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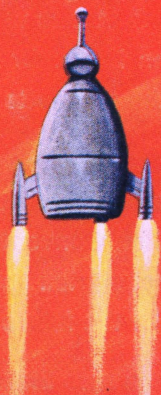
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by **ANDRE NORTON**



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What We Think With

By now we all have heard about *Australopithecus africanus* and Professor Leakey's paradoxical conjecture that it isn't really so much true that man invented tools as it is that tools invented man. We've discussed the reasoning involved in these pages before: How the large bones the idiot Australopithecines used to kill their prey and their enemies — the first tools — demanded more agility in their use; how the increased mobility demanded increased nerve connections; how the increased sensory and motor nerve networks demanded increased central nervous systems — that is, brains. But we've never before discussed what those brains are.

A new book by an old friend of *Galaxy* and *If* readers, H. Chandler Elliott — who is not only a science-fiction writer as time permits, but a professor of anatomy, neurology and psychiatry at the University of Nebraska College of Medicine — gives us as full a look at the structure and workings of the brain as we have ever seen. (It's called *The Shape of Intelligence*, and it's just published by Scribners.) It's a beautiful book, handsomely illustrated by Anthony Ravielli — al-

most too beautiful in a way, since it's very likely that a number of copies will wind up on someone's coffee table and will never be cracked except to admire the pretty illustrations. That will be a pity. For the trouble with the world, all the troubles with the world, rest on what men do to it; and the only hope of curing them rests on understanding why men do what they do. And one cannot understand men's minds without understanding the hardware that generates and forms them, the brain and nervous system.

It takes Professor Elliott nearly 300 pages to tell us what is now known about the brain. We can't cover it in the space we have on this page. But he does — very authoritatively, clearly and provocatively — and we commend the book to you.

We've known all along that some of the best science-fiction writers were scientists; we're glad to get further proof of the corollary, in books like this one. What distinguishes a first-rate scientist from a clod is his imagination and understanding. And we think that's why it appears to be so that some of the best scientists are science-fiction writers, too.

— THE EDITOR

TOYS OF TAMISAN

by ANDRE NORTON

Illustrated by ADKINS

*Tamisan built dreams for others.
But now she was trapped in night-
mare — and her dream was reality!*

I

“She is certified by the Foostmam, Lord Starrex. A true action dreamer to the tenth power.”

Jabis was being too eager, or almost so; he was pushing too much. Tamisan sneered mentally, keeping

her face carefully blank, though she took quick glances about from beneath half-closed eyelids. This sale very much concerned her, since she was the product being discussed, but she had nothing to say in the matter.

She supposed this was a typical

sky tower, seeming to float, masked in clouds at times, since its supports were so slender and well concealed, lifting it high above Ty-Kry. However, none of the windows gave on real sky, but each framed a very different landscape, illustrating what must be other planet scenes. Perhaps some were dream remembered or inspired.

There was a living lambil grass carpet around the easirest on which the owner half lay, half sat. But Jabis had not even been offered a pull-down wall seat. And the two other men in attendance on Lord Starrex stood also. They were real men and not androids, which placed the owner in the multi-credit class. One, Tamisan thought was a body-guard, and the other, younger, thinner, with a dissatisfied mouth, had on clothing nearly equal to that of the man on the easirest but with a shade of difference which meant a lesser place in the household.

Tamisan catalogued what she could see and filed it away for future reference. Most dreamers did not observe much of the world about them. They were too enmeshed in their own creations to care for reality. Most dreamers... Tamisan frowned. She *was* a dreamer. Jabis and the Foostmam could prove that. The lounge on the easirest could prove it if he paid Jabis' price. But she was also something more. Tamisan herself was

not quite sure what. And that there was a difference in her, she had had mother wit enough to conceal since she had first been aware that the others in the Foostmam's Hive were not able to come cleanly out of their dreams into the here and now. Why, some of them had to be fed, clothed, cared for as if they were not aware they had any bodies!

"Action dreamer." Lord Starrex shifted his shoulders against the padding which immediately accommodated itself to his stirring to give him maximum comfort. "Action dreaming is a little childish —"

Tamisan's control held, but she felt inside her a small flare of anger. Childish was it? She would like to show him just how childish a dream she could spin to enmesh a client. But Jabis was not in the least moved by that derogatory remark from a possible purchaser; it was in his eyes only a logical bargaining move.

"If you wish an E dreamer —" He shrugged. "But your demand to the Hive specified an A."

He was daring to be a little abrupt. Was he so sure of this lord as all that? He must have some inside information which allowed him to be so confident. For Jabis could cringe and belly-down in awe like the lowest beggar if he thought such a gesture needful to gain a credit or two.

"Kas, this is your idea. What is she worth?" Starrex asked indifferently.

The younger of his companions moved forward a step or two. He was the reason for her being here — Lord Kas, cousin to the owner of all this magnificence; though certainly not, Tamisan had already deduced, with any authority in the household. But the fact that Starrex lay in the easiest was not dictated by indolence, but rather by what was hidden by the fas-silk laprobe concealing half his body. A man who might not walk straight again could find pleasure in the abilities of an action dreamer.

"She has a ten-point rating," Kas reminded the other.

The black brows which gave a stern set to Starrex's features arose a trifle. "Is that so?"

Jabis was quick to take advantage. "It is so, Lord Starrex. Of all this year's swarm, she rated the highest. It was — is — the reason why we make this offer to your lordship."

"I do not pay for reports only," returned Starrex.

Jabis was not to be ruffled. "A point ten, my lord, does not give demonstrations. As you know, the Hive accrediting can not be forged. It is only because I have urgent business in Brok and must leave for there that I am selling her at all. Though I have had an offer from the Foostmam herself to re-

tain this one for lease-outs — "

Tamisan, had she had anything to wager or someone with whom to wager it, would have set the winning of this bout with her uncle. Uncle? To Tamisan's thinking she had no blood tie with this small insect of a man — with his wrinkled face, his never-still eyes, his thin hands with their half-crooked fingers always reminding one of claws outstretched to grab and grab and grab. Surely her mother must have been very unlike Uncle Jabis, or else how could her father ever have seen aught worth bedding — not for just one night but for half a year — in her?

Not for the first time her thoughts were on the riddle of her parents. Her mother had not been a dreamer — though she had had a sister who had regrettably — for the sake of the family fortune — died in the Hive during adolescent stimulation as an E dreamer. Her father had been from off-world — an alien, though humanoid enough to crossbreed. And he had disappeared again off-world when his desire for star roving had become too strong to master. Had it not been that she had early shown dreamer talent, Uncle Jabis and the rest of the greedy Yeska clan would never have taken any thought of her after her mother had died of the blue plague.

She was crossbred and had in-

telligence enough to guess early that this had given her the difference between her powers and those of others in the Hive. The ability to dream was an in-born talent. For those of low power, it was an indwelling withdrawal from the world. And those dreamers were largely useless. But the ones who could project dreams to include others — through linkage — brought high prices, according to the strength and stability of their creations. E dreamers who created erotic and lascivious other-worlds once rated more highly than action dreamers. But of late years, the swing had been in the opposite direction, though how long that might hold no one could guess. And those lucky enough to have an A dreamer to sell were pushing their wares speedily lest the market decline.

Tamisan's hidden talent was that she herself was never as completely lost in the dream world as those she conveyed to it. Also — and this she had discovered very recently and hugged that discovery to her — she could in a measure control the linkage so she was never a powerless prisoner forced to dream at another's desire.

She considered now what she knew concerning this Lord Starrex. That Jabis would sell her to the owner of one of the sky towers had been clear from the first. And naturally he would select what he

thought would be the best bargain. But, though rumors wafted through the Hive, Tamisan believed that much of their news of the outer world was inaccurate and grabbed. Dreamers were roofed and walled from any real meeting with everyday life, their talents feverishly fed and fostered by long sessions with tri-dee projectors and information tapes.

Starrex, unlike most of his class, had been a doer. He had broken the pattern of caste by going off-world on lengthy trips. It was only after some mysterious accident had crippled him that he became a recluse, supposedly hiding a maimed body. And he did not seem like those others who had come to the Hive seeking wares. Of course, it had been the Lord Kas who had summoned them here.

Stretched out on the easiest with that cover of fabulous silk across most of his body, he was hard to judge. But, she thought, standing he would top Jabis, and he seemed to be well muscled, more like his guardsman than his cousin.

He had a face unusual in its plans, broad across the forehead and cheek bones, then slimming to a strong chin which narrowed to give his head a vaguely wedge-shaped line. He was dark-skinned, almost as dark as a space crewman.



His hair was black, cut very short so that it was a tight velvety cap, in contrast to the longer strands of his cousin.

His tunic — lutrax of a coppery-rust shade — was of rich material but less ornamented than that of the younger man. Its sleeves were wide and loose, and now and then he ran his hands up his arms, pushing the fabric away from his skin. He wore only a single jewel, a koros stone set in an earring as a drop which dangled forward against his jaw line.

Tamisan did not consider him handsome. But there was something arresting about him. Perhaps it was his air of arrogant assurance, as if in all his life he had never had his wishes crossed. He had not met Jabis before; and perhaps now even Lord Starrex would have something to learn.

Twist and turn, indignant and persuasive, using every trick in a very considerable training for dealing and under-dealing, Jabis bargained. He appealed to gods and demons to witness his disinterested desire to please, his despair at being misunderstood. It was quite a notable act, and Tamisan stored up some of the choicer bits in her mental reservoir for the making of dreams. It was far more stimulating to watch then a tri-dee, and she wondered why this living drama material was not made available to the Hive. Unless, of course, the

Footmam and her assistants feared it, along with any shred of reality which might awaken the dreamers from their conditioned absorption in their own creations.

For an instant or two she wondered if the Lord Starrex was not enjoying it too. There was a kind of weariness in his face which suggested boredom, though that was the norm for anyone wanting a personal dreamer. Then suddenly as if he were tired of it all, he interrupted one of Jabis' more impassioned pleas for celestial understanding of his need for receiving a just price with a single sentence.

"I tire, fellow. Take your price and go." He closed his eyes in dismissal.

II

It was the guard who drew a credit plaque from his belt, swung a long arm over the back of the easiest for Lord Starrex to plant a thumb on its surface to certify payment, and then tossed it to Jabis. It fell to the floor so the small man had to scabble for it with his finger claws, and Tamisan saw the look in his darting eyes. Jabis had little liking for Lord Starrex — which did not mean, of course, that he disdained the credit plaque he had to stoop to catch up.

He did not give a glance to Tamisan as he bowed himself out. And

she was left standing as if she were an android or a machine. It was the Lord Kas who stepped forward, touched her lightly on the arm as if he thought she needed guidance.

"Come," he said, and his fingers about her wrist drew her after him. The Lord Starrex took no notice of his new possession.

"What is your name?" Lord Kas spoke slowly, emphasizing each word as if he needed to do so to pierce some veil between them. Tamisan guessed that he had had contact with a lower-rated dreamer, one who was always bemused in the real world. Caution suggested that she allow him to believe she was in a similiar daze. So she raised her head slowly, and looked at him, trying to give the appearance of one finding it difficult to focus.

"Tamisan," she answered after a lengthy pause. "I be Tamisan."

"Tamisan — that is a pretty name," he said as one would address a dull-minded child. "I am Lord Kas. I am your friend."

But Tamisan, sensitive to shades of voice, thought she had done well in playing bemused. Whatever Kas might be, he was not her friend, at least not unless it served his purpose.

"These rooms are yours." He had escorted her down a hall to a far door where he passed his hand over the surface in a pattern to break some light-lock. Then his

grip on her wrist brought her into a high-ceilinged room. There were no windows to break its curve of wall. The place was oval in shape. The center fell in a series of wide, shallow steps to a pool where a small fountain raised a perfumed mist to patter back into a bone-white basin. And on the steps were a number of cushions and soft lie-ons, all of many delicate shades of blue and green. While the oval walls were covered with a shimmer of rippling zidex webbing — pale gray covered with whirls and lines of palest green.

A great deal of care had gone into the making and furnishing of that room. Perhaps she was only the latest in a series of dreamers, for this was truly the rest place — raised to a point of luxury unknown even in the Hive — for a dreamer.

A strip of the web tapestry along the wall was raised, and a personal-care android entered. The head was only an oval ball with faceted eye-plates and hearing sensors to break its surface, its unclothed, humanoid form ivory white.

"This is Porpae," Kas told her. "She will watch over you."

My guard, Tamisan thought. That the care the android would give her would be unceasing and of the best, she did not doubt, any more than that the ivory being

would stand between her and any hope of freedom.

"If you have any wish, tell it to Porpae." Kas dropped his hold on her arm, turned to the door. "When the Lord Starrex wishes to dream he will send for you."

"I am at his command," she mumbled the proper response.

She watched Kas leave and then looked to Porpae. Tamison had good cause to believe that the android was programmed to record her every move. But would anyone here believe that a dreamer had any desire to be free? A dreamer wished only to dream; it was her life, her entire life. And to leave a place which did all to foster such a life — that would be akin to self-killing, something a certified dreamer could not think of.

"I hunger," she told the android. "I would eat."

"Food comes." Porpae went to the wall and swept aside the web once more to display a series of buttons she pressed in a complicated manner.

When the food arrived in a closed tray with the viands each in its own hot or cold compartment, Tamison ate. She recognized the usual dishes of a dreamer's diet, but better cooked and more tastily served than in the Hive. She ate; she made use of the bathing place Porpae guided her to behind another wall web, and she slept easily and without stirring on the cush-

ions beside the pool where the faint play of the water lulled her gently.

Time had very little meaning in the oval room. She ate, slept, bathed and looked upon the tri-dees she asked Porpae to supply. Had she been as the others from the Hive, this existence would have been ideal. But instead, when there was no call to display her art, she grew restless. She was prisoner here, and none of the other inhabitants of the sky tower seemed aware of her.

There was one thing she could do, Tamison decided upon her second waking. A dreamer was allowed — no, required — to study the personality of the master she must serve, if she were a private dreamer and not a leasee of the Hive. She had a right now to ask for tapes concerning Starrex. In fact, it might be considered odd if she did not, and accordingly she called for those. Thus she learned something of her master and his household.

Kas had had his personal fortune wiped out by some catastrophe when he was a child. He had been in a manner adopted by Starrex's father, the head of their clan, and since Starrex's injuries Kas had acted in some fashion as his deputy. The guard was Ulfilas, an off-world mercenary Starrex had brought back from one of his star voyages.

But Starrex, save for a handful of bare facts, remained more or less of an enigma. That he had any human responses to others Tamisan began to doubt. He had gone seeking change off-world, but what he might have found there had not cured his eternal weariness of life. And his personal recordings were meager. She now believed that, to him, any one of his household was only a tool to be used or swept from his path and ignored. He was unmarried and such feminine companionship as he had languidly attached to his household — and that more by the effort of the woman involved than through any direct action on his part — did not last long. In fact, he was so encased in a shell of indifference that Tamisan wondered if there was any longer a real man within that outer covering.

She began to speculate as to why he had allowed Kas to bring her as an addition to his belongings. To make the best use of a dreamer, the owner must be ready to partake, and what she read in these tapes suggested that Starrex's indifference would raise a barrier to any real dreaming.

But the more Tamisan learned in this negative fashion, the more it seemed a challenge. She lay beside the pool in deep thought — though that thought strayed even more than she herself guessed from the rigid mental exercises used by

a point ten dreamer. To deliver a dream which would captivate Starrex was indeed a challenge. He wanted action, but her training, acute as it had been, was not enough to entice him. Therefore — *her* action must be able to take a novel turn.

This was an age of over-sophistication — when star travel was a fact, when outer action existed in reality. And by these tapes, though they were not detailed as to what Starrex had done off-world, the lord had experienced much — the reality of his time.

So — he must be served the unknown. She had read nothing in the tapes to suggest that Starrex had sadistic or perverted tendencies. And she knew if he were to be reached in such a fashion, she was not the one to do it. Also Kas would have stated such a requirement at the Hive.

There were many rolls of history on which one could draw — but those had also been mined and re-mined. The future — that again had been over-used, frayed. Tamisan's dark brows drew together above her closed eyes. Trite — everything she thought of was trite! Why did she care anyway? She did not even know why it had become so strong a drive to build a dream that, when she was called upon to deliver it, would shake Starrex out of his shell — to prove to him that she was worth her rating. Maybe

it was partly because he had made no move to send for her and try to prove her powers, his indifference suggesting that he thought she had nothing to offer.

Tapes — she had the right to call upon the full library of the Hive, and it was the most complete in the star lanes. Why, ships were sent out for no other reason than to bring back new knowledge to feed the imaginations of the dreamers!

History. Her mind kept returning to the past, though it was too thread-bare for her purposes. History — what was history? A series of events — actions by individuals, or nations. Actions had results. Tamisan sat up among her cushions. Results of action! Sometimes there were far-reaching results from a single action — the death of a ruler, the outcome of one battle, the landing of a star ship — or its failure to land.

So —

Her flicker of idea became solid. History could have had many roads to travel beside the one already known. Now — could she make use of that?

Why, it had innumerable possibilities! Tamisan's hands clenched the robe lying across her knees. Study — she would have to study! And if Starrex only gave her more time... She no longer resented his indifference now. She

would need every minute it was prolonged.

"Porpae!"

The android materialized from behind the web.

"I must have certain tapes from the Hive." Tamisan hesitated. In spite of the spur of impatience, she must build smoothly and surely. "A message to the Foostmam: send to Tamisan n' Starrex the rolls of the history of Ty-Kry for the past five hundred years."

The history of a single city and that of the one which based this sky tower! Begin small so she could test and retest her idea. To-day a single city, tomorrow a world, and then — who knew — perhaps a solar system! She reined in her excitement. There was much to do. She needed a note recorder — and time. But by the Four Breasts of Vlasta — if she could do it!

It would seem she would have time, though always at the back of Tamisan's mind was the small spark of fear that at any moment the summons to Starrex might come. But the tapes arrived from the Hive and the recorder, so that she swung from one to the other, taking notes from what she learned. Then after the tapes had been returned, she studied those notes feverishly. Now her idea meant more to her than just a device to amuse a difficult master; it absorbed her utterly, as if she were a low-grade

dreamer caught in one of her own creations.

When Tamisan realized the danger of this, she broke with her studies and turned back to the household tapes to learn again what she could of Starrex.

But she was again running through her notes when at last the summons came. How long she had been in Starrex's tower she did not know, for days and nights in the oval room were all alike. Only Porpæ's watchfulness had kept her to a routine of eating and rest.

It was the Lord Kas who came for her, and she had just time to remember her role of bemused dreamer as he entered.

"You are well and happy?" He used the conventional greeting.

"I enjoy the good life."

"It is the Lord Starrex's wish that he enter a dream." Kas reached for her hand, and she allowed his touch. "The Lord Starrex demands much. Offer him your best, dreamer." He might have been warning her.

"A dreamer dreams," she answered him vaguely. "What is dreamed can be shared."

"True. But the Lord Starrex is hard to please. Do your best for him, dreamer."

She did not answer, and he drew her on, out of the room to a gray shaft and down that to a lower level. The room into which they finally

went had the apparatus very familiar to her— a couch for the dreamer, the second for the sharer with the linkage machine between. But here was a third couch. Tamisan looked at it in surprise.

"Two dream, not three."

Kas shook his head. "It is the Lord Starrex's will that another shares also. The linkage is of a new model, very powerful. It has been well tested."

Who would be that third? Ulfilas? Was it that Lord Starrex thought he must take his personal guard into a dream with him?

The door swung open again, and Lord Starrex entered. He walked stiffly, one leg swinging wide as if he could not bend the knee nor control the muscles, and he leaned heavily on an android. As the servant lowered him onto the couch, he did not look to Tamisan but nodded curtly to Kas.

"Take your place also," he ordered.

Did Starrex fear the dream state and want his cousin as a check because Kas had plainly dreamed before?

Then Starrex turned to her as he reached for the dream cap, copying the motion by which she settled her own circlet on her head.

"Let us see what you can do." There was a shadow of hostility in his voice, a challenge to produce something which he did not believe she could do.

She must not allow herself to think of Starrex now, only of her dream. She must create and have no fear that her creation would be less perfect than her hopes. Tamisan closed her eyes, firmed her will and drew into her imagination all the threads of the studies' spinning. She began the weaving of a dream.

For a moment, perhaps two fingers' count of moments, this was like the beginning of any dream and then —

She was not looking on, watching intently, critically, a fabric she spun with dexterity. No, it was rather as if that web suddenly became real and she was caught tightly in it, even as a blue-winged drotail might be enmeshed in a foss-spider's deadly nest curtain!

This was no dreaming such as Tamisan had ever known before, and panic gripped so harshly in her throat and chest that she might have screamed, save that she had no voice left. She fell down and down from a point above, to strike among bushes which took some of her weight, but with an impact which left her bruised and half senseless. She lay unmoving, gasping, her eyes closed, fearing to open them to see that she was indeed caught in a wild nightmare and not properly dreaming.

As she lay there, she came slowly out of her dazed bewilderment; she

tried to get control, not only over her fears, but her dreaming powers. Then she opened her eyes cautiously.

An arch of sky was overhead, palidly green, with traces, like long, clutching fingers, of thin gray cloud. As real as any sky might be, did she walk under it in her own time and world. Her own time and world!

The idea she had built upon to astound Starrex came back to her now. Had the fact that she had worked with a new theory, trying to bring a twist to dreaming which might pierce the indifference of a bored man precipitated this?

Tamisan sat up, wincing at the protest of her bruises, to look about her. Her vantage point was the crest of a small knob of earth. But the land about her was no wilderness. The turf was smooth and cropped, and here and there were outcrops of rock cleverly carved and clothed with flowering vines — some of them; others were starkly bare, brooding. And all faced down slope to a wall.

These forms varied from vaguely acceptable humanoid shapes to grotesque monsters. And Tamisan decided that she liked the aspect of none when she studied them more closely. There were *not* of her imagining.

Beyond the wall began a cluster of buildings. Used to seeing the sky towers and the lesser, if more substantial structures beneath those

which were of her own world, these looked unusually squat and heavy. The highest she could see from here was no more than three stories. Men did not build to the stars here, they hugged the earth closely.

But where was *here*? Not her dream — Tamisan closed her eyes and concentrated on the beginnings of her planned dream. That had been about going into another world, born of her imagining, yes — but not this! Her basic idea had been simple enough, if not one which had been used to her knowledge by any dreamer before her. It all hinged on the idea that the past history of her world had been altered many times during its flow — and she had taken three key-points of alteration, studied on what might have resulted had those been given the opposite decision by fate.

Now, keeping her eyes firmly closed against this seeming reality into which she had fallen, Tamisan concentrated with fierce intentness upon her chosen points.

“The Welcome of the Over-Queen Ahta — ” she recited the first.

What if the first star ship on its landing had not been accepted as a supernatural event and the small kingdom in which it had touched earth had not accepted its crew as godlings, but rather had greeted them instead with those poisoned

darts the spacemen had later seen used? That was her first decision.

“The loss of the Wanderer.” That was the second.

A colony ship driven far from its assigned course by computer failure, so that it had had to make a landing here or let its passengers die. If that failure had not occurred and the Wanderer not landed to start an unplanned colony...

“The death of Sylt the Sweet-Tongued before he reached the Altar of Ictio.”

A prophet who might never have arisen to ruthless power, leading to a blood-crazed insurrection from temple to temple, setting darkness on three-quarters of this world.

She had chosen those points, but she had not even been sure that one might not have canceled out another.

Sylt had led the rebellion against the colonists from the Wanderer. If the welcome had not occurred... Tamisan could not be sure — she had only tried to find a pattern sequence of events and then envision a modern world stemming from those changes.

However — she opened her eyes again — this was not her imagined world! Nor did one in a dream rub bruises, sit on damp sod, feel wind pull at clothes, and allow the first patter of rain to wet hair and robe. She put both hands to her head — what of the dream cap?

Her fingers found a weaving of

metal right enough, but there were no cords from it. And for the first time she remembered that she had been linked with Starrex and Kas when this happened.

Tamisan got to her feet to look around her, half expecting to see the other two somewhere near. But she was alone, and the rain was falling heavier. There was a roofed space near the wall, and Tamisan hurried for it.

Three twisted pillars supported a small dome of roof. There were no walls, and she huddled in the very center, trying to escape the wind-borne moisture. She could not keep pushing away the feeling that this was no dream but true reality.

If — if one could dream *true!* Tamisan fought panic and tried to examine the possibilities. *Had* she somehow landed in a Ty-Kry which might have existed had her three checkpoints actually been the decisions she envisioned? If so — could one get back by simply visioning them in reverse?

She shut her eyes and concentrated . . .

There was a sensation of stomach-turning giddiness. She swung out, to be jerked back — swung out, to return once more. Shaking with nausea, Tamisan stopped trying. She shuddered, opening her eyes to the rain. Then again she strove to understand what had happened. That swing had in it some of

the sensation of dream breaking. It *did!* Which meant that she was in a dream. But it was just as apparent that she had been held prisoner here. How? And why? Or—her eyes narrowed a little, though she was looking inward, not at the rain-misted garden before her — by whom?

Suppose — suppose one or both of those who had prepared to share her dream had also come into this place — though not right here — then she must find them. They must return together or the missing one would anchor the others. Find them — and now!

For the first time she looked down at the garment clinging dank and damp to her slender body. It was not the gray slip of a dreamer, for it was long, brushing her ankles. And in color it was a dusky violet, a shade she found strangely pleasing and right.

From its hem to her knees there was a border of intricate embroidery so entwined and ornate that she found it hard to define in any detail, though it seemed oddly enough that the longer she studied it, the more it appeared to be not threads on cloth, but words on a page of manuscript such as she had viewed in the ancient history video tapes. The threads were a metallic green and silver, with only a few minor touches of a lighter shade of violet.

Around her waist was a belt of silver links, clasped by a broad

buckle of the same metal set with purple stones. This supported a pouch with a metal top. The dress or robe was laced from the belt to her throat with silver cords run through metal eyelets in the material. And her sleeves were long and full, though from the elbow down they were slit to four parts, those fluttering away from her arms when she raised them to loose the crown.

What she brought away from her head was not the familiar skull cap made to fit over her cropped hair. Rather it was a circlet of silver with inner wires or strips rising to a conical point that added a foot or more to her height. On that point was a beautifully-fashioned flying thing, its wings a little lifted as if to take off, the glitter of tiny jewels marking its eyes.

It was so made that, as she turned the crown around, its long neck changed position and the wings moved a fraction. Thus at first she was almost startled enough to drop the circlet, thinking it might just be alive.

But the whole she recognized from one of the history tapes. The bird was the flacar of Olava. Wearing it so meant that she was a Mouth! A Mouth of Olava — half priestess, part sorceress—and oddly enough, entertainer. But fortune had favored her in this; a Mouth of Olava might wander anywhere without question, searching, and

seem merely to be about her normal business.

Tamisan ran her hand over her head before she replaced the crown. Her fingers did not find the bristly stubble of a dreamer, but rather soft, mist-dampened strands which curled down long enough to brush her forehead and tuft at the nape of her neck.

She had imagined garments for herself in dreams, of course. But this time she had not provided herself with such, and so the fact that she stood as a Mouth of Olava was not of her willing. But Olava was part of the time of the Over-Queen's rule. Had she somehow swept herself back in time? The sooner she found knowledge of where — and when — she was, the better.

The rain was slackening and Tamisan moved out from under the dome. She bunched up her robe in both hands to climb back up the slope. At its top she turned slowly, trying to find some proof that she had not been tossed alone into this strange world.

Save for the figures of stone and beds of rank-looking growth, there was nothing to be seen. The wall and the dome structure lay below. But when she faced about, there was a second slope leading to a still higher point which was crowned by a roof to be seen only in bits and patches through a screen of oarn

trees. The roof had a ridge which terminated at either side in a sharp upcurve, giving the building the odd appearance of an ear on either end. And it was green with a glittering surface, almost brilliantly so in spite of the clouds overhead.

To her right and left Tamisan caught glimpses of the wall curving, and more stone figures with flower or shrub plantings. Gathering up her skirts more firmly, she began to walk up the curve of the higher slope in search of some road or path leading to the roof.

She came across what she sought as she detoured to avoid a thicket of heavy brush in which were im-paled huge scarlet flowers. It was a wide roadway paved with small colored pebbles imbedded in a solid surface, and it led from an open gateway up the swell of the slope to the front of the rear structure.

In shape the building was vaguely familiar, though Tamisan could not identify it. Unless it resembled something she had seen in the tri-dees. The door was of the same brilliant green as her roof, but the walls were a pale yellow, cut sharply at regular intervals by windows, very narrow, and so tall that they ran from floor to roof level.

Even as she stood there wondering where she had seen such a house before, a woman came out. Like Tamisan she wore a long skirted robe with laced bodice and slit

sleeves. But hers was the same green as that of the door, so that, standing against it, only her head and arms were clearly visible. She gestured with vigor, and Tamisan suddenly realized that it must be she who was being summoned — as if she were expected. —

Again she fought down unease. In a dream she was well used to meetings and partings, but always those were of her own devising, did not happen for a purpose which was not of her wish. Her dream people were toys, game pieces, to be moved hither and thither at her will, she being always in command over them.

“Tamisan — they wait — come quickly!” The woman called.

IV

Tamisan was minded in that instant to run in the other direction. But the need to learn what had happened to her made her take what might be the dangerous course of joining the woman.

“Fah — you are wet! This is no hour for walking in the garden. The First Standing asks for a reading from the Mouth. If you would have lavishly from her purse, hurry lest she grows too impatient to wait!”

The door gave upon a narrow entryway, and the woman in green propelled Tamisan toward a second opening directly facing her. She came so into a large room where a

circle of couches was centered. By each stood a small table now burdened with dishes which serving maids were bearing away as if a meal had just been concluded. And tall candlesticks, matching Tamisan's own height, stood also between the divans, the candles in each, as thick as her forearm, alight to give forth not only radiance but a sweet odor as they burned.

Midpoint in the divan circle was a tall-backed chair over which arched a canopy. And in that sat a woman, a goblet in her hand. She had a fur cloak pulled about her shoulders hiding almost all of her robe, save that here and there a shimmer of gold caught fire from the candlelight. Only her face was visible in a hood of the same metallic-seeming fabric, and it was that of the very old, seamed with deep wrinkles, sunken of eye.

The divans, Tamisan marked, were occupied by both men and women, the women flanking the chair, the men farthest away from the ancient noblewoman. And directly facing her was a second impressive chair, lacking only the canopy; before it was a table on which stood, at each of its four corners, four small basins, one cream, one pale rose, one faintly blue, and the fourth sea-foam green.

Tamisan's store of knowledge gave her some preparation. This was the setting for the magic of a Mouth, and it was apparent that

her service as a foreseer was about to be demanded. What had she done in allowing herself to be drawn here? Could she make pretense her servant well enough to deceive this company?

"I hunger, Mouth of Olava, I hunger — not for that which will feed the body, but for that which satisfies the mind." The old woman leaned forward a little. Her voice might be the thin one of age, but it carried with it the force of authority, of one who has not had her word or desire questioned for a long time.

She must improvise, Tamisan knew. She was a dreamer and she had wrought in dreams many strange things. Let her but remember that now. Her damp skirts clung clammily to her legs and thighs as she came forward, saying nothing to the woman in return, but seating herself in the chair facing her client. She was drawing on faint stirrings of a memory which seemed not truly her own for guidance, though she had not yet realized that fully.

"What would you know, First Standing?" She raised her hands to her forehead in an instinctive gesture, touching forefingers to her temples, right and left.

"What comes to me—and mine." The last two words had come almost as an afterthought.

Tamisan's hands went out with-

out her conscious ordering. She stifled her amazement — this was as if she were repeating an act as well learned as her dreamer's technique had been. With her left hand she gathered up a palm full of the sand from the cream bowl. It was a shade or two darker than the container. She tossed this with a sharp movement of her wrist, and it settled smoothly as a film on the tabletop.

What she was doing was not of her conscious mind, as if another had taken charge of her actions. And judging by the way the woman in the chair leaned forward, the hush that had fallen on her companions, this was right and proper.

Without any order from her mind, Tamisan's right hand went now to the blue bowl with its dark blue sand. But this was not tossed. Instead, she held the fine grains in her fist and that upright, passing it slowly over the table top so that a very tiny trickle of grit fed down to make a pattern on the first film.

And it was a pattern, not a random scattering. What she had so drawn was a recognizable sword with a basket-shaped hilt and a slightly curved blade tapering to a narrow point.

Now her hand moved to the pink bowl. The sand she gathered up there was a dark red, more vivid than the other colors, as if she dealt now with flecks of newly shed blood. Once more she used

her upheld fist, and the shifting stream, fed from her palm, became a space ship! It was slightly different in outline from those she had seen all her life, but it was unmistakably a ship. And it was drawn on the table top as if it threatened to descend upon the pointed sword. Or was it that the sword threatened it?

She heard a gasp of surprise — or was it fear? But that sound had not come from the woman who had bade her foretell. It must have broken from some other member of the company intent upon Tamisan's painting with the flowing sand

It was to the fourth bowl now that her right hand moved. But she did not take up a full fistful, rather a generous pinch between thumb and forefinger. She held the sand high above the picture and released it. The green specks floated down—to gather in a sign like a circle with one portion missing.

She stared at that, and it seemed to alter a little under the intentness of her watching. What it had changed to was a symbol she knew well, one which brought a small gasp from her. It was the seal, simplified it was true, but still readable, of the House of Starrex, and it overlaid both the edge of the ship and the tip of the sword.

"Read you this!" The noblewoman demanded sharply.

And from somewhere the words came readily to Tamisan. "The sword is the sword of Ty-Kry raised in defense."

"Assured, assured." The murmur ran along the divans.

"The ship comes as a danger —"

"That thing — a ship? But it is no ship —"

"It is a ship from the stars."

"A woe—woe and woe —" That was no murmur now but a full throated cry of fright. "As in the days of our fathers when we had to deal with the false ones. Ahtap — let the spirit of Ahta be shield to our arms, a sword in our hands!"

The noblewoman made a silencing gesture with one hand. "Enough! Crying to the reverend spirits may bring comfort, but they are not noted for helping those not standing to arms on their own behalf. There have been other sky ships since Ahta's days, and with them we have dealt — to *our* purpose. If another comes, we are forewarned, which is also forearmed. But what lies there in green, O Mouth of Olava, which surprised even you?"

Tamisan had had precious moments in which to think. If it were true as she had deduced, that she was tied to this world by those she had brought with her, then she must find them. And it was clear that they were not of this company. Therefore this last must be made to work for her.

"The green sign is that of a

champion, one meant to be mighty in the coming battle. But he shall not be known save when the sign points to him, and it may be that this can only be seen by one with the Eyes."

She looked to the noblewoman, and, meeting those old eyes, Tamisan felt a small chill rise in her, one which had not been born from the still damp clothing she wore. For there was that in those two shadowed eyes which questioned coldly and did not accept without proof.

"So should the one with the Eye you speak of go sniffing all through Ty-Kry and the land beyond the city, even to the boundaries of the world?"

"If need be," Tamisan stood firm.

"A long journey, mayhap, and many step-strides into danger. And if the ship comes before this champion is found? A thin cord I think, O Mouth, on which to hang the future of a city, a kingdom or a people. Look if you will, but I say we have more tested ways of dealing with these interlopers from the skies. But, Mouth, since you have given warning, let it so be remembered."

She put her hands on the arms of her chair and arose, using them to lever her. And so all her company came to their feet, two of the women hurrying to her so that she

could lay her hands upon their shoulders to support her out. Without another glance at Tamisan she went, nor did the dreamer rise to see her go. For suddenly she was spent, tired as she had been in the past when a dream broke and left her supine and drained. Only this dream did not break, but kept her sitting before the table and its sand pictures, looking at that green symbol, still caught fast in the web of another world.

The woman in green returned, bearing a goblet in her two hands, offering it to Tamisan.

“The First Standing will go to the High Castle and the Over-Queen. She turned into that road. Drink, Tamisan, and mayhap the Over-Queen herself will ask you for a seeing.”

Tamisan? That was her true name. Twice this woman had called her by it. How was it known in a dream? Yet she dared not ask that question or any of the others she needed answers for. Instead she drank from the goblet, finding the liquid hot and spicy, driving the chill from her body.

There was so much she must learn, must know, and she could not discover it save indirectly, lest she reveal what she was and was not.

“I am tired.”

“There is a resting place prepared,” the woman said. “You have only to come —”

Tamisan had almost to lever herself up as the noblewoman had done. She was giddy, had to catch at the back of the chair. Then she moved after her hostess, hoping desperately to know . . .

