldn't be safely raised from $3 to $5 — and the additional sum turned over to

a professional convention-planning organization in whichever city is selected. The Committee would remain in full charge and sponsorship, but the professional convention-organizers would handle the increasingly difficult logistics — and deal firmly with hotels and suppliers to insure, under legal contract, that management promises are kept. When a thousand or more people gather together, some of them coming from great distances, at great personal expense, they deserve the kind of treatment and the kind of facilities afforded to "mundane" convention-goers. And an amateur Committee, with the best will in the world, and the ultimate expenditure of time and effort, just cannot cope with the situations which inevitably arise — the elevators which *don't* arise, for example — the bellhops who don't hop — the "24-hour-a-day" coffee-shop which closes due to lack of Labor Day help, or opens to serve thirty people out of thirteen hundred.

None of this is meant to be a reflection on the Baycon Committee or any previous or future Convention committee — and yet, until these matters are solved, it constitutes a reflection on all who strive so mightily to make these affairs a success. Perhaps this matter is worth consideration at future business sessions.

Meanwhile, the World Science Conventions go on — for fun, for fraternalization, for the enriching, exciting moments they provide. There's nothing else quite like them in this world — or out of it.

And if I recuperate in time, I'm going back next year.

END

Next Month in IF -

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All the Hugo winners in the next issue of the magazine that was voted world's best science-fiction magazine for the third straight year. Don't miss March *If* — a real collector's item!

THE DEFENDANT EARTH

by ANDREW J. OFFUTT

The green man from Mars came for justice — in a libel suit against Earth. He seemed to have a case!

Look, I didn't want to go to Washington in the first place. I am just a prosperous but honest trial attorney with clients in need of my gilded but glib tongue. I even winced when Miss Anderson said it was the Attorney General on the phone.

"You mean Hank Layton?"

"Um-hm."

"Oh, God." Henry C. Layton was a so-so lawyer who was Attorney General of these United States because he campaigned successfully for President-then-Governor Barber, rounded up a sizable campaign contribution and was from Barber's home town. I've always felt that the last point carried the most weight.

But he was the A.G., and I took the phone and listened to him babble frenetically. He had been sitting there trying to figure how to put the screws to a labor leader — with-

out forfeiting the union vote in the next election. Then he heard a little noise and smelled a funny smell and looked up. The gentleman from Mars had arrived, *sans* secretarial announcement, *sans* knock. And he hadn't come through the outer office — there hadn't been any shrieks.

After a brief discussion, Hank called his boss. In the first place President Barber was busy trying to figure how to put the screws on a corporation without losing its President's Club contribution. In the second place he was bugged at being interrupted by someone other than the military. He hung up. Apparently Hank tore his hair for a few hours and called good old me. Another Ohio boy.

I resisted. Hank predicated the predictable.

"Joe," he pleaded, "your country needs you, Joe."

I snorted at the telephone's dolorous voice. Hank resorted to a more basic appeal.

"This is a great opportunity for you, Joe."

I thought about that. National headlines: *Ohio Lawyer Saves World*. That should parlay into a cabin and a boat on Lake Lumen, at least. I sighed.

"Green, huh?"

"Green, Joe."

"Hm. What are the precedents? Whose system of jurisprudence prevails? Who calls and examines the jury? What color will they be? What's my fee?"

He admitted ignorance; it was up to me. As to fee: "Joe, it's your *country* you're serving!"

"I've noticed. The increase in social security I paid for my secretary this year was higher than the penalty I was charged because my quarterly tax estimate was low. Man, I'm serving!" I had made up my mind, in point of fact. But you don't sum up your case in your opening address. Besides, I wanted to hear his final plea.

I did. Internal Revenue, it seemed, was interested in my tax returns. They might even be interested in them for the duration.

"Just a minute, Hank," I said with malicious mien. "I've got to change the tape on my telephone recorder."

That, please be assured, brought silence from the Attorney General. After a passage of time no doubt measurable in seconds but seeming to span hours, I could no longer keep a straight voice. I, in lay terms, busted out laughing.

"Hank, I can't be blackmailed with threats of the Secret Police. And I have never and will not now accept a case on the telephone. But I will agree to confer with prosecution."

I waited, knowing he was calming himself, wisely curbing a profusion of appreciative noises and

taking a few deep breaths. "I am very pleased to hear that, counsellor," he said, and I nearly broke up again. "Suppose we send a plane down for you."

"Suppose I catch one myself. I'd just spend the whole flight on your plane thinking what a helluva way this is to spend all the taxes I've sent in the last five years. Besides, I'm in favor of private enterprise. Make me a room reservation and have me met, please. I'll wire my arrival time."

He agreed, and we parted, and I buzzed Miss Anderson. I told her I wanted a reservation on the first Washington-bound plane and asked her to send Turk in as soon as he showed up. Turk is my assistant. Able, willing, bright with book learning, fresh from passing the bar, and about as green as the Martian in Layton's office. Then I called home.

"What's for supper?"

"Hamburgers mit onions," my wife Jodie said. "You're not working tonight, remember, and no meetings for a change. Oh, and John and Judy."

My favorite at-home meal and my favorite talkers! "Damn! That makes it even worse, but . . . I'll be a little late."

She sighed; you know the sound. But she's well trained; we don't watch TV comedies. "Thanks for calling, honey. How late?"

"Ummm . . . maybe a few days, maybe a week. Can't be sure. I seem to be going to Washington." I watched Miss Anderson's progress across my office — one of life's little rewards — and conned a piece of paper she handed me. I nodded and winked at her. "I'm leaving at 6:17," I told the phone.

Jodie, as I said, is well trained She also knows me. She didn't say a word. My one true love knows when to make noises or wait silently, thereby forcing me to give her the straight nitty-gritty. I explained with brevity unbecoming a lawyer, and we said some sweet sad things, and she rang off to go do some packing for me.

The plane was not a headline-grabber, and I was safely in Washington a few hours later. Naturally the damned fools got me a suite. In Washington the only people who know how to be small are Internal Revenue.

Within an hour of that I was meeting with my learned opponent, the eminent Martian attorney Lars Larkas.

He was most definitely green, was Lars Larkas. His hairless humanoid body was, in point of fact, a very handsome olive color. This made it considerably more palatable than had he been, for instance, chartreuse or bilious. He possessed the standard complement of two arms and two legs — but with a pair of intermediary limbs thrown in. Ob-

viously a Martian in the wrestling-ring, or, if you're female, on the livingroom couch or at a drive-in movie, would be Bad News.

His eyes — two — were set at the sides of his head — one — and moved independently of each other, like those of an Earthly horse. The vertical slit of his, ah, nose and the nasty upcurving tusks resemble nothing I know of, aside from things I've seen in my own bed after several drinks and pizza with plenty of onions and garlic, topped off with pistachio ice cream. His big cupped ears stuck out like those of a certain recently-deceased movie star or a certain recent president.

The fact that his eyeballs were intensely white with irises of an equally intense red did not serve to put me wholly at ease with a visitor from a planet named after a war-god. My first impression of this first known visitor from space was one of inimicality. I hasten to add that I was wrong. He always looks that way. He can't help it, poor fellow; with big ears and red eyes and ferocious-looking tusks and a couple of extra limbs, what are you going to do?

I was introduced as an eminent attorney; so was Lars Larkas.

"My pleasure, counsellor," I said, with what I think was admirable aplomb.

"The pleasure is mine, counsellor," he said, in such perfect English that he blew my aplomb. His voice was startlingly soft, for his bulk; a delicate susurrus. He did not smile, I noticed. Thank God!

We got the preliminaries out of the way and agreed to sit; I am six-one and not accustomed to tilting back my head in conversation, since I have never formed the habit of conversing with overpaid pituitary freaks called basketball players. Seated, with several feet of carpet and free air between us to lessen the slope from the top of his head down to mine, I was considerably more at ease. The fact that he was far too big for his chair made him look even more imposing, and I made a mental note.

Perhaps I should add for the libidinously curious that he wore a handsome one-piece jumper or tunic or something of charcoal gray with a dark red stripe bisecting it down the front. The insignia of a practitioner of law. I liked that!

"You must stand high in the councils of Earth, Counsellor Blair, to have been chosen to represent your nation and, generally speaking, your planet in this matter," Lars Larkas said.

"That's something we should clear up," I told him. "There is a matter of jurisdiction involved. There may be one or two countries on Earth so niggardly as to object to so momentous a matter resting in the hands of the United States. I realize you have been through this

before, but would you mind stating to me the exact nature of your business here, and the complaint of your planet? I blush to admit it, but we have not been aware of your existence. As a matter of fact we have proven quite conclusively that intelligent life does not and cannot exist on Mars"

"Our philosophers have mentioned the same conclusion," Lars Larkas said, "as have yours." And we had a nice polite laugh together. He looked shocked as I continued to smile. I tried it with my mouth closed. He seemed to prefer that. I made a mental note. After all, it is rather unusual that man is the only beast on this planet that bares its fangs in *friendship!* Apparently the —to broaden the term's application — *men* of the planet called Red do not.

"I do not mind in the least, Counsellor Blair," Counsellor Lars said. (Patronym comes first on Mars, as in China. We all have our little peccadillos, as the American driver said in England just before he was creamed all over Berkely Square.) "As background information, there is indeed life on Mars. We are older than you, although not tremenduously older. Our race was full-formed though barbaric when your race first descended from the trees."

"You know that for fact?" I could not help interjecting. "Our descent, I mean."

He looked astonished — I guess. "Of course. I state nothing positively unless it is fact, Counsellor."

"Admirable in an attorney," I observed. Sets us apart from legislators. At any rate, Mister Scopes will be very glad to hear of man's origin, although a minister of my acquaintance will not. It'll play hob with his radio show — please excuse me and please continue, Mister Larkas. Excuse me—Counsellor Lars."

He shrugged. "Of course. We forgot that you are still wrestling with myth on this barbar — " He broke off and cleared his throat, which I thought was damned considerate of him. "There is also in fact intelligent life on Venus and on two of Jupiter's moons and, strangely, on Uranus, although the form it takes there would leave you breathless! It is rather more cold out there than on our worlds, and they are of course adapted to such a climate. Not to mention an impossibly abominable atmosphere." And I swear unto you Mister Lars Larkas shivered.

"We have a union; that's as good a word as any. A concordat, rather like your United Nations, although ours is effective."

To the quick, I thought. *Be sure to wipe off the blood when you pull out the blade, you Martian maledictor!*

"Naturally the matter of Earth has been brought up repeatedly,

particularly in recent years. Your people are a bit more warlike than most, but human nevertheless and intelligent, and we feel you would make valuable members of the Intrasystem Union."

Be damned! He did not, please observe, say that we are backward! He did *not* claim to vast superiority! He did *not* say we'd have to be quarantined, or wiped out, or that we'd been voted down or any of that old stuff. It is nice to know after a great deal of propaganda to the contrary that one is human and intelligent and would make a valuable contribution to an interplanetary alliance of Red-Eyed Monsters! (I stored that phrase away: REM's!)

"The matter has come to a vote and you have been accepted. However a blackball was cast, and a point of law was raised. The vote was completed on a contingency basis. That is the purpose of my visit. My planet has sent me here to state its case, Counsellor Blair, and to endeavor to arrive at a settlement."

"Just a moment," I said. "First, apparently you don't find our air overrich in oxygen? The gravity does not prevent too great a strain on your muscles or internal structure?"

He nodded vigorously, thereby confusing me; I did not learn until a bit later that a nod on Mars indicates a negative. We will not discuss their indication of a positive reaction or affirmative just now; not having been treated to the blessings of an antisexual religion, they are an astonishingly open and erotically frank people. Fortunately he said "Oh no" as he nodded, thereby giving me a clue. "I have had a series of inoculations and I take antoxygenates every six hours — Martian hours — and I am wearing a brace. I feel little discomfort. As a matter of fact, it certainly is easy to breathe here!"

"Try New York," I muttered. I had taken notice that he was as eager as I to get to know each other, to be polite, to otherwise take a roundabout course toward our final business, after the statement of which we might be enemies forever. It's the way things are done, you see. "You may be aware of our unfortunate tendency to debilitate with such things as intoxicants and depressants and the like. May I ask if — "

He waved a hand. No, two. Both on the same side. "Please feel free to drink coffee, which I find delightful, or alcohol, which we also use, or tobacco. That, you realize, we cannot afford, inasmuch as our air is thin and our lungs more important to us than yours to you."

I considered that from an empirical standpoint as I extracted a cigaret from one vest pocket — oh yes, I wear them; we conserva-

tives need badges to distinguish us from the socialists. I found a book of matches in another. He watched with interest and, I believe, something akin to horror. Or perhaps pity. I was careful with my smoke, which gave rise to a thought. I went to the bathroom and turned on the light. Uh-huh; at once the blower or rather sucker, the little ventilator thing most hotel bathrooms, have came on. I left the door open and the light on and blew my smoke that way. It went wherever bathroom blowers blow their bathroomy essences.

"This litigatory point existing between our planets, then, is the only factor holding Earth back from an open-arms welcome in the Intresystem Union, is that it?" I realized we'd have to do this all over; I had no secretary and thought it impolite and impolitic to switch on my recorder. I filled the tape later, and we later made an agreement to tape our conversations, too.

"Precisely that, Counsellor Blair, and well put," he said, patting his — that is, making the Martian sign of assent/agreement.

"Good. You seem rather more formal than we, by the way, and although I must admit I enjoy being called Counsellor just as if I were as important as someone with a Ph.D in Physical Education, I think it might be simpler if you just called me Joe, Counsellor Lars."

Then is when I got scared. First his eyes swelled up, and he became in every sense of the word a Bug-Eyed, ah, Martian. His fingers twitched. All of them, on all four arms, which is one hell of a lot of twitching. His ears moved. His big lower lip trembled, and the upper one writhed.

And then I saw the tears begin to creep down his green cheeks, glittering like emeralds and trembling as his cheeks seemed to shudder. He rose, slowly. I braced myself, wondering how six or eight of my valuable innards had got themselves jammed up in my throat. I wondered, too, what sort of weapon my cigaret would prove against an acre or so of green flesh.

He executed a bow that would have cricked Charlie Chan's back and a tear made a dark spot on the Federal Gold carpet. He rose slowly.

"You honor me most highly, most eminent Counsellor-of-Law of Earth," he said. "I shall never forget this moment. Nor shall the authorities on my planet fail to be apprised of your obvious connate comity! With honor this representative of the Sons of Lars accepts your name, Joe."

Well, I couldn't think of much to do save sigh gustily and beam at him. I certainly wasn't about to tell him his English vocabularly transcended mine! At any rate, with a great deal of obvious

ritual, he then reciprocated, and I was given permission/honor to call him Lark. (Lark! 400 pounds of long green!) I stood up and damn near broke my back bowing. It seemed the least I could do, inasmuch as I was totally unable to obtain the cooperation of my lachrymal glands in producing a tear or two for the occasion. Then we both sat, and I started another cigaret, and my old buddy Lark let me have it between the eyes.

"For many decades, and you realize of course we can and will spell out the full period of time, Joe; for many decades, I say, the inhabitants of your planet have heaped malicious, malevolent, and maleficient malignity on the gentle people of Mars. In your periodicals, on your radio, on your television, in books of both stiff and soft cover, in conversation and drama and even poetry, you have designated the gentle inhabitants of this sun's fourth planet as every form of monster and imperialist invader. The *War of the Worlds* of the Englishman Wells and the radio version of the same drama by his codefendant of the same patronym represent only the most infamous of the repeated libeling of my people by yours."

He paused for breath. So did I. I remembered about then to close my mouth. The first interplanetary libel suit, with Earth's entire future hinging upon its outcome, and *I* was supposed to play Perry Mason for my entire planet!

"Said libel will certainly have an inelectable effect on the relations of our two planets and our races for years, decades, perhaps even centuries to come. Thus my outraged people does state its intent to implead our case against persons living and the executors and administrators, heirs and assigns of persons deceased, of Herbert G. Welles, Orson Welles, Edgar R. Burroughs, Otis A. Klein —" and he went on for seven or nine minutes with a string of names that sounded as if they'd been copied from the telephone directories of at least three of New York's boroughs; I hadn't known there were so many pen-pushers and typewriter-wranglers in the world. He finally terminated with: " . . . and the planet Earth . . . !"

Without giving him pause for breath I made a figurative leap forward, mental sabre and raygun in hand. "You mean to tell me that the advanced race of a planet older than this, said race having not only interplanetary travel but being indeed a part of an interplanetary union, is bringing suit against my entire world for *fiction?* The countless stories by imaginative writers whose plots involve Martian menaces?"

"I do," he said, unintimidated.

I nodded. "All right," I said, with a great deal more confidence than

I felt. "Obviously we are guilty, however improper an admission that may be for an attorney to make. However I make it entirely off the record and will no doubt reconsider before you take any official pretrial depositions. May I ask what are the consequences? What are our grounds for fighting the case? In other words what the hell are you suing for?"

Lars Larkas of Mars — they call it "Srrickle," which means "dirt," same as "earth" — drew himself up and formed twin steeples with all four hands. "You will show cause why you should not be denied membership in the Intrasystem Union and indeed forbidden to leave your planet until such time as full recompense has been made to our gentle people."

Well, "gentle" beats "peaceloving," anyhow. "Please explain 'full recompense,' Lar — Counsellor Lars," I requested, getting formal. I always get formal when I am afflicted with the regrettable human debility known as anger.

" 'Full recompense,' " he said, "as stated and defined shall mean that for an equal period of years — yours — and in an equal number of publications and dramatic presentations, the people of Earth shall be shown Mars in its true character as a gentle, friendly planet — "

Well, I thought, at least that isn't too ba —

" — while Earthmen are clearly depicted as inimical, malicious, malevolent, maleficient and — "

" — malignant," I finished. "Not to mention morbid and mordacious and pretty darned morose. Good God, Lark, that ain't possible! First we have to prove we did not do something you can prove we've done with all four arms tied behind you. And if we don't, we're quarantined like measle-ridden first-graders while we spend decades or whatever cranking out tales about good-guy Martians and badguy Earthmen! Where the hell's the justice in that sort of one-way street?"

Once again my new Brother-under-the-Name (that's what they call it when you're on a first-name basis) looked shocked, or at the very least astonished. "But Joe! It is fair in the extreme! There are no punitive damages specified whatever, and the judges' hands are completely tied as to sentence; they cannot levy so much as a gram of uranium in punitive judgment! You should have heard the demands before the Intrasystem Union's Civil Council at last agreed on *this!*"

"Thank them for me," I said, with a dryness untranscended by any possible quantity of gin and vermouth. Which prompted me to excuse myself and reach for the telephone and dial the appropriate number. "Room Service? Blair in Suite 714. One bottle of vermouth, one bottle of gin, a handful of

olives, a lemon, ice and an assortment of glasses on the double." I paused and then, learning fast the ways of Our Nation's Capitol, added, "by order of the Attorney General!" I blotted the polite voice with my finger and dialed again. "Please call Attorney General Layton, who is somewhere in this hotel, and advise him Mister Blair is most anxious to confer with him. Thank you very much." Another inside number got me another hotel voice. I identified myself and dropped Hank Layton's name. "Please get me Miss Helen Anderson in Portsmouth, Ohio." I gave her the zip area or whatever it is and the number and hung up.

"Please pardon me, Counsellor," I said. "Have you brought along a secretary or an assistant?"

"One of each. You were calling yours?"

I nodded. "I can't do a damned thing without Miss Anderson, although I just realized it. She will call my assistant, and they'll be up here, or else. We will be ready to meet with you at any time after ten in the morning. Make it eleven. When is the trial set for, Lark, and when may we visit Mars."

"The trial will be at your convenience, Joe. And you may not visit Mars."

"How and to whom do I appeal?"

"To the Union; I can help with that. But it will do no good; you realize of course that this case will decide when the people of Earth are ready to leave Earth."

I stood up and enjoyed gazing down at him for the few seconds he remained seated. "The men of Earth will be in space and on Mars within the year, Lars Larkas, and then we will see what the Intrasystem Union thinks of *our* lawsuit!"

He was up now, and looking very much taken aback. "What suit?"

"Never mind," I said airily, going to answer the knock at the door. "I'll think of one between now and then!" I yanked open the door "Hello! Just bring all that right in and put it there by that awful orange chair. Will you stay for a martini?"

Room Service laughed. "Man, I heard you were from the South!"

"Southern Ohio," I said. "Lark . . . I guess we're through for tonight. You have a tremendous head start on me, but I shall try to make it up by eleven in the morning."

"I will telephone," Lars Larkas said, and departed. He bent for the doorway.

I grabbed the bottle of gin and issued the order to the scarlet-coated Room Service to crack open the vermouth; that's harder. "Do you have any idea, any idea at all," I asked, "just who THAT was?"

"No sir," he said, his eyes dancing. "All those Martians looked just alike to me."

When Attorney General Henry C. Layton came in, Room Service and I were standing integratedly in the middle of that Federal Gold carpet screaming with laughter, knuckling at tear-streaming eyes.

I began to see how easy it would be to let go and plunge onesself into this nose-in-the-taxpaid-trough business. All you have to do is look busy and act important. I began to look busy. I learned quickly that a crowd-pleaser and symbol of status is the size of one's staff. I had no desire to avail myself of the services of the myriad of bright-eyed husband-hunters and eager young men whose services were offered, nay urged, by both the Attorney General and the President.

The fact is I don't like the Feds, and told a few so. But I did create enough research projects and typing to tie up a hundred or so. It occurred to me that whatever I came up with could not look too easy, and would have to be done Washington-style. Too, there was the necessity of window-dressing to impress my worthy opposition. So I assigned a few bright-eyed husband-hunters and eager young men — amazing how many were Ohioans — to reading periodicals. Every time they came across a story with a reference to Mars or Martians, no matter how minuscule and no matter whether favorable or otherwise, they were to have the entire story typed and the author contacted. This proved very difficult in some cases. Writing types seem to move a great deal. Whether this is occasioned by wanderlust or need of a good attorney is a problem I hope to report on later, now that I am an honorary member of several organizations whose existence somehow escaped my knowledge for thirty-six years.

I had a steady stream of writers and editors and even agents through my suite, each man giving a statement and most of them hazarding opinions and advice and most of them accepting a bite or two of the bottles I kept about. Publishers I didn't bother with; they can hustle their own drinks.

Meanwhile Turk — my assistant; I've mentioned him, haven't I? — and Miss Anderson legged it all over and out of town. When I found a trustworthy youngster from Cincinnati who had not graduated from anywhere in the inscrutable East and who seemed to be interested in more than social-climbing, attire, females, and not-working, I grabbed him for my very own. Then I sent Turk home to get some continuances — he had a letter from the President, no less — and try to keep my clients happy. Miss Anderson formed a friendship, meanwhile, with her Martian counterpart, Miss Omilara Larkas — a cousin of Lark's, the Martian nepotist!

Omilara nearly lost her gleam-

ing-tusked head; she was a nut over imaginative writing and went wild over her stream of writers and editors. Some nut from Pennsylvania invited her down to his farm to attend a writers' conference; another from New York talked earnestly with her about setting up a reciprocal speaking-engagement arrangement. She also had a weakness for Maker's Mark and branch water — tapwater sufficed — and girltalk with Miss Anderson.

I had to hire her in the end, inasmuch as she won our case for us.

"We're ready to go to court," I told Lars Larkas three weeks after his arrival on Earth. (He had yet to tell us how, and we had not then discovered his means of transport. It played hell, as you know, with several transportation company stocks for a few days, until they jumped into the new mode, led by the new Hughes Cave Company.) "Any time you're ready, Lark. Where do we go?"

"We set it up via television," he said, looking surprised. I remain unconscionably and unreconstructably proud of the number of times I made him look surprised, that mabigionic Martian! "Your Telstar, I admit, will make it easier. But — are you sure — "

I smiled — with my mouth closed. "Very sure, Lark. That's why I thought we should have this little pretrial conference. You'll join me in a Martini, I presume?"

"Of course, Joe." And he made a Martini/ Martian play on words I will not even record.

"Lark," I said, sitting back and swinging one leg over the other comfortably while pawing my vest for cigarets, "you and your people should be ashamed of yourselves. You have attempted to bamboozle, hoodwink, and otherwise pull the wool over the eyes of a fine people who haven't had the opportunity to study you as you have us. And to steal from us."

He gaped. Nasty-looking, those tusks. One would think a civilized race would do something orthodontal about that reminder of an earlier, less friendly existence.

"It is indeed fortunate for Earth that she has a President and an Attorney General of such wisdom they saw fit to call in the most brilliant counsel on the planet to handle your allegations," I said with a perfectly straight face. "Hands down, Lark; I said allegations, and allegations I mean. Drink up. I do not plan to answer your charges. As a matter of fact I'll have them thrown out of court."

I had waited — malevolently, maliciously, etc., etc. — until he got the glass to his lips. We had commandeered some lab beakers to facilitate his and his assistants' drinking between their tusks — and now I was gratified to see him splutter and stain the nice brand-

new Earth-tailored suit he wore. With vest. And four armholes. And dark red stripe. He peered at me over the rim of the glass, not deigning to brush at his Martini-spotted clothing. Then, to show his calm, he lifted the glass again. And I let him have the other barrel.

"As a matter of fact," I said, flicking my cigaret in the best Hollywood manner and watching an amorphous serpent of pearly smoke climb ceilingward, "I will bring not one but two countersuits. The second is one that we, and I hope the Intrasystem Union's Civil Council, considers even more reprehensible, under the circumstances."

He stared. He ignored the new wetspots on his suit. That's one advantage of charcoal worsted flannel; spots fade quickly and don't show, unless they're mustard or Hollandaise.

"First, that the people of Mars have for several decades published and dramatically exhibited malevolent, etceteraetcetera ad M-finitum libel on the friendly people of this planet, by showing Earthmen as barbarous invaders and monsters attacking and displaying multiform and manifold attitudes of enmity toward the people of our great and respected sister-planet, Mars. Not only does this basely libel the friendly people of this world, but in view of your suit it demonstrates your people's regrettable and barbaric lack of the civilized trait of fairness and justice. How d'you like them olives?"

He put down his glass.

"Wait," I said, as he started to speak. "Before you start to speak, I remind that you that even though you came here on an unfriendly and indeed underhanded mission and we met as opponents and, so to speak, enemies, I invited you almost at once to call me by my personal name. That clearly indicates the inherent friendliness, the, as I believe you put it, innate comity of the people of Earth. You yourself have reported that back; gonna help my case, isn't it?" I smiled at him. "Nothing personal you understand, Lark, although you do represent your government on a career basis, and I do hate Feds. But then there's the matter of the second charge, purely aside from the fact that you've just published just as many novels and dramas in which *we* were monsters.

I let him stew while I poured some more Martini, offered him some with a gesture and an eyebrow-question — he refused with a violent nod — and lighted up a new cigaret. I hadn't enjoyed myself so much since I nailed that snotty DA's son for larceny and Possession back in 1962.

"Far more serious in my eyes is your obvious cynicism, your obvious dishonesty as a people. You are an uncreative lot, aren't you?