V

Did one sleep in a dream, dream upon dream, perhaps? Tamisan wondered about that as she stretched out upon the couch her hostess showed her. Yet when she set aside her crown and laid her head upon the roll which served as a pillow, she was once more alert, her thoughts racing or entangled in such wild confusion that she felt as giddy as she had upon rising from her seer’s chair.

The Starrex symbol overlying both that of the sword and the space ship in the sand picture — could it mean that she would only find what she sought when the might of this world met that of the starmen? And had she indeed in some manner fallen into the past where she would relive the first coming of the space voyagers to Ty-Kry? But no, the noblewoman had mentioned past encounters with them which had ended in favor of Ty-Kry.

Tamisan tried to envision a world of her own time, but one in which history had taken a different road. Yet much of that around her was of the past. Did that mean that,

without the decisions of her own time, the world of Ty-Kry remained largely unchanged from century to century?

Real, unreal, old, now — she had lost all a dreamer's command of action. Tamisan did not play now with toys which she could move about at will, but rather was caught up in a series of events she could not foresee and over which she had no control. Yet twice the woman had called her by her rightful name — and without willing it she had used the devices of a Mouth of Olava to foretell, as if she had done so many times before.

Could it be? Tamisan closed her teeth upon her lower lip and felt the pain of that, just as she felt the pain of the bruises left by her abrupt entrance into the mysterious here. Could it be that some dreams were so deep, so well woven that they were to the dreamer real? Was this indeed the fate of those "closed" dreamers who were worthless for the Hive? Did they in their trances live a countless number of lives? But she was not a closed dreamer —

Awake! Once more, stretched as she was upon the couch, she used the proper technique to throw herself out of a dream. And once more she experienced that weird nothingness in which she spun sickeningly, as if held helplessly in some void, tied to an anchor which kept her back from the full leap to sane

safety. There was only one explanation — that somewhere in this strange Ty-Kry one or both of those who had prepared to share her dream was now to be found and must be sought out before she could return.

So — the sooner that she accomplished, the better! But where should she start seeking? Though a feeling of weakness clung to her limbs, making her move slowly as if she strove to walk against the pull of a strong current, Tamisan arose from the couch. She turned to pick up her Mouth's crown and so looked into the oval of a mirror, startled thus into immobility. For the figure she looked upon as her own reflection was not that she had seen before.

It was not the robe or the crown which had changed her; she was not the same person. For a long time, ever since she could remember, she had had the pallid skin and the close cropped hair of a dreamer very seldom in the sunlight. But the face of the woman in the mirror was a soft, even brown. The cheekbones were wide, the eyes large, the lips very red. Her brows — she leaned closer to the mirror to see what gave them that odd upward slant and decided that they had been plucked or shaven to produce the effect. Her hair was perhaps three fingers long and not her very fair coloring, but

dark and curling. She was not the Tamisan she knew, nor was this stranger the product of her own will.

And it must follow logically that if she did not look like her normal self — then perhaps the two she sought were no longer as she remembered either. Thus her search would be twice the more difficult. Could she ever recognize them?

Frightened now, she sat down on the couch, facing the mirror. No, she dared not even give way to fear. For if she once let it break her control she might be utterly lost. Logic, even in such a world of unlogic, must make her think lucidly.

Just how true was her soothsaying? At least she had not influenced that fall of the sand. Therefore — perhaps the Mouth of Olava did have supernatural powers. She had played with the idea of magic in the past to embroider dreams, but that had been her own creation. Could she use it by will now—since it would seem this unknown self of hers did manage to draw upon some unknown source of power?

Fasten her thoughts upon one of the men, hold him in her mind — could the dream tie pull her to him? Kas or Starrex? All she knew of her master she had learned from tapes, and tapes gave one only superficial knowledge, as if one could study a person going through only half-understood actions behind a veil which concealed more

than it displayed. Kas had spoken directly to her, his flesh had touched hers. If she must choose one to draw her, then it had better be Kas.

Kas—in her mind Tamisan built a memory sketch of him as she would build a preliminary picture for a dream. Then suddenly the Kas in her mind flickered and changed. She saw another man. He was taller than the Kas she knew, and he wore a uniform tunic and space boots — his features were hard to distinguish — and that vision lasted only a fraction of time.

The ship! That symbol had lain touching both ship and sword in the sand seeing. And it would be easier to seek a man on the ship than wandering through the streets of a strange city with no better clue than that Starrex—this world's counterpart—might just be here.

So little on which to pin a quest! A ship which might or might not be now approaching Ty-Kry — and which would meet a drastic reception when it landed. Suppose Kas — or his this-world's double — were killed? Would that anchor her here for all time? Resolutely Tamisan pushed such negative speculation to the back of her mind. First things first; the ship had not yet planeted. But when it came she must make sure that she was among those who were preparing for its welcome.



It seemed that having made that decision she was at last able to sleep, for the fatigue which had struck at her in the hall returned a hundred-fold, and she fell, back on the couch as one drugged, remembering nothing more until she awakened to find the woman in green standing above her, one hand on her shoulder shaking her gently back to awareness.

"Awake — there is a summons."

A summons to dream, Tamisan thought dazedly, and then the unfamiliar room, the immediate past came completely back to her.

"The First Standing Jassa has summoned." The woman sounded excited. "It is said by her messenger, and he has brought a chair cart for you, that you are to go to the High Castle! Perhaps you will see for the Over-Queen herself! But there is time — I have won it for you — to bathe, to eat, to change your robe. See — I have plundered my own bride chest —" She pointed to a chair over which was spread a robe, not of the deep violet Tamisan now wore, but of a purple-wine. "It is the only one of the proper color — or near it." She ran her hand lovingly over the rich folds.

"But haste!" she added briskly. "As a Mouth you can claim the need for making ready to appear before high company, but to linger too long will raise the anger of the First Standing."

There was a basin large enough

to serve as a bath in the room beyond. And, as well as the robe, the woman brought fresh body linen. So that when Tamisan stood once more before the mirror to clasp her silver belt and assume the Mouth crown, she felt renewed and refreshed and her thanks were warm.

But the woman made a gesture of brushing them aside. "Are we not of the same clan, cousin-kin? Shall one say that Nahra is not open-handed with her own? That you are a Mouth is our clan pride, let us enjoy it through you!"

She brought a covered bowl and a goblet and Tamisan ate a dish of mush-meal into which had been baked dried fruit and bits of what she thought well-chopped meat. It was tasty, and she finished it to the last crumb, just as she emptied the cup of a tart-sweet drink.

"Well away, Tamisan, this is a great day for the clan of Fremont when you go to the High Castle and perhaps stand before the Over-Queen. May it be that the Seeing is not for ill, but for good. Though you are but the Mouth of Olava and not the One dealing fortune to us who live and die."

"For your aid and your good wishing, receive my thanks," Tamisan said. "I, too, hope that fortune comes from misfortune on this day." And that is stark truth, she thought, for I must gather fortune to me with both hands and hold it

tight, lest the chancy game I play be lost.

First Standing Jassa's messenger was an officer, his hair clubbed up under a ridged helm to give additional protection to his head in battle, his breastplate enameled blue with the double crown of the Over-Queen, and his sword very much to the fore—as if he already strode the street of a city at war. There was a small grypon between the shafts of the chair cart and two men-at-arms ready, one at the grypon's head, the other holding aside the curtains as their officer handed Tamisan into the chair. He brusquely jerked the curtains shut without asking her pleasure, and she decided that perhaps her visit to the High Castle was to be a secret matter.

But between the curtain edges she caught sight of this Ty-Kry. And, though in parts it was very strange to her, there were enough similarities to provide her with an anchor to the real. The sky towers and other off-world forms of architectures which had been introduced by space travelers were missing. But the streets themselves, the many beds of foliage and flowers, were those she had known all her life.

And the High Castle — she drew a deep breath as they wound out of town and along the river — this — this had been part of her world,

too, though then as a ruined and very ancient landmark. Part of it had been slagged in the war of Sylt's rebellion. And it had been considered a place of misfortune, largely shunned, save for off-world tourists seeking the unusual.

But here it was in its pride, larger, more widely spread than in her Ty-Kry, as if the generations who had deserted it in her world had clung to it here, adding ever to its bulk. For it was not a single structure but a city in itself, though it had no merchants nor public buildings, but rather provided homes to shelter the nobles, who must spend part of the year at court, and all their servants, and the many officials of the kingdom.

In its heart was the building which gave it its name, a collection of towers, rising far above the lesser structures at the foot. These were of a gray at their bases which changed subtly as they arose until their tops were a deep, rich blue, while the other buildings in the great pile were wholly gray as to wall, a darker blue as to roof.

The chair creaked forward on its two wheels, the grypon being kept to a steady pace by the man at its head, and passed under the thick arch in the outer wall, then up a street between buildings which, though dwarfed by the towers, were in turn dwarfing to those who walked or rode by them.

There was a second gate, more

buildings, a third, and then the open space about the central towers. They had passed people in plenty since entering the first gate. Many were soldiers of the guard, but some of the armed men had worn other colors and insignia, being, Tamisan guessed, the retainers of court lords. And now and then some Lord came proudly, his retinue strung along behind him by threes to make a show which amused Tamisan, as if the number of followers to tread on one's heels enhanced one's importance in the world.

She was handed down with a little more ceremony than she had been ushered into the chair. And the officer offered her his wrist, his men falling in behind as a groom hurried forward to lead off the equipage, thus affording her a tail-of-honor too.

But the towers of the High Castle were so awe inspiring, so huge a pile, she was glad she had an escort into their heart. The farther they went through halls — so high that it was hard to see their dusky roofs, ill lit by only the big candles in their man-tall holders—the more uneasy she became. As if once within his maze there might be no retreat and she would be lost forever.

VI

Twice they climbed staircases until her legs ached with the effort

and the stairs took on the aspect of mountains. Then her party passed into a long hall which was lighted not only by the candle-trees but some thin rays filtering through windows placed so high above their heads that nothing could be seen through them. And Tamisan, in that part of her which seemed familiar with this world, knew this to be the Walk of the Nobles, and the company now gathered here were, nearest, the Third Standing, then the Second and, at the far end of that road of blue carpet onto which her guide led her, First Standing — or rather sitting, there being two arcs of hooded and canopied chairs, with a throne above them on a three-step dias. And the hood over that was upheld by a double crown which glittered with gems, while on the steps were grouped men in the armor of the guard and others wearing bright tunics, their hair loose upon their shoulders.

It was toward that throne that the officer led her and they passed through the ranks of the Third Standing, hearing a low murmur of voices. Tamisan looked neither to right or left. She wished to see the Over-Queen, for it was plain she was being granted full audience. And then—something stirred deep within her as if a small pin pricked. The reason for this she did not know, save that ahead was something of vast importance to her.

Now they were equal with the

first of the chairs and she saw that the greater number of those who so sat were women, but not all. And mainly they were of an age to be at least in middle life. So Tamisan came to the foot of the dais, and in that moment she did not go to one knee as did the officer, but rather raised her fingertips to touch the rim of the crown on her head. For with another of those flashes of half recognition, she knew that in this place that which she represented did not bow as did others, but acknowledged only that the Queen was one to whom human allegiance was granted after another and greater loyalty was paid elsewhere.

The Over-Queen looked down with as deeply searching a stare as Tamisan looked up. And what Tamisan saw was a woman to whom she could not set an age; rather she might be either old or young, for the years had not seemed to mark her. The robe on her full figure was not ornate, but a soft pearl color without ornamentation, save that she wore a girdle of silvery chains braided and woven together, and a collar-like necklace of the same metal from which fringed milky gems cut into drops. Her hair was a flame of brightly glowing red in which a diadem of the same creamy stones was almost hidden. As for her face — was she beautiful? Tamisan could not

have said. But that she was vitally alive there was no doubt. Even though she sat so quietly now, there was an aura of energy about her suggesting that this was only a pause between the doing of great and necessary deeds. To Tamisan she was the most assertive personality she had ever seen and instantly the guards of a dreamer went into action. To serve such a mistress, Tamisan thought, would sap all the personality from one, so that the servant would become but a mirror to reflect from that sur-render onward.

“Welcome, Mouth of Olava who has been uttering strange things.” The Over-Queen’s voice was mocking, challenging.

“A Mouth says naught, Great One, save what is given it to speak.” Tamisan found her answer ready, though she had not consciously formed it in her mind.

“So we are told. Though Gods may grow old and tired. Or is that only the fate of men? But now it is our will that Olava speak again — if that is fortune for this hour. So be it!”

As if that last phrase was an order there was a stir among those standing on the steps of the throne. Two of the guardsmen brought out a table, a third a stool, the fourth a tray on which rested four bowls of sand. These they set up before the throne.

Tamisan took her place on the

stool, again put her fingers to her temples. Would this work once more? Or must she try to force a picture in the sand? She felt a small shiver of nerves she fought to control.

"What desires the Great One?" She was glad to hear her voice steady, no hint of her uneasiness in it.

"What chances in — say four passages of the sun?"

Tamisan waited. Would that other personality or power, or whatever it might be, take over? But her hand did not move. Instead that odd, disturbing prick grew the stronger; she was drawn, even as a noose might be laid about her forehead to pull her head around. So she turned to follow the dictates of that pull, to look where something willed her eyes to look. But all she saw was the line of officers on the steps of the throne, and they stared at and through her, none with any sign of recognition Starrex! She grasped at that hope; but none of them resembled the man she sought.

"Does Olava sleep? Or has His Mouth been forgotten for a space?"

The Over-Queen's voice was sharper, and Tamisan broke that hold on her attention, looked back to the throne and the woman on it.

"It is not meet for the Mouth to speak unless Olava wishes — "

Tamisan began, with increasing nervousness until she felt that sensation in her left hand, as if it were not under her control but possessed by another will. She fell silent as it gathered up the brownish sand and tossed it to form a picture's background.

But this time she did not seek next the blue grains; rather her fist dug into the red and moved to paint in the outline of the space ship, above it a single red circle.

Then there was a moment of hesitation, before her fingers strayed to the green, took up a generous pinch and again made Starrex's symbol below the ship.

"A single sun," the Over-Queen read out. "One day until the enemy comes. But what is the remaining word of Olava, Mouth?"

"That there be one among you who is a key to victory. He shall stand against the enemy and under him fortune comes."

"So? And who is this hero?"

Tamisan looked again to the line of officers. Dared she trust to instinct? Something within her urged her on.

"Let each of these protectors of Ty-Kry — " She raised a finger to indicate the officers. "Let each come forward and take up the sand of seeing. Let the Mouth touch that hand and may it then strew the answer — perhaps Olava will so make it clear."

To Tamisan's surprise, the Over-

Queen laughed. "As good a way as any perhaps for picking a champion. Though to abide by Olava's choice — that is another matter." And her smile faded as she glanced at the men, as if there was a thought in her mind which disturbed her.

At her nod, they came one by one. Under the shadows of their helmets their faces, being of one race, were very similiar; and Tamisan, studying each, could see no chance of telling which Starrex might be.

Each took up a pinch of green sand, held out his hand palm down and let the grains fall while she set finger tip to the back of that hand. The sand drifted, but in no shape and to no purpose.

It was not until the last man came that there was a difference, for then the sand did not drift, but fell to form again the symbol which was twin to the one already on the table. Tamisan looked up. The officer was staring at the sand rather than meeting her eyes, and there was a line of strain about his mouth, a look about him such as might shadow the face of a man who stood with his back to a wall and a ring of sword points at his throat.

"This is your man," Tamisan said. Starrex? She must be sure — if she could only demand the truth in this instant!

But her preoccupation was swept aside.

"Olava deals falsely!" That cry came from the officer behind her, the one who had brought her here.

"Perhaps we must not think ill of Olava's advice." The Over-Queen's voice had a guttural, feline purr. "It may be his Mouth is not wholly wedded to his service, but speaks for others than Olava at times. Hawarel — so you are to be our champion — "

The officer went to one knee, his hands clasped loosely before him as if he wished all to see he did not reach for any weapon.

"I am no choice, save the Great One's." In spite of the strain visible in his tense body he spoke levelly and without a tremor.

"Great One, *this* traitor — " Two of the officers moved as if to lay hands upon him and drag him away.

"No. Has not Olava spoken?" The mockery was very plain in the Over-Queen's tone now. "But to make sure that Olava's will be carried out, take good care of our champion - to - be. Since Hawarel is to fight our battle with the cursed starmen, he must be saved to do it." Now she looked to Tamisan, who was still startled by the quick turn of events and their hostility to Olava's choice. "Let the Mouth of Olava share with Hawarel this waiting that she may, perhaps instill in Olava's choice the

vigor and strength such a battle will demand of our chosen champion." Each time the Over-Queen spoke the last word she made of it a thing of derision and subtle menace.

"The audience is finished." The Over-Queen arose, stepped behind the throne as those about Tamisan fell to their knees; and then she was gone. But the officer who had guided Tamisan was by her side. And Hawarel, once more on his feet, was closely flanked by two of the other guards, one of whom pulled their prisoner's sword from his sheath before he could move. With Hawarel before her, Tamisan was urged from the hall.

At the moment she was pleased enough to go, hoping for a chance to prove the rightness of her guess, that Hawarel and Starrex were the same and she had found the first of her fellow dreamers — was this far onward toward their release.

They traversed more halls until they came to a door which one of Hawarel's guards opened. The prisoner walked through and Tamisan's escort waved her after him. Then the door slammed shut and at that sound Hawarel whirled around.

Under the beaking fore plate of his helmet his eyes were cold fire and he seemed a man about to leap for his enemy's throat.

"Who —" His voice was only a harsh whisper. "Who set you to my death wishing, witch?"

His clawed hands were reaching for her throat. Tamisan flung up her arm in an attempt to guard, stumbled back.

"Lord Starrex!" If she had been wrong — if — !

Though his finger tips brushed her shoulders, he did not grasp her. Instead it was his turn to retreat a step or two, his mouth half open in a gasp.

"Witch — witch!" The very force of the words he hurled at her made them like darts dispatched from one of the archaic crossbows of the history tapes.

"Lord Starrex," Tamisan repeated, feeling on more secure ground at seeing his stricken amazement, no longer fearing he would attack her out of hand. His reaction to that name was enough to assure her she was right, though he did not seem prepared to acknowledge it.

"I am Hawarel of the Vanora," he brought out those words as harsh croaking.

Tamisan glanced around. This was a bare-walled room, with no hiding place for a listener. In her own time and place she could have feared many scanning devices. But she thought those unknown to this Ty-Kry. And to win Hawarel-Starrex into cooperation was very necessary.

"You are Lord Starrex," she re-

turned with bold confidence or at least what she hoped was a convincing show of such. "Just as I am Tamisan, the dreamer. And this, wherein we are caught, is the dream you ordered of me."

He raised his hand to his forehead, his fingers encountered his helmet, and he swept it off unheedingly, so that it clanked and skidded across the polished floor. His hair, netted into a kind of protecting cushion, was piled about his head, giving him an odd appearance to Tamisan. It was black and thick, just as his skin was as brown-hued as that of her new body. And without the shadow of the helm she could see his face more clearly, finding in it no resemblance to the aloof master of the sky towers. In a way, it was that of a younger man, one less certain of himself.

"I am Hawarel," he repeated doggedly. "You try to trap me, or perhaps the trap has already closed and you seek now to make me condemn myself with my own mouth. I tell you, I am no traitor — I am Hawarel and my blood oath to the Great One has been faithfully kept."

Tamisan experienced a rise of impatience. She had not thought Lord Starrex to be a stupid man. But it would seem his counterpart here lacked more than just the face of his other self.

"You are Starrex, and this is a dream." If it was not, she did not care to raise that issue now. "Remember the sky tower? You bought me from Jabis for dreaming. Then you summoned me — and Lord Kas — and ordered me to prove my worth."

His brows drew together in a black frown as he stared at her.

"What have they given you or promised, that you do to me?" came his counter-demand. "I am no sworn enemy to you or yours — not that I know."

Tamisan sighed. "Do you deny you know the name Starrex?" she asked.

For a long moment he was silent. Then he turned from her, took a stride or two, his toe thumping against his helmet, sending it rolling ahead of him. She waited. He rounded again to face her.

"You are a Mouth of Olava —"

She shook her head, interrupting him. "We have little time for such fencing, Lord Starrex. You do know that name, and it is in my mind that you also remember the rest, at least in some measure. I am Tamisan the dreamer."

It was his turn to sigh. "So you say."

"So I shall continue to say. And, mayhap as I do, others than you will listen."

"As I thought!" he flashed. "You would have me betray myself."

"If you are truly Hawarel as you state, then what have you to betray?"

"Very well. I am — am two! I am Hawarel and I am someone else who has queer memories and who may well be a night demon come to dispute ownership of this body. There — you have it! Go and tell those who sent you and have me out to the arrow range for a quick ending there. Perhaps that will be better than to continue as a battle field between two different selves."

Perhaps he was not just being obstinate, Tamisan thought. It might be that the dream had a greater hold on him than it did on her. After all she was a trained dreamer, one used to venturing into illusions wrought from imagination.

"If you can remember a little — then listen!" She drew closer to him and began to speak in a lower voice — not that she believed they could be overheard, but it was well to take no chances. Swiftly she gave her account of this whole mad tangle, or what had been her part in it.

When she was done she was surprised to see that a certain hardening had overtaken his features, so that now he looked more resolute, less like one trapped in a maze which had no guide.

"And this is the truth?"

"By what god or power do you wish me to swear to it?" She was exasperated now, frustrated by his lingering doubts.

"None, because it explains what was heretofore unexplainable — what has made my life a hell of doubt these past hours and brought more suspicion upon me. I have been two persons. But if this is all a dream — why is that so?"

"I do not know." Tamisan chose frankness as best befitting her needs now. "This is unlike any dream I have created before."

"In what manner?" he asked crisply.

"It is part of a dreamer's duty to study her master's personality, to suit his desires, even if those be unexpressed and hidden. From what I had learned of you — of Lord Starrex — I thought that too much had been already seen, experienced, known to you. That it must be a new approach I tried, or else you would find that dreaming held no profit.

"Therefore it came to me suddenly that I would not dream of the past, nor of the future, which are the common approaches for an action dreamer, but refine upon the subject. In the past there were times in history when the future rested upon a single decision. And it was in my mind to select certain of these decisions and then envision a world, co-existent with our own, in which those decisions had

gone in the opposite direction — trying to see what would be the present-day result of actions in the past.”

“And so this is what you tried? And what decisions did you select for your experiment at the rewriting of history?” He was giving her his full attention now.

“I took three. First, the Welcome of the Over-Queen Ahta; second the drift of the Colony ship Wanderer; third, the rebellion of Sylt. Should the Welcome have been a rejection, should the colony ship never reached here, should Sylt have failed — these would produce a world I thought might be interesting to visit — in a dream. So I read what history tapes I could call upon. Thus, when you summoned me to dream I had my ideas ready. But — it did not work as it should have. Instead of spinning the proper dream, creating incidents in good order, I found myself fast caught in a world I did not know, nor build.”

As she spoke she watched the change in him. He had lost all the fervent antagonism of his first attack on her. More and more, she could see what she had associated with the personality of Lord Starrex coming through the unfamiliar envelope of the guardsman's body.

“So it did not work properly—”

“No, as I have said, I found myself in the dream, with no control of action, no recognizable creation

factors. I do not understand — ”

“No? There could be an explanation.” The frown line was back between his brows but it was not a scowl aimed at her; rather it was as if he were trying hard to remember something of importance which eluded his efforts. “There is a theory, a very old one — Yes! That of Parallel worlds!”

In her wide use of the tapes she had not come across that and now she demanded the knowledge of him almost fiercely. “What are those?”

“You are not the first — how could you be — to be struck by the notion that sometimes history and the future hang upon a very thin cord which can be twisted this way and that by small chance. There was a theory once advanced that when that chanced it created a second world, one in which the decision was made to the right, when that of the world we know went to the left.”

“But — alternated worlds — where — how did they exist?”

“Thus, perhaps.” He held out his two hands horizontally one above the other. “In layers. There were even old tales, created for amusement, of men traveling, not back in time, nor forward, but across it from one such world to another.”

“But — here we are. I am a Mouth of Olava, nor do I look like

myself. Just as to the eye you are not Lord Starrex — ”

“Perhaps we are the people we would be if our world had taken the other side of your three decisions. It is a clever device for a dreamer to create, Tamisan.”

“Only,” she told him now the last truth, “I do not think I have created it. Certainly I can not control it — ”

“You have tried to break this dream?”

“Of course! But I am tied here. I think by you and the Lord Kas. Until we three try together, perhaps we can not any of us return.”

“And Kas — now you must go searching for him?”

She shook her head. “Kas, I think, is one of the crew on this spacer about to set down. I believe I saw him — though not his face.” Now she smiled a little shakily. “It seems that though I am mainly the Tamisan I have always been, yet also do I have some of the powers of a Mouth. Just as you are Hawarel as well as Starrex.”

“The longer I listen to you,” he announced, “the more I become Starrex. So we must find Kas on the spacer before we wrangle free from this tangle? But that is going to be rather a problem. I am enough of Hawarel to know that the spacer is going to receive the usual welcome dealt off-world ships here — trickery and extinction. Your three points have been as you

envisioned them. There was no Welcome, but rather a massacre, no colony ship ever reached here, and Sylt was speared by a contemptuous man-at-arms the first time he lifted his voice to draw a crowd. Hawarel knows this as the truth; as Starrex I am aware there is another truth which did radically change life on this planet. Now, did you seek me out on purpose, your champion tale intended to be our bridge to Kas?”

“No, at least I did not consciously arrange it so. I tell you, I have some of the powers of a Mouth — they take over.”

He gave a sharp bark of sound which was not laughter but somewhat akin to it. “By the Fist of Jimsam Taragon, we have it complicated by magic, too! And I suppose you can not tell me just how much a Mouth can do in the way of foreseeing or forearming or freeing us from this trap?”

Tamisan shook her head. “The Mouths were mentioned in the history tapes; they were very important once. But after Sylt’s rebellion they were either killed or disappeared. They were hunted by both sides and most of what we know about them is only legend. I can not tell you what I can do. Sometimes something — perhaps it is the memory and knowledge of this body — takes over and then I do strange things. I neither will nor understand them.”



ADKINS

He crossed the room and pulled two stools from a far corner. "We might as well sit at ease and explore what we can of this world memories. It just might be that united we can learn more than when trying singly. The trouble is —" He reached out a hand and mechanically she touched finger tips to the back of it in a oddly formal ceremony which was not part of her own knowledge. So he guided her to one of the stools and she was glad to sit down.

"The trouble is," he repeated as he dropped on the other stool, stretching out his long legs and tugging at his sword belt with that dangerously empty sheath, "that I was more than a little mixed up when I awoke, if you might call it that—in this body. So that my first reactions must have suggested mental imbalance to those I encountered. Luckily the Hawarel part was in control soon enough to save me. But there is a second drawback to this identity—I am suspect as coming from a province where there has been a rebellion. In fact I am here in Ty-Kry as a distrusted hostage, rather than a member in good standing of the guard. I have not been able to ask questions, and all I have learned is in bits and pieces. The real Hawarel is a quite uncomplicated and simple soldier who is hurt by the

suspicion against him and quite fervently loyal to the crown. I wonder how Kas took *his* awakening. If he preserves any remnant of his real self, he ought to be well established by now."

Tamisan, surprised, asked a question to which she hoped he would give a true and open answer: "You do not like — you have reason to fear Lord Kas?"

"Like? Fear?" She could see that thin shadow of Starrex overlaying Hawarel become more distinct. "Those are emotions. I have had little to do with emotions for some time."

"But you wanted him to share the dream," she persisted.

"True. I may not be emotional about my esteemed cousin, but I am a prudent man. Since it was by his urging, in fact his arrangement, that you were added to my household, I thought it only fair he share in his plan for my entertainment. I know that Kas is very solicitous of his crippled cousin, ready-handed to serve in any way — so generous of time, energy —"

"You suspect him of something?" She thought she had sensed what lay behind his words.

"Suspect? Of what? He has been, as all would assure you freely, and as far as I would allow, my good friend." But there was a closed look about him, warning her off from any further exploration of that.

"His crippled cousin." This time Hawarel repeated those words as if he spoke to himself and not to her. "At least you have done me a small service on the credit side of the scale." Now he did look to Tamisan as he thumped his right leg with a satisfaction which was not of the Starrex she knew. "You have provided me with a body in good working order. Which I may well need, since so far bad has outweighed the good in this world."

"Hawarel — Lord Starrex — " she was beginning when he interrupted her.

"Give me always Hawarel. Remember! There is no need to add to the already heavy load of suspicion surrounding me in these halls."

"Hawarel, then. I did not choose you for the champion; that was done by that power I do not understand, working through me. If they agree — then you have a good chance to find Kas. You may even demand that he be the one you battle."

"Find him how?"

"They may allow me to select the proper one from the off-world force," she suggested. A very thin thread on which to hang any plan of escape, but she could not see a better one.

"And you think that this sand painting will pick him out — as it did me?"

"But it *did* you, did it not?"

"That I can not deny."

"And the first time I foresaw — for one of the First Standing — it made such an impression on her that she had me summoned here to foresee for the Over-Queen."

"Magic!" Again he uttered that half laugh.

"To another worlder, much that the space travelers can do might be termed magic."

"Well enough. I have seen things — yes, I have seen things myself, and not while dreaming either. Very well, I am to volunteer to meet an enemy champion from the ship and then you sand paint out the proper one. If you are successful and do find Kas — then what?"

"It is simple — we wake."

"You take us with you, of course?"

"If we are so linked that we can not leave here without one another — then a single waking will take us all."

"Are you sure you need Kas? After all, I was the one you were planning this dream for."

"We go, leave the Lord Kas here?"

"A cowardly withdrawal you think, my dreamer. But one, I assure you which would solve many things. However — can you send me through, return for Kas? It is in my mind I would like to know what is happening now for myself

— in our own world. Is it not by the dreamer's oath that he for whom the dream is wrought has first call upon the dreamer?"

So he did have some lurking uneasiness tied to Kas! But in a manner he was right. She reached out before he was aware of what she would do and seized his hand, at the same time using the formula for waking. Once more that mist which was nowhere enveloped her. But it was no use; her first guess had been right — they were still tied. And she blinked her eyes open upon the same room. Hawarel had slumped, was falling from his stool so that she had to go to one knee to support his body with her shoulder or he would have slid full length to the floor. Then his muscles tightened and he jerked erect, his eyes open and blazing into hers with the same cold anger with which he had first greeted her upon entering this room.

"Why — ?"

"You asked," she countered.

His lids drooped so she could no longer see that icy anger. "So I did. But I did not quite expect to be so quickly served. Now, you have effectively proven your point — three go or none. And it remains to be seen how soon we can find our missing third."

He asked her no more questions and she was glad, since that whirl into nowhere in the abortive at-

tempt at waking had tired her greatly. She moved the stool a little so her back could rest against the wall and she was farther from him. But in a little while he got to his feet and paced back and forth as if some driving desire for wider action worked in him, to the point where he could not sit still.

Once the door opened, but they were not summoned forth. Instead food and drink were brought to them by one of the guards, the other standing ready with a cross-bow at thigh, his eyes ever upon them.

"We are well served. Hawarel opened the lids of bowls and inspected their contents. "It would seem we are of importance. Hail, Rugaard, when do we go forth from this room, of which I am growing very tired?"

"Be at peace, you shall have action enough when the Great One desires it," the officers by the cross-bowman answered. "The ship from the stars has been sighted, the mountain beacons have blazed twice. They seem to be aiming for the plain beyond Ty-Kry. It is odd that they are so single-minded and come to the same pen to be taken each time. Perhaps Dalskol was right when he said that they do not think for themselves at all, but carry out the orders of an off-world power which does not allow them independent judgment. Your service time will come. And, Mouth

of Olava — ” He took a step forward to see Tamisan the better. “The Great One says that it might be well to read the sand on your own behalf. For false seers are given to those they have belittled in such seeing, to be done with as those they have so shamed may decide.”

“As is well known,” she answered him. “I have not dealt falsely, as shall be seen at the proper time and in the proper place.”

When they were gone she was hungry, and so it seemed was Hawarel, for they divided fairly and left nothing in the bowls. When they were done he said, “Since you are a reader of history and know old customs, perhaps you remember one which it is not too pleasant to recall now— that among some races it was the proper thing to dine well a prisoner about to die.”

“You choose a heartening thing to think on!”

“No, you choose it, for this is your world, remember that, my dreamer.”

Tamisan closed her eyes and leaned her head and shoulders back against the wall. Perhaps she even slept a little, for there was the clang of sudden noise and she gasped out of a doze. The room had grown dark, but at the door was a blaze of light and in that stood the officer, behind a guard of spearmen.

“The time has come,” he said.

“The wait has been long.” Hawarel stood up, stretching wide his arms as one who has been ready for too long. Then he turned to her and once more offered his wrist. She would have liked to have done without his aid, but she found herself stiff and cramped enough to be glad of it.

They went on a complicated way through halls, down stairs until at last they issued out into the night. And awaiting them was a covered cart much larger than the chair on wheels which had brought her to the castle, this one with two grypons between its shafts.

Into this their guard urged them, drawing the curtains, pegging those down tightly outside, so that even had they wished they could not and looked out. And as the cart creaked out, Tamisan tried to guess by sound where they might be going.

There was little noise to guide her. It was as if they now passed through a town deep in slumber. But in the gloom of the cart she felt rather than saw movement, and then a shoulder brushed hers and a whisper so faint she had to strain to hear it was at her ear.

“Out of the castle — ”

“Where?”

“My guess is the field — the forbidden place — ”

The memory of the this-world Tamisan supplied explanation.

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That was where two other spacers had planeted — not to rise again. In fact, the one which had come fifty years ago had never been dismantled but stood, a corroded mass of metal, to be a double warning — to the stars not to invade, to Ty-Kry to be alert against such invasion.

It seemed to Tamisan that their ride would never come to an end. Then there was an abrupt halt which bumped her soundly against the side of the cart, and lights bedazzled her eyes as the end curtains were pulled aside.

“Come, Champion and Champion-maker!”

Hawarel obeyed first and turned to give her assistance once more; but he was elbowed aside as the officer pulled rather than led her into the open. Torches in the hands of spearmen ringed them around. Beyond was a colorful mass of people, with a double rank of guards drawn up as a barrier between those and the dark of the land beyond.

“Up there — ” Hawarel was beside her again.

Tamisan raised her eyes, almost blinded by the glare as a sudden pillar of fire burst across the night sky. A spacer was riding down on tail rockets to make a fin landing.

TO BE CONTINUED

Starbright

by E. G. VON WALD

*The gems were worth a king's
ransom . . . and anybody's life!*

It was a perfect sphere, about ten millimeters in diameter, and it glowed like a tiny, cold blue star.

The old man at the bourse table nodded, smiling in appreciation.

With his hand, he shaded it from the lights of the bright exhibition hall, and the blue glow diminished. As the shadow cast by his hand became darker, the stone became dull, neutral, gray, lifeless-looking.

He nodded again and pronounced the word "perfect" with a certain reverence. Then, with evident regret, he replaced it in its case, closed the case and handed it back to its owner.

"Sean Macnessa, you old jewel

thief," he said in mock severity. "That is as fine a blue as I have ever seen."

Macnessa acknowledged the compliment with a pleased nod. "I traded five Centauran filigrees for that blue," he said. "Four of them were flawless."

They were old friends, these two, although they had not seen each other in years. It was natural that Macnessa, upon arriving at the gem collectors' convention, should go first to the booth of the old Centauran, Ommaley. If there were anything truly excellent available in the Abdebaran system, Ommaley would know.

The noise of the crowd of collec-

tors, traders and dealers was muted by the walls of the booth. That was one of the reasons for having booths. A certain privacy and quiet was deemed appropriate for the viewing of fine gems.

"So it's starbrights that you are after now," Ommaley said thoughtfully, his old gray eyes gazing quizzically at Macnessa. "A pity. I doubt if you will find any here."

Macnessa frowned. "I was given to understand that there were several reds in the Aldebaran region."

"For two months I have been here," Ommaley said, "preparing for this convention. I have yet to see even a black offered for sale."

"How can this be possible? My informant is like you, and rarely in error when it comes to fine gems."

Ommaley shrugged. "I have heard that as recently as a year ago, seven starbrights existed in Aldebaran dealers' stocks or in private hands. A blue — not as fine as yours — two yellows, a green and two reds. One of the reds is reputed to be a blood red and flawless, and readily excited to its characteristic radiation by even dim white light."

"What happened to them?"

"Gone. Disappeared. Nobody seems to know where. Of course, you know gem dealers. If something is available, it is not at all difficult to find out about it. Once it has been disposed of, discretion is the rule. It is good business as well as good ethics."

"But these are starbrights," Macnessa insisted. "An ordinary gem — yes, these can disappear. Even a Cen-

tauran filigree. But not starbrights. They are too rare and valuable." He paused and considered.

"If they were available," he decided, "but have been disposed of, then perhaps they could be made available again for a suitable trade. Unless — " He raised his eyebrows questioningly.

Ommaley shook his head.

"The peculiar political institutions of Aldebaran admit of considerable activity which we of Centaur would consider lawless, even brigandage. But I have heard of no gem traders involved in any such activity."

"I didn't really expect that," Macnessa admitted. "Gem traders generally know how to stay out of trouble."

"Exactly. Now your other point. You reason that if some local collector obtained them, he might be willing to trade them for something you might have. I'm afraid this is unlikely. Most Aldebarans, bless their ostentatious little souls, take great delight in display. None has shown off the starbrights."

"You mean they have been traded out of the system?"

Ommaley frowned thoughtfully, cocking his head to one side. "That part of it can be considered odd. If they had been traded, one would expect to see the equivalent value in other gems suddenly becoming available. But the better stones at this bourse today have pedigrees a meter long, and there is nothing irregular, or even sudden, in their recent history.

"On the other hand, although truly fine starbrights are not often sold, it

is possible. But even the usual brokerage commission for handling the transaction would be very large. I have heard of no dealers who have come into sudden wealth lately."

"Then what is your conclusion, old friend?"

The old man threw up his hands. "I have none to give you. The starbrights are gone."

"I cannot quite believe this," Macnessa insisted. "An old Centauran like you being at a loss for information about the gems of his adopted planetary system!"

"I am but a poor dealer," Ommaley said, with every evidence of humility except the twinkle in his eyes. "And what about a young Centauran like yourself, Sean?"

"A not-so-young Centauran like myself has the good sense to be respectful of his elders, particularly those of the old sod of Brave Centaurus."

"You wrong me," Ommaley said quickly. "I would do you no harm, Sean. If I could honestly help you, you know that I would."

Macnessa smiled and said, "Of course. But you admit that there is a possibility that the starbrights are still in Aldebaran?"

"I admit nothing. If you wish to so conclude, that is no affair of mine."

"I see." Macnessa pursed his lips. Abruptly he changed the subject. "Tell me about the native customs, old friend. I understand that they have 'warlords' here."

"It is true. There is a confederation of planets, but it is as loose as

the confederation of the states on the planets. Here on IV, power is concentrated in the hands of seven families.

"A hundred years ago the number of local chieftains was much larger, but through war and marriage this has been reduced to the present stalemate."

"There is much wealth?"

"Oh, yes. Gem collectors' conventions are not held in poor systems."

"I mean, could these warlords easily afford material in the starbright class?"

Ommaley smiled and shrugged. "If you want to know the common gossip, I can give you the common gossip. Certainly, any of them could to buy up one or two starbrights without straining their resources. Possibly all seven of them."

"Are they collectors?"

"To some extent. Nobody has a truly great collection, though, except the family Brandt. Theirs is hereditary. I have been told of no recent acquisitions. Lord Hauken has lately shown a greater interest than usual. He has a large harem. It is said that he would welcome a starbright, or possibly a particularly fine filigree of our homeland."

"He sounds like a man of taste."

"Hauken's taste runs more to political power. He and the Family Brandt are closely matched, and it is said that they are currently engaged in some political struggle. The Princess Brandt has recently disappeared, some say kidnapped, and as a result her mother has taken to the black garb of mourning."

"A kidnapped princess," said Mac-

nessa. "How quaint! Is she beautiful?"

"She is. She is also very young, although marriageable by local custom."

Ommaley suddenly appeared worried. "My advice to you, old friend, is to be very careful if you are thinking of getting involved in local politics. They play for keeps in Aldebaran."

"Politics is always for keeps," said Macnessa. "And I am always careful. Tell me something about this Hauken."

Ommaley glanced around, then lowered his voice. "Hauken is ambitious, clever, and extremely powerful and absolutely ruthless. The only real indication that he might have kidnapped the Princess Brandt is that nothing has been done about her disappearance. Only he could go unchallenged by the Brandt clan. Even so, there will be blood spilled before long, I think."

"Intriguing," murmured Macnessa. "A man with a captive princess, great wealth, and who now seeks a starbright."

"There are none available," said Ommaley soberly. "Unless you care to dispose of yours."

"I have a small stock of duplicates from my collection," admitted Macnessa.

"The blue?" Ommaley seemed slightly apprehensive.

"The blue is not available. That is to become part of my collection. And the other items I have are available only in trade for the gem I seek."

"I doubt if Lord Hauken has anything to interest you."

Macnessa left his friend and paid courtesy visits to several of the other dealers at the bourse. He was quite well known as a collector and trader. Those who had not met him personally knew him by reputation. Discreet inquiries about starbrights brought nothing but puzzled confessions of ignorance.

The following morning, a messenger delivered an invitation. Macnessa studied it carefully. He was not very surprised to receive it. He had made no secret about possessing some of the fabulous starbrights. The invitation was large, ornate and carried all the trappings of a wealthy but medieval political culture. There was an elaborate coat of arms, surrounded by cartouches of subordinate divisions of territory.

In a stately script, the missive advised him that His Eminence, Lord Hauken of IV requested the honor of his company that afternoon.

The messenger who brought it was almost as ornately got up as the invitation. Unfortunately, he knew nothing, or would admit to knowing nothing.

Again, Macnessa sought his friend at the bourse.

"I know better than to warn you," Ommaley said. "But this is dangerous. Lord Hauken will stop at nothing if he really wants your starbrights."

"I have been in dangerous situations before."

"Your luck and your ingenuity are well known," Ommaley admitted. "But my advice is to take the first ship out and don't come back. Both you and Hauken seek the same thing."

Lord Hauken was a man of medium height, powerful of build although somewhat given over to fat, with curly dark hair. His eyes were expressionless, but his manner was affable.

"Welcome to my humble abode," he said, indicating the huge palace with an expansive wave of his arm. "It was brought to my attention that you honored our system with your presence, and all know of your eminence in the study of gems."

"You flatter me, my lord Hauken," replied Macnessa. "I have a fondness for beautiful things. Gems are beautiful. Therefore, I occasionally acquire one."

"Indeed," Hauken said. "Perhaps you would honor me by viewing my collection."

"It would be a pleasure," said Macnessa.

Hauken carelessly waved, and a small platoon of servants approached with hand carriages. He and Macnessa each entered a carriage and were lifted to the servants' shoulders.

"There are those," he said, "who prefer mechanical conveyances, but I have always preferred to use humans. Somehow it does something for my soul."

They proceeded along huge, brilliantly lighted corridors, down broad and sweeping staircases, until finally they came to a secluded section, luxuriously planted with all manner of exotic vegetation. A pool gleamed in the late afternoon sunlight.

After assisting them out of the carriages, the husky servants vanished, to be replaced by others of a more delicate character.

"Few people are permitted in this section," Lord Hauken said with a smile. "It is my private retreat."

"It is delightful," said Macnessa.

They seated themselves in soft chairs beside the pool. Refreshments were brought.

"And now allow me to display some of my poor baubles," Lord Hauken said, and nodded a signal.

At once a young, dark-haired girl appeared from behind a screen of shrubbery. She walked calmly toward the two of them, and Macnessa became aware that something seemed to be missing. It was her clothes. With a smile, she bowed to the ground before them and held up her hands, which were covered with rings and wristlets set with brilliant jewels. After a suitable pause, she departed.

She was followed by a blonde, quite statuesquely rounded, wearing nothing but the green and red firestones native to Aldebaran I. Macnessa was pleased at the way they complemented her color, although they were not of the best quality.

The third was dark, small and elfin. Hardly more than a child, she bore herself like a queen. Her jewelry was metallic and massive-looking, contrasting pleasantly with her slight frame.

Lord Hauken said, "You can see why I rarely exhibit my collection. The special settings are suited only for the connoisseur."

"Beyond doubt," murmured Macnessa.

"You will find the gems attractive? Perhaps you would like to examine them more closely."

Hauken signaled, and the next girl,

after bowing to her lord, sat in Macnessa's lap. Her gem was a large filigree-and-emerald, suspended a few inches below her throat by an almost invisible metallic thread. Macnessa smiled at her and was rewarded by a raised eyebrow and just the hint of a dimple in her cheek.

He admitted, in response to Hauken's question, that it was a most attractive setting for a filigree-and-emerald.

"I take keen delight in my jewels," Hauken said, dismissing her. Then he assumed a melancholy attitude. "Unfortunately, the collection is meager."

"But pleasant," said Macnessa.

"Possibly. But I am sure that in your varied travels you have seen much better. Tell me, what would you say is the finest gem in the galaxy?"

"This would depend upon the locality and the species of being making the evaluation. However, I believe that most would agree that the stone called 'starbright' might claim that title."

"Oh, yes," said Hauken with studied casualness. "I have heard of that one. It glows all by itself, I understand, like a phosphor."

"Only in a certain sense," Macnessa replied. "The starbright does resemble a phosphor in that it can absorb light at one wavelength and emit light at another. But there the resemblance ends. For one thing, the starbright exhibits far greater purity of color. For another, starbright radiation is very nearly coherent, which accounts for its brilliance. As a matter of fact, they make excellent lasers

with only the most primitive of optical systems, and using only the ambient room illumination for excitation."

"I see," said Hauken.

"There is another interesting point. A starbright will emit its characteristic glow only if it is excited by light of a shorter wavelength. For this reason, the blue is usually dimmer in white light than, say, the red. A black, on the other hand — so-called because its characteristic radiation is infrared and therefore invisible — can convert the entire visible spectrum. Even a very tiny black always provides a pleasant sense of warmth. Large ones are used in industry."

"Fascinating," said Lord Hauken.

"Where do you suppose such marvelous gems might be obtained?"

Macnessa shrugged. "This is difficult to say. I understood that some fine reds would be available in Aldebaran. Unfortunately, I have not been able to locate any." He watched his host attentively, but could read nothing.

More refreshments were brought. Lord Hauken, having completed his display of jewelry, caused a small string orchestra to be assembled. It consisted of similarly lovely women, all of whom were similarly underdressed. Macnessa observed that they played with great skill.

Finally Lord Hauken came to the point. "I cannot help you with the red starbright. On the contrary, I, myself, am looking for a starbright of any color. I am told that you own one."

"This is true."

"Then I will buy them from you."

"I regret to say that this is impossible. The only way I could obtain the red that I want would be as a trade rather than a purchase. Such stones as I can spare from my collection constitute the currency for that transaction."

"I will buy your entire collection," insisted Hauken.

"I never sell my collections — whether gems, coins or any of the other items which I have collected from time to time."

"That is indeed regrettable," Hauken said. With a wave of his hand he banished the all-houri orchestra. The court became very still.

"You are sure you won't change your mind?" he went on. "I can pay you well."

"It is out of the question."

"What a shame," said Hauken. "I had hoped to do business with you. If you won't do business, though, then I must accomplish my objective by other means."

Macnessa stood up. "I am not sure I understand," he said.

"It is simplicity itself," replied Hauken with a heavy-lipped smile. "You will be my guest until such time that you agree to part with your pretties." The smile widened. "Naturally, although I am patient, my time is limited. I shall have your quarters searched. If the gems are not found, it may be necessary to use some more potent persuasion on you."

"You mean I am a prisoner?"

"Certainly not! You are a valued guest. Your quarters will be comfortable. I have another guest, whose quarters will adjoin yours. I am sure you will be well entertained, since

the other guest is extremely talkative — a characteristic which I am sure will be cured in due time."

He snapped his fingers. "Guards!"

A brace of husky, well-armed men appeared within ten seconds.

"Take the gentleman to the special guest rooms. His suite shall adjoin that of the Princess Brandt."

Macnessa allowed himself to be led away. While carefully observing the route they took through the elaborate palace, he tried to engage his guards in conversation. The effort was unrewarding.

They went down corridors, down stairways and down elevators. Macnessa estimated that they must be at least fifty meters below the surrounding surface level when they stopped.

It was a very large room, done entirely in white with curious pieces of covered apparatus set in the floor at various places. When he attempted to examine one of them, he was stopped. The guards told him gruffly that he would find out all about them in time. The idea seemed to amuse them.

They stripped him, examined him and his clothes and confiscated his money, pins, ocular cases and sundry minor items. Then they allowed him to dress again. After this, one of them drew back a curtain along the wall, which proved to have covered a barred door.

The first thing that Macnessa did when the guards left was to examine his spacious cell. There was a comfortable chair, a soft bunk, a table, a food dispenser and an alcove

equipped with various plumbing fixtures. Considered as a prison cell, it was quite comfortable indeed.

The decor left something to be desired, as sterile white was not Macnessa's favorite motive. He noted that the heating system was typical of the planet, being of the faceted radiant variety. Such systems consisted of close-spaced electric heating junctions, each faced with a small plastic lens; they provided an excellent distribution of radiant heat.

Several minutes later, while he was examining the food dispenser mechanism to see if it had any useful and detachable parts, he heard the words, "Oh dear."

He glanced around. A broad grill panel separated him from another room. There had been a white curtain across it when he entered, but this was now drawn back.

"I hope I didn't disturb you," the girl said.

"Ah," said Macnessa gallantly, "the Princess Brandt."

She appeared quite blonde and beautiful and also, as Ommaley had suggested, quite young. She was dressed in a pale green frock.

"I can't really say I am sorry you are here, sir," she said. "Actually I'm dying to have somebody to talk to."

"No doubt," agreed Macnessa. He approached the grill and examined it. It was quite securely fastened.

"Everything is locked up tight," she told him. "You can't get out when you want to, and you can't get in when you want to, either. But tell me who you are, sir?"

"My name is Sean Macnessa, Centauran by birth," he said proudly.

"My name is Tintinetta," the girl said, "but my friends call me Lulu."

"I see," murmured Macnessa. For a princess, she did not seem particularly haughty.

"May I call you Sean?"

"By all means."

"Good. Sit down, Sean, and we can get better acquainted."

Macnessa did so. "I understand you have been captive for some time."

"Nearly a month. It isn't so bad, except I don't have anybody to talk to except the guards, and they don't like to stand and chat. Maybe they aren't supposed to. And anyway, a princess really isn't supposed to be too familiar with the help, you know. It seems odd, but that's the way it has to be done."

"Are you permitted to contact your family," asked Macnessa, "or perhaps a lawyer?"

"I'm sure I wouldn't know what to do with a lawyer if I had one, and nobody expects visitors or letters when one is kidnapped. It seems to be against the rules. Do you know why?"

Macnessa sought for a reasonable-sounding reply. "Well," he said, "perhaps your kidnapper wants to keep it all a secret."

"Oh dear no. Everybody knows I'm kidnapped and they know who did it — that terrible Lord Hauken. They might not know exactly where I am being kept, of course." She hesitated momentarily and added, "But then, I don't know either."

"I believe —" Macnessa started to explain that she was in the Palace.

Hauken, but she seemed already to have lost interest in that topic.

"Did you say you were a Centauran? Does that mean you are in the jewelry business. Are all Centaurans in the jewelry business?"

Macnessa explained, "In times past, there was a great abundance of precious stones on the planets of Centaurus. This has made it a sort of ethnic calling. I myself make it a hobby — and occasionally a business — to collect rare and beautiful things of all sorts."

"Gem stones?"

"Yes."

"I see," replied Lulu. "Why did Lord Hauken kidnap you? Did you cheat him? I hope you did. I don't like him."

"I do not cheat," Macnessa said with irritation. "I have never found it necessary."

"But there must be some reason why he kidnapped you."

"Why did he kidnap you Princess?"

"He wants to marry me, of course."

"Ah," said Macnessa.

"Ah what?" she demanded, suddenly angry. "I don't want to marry him."

"Does Hauken think that keeping you here will change your mind about that?"

"Of course not. He knows better than that. But if he has me here, then nobody else can marry me."

"There is somebody else, then?"

"Oh of course. Lots of boys want to marry me." She added with an impudent smile, "Wouldn't you?"

"If the circumstances were suit-

able, I could think of nothing I should like better."

"You are very good at making pretty speeches. Are all Centaurans like that?"

"It is sometimes said to be a hereditary trait," Macnessa admitted.

"I know," she said.

"You do?" Macnessa was having some difficulty in following her conversation.

"Yes. The Lord Hauken wants to steal your jewelry." She frowned slightly and said, "In that case, you must carry some extremely valuable jewelry. Lord Hauken would never waste his time otherwise. He would — oh!" Her voice caught. "Now I understand. You must have some starbrights."

Macnessa was astonished. The combination of little girl chatter and quick analysis was a little disconcerting. He admitted that he had some starbrights and asked her how she guessed.

"It was easy. You see in my family we have had a custom for many generations. Any important princess like me must be given a wedding present of the finest jewelry available. Not many people know the custom has become an obligation, so that if somebody can produce jewelry that is truly the finest, then the wedding is almost automatic."

"So that is why Hauken wants the starbrights."

She nodded. "My father is all upset about this, too. He and Lord Hauken are enemies. Lord Hauken wants to make a lot of changes in the government, and my father says

that the changes would make virtual slaves out of all the people. Only, if Lord Hauken is married to me, then my father will have to compromise with him."

"So now Hauken holds you as a hostage."

"Hostage? You mean, he might harm me if my father didn't give in? Of course not! Lord Hauken is a tyrant and mean and terrible, but he certainly is a gentleman. My father is simply worried that Lord Hauken might force a marriage with me by getting hold of some starbrights. Then, he might hurt me. But not before."

"You have strange customs here."

"I don't think so," she replied logically. "A gentleman would never think of harming a girl like me, but naturally there is nothing to prevent a husband from harming his wife. Everybody knows that."

"And is that why you don't want to marry Hauken?"

Lulu sat for several moments considering it. Then she shook her head, making her golden hair form a brief halo about it. "I really never thought about that. I never expected it to go that far. Oh, dear!"

"Well," Macnessa said gently, "he doesn't have the starbrights yet."

"He will get them. You think you have hidden them well, and maybe you have. But if he doesn't find them, he will simply torture the information out of you. That is what the machines in the big room are for."

Macnessa turned and contemplated the torture instruments through the barred door to his cell, and involuntarily shuddered.

"I am very sorry, Sean," said Lulu. "Really I am. Are your starbrights very good?"

"Some of them are extremely good," he told her gravely.

She sighed. "Well, then he will marry me, anyway. So I shall just have to marry him without the starbrights. My father won't like it. But since Lord Hauken will make me marry him one way or another, you see, I might as well do things so that you don't get hurt. Only it's a pity that the family jewel collection will not benefit from my marriage."

"Can you do this?"

"Certainly!" Lulu said. "You don't think we are a primitive culture, do you? A princess is permitted to marry without a marriage gift if she wants to."

"Thank you very much," Macnessa said. "It is very generous of you."

"I think so, too," said Lulu. "I'm glad you appreciate it. I'll tell the guards when they check us on the next change of watch."

Macnessa smiled. "Perhaps it won't be necessary. I am not without a certain ingenuity, Princess Lulu."

"If you are going to address me as a princess, you must use my proper name of Tintinetta. You can only call me Lulu when you address me as a woman."

"I — ah — I shall try to keep that in mind, Princess," Macnessa murmured.

"And if by your ingenuity you mean that you are planning to escape, you don't have much time," she went on. "It won't take Lord Hauken long to discover you have hidden your treasure. This will make him angry."

Macnessa agreed that Hauken might get angry, upon which the girl burst out eagerly, "Incidentally, where did you hide your treasure?"

"In a safe place."

"All right," she pouted. "You don't have to tell me if you don't want to." Then she angrily pulled the curtain across the opening.

Macnessa shrugged, moved to the table, and set about his plans. After several minutes, however, he discovered that he lacked an essential part of the apparatus he expected to construct. He wondered if the luck of the Centauri were deserting him.

Soon the princess relented, drew the curtain back again and insisted on attention. When Macnessa humored her, he noticed that she had changed her attire; she was now wearing a new gown and some jewelry. There was a string of seven very large pearls which she said her mother had given her to wear only a few days before she had been kidnapped. She was very pleased with them. Macnessa did not tell her that they obviously were not genuine.

What interested him considerably more was a chain of concave silver spangles that she wore. They were almost precisely the right size and curvature for his needs.

Agreeably, she let him remove one of them from the chain, and he set to work on his apparatus. Using the silver spangle as a mirror, and several of the lenses prised from the radiant heating, he was able to construct a fairly adequate arrangement. The lenses were not ground to the proper focal distances, of course. But a gem

trader has necessarily an excellent background in optics. And Lulu was able to provide an adequate grinding compound in her silver polish.

Finally, Macnessa pulled off one of the round, plastic buttons from his tunic.

"What is that you are making?" Lulu demanded.

"It is called a Golden Ruberg, after a mythological genius."

"Did Ruberg come from Centaurus?"

"Ruberg, if he ever existed, lived long before Centaurus's humans came out to the stars. All a Golden Ruberg really is, I guess, is a complicated-looking gadget."

"Does it do anything?"

"I certainly hope so," said Macnessa. He fashioned a hood for the main focal point, connected it to a release lever and began to peel the plastic off the button.

About that time, a sound came from the big room outside. Macnessa hastily shoved his Golden Ruberg under the bunk. As he straightened up, the door to the cell was unlocked and two guards entered.

"Just a check-up," one of them said. "Change of watch."

They looked around the room, examined the remains of the lunch Macnessa had dialed from the food dispenser. One of them was about to look under the bunk, when a shriek came from Lulu's cell.

"I'm dying," she exclaimed. "I'm bleeding to death. Help!"

Hastily the guards rushed out, locking the cell door behind them, and entered into Lulu's cell. It was difficult for Macnessa to tell precisely

what was going on, but apparently Lulu had cut herself.

The guards were clearly angry. The cut did not strike them as serious, but they felt it necessary to see to it that she was placated.

When they finally left, taking her broken spangle chain with them, they did not think to complete the interrupted search of Macnessa's cell.

"What happened?" he asked after Lulu returned to the grill panel.

"I was watching through the curtain," she said. "I knew you had hidden your Golden Bugbird under the bunk where they were going to look. And I couldn't think of anything to distract them except cut my finger on one of my spangles. I had to do something, didn't I?"

"You did marvelously," Macnessa assured her. "I hope it wasn't too painful."

"It was *very* painful." She held up the index finger of her left hand with its tiny little bandage. "But one must be brave when one is a princess, don't you think?"

Macnessa agreed that a princess must be brave, and that she was every bit a princess.

"Good," she said happily. "Now you will tell me what the Golden Bugged does."

"First I must finish it."

"You don't have much time left. I'm perfectly safe, but I am afraid you are not. Perhaps it is already too late, because once Lord Hauken is angry, he gets mean."

Macnessa retrieved the apparatus from underneath the bunk. He took

the plastic button which he had removed from his tunic and peeled the casing off, revealing a small, black sphere. He then polished it to a fine slick surface with some of Lulu's face powder.

"That doesn't look very important," she said doubtfully as she watched.

Macnessa took it over to her and let her hold it. "Notice anything?" he asked.

"It's shiny."

"Anything else?"

"You must have rubbed it very hard, because it is still warm."

"The heat doesn't come from rubbing," he told her. You are holding a black starbright."

"Oh, dear. Is that where you keep them — in your buttons?" She giggled. "Lord Hauken will be so angry. He will plan a very long and unpleasant death for you."

"What a charming imagination you have," Macnessa grumbled, taking the black starbright and inserting it into the device. This operation was a little tricky, because he had to shield it with his hands until he could get the tiny hood over it. "There," he said. "It's finished." He held it up for to see.

"So that's a Golden Bedbug," she said, her eyes wide with wonder.

"Ruberg. Not bedbug."

"Oh. All right. Now what? Do you say some magic words?"

"No words are necessary. I simply press this trigger-like lever, that pushes on this stanchion, the stanchion leans and forces this little rod over, and that lifts the hood off the black starbright. Then, if the optical sys-

tem is properly set up, the device behaves as a powerful laser."

Lulu had more questions, but Macnessa had heard more racket from the outer room again. Hastily he was trying to test the device. The opportunity was denied him.

A jangling of keys sounded in the door. Lord Hauken's voice commanded the single guard who accompanied him to ready one of the pieces of torture apparatus. The door opened, and he stood there, scowling, while behind him the guard could be seen busily uncovering what appeared to be a large electric grill.

"You mock me by hiding things too well, Macnessa. So much the worse for you. It will merely be necessary for me to interrogate you for a while." He stopped frowning.

"What is that?" he demanded, pointing at the apparatus.

"You wanted a starbright," said Macnessa. "This is one —"

Lord Hauken interrupted him. "Of course," he smiled. "Your buttons. I see you have removed one. Well, never mind removing the others. I'll do that myself, while my man fries your liver a little." The smile vanished as he added, "I am not accustomed to being kept waiting."

He advanced into the room.

Macnessa aimed the optical system and pressed the lever. The hood was withdrawn from the starbright. The room was already at a high level of ambient illumination, and the lenses greatly increased the capture area of the small stone, while at the same time they focused the coherent infrared radiation which the starbright

emitted into a thin, intense beam.

Hauken screamed briefly and toppled, acrid smoke arising from his head. As the guard turned, reaching for his sidearm, Macnessa held the trigger down and swept the beam in that direction. The guard yelped, his wrist badly seared, and let the weapon fall.

Macnessa quickly stepped out and scooped it up.

It took only a few minutes to truss the lightly injured guard up and lock him in a cell. Macnessa then let Lulu out, and they dressed in the uniform capes that Hauken and the guard had worn. The fit was poor on both, but it was unlikely that anybody would question them closely.

Lulu said happily, "Oh, good! Now I can marry you instead of that awful Lord Hauken."

Several hours later, Macnessa was relating it all to Ommaley, in the latter's hotel suite.

"I had picked up that black in a trade for some other material. It was too small to be of much value commercially, but it was a starbright."

"And you have a certain affection for starbrights. Fascinating. What did



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Lord Brandt say when you returned his daughter and advised that Lord Hauken had suffered a slightly incinerated brain?"

"He was most grateful, of course. There was some embarrassment over Lulu's insistence on marrying me, but her mother managed to talk her out of it. Instead of giving herself to me, she gave me one of her imitation pearls."

"One of the imitation pearls?" Ommaley chuckled good-naturedly.

"This one." Macnessa held it up with mild disgust. "I had to accept it. It was the only polite thing to do."

Ommaley reached for it and examined it carefully. He hummed a little tune as he turned it around in his fingers.

"Naturally, what I was hoping for was the sort of reward that only the Family Brandt could give," Macnessa went on. "It didn't take much reflection to realize that they were the only ones in the system who had material suitable for trading. Given the custody of display prevalent here, when you told me that Lady Brandt had taken to mourning dress, I suspected that she had pledged the fam-

ily jewels in return for all the star-brights in the system."

"And did you," said Ommaley, as he busily worked on the imitation pearl with a small knife, "conclude who would be the only trader in this system who could be trusted to arrange such a deal in complete secrecy?"

Macnessa's mouth fell open with astonishment. He said, "Ommaley, you old jewel thief. You did this to me!"

"What I should have done," Ommaley said, "was to buy this worthless-looking bauble from you for half a credit. Instead, I expend my own time and energy in removing the casing with which I so carefully camouflaged it. Poor Hauken! He wanted starbrights, and he ended up with every starbright within twenty light-years in his own basement."

He removed the last shreds of the opaque casing, burnished the core with his sleeve, and held it up to the light.

It was a perfect sphere, about ten millimeters in diameter. And even in the dim light of the study, it glowed like a tiny, blood-red star.

END

Next Month in IF —

GROOVYLAND

A long and funny sf adventure novelette
by Robert Bloch (Author of *Psycho*, etc.)

Authorgraphs

An interview with Lester del Rey
And concluding

THE TOYS OF TAMISAN

by Andre Norton

Don't miss the May *If* — reserve your copy now!

A REPORT ON THE SIXTH INTERNATIONAL SF FILM FESTIVAL

Last July the lovely Italian city of Trieste offered its annual week fully dedicated to science-fiction movies.

Several countries have entered the Trieste Science-Fiction Film Festival with different kinds of movies, all of them well worth seeing.

Mostly interesting, this year's festival offered a wide range among science-fiction film trends. US and Japan cooperated to create the space opera *Battle Beyond the Stars*; Great Britain gathered the First Award for the best movie with an horror fantasy, *The Sorcerers*, which also got a prize for Catherine Lacey as best actress and a Gold Medal to its star Boris Karloff; the monster saga was introduced by the mighty Japanese spectacle *Ebirah*, starring Godzilla and Mothra in a satiric vein; a future space world was shown in the Russian movie *The Andromeda Nebula*; a plain satire was *Please, Don't Joke with Martians*, from France; an adult political drama was the Czech shocker *I, the Justice*; even the robot theme was masterfully treated in the best Asimov vein by another Russian spectacle. *Its Name Was Robert*.

Apart from the awards released from the international jury held by famed Italian writer and movie director Mario Soldati, the best movie shown in Trieste was *The Andromeda Nebula*. It is a pretty faithful

adaptation of the same novel by Ivan Efremov (see article in *International Science Fiction* No. 2). This movie can be easily considered as the Russian answer to Stanley Kubrick's 2001: *A Space Odyssey* — and really it is. Most astounding of all, *The Andromeda Nebula* as shown in Trieste is just the first of four colossal movies covering the whole Efremov book: movies No. 2 and 3 have already been completed and the fourth one is in the works. This Russian cycle will be long remembered as one of cinematographic marvels.

Several other movies of short length have been shown here in Trieste. I myself entered the Festival with a short fantasy, *Isabell, a dream*. The best of all was a French fantasy, *The Cage of Stone*, one of the best ventures into this field ever made.

Boris Karloff got high ratings as starring in *The Sorcerers*, as he was in two other classic movies shown here in Trieste: *The Black Cat* and *The Bride of Frankenstein*.

The festival included an exhibition of fanzines from all over the world. Fans gathered from all countries.

As Forrest Ackerman wrote in to the committee head of Sixth Trieste Science Fiction Film Festival: "May sf films and festivals always become better!" —LUIGI COZZI

THAT SEASON

by LAWRENCE MAYER

Jeff said: "The season's coming. I can feel it in my bones."

Mark groaned. They were standing by the water cooler, drinking. It was late afternoon; the office was restless, slack. Mark said: "I don't feel up to it, this year."

"Tomorrow you'll feel different," Jeff said.

Mark grunted his displeasure. But he knew Jeff was right. The idea was unthinkable, disgusting . . . until the season. Then it overpowered a man. And the time was soon. You could almost smell it in the air. The calendar said so too. There was a budding in his senses; his eyes kept peering toward Daisy, almost involuntarily; that was a sign. She worked in advertising. They were friends and bridge partners the rest of the year. And during the season, they had a long-standing arrangement.

Daisy too kept watching him all day, talking to him, touching him when she could. "You're edgy Mark," she said. "It's because of the season, isn't it?" But he denied it, out of masculine pride. "Hell, it's this pile-up of work," he said. "It's getting on my nerves. One good thing: when the siren goes off, I can tell the boss to go to hell."

"Hey, Daisy, how about switching this time?" Jeff said. "Get rid of this guy."

"I'm not thinking of *anybody*," she said.

"Come on, we'll have a ball," Jeff said.

"A ball, ha. *You* don't get pregnant."

She was good-looking, Daisy. Young and succulent. Good figure, pleasant eyes. Mark found himself staring, vaguely, at the sweet line

An IF First

Every month *IF* brings you the first published story of a new writer. This month, our writer is Lawrence Mayer, who combines a strong interest in sociology with a long-time interest in science fiction. Married and with two children. Among his other interests are music and history. We hope to see more stories in which he can combine his hobbies and his writing.

of her blouse. A small distant shadow crossed his mind. He felt something deep in his body, slight, bothersome, like the tickle of a feather. He tried to remember what it felt like, a year before, with Daisy. No use. Not yet. But the sirens would be sounded soon, for sure...as usual, he wouldn't feel ready....

Early June, yes, that was the time. In the nurseries, hundreds of thousands of babies, now three months old, cried for their milk. Dogs would be howling at the moon, cats scratching and whining at the doors....

He sighed, put down his cup and went back to his desk.

Mark lived alone, in a tall apartment house, not far from downtown. From his living-room window, he could see at night the bright city lights. Most men his age preferred dormitory life; but something in his nature liked living alone. Not that he lacked for good company. Jeff lived down the hall,

Marie and her friends across the street. Yet he felt, from time to time, a certain sourness in his soul, a curdled emptiness. What was it that was lacking? Was it kinship, was it warmth? In the old days, before the Great Change, people lived in family groups. A man of his age, and social class, would have lived very differently then...with a wife, small kids, a home, a mother and dad....

What a difference had come from that slight chemical change, carried in the air! A slight alteration of the genes: and society, irreversibly, was twisted out of joint. Mark often wondered: what was it really like, before? What was the texture of living then? He knew the gross facts from the books — about marriage, families, and divorce, about babies born throughout the year, and brought up at home. Grown men rarely lived in dormitories then. They had houses, homes, they had wives that cooked their food, loved them, took care of the kids.

Some things died slowly. Taking care of kids was still women's work. Some even raised children in their flats — sometimes their *own* children, too. But more and more women lived with their friends, in dormitories, apartments and clubs. Children grew up in nurseries and boarding schools, along with other children of their age. During birth-day-months (April and March) everybody turned out to help chil-

dren celebrate. Even men took part. Babies were not to most men's tastes, but they liked to lend a hand in the raising of small boys, teaching them baseball, or swimming, or masculine crafts, taking them on hikes or to the zoo. A few men formed attachment with boys whom they knew or thought to be their sons. Usually, it was hard to be sure.

All in all, though, during most of the year, the texture of life seemed, on the surface, much the same as before the Great Change. Or so Mark thought. Men slept, woke up, ate, went to work, worked a day, and went home. The big difference came once a year, that was all. When the sirens blew.

It was almost nine when Mark woke. He slid out of bed, yawning. To his annoyance, old Edna, the scrubwoman, was standing near his bed. He must have left his door unlocked. She was staring at him, licking her lips.

Good God, it's coming soon, he said to himself. He pushed her out of his apartment. She made a pitiful squealing noise as he slammed the door in her face. She was ugly as sin. He showered and shaved as quickly as he could. He wondered, did it pay to go down to the office, or not? No sirens had sounded; sometimes it took days to work up to that point. Still, the authorities were rather on the conservative

side; they sounded the horns only when absolutely sure. He flipped a coin; and decided to take the chance... he had so much to do at the office. His flesh had that creeping feeling, his head was mildly dizzy, but he thought: there's still a little time.

Edna was still in the hallway as he left. She stared at him. He locked the door and ran to the elevator. Traffic on the way to work was curiously unyielding. A certain tang of irresponsibility hung in the air. Not a leaf stirred in the trees. Gray-bellied clouds hugged the horizon. The air was sultry, moist.

He parked in the company lot and went up to the office. Nobody was there but poor Miss Grimm, tottering about in the file room. She was, of course, much too old to be affected by the sirens. Still, he warned her, shouting loudly (she was deaf as a post) that the sirens might sound at any minute. She thanked him and hobbled away. She, like other women of her age, would spend the weeks of the season at the nurseries, helping out. Every young woman ran away. The whole population of babies would surely have died, each year, except for the white-haired crew of women like Miss Grimm, who came streaming in when the sirens blew. They used the nursery as a refuge from the madness of the world; and paid for their sanctuary by caring for mankind's young.

Mark sat at his desk, playing with a pencil. He should never have come, he thought. He could not concentrate. He could scarcely scratch a word or two on paper without thinking of Daisy. The clock struck ten. He tore off his tie. He was sweating. It was late, late, late. His whole body pulsed with a rage of feeling. Then the siren sounded: a high-pitched whining scream. It had an almost physical impact. He ran through the office, to the door. Outside, he collided with Daisy.

She screamed, half in delight. "I knew you'd be here! I knew it!"

He dragged her by the waist into the boss's suite of offices. She seemed nearly faint with expectation: her eyes were glazed, she breathed deeply, her body trembled. He closed the door behind them.

Later on, in the afternoon, they smoked a cigarette together and talked rationally about their situation. "I've got to get you to my place," he said.

Daisy whimpered, "Can't we stay here?" "We'd starve," he said. "There's nothing to eat, not even a candy bar. The cafeteria's closed; the food's locked up. And where will we sleep?"