War of the Worlds by Tornos Bors indeed! *Swordsmen of Earth* by Flans Pollans indeed! *Menace of the Green Planet* hmp! Your so-called writers have stolen and palmed off as their own all of our imaginative fiction, changing only the names to protect the Martians!"

Watching him collapse and begin to look small in his big chair — I'd had a hernia-size one provided, to make him less overbearing, I went on. "Your people brought this suit against us only in order to cover up decades, centuries of plagiarism, to keep us restricted to this planet."

I leaned back slowly and enjoyed a large sip of good cold Martini. My baby-blue eyes remained on Lars Larkas' red ones. "I might," I said very quietly, "even go so far as to ask why your name bears such a strong resemblance to one invented by an Earth *creator* named Burroughs."

"How . . . did you . . . find out?"

"That does it! I remind you, Brother-under-the-Name, of our agreement of three weeks' duration: I have been recording ever since you came into this room."

It seems to me that the best thing to do was allow him to report home and let his leaders back down, which they did, and start taking steps to set up a wholesale book-burning, which they did. I admit I felt a little bad about not pressing to obtain royalties for all those earthly writers whose works were so well known on Mars under other names, and reprinted almost verbatim all over a planet whose people had one terrible debility; a lack of creative literary ability. But they are scientific whizzes, and it seemed to me at the time — and now — that we are best advised to get things started on a friendly basis. So I got them to withdraw the suit and the blackball, and we were officially contacted by the Intrasystem Union last week. And I am a thoroughly dishonest so-and-so; I have told no one how I won the dismissal. And now I have a seven-foot green secretary, since Omilara naturally got her tail canned — figure of speech; tails they *don't* have — when Lars Larkas and his people found out who'd spilled the beans to my Miss Anderson.

And I am meeting with several presidents of several writers' groups next week, to discuss my new job: I'm apparently going to represent a few thousand writers on Mars, through my contact and business partner, Lars Larkas.

The most enormous and also best-paying market for speculative fiction of all time has just opened up on a planet without speculators, and someone has to act as agent.

I figure that if standard rate for foreign sales is twenty percent, I can charge at least double that for interplanetary agenting fees. END

IF...and WHEN

by LESTER DEL REY

There are nine and sixty means
of upsetting human genes
And every single one of them is . . .

Science fiction has been called escape literature, and the term may be correct — but in a way no literary critic has yet realized. The writers and readers apparently aren't escaping *from* the problems of the world, but *to* the problems that the rest of the world doesn't yet know about.

So far, those major problems seem to come along about once every decade; or the public becomes aware of them at that rate. Twenty years ago, people became aware of the danger of atomic destruction. Then there was consternation as the first Sputnik sailed overhead. In both cases, science fiction had discussed the ideas so long that there was no shock left to the events for readers of our magazines.

Now there is a new problem, this time as a result of the amazing progress of biology. Most of the possibilities will be far from new to science fiction, but I suspect that full realization of what man can do in the near future in tinkering with life will be a more profound shock to most people than any previous problem.

This is all discussed in *The Biological Time Bomb,* a book by Gordon Rattray Taylor. It's the first complete survey I've seen for the general public, and it does cover almost everything being discussed by scientists up to the time of its publication. While many of the

possibilities will be somewhat familiar to science-fiction readers, the impact of the total collective ability of man to alter himself and his race in the next half century is impressive — perhaps even "more earth-shaking than the atom bomb," as the jacket copy claims.

One of the most interesting parts of the book is the time-table given in the last chapter. By the year 2000, Taylor lists such probabilities as baby-factories, artificial increase of intelligence in men and animals, the creation of one-celled life forms, and even the making of half-man, half-animal monsters — or chimeras. Even before then, we should have the power to choose the sex of our children and to build artificial viruses. A little further in the future, there should be control of ageing, control of heredity by manipulation of the genes, and such "horrors" as disembodied brains linked to computers.

Such a listing could come out of science fiction, of course. But in this case, Taylor cites the experimental work and the words of the scientists in the field, and the time-table is one he has averaged from their predictions. He also makes a serious attempt to analyze the impact of such developments on human society, together with the dangers to be faced.

Generally, it's a book worth reading carefully. The soft cover edition should be out shortly; look for it.

There's nothing new about man tinkering with life or even himself, of course. Skeletons dug up from neolithic times show evidence of trepanning — the boring of a hole in the skull to relieve pressure or let the demons out. Men deformed the feet of their women and tattooed and circumsized themselves from ancient days. They also changed much of the plant and animal life around them. Wheat was evolved from the primitive einkorn before written records, and the dog has been so completely altered and diversified by breeding that we can't be sure of his original ancestry.

So far, men haven't made any radical changes in their own nature, but our literature suggests that the idea has been with us for a long time. Plato's *Republic* represented special types of men — soldiers, workers, etc. — bred to type, like ants in a colony. And a fair amount of what science proposes to do was covered in Huxley's *Brave New World*.

Even the cyborg — the mixture of cybernetic machine and human organism — has been foreshadowed. Bifocal glasses are probably the most common example, dating from the time of Ben Franklin, though the cybernetic element of control was still in the eye of the beholder, in that case.

The only change has been in the sudden development of cybernetics,

medicine and biology within the last twenty years. Recently, for instance, the newspapers carried the story of an artificial arm which is controlled by nerve impulses and powered by electric energy. We are learning to overcome the body's immune reaction against anything other than its own tissue, and transplanted limbs and organs are no longer news. We've developed infertility drugs, and we've begun to tinker with the DNA molecule — the huge molecule that controls heredity and makes us what we are.

What we have not yet begun is the real investigation of the consequences, except in science fiction. Larry Niven's *Organleggers* in *Galaxy* suggests what might happen in a world where there was more demand for spare human parts than any normal supply. But, as Taylor points out, even such a simple thing as controlling the sex of our offspring can have a major impact on society. What happens if most parents want boys, as they will in many parts of the world? If there are two or three males for each female, what happens to our family institutions? If the female to male ratio is about even in one country and there's a dearth of females in another, will we have another war and rape of the Sabines? Of course, if society can adapt to the change, this might be an answer to the population explosion.

On the other hand, the possibility of extreme prolongation of life and youthful vigor within the next fifty years would seem to make controlling the population impossible. So far, fortunately as I see it, there is evidence that the DNA in the cells doesn't quite maintain itself perfectly, which reduces the chance of immortality; but even that is questionable for the future, since Japanese geneticists have found the cell's self-healing power greater than we expected and are studying ways to improve this.

Anyhow, with organs grown to replace defective ones or with artificial cybernetic organs, life almost certainly is going to be greatly prolonged.

Cloning also rears its head in the book. This is the trick of taking a few cells from the body and growing them in a culture; since each cell carries the DNA responsible for the whole organism, it should be possible to grow a whole new individual. It has already been done with such vegetables as the carrot. The personality would be different, due to different environmental forces, but the basic abilities would be the same. How many super-geniuses should we grow from each natural one?

Most of these steps involve tinkering with the individual. They may prove rather shocking to the general reader, but no permanent racial harm can come from

them, except for the impact of such a change on the society. They are all reversible. If cyborgs prove harmful, we can stop creating them — or man-animal chimeras, or whatever. A sex imbalance will be corrected by changing demands created by the scarcity of one sex or the other. Even immortality (that is, an extreme life extension) would probably be corrected when the population got out of hand; the food wars would see to that.

But tinkering with the DNA molecule is another matter, and it might not be reversible. Unquestionably within the next fifty years men will learn how to alter the tiny genes within the egg and sperm cells and change heredity. Scientists can already substitute part of one virus for another and create a viable new virus. But now we are tinkering with the basic germ plasm of the human race.

All the results of such changes would not show up at once. Some might well not show up for generations, as recessive characteristics lay dormant at first. There is already evidence of gene-linked characteristics that can wait for generations to develop. And by the time the results were in, there might be no chance to return to the immensely varied racial germ stock.

Who can determine what changes in heredity should be made, anyhow? Such power would hardly remain in the hands of scientists; it has too much political power inherent in it. And even assuming absolute benevolence, who can be sure of what characteristics to breed for — or build into mankind?

Apparently, we have already been tinkering with this far more than we realized until recently. Twenty years ago, we were fairly sure that mutations — changes in the DNA-heredity factors — could only occur as a result of something as violent as ionizing radiation from X-rays, atomic explosions, etc. Now nothing is so simple.

Viruses infect bacteria and swap DNA fractions, producing mutations; the same effect may cause cancer in human tissue. Drugs can produce such changes. Thalidomide caused deformed births, though no one so far has determined whether this change is hereditary. But there is increasing evidence that LSD and other hallucinogens alter the germ plasm.

We don't know what other drugs may effect such changes. And we've bombarded our systems with an incredible variety of chemicals, from preservatives in our food through pain-killers to industrial by-products in the atmosphere. Even without trying, we may have been tinkering with our own heredity. If we do so deliberately, the results may seem better — but in being less random, they may prove to be much harder to correct.

There's even a degree of "social" tinkering. Every time we save a child from dying of some hereditary problem, we theoretically weaken the racial germ stock by keeping an individual with what would previously have been a self-defeating defect. And we're a lot less sure of what's hereditary than we once thought. Even the high amount of near-sightedness may have come about because eyeglasses made the defective vision so easy to correct that it could then compete with those having normal vision. (One "defect" that seems unimportant — since men will probably never lose the ability to grind lenses now.)

Certainly the increasing innoculation of children against all kinds of diseases will tend to place less advantage on a high ability to fight off disease, and possibly weaken the race.

Such "social" tinkering has been largely a passive response to developments, based mostly on a failure to re-examine old values. But from now on, as Taylor points out in his last chapter, society must take full responsibility. The decisions that must be made in the use of the newly developed possibilities for human-engineering are too big for a few scientists or a group of semi-informed politicians. (And even the decision not to tinker is itself too big for any group now existing to accept.)

Sooner or later, he believes, we're going to have to create a responsible organization to oversee the developments and plan for the integration of the results into our way of life — or we'll lose that way of life.

This is the only really frightening concept I find in the book. It's a case where there has to be some answer, but no answer looks good. And here for the first time we get out of the proper element of science fiction and into politics where no writer has done more than skirt around the problems.

Maybe there will be a political answer. In that case, I have a feeling that ten years from now we'll get a book on the next great problem to face humanity. It might be called *The Political Time Bomb* — a frightening examination of the new breakthroughs in political science and the dangers there that must be controlled.

By then, I hope, science fiction will have helped to let us escape into the future ahead of time, as it has done with all our other major problems END

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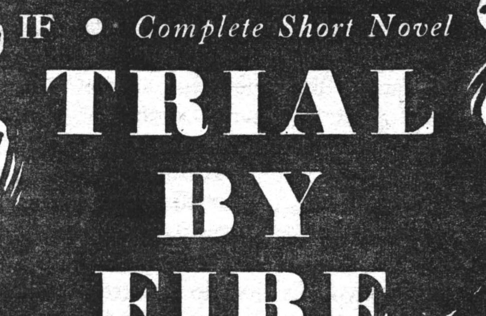


by JAMES E. GUNN

His crime was the foulest known to man — the practice of science — and the penalty was execution!

Illustrated by

"The people against John Wilson," a man said. It was chanted like an incantation, and it echoed in his head. "The people against John Wilson. The people against John Wilson."

John Wilson. John Wilson. Then he remembered. *He* was John Wilson. He tried to open his eyes and found they were open. Slowly, as he tried to remember what he had been doing before this moment, where he had been, who he was, his surroundings swam into focus.

He was in a large room with a high ceiling. He was conscious of the size before he saw it. Varnished wood was slick under his hands. He was seated in a wooden armchair at a long wooden table. The wood was light colored, oak perhaps. Opposite him was another long table. Two men sat on the other side of it, facing him. One was a big, blocky man with light brown hair and lumpy features. The other was smaller and younger. He had a large nose and dark, curly hair that grew low on his forehead. His lips seemed set in a perpetual sneer, and his close-set, black eyes squinted now at Wilson, looking into Wilson's eyes speculatively.

Wilson stared back. He wondered why this young man was so interested in him.

Another voice was speaking. "John Wilson, please stand," it said. The voice had said the same thing before.

"Can you stand up?" asked a voice beside him. The voice was light and drawling, with an edge of irony.

Wilson put his hands on the arms of the chair and pushed himself erect.

It was no particular effort, but once he was up the room spun around him in a blur of alternating darkness and light. The illusion reminded him of a carousel ride when he was young, and he watched it with interest and nostalgia.

As the room began to slow and settle into place, he saw a man placed higher than he was some ten paces to his right. The man was seated behind a tall, broad desklike piece of furniture. The front of it was made of oak, too, and it was carved into patterns of rectangles within rectangles.

The man behind the desk leaned forward. He had gray, wavy hair and a triangular face. "I say again, John Wilson," he said, "you are accused of arson and of murder in the first degree. How do you plead?"

"Arson?" Wilson thought. "Murder?" Had he burned something? Killed somebody? He could not remember. He could remember flames, yes, flames roaring in the night and forked, black figures running back and forth. And he could remember a silent crowd that waited for the figures

with clubs and pitchforks and axes, and some of the black figures chose the flames. But it was more like the memory of a nightmare than of something real. It had the spectatorlike quality of a dream. Was it reality instead, something he had pushed into the subconscious through fear or guilt?

The drawling voice beside him helped. "My client pleads not guilty," it said.

"Thank you, Mr. Youngman," said the man behind the desk. Only it was not a desk, of course. It was a bench, and the man was a judge.

He was being tried for arson and murder, Wilson told himself, and he couldn't remember what he had done or what had brought him here or, now that he thought about it, anything of his past. Was he a victim of amnesia? Of course not. There was no such thing as amnesia. Of that he was sure. Only he didn't know why he was sure.

Wilson sank back into his chair, thankful he had been relieved of the compulsion to speak, thankful, too, that someone had believed in him enough to speak up for his innocence.

His heart overflowing with warmth, Wilson turned his head to the left. Seated beside him was a tall, thin man with short, sandy hair and a face like a beardless Lincoln. His long legs were curled under his chair, His body was curled, too, until it rested on its spine. He was cadaverously thin. His face was tanned, and his indolent body seemed coiled with wiry strength. He smiled at Wilson and nodded as if to say, "You don't need to say anything. We're in this together, you and I."

Or so Wilson interpreted it, with relief — partly because he did not know what to say, partly because he was not sure he could muster the will to speak.

Men and women were being questioned, one at a time, as they sat in a chair on a platform raised a foot above the floor to the right of the judge's bench. The women seemed much alike and so did the men. The women were dressed in long dark dresses of gray or black or dark blue cotton, the men in coveralls with blue shirts or occasionally a dark suit with a blue shirt underneath open at the throat. So, too, were dressed the men at the table opposite him. One of them was not at the table now. He was asking questions of the men and women who sat in the chair. The younger one sat at the table. He said nothing. He stared at Wilson or occasionally allowed his gaze to drift around the room.

The questioning had been going on for some time now, Wilson decided. He must have drifted away again because half the chairs facing him in front of the oak partition now were filled with men and wom-

en. Like the young man at the table, they spent most of their time looking at him.

"Do you have a financial interest in any scientific laboratory?" the blocky man was asking. "Has any member of your family attended college? Taught in college? Performed research? Has any member of your family benefited from any of the so-called miracle treatments for organic disease? Do any of them have artificial organs?"

"Objection!" Youngman said occasionally.

"Overruled," said the judge.

If the answer to any of his questions was "yes," the blocky man said, "You are dismissed," and if the answer to all of them was "no," he would turn to Youngman with a little bow. Then Youngman would uncoil himself and standing negligently beside the table ask idle questions. He was not content to ask the same questions over and over like the blocky man. He asked some of the men and women whether they had made up their minds about the case, some whether they had seen the university burn, some whether they knew the defendant, and one whether he had any prejudices about science or scientists.

"Objection, your honor," said the blocky man.

"Sustained," said the judge, and he turned to Youngman to say, "I must warn you, Counselor, that this line of questioning is not permissible. Science is not on trial here. Nor are scientists."

"Exception," said Youngman. "The clerk will note the fact as grounds for appeal. Science and scientists are on trial here, as they are throughout this nation and throughout the world. Universities are being burned; scientists are being hunted down and exterminated . . . "

"I must caution you, Counselor, that you are risking contempt proceedings with this outburst," the judge said.

"I will call attention to the irregularities of this trial," Youngman said, "as the basis for an appeal not only to a higher court but to a higher jury." He waved his hand toward the back of the room. "There is the proof of the nature of this trial . . . "

"If you do not control yourself I will also dismiss you from this case," the judge said.

Wilson let his attention wander. To his left was a wooden railing. In the railing were three wooden gates on hinges, one at either side of him and one behind him where the railing jogged to allow room for a doorway with double doors into the courtroom.

Beyond the railing was the audience. They sat on pewlike benches. They sat silently in their dark dresses and their blue shirts, their hands folded in their laps or

their arms folded arcoss their chests. They stared at him. Wilson could not read their expressions, whether it was judgment suspended or judgment passed. If he was an arsonist and a murderer they would hate him, of course. Good men and women were bound to hate evil.

Here and there in the audience were a few persons who did not seem to fit with the rest — a beautiful blonde girl with short hair, young men with hard faces and watchful eyes, a few men in uniform on the front row.

Behind the audience, at the back of the aisles, were the television cameras pointed at the front of the room, at the men and women in the witness chair or at the lawyers or at the judge or at someone behind Wilson, but mostly at Wilson himself. He amused himself with watching the little red eye beneath the long lenses, particularly when he could tell that the lens was pointing toward him.

The blocky man — what had the judge called him? Oh, yes, the district attorney — was talking to the jury, but he kept turning toward the television cameras. The twelve chairs for the jury were placed in two rows of six; they all were filled. Above them was a crowded balcony. The balcony was reached by a narrow corridor behind the paneled partition that formed the back of the jury box and by a circular staircase at the end of the corridor. In the balcony were people who kept pointing things at him.

The district attorney was saying, "I shall prove that this man, in league with others like him, planned the burning of the University to discredit the Lowbrow Party and the Senate Subcommittee on Academic Practices and in an attempt to gain sympathy for the egghead cause, that the fire got out of hand and killed many of the arsonists themselves, but that this man, John Wilson, escaped and made his way to the Gulf Coast, where he attempted to sell his services and his nation's secrets to a foreign power and where he was captured by courageous members of this nation's national police force and returned to the Federal Penitentiary to stand trial . . ."

There was no doubt, Wilson thought. The expression of the audience was hate.

Before the scene faded out he decided that he liked the other dream better. As this one ended he felt Youngman take him by the hand in farewell. Then he was in some kind of wheeled vehicle. From the vibration he thought it was moving fast. He was lying flat on a kind of cot. On the other side was another cot. Someone was sitting on it. In a moment he recognized the dark-haired young man from the courtroom.

"He keeps coming out of it," the young man said. He had an eastern accent. His voice had a sneer to it, too. "Give him a bigger dose."

Someone leaned over him, shutting off his view of the young man, and he felt something cold and metallic placed against his bare arm. He heard a hissing noise, and the cold object went away.

He turned on his left side and let his eyelids descend. After a suitable period he tried to read the note Youngman had pressed into his hand. The light through the barred window beside him flickered, but he finally made out the words.

"You're under some kind of sedation. Next time try to cut yourself. We'll analyze the blood. Destroy the note. It's soluble in water."

How interesting, Wilson thought. He worked his hand up to his mouth and slipped the paper between his lips. It dissolved all right. It tasted like peppermint...

II

He dreamed. He dreamed that he woke in the transparent darkness just before dawn. Someone was hammering at the door. "Doctor," the door murmured through the house. "Doctor." He got up quickly and slipped into his white coat. He never appeared to the villagers dressed like an ordinary man. That would corrode their confidence.

When he reached the door, it transmitted to him the voice of an excited woman. "Doctor, my little girl!" And more knocking.

He pressed a button beside the door, as he ran his fingers through his hair. It was the blonde Pat Helman, as he had thought. He could see her plainly in the mirror beside the door. She had her daughter in in her arms. They were alone.

Wilson took a stimulant pill from the dispenser beside the door, shook off the last remnants of his disturbed slumber and told the door to open. "Come in," he said to the woman.

He took the little girl from her mother and carried her into the laboratory, shutting the door of the white-tiled room carefully in the mother's face. The girl was hot and breathing rapidly but still conscious. He placed the girl on the diagnostic table and set the dials for her identification.

The computer clicked as it searched its memory bank for the girl's medical history. The sensors applied themselves to the girl's body while Wilson soothed her fears with a calm hand and a calmer voice. In a moment the diagnosis appeared in the frosted glass above the little girl's head. *Encephalitis.*

The injection came immediately afterward, painless, virtually unfelt.

Wilson returned the girl to her mother. "She'll be all right now," he said confidently. "But hang this around her neck to ward off evil." It was a simple puzzle. Perhaps the girl would improve her mind with it.

"Thank you, Doctor, thank you, thank you," the young woman said, unable to stop. "She would have died."

"Yes," Wilson said. She would have, too, he thought. "How is your husband's leg?"

"All healed. He was walking on it the next day, just as if it had never been broken."

"And does he remember to say the charm?"

"The two-times-two? Yes, doctor. I'm even beginning to say it as well, just from hearing it so often."

"It won't hurt you," Wilson said. "You missed much instruction, coming from the city."

"We'll bring you a pig, Doctor!"

"I am here to help. Is everything all right in the village?"

"The stranger is still at the motel. The one we suspect is a tax collector. He has been asking questions about you."

"By name?"

"No. He asks only about our witch-doctor. Are you good? Do you charge too much? Where do you live? Do you have visitors? We do not tell him anything."

"Thank you, my dear."

He did not have time to think about the stranger in the village. Scarcely had the door closed behind Pat Helman and her daughter than the knocking began again and the door announced other callers.

First it was a farmer whose corn was not growing as it should in spite of fertilizer and water. He brought a sample of soil. The analyzer said it was too acid, and Wilson gave him a wagonload of holy powder to work into the land. A delivery truck limped in for service. The analyzer revealed that the reactor element was worn out and would have to be replaced and sent in for renewal. Even with the automatic equipment in the sealed garage, the job took half an hour.

Then came the most difficult part of Wilson's job, the birth of a child with a brain injury. The diagnosis was quick and the reaction immediate. The child was dead as soon as the computer clicked out the judgment that it would never lead more than a vegetable existence. Wilson found the mother's gratitude most difficult to endure, but he knew it was deserved.

By this time the sun was well up, and the time for religious instruction was at hand. In the classroom was a sprinkling of children from four to sixteen, and even a few married women who could not go on the pilgrimage and were not yet tied down by children. He welcomed them all.

After an invocation and a brief sermon, Wilson settled them to their individual programs at their individual learning stations. Soon they were listening to the personalized instruction that seemed to come to them out of the air. They listened for a few minutes, wrote on the magic tablets in front of them, and then compared their answers with the one in the soothsayer window beside the tablet.

Wilson left them and returned to his living quarters in the self-contained cottage. It was identical with thousands of such cottages in villages across the world. Now he would have a few moments of rest, while everyone was at work in their homes or in the fields or in the classroom. Perhaps he would even have time for a little research of his own.

But he did not have the time after all. He had no more settled himself into his favorite chair in the study than the computer told him that someone had followed him from the classroom. When the light rapping came at the door he knew who it had to be.

"Come in, Christopher," he said.

It was the James boy — 17 years old and a good student, a handsome, quick, inquisitive lad with an annoying habit of arguing with his elders that caused dissension in the village. His parents despaired of making him a cooperating part of the family group.

But he was humble now. "Doctor," he said, "I wish to be a wise man like you."

"How like me?" Wilson asked.

"Wise like you. I wish to know all things."

"I do not know all things. The universe is infinite and eternal, and even if a man searched through infinity for an eternity still he would not know all things."

"I wish then to know as much as a man can know."

"Knowledge alone is neither a blessing nor a virtue."

"It is all I want."

"The passion for knowledge is a fever that can consume a man."

"I am consumed now. How can I learn more?"

"There in the classroom."

"The voice of God tells me only what I know already. It is drill only, and I do it perfectly."

That was true. Wilson know. The boy had made no mistakes for weeks. The computer had warned him that it was time for the boy to begin his pilgrimage. "Knowledge is worthless without an end. The idle learner is a danger not only to himself but to others. He will put his knowledge to work only to satisfy his idle curiosity, heedless of the consequences."

The boy argued. "This survey is man's destiny — to seek truth and to follow wherever it leads. Truth is the greatest good. If some are

hurt in the discovery, some always will be hurt — in the absence of truth even more than in its presence — and it is better that they be hurt in the search for truth than in the protection of their ignorance."

"The man who has found true wisdom does not deal in right and wrong; he does not judge ends. For some, truth is a good, for others, a god. It must be good for all or it is good for none. God must serve man, not man God. The latter way leads to cruelty and amorality justified by self-righteousness."

"How can truth be good for all?" Christopher asked sullenly.

"I have sought truth all my life," said Wilson. "How do I use the little I have found?"

"You serve the village, but — "

"Yes?"

The boy burst out, "What *good* is knowledge? If one cannot seek more, if with every step one cannot see the universe opening up?"

Wilson was silent. He let the boy think about it.

"I suppose," Christopher said reluctantly, "you do not stop seeking. But you spend time in service when you might be learning." He was silent again. "I suppose I could learn to serve."

"That is part of what you must learn," Wilson said.

"How do I start?"

"The way of the seeker after truth is long and difficult."

The boy nodded. Wilson thought, he could not know how hard and how difficult it was, but perhaps, perhaps, he would follow the path to its end.

"You have lived in this village long enough," Wilson said. "Now you must go out and learn something about the world. You will wander from place to place learning about people and serving them, doing for them what they cannot do for themselves, and learning to do it with a glad heart. Perhaps you may spend some time at the Emperor's Court. Perhaps you may visit another kingdom. But if you learn well and seek long, you may find the way to greater knowledge than you now dream of."

"When can I begin?" the boy asked.

"Ask your parents," Wilson said gently. "Tell them I said you are ready for the pilgrimage." They would be sorry to see the boy go, he thought, and yet relieved.

The boy turned eagerly toward the door and then swung back. "Will I ever be like you, Doctor?"

"If you seek long and are found worthy, you will learn much. One day, if you are successful in all things, you will be expected to serve as I do."

"May I be worthy!" the boy said.

As he left, the door admitted George Johnson, the village

elder. He was breathless with excitement "Doctor," he said, panting. "There are soldiers in the village."

"How many?"

"Eight and a sergeant. They are demanding taxes."

"They or the stranger?"

"The stranger. He commands them."

"Where are they?"

"At the motel. Shall we refuse to pay? Shall we resist?"

"'Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's.' But I will go to speak with them."

When he reached the motel, he found two soldiers in imperial purple guarding the door with their pellet guns. They stirred uneasily at the sight of his white jacket and then stood aside to admit him.

At a table in the dining room, a man in a wrinkled suit and an open-collared blue shirt was accepting a few pieces of gold jewelry from one of the villagers and checking off a name on a list. The man looked up, and an expression of sardonic delight crossed his face as he waved the villager away.

The man was out of Wilson's persistent nightmare. He had dark, curly hair that grew low on his forehead, a large nose, and close-set black eyes that looked speculatively into Wilson's."

"You have come."

"You state the obvious."