"Right here," Daisy said. She was frightened now.

"It's too dangerous. The boss might come . . . or Jerry . . . or Jeff . . . or anybody. We've got to try it. My car's downstairs."

They waited for darkness. When night arrived, they slipped out the door and down the hallway. A man lay in a heap near the elevator, his clothes in disarray, a dark stain of matted blood beside him. He moaned; they ignored him. "Let's take the stairs," Mark said. The elevator was too much of a risk: who knows who was hiding there? In the lobby, they saw a small group of elderly men, standing about. When the men saw Daisy, a great howl went up. One of the men started running toward them. He was white-haired, heavy; Mark recognized Gifford, the insurance broker whose office was on the 14th floor. "Get going," he told Daisy. They ran out through the service entrance, slamming the door in the broker's face.

Mark's was the only car on the lot. He had forgotten to lock it, and two youngsters were in the back seat. The boy was scrawny and pimply-faced, no more than fifteen, the girl scarcely older. Mark threw them out bodily. The boy ran; the girl clung to Mark, panting hard. He looked into her face, then put her down on the back seat and started to undress. "Please, please," Daisy begged. A crowd of young males, armed with sticks, knives, and stones, stormed onto the parking lot. "They'll kill you!" Daisy said. He picked up the girl and put her down on the ground. The gang rushed toward her like sharks

drawn by blood. That gave them their chance. Mark started the motor, and the car raced away.

It was only a short distance to his apartment, but his heart was in his mouth the whole way. No street lights shone; no buses or taxis were running; few cars could be seen on the street. An early, eerie moon passed like a ghost in the sky. He drove slowly and carefully once he got onto the street. The streets were unsafe. Mobs of young men prowled up and down, hunters of prey, smashing down doors, breaking windows, looking for girls. Many would fail in their search. They would suffer the tortures of frustration, or settle for an old, unattractive, desperate woman, wandering the streets looking for men; or, when these too were gone, turn to howling and looting and destruction.

Mark drove without lights. Daisy crouched in the back of the car. The mobs would have pulled her out bodily, if they saw her, and killed Mark, too if he fought. Violent crime, in season, was a roaring tide. Policemen stopped work when the sirens blew; armies melted away. Afterward, there was little that could be done to mend the damage. By law, any violence over a woman was not punishable; that was simply the way of the world. Other crimes of violence were hard to prosecute, for lack of evidence; juries set free all but those who

committed the grossest of crimes. If a crowd of boys smashed Mark to death, who was to say that he died defending a woman, or out of the simple blood-lust of the crowd? And for him, of course, any verdict would come much too late. It was foolish to go out on the streets, except with a pack or gang of men. Many no doubt lay bleeding in the gutters already, drunk and dying alone.

"Hurry, darling, hurry," Daisy whispered.

On the horizon, the red glow of a fire, burning out of control.

They reached the apartment without incident. He parked his car in the alley behind the building. They entered quietly through the rear door and took the stairs. They had eight flights to climb. When they reached his floor, they were both exhausted; they clung to each other. He felt her warm breath near his ear.

He took out his key. A heavy hand closed on his wrist. It was Jeff, blocking the way.

"What the hell are you doing here?"

Jeff said: "You damn well know."

"Where's Marie?"

"She's gone off . . . with somebody else."

Jeff was younger than Mark, and heavier: a good athlete. The wise man might have let Daisy go. But if he had, he would have been forced out onto the street, to join

the gangs. And that was hell. He would rather fight. Then, too, he felt his blood grow hot inside of him, felt an animal instinct to defend his mate.

Cautiously, they circled about each other, looking for an opening. Daisy stood to one side, nervously smoking a cigarette. Whatever her preferences, she would go with the winner. She *had* to. The Great Change had been fatal to certain kinds of romantic love. Now Jeff darted forward and grappled with Mark; Mark struck back, savagely kicking, biting, and punching. He had to be vicious and fast; it was his only hope. Jeff's heavy fist caught him full on the face; Mark's jaw oozed blood. He shifted to one side breathing heavily; he caught Jeff off balance, tripped him, sent him crashing to the floor. Jeff reached for a knife. But Mark had thrown himself on top of Jeff's body; now he bit Jeff's wrist, as hard as he could; Jeff shrieked in pain; his arm spurted blood. The knife flew down the corridor. Mark pressed his advantage, pounding Jeff's skull against the floor until his eyes glazed and his body went limp.

Edna, the cleaning woman, stood in the shadows, hunched over, like a buzzard, waiting....

"Let's go," Mark whispered to Daisy. She crushed her cigarette underfoot and followed him. Jeff stirred and moaned dimly. Edna

dabbed at his bleeding skull with a rag. Mark had the key now; he opened his door, pulled Daisy inside, they locked and bolted themselves inside. They were safe now. They had food, warmth, and sanctuary... and a soft massive bed.

Days and nights passed by, in a dream-like frenzy. In the streets, the panic reached its height. Angry mobs pillaged every house with an unlocked door. It seemed to him the season had never been worse — never more concentrated, frantic, unbound. Luckily, the bolts held on the door, and the windows were too high to be climbed. He was more thankful than ever for his privacy. God, the madness of gang life, the insanity of those dormitories, for men and women alike....

Toward the middle of the second week, Daisy's mood turned suddenly sour. She was pregnant, she said. She said, love made her sick to her stomach. But he was still a roaring fire "Damn it," he said, "it's too soon to turn off." She sobbed, she begged, she demanded. But his body still screamed with desire; and she was trapped. So, too, was he.

A few days passed. He woke up one morning, early; brilliant sunshine streamed through the blinds. Daisy was awake, reading a magazine in bed. He reached out and lightly embraced her. She yawned

in his face. Her skin felt clammy to the touch. He disengaged himself, showered and got dressed. It's ending, he said to himself.

He still felt great affection for Daisy; from time to time, he caressed her, or gave her a brotherly kiss. She found a paperback copy of *Gone With the Wind*, and spent the day reading it, cover to cover. Despite her nausea, she was ravenous for dinner. He made her a feast, "to celebrate," out of the rest of his stock of food: a good strong steak, a salad and bread, washed down with a bottle of wine.

"Till next year," he said, raising his glass in a toast.

She puckered her lips. "Next year I might switch. For a change."

"I'll kill the guy," Mark said. But he knew it might happen. Three years before, she had gone over to Jeff, halfway through, and he went to Marie. Next year, who knows?

But the strain of *this* season was over; that was well worth a toast. The wine went to their heads; they giggled, rubbed noses, held hands and went early to bed. In the morning, a noxious fog crept through the window. He shut the blinds and shivered. They dressed like strangers, irritably waiting for a signal. Even the motion of a kiss was revolting.

At ten o'clock the siren sounded; it was always a trifle on the conservative side. "Can I give you a

lift?" he asked Daisy. She said: "Take me home. I've got to pick up some stuff. Then you can drive me to work." By noon, they were all back at the office. Mark looked for Jeff; when he found him, they grinned and shook hands. Jeff's face was bruised and bandaged; one eye was still swollen out of shape.

"Sorry, boy."

"Forget it."

The first day back at work was always hairy. The boss was ill-tempered and coarse, as expected. The men on the staff were exhausted; some limped and nursed their wounds. The women were more or less morning-sick.

Jeff said: "How about bridge? Tonight, at my place. You too tired?"

No, it sounded fine to Mark. "Good, it's a date." He drove out after work with Daisy and Marie. They ate pizzas and drank wine, and sang and played cards. A driving rain pounded on the windows, so the girls stayed the night, on the couches, and made breakfast for the four of them at dawn. The season was only memory now — less real than a dream. At breakfast, not a whisper of the season intruded. They made waffles and drank coffee, and teased each other like small children; then they drove to the office in one car, tired but happy, laughing over and over again at the jokes of the night before.

END

SPORK OF THE AYOR

by PERRY A. CHAPDELAINÉ

Illustrated by REESE

*I, Spork, am a true son of the Ayor.
But what are the strange beings that
look like me, who are called "human"?*

I

I had to bear in mind that, unlike other Ayorians, I was visible to many more wavelengths of light than ultra-violet, yet I wanted a perfectly clear view of

the two Tepen traps. It was a matter of revenge, and my vengeance for Eme's murder must *not* be left to chance!

Near one of the Tepen traps there was a waterfall, cascading from level to level high overhead.

I climbed to a small depression about one hundred feet above the two traps, half-hidden by the splattering, chilled water. I used only my leg and arm muscles, all the time reminding myself over and over again, "I must depend only on my physical strength, not my mind!"

The ultra-violet hued sun overhead beat hot against my unprotected skin as I squatted down to wait restlessly.

"How odd everything appears below," I reflected. Never before had I voluntarily turned off my telekmass — mass sensing and telekinetic — faculties. Far below me, here and there across the brilliant tapestry of the valley floor, I could see animals, and plants too, appearing and disappearing at random. Nothing had pattern or made sense ... except for the stupid Cien.

It was incapable of teleporting itself, so it stayed always steady as a rock, teleporting debris of every kind into its own huge stomach.

The heat was almost unbearable. I could do nothing about it. I knew if I were to use my indirect faculties to teleport away the molecules of high kinetic energy near my skin, thereby achieving comfort, I might all too easily become prey of the evil Tepen!

I crouched further behind the water-spray seeking its filtering

protection from the mercilessly hot sun. Time passed while my body, unused to such energy burdens, quivered in agony. As my mind slowed, I dreamed fitfully.

I dreamed primarily of Eme... of her loss... of how I came to accept not only her twinning problem but the obligation to avenge her death. I dreamed of the long-distant day when I first came to Enithra, and she found me....

The big red ball bounced before me as I crawled on hands and knees, reaching expectantly for the bright, elusive object. It stopped. I grabbed for it with my hands and arms, only to miss as it jumped away again.

Next I remembered the feel of the sharp prick-pain of the needle, the softness of my bed and covering pressure pushing against me, filling every centimeter of my six-month old body with the terror of falling. Then blessed sleep, so peaceful and calm, though each cell screamed still with its individual entrapped fear.

On that same day Eme's thoughts were chiefly on her inability to twin, though she was long in years. When her telekmass receptors sensed the large, hot body falling through Enithra's outer atmosphere, she extended her fine-tuning sensitivity to detect its twisted and tortured metallic compartments.



Even as the dropping object scooped out ten miles or more of violet and ultra-violet jungle growth and dirt before coming to rest, Eme teleported to the object.

Now it rested. Within it she sensed two fine layers of organic chemicals, charred and flattened on two formed holding platforms. Slightly forward of these were mechanical instruments which triggered great fear in her slight body. They might be traps built by Tepen — her hereditary enemies.

It was already too late for retreat; the activity of her mass-sensing probes and telekinetic movements would have given her away instantly. But nothing happened. She was greatly relieved when no Tepen energy net clasped at the magnetic structure of her being.

But when she sensed the strange shield of polarization surrounding, in turn, the exceedingly star-dense mass enclosing many direct-action instruments, her caution and fear sprang forth again unbounded.

In the center of this red-hot mass was me.

Was this a new kind of Tepen trap? Would the Tepen use ordinary animal life, surrounded by strange machines and materials, to capture the Ayori?

Fortunately for me, the code of twinning prevented her from seeking further help of her kind. This puzzle was only hers to solve!

Eme, like all other Ayorians except me, was transparent to every frequency except ultra-violet between 10^{12} and 10^{18} cycles — a fact which has occasionally been used by the Tepen in their capture. She found herself a well hidden cave several miles from the intensely radiating object where she could feel at least partially safe from Tepen while her indirect faculties continued to probe the wreckage.

She threw a protective telekinetic shield over the conglomerate of metal and fused plastic to protect it from the ever-seeking telekmass fingers of other Bnithra plant and animal life. Then she carefully studied the shield of polarization and its associated heavy mass, the broken and twisted direct-action instruments and the animal body which, at that time, was mine.

She carefully studied every aspect of the gross geometry too, for one of the lowest philosophical levels in support of twinning requires knowledge of the geometry which replicates.

Just above the two flattened smears of organic matter and immediately before the shield of polarization were the strange figures;

**HBART
— OF THE HOUSE
OF THE GALACTIC COUNCIL**

Her knowledge of natural statisti-

cal patterns suggested that these figures might represent forms of direct-action communications. Perhaps meaning lay in the spaces between each figure, or in their shapes.

She died before this part of her twinning problem could be confirmed.

My dozing mind screamed its grief helping to wake me as my muscles, too, began to shriek their anger as I crouched so long and steadily beneath the waterfall, waiting for the Tepen.

I longed to teleport the chemicals of fatigue away from the periphery of my muscles, thus decreasing the pain sensation. But I dared not.

The sun was lower now, only a few diameters above the tall mountain peak at the end of the valley. I stretched my leg and arm muscles with direct-action physical motion. It gave me considerable release from the pain for a moment; then I forcibly stilled my body again. The pain returned; and it and the burning sun once again drove my thoughts into reveries, back to Eme and her twinning problem, though every light and sound receptor of my being remained set on alert for Tepen....

As Eme's mass sense passed back and forth through the smouldering object, it slowly cooled until all that remained to be studied was

the animal—which was me—in the center, surrounded all around by Tepen-like direct-action machines. Still wary of Tepen magnetic traps, she inspected the machines atom by atom. One, she discovered, seemed to move in periodic rhythm corresponding, roughly, to the period of motion of our planet Emithra; but always it moved a tenth of a cycle faster.

This same cyclical equipment seemed to control the flow of electrons in other parts of the complex apparatus. Wires and tubes attached to me pulsed with the life of chemicals or electrons. Fluids flowed in and out of me; while certain skin areas of my body changed density causing changes in electronic flows. These changes, in their turn, caused other equipments to blow heavier or lighter air particles throughout the hollow cubicle.

Once she teleported radioactive particles away from the internal structure of the power source, noting how it affected the flow of electrons in support of all equipments — except one, the shield of polarization, which seemed to be generated as a by-product of the very dense metal surrounding all.

Fate had handed Eme a powerful puzzle as part of her twinning cycle; a puzzle which was completely foreign to either her personal experiences or those of her group!

Now satisfied that no Tepen traps existed here, she opened her philosophical self to assist in her studies. Would that flow be animal blood? Could the other flow be the product of animal waste? What chemical was it?

With her sensitive mass-receptor she explored the fine details of structure. She learned—iron so much, carbon so much, nitrogen so much, a little phosphorus here in just this shape. Swiftly, starting with the smallest chemical constituents and their structure she pieced together her conclusions.

Her original conjecture was verified. A form of animal life was trapped inside the hollow object.

Eme had need to call on creative aspects of her philosophy. Other than distorted information about the direct-action devices of the evil Tepen, she had no other experiences remotely connected to this. It was a wonder she did not twin right at that point in time!

As the jungle hours passed, animal, but primarily Enithra plant-life, slowly reclaimed the charred area around the broken fragment from the sky. Eme, using the same methodical pattern she had used in study of the equipment surrounding me, now began study of my immature form.

How great her surprise must have been when, on exploring the neutral patterns of my mind having to do with ability to teleport and

to sense mass, she discovered these patterns to be incomplete! I had no telesenses at all!

Time passed—I in my cubicle in drugged sleep and Eme in her cavern arranging and rearranging conjectures of her twinning problem. The jungle was now nearly covering all.

Though I was Eme's personal twinning problem, the time of Ayorian grouping approached—the time when all Ayors, hemisphere to hemisphere, stack themselves in a line as long in length as there are Ayors to form it.

For much of my early life I was unclear as to what occurred during the grouping. I have the wrong shape for it. My arms and legs, my light and sound and chemical receptors, do not match the Ayors. To fit the grouping pattern one needs the "8" shape of the Ayorian, where the top hemisphere is hollow on one side and the bottom hemisphere is hollow in the opposite direction. Furthermore, my magnetic structure is weak. It is diffused cell by cell, rather than strong and unitary in nature.

Later I learned that the time of grouping enables all twinning problems and their solutions to be shared by individual Ayors—as well as assisting the Ayor, as a racial whole, to achieve a higher evolutionary level.

It was easy to understand Eme's

dilemma when she found me. If she left for the grouping, she would miss her individual advancement by skipping her personal twinning problem — me. On the other hand, if she didn't attend the grouping, she missed her opportunity to assist in the advancement of the Ayor as a racial whole. She also would lose other Ayorian experiences which might materially assist her toward her next twinning.

Since I was the central part of her twinning problem she resolved her difficult dilemma by teleporting me out from the well protected cubicle directly to the Ayorian grouping chamber some five miles below Enithra's surface. . . .

Spray from the falling water chilled me in the here-and-now. The formerly broiling sun overhead was much cooler. Soon my skin shivered and tiny bumps formed from the cold. Thick haze appeared, consisting mostly of dust and vegetable oils. It thickened as the sun's weakened image cast longer rays through the atmosphere. Along the valley floor, the teleporting plant and animal life merged into blurs of violet shadows.

Hunger pangs began. I relieved them by groping and grasping with my arms and hands for fruits and nuts lying along the waterfall's edge. I wondered how long I could go without sleep. But somehow, I vowed, in spite of cold, in spite of

the lack of use of my indirect faculties and other comforts which were yet to be taken from me, I would wait, catch and kill these evil Tepen!

Near the cliff's base I quenched my thirst in a novel way. I used my hands; I stooped over, cupped both hands, filled them with water, raised them to my lips and drank! Could the Ayorian children have seen me, many hours of philosophical games would have been stimulated by this novel way of drinking.

Between me and the Tepen traps lay the flat, thickened membrane of plant growth, designed by nature to cover and protect a maximum amount of soil nourishment from foreign seeds which might, by chance, have teleported to its base. The membrane provided a sufficiently strong telekinetic protective field to prevent such seeds from sprouting.

More by instinct than reason, I tore this plant membrane from the soil with my muscles. I shook the small nodules of earth loose from its underside and wrapped it around my shaking body. The protective membrane provided satisfactory warmth at last. I reflected on how discovery of such a novel use, alone, would have helped me to win in the children's philosophical games!

I tied long strands of fibers to the two Tepen traps, being very

sure to hide the dead strands beneath the soil. Then I pulled the other ends to my hiding place overhead. Enithra's insistent plant and animal life would eventually sense, then teleport needed materials from these dead, hidden strands, I knew. But probably they would last until morning.

My stomach was full now, though I had accomplished it through the most unusual—and fatiguing—way of chewing and swallowing. With my body warmed by the organic membranes and the Tepca traps secured, weariness filled my body. I slept to dream again. . . .

Deep below Enithra's surface, Eme experimentally forced my neuronal growth, completing it. My indirect powers grew. This enabled my body to assume the automatic duties of self-protection from other seeking Enithra life forms, as my slower body growth consciously and unconsciously began the arduous tasks which accompany use of telekmass faculties.

I recovered my conscious awareness for the first time on Enithra while the Ayorian grouping assembled overhead.

Everywhere around me were fascinating "toys" of different shapes, sizes and "feel". I reached with my hands and arms to grasp and jostle them. Though my new mass-

sensing receptors assured me these "objects" were within "grasp", my physical efforts were fruitless. My fingers came away empty.

Eventually I learned to reach for these new objects with my mind. By turning sensitivity for mass up or down, I could make small objects appear large or small according to my interest of the moment.

Though awakened in darkness, I perceived; though deep in the bowels of the earth, lacking food and oxygen, I nourished and breathed. Eme kept watch on my needs. Up around me, on all sides of me, were the Ayor, every one aligning himself according to their respective polarities and their respective philosophical attitudes, each sharing his twinning problems and twinning experiences.

Even one of Eme's wonderful talents could not completely solve my babyhood need for human attention and affection, though she came close. By use of her telekinetic power, she could cause different parts of my body to feel warm with pressure—as would be the case if a genuine human held and cuddled me.

When an adult Ayorian "twins," he becomes two independent, separated Ayorian "children." Each Ayorian child has increased abilities along the lines which caused his "parent" to twin; but none has the memories of his parent.

Ayorian evolutionary progress can be measured by individual twinnings as well as group growth from group-accepted problems. My dreams, interrupted for but a moment, continued with my first grouping where the dialogue, weaved itself into my dreams:

"He is animal in body, thus non-Ayorian," said one of the group.

"He has a completed neuronc growth giving him the indirect faculties," another forced into the coordinated assemblage.

"He must be brought to full self-sufficiency," another responded.

"Place him with the children until he develops; Eme shall guide him until her twinning."

In my sleeping mind echoed clearly the Ayorians booming tones over and over, again, "Eme shall guide him; Eme shall guide him; Eme shall guide him...!"

But Eme was dead.

II

Searching, scorching heat of the sun woke me up.

Below and all around Enithra life stirred. It moved in jerky, discontinuous jumps, grasping with hungry power. No clouds hid the sun's rays. And as far as my light receptors could perceive, no evil Tepen traveled on the valley floor below.

I scurried quickly down to the

waterfall's basin, again using only my direct faculties of arms, legs and mouth to clean, move, eat, and drink. Though my muscles ached excruciatingly, I returned to await the Tepen.

I was fully conscious on this second day. Certainly I was suffering less from exposure to heat than the day before. Almost relaxed, I deliberately brought to mind my most early life with the children.

Constantly they laughed at me; my awkwardness in the use of indirect faculties was as clumsy as the very youngest of the Ayorian children.

"Spork!" they shouted with glee. In Ayorian language it means "moron."

They could talk and hear by vibrating the concave side of the hemisphere which composed the top half of their body. It was my only advantage over them. I was far superior in these two faculties. But it was trivial. What was important was the telekmass—mass sensing and telekinetic—faculties.

Like children everywhere, Ayorian children played those games, which were supposed to prepare them for the serious responsibilities of maturity.

In "hide-and-seek", one playing member teleports an object to an unknown location. When the signal is given, all others enlarge their telekmass network in ever-expand-

ing radii in search of the hidden object. Though the object might be hidden, say, only twenty miles away, each position in a three-dimensional sphere surrounding each playing member must be inspected. At each linear increase of the searching sphere's radius, each member has need to strain; the volume of positions to be searched increases by the cube of the radius.

Though most Ayorian children rapidly achieve a capability which includes all of Enithra, I could never find an object beyond a forty mile radius. This will give some idea of just how moronic I was!

Another common game was called "squeezing". Each player attempts to teleport the other; each resists the other. If the players are evenly matched, each feels as though he is "squeezed." Eventually one gives way and loses.

During my very early childhood, I was better at "squeezing" than other Ayorian children because of my greater mass. But, all adult Ayorians could always handle me with great ease.

A third game was called "null-thought". It consists of shutting off one's thought processes. While most Ayorians, with their unified magnetic field of thought, were expert at it, I, with my biological processes and their associated small, cellular, independent

magnetic-fields, continually broadcast loud identity waves in all directions.

My best game was "philosophical speculations". An object or set of relationships of any kind is selected for the game. This object or set of relationships may be almost anything. Each of us children would contemplate on the object or relationship. If an object were chosen, we extended our mass-sensors down to lowest levels to learn and discuss composition of structure; or, if relationships, we all speculated and formed hypotheses.

Those who advanced the most novel conjecture — determined by majority vote — which also fitted consistently within the framework of past "accepted" conjectures, won.

Though I could not play this game until I was five Enithra years old, the first day I played I won. This caused much surprise to all — Spork the moron, won!

One of the children had selected as a particular relationship a triangle drawn upon the dirt floor of the jungle. It had one right angle.

While all busied themselves in sensing the relationship of lines to lines and angles to angles while trying to generate new conjectures, I walked up to the triangle and drew a square along each side using the sides of the triangles as one of the sides of each square. It seemed quite obvious to me that the sum

of the areas of the two small squares was equal to the area of the big square, and I said so to the others.

They checked and re-checked this hypothesis — then finally agreed to the worth of my conjecture.

How big I felt on that day!

Usually though, speculation involved some object. Since I could seldom extend my telekmass sensor lower than molecular levels, I seldom conjectured much that was new or novel....

Clouds formed on the right side of my valley, now hiding the sun. I prepared another of the vegetable growths for cover, found food which I carried back to my hiding place and composed my mind on my tedious wait.

How useless all those games were to the Ayorian children, I thought. They were designed to train them in self-protection from Tepem. But they were miserable failures.

The clouds overhead now grew faster than the valley's puffballs could consume them, as they freely floated in search of minute particles of air, moisture and other nutrients. Water dropped from them.

I had often been exposed to rain. I didn't mind it. Always before I could teleport the water away from my skin as fast as the

rain dropped. But now, without the use of my indirect faculties, the water soon soaked me, making me even more miserable.

To mature toward twinning, each individual Ayorian must develop new and novel philosophical speculations about reality. Now, crouching in the heavy rains, groveling beneath the dead organic skin which provided me with some warmth, hiding beneath the heavy grief which was still mine, I almost smiled. I was thinking of how many philosophical games I could now win with what I had learned of direct-action effects!

But all these things were unimportant, compared to my need to avenge Eme's death!

When I woke, late on the next morning, I was exhausted and stiff from exposure to the cold and wet. The sun was already above the valley's peaks, raising steamy tendrils from last night's rain.

What water was left unused by Enithra's jungle life now flowed in tiny rivulets all over the valley. The waterfall behind which I crouched thundered louder, with a thousand new fountains fanning out wider and thicker from every splattering ledge.

I moved closer against the rocky backdrop, trying to avoid the greater water-sprays, to no avail. My vegetable covering was now pitted and holed by the telekinetic action of Enithra' life during the

night. It offered little protection.

After securing new covering and filling my empty stomach I returned to my watching post. My thoughts, as usual, returned to the evil Tepen and their source.

Hundreds of thousands of years earlier, the Tepen and Ayor had been one tribe. During the time of twinning of some long forgotten Ayorian, his philosophical twinning problem involved speculation on the "purpose" of material things. He solved his twinning problem with the conjecture that material things were to be used "directly" — that is, without use of one's telekmass abilities — rather than "indirectly" as would be the case with use of these two abilities.

His children followed this natural line of speculation. From then to the present day, each of his descendants solved his twinning problems within the consistent framework of those assumptions. They separated from the Ayor, developed a material science and an urban society.

Unfortunately, as their capacity for directly using material things grew, their capacity for mass sensing and teleportation declined. As these capacities declined, their philosophical sense of rightness and wrongness degenerated. They gave up groupings in favor of a single, all-powerful leader and a distorted, evil drive toward mastering their

environment through direct means.

Capacity for telekmass changed to a sense of a different kind. Each Tepen was surrounded at twinning with complex mechanical equipment responding directly to his mental command. Their shells contained clever energy fields capable of resisting the planet's life forms and their ever-present telekinetic tug.

Different, more ingenious energy fields were developed to catch other life forms. These captures were placed into huge machines which ground them into proper size and separated out their chemical constituents. The results were injected as nourishment into the machinery surrounding each Tepen.

My first contact with the Tepen came when we children chased "tree" nuts.

As each tree teleported its ripened seed away, hopefully to land in a region of nourishment within the capability of its feeble sensing apparatus, we would spring after the seed. First to find the nut was free to use it for his own nourishment.

How delicious they were!

On that day we had all sensed the quickened ripening of one seed. It was ready for a quick journey. We tensed, ready to spring after it no matter which way it flew.

The nut ripened, sprang from our location, then disappeared from everyone's telekmass sensors —

much to the surprise of everyone.

Ovef was far the best of us in the game of "hide-and-seek". He found the nut first . . . but he also disappeared from our sensing network. We searched long and diligently for Ovef.

I was the lucky—I should say unlucky—member that found him.

Floating in the middle of a jungle clearing was a huge cage. I had never seen anything like it before. It was surrounded by pulsating energy fields which cycled from low infra-red through ultra-violet.

As I watched the unusual display, I could see Ovef's small, now shrunken form reflected back to me each time the energy field passed through its ultra-violet sequence.

Then I noticed the nut. Somehow, diabolically, it had been drawn far beyond its normal range to land in the energy trap. Ovef, being the strongest, had sensed it and followed. And he, in turn, had tripped the energy fields which now contained him.

As soon as the other Ayorian children found us, without exception, they shouted "Tepen!" Then just as quickly teleported themselves away.

Having no grouping experience upon which to build my own fear of Tepen, I was not to be dissuaded

so easily. I hid from sight and waited. Our past conjecture games had taught me the Tepen used traps triggered by use of one's own telekmass faculties. So, I hid, using only my usually useless light receptors and other direct-action faculties—just as I was now doing high on this ledge.

I kept my eyes on the terrified Ovef.

When evening came I heard the Tepen approach, their floating suit-tanks scraping against Enthra foliage. Ugly protrusions of direct-action machinery covered the Tepen's metal suit-conveyances everywhere.

No wonder Eme suspected my arrival vessel! It must have looked just like a trap of Tepen! I thought, staring at the mechanical assemblages.

Though they made much noise while talking, and though the noises sounded much like the Ayorian language, I could not understand them.

One turned a small knob on the outside of his metal suit. The different colors surrounding Ovef changed to a steady ultra-violet. I could see him crouch back terrified. Another Tepen unloosed a small photocell which sought out Ovef, then steadied on him. I later learned that this small photocell had picked up Ovef's ultra-violet reflections, then transmitted the returned energy to a form which

could be easily sensed by the atrophied mass-sensor of the Tep-en.

As soon as the photocell steadied on Ovef, the Tepen produced a hose, which sprang from a complex cubical box. He pointed it directly at Ovef. An intense light beam poured forth from the top half of the hose and an energy stream came back from Ovef to flow through the lower half of the hose into the box.

I saw Ovef shrink and puff apart, as though he were as tenuous as one of the puffballs which suddenly disintegrate after their air is teleported from inside.

The Tepen turned off the coruscating energies around the cage and reset the trap. Then the three quietly floated away from the clearing in the opposite direction from where I was hiding.

I didn't follow them that day. Oh, how I wished I might have had the wisdom, the knowledge, the courage and the maturity to have done so. Eme might even now be alive if I had.

This day of waiting was very much like the other days — hot, uncomfortable, and full of pain for both body and mind. Puffballs lofted above and floated everywhere. The predatory Ettel consumed its share of stupid Ciens. The waterfall flowed on, though now decreased somewhat in size

and noise; and the Tepen cages continued to tantalize me below....

I remembered when I was twelve Enithra years old. Life until then had been one long agony of attempts to overcome my handicaps. I couldn't mass-sense any better than the least of the young. I couldn't teleport much better. I did have some little advantage on abstract relationships. But I couldn't go below the chemical level in mass-sensing, nor could I reach beyond a forty-mile radius.

I lost in every game; I was the moron.

Yet I often wondered what it was about me which, unlike other children, enabled me to watch Tepen from hiding? Was this to be my twinning problem — as I was still Eme's? And, if solved, would I then twin to become two helpless, moronic children?

Life continued its pastoral flavor. We moved. We played games. Once each year the grouping occurred — without me — and twinning occurred sporadically here and there as one or another Ayorian individual reached his philosophical plateau.

Though life continued the same for all the other children, it was different for me. How could Ayorians live so carefree when their very lives were endangered by Tepens? I wondered time and again.

When I asked the adults this



question, their only answer was, "This must be your twinning problem. You are still a child in many ways. But maybe, for you, twinning comes early."

How could a small animal-like child, as I was, make any impression on their complacency?

I know now that Ayors have no sense of hatred or revenge as I do. My emotions are probably closer akin to the evil Tepen than to the Ayor.

Each game became for me a philosophical vessel within which to fashion the fabric of Tepen revenge for Ovef's death. Each abstract conjecture was turned over and over in my mind to find some handle allowing me revenge.

Still I did nothing any different from the other children. Not yet could I be stirred to actually change my cultural behavior pattern.

The day Eme was caught was beautiful to view with light receptors. She and I were slowly teleporting through this beautiful valley, so covered with flowers of all kinds. I remember commenting to Eme on how much I wished she could see the brilliant array of colors with light receptors like mine. Her comment was typical—how much she wished I could sense the beautiful energy levels operating below my threshold level in the flowers!

I described for her how one par-

ticular flower slowly amassed bundles of red and green nodes as it reached seed maturity. I had to use Ayorian energy wavelength dimensions in my description, instead of color names; so I think the visual impact was not truly appreciated by her. Yet I was so anxious for her to share my sensitivities that I forged ahead.

I told her how each red and green node swelled up to form a hemispherical dot which aligned itself among others like it to form an unusually beautiful pattern.

Then, as each dark red node teleported at maturity, a shifting, changing pattern appeared. The background blue of the flower-pod suddenly showed in place of the dark-red seed. Now one could see the shifting blues, reds and greens weaving over and over into captivating patterns.

While I was trying to describe to Eme what I could view with light receptors, I remember also seeing a row of the rounded shape of the Cien, a rather dumb animal. They were teleporting debris of all kinds to their stomachs, without regard to food-value or type—just as they were now doing below me. Usually they continued this rather engorging behavior until their stomach howled with protest, after which they slept. Then, on awakening, they repeated their senseless cycle of satiation and pain.

The predatory Ettel could be seen teleporting from hummock to hummock behind the row of Cien. One Cien disappeared and Eme and I both could sense its appearance in the stomach of the Ettel. The other Cien continued their placid gluttony unconcerned.

We came to the end of this valley surrounded on all sides by steep, sweeping sheer cliffs. I was about to teleport to the top of one large cliff when Eme spotted the trap. Perhaps Eme was getting old and careless. More likely, her twinning problem was heavy on her mind.

She made the error of assuming the trap was simply what it appeared to be. She carefully cautioned me to stillness while she searched with her mind for the trap's outer boundaries.

Another trap, set just for this contingency, caught her mass-sensing probe and sprung! It drew her to it and closed with the same polycyclic field I had seen enclosing Ovef. Her voice screamed to me...then was suddenly cut off.

I expected the trap to behave just like the one I had seen around Ovef. But this time the Tepen had placed a killing device inside. The energy field passed through the ultra-violet, and I could see Eme wither and dissipate as the ray of energy passed through her body.

I raged with mixed anger and

grief. I struck at the trap with my bare hands. Wildly, like some stupid Cien, I threw debris at the machine — to no avail.

Then, in total exhaustion, I dropped to the ground, my light receptors strangely letting forth streams of liquid while my chest heaved breathlessly.

Eme was gone! I was alone.

Of all the Ayor, only I would seek her revenge, I knew. When sanity returned to me, I carefully searched around both traps — not with my mind, but with my body. I actually used my legs and arms to walk, physically, around each trap. In my mixture of anger and grief, I perceived the philosophical principles which could be tested only by me — not the Ayor — that these traps would be triggered only by mind energy!

Carefully, then, I walked around each trap. Tentatively, ready to draw back instantly, I held my hand around the sustaining field. I could feel only the normal pluck of mass-sensing fingers from the forest in the background.

Then, as my hand passed physically through the net, whatever residual mind energy existed in the cells of my arm triggered the trap. My arm felt pulled inward toward the center of the trap while my body tensed muscles in the opposite direction, easily conquering the pull.

All around the inside of the trap

I moved my arm until I came to the back of another of the death-ray devices. With something solid to grasp, I closed my fingers and pulled it toward me. It came easily and I crushed it under foot.

My hand came to the container from which the telekinetic field emanated. I reached for a heavy rock, and with my hands I raised the rock over my head and crushed the box flat. When I had done the same to the other trap, I searched the area carefully for any sign of Eme.

Only a thin residue of dust bore witness to her once beloved presence.

Many hours of philosophical conjecturing with the children had sharpened my mind insofar as relationships were concerned. Though I was a moron to the Ayor and their children, I knew now, without equivocation, that *only* I was capable of handling the relationships imposed by the Tepen. These were of an order of abstraction foreign to the Ayor.

But not to me.

Also, it seemed somehow a sweet kind of justice that I, who was Eme's twinning problem, should carry on her twinning goals—What am I? What is my purpose in life? And I now consciously, deliberately accepted her twinning problem as my own.

In the pseudo-clearness of thoughts generated from my grief

and now by my terrible anger, I could almost sense the end that should have been Eme's to observe, to enjoy, and to use in raising herself beyond her own philosophical limitations resulting, thereby, in the evolutionary necessity and pleasures of twinning.

But not quite — not quite! Much yet — too much — had to be done and learned!

The next night I dreamed again. The ledge was somewhat wider now because of the decrease in size of the waterfall. But I was wearying. I held myself in a tight ball to keep from falling off the hundred-foot ledge. In my hands and around my legs were twisted new strands of vegetable growth, tied to the Tepen traps below, ready to warn me should the Tepen return at night.

I dreamed that Eme was alive again — only ten times larger. My child-like form grew to her size, then went beyond until she appeared no more than fist-size. I reached for her, swallowed her, then began to sense her expanding form inside my body.