"The rest is incidental," the young man said. "Worthwhile but incidental. We wished only to get you away from your fortress. We have had quite enough of their defenses."

"Here I am," Wilson said. "If you are on a witch-hunt, you have found someone who will serve your purpose."

"You will be taken to district court for trial."

Wilson nodded.

The villagers were gathered outside in the dusk when Wilson was taken out of the motel, his hands chained behind him. The villagers stirred toward the soldiers, and the pellet guns came up quickly.

Wilson stepped forward. "Go home," he said. "They will not do to me anything that I do not permit. There will be another doctor here to help you while I am gone. Go home. Do not resist the Emperor's soldiers."

The villagers parted. The soldiers put him into the wagon and sat on the benches on either side as the horses started the wagon along the cracked, old, four-lane highway to the city...

III

Once more the voice of the bailiff parted the fog that filled his mind. "All rise. District court, Judge Green presiding, is now in session."

The twelve good men and true

— some of them women, to be truly accurate — were back in their oak jury box. The little balcony above the jury was crowded. Wilson had the feeling that it was balanced precariously on stilts and that it might topple forward at any moment. As Wilson's gaze drifted around the room, he saw that the benches beyond the railing to his left were filled as well. He looked until he saw the blonde girl and smiled. The television cameras were back, too, their red lights switching back and forth hypnotically.

Perhaps it was because he had been here before. Perhaps, if it was true that he was drugged, his tolerance for the drug was increasing. Or perhaps, if this were a dream, his subconscious was dredging up more detail to satisfy his conscious mind. Everything moved with elephantine slowness. Even in that slow progression there were curious gaps.

Perhaps the summer day was more humid and the old air-conditioners in the back windows could not keep up. They chuffed continuously, but the arms of his chair had a slick, moist feel to them. The room smelled oddly — acrid and musky, with human sweat from the bodies packed closely together, a little musty like decaying wood, and over it all the bite of burning incense.

Events had moved along in the courtroom, Wilson became aware. He had the impression that witnesses had been sitting in the chair to the right of the judge's bench and that they had been talking about him and a fire.

A university had been burned. Not just a building or two but the entire fifty or so structures. Now on top of the hill where once red roofs had been glimpsed from afar could be seen only black ruins. A janitor who had worked at the university testified, under the insistent questioning of the district attorney, that there had been late meetings in the offices he cleaned. He had overheard talk about setting fires, and he had retrieved from wastebaskets rough plans of the university buildings on which had been written the words "gasoline" or "thermite." The district attorney offered the papers in evidence.

Youngman objected occasionally. Usually he was overuled. He asked to have the identification of the handwriting verified by an independent expert and was refused.

The dark-haired young man beside the district attorney who looked familiar to Wilson, in a dreamlike way, said nothing. Sometimes he smiled at Wilson. Occasionally he leaned over to whisper to the district attorney or to motion with his head at the cameras. Then the district attorney would ask the witness a question or make a motion.

Then there was a student on the stand who said something about discussions in class concerning the ignorance of the common man and how easily he was misled. He had reported the discussions to the local committee on academic practices. He also had made tape recordings of the discussion and of the teacher's lectures. He had recorded talk in class about the university burnings, too, and whether they would turn the people against the Senate Subcommittee on Academic Practices and, indeed, the whole Lowbrow movement.

It all was vaguely familiar, like an old dream, and about as important.

Wilson gazed idly around the room again. Four old light fixtures hung from the tall ceiling. Some of the ceiling tiles were sagging. The air-conditioners were thin, old window units placed high in four tall windows at the back of the room, behind the cameras.

Suddenly he could not see as well. The room had darkened. Films were being shown at the front of the room.

The scene was in a classroom, and mostly the films showed a single person, the teacher, at the head of the room. He should know the teacher, Wilson thought... Of course. It was himself. He felt good to realize that he had a piece of himself back; he had been a teacher. He had not been particularly good at it, though.

He looked rather ridiculous up there talking about things like the sociological significance of protest and the psychological content of lynching, about the values of the Lowbrow movement and the hypocrisy of Senator Bartlett and his Subcommittee, about the importance of the scientific method and the necessity for the detachment of the scientist.

The film was dull, and the lecture was dull and pointlessly pontificial, saying nothing repetitively. Wilson felt Youngman's elbow glance into his ribs and heard the lawyer mutter something. He nodded and stared past the screen at the front of the room. There were two doors, one on either side of the judge's bench. The one on the judge's right had a frosted window; in the other the glass was clear.

The judge had just come through the door on his right; the recorder, who was in charge of a complicated device just in front of the bench, had come through the door with the clear glass.

Wilson turned farther to his right. Behind him, Wilson was fascinated to discover, was another group of chairs — about a dozen, similar to those on the opposite side of the room for the jury. Only this side had no wooden back or platform to raise the second row of chairs.

People were sitting in the chairs. They were dressed in ragged suits, most of them, with blue open-collared shirts beneath their coats. One face in particular drew Wilson's gaze. It was a face a little like that of an Old Testament prophet with a boyish, unruly mop of hair and eyes that looked at Wilson as if he were an object. Wilson looked at the man for a long time before the man looked away. Wilson decided that he knew the man, but he could not remember from where.

Above the heads of the people sitting behind him were a group of large pictures hung in two rows on the wall. They were in oak frames of assorted sizes. Four of the men pictured in them had beards; three of the other four had mustaches.

That made it seven to one in favor of face hair, Wilson thought. He felt his chin. *He* was clean-shaven, though he did not remember shaving.

When he turned his gaze to the front of the room, the films were more exciting. They were color films of a great fire. Buildings were burning, big ones with pillars and towers, built of stone and brick. Some of them were ruins of rubble and glowing coals, others were melting islands in a sea of flame.

If one looked closely one could see, as Wilson saw, black stick figures running in front of the flames, back and forth, back and forth . . . until the realization came that they were not in front of the flames but in them, and they were consumed. It was the old nightmare. Wilson remembered it now with all its horror.

He moaned. "Sylvia!" he said beneath his breath. "Sammy!"

The fog lifted a little from his brain and allowed the pain to lance through. Even as he watched the terrible scenes he remembered so well, he knew there was something he should do, something he had forgotten to do, something he must remember to do.

Then there was a face on the screen, a face painted with scarlet fingers, a face satanic in expression, a face trying to hide, it seemed, behind an unbuttoned shirt collar and a coat collar turned up. It was another familiar face. He knew that face. It was his own.

It was the face of guilt. He shrank from it. He turned his head away from it and met the gaze of Youngman at his side. Youngman's eyes were on him, asking him to do something, but Wilson's head was too filled with pain. Across from him the dark young man was looking at him, too, his lips curled in a mockery of a smile, his face changed by the scarlet reflections from the screen into a kind of devil's mask, not unlike Wilson's face there in the film. Behind him, Wilson had the feeling, other eyes were staring.

He stood up, swaying on his feet, and put his hand to his throat. He felt as if he were choking. There was a tie there, although he didn't remember putting on a tie. He felt his shoulders. He wore a coat. He ran his fingers tremblingly along the lapels. Suddenly he jerked them away with an exclamation of pain.

As the lights went up in the courtroom, he was standing at the table, looking down at his hand. There was blood on his right hand and more blood welling from a cut on his right index finger. Youngman reached out his handkerchief to staunch the flow of blood and got some on the sleeve of his coat.

The television cameras were staring at him. Wilson looked guiltily into their lenses.

IV

The room was on the third floor of a 28-story building located in the heart of the old city. It was on the third floor because the elevators had stopped working long ago and there was no point in climbing when so many comparable rooms were available on low levels all around the city.

The city was thinly populated now, supported only by the desultory activities of the Emperor and his authorities. Those activities had to be located where the old highway systems focused, where river traffic was possible and where an occasional steam-powered locomotive could tug in a string of decrepit cars on the rusty rails.

The room was large, but a corroded metal counter divided it in half. Wilson stood on the window side of the counter, where only a battered desk and a few rickety chairs cluttered the marble floors. The walls, too, were faced with marble higher than his head. A potbellied iron stove stood near a window where its black chimney pipe could snake through the shattered glass patched with plywood scavenged from somewhere else. The stove was cold now in the heat of the summer, but the room was cool.

The dark young man sat behind the desk, watching him. Wilson stood in front of the desk, waiting, his hands still chained behind him.

"So," the young man said finally, "you are a witch."

"That is what people call me."

"But you are not a witch."

"I am many things. To people who call me a witch, I am a witch. I have strange powers with which to control the natural world. I can do things that others cannot do, things they cannot even understand. For this they respect me; for my services in their behalf they sometimes pay me. I am their mediator between the goodness of life that they want and the evil in life that keeps them from having it."

"You are an educated man who uses the old science to delude the

people. The Emperor wants to know where you got your learning, and he wants to know where you got your building and equipment and how it is defended and where you get your supplies."

"The Emperor wants to know a great deal. That is the beginning of education."

"It is not wise to joke about the Emperor," the young man said.

"I do not joke," Wilson said.

"The Emperor does not want education," the young man snapped. "He wants information. He will get it from you." He settled back in his chair. "You have succeeded in stirring me once, against my will. If you succeed again you will be a clever man. Too clever to be allowed to exist. We will be put to the trouble of finding another witch."

"I would not willingly trouble anyone."

"You would be wise especially not to trouble the head of the Emperor's secret police."

"You are young for such eminence."

The young man smiled. "There is no age requirement for competence."

"Nor for ambition. And what is this competent young man's name?"

"You may call me 'Captain.'"

"You do think of me as a witch, a little, Captain."

"And why do you say that?"

"You do not give me your name. Is it because, after all, you believe that if I know your name I might have power over you?"

"Peasant superstition."

"And yet — ?"

"You will not taunt me into revealing my name to you. I think you have no power. And yet who knows what power the old science may give you? A prudent man — But you are clever! I have brought you here to answer my questions, and you have me answering yours. In the end it will avail you nothing, however. You will answer my questions."

"And then?"

"If you are cooperative the Emperor may choose to be merciful."

"The Emperor's mercy is well known. But I am a man who lives by reason. If I cooperate I will need to be convinced that my cooperation is merited. You will have to answer my questions."

"Ask your questions," the young man said, shrugging.

"Why does the Emperor suddenly interest himself in the villages?"

"The Emperor is interested in every part of his empire."

"But he has not interfered in the internal affairs of the villages for a decade. That was when the last witch-hunt ended in failure."

"So I have heard. But this is not a witch-hunt. What is one witch more or less?"

Wilson stood squarely in front of the young man, not shifting his weight, his shoulders pulled back by the chains binding his wrists. "Don't the villagers pay their taxes?"

"Only when soldiers are sent for them, and even then there is not much. A few trinkets. But no coins. And grain and livestock are too bulky for soldiers to carry."

"The villagers have little need for money."

"Thanks to you and your fellow witches. They have only to ask for help and you give it to them. How can they develop their initiative, their ability to help themselves?"

"And yet we keep the villages peaceful, the villagers happy. Surely the Emperor counts this a blessing. There have been no uprisings."

"How can sheep rebel? We are an annoyance to them. We should be indispensable."

"As are their witches," Wilson said simply. "The Emperor begrudges us that."

The Emperor begrudges nothing. He rules an empire stretching from St. Louis to Denver. It is the largest and greatest empire in the world, but it is only a shadow of what it might be. You and your fellow witches keep it feeble. Instead of sturdy, ambitious subjects, he has villages of listless farmers. Instead of a bustling empire filled with the sound of factories turning out goods for export, he has a land that is content to listen to the corn growing. How long before such a nation is conquered by its neighbors?"

"What difference would it make to the villagers?"

"It would make a difference to the Emperor. And it would make a difference to the villagers if they had the ambition to improve their lots, to produce for trade instead of consumption, to move their excess populations to the cities where they can put the factories to work again, revive the mines, repair the refineries, get the economy going..."

"Back to the machines?" Wilson shook his head. "Your Emperor's predecesors did their job too well. A hatred of machines is bred into the people. They cannot go back."

"You give them machines."

"Those are not machines. They are magic. The people are not tied to them. They are to serve, not to be served."

"The people won't go back as long as you and your fellow witches give them the benefits of the machine without responsibility for it. The Emperor calls you the opiate of the people."

The young man's eyes smoldered. "It is you witches who oppress the people. Once relieved of your crutch they will find that they never needed you. They will have to return to the cities; they will have to return to progress."

Wilson chuckled softly to himself.

"You laugh?" the young man asked incredulously.

"At the irony. First you destroy science and the machines science built, and then you struggle to get them back. It is all a matter of leverage for those who wield power — or want to."

"There would be no struggle if it were not for you. Our Emperor has the interests of the people in his heart; he wants to see them happy and prospering. He does not want them ground under the heel of a conqueror."

"Does someone threaten war?" Wilson asked. "That is hard to believe. Conditions are much the same everywhere. Only a few young men — who cannot master the teachings or the way of life of the villages, or who grow up untutored in the city's ruins — become soldiers. There are too few to fight a war of conquest. There is not enough transportation or enough material. But perhaps it is the Emperor who grows restless. Would he like to expand his empire? Is it he who plans a war of conquest?"

The young man looked at Wilson with hard eyes and unmoving face. "Enough of your questions. Now you will answer mine."

"Ask."

"'Where did you get your knowledge?"

"I was educated in a village not far from here."

"You did not learn all you know in a village school," the young man said sharply. "We have questioned villagers, and they have an interesting amount of misinformation and information of little value to them or anyone else. But they are filled with superstition. And they do not know how to heal the sick or how to make the land fertile or how to repair their machines when they stop working."

"When I was a young man," Wilson said, his eyes reminiscent, "there still were universities. I learned many things in one of them but more in the villages. I traveled from village to village working, talking to the people, learning from them. Eventually, by contemplation and perseverance, I found my way to truth."

"What is truth?"

"You will pardon me, Captain," Wilson said, as he moved slowly toward the unbroken window pane that was left and looked out into the street three floors below. It was cluttered with debris from the building opposite, which had been burned out before, and with rusted vehicles of various kinds, now little more than mounds of ore. A path wide enough for a wagon had been created in the center of the old street. Otherwise the street was the way it had been left when the city was abandoned by all except the scavengers. The street was empty and silent.

"If I could tell you what I found," Wilson said, turning back to the young man at the desk, "I would not have had to go to seek it. No one could tell me. At best I could only be prepared to find it and to know it when I found it and was ready to accept it. What is truth? I cannot tell you, Captain. I can only tell you where to find it."

"Where will I find it?"

"Among the people and in your heart and mind. It is the secret of the people's survival and their fitness to survive. It is what the people must be to survive and how they must be selected if they are to evolve."

"All this is the superstition you feed the villagers to keep them under your spell," the young man said impatiently. "What is it you found? Where did you get your knowledge?"

"This is not something you can pass along like a multiplication table, Captain. You must find it for yourself, with humility and an open mind."

"Rubbish! Where do you get your buildings? Where do you get your supplies?"

"From those who also have found truth."

The young man sat in his chair looking at Wilson. "You will tell me these things," he said at last. "We have some of the old drugs that are reputed to loosen tongues. And if these have lost their powers we can try methods more physical. And when you have told us all we wish to know, you will go on trial as a witch."

"How will you try me," Wilson asked, "when you already have judged me?"

"Sergeant," the young man called out. The leader of the platoon came through the doorway followed by two of his soldiers.

The young man smiled. "By fire, witch. How else?"

V

A woman was sitting in the witness chair when the courtroom swam back into Wilson's consciousness. Except for her the room was just as it had been before — the jury, the two men at the table opposite, Youngman beside him, the stone-faced audience, the peering eyes of the television cameras, the men sitting behind him under the pictures of the eight old men, seven of them with beards or mustaches.

It had the recurring quality of a nightmare, but it moved along. Which was real he wondered fuzzily. Was he the witch-doctor in a world of villagers being put to the question and dreaming of a world in which science was being repudiated? Or was he a scientist on trial for burning a university and dreaming of a world in which

the scientist was a respected and beloved helper of the people?

He could not decide. He knew, though, which one he *hoped* was real — and this was not it.

There were so many things he did not know. He did not know whether he was guilty, as this vaguely familiar woman in the chair seemed to be saying. The lawyer who was defending him — he had said Wilson was not guilty. But that was what lawyers always said, wasn't it? Or else there would be few trials.

The district attorney was asking the woman questions about the evening the university had burned. "You saw the defendant that evening, Mrs. Craddock?"

"He was at our house. We had dinner, and he said — "

"Who is this man? Can you identify him for us, Mrs. Craddock?"

"John Wilson," Mrs. Craddock said. "That man sitting there," she said, pointing.

She was an attractive woman, Wilson thought, but an unattractive emotion was distorting her features. Was it hatred?

"The defendant?"

"Yes. He said Harvard had burned and CalTech had burned, and the University would be next."

"And by 'the University' he meant — ?"

"We all knew what he meant. The university he worked for."

"And why did he think the University would be next?"

"He didn't say, but he gave us the impression that it was inevitable. That it was already determined."

"That it was planned?"

"Yes."

"That it would be soon?"

"Yes."

"And did you get the impression from the defendant that he had been part of the planning?"

"Yes — "

Youngman objected, and the judge ordered it stricken from the record, but the audience had heard it — and it stirred them to an animal moan. The television viewers had heard it. And most of all, the jurors had heard it. They were ready to declare him guilty on the spot, Wilson felt. As a matter of fact, he was ready to admit his own guilt. If he could only remember!

He half rose in his chair. "Emily?" he began. "Emily — ?" And he could not continue, because the thought had come to him that the name of the woman on the witness stand was "Emily," and he had remembered that much — an evening when he had eaten at a table with Emily and someone named Mark and two children named Amy and Junior, and he had said something like the things that Emily had said. Only it was not quite right.

He stood there in front of the jury and the audience and the television eyes, and it was like an admission of guilt that he should speak the woman's name but say no more but he could not think of what else to say but "EMILY." The woman he knew by that name frowned and unconsciously bit her lower lip. The dark young man who sat at the table opposite him and had not yet spoken aloud braced his hands upon his chair as if he were about to rise.

"Sit down, Mr. Wilson!" the judge ordered. "You may not interrupt the trial. If you wish to be heard, you must appear as a witness."

Youngman's hand touched Wilson's arm, and Wilson sank back to his seat, bemused.

After Youngman's cross-examination, unshaken but with apparent relief, Mrs. Craddock was allowed to leave the witness chair. She was followed to the chair by others. A man identified as a desk clerk at a downtown hotel testified that on the night of the fire he had seen the defendant get off a bus from this town, make a telephone call and then register at the hotel under the name of "Gerald Perry" and with the occupation of "salesman from Rochester, N.Y." He had left in the middle of the night. No one had seen him go.

A seedy middle-aged man said that he had been paid by Wilson to pick up a package addressed to Wilson at General Delivery and then to toss it behind a bush as he left the post office. Immediately afterward he had been accosted by detectives who were hunting for Wilson but by the time they had returned to the spot Wilson had fled.

An old man testified that a man who looked like Wilson had bought a hearing aid from him for $239.95 on the day following the fire, and a young man, who had clerked at that time in an electronics parts store, said that on the day following the fire Wilson had paid him $153 for parts and the use of a workroom and tools.

A broad-shouldered, thick-necked man with a nose that had been broken sometime in the recent past identified himself as an investigator for the Senate Subcommittee on Academic Practices and testified that he had picked up Wilson in New Orleans as Wilson was about to sell his services to an agent for the government of Brazil, along with whatever secrets he had in his possession.

Youngman objected again. "What is the relevance of the testimony of these witnesses to the crime of which my client is accused? These actions are readily interpreted as those of a man in great fear of his personal safety. As who would not be if he had

seen his university burned and his friends slain by a mob? I ask that all this testimony be struck from the record, and that the jury be asked to disregard it."

The judge looked at the district attorney, and the blocky man turned to the dark young man beside him. The young man whispered in the district attorney's ear, his hand cupped in front of his mouth.

"Your honor," said the district attorney, rising to his feet, "I am shocked at the attorney for the defense accusing the people of this state and of this nation of mob actions. I would remind the court and the attorney that they are not on trial. The witnesses who have appeared before this court have painted a picture of a man whose actions are not those of an innocent person who had only to enter the nearest police station if he needed protection. He could there have entered a complaint against others if he felt they were responsible for this tragic event. Instead he assumed a false name, persuaded others to act for him under suspicious circumstances, obtained devices for which he had no legal use and attempted to slip illegally out of the country. These are the actions of a man ridden with guilt and trying to evade the natural conseqquences for his actions — "

"Your honor," Youngman said, half-rising, "the district attorney is making a speech."

"All the testimony given today is pertinent, your honor," the district attorney said. "And it will lead to other revelations."

"Will it lead to the revelation," Youngman asked, "that I have not been permitted to consult with my client since his arrest, an official action which prejudices the entire trial and which will be called to the attention of the appellate court as soon as this trial is concluded?"

"Are you raising an objection, Mr. Youngman?" the judge asked evenly.

"I am objecting to the entire nature and structure of this trial," Youngman said clearly. "It is a farce to think that this man can defend himself without consultation. This man has not even been allowed to see his wife since his imprisonment. If this state of affairs continues, if my client is prevented from communicating with his lawyer and his family, I will refuse to let my client take the stand, and we will appeal this case to the highest court."

The jury stirred. The audience groaned. A blonde young woman stood up in the audience and screamed. Then, putting the back of her hand to her lips, she crumpled to the floor.

How fascinating, Wilson thought. Was that woman his wife? She looked familiar all right. He had seen her before. She looked like the

Pat Helman of his dream — or his dream of the Pat Helman of his real existence.

VI

Wilson's senses were numb, but the very numbness seemed to enhance his subconscious awareness. He had, for instance, a feeling that he was in a building of immense size. The room itself was relatively small. The walls were stone, and a stone fireplace with a marble mantle was built into the far wall. Several old tubular metal chairs with leatherette upholstery were placed neatly against the walls. A single tall window broke the wall at his right: it was latticed with metal bars. A thick doorway was to his left. Beyond it were two uniformed guards, and beyond them was a peering lens mounted on a tripod. It made a muted, whirring noise.

Besides the feeling of massive size, Wilson also sensed a strong institutional odor of soap and antiseptic. In addition he sensed, nearer, a more subtle fragrance that he had not smelled for a long time, for many months. It brought back memories of a girl driving a long Cadillac Turbojet 500, a girl with bright golden hair like a scarf tugging at her head, with blue eyes and warm lips and a throat like a white column.

He was not surprised that she was sitting beside him, but then little seemed to surprise him. "You've—you've cut—your hair," he got out. Her hair was straight and short now, not much longer than a man's, with soft bangs across her forehead. But she was as lovely as ever. She dressed more sedately than his errant memory recalled.

"Yes, darling," she said. "I'm an old married lady now." She held out a left hand with a thick gold ring on it.

"Married?" he echoed.

"Oh, what have they done to you?" she wailed. And she threw herself at him. Her arms went around his neck. Her head buried itself in the hollow between his neck and his shoulder, and he felt something sting the back of his neck. "To you, John Wilson," she whispered in his ear. He straightened, and for a moment the clouds in his head parted. "I'm sorry," she said an instant later as she pulled hair. "I lost control of myself. I promised myself I wouldn't do that. You have enough to worry about without that, I said."

He looked at her, trying to remember. Her name was Pat Helman. Maybe. Or perhaps it was Pat Wilson, Mrs. John Wilson. But surely he would be more certain about his wife. He was on trial for something to do with the burning of a university. He remembered that. And now he must be in prison where he was

being visited by this woman who said she was his wife.

She had been talking for several minutes, and he had not been listening, he realized guiltily. He tried to concentrate on what she was saying.

"You must try to understand, Johnny. They let one of us visit you. Only one. It's just for show, of course, but Charley and I — that's Charley Youngman, your lawyer — decided that we couldn't pass up the opportunity. We talked it over and decided I should come, that maybe I could get through to you better.

"You're on trial for your life, Johnny. They'll hang you for sure if you don't do something. As payment for this visit we've agreed to let you take the witness stand in your own defense. But you've got to snap out of it or they'll cut you up!"

The fog was beginning to drift away, he thought.

A moment later he was sure of it. First came the stab of remembrance like a flaming sword. The flames spread until they ate away a great and beautiful university and then consumed its beating heart, the men and women who taught and studied there, friends of his, colleagues, and one who was more than a friend. The pain made his eyes lower to his hands where they rested motionless on his legs like huge paralyzed white spiders.

"You're not guilty, Johnny," the blonde girl was saying, "but you're acting as if you were. And that's the same thing."

No, he wasn't guilty. He remembered now the way it was. He had returned to the university too late, returned from a dinner with his friends, Emily and Mark Craddock, in the city — Emily, who had repudiated him to save her family and had twisted the truth about him on the witness stand so that her family could be secure. He had returned too late to see the blaze begin, but he had seen it in its greatest fury. And he had seen the mob who had done it, and the faces of the mob, turned demonic by flames and something else worse than demons.

He had not been too late for the running of the egg-heads, for the silent crowds that waited at the exits of the university with clubs and pitchforks and axes for the black figures that ran in front of the flames and the casual youngsters who used them for target practice like clay pigeons at a skeet shoot. He had seen a sight like that once. When he was a boy he and some friends had fired an old grain bin to kill the rats as they came out.

"The time is almost up," the girl said. "They've given us only half an hour. You're going to be all right. I know it, now."

Yes, he was going to be all right if he could only keep remembering and not forget. He could remember the terror and desperation of the long escape to New Orleans, aided by the brain-wave detector he had gimmicked together out of a hearing aid, some electronic parts and an antenna he had sewn into his coat. They had traced his every step, these people who were trying him for the crimes of all scientists. The only facts they did not have — or at least that they had not revealed yet — were this girl beside him, who was not, he thought regretfully, Mrs. Wilson, and the shadowy organization she represented.

She had picked him up on the highway after he had left the train at Alexandria and his second-hand car had given up. "I'm old Tim Helman's only child," she had said, "and I have a guilt complex a runway long."

He knew who Tim Helman was. He was the financier who had put his money and the money of millions of others into commercial rocketports and artificial satellites. He was the man who had lost it all when the Lowbrow movement came along and the government revoked his subsidies before the complex could start paying off. He was the man who had died of a heart attack — it was announced as a heart attack — before he could be brought to trial for fraud under a blue-sky law that was, for once, aptly named.

Wilson had not been in the mood to trust anyone, and he had leaped from the car at the first opportunity.

Weeks later he made contact with a man named Fuentes, a representative of the Brazilian government, who offered him a chance to work there, not at his own research but at tasks that would be assigned him. He realized that there was no place left where a scientist could pursue truth in the old unfettered fashion. The question was academic, in any case. Agents of the Subcommittee on Academic Practices had been watching Fuentes. Wilson literally had fallen into their laps only to be rescued, in turn, by Pat Helman and a man named Pike.

They had convinced him that he and his fellow scientists were as blindly wrong in their pursuit of inhuman truth as the mobs who made up the Lowbrow movement were wrong in their massacre of the scientists. He had gone to live with the people, to see if he could become one of them instead of an egghead walled off by an impenetrable shell of superiority, to determine if he could learn from them what they were trying to communicate by violence.