Tighter and tighter she became until every cell of my body contained a part of Eme. When the pressure released I felt good over all my body.

Afterward, I slept deeply and comfortably for the first time since Eme's death...

Like shiny, tiny glow-light insects, teleporting here and there, now strong, then gone, the Tepen's body-suit reflected electro-magnetic radiation from the sun as it weaved its way in and out of Enithra's thick foliage. Unlike any other moving object in the valley, these tiny sparks moved continuously — contrasting greatly with the normal Enithra stop-and-go modes of locomotion.

There were seven sparks. In my imagination I could once again view the monstrosities which had attacked Ovef so long ago — metallic jacket, oval in shape; many mechanical protrusions of unknown functions attached to their protective suits; each floating above the ground as high as my knee, bringing their tops to about shoulder height.

My mind raced, my muscles tightened and I placed every effort of my physical, emotional and mental makeup into the concentrated task of watching Tepen. I was close to avenging Eme's death.

At their slow, lumbering pace, half the day passed before they reached their traps. Then they rushed from one trap to the other and back again. Excitedly they made their Ayorian-like but incomprehensible noises to one another.

I rolled a heavy rock to the edge

of my hiding place overhead. As one Tepen neared the base of the cliff directly below me, I dropped it directly on top of him and his machinery. I could see his yellowish fluid ooze between the crushed metallic membranes of his suit.

I had conjectured that since, except for themselves, their total environment was made up of life forms capable of only indirect action, not once would they think to focus their mechanical light cells upward in search of another direct-action being. Apparently I was right.

Quickly now they unlimbered an odd-looking box. Nervously they began turning and adjusting its controls. I dropped another rock.

The five remaining increased their efforts with the machinery. I placed myself in their position and imagined what their chain of reasoning must be: If someone were teleporting rocks on them, their protective machinery in the traps, which normally sensed telekinetic fields then took protective action, was not working. Furthermore, no purpose would be achieved by fleeing from their hidden enemies. No conceivable escape speed could possibly outdistance teleported objects.

I counted on such thinking on their part as I dropped yet a third rock. The yellow fluids gushed forth from another of the evil Tepen.

A polycyclic light surrounded their mechanical assemblage as the remaining four murderers activated its field. Inside this spectacular display, marking off the limits of their new telekinetic field, floated the four remaining Tepen. At their head, aimed at the exact center of the surrounding barrier, sat another of the automatic death rays which had killed Eme.

Crouching back further from the edge of the ledge, with only the top of my head and my light receptors peering over, I gave thought to this new Tepen course of action. As the nut-tree seed had been caught as soon as its telekinetic field had been activated, and as Ovef had been caught for the same reason, I believed that the Tepen had established a similar trap. Were I to exercise my own indirect faculties I would surely be instantly teleported to the center of the trap—where the death ray would destroy me.

I could, of course, continue to drop rocks on the Tepen with my arm muscles. But, if I did, they would sooner or later learn about my use of direct faculties. Then they would probably be capable of taking counter-action against me. Since I couldn't kill more than one at a time by this means, the risk was too great.

Furthermore, did I want to let Tepen everywhere learn of my peculiar abilities? And were these

seven to be the end of my revenge for Eme's sake? I thought not! For my kind of revenge, seven Tepen could not begin to satisfy the emptiness of my spirit. Also, I sensed, though only immaturely as yet, need for more knowledge and a greater campaign against these hereditary Ayorian enemies.

The sun slowly approached evening-line as both the Tepen and I patiently waited in our deadly game. For some time each of the Tepen rotated his photocells in all directions of the compass. Finally, tiring of this profitless task—none ever thought to point his photocell up in my direction—they hung the cells back on their protective suits unused.

My plan was well formulated now. I descended along the waterfall out of their possible line of sight until, reaching their level, I was well hidden behind the final and largest fountain of falling water.

I circled quietly behind the rear of the water-spray, finding additional screen from thick growing trees. Further beyond, well hidden from the Tepen line-of-sight, sat a row of Cien. One was asleep. This one I grabbed with my arm muscles, carefully transporting it directly behind the foliage near the four Tepen trappers.

I reasoned that sooner or later the Cien's indiscriminate appetite

would cause a piece of material to follow a telekinetic line beginning with its source, through the field of the Tepen trap and ending in its huge stomach. When the Cien's telekinetic field reached forth to seize its prey, the Tepen trap would automatically pull it in — just as it had for the tree nut and for Ovef and for Eme. The Tepen death ray at the center of the trap would automatically and nearly instantaneously destroy the Cien. I hoped the Tepen would conclude that their Ayorian enemy had been killed.

Back again on my ledge overlooking both the Tepens and the sole Cien, I waited for its awakening. When it came, the sun had reached its lowest point before disappearing for the day. As with all Cien, it opened its huge stomach sack to receive all manner of organic and inorganic materials for possible nourishment — anything at all which was within its sphere of telekinetic strength.

I could almost feel the Tepens' jubilation over their success when the Cien was caught and instantly disintegrated. They talked to one another in their strange Ayorian-like gabble as they disassembled equipment and turned back across the valley floor in the same direction from which they had come early in the morning.

The sun was half below the horizon as I slipped from stone to

stone down the wall to follow them.

The remaining Tepen advanced steadily toward the valley's far side, never once turning photocell to the rear. Within a matter of minutes I reached the trailing Tepen. I clubbed it to death with a broken branch.

The dusk light vanished. The Tepen forged ahead before me, bobbing, weaving and floating, each in a sphere of radiated light. Where they floated above the broken valley floor, I had to scramble and push and tug around many formerly minor obstacles. My muscles, nowhere near used to this unusual punishment, ached with dull pains of growth and sharp pinpricks of over-use.

As their light-encircled bodies floated easily up the valley's steep banks, I nearly weakened in my resolve not to use indirect faculties.

I could easily catch up by a small use of teleportation. But I dared not. I knew that other Ayorians, far above me in the use of indirect faculties, were falling to still unknown, hidden Tepen traps that used their own superiority against them.

Eventually exhausted and crying from the fibers of every one of my muscle filaments, I reached the steep rim overlooking the valley beyond. There, deceptively close in the dark, was the object of the Tepen's travels.

Glittering lights shone from the

floor of the valley, clustered in near circular form. Many lights sparkled like teleporting fireflies as they moved from point to point in the dark. The cool breeze blew jungle foliage back and forth between the lights and us.

This sight of my first Tepen village fully explained the avoidance of certain areas by my fellow Ayorians.

I forced air into my laboring lungs by forcing the expansion and contraction of my weak chest muscles. Then, taking a calculated risk, I rushed down the valley floor, ignoring noise and the possibility of discovery though direct sight.

I slowed to a fast walk, taking more time to push organic materials away from my direct path of approach as I neared the closest moving light. Within the Tepen's light-circle I could see his photocell pointed away from me, as with the other Tepen, I struck him down with some elation. Only two to go!

When the next rearmost member fell as easily, we were better than halfway across the valley floor to the Tepen village.

I approached the last unsuspecting Tepen close enough to strike when my mind presented me with a novel conjecture. I could make this Tepen teach me what I must know!

Fortunately for myself and the other Ayorians, I gave little thought

to potentially dangerous devices available to the Tepen's conscious defense and unknown to me. Possibly poisons from my muscular over-exertions clouded my thinking.

Dropping behind the remaining Tepen, I drew upon my mental images of one of the children's early conjectures. Quickly reconstructing their concept, I re-created the system of forces of their speculations by hand. I tied two stones to the end of a long vine and began whirling it around and around over my head. When I could feel both of the stones pulling against the muscles of my arm, I let the whole system of forces fly at the floating Tepen.

It whizzed around and around his body, successfully tangling most of his outer instruments.

I jumped on his suit, adding my weight to the total assemblage, then grabbed at his photocell and jerked it off.

As the combined weight of my body and the rocks exceeded the telekinetic capacity of his protective suit, we settled to the valley floor.

I kept my legs wrapped around the Tepen's suit. I reached for vines near us, using them to more completely entangle the captive. Then I broke off all of his suit's sensory protruberances.

This Tepen had the trap-box with its death-ray attachment. I slung the trap-box over one shoulder and, using the end of one trail-

ing vine, tugged the monster along the valley floor in the opposite direction from the Tepen village.

We traveled most of that night and the next, using only my powers of direct action.

Telekmass faculties had always made my search for food and water a minor task. Now, using only my direct faculties, I found the chore far more time consuming. In a valley far away from the Tepen's point of capture, along a stream whose banks were lined with edible food, I took the precaution of tying every protruberance on the Tepen's covering machinery with live vines bound to sturdy trees.

In view of the fact that I hadn't bothered to respond to the Tepen's noises, that it couldn't "see" without its photocell and that it couldn't mass-sense or teleport beyond the confines of its own mechanical protective suit, it must have been very puzzled indeed.

I set the death ray next to him, carefully pointing it away from us. By changing control knobs and observing effects, I was able to learn how it operated. Then I turned it back toward my captive, plugged his photocell back into his suit of machinery and pointed the death ray directly at him. Finally, I tied his body to my foot with a long vine and slept.

The Tepen did not move all that night.

When I awoke, the sun was well overhead. The air was cool and slightly misty. I ate and drank — the hard way — then turned back to my captive.

When his photocell was moved to include me in its vision, I pointed it at my finger, which was held near the death-ray switch. I made motions with my finger, pretending to switch the death ray on.

Even a stupid Cien could get that message!

I moved its photocell to cover me and said, "Spork!" Then I moved the cell to the stream of water, using Ayorian terms to say "water."

The beast and I learned. Its language was rooted in the Ayorian tongue, though concepts were structured around material things rather than philosophical ideas. I am sure that without the peculiar characteristics of my sensory network — light and sound receptors, etc. — I would have had as much difficulty learning its language as would any other Ayorian. Most nouns had concrete referents which I could point to, merely by moving his photocell from object to object.

I don't mean to imply that I was unusually bright. It was just that my limited capabilities happened to match the Tepen better than they did the other Ayor.

In a matter of weeks I was able to converse with my cap-

tive, though haltingly. I learned where his food box was located, allowing it to take whatever nourishment needed. As his food decreased, his rage would sometimes boil over; for, like me, he could produce anger. Then I would learn things which I am sure it had no initial intention of communicating — like the novel idea that messages could be sent from him to his far-distant village.

I shut off its photocell and denied it food until it taught me about the form of electromagnetic radiation which could bounce around the planet very rapidly.

It took me somewhat longer to learn that one of the metallic suit protrusions, which I had already luckily broken, had been constructed for the purpose of sending such messages.

Even though I now felt confident that I could separate its lies from its truthful statements, I moved to a further valley and kept even more careful watch for searching Tepen.

Months passed while I learned not only the language, but the function and limitation of every one of the suit's appendages. Some were for grasping objects, others for plugging into equipment found only in their village or larger cities. Some were special purpose protrusions whose functions were related to the trapping of Ayorian life. It was this latter feature which gave

me the most difficulty, and about which I wanted the most information.

As day followed day, I reflected ever more frequently on how difficult it would be to kill the Tepen, without motive, so to speak. As my ability to communicate increased, a certain empathy grew between us. Can anyone kill another being under such conditions? I wondered often.

Then I learned the Tepen purpose for trapping my Ayorian brothers and the intended purpose of Eme's death. As the death-ray tube worked on Eme, the return energy given off by her death was collected and trapped in side attachments.

Their sole motive in so capturing this peculiar life-energy was in the sensory pleasures its release gave them. Just as I considered the meat of the nut tree to be a delicacy worthy of expending time and energy to obtain, the Tepen considered Ayorian life a delicacy worthy of the search and death of their former ancestor. How depraved the Tepen had become!

When every drop of knowledge was squeezed from the Tepen, now finding it emotionally easy to kill, I pushed a sharp stick through openings in its armor. Then, using my indirect faculties for the first time in months, I teleported the dead organic mass out of the armor.

I studied the suit piece by piece, putting into play the many hours of philosophical conjecturing I had practiced with my playmates. There was not much about the machinery which I did not learn, for now I had no fear of using all of my senses, including mass-sensing and teleportation.

I manipulated the machinery with my mind, and I also doubled my body inside the suit, directing it to move from point to point. It was uncomfortable, but possible. So long as I triggered no mind traps, I could be free to move within their village should the need arise — that is, assuming they did not notice the small light receptor holes which I had created in the suit — and assuming I actually understood as much about the Tepen as I thought I did!

IV

Though, I, Spork, the Ayorian moron, determined to become Spork, the Ayorian avenger, I was not so stupid as to think I could yet imitate the Tepen in their own village. Furthermore their village was but a tiny outpost of their complete civilization. Time and chance had caused the number of Tepen to be approximately equal to that of the Ayor — nearly one hundred thousand each.

I needed to convince the Ayor

of *their* need for eliminating Tepen before we Ayors were all hunted down and killed. As you will immediately know from what I have said of my foster race, this was to be a most difficult task.

Even more difficult was the problem of just how an Ayor could kill a Tepen, even if he so desired. The only abilities native to Ayorian life were the indirect faculties which Tepen used against them!

The time of Ayorian grouping had arrived. There I hoped to make my plea, and so I teleported the death ray, the empty Tepen suit and myself to the place of gathering, a good five miles below the surface of Enithra. Even Tepen direct-action technology could not go this deep — yet!

As the Ayor arrived for the gathering, they arranged themselves into their new patterns of polarity. Their line curved along the top of the immense cavern and seemed to throb with intense philosophical thought, as their individual messages contributed to total racial growth.

As usual, they ignored Spork, the moron. Using my indirect faculties, I filled the huge cavern with sufficient air from the planet's surface, so that sound waves could be formed. Then, with a loud voice, I shouted, "Listen, fellow Ayorians! I have discovered many new things about the Tepen which all must share."

Unable to break their chain, the Ayor spoke back in unison, one hundred thousand strong. "What can Spork, the child, contribute?"

From the form of their response I knew I had met with great pessimism. In the adult mind, I was yet a child because of my obvious limitations. "I am as a child Ayorian, but am not a child for me," I responded. "Hear me out. Can the Ayor escape the Tepen traps? I can! Can the Ayor kill the Tepen? I have! Can the Ayor talk the Tepen language? I can! Should I say, then, that all other Ayor are children because they cannot do these things which I can?"

This thought, as I knew, was original and novel to my brothers. Their interest and respect had been aroused, so I pushed my advantage. I explained how their "squeezing" and "null-thought" games were useless — indeed, worse than useless, for the very act of protecting one's self with such mental energy activated Tepen traps.

I demonstrated the death ray and Tepen suit; I explained the depraved purpose of the energies taken from dying Ayors and I told of my experience in killing Tepen, concluding with the logical appeal that all Tepen must be killed everywhere.

This became the longest grouping in the history of the Ayor.

There was much new to learn, discuss and share. I had upset some of the most cherished attitudes found among my brethren, and they knew me to be truthful.

They had need to re-structure their complete philosophical concepts. Weeks passed while they weighed, assessed and evaluated each concept.

I felt I was winning my main point — and so I did, but in a way very much different than I supposed.

First, they abolished the squeezing and null-thought games. They were to be replaced by another called "non-sensing" which was to be played very much like the null-thought game. This, they felt, would give the children practice in *not* triggering Tepen traps.

I tried to explain they were talking "nonsense" with their new "non-sensing" game ... but got nowhere.

Second, they abolished the nut game to avoid traps of the kind which had killed Ovef.

I tried to explain that Tepen would make other traps and other ways of accomplishing the same objective. They were little concerned. They felt that, statistically, it was improbable the Tepen could harm the Ayorian race very badly.

I didn't try to explain my idea of the need for Ayorian revenge, since this concept would have been completely foreign to their nature.



APKINS-

Yet I tried to describe the great loss to the Ayorian race when individuals such as Eme were prevented from completing their twinning problem.

This only brought the response I had heard before. "That is *your* twinning problem. If you are not a child, solve it!"

Thus, Spork the moron became Spork the *only* Ayorian avenger!

I teleported back to Enithra's surface along with all the other Ayorians, my emotions in turmoil over their refusal to face what I felt was reality.

Alternately grief-stricken, then furious with rage, I moved from point to point along the surface without thought to my direction or purpose to my motion.

One hundred thousand Tepen were too many individual life forms for me to wage war against alone, I knew. Yet my deep loss over Eme and my non-Ayorian vow to seek revenge burned deeply.

Eventually, almost by accident, I found myself in the valley where I had been led by the Tepen who had killed Eme. There, far along the valley's lush violet and ultra-violet floor, shone the reflected metal of the Tepen village.

I teleported myself to a point close by the village, then walked to its edge with my legs and feet. There I physically climbed one of the larger trees overlooking some

of the metallic huts to better observe the Tepen activities in secret.

Had I not known of their common genetic heritage I would have thought the Tepen and Ayor to be totally different races of beings. Where the Ayor lived freely, nomadically, across the planet's surface, the Tepen built and lived in cavelike metallic structures tied together by concentric circles of metal-like paths that spread out from the center of the village. I could tell the metallic humps were living quarters because the Tepen floated along the paths into and out of the structures.

When night came, I retreated from the tall branches of the tree by use of direct action faculties and, in similar manner, filled my mouth and stomach with berries found on bushes nearby.

As I ate, I watched ripened berries teleport themselves in random directions, as was normal for all Enithra seed. Since my present indirect sensing faculties were deliberately self-protective only — automatically protective against Enithra's ever-seeking plant and animal life — I was incapable of following any of the berries' flight paths.

I knew the approximate teleportation strength of the berries. Thus I knew, within a radius of several arm lengths, about where they should be appearing. Since one of

the Tepen metal paths was located within the seed's radius of strength, by chance alone I should expect the appearance of ripened seeds scattered along the path.

None could be seen. Nor did any appear while I ate.

Knowing now that Tepen protective devices were operating throughout the village, I returned to my watch above the village with even more caution.

Nightfall deepened and artificial lighting turned on. Yet, during all the long, cold night of watch, nothing stirred below me. At sunrise, three Tepen floated toward the village exit, carrying traps and photocells. I quickly descended to ground level where I pushed my way through foliage and fallen jungle debris to hastily follow them.

We traveled for three days, sleeping nights, across five different valleys, before reaching the first trap. This time my direct action faculties — my leg and arm muscles — were hardened. I had no difficulty following behind in secret.

As they worked over their first Ayorian trap, rain tumbled from lingering clouds overhead. As I had learned to do once before, I quickly covered myself with vegetable growth to keep off the cold rain and to capture some heat for my body.

The rain provided me with sufficient cover so that I could now

creep closer to the working trio. Their voices were clear and I now knew their language. Stimulated and excited over success in capturing another Ayorian delicacy, they re-set the trap and began their slow flotation toward the next one.

When they had gone beyond their normal seeing distance, I circled the re-set trap to study it from every angle. There were two of them, the same type which had caught and killed Eme.

I could easily trigger them or destroy them. I could easily follow the Tepen and destroy every trap they set. But what then? Sooner or later, Tepen would know of my presence. Could I, single-handedly, kill one hundred thousand Tepen?

But if I let the traps lie untouched, Ayorian brothers would die, one at a time. Even at the risk of being discovered by Tepen, could I allow this to happen?

One trap was conspicuous while the other was hidden. Both were protected from Enithra's ever-seeking life-fingers by tiny, mechanically generated indirect-action fields. Thus they could lie on the jungle floor indefinitely in wait for unwary Ayorians. When the Ayor sensed the obvious trap and reached to switch it off, the mechanically generated entrapping field hidden several feet away was activated — and the wary Ayorian to be tricked into trapping himself.

Reaching through the trap's telekinetic barriers physically, I pulled away one of the two death rays. I set it beside the other, orienting it in the opposite direction but hidden low. Flicking the switch to the on position, I separated a strand of fiber from one of the plant growths and tied it to the switch. Then I wrapped the other end of the fiber to the "off" switch of the other ray, and thus set up my Tepen trap.

Carefully, I turned the "off" switch "on"—and the strand of fiber tugged the "on" ray "off." Since both switches were constructed the same way, whatever happened to one switch caused the other to do the opposite

On their next rounds, the Tepen would see the energy field surrounding an obviously "on" death ray. Then, when they extended a mechanical appendage to turn it off, they would be positioned just right to be blasted by the other ray as their action turned it on.

I was highly pleased with this arrangement. Ayorians might still be trapped, but it was not as likely. And it was almost certain that investigating Tepen would be. With heightened enthusiasm, I followed behind the Tepen, resetting every one of the fourteen traps they visited. Sooner or later they would begin to suspect my presence. But I was determined to put fear into

them while they were learning!

The rain had ceased several days earlier. While I was not entirely comfortable, I was not cold and wet as before.

The three Tepen approached their home valley late in the afternoon, moving as quickly as their mechanical devices would allow. One Tepen trailed far behind the others, beyond their hearing distance. I leaped upon his suit, grasping it tightly with both arms and legs. I struck first at the long distance radio message wire, breaking it off while my legs clung to his cold, metallic coating. My weight prevented it from moving.

Reaching for jungle vines, I quickly tied the waving appendages of the struggling Tepen, hoisted him to my shoulder and ran into the jungle, away from the village, faster than any Tepen could follow, until I felt myself to be sufficiently far away. Then I put the Tepen down for a careful surveillance of every feature of his suit. I ignored the items which were familiar to me and broke all those which were unfamiliar. Once sure that no traps could remain hidden in these features, I teleported both of us to a distant spot.

Interrogation of this prisoner went swiftly. I drew a design of the village on the jungle floor and asked for the function and purpose of every building. Though the Tep-

en did not give me proper answers at first, several days of starvation brought truthful statements.

I learned the village was one of several hundred scattered around the planet's surface, each having the chief function of trapping the Ayor. I learned the purpose of each metal mound — which building was their laboratory, which was their resting quarters and which was their long-distance communications center. I knew where the source of their energy was located. And, I believed, I now knew how to destroy their villages safely.

But if I could teleport only forty miles per jump, how long would it take me, Spork the moron, to find several hundred villages scattered across the complete planet? Also, how could I handle their citadel village, where sat their ruler — the one for which most of the Ayor "delicacies" were being collected? At, say, fifty Tepen per village, two hundred villages made only ten thousand Tepen, I could hope to destroy one by one. I would still be facing ninety thousand at the other main center!

I continued surveillance of the village, harrassing its members while puzzling over my extra twinning problem. Obviously I needed Ayorian assistance. Equally obviously, the other Ayor needed to help themselves; for, even should I be successful in my campaign against Tepen, Ayors were still un-

trained to the art of self-preservation. What of the next unpredictable obstacle in their racial progress?

The next captured Tepen taught me about planetary maps and described how Tepen travel swiftly from city to city merely by stepping into the grid of one of the little metal mounds. It looked and sounded very much like a kind of slow, mechanically induced teleportation device. This Tepen started the idea which slowly percolated upward to my consciousness.

There were exactly forty-two members in the village. If I could close off their transportation door as well as their means of long-distance communication, I believed the village would be mine.

V

Late that night I dressed myself in one of their mechanical suits and slowly made my way to the communication center. I inspected everything very carefully for traps before teleporting chunks of instrument, far away in the jungle. Except for a slight tinkling of certain materials as my mental shearing cut through the equipment, all was yet quiet.

I worked my way just as carefully near their transportation door where, in the dark, my infra-red presence would look to any watching Tepen as though I were another

Tepen. Any close inspection would certainly give me away, however, so I depended on their habit of nightly sleep.

Again I carefully inspected the transportation device for Tepen traps. Finding none, I also teleported part of this assemblage away from the village.

Neither communicator nor door were any longer operational. I should now find exactly forty-two helpless, or near helpless, sleeping Tepen.

I quietly counted their floating figures. Yes, there were exactly forty-two floating figures. I unlimbered one of their death rays and sprayed its beam slowly across the awaking figures. Deliberately missing one of them, I watched as it rushed past me through the doorway.

The forty-one dead Tepen were no longer a threat. As the escaping Tepen ran first to the Transporter, then to the communicator, I teleported out of the mechanical suit, keeping it afloat and active-looking with my indirect faculties and directing it to follow the Tepen overtly while I followed secretly.

The stage of damage found on both the communicator and transporter gave the remaining Tepen its clue to my nature—at least I hoped so. It headed from the useless communicator directly to the laboratory, with my empty suit trailing behind.

I made the mechanical appendage on the suit appear to open the door and follow it, as my mass sensing extended throughout the area sensing his every move.

It reached for a bulky device, swiveling it around to face the trailing suit. As soon as I sensed his appendage reach for the "on" switch, in rapid sequence I mentally shoved the empty suit forward to distract its attention, teleported a large chunk of wall away from the building's side for my own entry, clamped mental energy on the Tepen's appendage to keep it from activating the bulky weapon and, with my muscles, jumped through the open hole to its side.

The creature was completely surprised. My muscles were more than sufficient match for his mechanical linkages. Furthermore, if needed, I was now free to use my indirect faculties without fear of traps.

Once it was tightly tied with metallic cords I turned with anticipation toward the bulky object of my search—a device which intuitive reasoning, alone, told me must exist.

It was nearly twice as large as me and nearly exceeded the limit of mass which my mind could transport. Its barrel-shaped body was linked by cables to a square box, with the usual switches.

I reached out with my mind beyond the village to find a Cien and

(continued on page 151)

IF ... AND WHEN

by LESTER DEL REY

Such stuff as dreams are made on

The average man probably does not remember too much of what he dreams, and that may be a good thing. Aside from nightmares — often based on some standard form of total helplessness or estrangement — most dreams don't leave a vivid impression because there really isn't enough interesting material in them to be worth remembering. Even nightmares depend on emotional rather than intellectual interest, as a rule.

Apparently the human mind spends a great deal of time in sleep in dreams, many of such low intensity that they aren't remembered at all. Tests have indicated that this activity is far from useless, however; a man who is interrupted whenever his brain pattern shows dreaming to be taking place gets very little real rest out of his sleep. And if he is prevented from dream-

ing for several nights, he becomes disoriented to a large degree, even though he seems to sleep enough.

Apparently the memory gets loaded down with assorted bits of garbage and random associations during the day, and dreams act as the mental garbage collector; the useless material is dumped. But the sleeping mind can't afford to clear itself without some care, so samples are played back and examined.

It seems a shame, however, to think of all that time spent in dreaming with so little obvious reward in enjoyment. We know that a dream can be an interesting experience. Now and then, one with some stronger angle will apparently trigger the sleeping mind to build some kind of a story around it, and the personal sense of involvement makes it seem far better than it probably is.

A few people are lucky enough to dream mostly in stories—so far as they can remember. I've known a few who could be waked up and go back to sleep deliberately to finish their dreams. And I've talked to a couple beside myself who have caught their minds delaying a dream until they could replot it, and then finishing it in the improved version, without waking up. Probably that happens mostly to writers, who spend a fair amount of waking time re-plotting basic story ideas.

Andre Norton is obviously touching on a matter dear to our wishes with her expert dreamer who can control all of a dream (supposedly) and supply this well-developed story as a dream to another. Obviously, if we could do it only from one mind to another, it would be as expensive as she indicates—limited only to the filthy rich.

Others have suggested taping or broadcasting dreams. If there were some way to program a better grade of dreams for most sleepers, it should be even better than television, and save the apparent waste of several hours we now spend in sleep. Of course, someone would probably figure out how to add commercials, but most roses have thorns somewhere.

Most of these stories in science fiction deal with entertainment.

But there is no reason why it shouldn't serve a serious purpose. A dream done by a man who could really play the piano might be very helpful to the dreamer who hasn't time for steady practice; a dream of Valley Forge could give a sense of the cold and misery that no movie could convey to a history student.

So far, nobody has been able to do much to influence dreams, beyond such crude things as dropping an object with a loud crash—which sometimes produces a dream of some random kind around the noise.

But dreams are an intrinsic part of sleep— as even careful study of a dog or cat will show. As such, they must be tied into the general mysteries that surround the whole matter of sleeping.

Here science has developed a wrinkle that isn't exactly new, but is finding new interest through better means of applying it. This was once called electronarcosis, but now goes under the simpler term of electrosleep. It's a fairly old idea, first developed by a French scientist named Leduc near the turn of the century.

Today, the Russians seem to have gained the lead in this field, using far more sophisticated equipment than was possible until recently. American scientists are just picking up the idea and experimenting with it.

The basic idea is to make the brain somnolent through "negative"

stimulation with pulsing electric current. Here modern electronics has provided us with excellent means of adjusting voltage, amperage and frequency, as well as the pulse shape.

The brain generates a number of pulses of its own. One of these, known as the alpha rhythm, is always strongest and most regular during sleep. Scientists working with electrosleep usually use this alpha rhythm as a model, preferably while studying the alpha rhythm of the subject to be put to sleep.

First treatments last for about half an hour, increasing gradually up to three hours, after which the subject is allowed to sleep normally. Many cases of insomnia can be cured with a dozen or so sessions, though more stubborn cases may take the course over again later for several times.

The sleep induced seems to be normal, restful sleep, with none of the undesirable side effects that accompany most chemical means of causing sleep; there is no dozey feeling on awakening, nor is sleep unduly prolonged beyond the normal, healthy period.

Good results have also been achieved in some cases in treating schizophrenia. One theory to account for this psychosis is that the brain is overstimulated (by fear, worry, habit, etc.) until it is suffering from overexhaustion — which

makes sleeping more difficult leading to worse exhaustion! The electrosleep machine can break the cycle and give the brain cells a chance for the completed rest needed.

Electrosleep equipment is generally available in Europe, such as the Elektrodorm models in use in Russian and French clinics. But so far they are *not* available for home use — nor should they be. The technique is still experimental, and the possibility for serious and permanent damage does exist without skilled medical supervision.

But it seems probably that in the future, after enough is learned of this, every bedside might have its simplified Elektrodorm — probably with a slot for the patient's own alpha pattern to be inserted. With mass production, the cost of a machine should come down to less than that of a television set — and a black-and-white one, at that.

Maybe by then scientists will also have been able to learn a bit more about sleep and how the brain manages it. They've had very poor success so far in trying to read what goes on with the encephalograph. The location and basic nature of the processes in the brain are almost as much a mystery as ever.

By experimenting with the creation of wave patterns — or the augmenting of them — by electric currents and pulses, it may be possible to learn more. There is no way

to isolate a single type of brain wave from others when reading the signals of the living brain. But we can already isolate any type of signal to be sent *into* the brain, and its effects can then be studied. We've long suspected that the alpha rhythm is the basic clue to our sleep activity; now, by sending such a pattern through electrodes into the brain, we've at least proved a direct relationship.

Most of the other brain patterns are more difficult to pin down than the strong alpha rhythm. Early work with the encephalograph showed a fairly simple series of patterns, but it was often deceptive. The early recording machines had a limited ability to handle higher frequencies, and often smoothed off the sharp peaks of the pulses — they were like a bad tape recorder trying to handle piano music! Modern "high-fidelity" machines have shown that the brain's activity is far more complicated than the early traces indicated.

Here we can again approach things from the other end. If there is a suspicion that certain pulse patterns are involved in the use of speech, they can be experimentally induced and modified, while the subject undergoes a continuous test to determine the effects. This may also have the additional benefit of helping people with aphasia and

other mental difficulties with speech.

Some work has already been done in trying to alter dreams by means of pulsed signals. Speech patterns can be impressed on the wave trains — or series of pulses — just as speech modulation can be impressed on the wave trains of radio signals. So far this work is highly experimental, and no significant results have yet been published, but the beginning of dream shaping and dream creation is already with us.

Andre Norton's dream-linking machine isn't impossible, theoretically, either. We know a great deal about shaping, modifying and amplifying pulses; some of our electronic organs can turn out shaped pulses of fantastic complexity to produce the ready waveform of a clarinet or the effects of a whole percussion section going at once — all from the electronic manipulation of the most simple pure tones.

It seems entirely possible today to take the brain patterns of one person and impress them on the brain of a second individual, particularly if the recipient is sleeping, without interference from signals from his sensory organs. A high-fidelity encephalograph can pick up the brain patterns of the sender and impress them on a train of pulses being sent through something like the Elektrodorm to the mind of the recipient. It can be done with animals as well as men for

early experiments; such things as a pecking movement from a sending chicken to a receiving one could be easily detected, at least. There have been reports of such efforts to establish "wired telepathy" reported previously, but I've yet to see evidence of adequate equipment being used, as should be the case now.

Almost certainly there is going to be trouble in trying to make the pattern of one mind fit another. The signal from the sender will probably have to be modified considerably before it can be effective. But with sufficient study and even today's computers, this difficulty can surely be overcome. Nobody can guarantee that there will be any clear transfer of thoughts — though that remains a possibility — but there is a good chance that at least certain basic mental activities can be impressed on one brain from another.

The machine to do this is, of course, exactly what Andre Norton describes briefly in her story. It is interesting to note that she limits it generally to one person to make dreams and another to receive them — as would be the case where some computer-controlled modification was needed to make the dreamer's patterns fit the recipient mind.

Like most "inventions in the egg", this presents all sorts of

potential benefits and problems — and most of them are ones we can't begin to guess accurately until the invention reaches common usage. It's too valuable a research and teaching tool to be wasted on entertainment, for instance; so was television, which was constantly being written up as a means to inform and instruct — until the entertainment moguls made it a household commodity.

The most obvious danger is the transfer of thought patterns that somehow deform the recipient's own thoughts (except where that is the therapeutic goal). Will a man who wants to learn to appreciate music from the mind of a great musician pick up such things as a terror of insects — or some ugly racial prejudice he didn't have before? Or will use of the device weaken his own personality and establish a mere shadow of another mind in his head? This may be a serious problem because the impressed pulses can be made much stronger than the natural ones.

I keep wondering, however, if dream-spinning will go through the phases that so often hit out ancient attempts to share our dreams — will there be a "new wave" among the dream makers? Or will there be "adult" dreams restricted to those over sixteen?

Where do you draw the line between dreams and nightmares?

END

THE LIGHT BEARER

by WILLIAM M. LEE

*Never mix pepper with nerve drugs
— or there'll be the devil to pay!*

The Coventry Drug Company, as you are probably aware has one of the largest research departments in the business, with some hundreds of chemists, pharmacologists and others of related skills, all dedicated to the discovery of new and better, but conceivably more costly, drugs. Quite a few echelons from the top of this great organization was an unhappy young man named Peter Coghill.

Five years earlier Pete Coghill, in somewhat erratic pursuit of his Ph.D., had been notably extroverted, given to beer guzzling, ball games and dates with good looking wenches. He liked everyone around him and was liked in turn. Though

not exactly anybody's genius, he gave promise of becoming a pretty good biochemist and in a general sort of way he looked forward to a university career. This was not to be.

The formidable Professor Metz assigned him a problem, the nature of which is neither here nor there. It was a neat enough problem, one on which Metz had already worked and published. Young Coghill was expected to do no more than fill in some detail. Injudiciously, Coghill undertook a new approach and came up with findings which completely (and beyond dispute) invalidated the great man's earlier work.

If Peter had been a few years

wiser, or if he had paused to consider the possible consequences, he would have found a way to save face for Professor Metz. Instead he discussed his findings freely and gleefully around the Department. Metz had perforce to admit his error, and, indeed, encourage Coghill to make the work a part of his thesis; but naturally he was bitter about it and began, as did some of his faculty cronies, to avoid seeing Coghill when they passed in a corridor.

Just after Peter was awarded his doctorate, Professor Metz died of a broken heart, perhaps complicated by a kidney ailment, and the atmosphere became so chilling that Peter abandoned his plans for an academic career and went to work for industry.

His first assignment with Coventry had to do with a drug called Neonexal, which had been passed by the Food and Drug Administration and was about to be put on the market. Peter was responsible in large part for the unwelcome discovery that occasional lots of the drug could cause a skin irritation which, while not serious, was unsightly and a likely basis for lawsuits. So Neonexal was held up for nearly a year while some changes were made to eliminate its allergic properties; and one senior research man most unfairly blamed Peter Coghill for making an issue of a trivial deficiency.

In the following year he discovered three errors, one of them serious, on the parts of colleagues, and he hadn't a friend left in the entire organization. Top management began to consider him an insurance policy against mistakes and oversights and gave him the task of reviewing the reports of many of his co-workers. It took most of his days and left nearly no time for constructive work of his own.

Being an insurance policy had proved at first to be unrewarding. Little by little, however, Peter Coghill was adapting to his job, coming to value a discovered error as an accomplishment in itself and even savoring the act of pouncing on the perpetrator. He was in the course, that is, of becoming a thoroughly unpleasant character.