Intellectually he had understood before he joined them. He had accepted the idea that the

ordinary citizen whose skills were being outmoded by galloping automation several times in his life had grown terrified. The ordinary citizen felt that his fate was beyond his control; it had been placed in the hands of others, distant and unconcerned, who did things that he could not do with powers he could not understand and who pretended that anyone could do these things if they wanted to and tried hard enough, who pursued their mysterious ends without thought of human consequences and with only casual attempts to communicate to laymen what it was they were trying to do and why.

He had understood with his mind that the little man, in his terror of bombs and rockets and machines, had despaired of attracting the attention of the scientists by tugging a their sleeves. So he had given the scientists the same troubles he had, insecurity and the fear of sudden death, in the subconscious hope that he could learn from the efforts of the scientists to solve that problem. And they had learned nothing — except that scientists died like other men and fled from danger like other men. Still they had killed them and chased them because if they could not help the people at least they could not hurt them either.

Now Wilson understood these matters emotionally as well, and he thought he understood the people. He understood their need for a scapegoat to take the blame for their sins, and he also understood their desires for someone better than themselves to represent their finest aspirations. He had given himself up as one or the other.

What was it to be?

"Oh, Johnny," said Pat Helman, whose name was not Wilson and never had been and perhaps never would be.

"It's all up to you, and I've got to go now. I may never see you again." Once more she threw herself at him, and again she whispered against his ear. "We didn't mean for you to give yourself up, you idiot! We can't get you out of here or that courtroom either. All we can do is give you the antidote to the drugs. Which I've done. You mustn't let on though, or they'll never put you on the stand, and your martyrdom might as well pay off in one moment of glory." And then she pulled herself away. "Good-by Johnny. Good-by."

He was left alone in the little room, staring after her, staring into the eye of the camera which had recorded this touching moment of reunion between a notorious criminal and his wife, through official generosity, and he dulled his eyes and let them sink to his hands as the guards came and led him unresisting down the echoing corridors to his cell.

VII

The words in the relentless whisper echoed in his ears, "You are a witch, a witch, a witch. Where do you get your wit, your wit, your wit?" The echo was inside his head, which was a great empty space.

He opened his eyes and saw nothing. At first he thought that he was blind. Then, as a shadow pirouetted across the ceiling, he realized that the cell was lit by a single candle in the corner. He could not summon the will to look at it but he knew it was there by the shadows.

He was lying on crumbling cement. He could feel it dusty beneath his hands. From the musty smell of the place it might be an underground room, perhaps a room in the same old City Hall in which he had talked with the young man who called himself Captain.

"Who are you? What is your name?" came the whisper again.

"John Wilson," he said with difficulty but with precision. He did not need to look. The dark young man was seated on the cement beside him.

"John Wilson," the young man said, "you will tell me what I need to know."

"I will tell you — what you need to know," Wilson repeated. The words were the same but the meaning somehow was different.

The young man felt it, too. "You will tell me what I wish to know."

"I will tell you — what you need to know," Wilson said.

"Where did you get your education?" came the whisper.

"Part of it — before the destruction — of the machines."

"But that would make you, more than one hundred years old!" the young man snapped. Wilson did not say anything. It was not a question. "Are you more than one hundred years old?"

"Yes."

"That's ridiculous! You do not look more than middle aged." Again there was silence. "How can such things be?"

"Much is possible — for men who had found truth," Wilson got out. "Disease is unnecessary. Aging can be delayed."

The young man was silent again. Perhaps he was absorbing the implications of the information he had received. What would the Emperor give for the secret of longevity? What could the young man himself do with another half century or more of vigorous life in which to get ahead in the world? It might change his entire outlook upon his career; he might not have to take shortcuts to win success while he still could enjoy its fruits.

The silence endured until Wilson was afraid he would fall back into the cavern inside his

head. But he clung to consciousness as if it were the edge of a cliff. Next time he might not have so firm a grip on his cavern — on his mind.

"Are you telling the truth?"

"Can I tell — anything else?"

"Always you answer a question with a question. Why?"

"That is the nature of man — and the nature of life. There are no final answers — only new questions."

"Mysticism! The answers I want are not so difficult. Where did you get the rest of your education?"

"Everywhere."

"Are you a witch?"

"To some."

"Where are your fellow witches?"

"In the villages."

"Where do they get their support?"

"From the villages."

"They do not get their machines from the villages nor their supplies. Where is the witch world? Where is the place that witches learn their craft? Where do they get their machines?"

"The witch world — co-exists with the empire — and with all other kingdoms and empires — of the world."

"Where else is it?"

"Wherever man can exist."

"And where is that?"

"Everywhere."

"You are evading my questions. Have you the will to do that?"

"The will — and the capability."

"Then there are other methods of persuasion."

Distantly Wilson felt his hand lifted. The shadows swirled on the ceiling above his head. He did not feel pain, but in a few moments the odor of cooking meat drifted to his nostrils.

"A foretaste of the flames," the young man said.

"Your measures — combat each other." Wilson said. "I feel nothing. Burn away. Or if you would have me suffer — you must give me the power — to resist."

"You devil!" As distantly as it was lifted, Wilson felt his hand dropped. The shadows danced once more across the ceiling. "Why did you let yourself be captured?"

"If not me then another."

"The villagers could have resisted. They could have overcome us."

"They are peaceful folk. Violence breeds more violence. Other soldiers would come. So long as the Emperor is content — to rule the body without coercing the spirit — the Empire will exist and the people will obey it. The life the people have — is beyond the realm of the Emperor."

"You are speaking nonsense again," the young man said, but he said it absently. "Would you like your right hand to match your left? Let me tell you what the Emperor has in mind. If the witches

would support him with goods and machines — and you have them, we know — he could soon conquer this entire continent. Eventually perhaps the world itself! All the world under one peaceful rule. Think of that! And you witches would be well repaid."

"Sometime in his life every ruler has that dream," Wilson said. "The answer is always the same. You cannot give us anything we do not already have. You can only take from the people."

"You are an obstinate and short-sighted witch!"

Wilson summoned his energies once more. "You are an inquisitive young man. You wish to know. If you had attended a village school you would know much already."

"I attended the Court School. And I learned much there but even more at the Court itself. You see where it has taken me."

"From ignorance to ignorance," Wilson said. "It is not too late. I was ten years older than you are before my education truly began. You still can learn. Go seek the truth. What distinguishes half-man from animal? What separates man from half-man? What will select next man from present man?"

"What should I care about such follies? Be still, old man."

"You may be next man. But you must find your way. You must pass the tests. To be fit to survive you must survive."

"You talk rubbish, old man," the young man said, but he sounded uneasy.

He was thoughtful for a few moments and then, Wilson thought, he shook himself like a dog coming out of a cold bath. "Next man or past man, you will burn, old man. We will put you to the trial, and then you will be dead man."

"You do not fear the witch's power?"

"Let it save you from the flames. Perhaps then I will believe in witchcraft and your mumbo-jumbo."

"Then it may be too late. The man who can be convinced only by a show of force — is lost to reason."

"Reason is a weak man's solace."

"Force is a strong man's refuge."

"You will burn brightly!"

"Burn me brightly then," Wilson said. "Perhaps by my light you may see a part of the truth. You will not have another chance. I am the only witch we will allow the Emperor to take."

And Wilson loosened his grasp and fell back into the cavern and dreamed of flames.

VIII

Wilson woke not to the dim confusion of the courtroom but to the pale light of morning filtering through tall windows lined

with bars. His pillow was whispering to him, "You are a witch, and you have set a fire — a fire which destroyed a university and the people in it, people who were your friends and now are dead ashes. You are guilty. You have committed arson and murder, and you must be punished."

More bars were all around him. Bars for walls, bars for a door. Only above him and below him was there something solid — the ceiling and the floor were concrete, but Wilson felt that inside them, if he dug, he would find the same cold, gray bars.

He was in a cell. It was part of a block of cells stacked one atop another and beside another like so many houses built of toothpicks, but the toothpicks were solid steel. Outside his cell was a corridor, and beyond that was a stone wall. The tall, barred windows were in the wall. He was a prisoner held in a maximum security prison, and he had no more chance of escaping than a witch from the deepest Inquisitorial dungeon.

He ran his hand over the rough material of the prison blanket that covered him, and over the dustily astringent odor of mopped concrete floors he smelled coffee brewing far off. How long had it been since he had smelled something so good? They had taken that from him, and he lay in his bunk, listening to his pillow, and enjoyed the smell.

"You're awake, eh?" said an interested voice close beside him. "It's the first time you've been awake."

Wilson's eyes slowly drifted shut.

"Oh," the voice said, disappointed. "I guess you ain't. But if you are and don't want to let on, I want to talk to you when you get a chance to listen. They say you're a crummy scientist. But you don't seem so bad to me. You just lay there, moaning and talking in your sleep, and I guess you're just a crummy con like me, and it's us against them. We got something working, fellow. If you want a piece of it just wiggle your eyelids."

Wilson lay very still, breathing regularly, listening to his vindictive pillow. His eyelids did not move.

"I don't blame you, fellow," said the voice beside him. "Why should you trust anybody? Maybe when they bring you back — if they bring you back."

They came soon afterwards. Men dressed Wilson's unresisting body in newly pressed clothes and half carried, half dragged him to an armored truck. It had two cots in the back, and they placed Wilson on one of them. The truck started up. After about ten minutes of slow, twisting city driving, the truck picked up speed. Twenty minutes later it drew up to the back of an old brick building. Wilson was hustled into a small doorway

and up a flight of stairs to the courtroom.

"No one will appear in this man's defense," Youngman said. "His cause is unpopular, and anyone who testifies for him will be called 'traitor' by his neighbors, and perhaps worse will happen to him. Therefore I will call John Wilson himself to be the only witness for the defense."

With great care, as if he were walking a tightrope, Wilson made his way to the witness chair and with Youngman's aid settled himself into it. Slowly Youngman led him through a rebuttal of the testimony presented by the prosecution. Wilson hesitated often and fumbled for words, but he finally told his story of the events.

He had returned to find the University already in flames, he said. He had fled the scene and later the area under an assumed name for fear that what had happened to the others at the University would happen to him. By the time Youngman had finished, they had painted a picture of a man driven by desperation into a wild and sometimes irrational flight for his life.

Youngman turned to the district attorney and took his seat. The district attorney hesitated for a moment, frowning, and then pulled himself up.

"You claim that you returned to the University to find it in flames. Yet Mrs. Craddock points out that you were talking about plans to burn it at dinner that evening."

Wilson straightened a little. "Not plans," he said gently. "The possibility of others burning it. And by the testimony of your own witnesses — Mrs. Craddock and the officials who noted the time of the fire — I left the city *after* the fire already had begun, 35 miles away."

The district attorney seemed unable to find an appropriate word. He turned halfway toward the young man sitting at the table. Smoothly the young man got up. "Your honor? May I interrogate the witness?"

The voice was familiar.

The judge nodded. "Of course, Mr. Kelley. You have been appointed asistant prosecutor for that purpose."

Now Wilson knew him. Leonard Kelley was chief investigator for Senator Bartlett's Subcommittee on Academic Practices.

"Mr. Wilson," Kelley said smoothly, "you are, as you know, not accused of setting the fire itself but of conspiring with others to set it. That you were not there to put the torch yourself is incidental, and you are only trying to confuse the jury by pretending otherwise. You will not deny that your actions following the fire were those of a guilty man."

"It is a truism that the guilty flee when no man pursueth," Wil-

son said drily, straightening a little more. "But it is equally true and equally obvious that the wise man, when he sees an angry mob approaching with a rope, does not stop to ask questions."

Kelley studied Wilson's face with shrewd, perceptive eyes. "You were trying to flee the country entirely when you were captured."

"A moment of folly. Luckily I thought better of it and returned."

"You mean you were returned."

"No, I returned of my own volition, having escaped from the agent of the Subcommittee."

"You escaped, Wilson? How?"

"Your colleague lost his head — and had his nose somewhat altered."

"And then what did you do, Wilson?"

"I returned. Three months later I gave myself up voluntarily."

The members of the jury turned to each other. The stern-faced members of the audience shifted positions.

"What did you do in those three months, Wilson?"

"I lived in small towns, worked in the fields and in the shops."

"Did you believe that this would enable you to escape justice?"

"I *knew* that I could avoid recapture," Wilson said with a careful choice of words. "But I was living in these places in this way so that I could learn why the people hate scientists."

Kelley turned toward the jury and the audience until his back was almost to Wilson. "I am glad that you admit this basic truth, Wilson. The people hate scientists, and they have good reason to hate. But why do you think they hate you."

"Not me personally," Wilson said. "All scientists. Blame for that lies on both sides. The scientists are at fault because they have been blind to the needs of the people for security, and the people, because they have been unable to see that the only security is death — or a way of life so like death that it is scarcely distinguishable."

"You are condemning the people to death?"

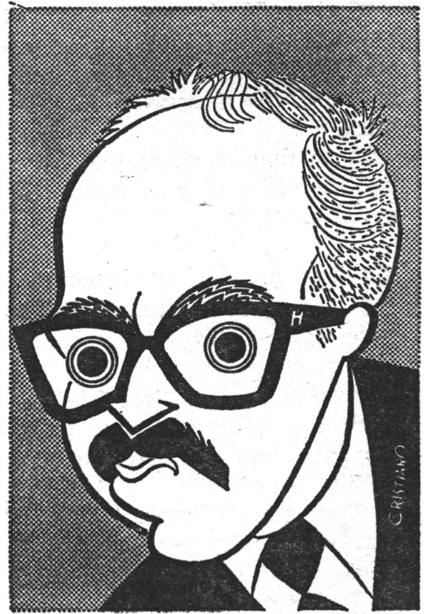
"You twist my words. The people must accept the fact of insecurity. I do not say it; life insists on it. The people must find their security in their own ability to cope with change. The scientist, on the other hand, must give up his childlike worship of science.

"One of the great philosophers of science, T. H. Huxley, summed it up this way, 'Science seems to me to teach in the highest and strongest manner the great truth which is embodied in the Christian conception of entire surrender to the will of God. Sit down before fact as a little child, be prepared to give up every pre-conceived

(*continued on page* 142)

AUTHORGRAPHS:

An Interview with Harry Harrison



The story of my interest in science fiction is the story of my life; at the age of seven I came across one of the old large-size magazines, with the Frank R. Paul covers, and I read it and that was that. I've been hoping for years to come across that issue again, but I'm afraid if I ever saw it it would be like *The Green Man of Graypec,* which I was so much in love with that I cut it out and bound it up separately . . . and came across a long time later. When I tried to read it, I could only get through a couple of pages. Aargh. Only Sam Moskowitz can read that old stuff and really enjoy it.

I've been a fan all my life, starting around 1932. A few years later the Queens Science Fiction League came along, and I met such great names as Moskowitz and Sykora; I stayed on as a member until the war came along and I went into the Army.

When I got out I went to art school, where I ran into some comics artists. I spent a lot of time telling them what a negative, degenerate, lousy art form comics were; then I found myself beginning to do some. Actually, they had some damn good artists. Beautiful artists, who could get just the line they wanted down on paper; but the writers were always afraid to sign their names.

I kept working in comics, drawing and editing, and when the Hydra Club came along I joined. I was Harry The Artist, doing illustrations for *Marvel Tales* and *Galaxy* — the first one I remember for *Galaxy* was for *Bridge Crossing,* by Dave Dryfoos; the Art Editor was W. I. Vanderpoel at the time — and book jackets for Marty

Greenberg's Gnome Press and so on.

Then Damon Knight was editing a magazine called *Worlds Beyond,* around 1953; I'd done a couple of illustrations for the first issue, about half of the second issue, the third issue was all mine — and then I got a throat infection. I lost thirty or thirty-five pounds, and I was too weak to draw, but I could sit up in bed and type. So I wrote a story. It was called *Rocky Diver;* Damon bought it, and I was immediately anthologized — the man who did the anthology was also my agent — and I should have stopped then, with a perfect record: 100% sales, 100% anthologizations.

I was still editing comics, and writing and drawing them, but science fiction was the Holy Grail. I did a little of it — and a lot of other kinds of writing. I was a hack artist and a hackwriter: Confessions, Westerns, Detectives — whatever they want to pay money for I did. They'd pay me ten dollars for a picture, and then I'd write a special story around it — maybe a confession about a girl in an iron lung, dying, giving birth to a baby, whatever.

Then comics collapsed. I'd gotten in with a publisher named John Raymond and worked for him on his science-fiction and fantasy magazines while they lasted; then I spent about six months as an art editor and got together enough money to go to Mexico. I got an apartment and an old car and lived down there on $75 a month and wrote a novel called *The Stainless Steel Rat,* which was my first big sale, and never looked back. I found that down there I could write more than 2,000-word stories, which I couldn't do in New York.

On the strength of that my wife and I went to Europe, for the London Worldcon in 1957, and for the next ten years or so we stayed there most of the time. My big bread-and-butter income was from writing Flash Gordon scripts over most of that period, but I also did a lot of science fiction. We lived in England, Italy, back to New York for our first baby to be born, then to Denmark, where we stayed for seven years. I served as a foreign correspondent for a magazine for a while, wrote some science articles under a pen name — and kept on with science fiction.

I haven't done any drawing for at least ten years — which is a good thing; face it, I was a bad artist — except that when I was sitting on the beach in Italy with a ballpoint pen, I did some drawings of future weapons for a fanzine. We were killing time in a little town south of Salerno, waiting for a free ride back to the states from a friend of mine who's a shipowner; I'd just sold a novel for a couple thousand dollars and did

not see any point in working, so I sat in an olive grove and killed time for a couple of weeks.

While I was in Denmark, I'd take a trip to the various science-fiction conventions in Europe; I met Brian Aldiss at the Trieste Film Festival and we kept in touch, corresponded, saw each other now and then, and we started *SF Horizon*, a critical science-fiction magazine. To my thinking Aldiss is one of the big sf writers of the last five or ten years. Maybe the biggest. His novels have a feeling for continuity and form — *Non-Stop, Greybeard,* which I think is a classic; it's going to be the sleeper of all time, I swear.

Then there's Bester — of course: stories like *The Stars, My Destination* — and always there's Heinlein. Perpetually there's Heinlein. This is the seminal guy in the while field. I'm not talking about what I consider his bad period — he went preachy; the same thing happened to Huxley, when he quit writing novels in favor of essays on society — but the bulk of his work satisifies me completely.

I associate them with the Golden Age of *Astounding,* back in the '30's and '40's. Those were the perfect days for me; I remember I used to go down to Hudson Terminal to a stand that got the new issues two days ahead of anybody else—an extra half hour on the subway, just to get those two extra days. It wasn't just those two writers; there was a whole gestalt to that time. Heinlein, Clement, Sturgeon, a lot of others; they may not all have been polished writers, but they were superb entertainers.

I miss that in a lot of newer writers. Ballard, for instance — some of his short stories are fine, but his novels lose me. Ellison has done a couple of good ones — not science fiction, though, the ones I like best.

Fritz Leiber is a guy who's been growing all the time. He writes so *well.* And it's science fiction to the core, sometimes like Lovecraft, with a little bit of fantasy.

Now I'm back in the States — we had to make up our minds whether we wanted the kids speaking Danish or English and decided on English — and spending just about all my time on science fiction: writing, editing anthologies and so on. I have twelve or thirteen books behind me now, enough so that I can feel I can survive in any environment. The environment I've got is just below San Diego, about four miles from the Mexican border; completely away from everybody else. We've got an acre in the hills — rabbits, quail; there's nothing around us, and we've got the house sealed off with an air-conditioner, so we can lock the doors and turn off the telephone and we've got absolute privacy. So I can work; and it's been working out very nicely. END

The Fire Egg

by ROGER F. BURLINGAME

To a peasant it is not given to handle the Holy Things — unless he is willing to die!

"Hai!" Sum Lin dropped his hoe and knelt in wonder beside the furrow he had just made. The tip of the stone hoe had uncovered a scaly metal oval, scarcely distinguishable from the rust-red dirt around it. A fire-egg, he told himself excitedly! A fire-egg waiting to hatch in my field!

Lin picked up the fabulous egg and cupped it reverently in his rough hands. He felt a sullen warmth creep from the metal into his flesh. It wants to be born, he thought. It wants me to help it hatch into a sickle-bird. I must tell the priest!

Turning his face toward the rosy, cloud-free sky, the boy in black pajamas silently thanked the gods of the thunder-that-comes-no-more for honoring him with this discovery. Nor did he forget to thank them for the many pieces of flat hammered steel he would get for returning to their local priest this symbol of the god's prehistoric activity.

Panting, Lin arrived at the gate of his village. A guard stepped forward, shifting his rusty M16 to the crook of his elbow to begin the customary clothing search, but the young farmer protested. "No, honored green-head! It is not fitting to search one who carries a holy thing. See, I bring a fire-egg to our priest."

Proudly he held up the egg. The guard automatically reached for it, then jerked his hand back to hide

his face. Dropping his non-fuctional rifle, his hands covered his eyes under the green-dyed hair. He bowed deeply. "Take it, fortunate Lin. And tell the Intelligence Win Dom that I sped thee on thy mission!"

Achieving some compromise between an anxious trot and a self-conscious saunter, Lin made his way down the dusty main street toward the priest's house. This stood in the center of the village, a single-storied bungalow of neatly fitted concrete blocks, contrasting with the peeling plaster and wood of the village huts. Behind it loomed the walls of the sacred enclosure where the Superior Persons dwelt, who, legend related, once could talk to the great sickle-birds in their own language.

Lin knocked respectfully at the heavy teak door. Then, stepping back, he squatted in the posture suitable to his class and waited with the patience he used in waiting for the annual monsoon. Finally the door swung back to reveal the pallid figure of the priest.

"Intelligence" Win Dom always reminded Lin of a ghost — that is, if you believed that ghosts had red and baleful eyes. All the rest of the man was white: hair, skin and robes. Lin was not shocked, for this was how all priests looked: white with glaring red eyes. Perhaps, thought the farmer, that is why they *are* priests. The gods have marked them for their own by making them unlike all living men.

AN IF FIRST

Each month *If* publishes a story by a new writer, never before in print. This month's "first" is by a 38-year-old minister of the Church of Christ in New York State. A former Fulbright scholar (to Heidelberg, Germany), graduate of Oberlin and the Harvard Divinity School, Rev. Burlingame has been a science-fiction reader since his teens. *The Fire Egg*, which began as an assignment for a course in the Famous Writers School, is his first fiction appearance anywhere.

The old priest's voice contrasted with the brightness of his eyes as he said in a dull, unconcerned tone, "Thou hast a wish, my son?"

As soon as he heard the door open, Lin shifted from his haunches to his knees. Holding up the fire-egg in laced fingers, he answered, "Truly, Intelligence. I discovered this holy egg buried in my new field. After giving thanks to the gods at once, as is proper, I hurried to bring it to you!"

Getting to his feet, the young man made as if to hand the egg to the priest. But Win Dom jumped back clasping his hands behind him. "No, my son. I may not touch it." He hesitated as if in confusion at the sudden revelation of holiness. "I am not yet purified today. But since thou hast found it, keep it for now. I must consult with one of the superior persons."

Lin swallowed his surprise. He had never been in contact with

these awesome creatures. Indeed, no villager had ever seen one in Lin's generation. They gave their orders and directives through the priests. Lin placed the egg tenderly inside his shirt and pressed it to his flat stomach while the priest disappeared inside the house.

In his office, Win Dom, who was called "U-stase" within the bosom of his albino family, closed the door firmly and stood in worried thought. He knew what the farm boy had found and he knew he had to report it at once. Slowly he clenched and unclenched his bony fingers as he thought of the possibilities of the boy's discovery.

Priestcraft, at least that form into which Military Intelligence had degenerated, informed him of the true nature of the fire-eggs, not much less powerful than the spitting teeth of the giant beetles which once had fought with and against the sickle-birds.

If Win Dom had such an egg to possess, then how superior would those insufferable people be inside their walled enclosure? With the destructive force of the egg at his command, he would no longer be forced to live in this half-world between the great concrete wall and the village huts, dependent on the good will of his superiors and the sometimes intermittent offerings of the peasants.

His thoughts focused on the picture of his second son — a handsome infant as white as his father, though born without legs. Win Dom's wife had hidden the child with a peasant family; but on the boy's first birthday four greenhead guards ferreted him out and delivered him to the superiors to be devoted to the gods. Win Dom had never seen this ceremony, but he had watched the oily smoke rising above the walls of the enclosure. He gritted his teeth in an agony of remembering.

Some day! But Win Dom was born to be a priest in an age when priests were intermediaries, not between men and the gods, but between two classes of men — the villagers and the superior persons who hid behind walls of concrete. It's uncomfortable for a priest to live too close to the gods he serves, but it's unbearable to be born a priest with no more choosing of it than the melanin-free skin tint which characterized all the members of that profession.

Win Dom pushed his finger tips hard against the plywood top of his desk, then let his hands relax. His second right index finger moved to the button of the patched-up intercom and pressed. The box responded laconically: "Report!"

"A farmer, sir, with a fire-egg he says he found in his field."

The box gave him a black one-eyed stare. "Better come in!"

Win Dom's office had three doors: one opening onto the village square, one leading to his family quarters, and the third a combination wood and steel gate opening into the enclosure. The priest waited until the gate swung back and thought happily how those strong hinges could be twisted apart by the impact of a single, recently found fire-egg. And the villagers rushing in for the food and metal, and the priests for the precious instruments and weapons!

Entering the check room of the enclosure, Win Dom saw the dark figure of Bu Run bulging over the plastic top of his desk. Bu Run smiled at the waspish little priest and asked, "What's with the fire-egg, Stase?"

Win Dom flinched, as always, at the inelegant language used by his superiors. Even the farm boy spoke more correctly, using the proper forms of address. With offended dignity he reported, "A young farmer, sir, just brought this fire-egg to my office. He says he uncovered it with his hoe, but my opinion is he stole it. There are several holy egg shells in our temple museum. I will send someone to see if one be missing. I have reported the incident to you immediately, as the directive requires."

Bu Run's dusky smile dissolved as he studied the priest. "Do you have the egg with you?"

"No, sir. I left it with the boy, thinking it better for the evidence to be in his possession if my suspicions were justified."

"You don't think he'll run away?"

Win Dom expressed judicious assurance. "Out of the question, sir. He's after the sheet metal, and he won't do anything to jeopardize his reward!"

Bu Run nodded agreement. "And who were you going to send to check the museum?"

Without hesitation Win Dom answered, "My oldest son. He is worthy of my confidence. We can rely on his discretion."

Bu Run shook his head impatiently. "Better bring the kid who found it in. Let him talk for himself," he ordered.

The priest tried to protest, summoning up regulations prohibiting the entrance of village personnel into the enclosure. Against his will he found himself stepping back through the gate into his humid office, opening the door to the street. Lin was crouched against the wall, his arms cradled against his stomach warming the precious egg, even as it was warming him. He rose eagerly as the priest opened the door.

"Come, my son, and take courage. A superior person has ordered that thou shouldst bring him the holy egg. Surely the reward will be great, if thou art thus honored!"

Too shocked for speech, Lin fol-

lowed the priest into his office, averting his eyes superstitiously from the finger play with the intercom.

As he entered the holy ground of the enclosure, Lin's heart laughed inside him. The great one must be as excited as he was at the discovery. Ah, the sheets of gleaming metal that would be his, the strong tools, the look of respect in the eyes of the village elders! They would visit his house to pay him compliments and to ask his opinion on the prospects of the crops. Even Mai Ling's father, he exulted.

Ever since he had begun to appreciate his male equipment, he had chosen Mai Ling to be his mate. Now her father would rejoice to have such a fortunate son-in-law. Not for him a girl chosen by the old men who make marriages. He was a man now, with the power to choose his own. But he stood with humbly bowed neck before the glistening table of the great one.

The huge dark person smiled gently at him. "You found a fire-egg, son?"

Lin nodded, feeling its soothing power against his bare flesh.

"But the holy one says that you stole it," Bu Run continued. "Now, how am I going to find out who speaks truth?"

Aware that the native was unable or afraid to answer, the Negro turned to the priest standing some distance away. "The directive says: where there is no evidence, the word of the superior is to be taken. I think I remember it right?"

Win Dom nodded, a glint in his ruby-colored eyes. "You are perfectly correct, sir!"

"Okay, it's your egg," Bu Run shrugged. "Go ahead and take it."

The priest almost jumped forward, then stopped himself — a reaction three ancestors too late. "First — first I must get a suitable nest for it, sir. The sacred egg must lie on soft metal."

A smile touched Bu Run's mouth. "What's the difference? You can rely on *our* discretion. Just get it back to the museum!" When Win Dom still hesitated, Bu Run's tone grew harsher. "All right. There's one sure way to find out! Have your discreet Number One Son take this kid out to the hill of sacrifice and offer the egg to the gods. If it's a museum egg, they won't take it. If it's a live fire-egg, they'll let us know!"

Grudgingly, Win Dom ordered the oriental out of the check room and started to follow him. "Hold it!" Bu Run commanded. "Tell him how the little ring hatches the egg. Then get back here and leave the gate open!"

The black man leafed through the reports lying on his desk. The

pages repeated yesterday's information — or last year's, for that matter. No activity on the perimeter, compound enclosure still at safe level. No contact with Saigon or off-shore stations. No contact with anyone except within the sterile incubator of the enclosure.

The priest returned, and Bu Run motioned him to a seat while he took out and lit a cigarette, made with what he had been assured was tobacco. Blowing the first puff of smoke toward the open gateway, he addressed the albino without looking at him. "You never learn, do you? We've got all the clean stuff in here. That's why you live out there, remember? Maybe the ground's clean now, and maybe the food's fit to eat. But the metal they dig up is still plenty hot, or 'holy,' as you call it!"

Win Dom clasped his twelve pale fingers together and stared glumly at an imaginary speck of mildew on the spotless metal desk.

Bu Run ignored the sullen white man and imagined the feel of the end-of-duty shower that would clean his skin of contamination with priest and peasant.

When the blast of the concussion reached them, the papers on Bu Run's desk fluttered madly. Over the hill of sacrifice bits and pieces of Sum Lin were undergoing separate and bodily assumption into the cloudless atmosphere of Viet Nam.

Sergeant Bu Run, or "Brown," in the archaic pronunciation still used in the enclosure, ground out his cigarette and signalled for the priests to leave.

Slowly he heaved himself up from behind the desk and walked to the open gate. It's the best way to get rid of that damned radioactive junk, he told himself. Anyway, it's a lot quicker for the poor gook than having his stomach corrode from the inside out. He pushed the switch beside the heavy gate and watched it swing closed. "Well," he muttered the traditional benediction. "Keep the faith, Charlie!" END

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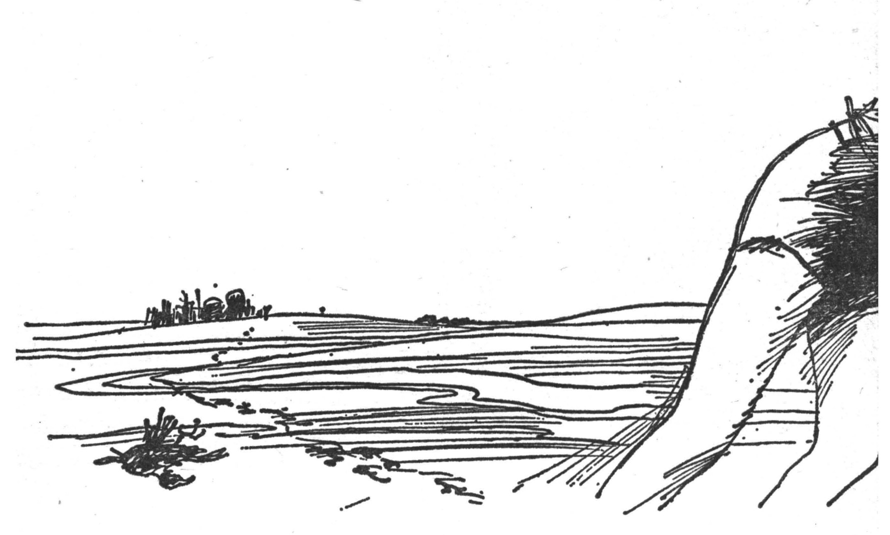
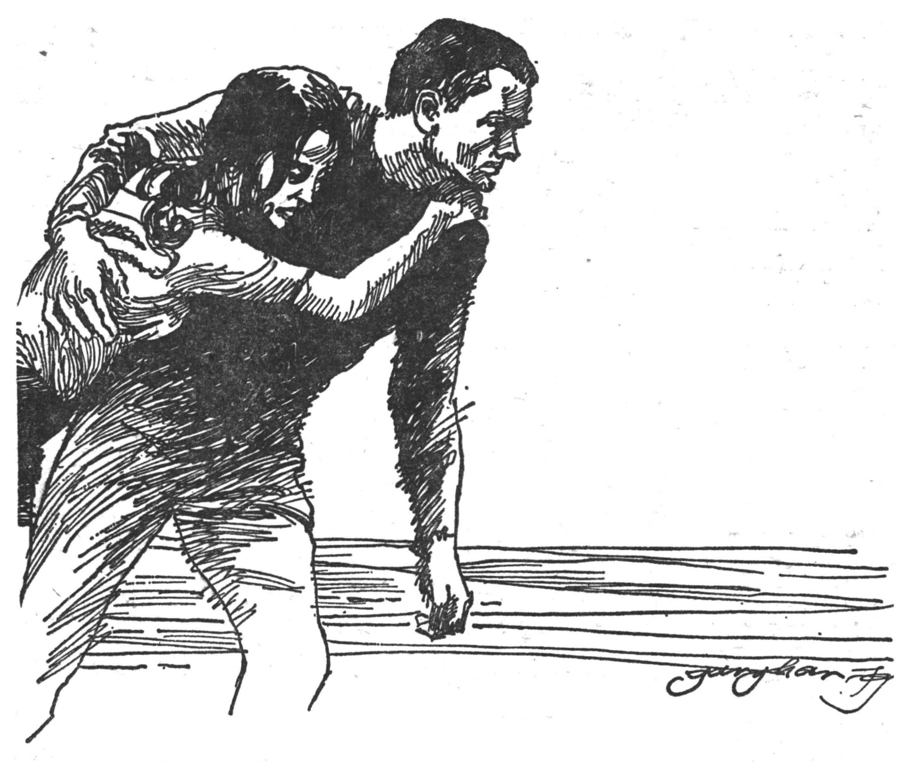


SIX GATES

by J. T. McINTOSH

There were six ways to get out of Limbo. Five of them involved suffering — the sixth meant death!



TO LIMBO

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

He did not know his name, but the coffin from which he had arisen bore the legends Rex. He did not know the name of the place where he found himself and called it Limbo.

It was a paradise — almost — with green fields, flowers, a house to live in, a crystal lake, birds and animals that were lovely and unafraid. Two things marred it:

First, an Eden should have an Eve — but Rex had two: the girl

whose nameplate said Regina, and another, the loveliest creature he had ever seen, labeled Venus.

Second, this paradise was surrounded by a wall. The wall was not stone or brick, but a gray, queerly fuzzy form of energy. He could not pass through it, but there were six Gateways in the wall, each opening onto another world.

Rex dared one gateway and found himself on the planet of Bullan, where the human colonists were despairing to the point of apathy and even suicide.

He returned to Limbo, perplexed and worried. Yet there was nothing to do but to explore the other Gateways, one by one. He chose the second and entered it, this time accompanied by Regina.

They found themselves on a desert world, where the heat was intolerable and the only life in sight that which had been imported, cell by cell, from other planets. It had a human population, even great cities. Yet it was a dying world, cut off from Earth, lacking the basic organic components in its ecology to keep itself going . . . and intensely hostile and suspicious.

Unfortunately for Rex, he aroused the suspicions of the first people he talked to. He let slip that he was not a native, and not from Earth — and the girl he was talking to reacted instantly.

She reached to press a button to summon help.

He was over the counter in a moment, her wrist held in his. His other hand was over her mouth and she was trying to bite it, to scream.

He dragged her through the doorway behind her and into the first room off the passage there. His luck was in; it was a toilet, with a bath, showers, and no windows.

And there she suddenly stopped struggling. "You're a Twentyman," she said.

He didn't let her go, but his tactics changed.

"So?" he said.

"Why hold me, then?"

He let her go. Twentymen didn't have to use violence.

"What is a Twentyman?" he asked.

She stared.

"Tell me," he said, and instead of trying to conceal his power, he exerted it all on this thin, pale girl, willing her to answer.

"Oh . . . you have to be special in the first place, the dominant people merge with you — "

"Merge?"

"Suicides. Instead of just ending it all, they merge with the Dominant to make a Twentyman. Nothing much survives of them, everybody knows that. No knowledge, only traces of skill and intelligence and talent. But some of the soul, we believe. The cream. The top of the personality. The

suicides get peace, and they don't quite die."

"And the result?"

"A Twentyman? He's stable. He never commits suicide. It's never been known. He never gets depressed. He's . . . moral. It's not possible for him to be evil."

"Or her?"

"Girl Twentymen? There aren't so many of them. Not because there aren't as many women suicides, but because there aren't as many girl Dominants. Well, do I pass? What do you really want?"

"I came only for information."

She looked at him warily. "Not about me, surely. I'm nobody. I've done nothing."

"About Cresta."

"You came in the last ship?"

"No."

She nodded. "You came like the birds."

Something clicked. "Birds have been turning up here unexpectedly, is that it? And you want more?"

"Millions of them. Somehow, a few of them manage to live. You do know about the birds, don't you? Where they come from?"

He could guess. The area immediately beside the Gateways in Limbo was swarming with birds. Deliberately, carelessly or blindly, many of them had blundered into the Gateways. Section K had made a mistake there. "There won't be any more," he said.

Tears welled from her eyes. She didn't sob. The tears, unchecked, ran down her thin face.

"Then it was just a mistake," she whispered. "We thought — some of us thought — someone was really trying to help us."

She didn't resist as he tied her to a chair with strips torn from a roller towel. Instead, she looked at him steadily and said: "Twentyman, unless all I've ever heard is wrong, you have to be good, moral, just. Cresta is hovering between life and death. Not the voluntary death that faces almost every other world in the galaxy. Slow, painful death because though we're a good settlement we can't import or create enough life to keep us alive. Twentyman, wherever you're from, you've got to help us."

"I can't promise anything," he said. "But if it turns out it's possible for me to do something, I'll do it."

Five minutes later he joined Regina and said: "Let's get out of here."

The rest had done her no good. She was lackluster, drooping. She stood up with an effort.

Nobody paid any more attention to them than before. At the edge of the city they did not have to wait long until there was nobody in sight. In the desert they felt safer.

"What happened?" asked Regina.

"I'll tell you later. I know you're

in a bad way, Regina, but we have to leave this place."

"If I survive, I'm never going through a Gateway again. You know that, don't you?"

"Sometimes it's worse than others."

Her tired brain gave up the effort. It was all she could do to plod along, reeling.

All the way back to the Gateway, Rex was looking for corpses of birds. To his relief he saw none. So the birds, although they had given the Crestans a clue to the existence of the Gateway, had given them no clue to its exact location.

Without Regina's unerring sense of direction, they'd never have found the Gateway. The coincidence which showed them exactly where it was would have been of no value to them if they hadn't been within fifty yards of it at the time and making directly for it.

A large pigeon suddenly appeared from nowhere, flapping desperately. It fell to the ground as if it had been brought down by a shot. But within a couple of seconds, its movements more coordinated, it took off and began making wide circles in the sky.

"Nothing to them, apparently," said Regina.

The tiny effort of thinking and speaking proved too much for her. Her knees buckled and she folded.

Rex had to carry her to the Gateway.

XI

Rex managed, with enormous effort, to get down the stairway. It took him half an hour. Surprisingly, Regina was conscious, though too weak to raise an arm. He had to leave her on the platform, knowing that if he tried to help her down they would both tumble all the way.

This time there was no water. But within yards of the base of the stairway were hundreds of eggs. Rex sucked a few and took some to Regina. Half an hour later, with his help, she was able to get down the stairs.

And then Venus was with them, strong and capable. Rex noted indifferently, for consideration later, that Venus had known they were back the moment they arrived, as Regina would have done.

It was late afternoon when they reached Limbo, and it was beginning to get dark as they dragged themselves into the house, Venus half carrying Rex and more than half carrying Regina. Only then did Rex ask Venus: "How long were we gone?"

"Twenty-nine days," she said.

As Venus carried Regina upstairs and put her to bed, Rex, sprawled in an armchair, realized that Venus had a clear and important role in Limbo after all — the unlikely one of nurse.

Later, when she had heard the

story, it was Venus who hit on the one word that crystallized the mood of Strand 7, probably of the whole world.

"Desperation," she said.

That was it. As Bullan was characterized by apathy, Cresta was a world of desperation. The scheme to re-create life on the planet wasn't going to work unless someone or something much bigger and richer and more powerful than the little Crestan settlement weighed in and made it work.

It was a far better world than Bullan, but perhaps only because Cresta couldn't afford apathy. Cresta *had* to be desperate...

Next day all Regina could do was lie on a divan out in the open and drink orange juice.

She had always been tiny and fragile. Now as she lay soaking up the veiled sunlight of Limbo, she was a ghost of the tiny creature she had been.

"Obviously," she said faintly when she caught Rex looking at her, "I can't go through a Gateway again. I hope you never go. I know I can't."

Rex sat down beside her. "Perhaps you can," he said.

"Rex, I can't take that again. Oh, I'd do it if it was the only way of getting back here. If it was a matter of life and death. But when it's only an experiment, something done out of curiosity, because you believe exploration is important —"

"What I meant was I don't think transference need be so bad as that. The galaxy model doesn't tell us where Limbo is, but if we assume the length of time gone is proportional to the distance traveled — we've got to assume something — we'll soon get some indication where Limbo probably is. When I went to Bullan I was gone seventeen days.The Cresta double trip took twenty-nine. Bullan is roughly two-thirds of the way to the rim of the galaxy, from the center. Cresta is practically on the rim. Suppose Limbo is roughly at the center — "

"Then we'll have a long trip to Earth," said Regina tiredly.

"We can't go to Earth. On my theory, the next world, Neri, is farther than Bullan, farther even than Cresta. Landfall not quite as far as Bullan. Chuter, at the center of the galaxy, may be no distance at all. We may even be on Chuter."

"Rather wild guesses, aren't they?"

"Of course. To check it, I suggest we go to Chuter next. All of us, Venus too. If I'm right, the journey won't be anything like the ordeal the long trips are — "

"Let's discuss further expeditions from Limbo," said Regina, "in about three months, when I feel approximately human again."

Inevitably, with Regina spending

all day and every day lying in the sun, Venus and Rex spent a lot of time together, working together. It was Venus who helped Rex to fix up a light framework of steel and wood round three sides of the platform facing the Cresta Gateway, preventing birds from flying into it and at the same time leaving the Gateway open. Later she helped Rex to build another stairway at the Chuter Gateway.

Three weeks after the return of Rex and Regina from Cresta, the three of them stood rather awkwardly at the foot of the Chuter stairway. Rex's relations with Regina had been strained in the last few days. They had not quarreled, largely because the Gateways were never mentioned. But it was an awkward situation, a man going on a possibly dangerous mission with a beautiful woman, leaving his wife behind because she had flatly refused to go.

"Good-by, Regina." Rex was formal partly because Venus was there and partly because he wanted the parting, since it could not be cordial, to be as neutral as possible. He kissed Regina lightly, started to say something, and stopped.

They waved from the top of the stairway . . .

This time there was scarcely any unconsciousness. It was almost like awakening from a healthy night's sleep, with a certain thirst, a desire to go to the bathroom and clean his teeth, but no more than that.

Rex took a drink from his water-bottle. They were in a forest of huge trees, with a blinding sun shooting white arrows through thick foliage.

Venus smiled at him. She was throwing aside everything but the sandals, skirt and blouse which she had worn under her overalls for use as tropical kit, as Regina had done on Cresta.

"Now let's get this clear, Venus," he said warmly. "Until we know better, our overalls are our best chance of passing unnoticed on this or any other world. Now put them back on."

She shook her head slowly, her smile fading. "No," she said. "It doesn't matter a damn how we look here — because there's no one to see."

They marked the location of the Gateway. Then they drank, ate some chocolate and found the edge of the forest.

When they saw the city Venus said soberly: "It's dead."

"You can sense things, like Regina?"

"Not quite like Regina. She can see places, things. I can only sense the living and the dead."

"And this planet is dead?"

"No, the animals, birds and insects are alive. Look, there's a flight of birds. But humans . . . it's hard to

say. Quite recently, I think, there were humans. Now they're either dead or have gone away."

The moment they stepped from the shade the heat hit them, making them gasp for breath. Instantly Rex was wet with sweat.

Two out of three worlds very hot. This was worse than Cresta.

They walked over yellow grass to the city. It was neat and clean and new, but nobody moved in it. The streets were bare. On the whole, it looked as if there had been orderly evacuation rather than disaster. Certainly there had been no sudden disaster, for doors were locked, cars were off the streets, and there was no damage. Dust and dirt were negligible.

"There's no life," said Venus, but I can tell the places where life has most recently been."

They went to some of these places and found bodies.

It was no puzzle, no secret. This city, which was called, rather forbiddingly, Havoc, had killed itself, gradually, systematically, ingloriously.

Plenty of material was left for anyone who wanted to write a history of the Last Days of Havoc. Some of the last messages were mere suicide notes. Some were voluminous diaries. Many were tapes left on recorders.

Rex and Venus read and listened to many of these messages from the grave.

The last man in Havoc died three months before they arrived on February 4, 3652. They found several chronometers still recording both galactic time and local time.

In all those hundreds of thousands of last words, they did not find exactly why Havoc had committed suicide.

Some blamed the incessant heat. Some blamed the solitude — Havoc was the only city on the planet, a pilot city set up and populated with 5,000 people and left for five years.

One blamed the fact that there had never been a child in Havoc. On tape he said: "We were meant to have children. There were plenty of young couples. But who was to be the first to bring a child into this world? Early on, we lost heart. It was too hot; the work was hard; there was no variety; nobody could be bothered to do any more than stay alive . . ."

There was a long pause, and then the tired voice went on, the tired voice of a man of twenty-nine whose twenty-three-year-old wife had killed herself that morning.

"We drew together, once there were gaps. We hadn't been here a year, and the ship from Earth wouldn't arrive for five years — that was the bargain. Most of us hadn't realized how hard the cleavage from Earth would hit us. And only a few could go back, we knew that — just a few to tell the story That was the bargain..."

A woman who did not give her name but who sounded like a young girl said on her tape: "There is a sickness in mankind. *Doomsday is near*... and it's our own doing. A hundred suicides, five other deaths. Only 4,895 of us left. The heat. The tiny city. The work. The four years still to wait. And no way of getting back to Earth then... Why did we ever agree?"

There was escalation in suicide. When there were still over 3,000 of them, the people of Havoc began to be terrified of being left alone.

The last man had died just eight months short of the scheduled return of the ship from Earth. Eight months was just too long to wait.

There was one thing more, the thing that made it hopeless, pointless, to wait for the ship. Havoc had murder as well as suicide on its hands.

A low voice on one of the tapes said: "We grew to hate the Twentymen. The rest of us had let go, and they wouldn't let go. They wouldn't let us give up.

"So we killed them. Yes, we killed the Twentymen. All three of them. We couldn't have done it face to face. We arranged a meeting. They turned up. We didn't. And the bomb went off."

The pause was so long that they thought there was no more on the tape. Then the voice began again, perfectly calm now: "That did it. Yes, we meant to kill them. We weren't sorry they were dead. We didn't repent. They didn't haunt us. But later — how could we wait for the ship and say when it came we murdered three Twentymen because they were Twentymen, because they wouldn't let us give up?"

Rex looked up at Venus. They had been listening in silence.

"Apathy, desperation and... what?" he said.

"Fear," she said. "The most spineless kind of mass surrender. They even murdered through fear."

"It's pathological, of course," Rex mused. "Mass neurosis."

"And that girl was right. It's not just in the pathetic five thousand who came here. It's in mankind."

"They know it and they do nothing about it. *Doomsday is near.*"

"For Havoc," said Venus drily, "Doomsday has come and gone."

XII

Regina met them halfway between the Chuter Gateway and the house.

"You were gone only two days," she said.

Rex turned his head away to smile. She was surprised, even a little resentful, that the Chuter mission had so obviously been easy.

Regina had taken a stand against a course she felt to be highly dangerous and a big test of endurance. She had flatly refused to submit

herself to such an ordeal again. Had Rex and Venus returned exhausted, parched, famished, barely able to stagger from the Gateway, she wouldn't necessarily have said "I told you so," but only because it would not have been necessary to say anything. Now it seemed that the Chuter trip had been no more arduous than an overnight stop in the far south of Limbo.

"What did you find?" she asked crossly.

Rex told her.

As they rested at the lake, Venus said abruptly: "Suppose we go to Chuter and stay there."

Regina's astonished stare was her only answer.

"I mean it," said Venus. "Moving between Chuter and Limbo is easy, like walking through any ordinary doorway. If we want anything, we can easily come back. There's an empty city on Chuter, crops for five thousand, plenty of fruit."

"But why?" Rex asked.

"Don't you want to meet the people behind Limbo? The people of Section K? There will be a ship from Earth in five months. It wouldn't have taken five thousand people back to Earth — that wasn't in the bargain, as so many dead men told us. But it'll take three, if we're persuasive. If we let them see we're Twentymen — "

"Yes," said Rex thoughtfully.

"Instead of dragging this on, there's a way to get it over with."

"How?" said Regina quickly.

"We'd have to work together. The three of us draw lots for Neri, Byron, Landfall. Then we all go at the same time, each alone, and compare notes when we get back."

They thought about it. Rex liked the idea: it was a way to get this preliminary investigation over, this thing which had to be done, and be on Chuter in plenty of time to be sure of meeting the ship.

It was Regina, of course, who raised doubts. "Will that be enough? A quick glance at the three other worlds?"

"It might be," Rex said. "I don't think the Gateways are meant to provide six keys, each of them necessary to unlock a vast puzzle. They're more like six windows. We look through each of them, and having done so, we act."

There was still one more important objection Regina could make. She made it. "Assuming you're right about the position of Limbo — near the center of the galaxy, certainly very near Chuter — whoever draws Neri is going to be a long time gone. Maybe forever."

Rex nodded, frowning. "I know. We have to assume it can be done. And that it's important." He took it for granted somehow that he would draw Neri.

"You want me to draw, Rex?"

He hesitated. At last he said: "I don't wish danger on you, Regina. I don't want you to be hurt, or go

through anything like what happened last time. But I do want you to work on this."

"I'll draw," she said.

Rex got Byron, Regina Landfall, and Venus Neri.

Regina lay for a time without opening her eyes, not wishing to awaken. But inexorably awareness came back, and at last she sat up abruptly and opened her eyes, remembering before she saw anything that she was not in the climatic chaos of Landfall after all. She was back in Limbo.

One disappointment... she was alone in Limbo. Venus was not likely to be back from Neri for several weeks, but Rex might easily have been back before her, especially since she had been forced to spend eight days in Landfall.

She shuddered at some of her memories of Landfall, and then breathed deep relief at being back in Limbo.

Rex was not back, as she knew the moment she reached out with the `fingers of her mind. She was not really worried about him, however. It was by the greatest good luck, as well as courage she did not credit herself with possessing, that she was back in Limbo. Some of the desperate things she had done she had accomplished only because there was clearly no choice. But Rex was different.

Her black plastic snowsuit was still damp inside. Curiously, transference, which took days, brought hunger and thirst, but wet clothes didn't dry.

She started off for the house at a determined trot. Soon she had to remove her plastic suit. She left it hidden under a bush in case Rex wanted to examine it as a product of Landfall, the only one she had brought back.

Exertion made her hungry and thirsty, proving that she was in far better state despite the rigors of her stay in Inverkoron than on her return from Cresta, or even on her arrival at Cresta. But she did not pause again until she was home.

Home... Luxuriating in a warm, scented bath that eased her cuts and bruises and drew all the other aches from her body, she remembered that once she had told Rex that Earth was home. Well, so it was. Yet she was less inclined now ever to return there. Landfall had helped to cure her.

She was still in her bath when she sensed that Rex was back. She laughed aloud in relief. On the point of jumping out of the bath and running to him, she changed her mind and relaxed again. There was no sense of distress about his arrival. He would make straight for the house, as they had agreed. Since the Byron Gateway was the nearest except for Bullan, he would be back in an hour or so. She needed that time to make herself look her best,

start a meal in the kitchen, and make a quick round of the house without which it could not be considered habitable.

XIII

"You first, please," Regina said. They were in the lounge with glasses and a bottle of wine Rex had brought back from Byron. Regina, in a cool white dress, somewhat Grecian and nearly ankle-length, was curled on the sofa.

Rex looked at her thoughtfully, wonderingly. "You've changed, Regina," he said.

"In no essential particular," she said. "True, I've been nearly killed by men and women and the elements, beaten with sticks a couple of times, had to swim a river full of ice floes, escaped rape only because my host turned out to be temporarily impotent, dashed against trees in a forest by a wind the like of which you've never dreamed, had my throat cut — "

"What?"

"Oh, it was a threat rather than a serious attempt at murder. And as you see a surgeon was called in at once and fixed me up so that it will never show."

She shrugged. "All that is nothing really, now it's over and I don't have to go through it again. Maybe you're right that I've changed, Rex, but that wasn't what changed me. Let's have your story, Rex."

"There's nothing in it to match yours. Oh, all right."

It was not an exciting or even a very interesting story. Byron was superficially very Terran. Nobody bothered Rex, except one maniac reminiscent of the one he had encountered on Bullan.

Byron was, literally, a mad world, a schizoid world. Except for the Twentymen, who were more necessary there than in most places to preserve even a semblance of order, the Byronians were manic-depressives reacting violently on each other. Their particular type was gay-sad, with frenetic gaiety switching itself, sometimes instantly, to blackest depression. The suicide rate was the highest in the galaxy.

"Can't be higher than Chuter," Regina remarked in one of her rare interruptions. "There it was 100 per cent."