His evenings provided little relief from the increasing loneliness of his days. The good looking wenches he had known in college seemed mostly to be married and he had mislaid the facility to locate new recruits. Most nights he drank a couple of beers in the corner tavern and retreated to his apartment with the worthy but unexciting excuse of keeping up with the scientific journals.

One day near the beginning of his fifth year with Coventry, Dr. Coghill sat alone in his office-laboratory, considering whether to eat lunch first or to read Dr. Brock's

monthly report. He decided to do them together. Brock was in the course of synthesizing compounds related to LSD — not the easy ones, the derivatives of lysergic acid itself, but structures in which the parent substance was subtly altered in one way or another.

This is not to say that Coventry wasn't just as aware as any other responsible group of the dangers of LSD. Their medical staff knew all too much about the psychoses, the suicides, the accidental deaths and the crowd of pimply fizz heads which followed in its wake. Nobody wanted another LSD or anything like it; but it was much too valuable a clue to the biochemistry of the brain to be ignored. So Brock was synthesizing analogs, and other people were testing them in mice and rabbits and cats and monkeys, and Peter Coghill picked up his red pencil, all ready to find a good juicy mistake.

Peter had given up going to the company cafeteria. It was no fun always to eat alone at a table for six. Most days he put together a lunch of sorts before leaving his apartment and, along with a few journals, his attache case would usually contain a couple of sandwiches and a thermos of coffee.

Today his fare included a hard-boiled egg, and he performed the neat trick of chipping the shell off cleanly without once looking at it. He read:

"The free base (422-4) obtained from the hydrochloride with silver oxide had a strong blue color. MP 181-182°."

"Now why the hell," said Peter aloud, "would it have a strong blue color?" He flipped back a page to look again at the structure, sensing the possibility of an error.

Resting in his in-basket was a collection of vials, each containing a minute sample of one of the experimental chemicals of current interest. Coventry circulated these in the hope, not often realized, that they might stimulate someone to serendipitous thought. Sure enough, there was Brock's 422-4, along with several others of the series. The sample was blue, no question of that, even though it was a fine powder. Very odd. No reason at all for it to be colored.

Carefully Peter spilled a little heap of the blue dust on a sheet of paper and even more carefully sniffed it. Odorless. He returned to his reading and his lunch. He found nothing to red pencil and very little to give him pause up to the last page, when the room shook.

His first thought was that an explosion had occurred in one of the nearby rooms, and he shot out of his own laboratory and stood peering up and down the empty corridor. There was no sound or sign of excitement. No alarm bells clanged. It could have been a very small

earthquake, he told himself. Leaving the door open, he went back to his desk and sat down with a thud on a chair that had suddenly become an inch higher than usual. Peter closed his eyes, then opened them and looked at the white pad that should have had a small heap of blue powder on it. The powder was gone, or very nearly. Next to the pad was another piece of paper, once folded neatly, now open. It bore a scatter of salt and pepper. There were crumbs of hard boiled egg on both sheets. He stared silently at the evidence and wondered what he had just done to himself.

Structures like this one (to the extent that you could infer such things) weren't likely to be violently toxic, but they were very likely indeed to produce distortions of the mind or senses; some of them damned unpleasant. Peter knew this from reading and observing, not from personal experience. By habit he shied away from pill taking and had never been tempted to that practice of some biochemists to try things on themselves. The knowledge that he was now absorbing into his bloodstream a compound of totally unknown properties was distinctly discomfoting.

The room shook again, quite sharply this time, and he was on the point of rising to see whether anything on the laboratory benches was in danger of falling off, but re-

minded himself that these tremors were subjective and unreal. So, of course, was the slow tilt which he was now perceiving — a few degrees to the right, back to normal, then a few more degrees. He remembered reading about a hoped-for morphine substitute which not only slanted the room, but convinced several experimental subjects that they were hanging from the ceiling.

His own laboratory came gradually to rest about fifteen degrees to starboard. Not a bad angle at all. The room looked rather nice that way. He wondered whether the entire Coventry Tower Building pointed slanting toward the sky, and told himself not to be vainglorious. Where the hell had that word come from? He really ought to let somebody know, so he dialed Dr. Brock who more than anybody should be interested in 422-4. There was no answer. The wall clock told him it was a quarter after. Everybody would be at lunch. He tried Dr. Kinnison. No answer. Rather unwillingly he dialed the infirmary, but hung up before they answered.

So okay, he would ride it out alone. Lock the door, that came first. Against the rules to lock a lab door during working hours. Pfui. He wasn't working. He bent one leg against the tilt and made it to the door gracefully and with some aplomb. The latch made a satisfying snick, though his fingers weren't

working quite right. Thurber had said something about nouns showing up in the past tense; that his fingers were becoming fungers. How neatly Thurber stated things.

Back at his desk with notebook open and pen poised, he sat prepared for all things to be said or left unsaid. His clothes had tingled as he walked, which must be noted, and so he wrote (back-hand to compensate for the tilt), "garments do tingle."

The door opened and Dr. Hugo Carreford walked into the room.

That he had entered through a just-locked door was less surprising than the visitor's identity. Peter had once heard Dr. Carreford make the keynote address at a very important meeting, had read several of his papers and had seen his picture many times. Carreford was an accepted authority in half a dozen learned fields, a brilliant teacher, an advisor to presidents, in short the prototype and paragon of scholars. Peter leaped to his feet, pawing the air only a little to correct his balance. Perhaps in the presence of so great a man the aberrant angles were correcting themselves. In any case the tilted room became unnoticeable.

"Please," said Carreford, and waved a bony hand in typical gesture. "Please, Dr. Coghill, do sit down. Relax. You make me feel my visit is somehow dismaying. There, I'll take this lab stool. Time was,

you know, when my rump was better contoured to the lab stool than the easy chair. I see that you smoke, so I'll take the liberty."

Peter watched rather numbly as his visitor fitted a cigarette to the long black holder which had become a Carreford trademark. He found his voice.

"To what am I indebted . . . ?" he began, then realized how utterly silly the question sounded, and let it trail off.

Carreford blew a plume of smoke toward the ceiling and smiled, the corners of his mouth turning up till he looked like a sculptured satyr.

"Yes indeed, a natural question, which I can and shall answer. First let me say that my appearance here, though made at some personal inconvenience, is a pleasure. One is always happy to meet a fellow who is due to accomplish great things."

"Hah!" said Peter.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Hah!" Peter repeated with fervency. "I know just what accomplishments I'm likely to make; tearing apart work that somebody else has done. That's what. And you know it, too."

Carreford raised bushy eyebrows in astonishment. "I do?"

"Of course. For a minute I forgot I was doped up with a hallucinating agent. You walked in through a locked door, which should have been a tip-off, but I'm

not thinking too clearly. Besides, you do look real, you know."

"Thank you," Carreford said drily. "It's reassuring to be told. As a realistic hallucination, then, I should know what you know. Is that it? Let me assure you, the situation is not quite that simple. You won't mind, perhaps, if I ask you some questions?"

Peter's laugh held a note of hysteria. "This is asinine. It's one thing to see a hallucination, something else to debate with it about its reality. How screwed up can you get? So go ahead and ask your questions."

"You have already answered a first and most important question. It required, you see, a rather specific concatenation of circumstances to bring me here; the drugs, that is, your character and your need."

Peter lost the thread of this remark and took to staring around the laboratory. The effects of the 422-4 were now much more interesting than alarming, and the concern with which he had viewed his role as an unwitting guinea pig had disappeared.

"Sam Brock," he remarked aloud, "is going to be very much interested. The light in the room seems to have increased not less than three-fold." In a mental aside he noted his casual use of the unfamiliar expression. "Three, four or five-fold. Dazzling. The walls are

lacy and light permeable. Yonder venetian blind has fulfilled itself with crackling streamers of blue. In fact, you're the only thing here that looks solid, and you're a phantasm. I could walk right through you."

"Please," said Dr. Carreford, "don't try it, and I'd really rather you stopped peering at me as though trying to see through. My interior is, after all, rather personal. But now to business. You are unhappy because you find yourself cast as a critic of the scientific drama rather than an actor."

"Who said I was unhappy?"

"You are. Let us not belabor the point. You want greatly to be an originator, an innovator, a creative thinker, which, in fact, you must be. My kind of assignment, you know."

Peter shook his head. "Are you telling me that you've been assigned to visit me to discuss my creativeness?"

"Approximately that, yes."

"Who assigned you?"

Carreford gestured vaguely. "Well, um, the Committee, shall we say?"

"Say it if you wish. You're a preposterous hallucination. Who's on the Committee?"

"Different people, different people. Albert, of course, and Niels, Sir Humphrey. Some others. Lucifer is the permanent chairman."

"Lucifer! You're an emissary from the devil?"

The cigarette holder waggled in a manner suggesting annoyance, and left a zigzag of orange light in its wake. "Now, please, young man, let's not fall into that ancient error. Lucifer is the light bearer and was once an angel of excellent character. He fell, however, from heaven as a result of certain misdemeanors. Someday these will be expunged from the books, but in the long meanwhile he must serve on some millions of committees.

"I thought Lucifer was one of the names of Satan."

"There is considerable confusion in the literature, I must admit. Let us consider him, notwithstanding, as a bearer of light. On this brief errand, my visit to you, such is assuredly my mission. To bear some enlightenment, that is. Now, young Dr. Coghill, I ask you, what is your attitude toward a mistake? Do you regard it as a challenge?"

"What do you mean?"

Dr. Carreford wreathed himself in silvery smoke. His cigarette had grown no shorter and now appeared to be a super king size. "I'll explain. I do in fact know something of your history. Early in your career you detected an error on the part of one Professor Metz. Metz, as I recall, had the manners of an ill-natured peacock, but he was an able scientist and he didn't deserve what you did to him."

"But he was wrong."

"Of course he was wrong. But if you and he together had reviewed discrepancies between your findings, a more significant conclusion would have been reached. Why is 422 blue — those few micrograms you swallowed?"

"Probably contaminated. What's that got to do with anything?"

"I've no notion," Carreford said. "It may be quite unimportant. But once upon a time somebody found some blue specks in a batch of phthalic anhydride, and a new dye industry was born. When you saw that blue color you were startled. You said, I believe, 'why the hell?' Now you dismiss it as an unknown contaminant. Um. Let us get back to the matter of mistakes."

Peter grimaced. "I wish I could stop finding them."

"You never will," Carreford told him. "You never will. You have a quick eye and a keen analytical sense. But you must never again turn a mistake to anybody's disadvantage. That's the easy part of my advice. But mark this well! What may at first seem a mistake may prove, if one is lucky, to be a wild fact."

"A what?"

"A wild fact. The point that lies off the curve, the analysis that adds to a hundred and five percent, the bacterial broth that unexplainably begins to foam, the hint of an odor where there should be none. Faced with what is difficult to explain,

you, my young friend, are given to deducing a mistake, and you may often be right. But make that deduction as a last resort, if you please. Hold the belief, for a time anyway, that your odd datum may be right, even if that requires you to sacrifice some things you know and cherish. Examine your wild facts forward and backward, upside down and inside out, and one of these days you'll be known as an original thinker."

"Is that how you did it?" Peter Coghill inquired.

Carreford grinned and looked alarmingly satanic for a moment. "So now you ask the old phantasm how he, as Hugo Carreford, achieved success. Well, there are a variety of approaches to recognition, but those of us who possess creativity — I include both of us, naturally — seem to display the trait at an early age. You, for example, are reported to have built a seismograph of sorts before you'd ever heard of such an instrument, and succeeded in detecting trucks as they passed a block away."

"Aha," said Peter, "oho. That proves it. You're a figment of my imagination, otherwise you couldn't remember what I've almost forgotten. On the other hand —" Peter held up his left hand and regarded it surprisedly, since it appeared to be backward. " — on the other hand, you're giving me some good

advice — well anyway, advice — which strongly suggests that you want something from me in return. So-o-o-o." The sound of the last word pleased him and he continued it for some time until the air was quite full of little round O's.

"So?" Carreford prompted.

"So you must be an emissary of the devil."

"Lucifer, as I told you."

"Lucifer, the devil, Satan, Beelzebub. You're trying to buy my soul."

Carreford chuckled, seeming in high good humor. "And what is your soul, my dear Dr. Coghill? As a biochemist of course you must have a theory. Would it be a ductless gland, a hormone perhaps, a peculiar sequence in a hidden helix of DNA? An enzyme? You fellows invent a new enzyme every time you want to explain a biological event. Well, whatever your soul happens to be, I don't really want it, and neither does the Committee."

"Then what do you want?"

"Just to help you get back on the course of a career from which you have been straying."

"For a hallucination, you've been making some statements which sound uncommonly sensible. I wonder if I'll remember it later. Wait."

He seized his pen and wrote in an ungainly scrawl. When he looked up Dr. Carreford had become rather dim.

"I can so," said Peter suddenly.

"Can what?"

"See through you. No detail, but I can see the doorknob about where your liver should be."

"Ah, yes. I'm about to depart and this is the easiest way. I am, at the moment, attending a conference on education in Rome and I should be getting back. Somebody might say something intelligent, you know. Concerning my advice. If you decide to act on it, you may — just possibly — incur a slight obligation. Nothing to do with souls."

"Then what?" Peter asked.

"You might be asked to go on an errand someday. An errand similar to this. Nothing arduous, but you do get into some of the damndest conversations. One last word. Don't mix pepper with drugs likely to have a central nervous system effect. Capsicum is frequently synergistic."

With that the figure dimmed still further until it was barely visible, then it disappeared with a small popping sound. After a minute Peter rose and prowled the laboratory, navigating now without difficulty. Feeling foolish, he waved his arm through the air over the lab stool. Naturally there was nothing, nothing beyond a faint unfamiliar fragrance of Turkish tobacco.

"Well," said Peter; then, after some thought, "Well." The clock

stood at one ten, but he had not perceived the passing of nearly an hour. To all intents and purposes then, he had been asleep, and he found himself still overpoweringly sleepy. He slumped into his chair, elevated his feet to the desk and slept dreamlessly until nearly five o'clock.

The following day, with no evident aftereffects from his encounter with 422, he was inclined to smile at his recollections, already becoming a little hazy. He gave a much abbreviated account to Dr. Brock. In due course, 422-4 was tested in mice for toxicity and in cats for behavioral effects. It proved to be quite inactive and was presently abandoned in favor of other, more promising structures.

At no time during the next year did anyone become aware of any change in Dr. Coghill's character, or realize that their attitudes toward him were changing little by little. By the end of that time, however, his comments on programs were being sought out, because so often he had something helpful to suggest. Let's kick it around with Pete, became a frequent expression and his table in the cafeteria was the center of a lot of productive discussions.

In later years, as we all know, Dr. Coghill accomplished much. But his first major accomplishment was in some respects one of the most interesting. It began not long after his marriage to an exceedingly good

looking wench who thought that biochemistry was an odd way for a grown man to make a living... But she liked to cook, she liked most of his friends and she knew how to listen. They got along fine.

This particular thing started one day when he'd gone into one of the animal labs to share a coffee break with Joe Polanetsky. Joe was standing before a collection of white rats, scribbling notations on a clip board. There was a score or more of the rats, each quartered in a separate cage. They were largely comatose.

"Here's your coffee," said Peter. "What are you doing with those?"

"They're for Doc Siever," Joe said. "For his anti-shock drug work. Once a week I've been putting a collection of rats into mild shock, then he tries to bring them out of it."

"How do you do it?"

"Put rats into shock? Various ways. These got a series of electric shocks ranging from barely perceptible up to fairly unpleasant, along with lights and noises. Vary the timing and the sequence. After a while poor old rattus gets to the point he doesn't know what's going to happen next and he doesn't much care. He turns pale, ceases to wiggle his whiskers and so on."

"What about number five?" Peter asked. "That one. He looks pretty frisky. Held out as a control?"

"Nope. He's had the treatment, too. Sometimes you get rats that don't give up. At least they don't go into shock in up to twice the usual period."

Peter went over and watched number five thoughtfully. "Mind if I tickle him?"

Joe looked severe. "If you enjoy tickling rats, you may. I don't know what Freud would have made of it."

Peter lifted the lid and prodded number five with a cautious forefinger. Number five looked interested.

"Would Siever let me have him, do you think?"

"He's no use to Siever. I'll put him back in stock, marked for you. What do you want to do with him?"

"I don't know. Do these resistant rats come in both sexes?"

"Never noticed."

"How many do you get?"

"One in a couple hundred, maybe."

"Save me some more, will you?"

"Sure enough."

Polanetsky called him on the phone a month or so later. "I've got six. Four of them are females. If you still want them, you owe me a drink."

"I do," Peter said, and went to see Helen Markley, the geneticist. He still had no idea what he was going to do with them, but he wanted to know the pattern of inheritability of the resistance.

While Helen was finding this out — purely as a favor, since there was no official project on the books — Peter Coghill began to look for biochemical variations in his rats and Polanetsky bootlegged some behavioral studies. These were interesting. The rats which resisted shock also learned mazes more rapidly than their fellows and took longer to forget them. By choice they ate a little more heavily and, in the jiggle cages, showed higher than normal activity. Peter took to carrying one of them in his side coat pocket, and several times carried him home. Let it be said for Susan Coghill that, after some initial reservation, she became quite fond of one exceptionally intelligent rat called Hugo.

The search for biochemical variations proved, however, to present difficulties. The Coventry management tolerated, and to a degree encouraged, research bootlegging, but they had about reached the point of clamping down on any further work on shock-resistant rats, when Peter received from Analytical Department this note, still unofficial and correspondingly informal:

"We reanalyzed the nerve fibre extract. The second cut was trimethyl hydroxyethylphosphonium chloride. Elemental analysis is damn near on the nose. Confirmed by titration and IR. If you want an NMR, you'll have to get a topside blessing."

Carried by Peter to the Director's office, this brief report had immediate impact, and before the end of the working day he had received his topside blessing, an allocation of funds and two new assistants.

Susan heard him banging around in the kitchen.

"What's up?" she called.

"Hugo and I are going to have a martini," he shouted back, then added generously, "You may have one, too."

"Well, thanks. Did you get a raise?"

"No, nothing like that. This is important."

It must be recorded that Hugo did not like his first taste of martini. Deplorable, but one can't expect too much of a rat.

"OK," Susan said presently. "Settle down and tell me about it. Easy words only, remember."

"Very good," said Peter. "First of all, you recall that Hugo and a few of his cousins are very superior rats."

"How could I forget it?"

"Right. And we're beginning — Helen Markley is — to be able to breed this quality into them. But we hadn't found out why they were the way they are. Not until today. Not until today. We had dissected out some nerve fibres and analyzed them six ways from Sunday, but we kept missing it.

"So-o. In our nerves — yours and mine — there's a material called acetylcholine. It can come apart and go together again very rapidly like an on-off switch, and this effect causes impulses to travel along the nerve. Okay? Well, choline consists of a central nitrogen atom with three methyl groups and a hydroxethyl group attached to it."

"Hydroxethyl group. Sort of like alcohol?"

"Sort of. So our nerves contain this choline and so do rats' nerves, including Hugo's. Only, as we found out today, his contain something else, too, in a very small quantity. It's a central atom of phosphorus with three methyl and one hydroxethyl group attached. You see? The same thing except for the central atom."

"I guess I see."

"Of course you do. The molecules aren't exactly the same shape, but they should have the same function in the body, almost certainly."

"And this is important? Is this why we're having martinis?"

"Right. Heres the rest of the picture. Hugo is smarter and healthier and has a finer moral character than other rats. Haven't you, Hugo? Somewhere among the branches of his family tree he learned to synthesize this phosphorous compound and how to use it, along with choline, to carry nerve impulses. Presumably it's a little more efficient than choline, and this

accounts for his smartness although there isn't yet any solid evidence for that presumption. I'm making an inference. Right?

"So okay. Humans, at least so far as we know, haven't learned to synthesize this compound. Question: If we provide it, say by injection, can human nerves learn how to use it? Will it increase human abilities to resist shock and to think better and to find our way through our own frightening mazes? This is speculation, of course. Lots of work still to be done. In the meanwhile you had better not mention it."

"Mention it?" said Susan. "I can't even remember it."

This, then, was only the first of a number of important developments in medicine which are credited to Dr. Coghill. You must have seen his picture in *Time* quite recently, when he was given another honorary doctorate in California.

He travels a good deal these days and makes a lot of important speeches.

Not long ago Peter and Susan were in Paris, he to attend an international conference, she to pick up a few dresses. Late one afternoon they came back to their hotel and who should Peter see but Dr. Hugo Carreford sitting in the lounge with the American ambassador.

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"Let's walk over this way," he said to Susan. That's Dr. Carreford over there, and I'd like to get a good look at him."

They would have walked past, looking as casual as possible, except that Carreford rose and waved his cigarette holder in greeting. "Peter," he called, "Peter Coghill. So good to see you again. Ambassador, I'd like you to meet Dr. Coghill and — I presume — Mrs. Coghill. How nice that you could come along to Paris."

Peter shook hands numbly and, unable to find words, said nothing.

Dr. Carreford filled the gap.

"This young man, Ambassador, is the fellow who fathered the drug that stimulates learning and has turned our whole academic world topsy turvy. He also has the distinction, if you can call it that, of having a strain of white rats named after him

"I do trust, Peter, that you have not been mixing pepper with any of your experimental products. Capsicum, you know, has some odd synergistic effects. Don't look so baffled, Mrs. Coghill. Just a private joke of ours."

That was four months ago, and Peter Coghill hasn't heard a word from the Committee.

Not yet.

END



AUTHORGRAPHS :

An Interview
with
Jack Williamson

I must have started writing science fiction in 1926, or thereabouts. A little bit earlier I'd read Mark Twain's *Connecticut Yankee* and been thrilled by it and tried to write a sort of imitation of it called *The Castle of the Seven Gates*. I used up all my material on the first page.

When Hugo Gernsback's *Amazing Stories* came out, which was in 1926, this was exciting to me. Earlier I'd thought about science, hoped to be a scientist, saw no real opportunity; but at least I was interested in science. And when I discovered science fiction, why here was something I could do about it, I suppose. I started writing science-fiction stories in my spare time, sending those I could finish to Gernsback. And in '28 he published one of them, called *The Metal Man*.

After I'd been writing for a while I got acquainted with Edmond Hamilton through Jerry Siegel, the inventor of *Superman*, who'd been corresponding with Ed and with me. I met Ed for the first time in a



hotel in St. Paul, Minnesota. We had originally planned to buy a houseboat and drift down the Mississippi River. The houseboat idea didn't work out, so we got an outboard motorboat and went down the river, camping on the banks the first part of the trip, then later staying in YMCA's and so forth at night. Finally, when the outboard motor wore out, we sold the boat and went on down the river on the *Tennessee Belle*, which was one of the last of the old riverboats. The trip on that was something like a chapter out of Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi*. Ed and I

talked about science fiction, and the captains on the boat talked about old days on the river.

Mostly I've never done anything else but write science fiction. I was an Air Force weatherman for about three years, 1942 to 1945; and lately, for the last dozen years, I've been edging back into the academic field.

In my Army service, when I went to Fort Bliss for induction, and got shipped to Chanute Field, I had three choices of what I wanted to do when I got in. I put down first "glider pilot" — thank the Lord I didn't become a glider pilot! — and second "intelligence" and third "weather". I got to be a weatherman. I was very happy about it. I spent eleven weeks at Chanute Field learning to be a weather observer, and six months in the field practicing weather observation — that is, taking observations, plotting maps and so forth — and went back to forecasting school at Chanute Field for twenty-two weeks. I came out as a weather forecaster and spent fifteen months at Hobbs, New Mexico forecasting the weather for a four-engine pilot training school flying B-17's. Finally, in 1945, I went overseas to the Southwest Pacific and briefly had a try at forecasting tropical weather for the Marine air groups that were heckling the Japanese in the Northern Solomons.

I had started out to become a

chemist. But when I got into chemistry, it began to look like sort of drudgery. Physics turned out to be far more interesting. I suppose if I could have been a scientist, I should have liked to be a theoretical physicist, or an astronomer. I'm still very much interested in such branches of science.

I had dropped out of college after three years. I entered college first in 1928; and I got my bachelor's and master's degrees in 1957 — after a lapse of 29 years, I believe it is. I got my Ph.D. in 1964. Since 1960 I've been teaching English at Eastern New Mexico University, and I've been writing science fiction in the summers, since I finished my doctoral dissertation. That was: *H. G. Wells: A Critical Progress*, my idea being that there is an unfair stereotype of Wells as a sort of materialistic Utopian who believed that machinery and science and progress could solve all our problems. My thesis in this is that Wells had been apprehensive about change from the beginning, afraid of what was going to happen, and that in much of his life — when he was writing *The Outline of History* and *The Science of Life* and his work on economics — he was trying to educate the human race, to make them fit citizens for a World State that he hoped might be the salvation of the race. I think in his latter years he became pessimistic about his education effort — and about

anybody saving the human race.

He was — well, a great man, I think; and the real father of modern science fiction. Most of modern science fiction has been written in patterns that Wells pioneered.

In modern science fiction, the big names that occur to me are Heinlein and Arthur Clarke — and Ray Bradbury, I suppose; it's debatable whether he writes science fiction, but he writes literature. Heinlein and Clarke are two people I like to name because they can see good things happening in the future because science can be used to solve problems and make the world, possibly, better. There are only a few writers you can think of who take this point of view. Most of the best modern science fiction belongs to the dystopian and anti-Utopian school, the school of the early Wells, and Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's 1984. They see nothing good coming out of progress; even if science solves our problems, it destroys us in the process.

At the university, I used to teach a course in writing the short story. Now I have a course in science fiction that is about half appreciation and half writing; most of the students are interested in writing science fiction, and I let them write either critical papers or science-fiction stories. Some of them have been writing some excellent stories; I've been thinking I might publish a class magazine this semester.

AUTHORGRAPHS:

Among the new science-fiction writers, I was very much taken with Delany's *The Einstein Intersection* — written in a dazzling style; a wonderful story with a flavor of its own. Half of the way it reads like fantasy, but it has a disturbing amount of reality in it, also. It's something new and exciting.

I haven't read too much of Ballard. But his story, *The Drowned Giant*, strikes me as a classic. It has a sort of mythological impact to me. Of course, I'm generally a little cool toward the "New Wave". As I understand the New Wave, what it does is essentially to throw out the tested ideas of plot and characterization in favor of radical experiments in language, style and presentation, and most of the so-called "New Wave" things leave me cold. But when you have something like *The Einstein Intersection*, that has believable characters and interesting action, why, it's wonderful.

In the forty or so years I've been writing science fiction, I suppose many writers have influenced me. In the beginning I was a tremendous admirer of A. Merritt. In a way, I still am. But I've recently been looking at some of the old stories that I wrote under Merritt's influence, and they seem to me too flowery, with too many adjectives and too much elaboration of style. What I try to do nowadays is some-

thing leaner and simpler. The influences have been too numerous to mention, I suppose. Now I like the way Hemingway writes. There was a writer named C. E. Scoggins, who used to write for the *Saturday Evening Post*, whose style and way of construction I admired, and attempted to imitate when I was becoming Will Stewart for John Campbell during the war, when he wanted a new name on the contents page of *Astounding*.

Science-fiction writers are pretty much the same as when I first got started, nearly 40 years ago. They're vocal, they're full of ideas that are challenging and interesting to me. They don't agree on anything, and they're likely to disagree explosively. It seems to me that the New Wave writers are a little more pessimistic or soured on the world. It's possible that more writers were more optimistic about the future thirty years ago than they are now; more of them felt that science would do us good, and not so many were convinced that science would do us harm. But they weren't all rosy optimists even then. Wells was pretty pessimistic about the possible futures.

When I was in England, I looked for Wells' country. London has since sprawled out over all of the *War of the Worlds* territory, so it wasn't like Wells had described it. But I got a thrill out of seeing familiar names on street intersec-

tions and so forth. What was countryside when the Martians came is now built up with modern housing.

On that trip, my wife and I flew to Spain, spent a week in Madrid, crossed North Africa to Egypt; we were there for five days, seeing the Pyramids, et cetera. Then we came back through Athens and made some tours to the Greek islands; a few days in Italy, then up across Europe to England. When we were making this part of the trip it was fascinating to me to see the evidences of how civilization was born in the Near East and spread across Europe.

Then, from England, we spent a couple of weeks on a guided tour to Russia. Russia had a sort of science-fictional interest of its own, in that it is a society very much like our Western society, but based on slightly different assumptions — the assumption that Marx was right. This gave it a kind of familiarity with a difference that was poignant, partly because the Russian cities — with the trees in the streets and the absence of motorcars — had a sort of nineteenth-century aspect. So Russia was exciting and a lot of fun; and then we came back to London in time for a science-fiction convention, which sort of finished this tour of the past to the future that began with the Pyramids.

END

IF

TOURISTS WELCOME

by ROGER DEELEY

Some tourists will buy anything!

Police Sergeant Herbert Slocombe was strolling leisurely down Maxcombe Parva High Street. He was an imposing figure this Police Sergeant Herbert Slocombe — tall, perhaps huge is more the word, with a waistline that laughed mockingly at diet sheets, and a pair of feet to put the Queen Mary to shame. Police modernization had spread to most parts of the country, where patrol cars, personal walkie-talkies, helicopters and mobile headquarters were no longer new terms, but progress is slow in some parts of the country, and nowhere more so than in Maxcombe Parva. Here at night Police Sergeant Slocombe still ambled slowly along his beat on his size thirteens, able

and ready to deal with all the terrors that the world of crime was prepared to throw at him, normally consisting on an average week of half a dozen traffic offenses, an occasional break-in, young boys stealing apples, and poaching. And poaching. And *poaching*.

The local poacher was Geoffrey Rye. And he was a poacher par excellence, a poacher whose sheer uncanny ability left everyone else in the shade. He could sniff rabbits miles off, and he knocked down pheasants by the score — silently — with an old crossbow he had made himself. Everyone knew this happened. But could they catch him? Not on your life. Once in a while, to be sure, Geoff would ac-

cidentally round a corner too fast on his old bike and run straight into some arm of the law, too unexpectedly to get rid of the sack full of dead stock over his shoulder. There would be a fine, perhaps a couple of months in jail, but he was soon back to take up where he left off. He was no criminal, no member of the underworld, just someone who couldn't see quite eye to eye with the local game-keepers, and who happened to like rabbit pie.

In the summer months, the situation got a bit different, for Geoff rather tended to fancy himself as a bit of a con man. This part of the West Country was Tourist Country, and large portly foreigners in enormous befinned cars, festooned with ultra-modern cameras and other wondrous gadgets, descended on Maxcombe Parva and the near area, determined to drink in the beauty of the English countryside. And Geoff loved it. Originally he had simply hung around the local pub, told fascinated tourists at great length and in great detail some of the more lurid if more imaginative historical details of this particular area ("Ar yes, m'dear, that there chair you'm sittin' on be the selfsame chair that old Charley the Second sat on to rest when we were being chased by the Roundheads.") in the hope of making out of it a couple of drinks and a smoke.

Then he discovered the engaging fact that these tourists were only too willing to buy that selfsame chair to take home with them to Connecticut, to show off to the folks. And so the idea had mushroomed. Sergeant Slocombe, being the senior police officer of the district, had smiled amiably at such goings-on, merely shaking his head sorrowfully at the seemingly endless naivete of tourists, until Geoff had started selling things that were not his to sell. This had to be stopped, and a few fines imposed by the local Bench seemed to have had a salutary effect. But only seemed. Geoff went on from strength to strength, and on one famous day he sold the entire Town Hall clock complete with tower to no less than five people on the same afternoon. And oddly enough, most of the time he got away with it. When their astonishing gullibility was pointed out to them, the tourists were so appalled with themselves that they left the district immediately without ever bothering to press charges.

So Geoff prospered, relatively speaking. Once in a blue moon, he made a fortune from some enterprising idiot, but it all got spent at once, or else an enormous great fine took most of it off him, so he was reduced to poaching again, come winter. His relations with the law were friendly, almost neighborly. No one bothered anyone much.

They remained the best of enemies.

But on this day in question, Sergeant Slocombe was puzzled. A sort of miniature crime wave seemed to have hit the sleepy village, and he was determined to find out the cause. Six cars had been reported stolen in the last three hours, which — considering only two others had gone since the end of the war — was an astonishing fact, to say the least. Sergeant Slocombe had nothing to go on as such, except his local knowledge. Naturally the County Police had been notified, searches and checks were being made in all the surrounding districts. But Sgt. Slocombe had ideas of his own. In a small community like Maxcombe Parva news travels fast, and someone had mentioned to him only a few minutes ago that Geoff Rye was in the "Pup and Pistol," spending more money than he'd seen for many a long year. Geoff with a lot of money was a factor which always interested him, so Sgt. Slocombe strolled through the gnat-filled summer twilight and pushed open the door to the Public Bar of the *Dog and Gun*, long ago christened the Pup and Pistol by its regulars.

The bar was full of smoke and conversation, and Sergeant Slocombe immediately made out Geoff Rye leaning against the bar, clutching a half-empty tankard in

his fist, a gigantic cigar blazing like a miniature bonfire in his mouth, with an admiring crowd of locals around him listening to the story he was telling.

Sgt. Slocombe crossed over to this group, and the conversation suddenly and miraculously stopped. Geoff Rye looked at the sergeant and grinned companionably.

"How do, Bert," he declared with a grin. "You drinking?"

"Not on duty, Geoff, you know that," Sgt. Slocombe replied. He looked around him. "Been buying drinks for all these people, then, Geoff?"

"Ar."

"Very sociable of you, isn't it?"

"Ar."

"Come into some money, have you?"

"Ar."

It very much appeared that Geoff was not in the most communicative of moods, so Sergeant Slocombe took him by the elbow and said, "Come on, Geoff, I think you and I had better go and have a little talk."

Geoff grinned. Then he downed the last of his pint and followed the sergeant out of the bar and into the carpark, where they both sat down together on the low stone wall and listened for a time in silence to the hum of the insects in the dying day.

"Who have you done this time, thei?" asked the sergeant.

"I don't know what you mean."

"Oh, come on, Geoff," continued the sergeant, cheerfully enough. "We've both known each other for years. If you suddenly produce a fat wad of notes, we all know you didn't dig it up in your back garden. Who have you done?"

"I'm not saying a word," Geoff replied, idly drawing a pattern with his shoe in the gravel of the carpark.

"Look, Geoff, you know as well as I do that I can't do anything unless someone makes a formal charge, so you needn't worry. We've both got pretty well the same opinion of the tourists, so why don't you tell me? If they do make a charge, you've had it anyway."

"Why are you so interested?" asked Geoff, eyeing him shrewdly in the twilight.

Sgt. Slocombe shrugged. "There are circumstances," he announced rather officially, "about this particular case that are a little unusual."

"Which ones?"

"I'll tell you in a minute. Now who did you do?"

Geoff shrugged. "I don't see as how it'll matter to tell you, Bert," he said casually. "Though I don't think this one will complain. He seemed too satisfied."

"Who was he?" asked the sergeant. "Anyone you've seen before? American? European?"

"Oh, I don't know who the fellow was," Geoff replied, spreading his hands and hunching his shoulders in a massive shrug. "He spoke English well enough, but with a bit of an accent. He was one of them foreigners all right, but I couldn't tell you where from."

"All right then, what did you sell him? The Town Hall clock again?"

Geoff grinned. "No, Bert, that's old stuff. This chap would've bought anything." He drew closer to the sergeant and winked conspiratorially. "Personally I'm of the opinion he was drunk."

"Why?"

"He'd have to have been drunk to take what I gave him."

Sergeant Slocombe sighed. "And just what was that, Geoff?" he asked heavily.

"Well, he said he wanted souvenirs, right? But he acted as if everything was strange to him — everything, cars, clothes, furniture, the lot. I don't know what country he came from, but they couldn't have had very much. Except money. He said the cars were fascinating, so I sold him six." Six? Mentally Sgt. Slocombe sat up. "And he couldn't get over our funny clothes, as he called them, so I said he could have his pick of the ones in John White's shop, and the furniture in Martin's, and . . . oh I don't know. I was enjoying myself too much to remember what I

said. But he wrote it all down in a little book, and seemed very excited. Kept telling me how generous we were, to sell all these things to a visitor." Geoff sniggered. "Don't know how he thought he was going to collect them."

Sergeant Slocombe was feeling unaccountably worried. "Geoff," he said slowly, that's what I came to see you about. Six cars disappeared today. I don't know about the rest." He had a strange premonition that back at the police station they would at this moment be filling in reports about burglaries at White's and Martin's and elsewhere.

Geoff's grin had disappeared like magic. "But he *can't* have," he said. "How do you take away six cars? It must be coincidence."