Byron was a world of fantastic excesses. "Venus would find a word to sum it all up," said Rex, "but I can't. Decadence, maybe. Sometimes it reminded me of Rome at its most rotten, with people carousing at the most incredible orgies and then having each other murdered the next morning. Incest — they make quite a point of that. Any man with an attractive daughter who has not contrived to go to bed with her is considered . . . let's say peculiar. There are few of these, because it's equally obligatory for any girl demonstrably nubile to

complete the Electra adventure. The Search for Something on Byron is so desperate, so unremitting, that anything that has not been tried has to be tried, no matter how revolting."

He shook his head as if to clear it. "I stayed longer than I need have done, looking for something that wasn't there. On Byron, it was easy to stay. Find any wildly enthusiastic fun-maker, and he'll give you half what he owns. I tried to pump some of the Twentymen, but all I found was that they feel it their duty to keep the unholy mess from being even worse. Is that enough, or do you want any more details?"

Regina sipped her wine. "This is good. Very good. Does that mean nothing?"

"Nothing. I got it from some Twentymen who made it themselves. They gave me a few things because I helped them in a small way — a few pitiful things that represented the best of Byron. There's a couple of paintings we might hang somewhere, a weird dress for you that's either brilliant or insane, a book that nobody understands but nobody puts down. I left them at the Gateway and hurried here."

Regina stood up and began to move about the room, but not restlessly, Rex noticed, rather with a casual grace which he would have said before this night was more typical of Venus than Regina. He looked at her admiringly and with a new wonder.

It was hard to listen without irrelevant anger or belated protectiveness as she told him what had happened to her on Landfall.

The dominant feature of Landfall was rage. Not the maniacal rage he had encountered on Byron. Cold rage directed mainly at Earth, so far away from Landfall and so implacable.

Unfortunately, the first time Regina spoke, her accent immediately identified her as Terran.

There were no Twentymen in Landfall. It was partly for this reason that all the nastiness of humanity went naked there, without even the minor check on the baser instincts that the Twentymen achieved.

When Regina gave herself away as a Terran, a gang of teenagers, girls as well as youths, beat her with sticks. Rescued by police, she was taken to headquarters, where they shut her in an open courtyard with snow three feet deep and forgot her existence.

Hungry and frozen, she labored for an hour to build up stamped-down snow so that she could climb over a thirteen-foot gate and was on the point of escape when one of the fantastic climactic reversals of Landfall hit the courtyard. A blast of searing heat, swirling, boiling, dry air, funneled down, took Regina's breath away and melted

the snow in seconds. Although the drainage was good — it had to be in Inverkoron — she was soaked to the waist before the water had flowed away.

Since there was now no means of escape over the gate, she had to take the chance of breaking a window and entering one of the buildings. For the first time fortune favored her; she found herself in a pantry, and thereafter hunger wasn't a major hardship.

She escaped from the building easily enough, but her gray overalls did not make her inconspicuous in Inverkoron, where everyone wore plastic suits with hoods, internally heated. A crowd gathered again, shouting abuse at her, and she was saved from further violence only by the intervention of a little fat man.

The little fat man took her home with him, and she went not unwillingly because it was snowing heavily again, night was falling and she knew it was physically impossible at the moment for her to reach the Gateway, although it was barely a mile from Inverkoron. She felt she could handle the little fat man, and she couldn't handle a mob.

It worked out quite well, the first night. The little man lived pitifully in a tiny and rather dirty corner of a large house. Once the whole house had been his and technically it still was, but after his wife and family left him he was not allowed to keep all that first-class accommodation to himself. Despite his wealth, he was shoved into a bedroom, bathroom and kitchenette, and this palatial suite was walled off from the rest of the house. He entered by a door starkly cut in the outside wall of the bedroom.

"You don't sound at all sorry for the little man," said Rex.

"I'm not sorry for him," said Regina grimly. "Wait."

The little man started to make supper, but gratefully accepted Regina's offer to take over. Afterwards, he made passes at her which she was able to ignore. She slept at first on the floor and later in the bath, with the door locked, after wakening to find her host feebly pawing her.

The next morning she made breakfast and decided she had seen enough of Landfall. After breakfast the little man, who had apparently been steeling himself, made quite a determined assault on her virtue. Regina was not impressed until she found herself pressed against a wall by his greater weight, with a long and very sharp knife at her throat.

"That was when it happened," Rex said.

She nodded. "He was so ineffectual I was sure he was bluffing. I made it very clear that in no circumstances would I have anything to do with him, in that way. Then I felt blood running down my neck."

A doctor was called, and she was patched up efficiently. The little man was incoherently apologetic, and she did feel a little sorry for him... until the police arrived, called by the little fat man, to take her away, because she was no good to him.

She then spent several days in a semi-jail, semi-asylum. She was fed well enough and nobody bothered her. There was no word of trial either.

Then three men came to pay her fine and, apparently, buy her. As a Terran she had no rights. She was not supposed to be there. Any time she ceased to be there, no one would care.

"The last night," said Regina "I was locked in a bathroom right at the top of an eleven-story block of flats I — "

"Hey, what's this?" Rex demanded "You've skipped about four days."

Regina said firmly. "Honestly, I don't think it's relevant. There's more to tell you, but what matters all happened after I was locked in that bathroom — "

"Please, Regina," said Rex.

She looked at him steadily, asking him not to insist. When he said nothing, she sighed and said: "All right. They bought me to put me on show."

"On show?"

"For people to pay money to spit on a Terran girl. At first they hung me up outside by my wrists, in a disgusting costume, and periodically threw water over me. But I fainted from the cold, and they saw they were going to lose me very quickly if they went on treating me like that. So they moved the show inside and dressed me in filthy rags. Thousands of people came."

She shuddered. "The little fat man came, and he spat on me. They let me loose, but with my hands tied behind my back, and threw disgusting food on the floor. I was supposed to get down and lick it with my tongue. I ignored it, and they beat me with sticks. I still wouldn't eat the food on the floor. After that they fed me decently. I was a valuable property. More thousands came. Then the flow began to diminish. A new act was needed. This time they cleaned me up and made me a pin-up girl, swathed in jewels and yards of scarlet satin. At least the crowds weren't allowed to spit any more. That worked for another day."

"They had a lot of bright ideas, did they?" Rex said quietly. "I can guess."

"The best one, of course, was to put me up for auction — not for keeps, just for a half-hour. I told you about that already. My sponsors were annoyed, because this part of the show was public too, and it was an utter flop. More than that, I got scratched and they had to let

me clean myself. That was when I was locked in the bathroom."

"Ah," said Rex. He was fighting down the impulse to go to Inverkoron immediately and clobber everyone in sight.

"Well, I knew I was on the top floor. I knew the river Koron flowed past the block. They knew that too. I suppose it didn't occur to them, because I'd made it perfectly clear that I wasn't the suicide type, that I'd break the window and jump out."

Rex got up and sat beside her, taking her in his arms. "Why did you?" he asked.

"Well, it was the first real chance I'd had. So I took it."

"Yes," said Rex, caressing her gently.

"So . . . I dropped the satin rubbish on the floor, because it could only hamper me. I smashed the window with a jar of bath salts. Then I got through and pushed myself outwards as I fell. The water was freezing. Anyway, I missed the ice floes. I went so deep I thought I'd never come up again. But after I reached the other side and climbed out, the cold struck right through me, I could scarcely move for shivering, and I knew I had to get a snowsuit in about two minutes or it would be too late."

"You got it," said Rex.

"Yes. I don't know whether I killed the man or just stunned him. When I saw his face I was relieved. I was certain he was one of those who spat on me. That made me feel a lot less guilty."

The whole thing should have been over then. She was less than half a mile from the Gateway. However, she had scarcely passed the end of the last bridge across the Koron when she heard the howling mob racing across from the other side. She must have been heard breaking the window. They must have guessed where she had to go.

She ran, at least having the advantage of knowing exactly where she was going. In a flurry of snow it seemed for a minute or two that she was bound to make it. Then the night cleared, the air went still and there was a shout behind her as the mob saw her.

Looking over her shoulder she tripped on a root, and although she was up at once, no bones broken, she could not put her left foot to the ground. And she knew it was over — the wrong way.

She turned to wait for the mob, and, twenty beams of light fastened on her as she waited without a trace of fear, despising the mob too much for fear.

She smiled.

One of the beams faltered, then another. The crowd broke.

"It was all unnecessary," Regina sighed. "Hadn't you already found that for yourself? Landfall has no Twentymen, but when I stood and

faced them, they were helpless. I needn't have let those kids beat me. I could have handled the little fat man more easily with my eyes, if I ever really looked at him. The three showmen, even the crowds, I could have silenced and cowed. I didn't need to be brave, to be desperate. I'm a Twentyman. If I'd stood up for myself and dared them to touch me, instead of bowing my head and hoping I'd find the courage to get through the next ten minutes, none of this would have happened."

Rex turned her head and kissed her. "Thank you," he said.

"For what?"

"For helping. For going through all that."

"Unnecessarily."

"No. If you'd marched into Inverkoron as a Twentyman, making all bow down before you, you'd have learned nothing."

"And it matters, Rex? You think it matters? Does what we've found out make sense?"

"Yes," he said.

"Well, tell me the sense."

He shook his head. "It's one of those things that everyone has to decide for himself, or herself."

"And you've decided?"

"Yes."

"Then Venus is wasting her time? You already know what she'll find?"

"No, I wouldn't say that. I could make a few guesses, not more than three. If she confirms what I suspect, that will be very important."

Regina shrugged. "My voice is raw. I'm tired. The wine is finished. Venus won't be back for days, maybe weeks. I'm disgusted with some men, but not, strangely enough, with you. Are you coming to bed or aren't you?"

"I'm coming."

Much later they established, almost definitely, that that was the start of Regina's pregnancy.

XIV

They were both, as it happened, obliviously ill at the moment when Venus returned from Neri. It was food poisoning, beyond doubt the result of using a defective can of food. Even in Limbo, such things could happen. As a result, Regina was too deeply asleep, with a high temperature, to sense Venus's return, and Rex couldn't do things like that anyway.

Thus it was that Rex, venturing shakily downstairs late the next day, encountered Venus dragging herself tiredly into the house, wrapped in a shapeless, all-enveloping cloak which was curiously stained. Weak as he was, he rushed to help her, but she held up her hand.

"I'll manage," she said. "I'll be all right now."

She was as beautiful as ever, though tired.

"I won't be down for two or three days," she said, "but I think I can

tell you in one word all that Neri stands for."

"Venus, I'm sorry we weren't able to help you — "

"Never mind that. I didn't need help, and I'm back now, thank God. You and Regina are all right, I know. In fact you're closer than you ever were."

She dragged herself towards the stairs, and Rex had to check himself. Except when it was accidental or in play, or in tiny acts of courtesy, she had never let him touch her, he remembered.

"Neri in one word," she said, turning at the foot of the stairs. *"Cruelty."*

And as he watched her, with troubled eyes, pulling herself up by the banister, Rex realized that what Regina had suffered in Inverkoron was merely rage, as she described it, not *cruelty*.

It was winter in London.

There had been no difficulty in getting this far. There had been regret at leaving Limbo, greater regret at leaving Regina. It had been decided that he alone should return to Chuter and wait for the ship there.

There was regret at leaving Limbo and Regina to go to Earth, but no difficulty. The ship from Earth, a fast scout, arrived at Havoc exactly on schedule, and Rex, for once admitting from the first his Twentyman status, found he could have told any lie and been believed. As it happened, it was unnecessary to tell any lies, except the indirect one of pretending to be one of the Chuter Twentymen. He had temporarily adopted the identity of an actual Twentyman, one of the first to be murdered.

The crew and field-study group brought by the ship were quite unsurprised at what had happened. They were rather surprised and relieved to find a surviving Twentyman who could save time and trouble by telling them what had happened and had already collated the story of the last days of the Havoc settlement. Anyway, he was taken back to Earth, where he was to report, conveniently, to the Department of Education and Science, London — not Section K, but another section in the same building.

As he strode through archaic slush in London's West End, knowing Regina was only six months pregnant and that it was perfectly possible that he might be back in Limbo before her time came, Rex was in a mood to get the present unpleasant business over as soon as possible.

London was one of the museum cities of Earth, the central part kept as it had been a thousand years ago, except that only ceremonial traffic ever passed through the old-fashioned streets.

Wearing a hat, coat and gloves over a lounge suit and leather shoes

(all charged to Section K), Rex looked more at the people than the surroundings.

He was reminded of Bullan.

Mercury was no museum city. Unlike the West End of London, it was entirely functional, planned and built for the present circumstances. Yet the people who passed him without even a glance at him reminded him irresistibly of the people of Mercury, although they were dressed quite differently.

Tourists had to be allowed in, had to be allowed even to live in the sanctuary, because otherwise the object would not be achieved. The Ritz, the Dorchester, the Grosvenor, the Berkeley were still there, but only outworld visitors could stay there. The waiting list was so enormous that chance decided who actually got in; there was a complicated system of priorities for Earth visits, and even someone who got to the head of the list had to accept the booking he got, which might be for London, New York, Moscow, Berlin, Paris, Edinburgh, Shanghai, Calcutta, Sydney or any other of the seven hundred museum cities or the five thousand reservations.

Apart from the gawking visitors, the people, like the Mercurians, were isolated, apathetic. The Terrans were no master-race.

Rex reached the Department of Education and Science and looked at its exterior, unimpressed. He was not surprised to find it took up the whole of one side of Hill Street. He would not have been surprised if it stretched all the way to the Thames.

He entered by a glass door and found himself between two lines of reception desks, as if the Department of Education and Science dealt with hundreds of visitors an hour. But he and the middle-aged woman behind one of the desks were the only people in the place.

"Section K," he said briefly.

She pressed buttons on a viewer file beside her, and he realized, incredulously, that she was looking up the location of Section K.

"Section K comes under the Research Group," she said finally. "Go to B7134 — and take it from there," she added with a wintry smile.

"Thank you." At the end of the entrance hall, a passage at right angles had wall signs and arrows indicating A-M and N-Z. He took the first.

For such an enormous building, the Department seemed singularly deserted. Only occasionally did he meet a typist or an office boy crossing the miles of corridors. After walking several hundred yards he found and entered the B section.

All the doors, the infinity of doors were blank and no sound came from within.

Then, suddenly, everything was easy. At another desk, facing another middle-aged woman, he knew he had to give a password. He said: "Rex."

In no time at all he was shown into the office of John Hilton, the section chief.

Hilton, a quiet little man with gray hair and watchful eyes, came to him with hand oustretched in greeting.

"Glad to see you, Rex," he said cautiously. "Surprised, but glad." His grasp was soft and warm.

"Why surprised?"

"You weren't expected for at least another five years. Sooner or later you had to investigate Section K. It was presumed you'd explore the six available worlds first. Did you?"

"We had a look at them."

"You and ..."

"Regina and Venus."

"Oh. Venus too."

Hilton's eyes, if anything, had become even more watchful. He went back to his desk and waved Rex to a chair, yet all the time Rex felt he was watching for something ... or perhaps everything.

"Hilton, who am I?"

Hilton was silent, questioning. Rex had to give him a reason for answering that before he would answer.

"I know I'm a Twentyman — "

"Wrong."

"I'm a Twentyman," said Rex patiently, "and so is Regina and so is Venus."

"Wrong. Regina is a Twentyman. You and Venus are Millionmen. The only two in existence."

"Ah," said Rex. "Perhaps I understand about Venus and myself. Tell me about Regina. Why is she only a Twentyman?"

Hilton smiled. "Only a Twentyman?"

"It's been harder for her. She's too Earthbound. Happy in Limbo, but — " He stopped. He was not handing out information, but seeking it. "The dominant personality, Regina's dominant personality, was borrowed?"

Hilton nodded, unsurprised this time. "I know what you mean. You and Venus are yourselves, plus 999,999 would-be suicides. Regina is a Dominant who chose the body of one of her nineteen ... partners. It often happens. Naturally she chose the prettiest."

"But that made her an uneasy amalgam. It's only now that she's begun to ... Never mind, I know about that. Now, Hilton — the goal. What is it? *Why?*"

When Hilton shook his head, Rex went on wearily: "Oh, please take my word for it I only want to plug the holes. I *know* the goal. We had psychological treatment and were then sent to Limbo to lose our Earth ties. We were given a

chance to see six not particularly important worlds to find out that Doomsday is near, and why. We were supposed to decide something ought to be done about it, and figure out what. All that is elementary, and I wouldn't be here if I hadn't already made up my mind what has to be done — "

Hilton was really startled this time. He was excited too. He jumped up and began to pace about.

"Something can be done? You have a plan?"

"However," said Rex in the same tone, "there are, as I told you, holes I want to plug. I can't guess everything."

He stood up. "Hilton," he said softly, "tell me what I have to know."

Hilton went behind the desk and sat down again. He began to smile. "You may be a Millionman, Rex," he said, "but of course I'm a Twentyman myself. *Only* a Twentyman. But you'll find it's no use trying to browbeat me."

"All right," said Rex. "Assume I've decided what to do. Assume that, simply as a hypothesis. Assume that I'm going to do what I believe has to be done. Don't you think you'd better tell me anything I should know before I take the first step to implement the plan?"

"I think you should know it," Hilton said. "But I don't think *I* should tell you."

"Then who should?"

"Venus."

Rex stood still for several seconds and then nodded. "Yes. That's right. Venus. Who gave us these ridiculous names, by the way?"

"You chose them yourselves," said Hilton mildly.

"How can I get back?"

"Now there's a problem. There's a Gateway between this building and the place you call Limbo, of course."

"I guessed that."

"But it can be locked shut on Limbo, and it is. You can't use that."

"Venus might have told me. A lot of trouble could have been saved."

"Venus probably doesn't know. When you get back, remind her of Ron and Phyllis."

"Regina and me?" said Rex quickly.

Hilton shook his head. "Tell her of the time she turned her back. Remind her she was tricked into being the first Millionman. If she sounds bitter, remind her that it was she who decided there should be one other Millionman — you."

"That's all?"

"It should be enough."

"How do I get back to Limbo?"

Hilton leaned back in his chair. "Well, Limbo is on a poisonous, useless, sterile world that marches round an uninteresting sun in an unvarying orbit. It's impossible for

any ordinary ship to land on the world — Limbo, as you may have guessed, is a bubble sanctuary, a sort of immobile luxury space-houseboat. It was created as an experiment quite independent of the things which have been concerning you. We took it over later. Anyway, you can return only through one of the seven MT screens, and the direct one is locked."

"That means I have to get to Bullan or Cresta or Neri or . . ."

"Just a minute." Hilton pressed a button. "I'll see what can be done."

XV

It was not far to the house from the Cresta Gateway. Rex was nearly there when Regina came running to throw herself in his arms, laughing and crying at once.

Presently he held her back to look at her, and marveled. She had completely lost her former glossy smartness. Having a child to look after had made her settle for practical neatness rather than bandbox elegance. She wore a white sweater and white shorts and flat shoes, and her hair was simply caught in a band. But she was far lovelier, and Rex realized, even if she herself did not have the important clue, that she was at last one in mind and body, having come to accept herself as she was.

"The baby?" he said.

"Princess? Crawling in the grass at the back. We made a playpen, Venus and I."

"Princess?" said Rex.

"That needn't be her name. Since we hadn't decided on a name together, I called her that — it's pretty obvious, isn't it, though maybe it should have been in Latin — as a sort of pet name, one we can always use even though we call her Dawn or Mary or Venetia — "

"Venetia?"

She laughed again. "Oh well. We'll talk it over, of course . . . she just seems like a little Venetia to me."

At the house they found Venus patiently waiting for them, curious, naturally, but taking it for granted that Rex would want to see Princess first of all. Princess, or Venetia, was really an unusually beautiful child, he decided, and remarkably healthy. The moment he saw her he changed his mind, like so many other fathers, and told himself he hadn't really wanted a son after all.

Left alone after lunch while Venus and Regina attended to Princess and settled her for her afternoon nap — apparently it took two of them to do it — Rex went down to the cellar and then the vault. At the wall board he did what the technicians of Section K had told him to do, after Hilton reluctantly agreed. Basically the effect was to merge the Chuter and

Cresta Gateways, so that people on the Cresta side found themselves in Chuter direct, without having to touch Limbo. There were ways in which he could still use both Gateways himself, and return to Limbo. Without real understanding, he did as he had been told. The job would not have been difficult but for the fact that he had felt it necessary to know from the equipment here how many people were making use of the Gateway. Through the girl at the immigration center, they would know now what to do — but would they do it?

It was late in the afternoon before he left the vault and sought out Regina and Venus.

He found Venus in the kitchen, preparing something very elaborate for dinner, no doubt in honor of his return. He began to feel hungry at once.

"Where's Regina?" he asked.

"At the lake with Princess."

Venus was working with a quickness and assurance which was entirely like her, but her obvious total command of the kitchen was something new.

"You do the cooking now?" he said.

"Some of it."

"You were never as good a cook as Regina."

"Now that's not very nice, Rex. I always do my best."

"But now you are."

"She and I have been working in the kitchen. I may have picked up a few things."

"She couldn't teach you a thing. And you know it."

Venus wiped her hands, took a last look round to see that all was well and drew him with her into the lounge.

"They told you?" she said quietly.

Rex was almost certain that she was talking about something he had not been told, but hazily guessed.

"Not exactly," he said. "Hilton told me you would tell me."

"But you know?"

"Please, Venus," he said, "let's have no more sparring. Hilton told me to remind you of Ron and Phyllis — "

"Oh." There was sadness in her face.

"And of the time you turned your back."

Now the sadness was pain. "Rex, I wonder if you know what you're doing to me," she said.

"I don't, but it seems I have to do it. I was to remind you you were tricked into being the first Millionman."

Bleakly she murmured: "That's something I don't need reminding about. It's something I remembered even as I looked at the cases and read the labels Rex, Regina and Venus."

"Hilton said," Rex went on, " 'if

she sounds bitter, remind her that it was she who decided there should be one other Millionman — you.' "

The sadness and the pain was gone, replaced by resignation that was almost her old serenity. "Yes," she said. "And I'm almost sure I made up for everything with that. You're not as I thought you'd be, Rex. You're not tortured, like me."

"Tortured? You?"

"The Millionman experiment was not a success. Twentymen, yes. They're not perfect, they're not geniuses, yet the relatively few Twentymen in the galaxy are holding Doomsday back."

Rex nodded. "I've seen that."

"Talking isn't one of my favorite occupations, Rex. You know that. What do you want?"

"That's the trouble. I don't know."

"So you want me to tell you what I think you should know."

"Yes."

"That would amount to my directing you."

"You said talking isn't your favorite occupation. Why not tell me in about three sentences the plain facts that you know and I don't, and let me worry about the use to make of them?"

"I could . . . Rex, do you know what has to be done?"

"Yes." He didn't say, "I think so." He said simply, "Yes."

"Anything more I tell you may make it harder for you to do what has to be done. Think about that."

He hesitated. He thought of Regina and Princess. And he found an excuse or even a good reason to wait for a few more days.

He wanted to know about the Crestans. What they did could be the crucial point. Did they realize that they *must* disobey earth's ruling and go to Chuker?

He was already certain what had to be done. But there was one more test.

"I'll wait," he said. "But it has to come — you know that."

"I know that," said Venus. The pain was back in her eyes.

Even Cresta, the most independent world he had found, was a dependent. A dependent relative. Not a world with courage and freedom of action. There was no such world. They had a chance of life, but they found Earth's displeasure.

And finally one day he talked to Venus, again when Regina set off with Princess for the lake. He set out clearly what he wanted to know, and she told him.

She was right — it made it harder. At the same time, however, what she told him crystallized everything.

As a young but highly regarded executive in Section K, just married and very happily married, she first became involved with Limbo (it wasn't called Limbo, of course). Here was a white elephant aban-

doned by the section which had gone to enormous, expensive trouble to create it. What could be done with it?

That, at the time, was only a minor problem. Her husband Ron, also in Section K, was asked to become a Twentyman. Asked — that was a little unusual. Suicides and would-be Twentymen Dominants were so common that it was rare for anyone not actively thinking of becoming a Twentyman or part of a Twentyman to be invited into the circle. But Ron, Section K thought, would be more useful to them as a Twentyman.

He went to the clinic at the appointed time, a routine affair. Nothing ever went wrong. The process was well established.

But Ron died. So did the others.

Phyllis, or Venus as Rex still thought of her, was shattered. She was pregnant at the time, and she was a one-man woman. There would never be another man for her. While her baby was growing in her, she worked, since she had to work on something, on the Limbo project.

And she achieved cold, brilliant success.

A cold, brilliant overseer was needed. The human race was in a sorry mess. Population explosions had led to frantic colonization of the galaxy, but nobody had guessed what would follow that . . .

Section K had had a plan for Ron and later, when that failed, Venus. A special Twentyman with all ties broken might see the Answer, if there was an Answer. After Ron's death Venus took over, for something to do.

Venus had learned by this time that Ron had been meant to be a Thousandman, the first ever. And something had gone wrong.

Coldly, dispassionately, in a manner diametrically opposed to her essential nature, Venus set up the project — in her last months of pregnancy and before she was even a Twentyman.

Someone would be sent to Limbo alone to live there and lose involvement with Earth and the human race. The new MT transference would be used with deep-sleep and certain phychiatric techniques to ensure that the Supremo should have all impersonal knowledge and no personal knowledge whatever. The Supremo would sleep perforce for ten years and exist in Limbo for another ten. After that, the Supremo, it was hoped, would know what to do.

Venus had her baby, a girl, and never looked at her. Venus had turned her back on everything except Project Supremo, which had sustained her for eight months. Now she wanted to die, like so many others.

They tricked her by making her think she was to be one of the nineteen to feed a Twentyman. Her

baby would be looked after, of course. She accepted gladly.

Instead, she was the Dominant. And she was not merely a Twentyman at the end, but a Millionman.

Nine hundred and ninety-nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine women died willingly to make her. She would have screamed at the cruelty of the trick that had been played on her, but for the fact that as a Millionman — there was no failure this time — she had become a unique being, unable to scream about things which could not be helped.

She still abandoned Regina, but she went to Limbo instead of to heaven or hell.

On her awakening in Limbo, things were different, but not different enough. She would never forget Ron. She never managed to become uninvolved, and she knew it. Her idea, formed when she was an ordinary girl of twenty or so, not sound. But she was not the one to put it into practice.

There was only one Gateway then, the one to Earth. It was in the vault, only to be discovered when the occupant of Limbo had attained serenity and poise and ice-cold clarity. Venus found it at once.

She did not spend ten years awake in Limbo. She spent scarcely two. At about the time when Regina was fourteen, Venus, who had made the Limbo plan, saw the inadequacies in it and in herself.

First, she was not the Supremo. A man was needed, and not an entirely lonely man. Such a man, instead of being utterly impartial, was bound to be in some ways more involved than ever with the future of his race elsewhere.

Secondly, she knew too much. The process intended to divorce the Supremo from personal involvement with the human race had to go deeper. He had to remember still less. Yet at the same time, he had to be able to learn something of the situation in the galaxy. He had to be able to see it for himself and make up his mind about it and about what had to be done. She did not then know much about MT transference, an expensive system with many snags.

So Venus went back to Earth. Her old boss was dead, a fact which for the good of Project Supremo was perhaps as well. She could never have worked at full efficiency with the man who had killed Ron and tricked her.

The new chief was John Hilton.

The new plan took four years to work out and put into effect. Venus never saw her daughter, never sought to see her. And then, when the vast Section K computers were asked for the names of young men and women most fitted to figure in the key roles of Project Supremo, one of the first names to issue from the machines was that of Venus's daughter.

"Possibly John Hilton arranged that deliberately," she said. "He was in on the original plan, as a young man. I think he was horrified at my abandonment of . . . I may as well go on calling her Regina.

"You were a brash young man, less assured then and over-confident in manner. But I felt sure you were right. Regina was curiously rootless. My fault. She had known love all right, but not from her family. And there had been no man in her life. She was keen on the idea, as a theory — "

"Did we ever meet? Regina and I?"

"No. We all agreed, including yourselves, that the first meeting should be in Limbo. And I was to return with you . . . I don't have to tell you any more, do I? You know all you have to know. Perhaps it might be better if you knew a little less."

Rex knew what she meant, but had not been aware that she knew.

"You're so young," he said wonderingly.

She smiled. "I was born in 3607, which makes me forty-five. But I've lived less than thirty years — funny, I've never bothered to work it out. Ten off for my first long sleep, a little over five for the second. And deepsleep has a rejuvenating effect. I suppose, practically, I'm around twenty-five."

"About that I always thought," said Rex. "No wonder it didn't exactly spring to my mind that you were my mother-in-law."

"And yet . . . you always knew, didn't you?"

"I knew something."

There was a long pause. Both knew what was coming, but neither was in a hurry to go ahead.

At last Venus said: "You've made up your mind, Rex?"

"Yes."

"You're sure?"

"I'm certain. The only doubt is whether I have to do it myself or if it's possible to ask you."

She smiled. "Of course it's possible to ask me. It's possible to ask anyone anything."

"Not this."

Her smile faded. "I knew all along. I created the plan, but I couldn't face the conclusion. No, Rex, you needn't ask. Just tell me you're certain that it's the only way."

"It's the only way."

"Right," she said briskly. "You do me credit, Rex. You have the moral courage to order what no one else could order, and to order someone other than yourself to be the one to do it."

"It's no order — "

"Now, don't let me down, Rex. After all, I'm not *your* mother, but I created you. You have broad shoulders. Take the responsibility, and never deny to yourself or anyone else that you took it."

"All right. He smiled faintly. "You know, of course, that you're not making it difficult for me, Venus. You're making it easy."

"Let me try to make the other part easier for you too. You *have* to stay here. You have to be the general who gives the brutal order and then sits back and watches. That's why you were created. That's why you're here. Good-bye, Rex."

It was so abrupt that he was caught off his guard. She kissed him lightly and said, as even a Millionman mother couldn't help doing: "Look after Regina."

Then she left him. He forced himself not to move.

Venus knew far more of the workings of Limbo than he did, having helped to set them up. She would return straight to Earth. She knew how.

It was only a few minutes later that Regina dashed in.

"What's happening?" she asked breathlesly.

The ESP gifts of Venus and Regina were not identical, but they shared each other's special abilities to some extent. Venus sensed feelings, mainly, and Regina things, but Regina had clearly sensed something far more than the simple fact that Venus had gone down to the vault, alone.

"Where's Venetia?" said Rex, stalling.

"She's sleeping. I left her outside. What's happened to Venus?"

Rex found he couldn't say anything. He was, as Venus said, the general who gave the brutal order and then sat back in safety to watch. He, and not Venus, was the greatest criminal in history.

"She's gone," he said at last. "I don't think we'll ever see her again. That's what you wanted, isn't it?"

"Did you send her away?"

"I didn't have to. She knew what she had to do."

"Because of us?"

He shook his head. "Nothing so unimportant as the convenience of two people."

"Well, tell me!"

"How do you feel about Venus now, Regina?"

She shrugged impatiently. "Oh, she's . . . well, she and I are linked somehow. She could be my sister. If that's what you've got to tell me, don't pile on the suspense."

"She's your mother."

Regina drew in her breath. She had not expected that. Yet once she heard it,it made so much sense to her that she didn't argue, didn't protest about any of the difficulties, such as the curiosity of a twenty-five-year-old girl having a daughter of nineteen.

"Well, we're straight now," she said at last. "I think everything's been put right between us. Come to that, I never did or said anything to her I might regret for the

rest of my life. And I did throw the switch, the first time I had the chance."

"Didn't you know all along?"

"No," she said frankly. "There were times when I hated her." There were tears in her eyes.

"I must go and see if Venetia is all right," she said, jumping up.

Princess was Venetia now; they had never agreed on it, it was taken for granted. And Rex was glad that that had been established even before they knew that Venetia was Venus's granddaughter. Occasionally they called her Princess. That would stick too.

When Regina came back she was thoughtful again.

"Venus has gone, you said. By way of the vault?"

"To Earth."

"There's another Gateway, then?"

Rex now had an easy way to stall for a while. He told her what Venus had told him. But at the end...

Regina faced him. "What's this thing she's gone to do?"

"Destroy Earth," said Rex quietly.

XVI

The words didn't register. Regina stared at him blankly.

"Isn't it as obvious to you as it was to her and to me?" said Rex harshly. "Some sons and daughters never cut loose from their mother's apron strings. That's what happened with the children of Mother Earth. They weren't forced, like you, to live for the whole of their childhood and adolescence without a father and without a mother. The umbilical cord was never cut. They went on depending on Earth. The children of Earth, all over the galaxy never grew up, because Earth was so big, so powerful, so efficient in the early stages that it was never necessary for them to grow up. Those settlements that did cut themselves off failed, perhaps by chance, perhaps by — "

"Destroy Earth?" said Regina incredulously.

"We've seen six of the colonies. Bullan, apathetic. Cresta, desperate. Chuter, self-canceled because Earth didn't come back to help. Landfall — "

"Never mind about Landfall. I was there. You weren't." She pause "You really mean — "

"There's only one way to do it."

"The most inhuman mass murder in history?"

"Yes."

"And Venus agreed?"

"We didn't discuss it. She knew."

"You sent her?"

Rex didn't even wince. "She went."

"To do what, exactly? What were your instructions?"

"I told you, there were no instructions. She knew."

"Don't keep saying that!"

"She went to Earth. That's all."

Regina jumped up. "Destroy Earth? That will be easy, of course. All she'll have to do is buy a firework. Why, it's nonsense. How could she possibly — "

They looked at each other, suddenly close again. Venus was no ordinary woman. Whatever had to be done, she would be able to do. She didn't have to be instructed. She would find a way to do it.

"But she'll come back," whispered Regina.

Rex shook his head. "You know better. If she destroyed Earth, could she allow herself to escape before the end? No. She'll stay. So would I."

Regina was suddenly furious. "But you let her go, and didn't go yourself? Even if it's necessary... Well, maybe for the greatest good for the greatest number it might be. How should I know? I'm only a Twentyman. Rex — we've got to stop her."

Regina's sudden appeal was to him as her husband. He followed her as she ran to the cellar, raced down the stone steps scarcely touching them, and leaped into her case...

It didn't move. She shut the lid behind her, opened it, stared at Rex frantically, shut it again.

Rex tried his own. It didn't move either. And Venus's case was locked.

"Break it open!" Regina exclaimed.

There was nothing in the cellar with which to do this. Rex went with Regina to the workshop. There he caught her in his arms gently but firmly.

"Regina. This is no use."

"Maybe, but we've got to try, haven't we?"

"No. Venus wanted to go."

"Wanted to? Nonsense. How could anyone want to?"

"She knew it had to be done. She knew she had to do it. I was created merely to confirm what she knew."

"If a mere Twentyman like me can't commit suicide, how can a Millionman like her?"

"Regina." His voice was no longer urgent, but soft. "You were right. This was what you saw. What you knew. Why you fought exploration of the Gateways all along. Yet you knew, as you fought, that it couldn't be stopped."

"It?"

"What Venus calls Project Supremo."

"And you," she said bitterly, freeing herself to step back and look at him, "are the Supremo."

"No."

"What do you mean, no?"

"Venus is and always was behind it. We're part of Venus's plan. We were needed, I was needed, as a switch is needed. You don't complete the circuit as you build a relay. You include a switch so that when the time is right, *someone* can."

"A switch," she whispered.

"Yes, a switch. I was the switch. At the right time."

"I did know."

He said nothing.

She said quietly. "All right, so I'm in it too. In her plan, I mean. When I saw the switch on her plinth, I knew it would be far better for all of us if it was never touched. But I knew I had to close the switch, and I did it. So . . ."

Her eyes were full of tears. "I think I knew then that by reviving Venus, I was killing her. And yet I had to do it."

Rex kissed her very gently. He did not feel like a murderer.

Two months later they found the way to the vault again open to them. But when they got there, there was no sign of any Gateway to Earth. That remained Venus's secret.

And there was nothing Regina could do.

It was not until after Prince was born (they called him Ron and sometimes Prince, as they called his sister Venetia and sometimes Princess) that the relay set up in the vault showed that the Cresta-Chuter Gateway had been used at last. First a few went to Chuter. Then a pause. Then some of them returned. Then many began to use the Gateway.

"Now they know Earth is gone."

It wasn't Rex who said that, it was Regina.

And it was Rex who said: "Venus is gone too."

"Well," said Regina, with the brutal practicality of a mother of two, "she left me for nineteen years. I must try to remember that. Before I abandoned Prince and Princess, something would have to happen to me that . . ."

She shuddered. "She was a lovely woman. But I believe now some of the things you told me just after she left. Her life must have been over before we ever knew her. Being a Millionman, maybe she was glad of a great, important, unanswerable, unavoidable excuse to die."

It was a strange epitaph, and it might have been better expressed. But Rex thought there had seldom been a truer one. And Regina said it.

They were happy. Regina never left Limbo, would never leave Limbo again. Rex went to one of the Gateway worlds only occasionally, to keep in touch with events in the galaxy. What he saw was good, and he was pleased. Any surgeon who cut off a leg would be glad to have it confirmed that the leg was incurably diseased.

He had to keep on watching what was going on.

He would always have to watch what was going on.

Some day he might be needed again.

END

TRIAL BY FIRE

(*continued from page* 98)

notion, follow humbly wherever and to whatever abysses Nature leads, or you shall learn nothing.' The scientists must recognize that he still is a layman in every field but one. And in that one field he must accept the consequences of his actions, reckoning the human payment for every change and communicating broadly the information that is peculiarly his own. I do not say it; the gulf between the people and the scientists demands it."

"You claim that they are a separate breed?"

"Their attitudes set them apart; their common interests and their common heritage must bring them back together. The scientist is rational man at work. The mob is irrational, wherein lies the ultimate terror for the reasoning man."

"Now you are calling the people irrational!"

"Only when they act like a mob or when, like the scientist when he is out of his laboratory, they are sentimentalists. The sentimentalist is the person who wants to eat his cake and have it, too. G. K. Chesterton once said about him, 'He has no sense of honor about ideas; he will not see that one must pay for an idea as for anything else. He will have them all at once in one wild intellectual harem, no matter how much they quarrel.' "

Kelley studied the audience and the jury and then looked back at Wilson. "Science never has reckoned the consequences for any of its actions or computed the human payment that must be made. Why should it start now?"

"Men once never herded cattle or tilled the land or lived in cities or traveled in airplanes. Tribes once killed every stranger. Kings once cut off the heads of the bearers of ill tidings. Senators once were elected by state legislatures."

"Are you trying to tell us that men change?" Kelley asked.

"That is obvious to everyone except the cynic. Men can change. And they do. This is not only a possibility for the individual and a necessity for society but a historical inevitability. Our perspective is too short for us to recognize the phenomenon in action, but men evolve. We can see it happening more swiftly in our social institutions."

"How do you think men are changing, Wilson?"

Wilson smiled. Kelley was willing to let him convict himself out of his own mouth, not only before the jury here in the courtroom but before the broader jury of the nation. But it was more important to Wilson that he get these concepts on the record — not just for now, important as it was, but for the years to come.

"Surpluses slow down the process

of change," Wilson said. "Shortages speed it up. Necessity is not only the mother of invention but evolution. Surpluses are created by advancing stages of civilization, and population expands to consume them. When primitive man progressed from nut and fruit gathering to the hunting of concentrated sources of protein on the hoof, he had extra food with which he could feed the child which once might have been sacrificed to starvation.

"When the hunter became the farmer and the herder, the process of selection became slowed even more. He could nurse the sick as well as feed the unable and the unwilling. The coming of the machine and industrialization brought further surpluses and the further development of morality and ethics and the religions that glorify weakness. Evolution is further slowed."

"Are you now attacking the Christian religion?" Kelley asked sharply.

Wilson waited until the roar of the audience died away. "Other religions do the same thing." The roar returned. "Moreover, I am a Christian — though, to be sure, a Unitarian. Christianity is one of the finest ethical and moral philosophies man ever had conceived, but it is a philosophy bred of surpluses. It could never have been possible to a tribe living on the narrow edge of starvation.

"The concern of that tribe is for the traits that will promote survival in this life, not in the next. That tribe's religious rites are basically evolutionary. When man was recently separated from his apelike ancestors, many throwbacks must have been born. They had to be weeded out."

"How, Wilson?"

Again Kelley was leading him, Wilson thought. Let him lead as long as the ideas came out. "The rite of manhood was the principal method — not merely adulthood but manhood. As soon as the child was old enough to have reached discretion, he was subjected to some ritualistic torture or feat of endurance. Scars were scratched into his body and face; lips and earlobes were distended by progressively larger plugs; food was withheld or voluntarily abjured. This was true of the American Indian. And even in some of the countries considered more civilized it was part of the rites preceding knighthood.

"All of these rites stressed a common element — present sacrifice for future good, something no animal can comprehend, something only the human can consciously achieve. Imagine a tribal meeting around a campfire. The adolescent stands straight before the fire, hoping he can endure what lies ahead, anticipating the joys of manhood if he can come through without disgrace. The chief or the witch doctor

picks up a burning brand from the fire and hands it to the boy, flames toward him. If the boy is human he accepts it, lets it burn him to prove that he is fit to join the adults of the tribe. If he is animal, if he is not fit, he refuses to take it or lets it drop. And he is killed. Or he is killed genetically by the refusal of any young woman of the tribe to mate with him."

"Are you suggesting," Kelley asked, "that the American people return to that kind of tribal rite?"

"The time when that would have been effective has passed. We have other tribal rites, only they are not as effective in producing the desired results. The greatest examples of present sacrifice for future good are found in religion. And its greatest symbol is Christ on the Cross. To day we need a new device, a new evolutionary pressure or a new rite to select the men and women who are capable of living in close association with the machine."

"Why should we wish to do that Kelley asked. "Why not merely destroy the machines and return to a better life?"

"Some always want to go back," Wilson said patiently. "Serfs who cannot accept industrialization, hunters who constitutionally cannot tie themselves to a single plot of ground, nut gathers who can't eat meat, animals who will not suffer now to live better later. But you can't go back. A least you can't go back as you are. You go back decimated. This world cannot support more than a few hundred million people by primitive agriculture alone. If you discard the machines, four billion of you out there will die."

IX

The jury came upright in its chairs. The audience looked startled, and men and women turned to one another to murmur. Kelley jerked his head squarely enough to talk to Wilson. "Scare talk! That's the kind of unprovable predictions with which scientists always have tried to get what they want. You can't trust a scientist. We've fôund that out."

"There is enough evidence to prove everything I have said," Wilson said, "but proof really is unnecessary. Simple logic will tell you that I am right. Simple logic will tell you, too, that man is perfectible. He can go on to greater works, greater glories, greater humanity. In every one of you," Wilson said, turning to the jury and then to the audience and the cameras, "is that potential. The only requirement is the willingness to accept the burning brand, to let yourself be nailed to the cross of your own convictions. This thought, and the hope of getting it across, was the real reason I gave myself up."

"Are you comparing yourself to

Christ?" Kelley snapped back.

"God help me," Wilson said, "I hope not."

Kelley hesitated and then turned to the judge. "Your honor, I request that this session be adjourned and that this cross-examination be continued tomorrow."

Youngman was on his feet much quicker than Wilson ever had seen him move before. "Your honor, I see no grounds for this unusual request. The session is scarcely an hour old. If the assistant prosecutor wishes to conclude his cross-examination, we will consent. If not, I ask that he be instructed to continue."

"The witness has been questioned for a considerable time," Kelley said smoothly. "My request was only out of consideration for him."

"I feel fine," Wilson said. He glanced at Youngman. The lawyer nodded encouragingly. "Tomorrow, when the Subcommittee's doctors get through with me, I may not feel so well."

The judge looked from Youngman to Kelley to Wilson, his lips pursed. He glanced quickly to his left and said, "Continue."

"Wilson," Kelley said without hesitation, "you have called for a new selection process by which men will be chosen for this new world of yours. Are these to be supermen — like you?"

"Like me, perhaps," Wilson said quietly. "I have enough vanity to think that I might be qualified to live in a changing world, to adapt to its demands and to pass along my talents to children that someday I might have. But not supermen. No more than the farmer was a superman to the hunter or the mechanic to the farmer."

"And where will these supermen be selected," Kelley asked, sneering, "in the universities?"

Kelley had not been corrected, and Wilson supposed he never would be. No matter what anyone said, the concept would stick. "Some were far a while. College graduates, on the whole, were more successful in their society. They made more money, accumulated more authority, and sometimes passed along their traits and their power to their children, who also went to college. A greater proportion of the population was going on to higher education. They were becoming a majority, which might have meant a new plateau of selectivity; but, unfortunately, higher education wasn't adaptable to everybody's needs. More important, it was not responsive to the needs of the future. And it was somewhat lacking in the needs of the present. The universities became isolated from society, intellectually inbred, and the things for which they were selecting their students were idle intellectual pastimes not the world outside."

"I had not expected you to provide the justification for the burning of the universities by the people," Kelley said. "You know, of course, that the nation's tax-free colleges and universities and the tax-free philanthropic foundations that help support them now control nearly one-third of all he produtcive property in the nation."

"I have heard that statement."

"How can you justify that kind of selfish use of private property?"

"I can't because I don't believe it," Wilson said, "although the amount of property controlled by the 2,000 or so colleges and universities must be substantial. Even if it were true, it would be human and not diabolical. Education should be everyone's responsibility to himself and to his children and collectively through these to his neighbor and his neighbor's children. He should pay for it daily or at least annually. But it is human to forget to pay, and it is human to those placed in charge of education to amass wealth for their institutions for protection against the public's neglect. Just as it is human for men and women in this audience and perhaps even on the jury itself to condemn me for a crime in which they themselves participated — and honestly believe that I am guilty."

After the uproar subsided, Wilson added, "What your question means to me, of course, Is that you and Senator Bartlett have the same economic reason for burning the universities as King Henry VIII and his fellow rulers had for confiscating church lands in the Middle Ages," Wilson smiled. "My former colleagues in economics would be smiling if they were here."

"I do not care what your former colleagues would be doing," Kelley said savagely, "nor what this question means to you. Nor does this excellent jury that you have slandered with your filthy accusations or the vast American audience care for this farcical justification for your criminal actions. A man on trial for his life should not be cynical."

"A prosecuting attorney should not be making speeches during cross-examination," Wilson said.

Kelley turned off his anger as quickly as he had turned it on. "I understand that you are a sociologist, Wilson."

"A physicist and then a sociologist."

"What is a sociologist?"

"He is concerned with the development and evolution of society."

"He wants to know why groups of people act the way they do?"

"That's part of what he wants to know."

"And what if he should find out, Wilson?"

"People could construct better societies. They could learn how to live together without conflict and frustration, getting out of society the satisfactions they need and putting back the fuel that society needs."

"You mean, don't you, that sociologists could construct societies they thought were better?"

Wilson said, "You turn to a doctor when you are sick because he knows more about sickness and health."

"And knowledge is power, isn't it, Wilson? If I know why a group of people does something it is only a small step farther to knowing how to make the people do it — or do something else."

"Well, yes," Wilson admitted, "but sociologists wouldn't — "

"Why wouldn't they? Wouldn't you construct a better society if you could, a society in which the universities would not burn?"

"I suppose — "

"Are the rest of us to trust our lives to the benevolence and wisdom of the sociologists? Or the psychologist? If a psychologist knows why a person acts the way he does — if he really knows instead of guessing a little better a little more often than the average person — the next thing he can do is make a person act that way, or some other way. Give a psychologist that power and you take away free will from the rest of us. People don't want that to happen. You don't want it, Wilson. I don't want it. Nobody wants to be a puppet; they want to be people; they want to make their own choices, their own mistakes. They don't want to live somebody's else's idea of the good life."

"Nobody wants — "

"How do you know what nobody wants? You want to build a better society. The psychologist wants to build a better person. But who knows how to build a better sociologist, a better psychologist? Who knows how sensible you are? How sane you are? Who gave you the power? The people do not want you to know that much about them. Before they let you know that much they will burn you!" Kelley's voice had climbed steadily until it was almost a scream at the end.

Wilson looked at him in amazement. "What you are saying is that ignorance is preferable to knowledge. It may be bliss, but it is a dangerous bliss that threatens its neighbor as well as itself."

But very few could have heard Wilson. The courtroom was in an uproar. The judge's gavel was banging on his bench.

At last, when relative quiet returned, Wilson said, "You are talking about mere animal survival; I'm talking about the glory of being human."

Kelley's voice was deceptively mild. "That is your own coat you are wearing, isn't it?"

Wilson looked down, surprised. He fingered the lapel where he had once, in a moment of lucidity, concealed a razor blade. The blade was gone now. "Yes, I think so."

Kelley stepped forward and put his hand on the breast pocket. He pulled down hard.

The pocket ripped — so artfully that Wilson thought it must have been carefully prepared for this moment. With the pocket came much of the jacket front. It revealed what had been concealed between the layers of cloth — a fan of thin, insulated wires. So much had happened since he put them there that he had forgotten, but Wilson remembered now the device he had gimmicked together in the desperation of his flight, a gadget adapted from his research which would pick up primitive theta brain-rhythms in his immediate vicinity. The hearing aid he had attached to the antenna had long ago been discarded. He didn't need it now to pick up the theta rhythms of the audience, rapid, pounding . . .

"Here is not merely a sociologist!" Kelley was screaming. "Here is a scientist with a machine for reading minds — and perhaps, God forbid, for making others do his will!"

The audience roared in animal fury. They were out of their benches, fighting toward the railing. In spite of his training Wilson shrank back in his chair. But there was a man, a single man, who stood between him and the crowd — not Kelley, who had pulled back in front of the jury, but a man who had been sitting in the group behind Wilson's table. Senator Bartlett himself, in his threadbare coat and his ragged blue shirt open at the collar, held back the crowd.

"Gentlemen," he implored in his unctuous voice. "Ladies! This man is on trial in a court of law. No matter how heinous his crime, he deserves a fair American trial. Not only the nation but the world is watching. He must be convicted legally, not lynched by a mob."

Slowly they fell under the mesmeric spell of his singsong phrases. The television cameras came up close to study Bartlett's face. Wilson, however, was not present for the end of the scene. Guards had closed around him, hustled him out the door with the frosted glass and then out the back way and into the waiting truck. In a moment it had pulled away and was speeding toward the highway, leaving the old courthouse behind.

"Well," Kelley said, "you gave us a little surprise there, didn't you?" Almost pulled it off, too. Who got the antidote to you? The girl? I suppose. It doesn't matter, though. You're going to die in a

very public and edifying way. Put him out, Doc."

And someone pressed an anesthetic gun to his arm and pulled the trigger. It was a drug for which he had received no antidote. Or one for which the antidote he had received had worn off. The world faded away.

X

Someone was shaking him by the shoulder. "Wake up, Mac," said a rough voice. But that was not the start of it. Even before the shaking and the voice that urged him out of his dark isolation, he had felt the bite of a needle into his arm, or his subconscious remembered it. "Shake out of it, fellow," the voice said impatiently. "We gotta go."

The sting of his arm had roused him out of a vivid dream of that world which he now accepted as a dream world. He had been standing in the imposing entrance of the City Hall. Its ceiling towered 40 or 50 feet above his head.

Around the edges of the central lobby had been the soldiers. Huddled within the circle formed by the soldiers were a hundred spectators, mostly villagers with a sprinkling of ragged city dwellers. A soldier stood on either side of Wilson. In front of him was the dark young man. He sat in a tall chair. Between them was a charcoal brazier. From the coals that glowed in it a thin, almost invisible column of smoke spiraled up to be lost in the dim heights of the ceiling. On the coals the large, blunt tip of a soldering iron with a wooden handle was beginning to turn red.

"John Wilson, are you a witch?" the young man asked in a stern voice. The audience drew a deep breath.

"I am what I am," Wilson said.

"Are you a witch?" the young man asked again.

"I am a man, no more, no less," Wilson replied.

"Are you a witch?" the young man asked the third time.

"If I were a witch," Wilson said, "you would not dare my wrath, Captain Leonard Kelley."

The audience moaned. The young man drew back in his chair, his index finger and his little finger making horns at Wilson with his right hand. His face was rigid and his eyes narrowed. "If you know my name, you know it by witchcraft," he said. "But I do not fear your power, nor will I condemn you without fair trial. Hold out your hand, John Wilson."

Wilson held out his right hand. Kelley picked up the soldering iron and moved it gently through the air. Smoke curled from the glowing tip. Kelley passed the iron in front of Wilson's face. Wilson could feel the radiant heat.

"If you can hold the iron and not be burned," Kelley said, "you are a witch and you will be placed in a fire prepared for you in the plaza outside until your power is overcome. If you do not accept the iron, you are a confessed witch and you will burn. John Wilson, do you confess?"

"I confess that I seek truth and serve the people," Wilson said, "and because of these things I will accept the iron."

Wilson held out his hand. Kelley hesitated and chewed on one side of his lower lip. "Take it, then!"

He placed the still-glowing iron in Wilson's hand. The audience groaned and surged forward only to be met with the upraised weapons of the soldiers. "Calm yourselves, friends," Wilson said clearly, although his hand smoked and waves of pain coursed up his arm toward his head.

Kelley sank back in his tall chair, staring at Wilson with dark eyes, his hand covering the lower part of his face.

"And what if I accept the iron and burn, Captain Kelley?" Wilson asked.

"Kill him!" Kelley said.

The spectators surged forward.

"You gotta wake up," said the voice again. "We got no time."

Wilson opened his eyes and looked at his right hand. It was pink and unmarred. He wiggled his fingers. They moved freely. He had only the memory of pain, but it still seemed quite real.

A man was bending over him, a man in prison denims of gray and dark blue. Beyond him the sliding bars that formed the door to his cell were pushed back. The door was open. Beyond the door was the wide corridor between the cell block and the stone outside wall, lit feebly now against the night by light bulbs high in the ceiling. The barred windows were dark.

"We're breaking out of here," the man said, moving back a little. "Strange things're going on. Men have seen fire balls drifting outside and one guy said he saw one inside the walls. I don't know why but the guards're gone. Come on, Mac. Get up and let's go."

"That's all right," Wilson said. "I'd just as soon stay here."