"Possibly." Slocombe got to his feet. "But I think we ought to see this foreign fellow, whoever he is. Do you know where he's staying?"

Geoff shook his head. "No," he said. "He said he was leaving almost at once. Said he landed over there, past Druid's Wood. I kept thinking he might be some Arab sheik or something, didn't know cars or that, lots of money, and he was all dark and suntanned. I thought he probably meant he had his own private helicopter, perhaps." He stopped, worried.

"Let's go and see," said Sergeant Slocombe. We might get a clue or something."

They drove in Sergeant Slocombe's car to as near as they were able to Druid's Wood, then continued on foot. The wood in fact was a sort of circle of trees; there had always been a great cleared space in the very center, and it was towards this that they walked. When they stepped out of the surrounding trees, they both stopped in silent astonishment and indeed some fear. All the vegetation, the grass, the bushes, the shrubs, in this clearing to a diameter of a hundred yards or more was squashed flat as if by some gigantic weight, the grass around this perimeter blown outwards around the huge circle as if by a hurricane-strength wind. The trees on the edge of the clearing were shredded of leaves, and the bark facing it had been peeled in places, and lay in thin wafers on the ground.

Blimey!" murmured Geoff Rye.

"That would have to have been a bigger helicopter than you or I have ever seen," commented Ser-

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geant Slocombe, scared despite himself. "Something enormous has landed here and taken off again. I don't know who your man was that you thought you'd swindled, but it looks very much as if he's collected, and he has the machinery to do it with." He turned round, to see Geoff as pale as death, his eyes staring in a kind of horror. "What is the matter?" he snapped, urgently now.

"Do you think he'll collect?" whimpered Geoff almost soundlessly.

"He already has done."

Geoff sank to the floor, moaning softly.

"I thought he was mad, Sarge, really," he said.

Slocombe grabbed him by the shirtfront with more force than he had used on anyone in years and hauled him to his feet.

"What did you *do*?" he hissed fiercely.

"He said our way of government was so archy . . . what's the word, means old?"

"Archaic?"

Yes. Said it fascinated him."

"So?"

"So, I think I got carried away. I said he could have it. For five hundred pounds I threw in London."

END

This Month in Galaxy

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by James E. Gunn

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RETRIEF,

THE LONG-AWAITED

MASTER

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I

“Twenty thousand years ago,” said Cultural Attache Pennyfool, “this, unless I miss my guess, was the capital city of a thriving alien culture.”

The half dozen Terrans — members of a Field Expeditionary Group of the Corps Diplomatique Terrestrienne — stood in the center of a narrow strip of turquoise-colored sward that wound between weathered slabs of porous, orange

masonry, rusting spires of twisted metal to which a few bits of colored tile still clung, and anonymous mounds in which wildflowers nodded alien petals under the light of a swollen orange sun.

"Imagine," Consul Magnan said in an awed tone, as the party strolled on through a crumbling arcade and across a sand-drifted square. "At a time when we were still living in caves, these creatures had already developed automats and traffic jams." He sighed. "And now they're utterly extinct. The survey's life detectors didn't so much as quiver."

"They seem to have progressed from neon to nuclear annihilation in record time." Second Secretary Retief commented. "But I think we have a good chance of bettering their track record."

"Think of it, gentlemen," Pennyfool called, pausing at the base of a capless pylon and rubbing his hands together with a sound like a cicada grooming its wing-cases. "An entire city in pristine condition — nay, more, a whole continent, a complete planet! It's an archeologist's dream come true! Picture the treasures to be found: the stone axes and telly sets, the implements of bone and plastic, the artifacts of home, school and office, the tin cans, the beer bottles, the bones — oh, my, the bones, gentlemen! Emerging into the light of day after all these centuries to tell us

their tales of the life and demise of a culture!"

"If they've been dead for twenty thousand years, what's the point in digging around in their garbage dumps?" an assistant Military Attache inquired *sotto voce*. "I say Corps funds would be better spent running a little nose-to-ground reconnaissance of Boge, or keeping an eye on the Groaci."

"Tsk, Major," Magnan said. "Such comments merely serve to reinforce the popular stereotype of the crassness of the military mind."

"What's so crass about keeping abreast of the opposition?" the officer protested. "It might be a nice change if we hit them first, for once, instead of getting clobbered on the ground."

"Sir!" Magnan tugged at the iridium-braided lapels of his liver-colored informal field coverall. "Would you fly in the face of six hundred years of tradition?"

"Now, gentlemen," Pennyfool was saying, "we're not here to carry out a full-scale dig, of course, merely to conduct a preliminary survey. But I see no reason why we should not wet a line, so to speak. Magnan, suppose you just take one of these spades and we'll poke about a bit. But carefully, mind you. We wouldn't want to damage an irreplaceable art treasure."

"Heavens, I'd love to," Magnan said as his superior offered him the shovel. "What perfectly vile luck



that I happen to have a rare joint condition known as Motorman's Arm — ”

“A diplomat who can't bend his elbow?” the other replied briskly. “Nonsense.” He thrust the implement at Magnan.

“**O**utrageous,” the latter muttered as his superior moved out of earshot, scanning the area for a likely spot to commence. “I thought I was volunteering for a relaxing junket, not being dragooned to serve as a navy.”

“Your experience in digging through Central Files should serve you in good stead, Mr. Magnan,” Second Secretary Retief said. “Let's just pretend we're after evidence of a political prediction that didn't pan out by someone just above you on the promotion list.”

“I resent the implication that I would stoop to such tactics,” Magnan said loftily. “In any case, only an idiot would go on record with guesswork.” He eyed Retief obliquely. “I, ah, don't suppose you *know* of any such idiot?”

“I did,” Retief said. “But he just made Ambassador.”

“Aha!” Pennyfool caroled from a heavily silted doorway flanked by a pair of glassless openings. “A well-nigh intact structure, quite possibly a museum. Suppose we just take a peek.” The diplomats trailed their enthusiastic leader as he scrambled through into a roofless chamber

with an uneven, dirt-drifted floor and bare walls from which the plaster had long since disappeared. Along one side of the room a flat-topped ridge projected a foot above the ground. Pennyfool poked a finger at a small mound atop it, exposing a lumpy object.

“Eureka!” he cried, brushing dirt away from his find. “You see, gentlemen? I've already turned up a masterpiece of the Late Meretricious!”

“I say, sir,” a plump Third Secretary addressed the expedition's leader. “Since Verdigris is a virgin world, and we're the first beings to set foot here since its discovery, how does it happen the era already has a name?”

“Simple, my boy,” Pennyfool snapped. “I just named it.”

“Look here, sir,” an eager information Agency man who had been poking at the find said, “I think there's been an error. This place isn't a museum, its a lunch counter. And the masterpiece is a plate of petrified mashed potatoes and mummified peas.”

“By jove, I think you've got something there, Quagmire,” a portly Admin Officer said. “Looks just like the stuff they served at the Testimonial Dinner for Ambassador Clawhammer — ”

“He's right,” Magnan announced from his position farther down the line. “Here's a side-order of french fries.”

"Dunderheads!" Pennyfool snapped. "I'm not in need of uninformed conjectures by amateurs in order to properly classify priceless antiquities. Kindly leave such matters to experts. Now come along. There seems to be an adjoining room with an intact roof — a room unvisited for twenty centuries! I'll wager my fig-leaf cluster to my *Grand Cordon* of the Legion d'Cosme that a thrilling discovery awaits us there!" His staff followed him past the edge of a metal door standing half open, into a dark chamber. The next moment, pale yellowish light flooded the room.

"To stop where you are!" A weak voice hissed the words in a breathy alien tongue from behind the delegation. "To raise your digital members above your cephalic nodules or to be incinerated on the spot!"

II

A spindle-legged creature in a flaring helmet and sequined greaves emerged from the deep shadow of the door, aiming a scatter gun carelessly at Magnan's knees.

"What's this?" Pennyfool's voice cracked on the words. "Groaci? Here?"

"Indeed, Soft One," the alien confirmed. "To comply at once with my instructions or to add your osseous components to those already interred here!"

Other gun-toting creatures appeared from alcoves and behind columns, closed in, clacking horny mandibles threateningly.

"See here, Captain," Pennyfool said in a high nervous voice to a larger than average Groaci in jeweled eye-shields who carried no weapon but an ornamental side arm. "What's the meaning of this unwarranted interference with a peaceful party of duly authorized official personnel of the Corps Diplomatique Terrestrienne?"

"The meaning, Mr. Pennyfool," the officer replied in accent-free Terran, "is that you are anticipated, forestalled, preceded." He casually waved a dope-stick in a foot-long ivory holder. "You are interlopers, trespassers on Groacian real estate. You note that out of delicacy I refrain from use of the term 'invaders.'"

"Invaders? We're scientists! Art-lovers! And —"

"To be sure," the captain cut him off curtly. "However, it will be necessary for you to indulge these fancies elsewhere. Verdigris, as an unoccupied planet, has been claimed by my government. Unfortunately, we are at present unable to issue tourist visas to the curious. You will therefore repair at once to your vessel, pay the accumulated landing fees, demurrage, fines for illegal parking and lift-tax and be on your way."

"This is an outrage, you five-

eyed bandit!" the assistant military attache yelled, thrusting to the fore. "This planet was discovered by a Corps scouting vessel! It belongs to us!"

"I shall overlook your tone, Major," the Groaci whispered acidly, "induced no doubt by envy at my race's superior optical endowments and simply inquire whether any Terran claim to the world was ever registered with the appropriate tribunals?"

"Of course not," Pennyfool snapped. "We didn't want every claim-jumping Tom, Dick and Irving in this end of the Arm swarming in here to see what they could loot!"

"An unfortunate oversight."

"But the Survey boat planted a claim beacon. You must have seen it."

"Dear me, now that you mention it I seem to recall my chaps vaporizing some sort of electronic noise-maker which was interfering with radio reception. Too bad that not a trace remains."

"That's a gross violation of Interplanetary Rules!"

"So? Possession is nine points of the law, Mr. Pennyfool. But enough of these pleasantries; at the moment, the matter of accounts receivable requires our attention. I'm sure you're eager to clear up the trifling indebtedness and be about your no doubt legitimate activities elsewhere."

"How . . . how much," Pennyfool asked, "is this going to cost us?"

"If one of you will hand over twenty-two thousand six hundred and four galactic credits — cash, no checks, please — you can be on your way."

"Twenty-two thousand!" Pennyfool choked on the words. "That's highway robbery!"

"Plus an additional thousand penalty fee for each insult," the captain added in an ominous whisper. "And of course I need not remind you that the demurrage charges are piling up minute by minute."

"That's out of the question," Pennyfool gasped. "I have no such amount in my possession! We're a scientific expedition, not a party of bank messengers!"

"Too bad," the captain whispered. "In that case . . ." He made a curt gesture; armed troops stepped forward, guns at the ready.

"Stop!" Magnan yelled. "You can't just shoot diplomats down in cold blood!"

"Since higher organisms such as myself employ no vascular fluids, I am under no such restraint," the captain pointed out. "However, I agree it would be less than couth to fail to observe the forms. Accordingly, I shall refer the matter to my chief." He murmured a word to a soldier, who slung his weapon and hurried away. The captain saunter-

ed off, humming a gay little tune to himself.

"Verdigris was supposed to be the best-kept secret of the year," Pennyfool muttered brokenly to Magnan. "Who would have dreamed the Groaci would be here ahead of us?"

"They couldn't have found it by accident," the Information Agency man said glumly. "Coincidences like that don't happen."

"You're right, Crouchwell," Pennyfool said, staring around at his staff. "Gentlemen — somebody leaked!"

"Well, gracious, don't look at me, sir," Magnan said, an indignant expression pinching his narrow features. "I hardly breathed a word, except to a few highly respected colleagues."

"Colleagues?" Pennyfool raised a pale eyebrow.

"Fellow diplomats; high-type chaps like Ambassador P'Yim-Yim of Yill and Slunk the Fustian Minister, and . . . and . . ."

"And?" Pennyfool prompted.

"And Consul-General Shilth," Magnan finished weakly.

"Planetary Director Shilth, if you don't mind," a voice susurrated from the doorway.

There was a stir among the troops ringing in the Terrans. A tall Groaci in an elaborately ribbed hip-cloak strolled forward, waved jauntily at Magnan, nodded to Pennyfool.

"Well, gentlemen, good of you to pay a courtesy call," he said smoothly.

"Consul-General Shilth," Magnan said in a hurt tone. "I never dreamed you'd be so uncouth as to betray a confidence."

Shilth frowned, an expression he achieved by crossing two pairs of eyes. "No?" he said in a surprised tone. "Why not?" He vibrated his throat sac in a manner analogous to throat-clearing. "By the way, Pennyfool, just what was it you expected to find here?" His whisper was elaborately casual.

"You're standing in the center of a treasure house," Pennyfool said sourly, "and you have the confounded gall to ask me that?"

"My chaps have devoted the better part of the past ten hours to fruitless scrabbling in these ruins," Shilth hissed. "They've turned up nothing of the remotest utility."

"You've allowed your troops to dig here at random?" Pennyfool yelped.

"Aha!" Shilth wagged an accusatory tentacle. "In spite of your subtle dissembling, your reaction proves that treasures do indeed lie beneath this wilderness." His tone became crisp. "Kindly specify precisely what it is we're looking for, and I might — *might* mind you — find a way to reduce your port fees."

"You . . . you assassin!" Pennyfool yelled. "You have no right to

so much as set foot on this hal-
lowed ground!"

"Still — I am here," Shilth said blandly. "And I see nothing in these rubble-heaps to excite CDT interest." He stirred a heap of pot-sherds, bottle caps and broken phonograph records with a horny foot. "Ergo, there must be a subtler prize awaiting the lucky finder."

"Shilth, you Vandal!" Pennyfool yelled. "Have you no reverence for anything?"

"Try me with gold," the Groaci said succinctly.

"You're out of your mind, you Philistine! I've told you I don't have any cash on hand!"

"You refuse to speak?" Shilth turned to the captain. "Thish, I tire of the Soft One's lies and his insults. Take him out and execute him." Pennyfool squealed as the guards laid hold of him.

"Execute him?" Magnan bleated. "Couldn't you just strike him off the invitation list for cocktail parties or something?"

"If it's gold you're interested in," Retief suggested, "I'm sure CDT Sector HQ will come through with a tidy sum in return for Mr. Pennyfool's hide, unbroken."

"Splendid notion," a member from the Commercial Section piped up. "I'm sure the ransom money — that is to say, the port fees — will be forthcoming the minute they see us all back to Sector HQ."

"Indeed?" Shilth said in a bored tone. "And if I allowed you to depart, what surety would I then have that the just indemnities will be paid?"

"You have the word of a diplomat," Magnan said promptly.

"I admire your coolness, Magnan," Shilth said with a little bow, "essaying jests at such a moment."

"I suppose I might consent to go alone," Pennyfool said, blinking his eyes rapidly. "Although of course I'd prefer to stay on as hostage myself, my rank will undoubtedly be helpful in expediting payment."

"One may go," Shilth said in a chilling whisper. "That one." He pointed at Retief. Thish stepped forward, pointing his over-decorated hand-gun at the victim.

"Watch him closely, Captain," Shilth admonished. "He has a reputation as a trouble-maker. As well have him off our hands."

As Thish, close beside Retief, waved the gun toward the entrance, Retief, with a swift motion, swept the weapon from the other's grip, took a step, caught Shilth by the neck and backed against the wall, the muzzle of the pistol pressed against the hostage's ventral carapace.

III

"Tell your boys to stand fast," he said in a conversational tone as the Groaci official writhed

and kicked futilely, while the soldiers looked on as if paralyzed. "Mr. Pennyfool, if you're ready to board ship, I don't think Planetary Director Shilth will voice any objection."

"My soldiers will shoot you down like nesting nid-fowls!" Shilth hissed.

"In which case I'd be forced to pump your thorax full of soft-nosed slugs," Retief said. "I've heard they penetrate the exo-skeleton and then just ricochet around inside until they lose momentum. Be interesting to find out if it's true."

"I remind you, Pennyfool," Shilth cocked his oculars at the Terran, who had not moved, "my lads' scatter-guns are highly disruptive to flimsy organisms such as yourselves. Disarm your misguided colleague, and spare the CDT the expense of a mass funeral, no less costly for lack of any identifiable remains!"

"Better get moving, sir, before some bright lad gets ideas," Retief suggested.

"They . . . we . . . I . . ." Pennyfool gasped.

"By no means," Retief said soothingly. "They hold Shilth in far too high esteem to see him converted into a boiled pudding in the half shell."

Cautiously, the Terrans sidled toward the door. Pennyfool went through in a scrambling leap,

followed closely by his associates.

"Retief," Magnan, at the rear of the party said "How are *you* going to get clear? If one of them gets behind you —"

"Better get aboard, Mr. Magnan," Retief cut in "I have an idea Mr. Pennyfool won't dawdle around waiting for stragglers."

"But — but —"

"Captain Thish, perhaps you'd be kind enough to act as escort," Retief said. "Just in case any of the boys on the outside leap to conclusions."

"To comply," Shilth whispered in Groaci as the officer hesitated. "Later, to visit this miscreant's crimes upon him in a fashion devised at leisure. Our leisure, that is."

Magnan made a gobbling sound and disappeared, Thish at his heels. Shilth had stopped struggling. The Groaci soldiery stood in attitudes of alert paralysis, watching for an opening.

It was ten minutes before the sound of the Corps vessel's drive rumbled briefly, faded, and was gone.

"And now?" Shilth inquired. "If you contemplate a contest of endurance, I remind you that we Groaci can carry on for upward of ten standard days without so much as nictating a membrane.

"Send them outside," Retief said.

Shilth remonstrated, but complied. A moment later, a shrill but

unmistakably human yelp sounded from beyond the door. Magnan appeared in the entry, his arms gripped by a pair of Groaci while a third held a scatter gun to his head.

"They... they didn't wait," the diplomat wailed.

"Release me!" Shilth hissed. "Or would you prefer to wait until after my lads have blown your superior's head off?"

"Sounds like an even trade," Retief said. Magnan gasped and swallowed.

"Much as I should dislike to see the Planetary Director's internal arrangements hashed in the manner you so vividly describe," Thish said from behind Magnan, "I assure you I would make the sacrifice on the interest of the Groaci national honor."

"In the interest of his next promotion, he means," Shilth hissed. "What does he care if I'm diced in the process?"

Retief thrust Shilth away, tossed the gun on the floor. "If I didn't know you wanted both of us alive, I'd have called your bluff, Thish," he said.

"Oh? And do I want you alive, Soft One?" Thish took aim with a borrowed rifle.

"Of course you do, litter-mate of genetic inferiors!" Shilth snapped, massaging the point of his back where the gun muzzle had dug in.

"At least until they divulge the secret of what they sought here!" He turned to Retief. "And now let us to business, eh?"

Retief plucked a cigar from his breast pocket, puffed it alight, blew scented smoke past the alien's olfactory orifices, which cinched up tight at the aroma of Virginia leaf.

"Certainly, Shilth. Who's for sale now?"

"You are, my dear Terry," the Groaci said ominously. "The price of your life is a complete description of the nature and location of the riches hidden here."

Retief waved the stogie at the blotched walls, the dirt-drifted corners, the broken tilework. "You are looking at them."

"Ah, so we are to have the pleasure of assisting you in developing a more cooperative attitude, eh? Capital. Easy babblers are such bores."

"You wouldn't dare torture us," Magnan said in squeaky tone. "Our colleagues know where we are. If we aren't returned unharmed, they'll extract a terrible vengeance!"

"A sharp note to the Ambassador, no doubt," Shilth said, with an amused snap of the mandibles. "Still, there are subtler methods of persuasion than living dismemberment. Now, we Groaci are quite at home in enclosed spaces; but you Terries, it is rumored, are claustrophobes, an allegation I've often

yearned to test. And I know just the setting in which to conduct the experiment." He gestured to Thish, who urged the two Terrans at gun point along a wide passage to a metal door. Two soldiers came forward to wrestle the heavy panel aside, exposing a tiny chamber no more than six feet on a side, windowless, unfurnished.

"Gentlemen, your cell. A trifle cramped, perhaps, but well protected from excessive wind and rain, eh?"

Retief and Magnan stepped inside. The two soldiers forced the heavy sliding door shut.

In the total darkness, a dim spot of light glowed on one wall. Retief reached out and pressed a thumb against it.

With a grinding of ancient gears, a groaning of antique cables, the elevator started down.

IV

Magnan emitted a shrill cry and attempted to climb the wall "Retief! What's happening?"

"No, no, Mr. Magnan," Retief said, "Your line is, 'Ah, just as I planned.' That's the way reputations for forethought are built."

"Shilth was quite right about the claustrophobia," Magnan said in a choked voice. "I feel that the walls are going to close in on me!"

"Just close your eyes and pretend you're at a Tuesday morning

staff meeting. The relief when you find yourself here should carry you through anything short of utter catastrophe."

With a shudder and a clank, the car came to a halt.

"N-now what?" Magnan said in a small voice. Retief felt over the door, found the stub of a lever. He gripped it and pulled. Reluctantly, the door slid aside on a large, column-filled room faintly lit by strips of dimly glowing material still adhering to the ceiling and walls, which were adorned with murals depicting grotesque figures engaged in obscure rites.

"Tomb paintings," Magnan said in a hushed voice. "We're in the catacombs. The place is probably full of bones—not that I actually believe in the curses of dead kings or anything."

"The curses of live Ambassadors are far more potent, I suspect," Retief said, leading the way across the room and into one of the many passages debouching from the chamber. Here more cabalistic scenes were etched in still-bright colors against the ancient walls. Cryptic legends in an unknown script were blazoned across many of them.

"They're probably quotations from the local version of the Book of the Dead," Magnan hazarded, his eye caught by a vividly pigmented representation of a large alien being making what seemed to be a threatening gesture at a

second alien from whose ears wisps of mist coiled.

"This one, for example," he said, "no doubt shows us the God of the Underworld judging a soul and finding it wanting."

"Either that, or it's a NO SMOKING sign," Retief agreed.

The passage turned, branched. The left branch dead-ended at an ominous-looking sump half filled with a glistening black fluid.

"The sacrificial well," Magnan said with a shudder. "I daresay the bottom — goodness knows how far down *that* is — is covered with the remains of youths and maidens offered to the gods."

Retief sniffed. "It smells like drained crankcase oil."

They skirted the pit, came into a wide room crowded with massive, complex shapes of corroded metal, ranked in rows in the deep gloom.

"And these are the alien idols," Magnan whispered. "Gad, they have a look of the most frightful ferocity about them."

"That one," Retief indicated a tall, many-armed monster looming before him, "bears a remarkable resemblance to a hay-baler."

"Mind your tongue, Retief!" Magnan said sharply. "It's not that I imagine they can hear us, of course, but why tempt fate?"

There was a sharp *click!*, a whirring and clattering, a stir of massive forms all across the gloomy

chamber. Magnan yipped and leaped back as a construct the size of a fork-lift stirred into motion, turned, creaking, and surveyed him with a pair of what were indisputably glowing amber eyes.

"We're surrounded," Magnan chirped faintly. "And they told us the planet was uninhabited!"

"It is," Retief said, as more giant shapes moved forward, accompanied by the squeak of unlubricated metal.

"Then what are these?" Magnan came back sharply. "Oversized spooks?"

"Close, but not kewpie doll," Retief said. "This is the city garage, and these are maintenance robots."

"R-r-robots?"

"Our coming in must have triggered them to come to alert status." They moved along the row of giant machines, each equipped with a variety of limbs, organs, and sensors.

"Then . . . then they're probably waiting for us to give them orders," Magnan said with returning confidence. "Retief! Don't you see what this means? We can tell them to jump in the lift and ride up and scare the nether garments off that sticky little Shilth and his army — or we could have done," he added, "if they understood Terran."

"*Terran understood*," a scratch bass voice rasped from a point just opposite Magnan's ear. He leaped

and whirled, banging a shin smartly.

"Retief! They understand us! We're saved! Good lord, when I first planned our escape via the lift, I never dreamed we'd have such a stroke of luck!"

"Now you're getting the idea," Retief said admiringly. "But why not just add that extra touch of *savoir-faire* by pretending you'd deduced the whole thing, robots and all, from a cryptic squiggle on the contact party's scopegram?"

"Don't be crude, Retief," Magnan said loftily. "I fully intend to share the credit for the coup. In my report I'll mention that you pushed the lift button with no more than a hint from me."

"Maybe you'd better not write up that report just yet," Retief said, as a robot directly before them shifted position with a dry squeal of rusty bearing to squarely block their advance. Others closed in on either side; they turned to find retreat similarly cut off.

"My, see how eager they are, Retief," Magnan said in a comfortable tone. "There, there, just stand aside like a good, er, fellow," he addressed the machine before him.

It failed to move. Frowning, Magnan started around it, was cut off by a smaller automaton — this one no bigger than a commercial sausage grinder, and adorned with a similar set of blades visible inside a gaping metallic maw.

"Well! I see they're in need of re-programming," Magnan said sharply. "It's all very well to fawn a little, but —"

"I'm not sure they're fawning," Retief said.

"Then what in the world are they doing?"

"*Terran are surrounded*," a voice like broken glass stated from behind the encircled diplomats.

"*We are judging Terran*," an un-oiled tenor stated from the rear rank. "*And finding you wanting*."

"*Frightful oversized robots will jump on your smoking remains*," chimed in a third voice, reminiscent of a file on steel.

"*We are eager for crude contact*," Broken Glass agreed.

"**T**hey have a curious mode of expressing themselves," Magnan said nervously. "I seem to detect an almost ominous note in their singular choice of words."

"I think they're picking up their vocabulary from us," Retief said.

"Retief — if it wasn't so silly, I'd think that one intended us bodily harm," Magnan said in a tone of forced jocularly, as a ponderous assemblage of sharp edges came forward, rumbling.

"*We intend you bodily harm*," File-on-Steel said.

"But — but you can't attack us," Magnan protested. "You're just machines! We're alive! We're your rightful masters!"

"Masters are better than robots," Broken Glass stated. "You are not better than us. You are not masters. We will certainly harm you."

"You will not escape," a red-eyed monster added.

"Retief, I suspect we've made a blunder," Magnan said in a wavering tone. "We were better off at the tender mercies of the Groaci!"

"What's it all about, boys?" Retief called over the gathering creak and clank as the machines closed in.

"This planet is not your world. We are programmed to give no mercies to you fellow."

"Just a minute," Magnan protested. "We're just harmless diplomats. Can't we all be friends or something?"

"Who gave you your order?" Retief asked.

"Our masters," replied a voice like a sand-filled gearbox.

"That was a long time ago," Retief said. "Matters have changed somewhat."

"Yes, indeed," Magnan chimed in. "You see, now that your old masters are all dead, we're taking over their duties."

"Our duties are to see you dead," Red-eye boomed, raising a pair of yard-long cleavers.

"Help!" Magnan yelled.

"We wouldn't want to stand in the way of duty," Retief said, watching the poised cutting edges,

"but suppose we turned out to be your masters after all? I'm sure you wouldn't want to make the mistake of slicing up your legitimate owners."

"You see, we took over where they left off," Magnan said hastily. "We're, ah, looking after all their affairs for them, carrying out their wishes as we understand them, tidying up —"

"There is no mistake, Terran. You are not our masters."

"You said masters are better than robots," Retief reminded the machine. "If we can prove our superiority, will you concede the point?"

V

Silence fell, broken only by the whir and hum of robotic metabolisms.

"If you could so prove, we will certainly concede your status as our masters," Sand-in-the-gears said at last.

"Gracious, I should think so!" Magnan jerked his ruffled lapels into line. "For a moment, Retief, I confess I was beginning to feel just the teeniest bit apprehensive."

"You have one minute to prove your superiority," Broken Glass said flatly.

"Well, I should think it was obvious," Magnan sniffed. "Just look at us."

"Indeed, we've done so. We find

you little, silly, crude, tender, apprehensive and harmless."

"You mean — ?"

"It means we'll have to do something even more impressive than standing around radiating righteous indignation, Mr. Magnan."

"Well, for heaven's sake," Magnan sniffed. "I never thought I'd see the day when I had to prove the obvious ascendancy of a diplomat over a donkey engine."

"*We are waiting,*" File-on-Steel said.

"Well, what do they expect?" Magnan yelped. "It's true they're bigger, stronger, faster, longer-lived, and cheaper to operate; and of course they have vast memory banks and can do lightning calculations and tricks of that sort — which, however, can hardly compare with our unique human ability to, ah, do what we do," he finished in a subdued tone.

"*What do you do?*" Red-eye demanded.

"Why, we, ah, demonstrate moral superiority," Magnan said brightly.

"Shilth was right about your sense of humor," Retief said admiringly. "But I think we'd better defer the subtle japes until we discover whether we're going to survive to enjoy the laugh."

"Well for heaven's sake *do* something, Retief," Magnan whispered, "before they make a terrible blunder." He rolled his eyes sideways

at a scythe-like implement hovering as if ready to shear at any instant through the volume of space he occupied.

"*Time is up,*" Broken Glass said.

The machines surged forward. The scythe, sweeping horizontally, clanged against the descending cleavers as Retief and Magnan jumped aside from the rush of a low-slung tree mower with chattering blades. The latter swerved, collided with a massive punch-press, one of whose piston-like members stabbed through the side of a ponderous masonry wrecker. It wobbled, did a sharp right turn and slammed into the cast-concrete wall, which cracked and leaned, allowing a massive beam to drop free at one end, narrowly missing Magnan as he rebounded from the flank of a charging garbage shredder. The falling girder crashed across the mid-section of the latter machine with a decisive *crunch!* pinning the hapless apparatus to the spot. It clashed its treads futilely, sending up a shower of concrete chips. The other machines clustered around it in attitudes of concern, the Terrans for the moment forgotten.

"Hsst! Retief! This is our chance to beat a strategic withdrawal!" Magnan stage-whispered. "If we can just make it back to the elevator —"

"We'll find Shilth waiting at the top," Retief said. "Mr. Magnan,



suppose you find a comfortable spot behind a packing case somewhere. I'm not quite ready to leave yet."

"Are you insane? These blood-thirsty bags of bolts are ready to pound us to putty!"

"They seem to be fully occupied with another problem at the moment," Retief pointed out, nodding toward a post-hole digger which was fruitlessly poking at the end of the beam which had trapped its fellow. The scythe-armed robot was as busily scraping at the massive member, without result. The ranks parted to let a heavy-duty paint-chipper through; but it merely clattered its chisel-tips vainly against the impervious material. And all the while, the pinioned machine groaned lugubriously, sparks flying from its commutator box as it threshed vainly to pull free.

Retief stepped forward; Red-eye swiveled on him, raising a large mallet apparently designed for pounding heavy posts into hard ground.

"Before you drive home your argument," Retief said, "I have a proposal."

"*What proposal?*"

"You don't seem to be having much luck extricating your colleague from under the beam. Suppose I try."

"*One minute. I will lift the beam,*" a deep voice boomed. A massively built loading robot trun-

dled forward, maneuvered deftly into position, secured a grip on the concrete member with its single huge arm and heaved. For a moment, nothing happened; then there was a sharp *clonk!* and a broken duralloy torque rod dangled from the lifter's forged-steel biceps. The girder had not stirred.

“Tough luck, old fellow,” Retief said. “My turn.”

“Good heavens, Retief, if that cast-iron Hercules couldn't do it, how can you hope to succeed?” Magnan squeaked from his corner.

“*You have the ability to help our colleague?*” Broken Glass demanded.

“If I do, will you follow my orders?”

“*If you can do that which we cannot do, your superiority is obvious.*”

“In that case, just pull that bar out of there, will you?” Retief pointed to a four-inch diameter steel rod, twenty feet long, part of a roller assembly presumably once used in loading operations. A stacking machine gripped the rod and gave it a firm pull, ripping it free from its mountings.

“Stick one end under the edge of the beam, like a good fellow,” Retief said. “You there, jack-hammer: push that anvil under the rod, eh?” The machines complied with his requests with brisk efficiency, adjusting the lever as directed, with

the fulcrum as close as possible to the weight to be lifted.

“Retief—if you couldn't even lift the lever how are you going to . . .” Magnan's voice faded as Retief stepped up on the tread-skirt of a sand-blaster and put a foot on the up-angled long arm of the jury-rigged pry-bar. Steadying himself, he let his full weight onto the rod. Instantly, it sank gracefully down, lifting the multi-ton beam a full half-inch from the depression it had imprinted in the garbage shredder. The latter made a clanking sound, attempted to move, emitted a cascade of electrical sputterings and subsided.

“He's ruptured himself!” Magnan gasped. “Poor thing. Still, we've done our part.”

The other machines were maneuvering, making way for a squat cargo-tug, which backed up to the victim, but was unable to get in position to attach its tow-cable. A dirt-pusher with a wide blade tried next, but in the close quarters failed to get within six feet of the disabled machine. The others had no better luck.

“Mr. Magnan, find a length of cable,” Retief called. Magnan rummaged, turned up a rusting coil of braided wire.

“One of you robots with digits tie one end of the cable to the patient,” Retief said. “Cinch the other up to something that won't give.”

Two minutes later the cable was stretched drum tight from a massive stanchion to the cripple, running between closely-spaced paired columns.

"Next, we apply a transverse pull to the center of the cable," Retief directed.

"They can't," Magnan wailed. "There's no room!"

"In that case, Mr. Magnan, perhaps you'd be good enough to perform the office."

"I?" Magnan's eyebrows went up. "Perhaps you've forgotten my Motorman's Arm."

"Use the other one."

"You expect me, one-handed, to budge that ten-ton hulk?"

"Better hurry up. I feel my foot slipping."

"This is madness," Magnan exclaimed, but he stepped to the cable, gripped it at mid-point, and tugged. With a harsh squeak of metal, the damaged machine moved forward half an inch.

"Why — why, that's positively astonishing!" Magnan said with a pleased look.

"Tighten the cable and do it again!" Retief said quickly. The machines hurried to take up the slack. Magnan, with an amazed expression, applied a second pull. The wreck moved another centimeter. After three more nibbles, the tug was able to hook on and drag its fellow clear. Retief jumped down, letting the beam drop with

an incredible floor-shaking boom!

"Heavens!" Magnan found his voice. "I never imagined I was such a brute! After all, the diplomatic life is somewhat sedentary . . ." He flexed a thin arm, fingering it in search of a biceps.

"Wrestling with the conscience is excellent exercise," Retief pointed out. "And you've held up your end of some rather weighty conversations in your time."

"Jape if you must," Magnan said coolly. "But you can't deny I *did* free the creature. Er, machine, that is."

"*You have freed our colleague,*" Sand-in-the-gears said to Magnan. "*We are waiting for your orders, Master.*"

"To be sure," Magnan placed his fingertips together and pursed his lips. "You won't fit into the lift," he said judiciously, looking over his new subjects. "Is there another way up?"

"To be sure, Master."

"Excellent. I want all of you to ascend to the surface at once, round up and disarm every Groaci on the planet, and lock them up. And see that you don't squash the one called Shilth in the process. I have a little gloating to do."

VI

On a newly excavated terrace under a romantically crumbling wall of pink brick, Magnan and

Retief sat with Shilth, the latter wearing a crestfallen expression involving quivering anterior mandibles and drooping eye-stalks. His elaborate cloak of office was gone, and there were smudges of axle grease on his once-polished thorax.

"Dirty pool, Magnan," the Groaci said, his breathy voice fainter than ever. "I was in line for the Order of the Rubber Calipers, Second Class, at the very least, and you spoiled it all with your perambulating junk-yard. Who would have dreamed you'd been so sly as to secretly conceal a host of war-machines? I suspect you did it merely to embarrass me."

"Actually," Magnan began, and paused. "Actually, it *was* quite shrewd of me, now that you mention it."

"I think you overdid the camouflage, however," Shilth said acidly as a street-broom whiffled past, casting a shower of dust over the party. "The confounded things don't appear to be aware that the *coup* is over. They're still carrying on the charade."

"I like to keep my lads occupied," Magnan said briskly, nodding grandly at a hauler trundling past along the newly cleaned avenue with a load of newly uprooted brush. "Helps to keep them in trim in case they're needed suddenly to quell any disturbances."

"Never fear, I've impressed on Thish that he will not long sur-

vive any threat to my well-being."

"Company coming," Retief said, gesturing toward a descending point of sun-bright blue light. They watched the ship settle in to a landing a quarter of a mile distant, then rose and strolled over to greet the emerging passengers.

"Why, it's Mr. Pennyfool," Magnan said. "I knew he'd be along to rescue us. Yoo-hoo, Mr. Pennyfool!"