"Mac, you don't know what you're saying. They're gonna hang you."

"How do you know?" Wilson asked, interested.

The man shrugged, his shaggy eyebrows moving high on his forehead. "We heard the radio reports on our earphones. No jury could do anything but find you guilty, the announcer said. That's the word, brother, believe me!"

"You'd better go on," Wilson said. "I'm going to wait for whatever comes."

The other caught his right wrist

in a strong right hand. He pulled Wilson upright. "You don't know what you're saying, Mac. We ain't gonna leave nobody here."

Wilson pulled his wrist free. "Try to understand, fellow. I'm conscious, and I'm turning down your invitation. I'm grateful for your concern, but — "

The other's fist caught him on the jaw before he could finish. As consciousness fled Wilson could feel himself falling.

XI

Wilson lifted his head as the men half-carried him down the broad steps. Subconsciously he counted them as his feet bumped down each one. "Forty-two," he said at the bottom and didn't know why he said it.

Fifty feet from the bottom of the steps was a tall guard house shaped something like a lighthouse. Wilson couldn't see a guard in it, but he thought he saw something else in the shadows behind the glass panels at the top. Something with one staring eye and a small red eye beneath; but he couldn't be sure.

Beside him and around him other men were moving. He could feel them in the darkness and then he saw them clearly as a ball of red lightning drifted around the corner of the tall penitentiary building and passed near them before it swerved toward the guard house, clung to the knob at the top for a few seconds, and dissipated.

The heat of the evening was oppressive and still, and the clouds were low. "Just the night for a tornado," Wilson muttered.

The group of men in whose midst he was moved along turned toward a truck parked nearby in the broad driveway that circled the guard house before it headed back toward the distant town. Suddenly men in uniform began coming around both corners of the building. They came endlessly. "Stop!" said a voice amplified into a giant's roar. "Don't move! If you try to escape, you will be shot down. Stop where you are!"

Wilson looked back up the steps. More men in uniform were coming through the doors they just had left. One of them carried a portable amplifier held to his mouth.

Down the long double driveway past the guard tower lights began to flicker like giant fireflies. The men with Wilson didn't stop. They continued toward the tarpaulin-covered truck, but others began to scatter. Some of them ran to the left across the open lawn. Others sprinted out to the right.

"For the last time, I warn you! Stop where you are!" said the giant's voice.

Guns barked. Searchlights came on, holding men pinned in their beams like butterflies against a black velvet mounting board. Men

crumpled in mid-stride. Others staggered on until they, too, were knocked to the ground. Some were whirled around by the shock of the impact. Others turned and held their hands in the air.

The group of men with Wilson was almost to the truck now. Just before they reached it the tarpaulin in the back parted. The men with Wilson stopped. The dark young man named Kelley was in the back of the truck, and more guards and more guns.

"Here he is," said the man who had been in Wilson's cell.

"And here is your reward," Kelley said.

A gun went off and another. The men near Wilson began to drop away. The man who had spoken looked to the right and left bewildered. "But you said —" he began, and then he, too, started folding himself up.

In a moment Wilson was standing alone. He felt his sore jaw. "Aren't you going to shoot me, too?" he asked.

"We're going to do better than that," Kelley said and motioned toward the driveways.

The fireflies had turned into torches, and the torches were at the head of twin crowds of men and women. Hoarse voices reached his ears. They were singing something. Men with portable cameras ran along beside the crowds.

Guards were on either side of him. They boosted Wilson into the truck and pulled the tarpaulin back against the cab. There, his back braced against the cab, was Senator Bartlett. He did not move as the truck started up and pulled slowly down the driveway. Wilson staggered and caught himself.

"Hello, Senator," Wilson said.

Bartlett's arms were folded across his chest. "You're a strange man, Wilson. We could have chosen better."

"Everybody agreed he was the one," Kelley said defensively.

"I'm not blaming anybody," Bartlett said. "But the way things turned out, we could have chosen better."

"I would gladly have had this cup pass from me," Wilson said.

"You are a blasphemer as well as a meddler," Bartlett said. "No wonder the people hate your kind."

The voice of the crowd was closer. The song they were singing was *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*.

"They will hate anybody," Wilson said, "but you have done your job well. And profited thereby."

The truck stopped, backed in a curving path, and turned in another curve so that its back was toward the crowd. The crowd's torches created a ragged hemisphere of light. Beyond it the blackness struggled to return.

"I do not lead," Bartlett said, his gaze turned inward. "I am pushed.

The people tell me what to say and what to do, and I say and I do what they tell me. They say that the eggheads must die if the people are to live, and the eggheads will die." It was as if God had spoken.

Bartlett stepped to the rear of the truck to face the crowd. A murmur ran through it as the singing died away. The murmur turned to cheers and shouts of "Senator! Senator!"

Bartlett held out his arms for silence. Standing between two guards Wilson could see the cameras focused on the Senator's flame-lit face and outstretched arms. It was a familiar pose. Wilson had seen it often on television and in publicity shots. It brought back the memory of the night the university had burned.

"People!" Bartlett said. He said it quietly but his voice carried well. Wilson decided that he had a pick-up in his artfully threadbare coat. The crowd roared and sltwly returned to silence. "My people!" The crowd roared again. "Disperse, I ask you now! Go to your homes! Leave this man to the law!"

"No! No!" the crowd shouted. "Burn him."

Beyond the crowd Wilson could see a tall pillar and a pile of crates and boards around it, still growing as men tossed more wood on the pile.

"I honor your feelings in this matter," Bartlett said. "The man did try to escape, to evade his proper punishment. But I ask you to forbear. A second time I ask you, leave him to the law"

"Burn him! Burn him!"

"This man is guilty," Bartlett said. "We all know that. The verdict is a formality. But I ask you to hold your hand, restrain your honest wrath. Leave him to the law!"

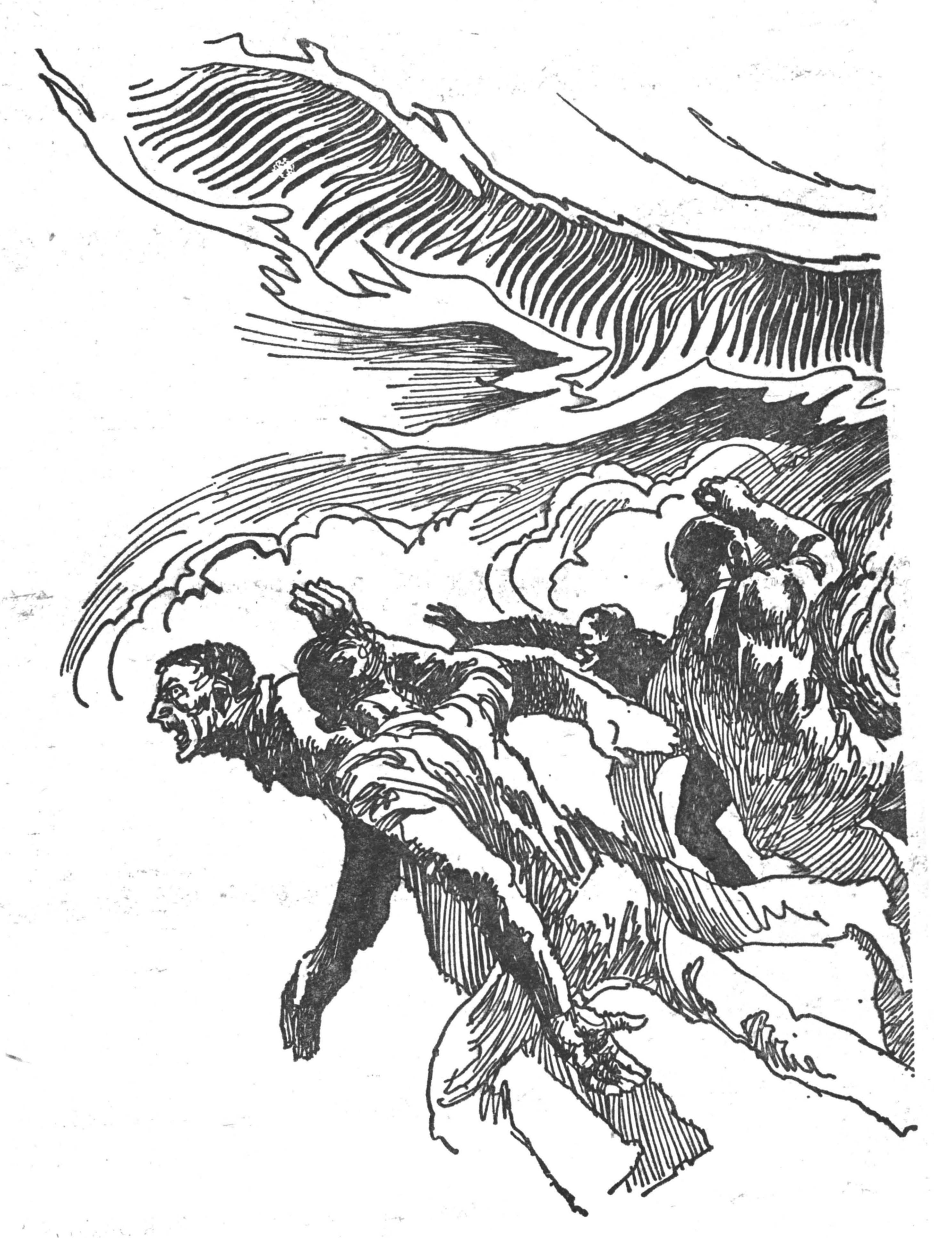
"No! No! No!"

"Then if you must have it so, I give this man to you for justice. Let him die for what he has done! Let him burn for the torment he has given others! Let him perish along with all others of his kind! Let his fiery end be a warning to the rest! The people will not be ruled by any except themselves.

"This man is guilty of treason to the people. He has betrayed you. He has tried to steal your minds and twist your thoughts. Let him burn!"

Bartlett ended with his arms spread wide once more. His arms dropped to his sides, his head drooped like a wilting narcissus, and he stood aside. Wilson was pushed forward by the guards.

"I can walk," Wilson said, but they would not let him. He was shoved from behind, and he fell into the crowd. Head high the men and women carried him toward the post. Hands clutched at his clothing and tore pieces of it away and, he thought from the twinges of pain,



pieces of himself as well.

In a moment they placed him upright against the pillar which was, he discovered, an old fence post. Someone pulled his arms behind the post, tied his hands together, and hammered something into the post. When he couldn't move his hands up or down he decided that the rope had been nailed to the post. "Hang on tight!" someone said in his ear. Wilson tried to see who it was, but the man was gone.

Then a man came forward with a torch.

"People!" Wilson shouted. They quieted slowly, and the man with the torch hesitated.

"Go ahead," someone urged from the back. The man with the torch started forward again.

"I came back," Wilson shouted, "to die if I must. But I did not come back wanting to die. I am ready to die because we all are guilty, but it will not help you to kill me. You will be killing part of yourselves — the part that thinks, the part that makes you human. Know what you do! When you abandon reason and commit yourself to terror, you can be certain of only one thing. You will never know what tomorrow brings. You may be next. You —

And then the torch plunged into the crates and boards at his feet. They began to smoke and to crackle. In a moment they had sprung into flame, and Wilson took a deep breath of air before it, too, turned into flame.

He was trying to decide whether it would be better to hold his breath as long as possible or to breathe in the fire and shorten the end when he noticed the crowd stirring around him, looking behind rather than at him. Over their heads as they cringed aside came a ball of lightning. It came straight toward Wilson and settled on the post just above his head.

Wilson could not see it then, but he could feel it, electric and almost cool, behind him. It must make him quite a sight, he thought, as he wondered how long it would be before the flames began to consume his legs.

Miraculously, however, the post began to move, slowly at first and then with greater speed, pulling him up and away. He felt the strain on his shoulders as if they were about to be dislocated, and he hugged the post tight with all his strength. The flames dropped behind, below. He could see the faces of the crowd looking up at him like curious saucers with shadowy eyes and noses and mouths painted on them.

"Shoot!" somebody shouted below. It sounded like Kelley. "Quick. Shoot him!"

But the barking of the guns was seconds too late. He felt a bullet pluck at his tattered clothing, and then he was into the low-hanging

clouds and into something else, and hands grabbed him, something cool and wet was sprayed onto his legs and feet, and he was drawn back onto a bench or cot.

Wilson looked around. He was in the belly of some kind of airplane. In front of him an open doorway in the floor was closing. From the way it hovered, Wilson thought it must be a helicopter, but it was remarkably silent. To his left was a man he had known as Pike. In front of him was Youngman. To his right was Pat Helman looking as desirable as ever.

"Surprised?" Pat Helman said.

"Pleasantly," Wilson said. "I wasn't expecting you."

"That's the best kind," Youngman said.

"That was quite a fireball," Wilson said.

"The ball lightning was just for show," Pike said. "A strong black wire did the real job, just like in the magic shows."

"What were all Bartlett's and Kelley's last-minute shenanigans about?" Wilson asked.

"They were losing in the courtroom and on the tube," Youngman drawled. "They had to wind it up fast and dramatically or find themselves on the losing side — and once those kind start to lose they go down fast, like Danton and Robespierre."

"You're joking," Wilson said.

"You underestimate your powers of persuasion," Pat Helman said. "You're quite a man, John Wilson."

Wilson looked at her. "I wonder how persuasive I could be." He turned to Youngman again. "Was it worth it? Did we do any good?"

"Our best estimate is that it will slow them down," Pike said. "Nothing will reverse the trend. That must wear itself out. But we may have eased it off a little. Maybe we can save a few more victims. At least the stage is set for the next act."

"Was the last act to your satisfaction?" Wilson asked. His voice had an edge to it.

"We're not stage managers," Youngman said. "We just hang around to pick up the pieces and try to keep the edges of the conflagration dampened so that it doesn't spread too fast. You've had the toughest part, but don't forget that Pat and I had our necks out there, too."

"Sorry," Wilson said. "What is the next act?"

"We have to start work in the little towns, the little out-of-the-way places," Pat Helman said. "The consensus is that we should establish ourselves there as witches, if you will, or witch-doctors, with the power to help the people control the unseen and the unknowable, while others go in search of truth and find — "

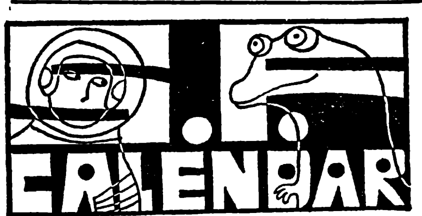
"Don't tell me," Wilson said gid-

dily. "I already know all about it."

He was feeling very strange. He was just beginning to realize that the martyrdom he had accepted had indeed passed him by. The relief made him feel weak and somehow ashamed of his weakness.

He thought about how he must have looked to the crowd as he rose, with his halo of ball lightning, toward the clouds. The apotheosis of John Wilson, he thought.

And he recalled how close the flames had been . . . and fainted. That was a habit that would be hard to break. END



March 2, 1969. ESFA Annual Open Meeting. At YM-YWCA, 600 Broad Street, Newark, New Jersey 07104. General theme: "Looking Backward: 1969-1939," Changes in the SF Field in the Last Thirty Years. Admission: $1.25. For Information: Allen Howard, 157 Grafton Avenue, Newark, New Jersey 07104.

March 22-23, 1969. BOSKONE VI. At the Statler-Hilton, Boston, Massachusetts. Guest of Honor: Jack Gaughan. Membership $2.00. For information: New England Science Fiction Association, Box G, MIT Branch Station, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139.

March 29-30, 1969. MARCON. At the Holiday East Motel, Columbus, Ohio 43227. Guest of Honor: Terry Carr. Features: Panel Discussions, Open Party, Banquet. Registration fee: $2.00. Banquet Ticket: $5.00. For information: Bob Hillis, 1290 Byron Avenue, Columbus, Ohio 43227.

April 4-6, 1969. MINICON TWO. At the Hotel Andrews, 4th Street at Hennepin, Minneapolis, Minnesota. Guests of Honor: Charles V. De Vet, Gordon R. Dickson, Carl Jacobi, Clifford D. Simak. Membership: $2.00 — register now and receive two progress reports. For information: Jim Young, 1948 Ulysses Street N.E., Minneapolis, Minnesota 55418. Make checks or money-orders payable to Mrs. Margaret Lessinger.

April 4-6, 1969. BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION. At Randolph Hotel, Oxford, England. Guest of Honor: Judith Merril. For information in the USA: Sam Russell, 1351 Tremaine Avenue, Los Angeles, California 90019.

April 11-13, 1969. LUNACON. Guest of Honor: Robert (Doc) A. W. Lowndes. At the Hotel McAlpin, New York City. Advance membership $2.00, or $2.50 at the door. Two Progress Reports will be sent to members. For information: Franklin M. Dietz, 1750 Walton Avenue, Bronx, New York 10453.

July 3-6, 1969 WESTERCON XXII/FUNCON II. At Miramar Hotel, Santa Monica, California. Guest of Honor: Randall Garrett. Fan Guest of Honor: Roy Tackett, Toastmaster: Harlan Ellison. Membership: $3.00 in advance, $5.00 at the door. A supporting membership of $1.00 entitles you to all publications. For information: FUNCON II, Box 1, Santa Monica, California 90406. Make checks payable to Ken Rudolph.

August 29- *September* 1, 1969. ST. LOUISCON: 27th World Science Fiction Convention. At Chase-Park Plaza Hotel, 212 N. Kingshighway, St. Louis, Missouri 63108. Guest of Honor: Jack Gaughan. Fan Guest of Honor: Ted White. Features: Project Art Show; Masquerade Ball; All-night movies — every night; Rock Band; Panels and speeches featuring all your favorite writers, editors, and artists; Auctions; Awards Banquet and the Presentation of the Hugos. Memberships: $4.00, attending; $3.00, supporting. Join now and receive all the progress reports as they are published. For information: St. Louiscon, P.O. Box 3008, St. Louis, Missouri 63130. Make checks payable to St. Louiscon.

Dear Editor:

Many years ago I read a story based on or referring to the Epic of Gilgamesh. I would appreciate it if any of your readers could supply me with the name of the author and the book or story title. — Sophie Marks, 1462 East 18th St., Brooklyn, N. Y. 11230.

• One that comes to mind is *The Time Masters,* a novel by Wilson Tucker. But there must have been others on this subject. Any suggestions from the readers? — *Editor.*

* * *

Dear Editor:

I do not agree with your idea of eliminating serials in *If*. The most popular stories in your magazine are the serials, and without them the sales will falter. Where would you be without *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress, Skylark DuQuesne, Earthblood* and others? People buy your magazine for the stories by big-name authors. Heinlein hasn't written a short story in years.

Please under no circumstances condense a novel in the manner of the Van Vogt piece coming up. A shortened version of a novel can thwart an author's attempts at characterization, can destroy the theme or eliminate an important part and thus render the whole thing illogical and incomprehensible to the reader.

Wise old Horace Gold said in one of the very first issues of *Galaxy* that he would not review fanzines because "that is being covered sufficiently elsewhere." Now it is being covered nowhere and I would like you to do this. Lin Carter seems to be the ideal person to be the reviewer, so why don't you ask him? It doesn't have to be large; only a page or two of small print.

Let's have more Morrow, Pedersen, McKenna and Chaffee covers. See if you can pry a story out of Ed Hamilton. Get Zelazny's next novel. And avoid Harlan Ellison's version of the new wave. — Darrell Schweitzer, 113 Deepdale Rd., Stratford, Penna. 19087.

• Part of Zelazny's "next novel" is in this issue. And we have no intention of eliminating serials. When we get a good one, we'll use it! It's a funny thing; we get letters objecting to serials until a serial is missing

—then everyone screams at us for not having one! As to fanzine reviews, we feel the long lag between our receipt of the publications and the time the review could appear in print would make them useless; by the time the readers could see our comments, the magazine reviewed would be no longer obtainable. And the life and quality of most of such fan publications is too uncertain to make other than really current reviews fair to our readers. As to Ed Hamilton, we're prying. —*Editor*.

* * *

Dear Fred:

A little experiment occurs to me, which you may or may not like to play with. I enclose three columns of numbers, whose nature and meaning would be obvious to any astronomer. If anyone can take these numbers and from them tell me the mass of the star system they refer to, I will be glad to listen to his opinions about the Velikovsky thesis. It is understood, of course, that no references other than log and trig tables are to be used. If anyone who cannot do this presumes to support Velikovsky against the "establishment", I will cheerfully cite him as an example of this "arrogance of ignorance" we hear so much about lately.

It ought to be fun to read the excuses. To forestall the most obvious, this is not something fit only for Ph. D.'s. It is part of a first-year astronomy exercise in which I had no difficulty in getting an A — at a time when my math and physics grades were C and D respectively. It is not something controversial, except to EV supporters; the same basic rules are used in predicting eclipses, though the latter demands a lot more detailed computing. It does

Date of Observation	Position Angle (Degrees)	Angular Separation (Seconds)
1886.52	178.8	0.66
1887.53	186.2	0.85
1887.58	194.1	0.86
1888.56	194.9	0.68
1889.54	201.5	0.64
1890.52	209.2	0.60
1891.51	216.9	0.58
1892.53	229.6	0.56
1893.50	243.1	0.51
1894.44	261.8	0.43
1895.48	287.5	0.38
1896.49	314.0	0.41
1897.47	332.4	0.48
1898.52	344.2	0.54
1899.47	353.2	0.65
1900.47	2.2	0.74
1901.47	7.9	0.87
1902.41	9.7	0.86
1903.42	15.3	1.00
1904.52	20.0	1.01
1905.33	23.2	1.14
1906.45	26.1	1.03
1907.38	29.0	0.99
1908.35	30.4	1.05
1909.38	34.0	1.07
1910.50	37.5	1.04
1911.47	41.0	1.02
1912.42	43.5	1.00
1913.49	47.4	0.97
1914.38	51.1	0.93
1915.47	56.0	0.84
1916.34	60.6	0.84
1917.30	67.6	0.75
1918.42	76.2	0.65
1919.48	83.6	0.64
1920.44	92.6	0.64
1921.43	103.5	0.54
1922.48	116.1	0.59
1923.42	126.8	0.50
1924.41	140.3	0.53
1925.42	153.2	0.55
1926.39	162.8	0.59

Parallax = 0.065"

not demand access to a high-class computer; most of my tenth-graders who have done it use the slide rule, but some prefer longhand arithmetic and still finish in a reasonable time. The observations are quite genuine, obtained from a published source, not cooked up for the purpose.

As a schoolteacher, I know the near hopelessness of changing the mind of an adult; but maybe the excuses we get could be used to show my youngsters what they'll be sounding like if they don't develop reasonably high standards of thinking. And maybe, of course, since my own mind is just as fossilized as that of most people my age, I'll wind up looking silly myself. — Hal Clement, Milton, Mass.

* * *

Dear Editor:

I would like to compliment you on the excellence of your magazine, *Worlds of IF*. No one can say science fiction is dying. On the contrary, it is on its way up with *IF* setting new trends.

Now to the point of my letter. Imagine for a moment the magazine *Playboy*. You change the girl on the centerfold to a space ship, the pictorials to colored art work by Chaffee, Adkins or Morrow. Next you add stories out of *IF*, the now silent *Worlds of Tomorrow*, *Galaxy*, etc. What fan could pass up a magazine like that! Certainly a dollar would not be a price too high to pay.

I would like to applaud Mrs. Morris for her letter in the August *IF*. There is nothing more saddening and dangerous than a person who refuses to think for himself. Who knows, maybe if more people read science fiction, we'd have fewer wars. — Jurgen Heidenreich, 4220 146th Avenue S. E., Bellevue, Wash. 98004.

• The only trouble with your idea for a magazine is that it would cost three dollars a copy to put out; and science-fiction magazines can't get the advertising to make up the difference, as more generalized magazines do. — *Editor.*

* * *

Dear Editor:

With regard to Mr. Allen's letter in October *If,* I totally disagree with him. To publish a story in each issue with "as little of the jargon of the medium as possible" would ruin the story completely. In my opinion, most science-fiction readers are of above-average intelligence and are not in need of explanations. There may be a technical term once in a great while with which the reader may not be familiar, but that can easily be looked up. It is very considerate of Mr. Allen to suggest that you provide these explanations — "especially for women." But he really need not worry. There are very few women who read SF, and those few, I am sure, are mostly young, college-educated women who have no trouble understanding SF, no matter how technical. (I started reading SF about five years ago and I have never had any trouble — even though English is not my mother tongue. As a matter of fact, I have come to prefer it to any other type of fiction.)

So much for that. I would like to refer to Mr. Neagle's letter in the same issue, who would like a sword-

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and-sorcery story once in a while. I am sure that most *If* readers will agree with me when I say that *If* should stick to "hard-core" SF. At present there are only three magazines available which publish SF exclusively; there are three magazines which publish a mixture of SF and fantasy as well as a fantasy-type magazine, *Worlds of Fantasy*, so there should be no need to publish that type of story in *If*. — Mrs. Victor Porguen, 604 Sawyer St., Rochester, N. Y. 14619.

* * *

Dear Editor,

The December 1968 issue of *If* was a goodie —I even liked the Ellison.

It had one story of outstanding merit which I must commend. I do not know when I have read any story which so perfectly demonstrated the true function of science fiction — the logical projection of present day scientific trends into the future. In addition, this story very neatly pointed up another function of sf which I I feel is important, although I have never seen it mentioned. This is the fact that human nature does not change — it hasn't through the ages of history, and it won't in the future. The story is, of course, Asimov's "The Holmes-Ginsbook Device". Add to this the delightful finishing touch. Gaughan's illustration of The Compleat Scientist, which again subtly points out this second sf truth — that scientists in the future will be, basically, just like the scientists of today. Yeah.

—Rachel C. Payes,
Shrub Oak, N. Y. 10588

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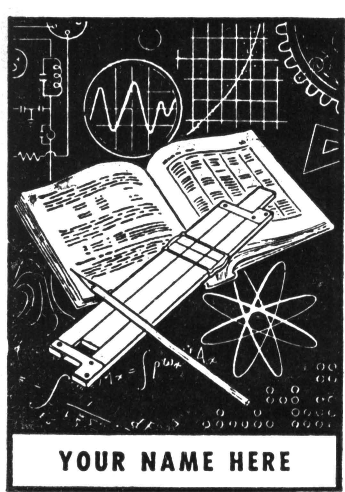

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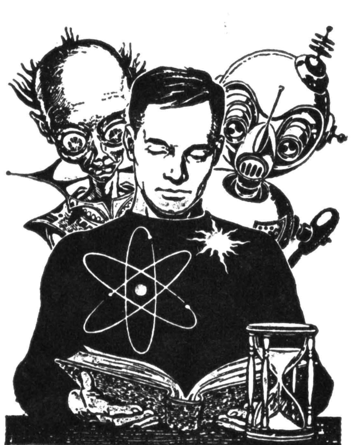

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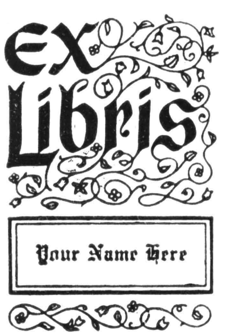

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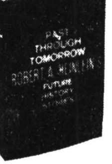

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