"That's Mr. Ambassador, Magnan," Pennyfool corrected sharply. "Kindly step aside. You're interfering with a delicate negotiation." The little man marched past Retief without a glance, halted before Shilth, offering a wide smile and a limp hand. The Groaci studied the latter, turned it over gingerly and examined the back, then dropped it.

"Liver spots," he said. "How unesthetic."

"Now, Planetary Director Shilth, we're prepared to offer a handsome fee in return for exploratory rights here on Verdigris." Pennyfool restored his smile with an effort. "Of course, anything we find will be turned over to you at once —"

"Oh, ah, Mr. Ambassador," Magnan hazarded.

"We Groaci," Shilth said sourly, "are not subject to such pigmentational disorders. We remain a uniform, soothing puce at all times."

"Sir," Magnan piped up. "I'd just like —"

"Now, naturally, we're prepared to underwrite a generous program of planetary development to assist your people in settling in," Pennyfool hurried on. "I had in mind about a half a billion to start . . ." He paused to gauge reaction. "Per year, of course," he amended, judging the omens, "with adequate bonuses for special projects, naturally. Now, I'd say a staff of say two hundred to begin with . . . ?"

"Pennyfool, I have a dreadful node-ache," Shilth hissed. "Why don't you go jump down an elevator shaft?" He patted back a counterfeited yawn and stalked away.

"Well, I can see that this is going to be a challenge," Pennyfool said, staring after the alien. "The tricky fellow is going to hold out for two billion, no doubt."

"Mr. Ambassador, I have good news," Magnan said hastily. "We can save the taxpayers those billions. Verdigris belongs to me!"

"See here, Magnan, the privation can't have scrambled your meager wits already! You've only been here seventy-two hours!"

"But, sir — there's no need to promise Shilth the moon — "

"Aha! So that's what he's holding out for. Well, I see no reason the negotiation should founder over a mere satellite." Pennyfool turned to pursue Shilth.

"No, no, you don't quite grasp my meaning," Magnan yipped, grabbing at his superior's sleeve.

"Unhand me, Magnan!" Pennyfool roared. "I'll see to your release after other, more vital matters are dealt with. In the meantime, I suggest you set a good example by cobbling a record number of shoes, or whatever task they've set you — "

"Master, is this person troubling you?" a torn-metal voice inquired. Magnan and Pennyfool whirled to see a rust covered hedge-clipper looming over them, four-foot-clippers at the ready.

"No, that's quite all right, Albert," Magnan said acidly. "I *like* being bullied."

"You're quite certain you don't wish him trimmed to a uniform height?"

"No. I just want him to listen to what I have to say."

Albert clacked the shears together with a nerve-shredding sound.

"I — I'd love to listen to you, my dear Magnan," Pennyfool said rapidly.

Magnan delivered a brief account of his capture of the planet. "So you see, sir," he concluded, "the whole thing is Terran property."

"Magnan!" Pennyfool roared, then with a glance at Albert lowered his voice to a whisper. "Do you realize what this means? When I reported the Groaci here ahead of us, I was appointed as Terran Ambassador Extraordinary and

Minister Plenipotentiary to the con-founded place! If we own it, then pfft! There goes my appointment!"

"Great heavens, sir," Magnan paled at the announcement. "I had no idea!"

"Look here, do you suppose we could get the Groaci to take it back?"

"What, stay here, surrounded by these mobile moldy monstrosities?" Shilth, who had returned silently, hissed. "Never! I demand repatriation!"

Retief caught Magnan's eye as Pennyfool turned to soothe the Groaci.

"What is it, Retief? Can't you see I'm at a critical point, career-wise?"

"I have a suggestion," Retief said. . . .

As Magnan rejoined Pennyfool, Shilth was still hissing imprecations.

"Master, what say I prune this fellow a bit?" Albert proposed. "He seems to have sprouted too many eyes."

"Not unless he says another word," Magnan said. He turned to Pennyfool with a thoughtful look. "I say, sir, suppose I should come up with a scheme which will insure you confirmation, and which will at the same time reflect favorably on the Terran image? You know, the kindly, selfless, helping-hand sort of thing?"

"Yes, yes?"

"I daresay once established here,



you'd want to surround yourself with a staff widely versed in local problems — ”

“Naturally. There are plenty of reliable team-men available doing Underground research work in subterranean libraries back at Sector. Get on with it, Magnan.”

“I want the Counsellorship,” Magnan said crisply.

“You, number two man in my Embassy? Ridiculous! I'd have to jump you over the heads of men with vast experience under their belts!”

“Most of my experience has been at a somewhat higher level,” Magnan said loftily. “No Counsellorship, no scheme.”

“What's this, Magnan, blackmail?” Pennyfool gasped.

“Precisely,” Magnan said.

Pennywise opened his mouth to yell, then closed it and nodded.

“Magnan, it's apparent you're more familiar with the techniques of diplomacy than I suspected. I accept. Now, just what do you have in mind?”

VII

“It's a bit unusual,” Ambassador Pennyfool said complacently, glancing out the window of his freshly refurbished office on the top floor of a newly excavated tower of green-anodized aluminum serving as CDT chancery. “But on the other hand, it is a challenge.”

“Gracious, yes,” Counsellor Magnan said, nodding. “The first Terran envoy to present credentials to a mechanical Head of State.

“I don't know,” the Military Attache said darkly. “Freeing these inanimate objects and letting them set up in business for themselves may create a dangerous precedent. What if my cybernetic military equipment, for example, should start getting ideas about pensions and promotions?”

“And office machines,” the Budget and Fiscal Officer said worriedly. “If my bookkeeping computers took it into their transistors to start agitating for civil rights I shudder to contemplate the consequences in terms of, say, late pay checks.”

“I'm already having trouble with my Motor Pool picking up liberal ideas,” the Admin Officer wagged his head, frowning. “I've had to enact strict rules against fraternization with the natives.”

There was a musical chime from the desk screen. The square-cornered sense-organ panel of Planetary Secretary Albert Sand-in-the-Gears appeared.

“Ah, there, Pennyfool,” the robotic Chief of State said in a tone as genial as his vocal equipment would allow. “I hoped I'd find you in. I was just ringing up to ask whether you'd care to join me on the links this afternoon for a few holes of ballistic golf.”

“I'm sorry, Mr. President,” the

Terran said shortly. "A game in which one is required to score eight holes-in-one out of ten from a tee seven miles from the green is not my strong suit."

"Of course. I keep forgetting you're not equipped with telescopic sights. A pity." The President sighed, a sound like tearing steel. "It was difficult enough grasping the idea of the superiority of my inferiors; trying to behave as equals is even more trying. No offense intended, of course."

"Mr. President — who's that sitting behind you?" Pennyfool asked sharply.

"Ah, forgive me. This is Special Trade Representative Shilth, of Groac. His government has sent him along to assist in getting the Verdigran economy rolling."

"How long has he been here?"

"Long enough to demonstrate my indispensability," Shilth leaned forward to leer at the Terrans. "I've already concluded Trade Agreements with a number of hard currency markets for export of Verdigran antiquities."

"You didn't," Pennyfool gasped.

"Oh, have no fear, they're not the real thing." Shilth waggled an eye at Magnan, who pretended not to notice. "Though we let it be noised about that they're all bootleg National Treasures."

"Oh, I see. Reproductions?"

Pennyfool grunted. "Just so you
RETIEF, THE LONG-AWAITED MASTER

don't ship any irreplaceable objets d'arte off-planet."

"We won't. We require them as patterns for the matter duplicators."

"Eh?"

"The locals are digging them out by the truckload; they sort them, discard the rejects — broken pots and the like — then scrub up the choice items and send them along to the duplication centers. We already have a dozen plants in full swing. Our ceramic fingering-knobs are already a sensation with the cultured set. In a year Verdigris will be known as the antique capital of the Eastern Arm."

"Matter duplicators? You're flooding the Galaxy with bogus antiques?"

"Bogus? They're identical with the real thing, to the last molecule."

"Hah! The genuine articles are priceless examples of Verdigran art; the copies are just so much junk!"

"But, my dear Pennyfool—if one can't distinguish a masterpiece from a piece of junk . . . ?"

"I can detect the genuine at a glance!"

"Show me," the Groaci said, and whipped out a pair of seemingly identical shapes of lumpy blue-glazed clay the size and approximate shape of stunted rutabagas.

". . . but unfortunately, I have something in my eye," Pennyfool

subsided, poking at the offending organ.

"A pity. I would have enjoyed a demonstration of your expertise," Shilth cooed.

"Well, gentlemen, that tears it," the Ambassador said to his staff after the screen had blanked. "After all my delicate maneuvering to secure self-determination for these unfortunate relics of a by-gone age, and to place the CDT in a position of paternal influence vis-a-vis their emergent nation, the infernal Groaci have stolen a march on us again. Fake antiques, indeed!"

"Goodness, I see what you mean, Mr. Ambassador," Magnan said sympathetically. "Why didn't we think of doing that?"

In the Chancery corridor ten minutes later, Magnan mopped at his thin neck with a large floral-patterned tissue.

"Heavens, who'd have thought he'd fly into such a passion?" he inquired of Retief. "After all, it isn't as if those silly little gobs of mud possessed an intrinsic merit."

"Oh, I don't know," Retief said. "They're not bad, considering that the locals have to mass-produce them and bury them at night when nobody's looking."

"Retief!" Magnan stopped dead. "You don't mean . . . ?"

"It seemed like a good idea to sidetrack the Groaci away from the genuine stuff," Retief pointed out, in a completely serious voice. "Just in case any of it had any sentimental value."

"Fake fakes," Magnan murmured. "The concept has a certain euphony."

They paused beside a pair of double doors opening onto an airy balcony two hundred feet above the freshly scrubbed city. As they stepped out, a small copter with a saddle and handlebars came winging in across the park to hover just beyond the balustrade.

"Hope aboard, Retief, we're late," the machine called in a cheerful baritone.

"Retief, where are you going?" Magnan barked as the latter swung over the rail. "You have the quarterly Report of Redundant Reports to compile, to say nothing of the redundant reports themselves!"

"Duty calls, Mr. Magnan," Retief said soothingly. "My additional assignment as Wildlife Census Officer makes it incumbent on me to cement relations with the locals. I'm off to a game of sky polo with a couple of Cabinet Ministers." He waved and set spurs to his mount, which launched itself with a bound into the wide green sky. END



SPORK OF THE AYOR

(continued from page 98)

placed it within the device's field. At once it appeared to "squeeze" down just as I had seen life do in other Tepen traps. The weapon acted as effectively as would any organically generated field.

I learned how to make the field large or small. When, in time, I had the desired knowledge, I killed the remaining Tepen without qualms.

Now the sun was rising above the valley's rim and a cold wind blew through the village. Thankful that I could use my indirect faculties again, I teleported myself and the new weapon to the cavern of Ayorian grouping many miles away and five miles below ground. Though exhausted and badly in need of nourishment, I returned to the empty Tepen village quickly.

I remembered how Eme had described the power supply surrounding me. She had learned that she could shut it down by moving radioactive particles away faster than they were produced. Though I couldn't reach this low energy level, perhaps something similar might be arranged at the molecular level—which I could reach.

I found a mixture of different elements in rodlike containers which furnished the main Tepen power source. By moving certain kinds of heavy chemicals from poorer to richer local concentrations, I in-

creased the activity of the power supply. I had no knowledge of just how fast such an increase could take place.

Fortunately I was well over thirty miles away from the village when the power supply blew!

The Tepen were not dumb. As a matter of fact, they had been able to duplicate nearly all of the Ayorian senses by means of direct-action science. I appreciated the truly stupendous amount of practical knowledge which they had gained.

It would be possible for them to ignore the blowup of one village. Would they overlook more odd occurrences? Not wishing to risk their further alarm and since my final plan required a full Ayorian grouping, I had nearly a whole Enithra year to wait.

It would be dangerous to use the time in further harrassment of the Tepen, I concluded.

But what should I do?

The answer was obvious. I would rejoin the children. Not only to avoid the long period of aloneness—for we Ayor do not take well to long periods of solitude—but also to prepare for the implementation of my plan.

Any Ayor can always find any other. This is why we use objects for hide-and-seek, rather than ourselves. How this is accomplished I do not know; but since I desired

to rejoin my group, I teleported perhaps sixty or seventy times — between two and three thousand miles — and found them.

On my way I filled my stomach with berries and nuts, stopping only long enough between jumps to sense nourishment and move it to my stomach organ.

The day was nearly gone, the sun weakening rapidly, but the children were still deep in one of their philosophical games which all Ayorian children and adults love so well.

When I arrived, they clustered around me excitedly as I brought forth concept after concept of a new and novel nature. All of them were familiar with my twinning problem — not the real one which I had accepted at Eme's death, but the assumed one which the grouping had called upon me.

I didn't attempt to argue my conviction regarding the Tepen. This would have been futile. My plan was far more subtle, and I was convinced that every Ayorian must be willing to accept the challenge as represented by Tepen or surely all Ayorians would one day be extinct.

Had they ever thought of an infinite series of teleportations across an infinite set of points? I demonstrated what I meant by walking back and forth across the valley, so they could observe the characteristic of "continuous motion."

Had they observed the relation-

ship between twinning structure and language structure? I demonstrated the concreteness of the Tepen language versus the abstraction of the Ayorian language.

Had they considered the requisite characteristics of tools required for "direct" action on material things as opposed to "indirect" mental action? I demonstrated by using my body — fingers, hands, arms and legs — in new and novel ways, then moved on to the construction of crude implements. Sticks used for shovels, levers and other devices of this nature captured their attention for weeks before I could direct their attention to more sophisticated Tepen machinery.

Needless to say, Spork, the Ayorian moron, kept their attention for the year of wait. Though Spork was still far inferior in mass-sensing and teleportation, he was proving to be superior in philosophical construct!

This latter, as all Ayorians knew, was far the most important. Without it, how could individuals twin or the Ayorian race advance?

One member of our children's group reached beyond his immature plateau level. He matured nearly to the point of twinning and thus left us for adult company. The excitement of this event caused all to press me even harder for novel philosophical ideas. I saved my best and biggest idea for the time of grouping, however. This idea consisted of two parts.

"Can intelligent beings exist which do not twin?"

And:

"What happens to a race when they refuse to accept their twinning problem?"

VI

The time of grouping came again.

I waited silently in our huge grouping cavern, letting my mind wander back over the memory of my years, back to Eme's careful telekinetic caressing of my small body when I so needed comfort and attention. As the Ayor formed their grouping chain overhead I imagined I could once again sense Eme in her appropriate polarity position for this year.

I imagined that I could sense her attention on me, supplying me with air and food and water as my needs became apparent. I imagined, too, that I once again could feel her love for me and her hidden puzzlement, always present, as to the purpose of her twinning problem — namely me, Spork the Ayorian moron.

I imagined I could answer her. "Eme," I said, "*I now know the purpose of your twinning problem. Bear with me through this next great trial and you, too, shall know. Then you will be free to complete your twinning!*"

When the cavern was filled with all the Ayor, lined up according to

their respective philosophical polarities, and their grouping interchanges had begun, I turned on the Tepen field from the captured Tepen weapon. It filled the whole cavern to contain all the Ayor.

Slowly I turned the dial to squeeze the field down. Slowly the whole Ayorian race was squeezed tighter and tighter with no way of escape.

"It is the Tepen!" they shouted as one, in near hysteria.

"No!" I shouted back. "It is Spork, the Ayorian moron!"

"What are you doing, Spork? Why are you doing this?" they chorused.

"I, Spork, was given my twinning problem last year at the grouping. I have come to solve it!"

Their puzzlement was clearly evident. I let them think on it while I twisted the field down tighter.

"We are not Tepen! Why do you treat us like this?" they cried together.

"I am presenting the Ayor with a racial twinning problem!" I responded enigmatically.

Then, no matter what they asked, I kept silent. I knew the Ayorian mind as I knew my own. My seeds had been planted — now, as well as earlier with the children!

Days passed as I squeezed the field down always tighter. Each squeeze caused the Ayor more anguish. But each squeeze had the

desired effect. By now they were forgetting the insignificant philosophical points which formerly took so much of their energy and time. Every member was called on by the racial mind of the Ayor to contribute every bit of itself toward a solution to this dilemma.

Weeks passed in silence . . . to be broken finally by the suffering Ayor. "We understand! We accept our racial twinning problem."

And I released the field!

The seeds I had planted in the children's mind during the past year had slowly worked their way to the attention of the Ayorian consciousness. "What happens to a race," I had asked the children just before the grouping, "when they refuse to accept their twinning problem? Can intelligent beings exist which do not twin?"

Faced with direct threat to survival of the whole race, the Ayors now recognized that Tepen were, and had been for many generations, their chief twinning problem. They now knew how they had refused to accept the problem—how stagnated at one plateau of development each of the groupings had become.

They knew what I had done to them with Tepen equipment would eventually have been done to them by Tepen. Then the Ayorian race would die or be enslaved!

With individual Ayorians, once the twinning problem is accepted, one accepts full responsibility for

its resolution. It is the same with the race. The Ayor, having seen their error, fully accepted the problem of evil Tepen as their racial twinning problem. With one hundred thousand Ayorians now giving it their primary attention, I felt no obstacle could prevent us from quickly overcoming the Tepen.

I was close to being very wrong!

Never once had the Tepen been endangered by any form of life on Enithra. They would feel secure. They would puzzle over the disappearance of one remote village, but they would have no cause for suspicion, or need for Ayorian traps, within their own communities. It was safe, therefore, for the Ayor to scout out the location of each Tepen on the planet.

The day of attack arrived. Each Ayorian was assigned to the destruction of at least one Tepen and surveillance of another Ayorian to give assistance in event of trouble.

At a prearranged time, each Ayor telekmassed his assigned Tepen several thousand feet underground. The sudden appearance of Tepen atoms within the matrix of underground materials caused a spontaneous realignment of energy patterns . . . resulting in huge atomic explosions underground, effectively destroying each Tepen.

Degraded, selfish, bestial entities that they were, yet still they had keen brains. The Tepen

leader had prepared equipment for his self-protection even in the remote possibility of an Ayorian uprising. Such a contingency was so logically remote and unnecessary that it demonstrates the degree of paranoia which must have accompanied Tepen leadership!

As each Ayorian accomplished his single act of destruction against his assigned Tepen, he also observed the success or failure of another. Athie, assigned to the Tepen leader who was located in his more than adequately protected citadel, was trapped by the Tepen first. His mental probes activated the protective devices.

The Ayorian observing Athie turned to help — and was trapped next. As each Ayorian mentally flew to help another, his own mental probes entrapped himself, as Ovef had been trapped in chase of the nut during our “nut game”.

Faster and faster the Ayorians were caught while I, nearly a planetary diameter away, raged in frustration.

I rushed to one group of adults only to watch as they disappeared before my light receptors. I, Spork, the Ayorian moron, Spork, the would-be avenger, had been the cause of this disaster! Was this mighty effort merely the start of total Ayorian extinction?

One group of children moved me the planetary distance and I arrived, striking in frenzy and an-

guish at the mound of metal which served to protect the Tepen leader and within which so many of my beloved Ayorian brethren were now trapped.

Whatever I did had to be right! It also had to be done without the use of mass sense or teleportation faculties!

I physically walked to the doorway of the metal mound, stepping cautiously inside. There, in the center of the huge dome, was the suited figure of the last remaining Tepen. He floated over a circular platform surrounded by my entrapped brethren. Though the telekinetic cages had only begun to be filled with Ayors, each was squeezed tightly against another and more entered in the brief moment of my glance.

Enraged at these evil doings, I ran swiftly toward the platform intent, on grasping and killing the terrible Tepen leader with my hands and teeth. Never before — not since the time of Emé's death, at least — had I had to control such terrible pent-up emotions.

I sprang forward — and it was then I hit the new physical-barrier energy field to be knocked unconscious by my own momentum!

VII

When I regained awareness, all was as before — except that now there were twenty or more en-

ergy cages containing the suffering Ayor. Whatever threat I might have represented to the Tepen chief he must have felt was successfully countered by the new, invisible physical-barrier shield which I had struck. The Tepen leader ignored me.

I regained my feet to batter in futile rage at the invisible shield. Around and around the platform and cages I raced, battering and bruising only my fists against the impregnable barrier; while, just beyond my reach, new energy cages sprang into being.

Helplessly, I sat exhausted then, to stare at the polycyclic energy fields encaging my tribe. As each cycle passed from infra-red to ultra-violet, I could momentarily see their agonized bodies.

Then, thank the great one, I knew the final answer!

I teleported myself toward the evil Tepen — only to find myself, as expected, trapped in one of the energy cages with the Ayor. Ah, but I could move *through* the energy cages with my appendages — arms and legs! As I had learned so long ago, the magnetic structure of my being was too weak to be held by the field as my brethren were. I immediately pushed my way through the limbless Ayorian bodies, and easily pushed myself through the tingling, brilliant telekinetic entrapping field to land on the floor beside the Tepen chief.

Only then did he take cognizance of me.

He raised his death ray toward me. But I had long ago learned how swiftly I could move compared to them. I dodged his motion easily, swung to his side and crushed my fist completely through the top of his thin artificial, metallic shell. My hand withdrew, dripping his sickly yellow fluids onto the “off” switches of the telekinetic cages.

How filled with joy we were with the release of nearly half our tribe! Now the evil Tepen were dead — and not one Ayorian had died in the accomplishment.

The last citadel of the Tepen was largest of all; it contained every device invented or in use by the Tepen. Though we destroyed all other villages, we left the power plant operational in this largest one so that its metallic structures would be protected from the seeking fingers of Enithra life.

As a racial group, the Ayor had reached and passed a major twinning plateau, I was sure. Heretofore, the Ayor, who were the dominant species of Enithra, excepting their degenerate descendants, had interest and concern for only things mental. So long as they persisted in this direction, they came closer and closer to their racial extinction. Thus a plateau had been reached, unknowingly, many generations back.

Unwilling to challenge their basic hypothesis of life, their relationship to it and their tribal goals, they maintained their plateau position unchanged. They had disguised their lack of evolutionary progress in their terrible drive for "consistency."

Even their philosophical games, as I had learned under the children, bore the marks of this rigidity. Only those ideas which were both novel *and* simultaneously consistent with their past philosophy could win in the game.

Over the years, truly new and novel ideas that were inconsistent with past philosophy were unacceptable. Thus the rise of the Tepen was inevitable as some kind of divergent radial adaptation.

Fortunately for the Ayor, I, too, was inconsistent to the Enithra way of life — not just to Ayor or Tepen, but to all plant life and animal life.

I was capable of indirect *and* direct action against the material environment. Thus, as the central part of Eme's twinning problem, she had to recognize and accept my inconsistency from Enithra patterns. If my beloved Eme had only lived, I like to believe that her eventual recognition and acceptance would have led her genetic children to accept the principle of direct action along *with* their native-born instinctive, indirect action.

Fortunately, too, I was placed with the Ayorian children for so many years. There I thoroughly learned the Ayorian mind, how it worked, and how each individual twinning led to divergent radial adaptations through changes in the magnetic structure of each twin. For the Ayor, form followed function almost completely. Once function — that is, accepted premises of one's attitude toward the universe — changed, then so did their structure and their potential.

Only the children were sufficiently plastic to accept *my* ideas as worthy of consideration — even though not consistent with past Ayorian belief.

Then, too, only the terrible Tepen threat to Ayorian survival could force the Ayorian adult to re-structure his thinking.

I could easily imagine the next plateau for the Ayorians! First, tentatively exploring and stumbling time and again, the Ayor would reach for the knowledge of the Tepen. Slowly but surely, they would enlarge the fabric of their being to include the principles of both direct and indirect action against their environment. Then, and only then, they would become true masters of their environment — ready, perhaps, for the next plateau.

But why do I speak of "them" so easily? Am I not, too, an Ayorian?

If I were truly an Ayor, one who has accepted fully another's twinning problem and conquered it successfully as I had Eme's, would I not twin? Yet here am I, Spork the moron, Spork the avenger, un-twinning.

Release of tension which often accompanies death and its dangers brought me to a new low of emotional apathy. I could not understand my failure to twin, as would any other Ayor who had conquered a twinning problem.

So in puzzlement and emotional apathy, I turned my back on my brothers. I teleported at random, from point to point, across Enithra's surface. The sun shone brightly whenever I passed through cloudless skies; the flowers still displayed variegated rivers of colorful motion; animal life jumped and struggled around me. Yet I passed through Enithra's delights with my mind slowed and my spirits sagging. *I hadn't twinned! Who am I? What am I?*

The place was profusely covered with dense violet jungle growth — it was the place where Eme had found me twelve Enithra years ago. Oddly, I had not given thought to this place during all my years of growth.

Nearly all of the metal I had been found in was gone. Plant life had found it an easy source for nourishment from which, molecule by molecule, it was drawn.

My hand touched the polarization barrier surrounding the untouched dense metal ball within which Eme had found me.

Inscribed on some chemical structure still unwanted by Enithra life was the regular geometric inscription that Eme had described to me and puzzled over for so many years. It was shaped thus:

HEART OF THE HOUSE OF THE GALACTIC COUNCIL.

Beyond this strange geometry was the dense sphere. Inside it lay only broken pieces of apparatus discarded or not yet used by the voracious appetite of Enithra's life. Clearly, there was no hint here as to what Spork really was!

In much sadness and sentimentalism, I sat to stare at this odd figure. My mind searched all around to recapture the original scene. Where had Eme hidden? What did she hide behind? Was she in the small hollow cave only three miles away? Was she behind that flowing waterfall only a mile away?

With strangely watering light-receptors, I let my mind reach through its forty-mile limit to find what would have appeared to Eme to be a good hiding place from Tepen. Then I imagined Eme there, slowly letting her fine-tuned telekmass sensor reach out for

study of the once hot body at my feet.

As I imagined her mind pushing from atom to atom, always alert for Tepen traps, I let my mind wander over the small life form which was I, inside the protective sphere; I imagined how I must have lain so still to be fed by strange mechanical and chemical apparatus.

As my mind dwelled sentimentally on the total experience, I imagined I could once again feel the touch of soft hands pressing and caressing my baby skin. "Much like Eme's telekinetic touch," I thought.

Then, still in deep fatigue and reverie, fragments of my memory coalesced to break open with blinding reality.

I really was being held! I could feel *her* hands on my back and her breast at my chest! I could smell *her* clean perfume! I knew the security of deep contentment that comes only with a full stomach and a biological mother's love!

She patted me on my buttocks while the other being spoke: "Though we headed the house of the galactic council, Patricia, the sabotage was inevitable. We may be genetically superior. But to the common people we are still only

human. Place the baby in the life container now."

I, Spork, the Ayorian moron — Spork, the avenger — was Spork, "only human!"

Aside from new conscious memory of my parent's similarity to my structure — with arms, legs, nose, mouth and so on — their conversation was as meaningless to me as was the geometry proclaiming "HEART OF THE HOUSE OF THE GALACTIC COUNCIL."

Though I now knew I belonged to another species, the knowledge was only that, not an emotional fact of my life. And the noises which my parents used just before placing me in the life container were "feeling" messages, not semantic symbols terminating in conscious understanding. I still had to discern meaning. "Only human" was just a part of the buried semantic content in need of deciphering.

I slept a dreamless sleep, deep with comfort and contentment this night. The weather was mild and the sleep fulfilling; my mind, finally composing itself in nature's way, also prepared me for the long future ahead.

I slept in peace. Perhaps I could not twin, but I had been given a new twinning problem: to find the content for the symbol "human" — and to attain my destiny! *END*



Dear Editor:

Since President Nixon has recently gone on record as opposing appropriations for deep-space exploration, there are good grounds for your concern that our race will elect to delay its full entrance into space and return to its "wars and squabbles". If the squabbling is carried out in the usual fashion, this clearly involves a net loss. But the closed-system approach to inhabited planets has spawned an odd and somewhat frightening conjecture which might be used to defend Mr. Nixon's position.

The conjecture (I believe it was made by Fred Hoyle) is that any intelligent race on the verge of becoming spacefarers is apt to be threatened *at exactly that time* with a period of extreme social instability — a mechanism ideal for reducing interstellar congestion.

The argument for this is fairly simple. A race which is just reaching the technological level needed for space travel is starting to crowd the limits of its planet in several important ways. Its civilization's

normal functioning is starting to get rough on global ecology (and other environmental features). Its technology **can** raise comprehensive hell in the (formerly tolerable) event of major war. And it is being pressured toward these hazards by the simple force of population pressure.

In one sense there shouldn't be any problem. The ecological damage could be cut down, the social tempers soothed and the population quickly decrowded — all by some simple applications of fast, high-volume space travel to lots of well scouted habitable planets. The efficacy of this "frontier" solution could be argued by analogy with the salutary effects that the opening up of the Western Hemisphere had on our own "old world". But there will not be enough time for this solution to develop. Before the race can develop and carry out interstellar exploration, it will have (at least temporarily) taken itself out of the running . . . unless it can develop *other* means of getting itself through the social bottleneck.

If this conjecture is at all cor-

rect, the races who inherit the stars will be, paradoxically, not those which devote their energies to space travel as soon as it comes within their reach, but those which divert their energies to fairly successful dealings with their wars and squabbles!

I would be interested in hearing other people's reactions to this idea.

I do not apologize if the above sounds neo-Malthusian. I cannot agree with Mr. Gold's listing of Malthus among the "great refuted theorists" of the past, particularly in view of the fact that Argentina, Australia and the U.S. — the only nations now producing more food than they can eat — were all pure frontier to his world. — Wilbur Walkoe, Jr., 4505 Lake Michigan Drive, Allendale, Michigan 49401.

● Very good points, to be sure. But whether they can be used to demonstrate the space program should be canceled is another question. We think not. First, because a solution which *may* not work should not be abandoned on those grounds unless there are alternative solutions which are both more likely to work and competitive with the uncertain one. We have no such alternative solutions. Second, because there is no clearly visible future time which will be *better* for implementing a space

program than now, so why not do it now? (Especially since if population growth remains explosive, all future times are likely to have less in the way of available capital than the present.) Third — and probably most important! — Because Space Is There. — *The Editor*.

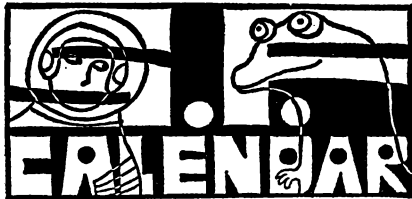
* * *

Dear Editor:

Why don't you conduct a poll where fans send in a list of their favorite authors and you get stories from the top half dozen or so for a special issue of *Galaxy* or *If*? It might take a year to get stories from the favorite authors, but would be worth the wait. I'd like to see more of Robert Silverberg, Clifford Simak, Gordon Dickson and especially Fritz Leiber.—Donald Leach, R.F.D. #2, East Holden, Maine 04429.

● The idea's fine, the mechanics are a problem. So we probably can't do a special issue; but what we do do, and have been doing for years, is place very heavy reliance on what readers ask for: Andre Norton, for instance was requested by many readers, and so we made a determined effort to get Andre Norton stories (like *The Toys of Tamisen!*). And, of the four you mention — we're happy to say all are upcoming in near-future issues of *Galaxy* and *If*. — *The Editor*.

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May 9-11, 1969. DISCLAVE. At Skyline Inn, South Capitol and I Street, S.W. Washington D.C. Guest of Honor: Lester del Rey. Membership: \$1.50, in advance; \$2.00, at the door. For information: Jay Haldeman, 1244 Woodbourne Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland 21212.

June 6-8, 1969. PgHLANGE (Pittsburgh regional convention). At Allegheny Motor Inn, 1424 Beers School Road, Coraopolis, Pennsylvania. Guest of Honor: Robert Silverberg. Features a banquet. Membership: \$1.50, in advance, \$2.00, at the door. For information: Peter Hays, 1421 Wightman, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15217.

June 23-August 1, 1969. THE SECOND ANNUAL CLARION WRITERS' WORKSHOP IN SPECULATIVE FICTION. Participants may register for two, four or six weeks, and college credit may be granted. Faculty: Robin Scott, Fredrik Pohl, Fritz Leiber, Harlan Ellison, Damon Knight and Kate Wilhelm. The cost is \$88.00 for each two-week segment and includes full room and board. For information: Robin Scott Wilson, English Department, Clarion State College, Clarion Pennsylvania 16214.

June 20-22, 1969. THE SOUTH-WESTERCON. At the Ramada Inn, 2525 Allen Parkway, Houston, Texas.

Membership \$2.50. For information: Tony Smith, 1414 Lynnview, Houston, Texas 77055.

June 28-30, 1969, MIDWESTCON. At The North Plaza Motel, 7911 Reading Road, Cincinnati, Ohio. For reservation blanks and information: Lou Tabakow, 3953 St. Johns Terrace, Cincinnati, Ohio 45236.

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 22-24, 1969. DEEP SOUTH STF CONFERENCE (DSC). At Ramada Inn, just off I-40 and I-75, Knoxville, Tennessee. Guest of Honor: Rachel Maddux, author of "The Green Kingdom." Membership: \$2.00. For information: Janie Lamb, Rt. #1, Box 364, Heiskell, Tennessee 37754.

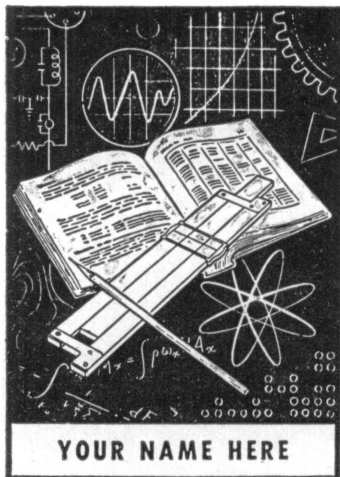
August 29- September 1, 1969. ST. LOUISCON: 27th World Science Fiction Convention. At Chase-Park Plaza Hotel, 212 N. Kingshighway, St. Louis, Missouri 63108. Guest of Honor: Jack Gaughan. Fan Guest of Honor: Ted White. Features: Project Art Show; Masquerade Ball; All-night movies — every night; Rock 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.

November 8-9, 1969. PHILCON. At Warwick Hotel, 17th and Locust, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Membership: \$2.00. For information: Tom Purdom, 4734 Cedar Avenue, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19143.

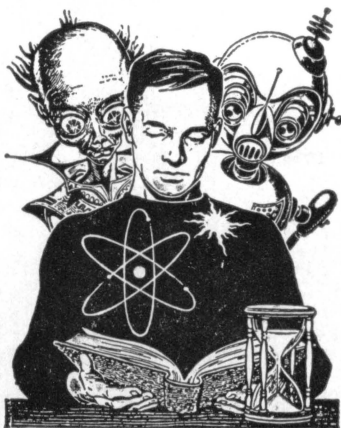
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Dept. 94-FHX, Garden City, N.Y. 11530

Please accept my application for membership and rush me the 3 books whose numbers I have circled below. Bill me only \$1.00, plus shipping and handling, for all 3. Then, every month, send me the Club's free bulletin, "Things to Come", which describes coming selections. For each book I accept, I will pay only \$1.49, plus shipping and handling, unless I take an extra-value selection at a higher price. I need take only four books within the coming year and may resign at any time thereafter.

NO-RISK GUARANTEE: If not delighted with my introductory package, I may return it in 10 days to cancel membership.

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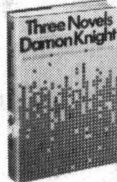
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If under 18, parent must sign here. (Offer good in U.S.A. only)

Circle the numbers of
the 3 books you want.

600	606	607
610	616	618
619	622	623
627	628	632
643		



610. Three Novels by Damon Knight. Rule Golden. The Dying Man & Natural State—all complete. Pub. ed. \$3.95

607. Prelude to Mars by Arthur C. Clarke. "Sands of Mars" & "Prelude to Space"—both complete! Plus 16 short-stories. Pub. ed. \$4.95

622. The Foundation Trilogy, by Isaac Asimov. The ends of the galaxy revert to barbarism. Pub. ed. \$10.50

627. Last Starship From Earth by John Boyd. Young lovers flee loveless society ruled by computer "god". Pub. ed. \$4.95.



643. The Past Through Tomorrow. Fourty-four stories by the Grand Master of science fiction. Pub. ed. \$5.95

616. Twice 22 by Ray Bradbury. Fourty-four stories by the Grand Master of science fiction. Pub. ed. \$4.95

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619. Asimov's Mysteries by Isaac Asimov. 13 love-and-larceny spiced whodunits of the future — puzzlers all! Pub. ed. \$4.50

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