WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION • June 1973 • 75¢

IF

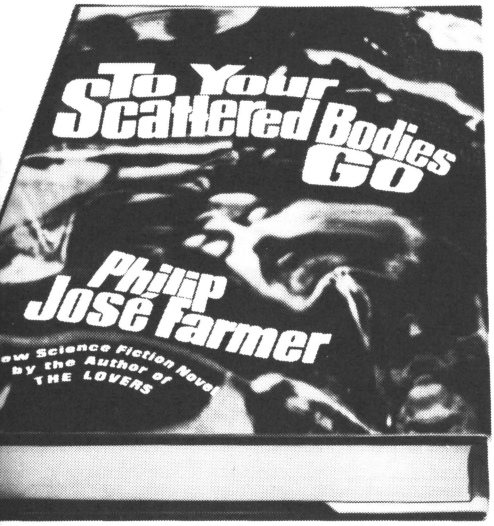
BRILLIANT NEW NOVEL!

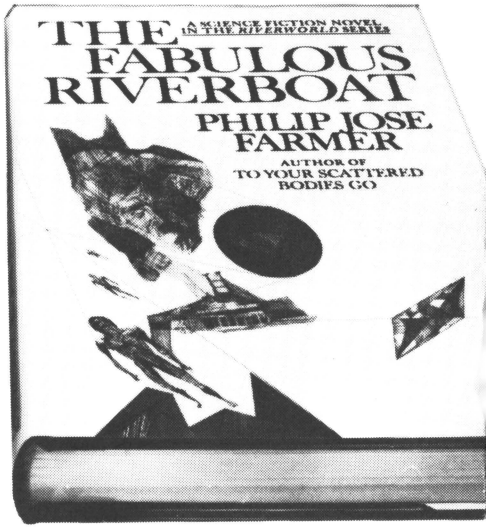
OUR CHILDREN'S CHILDREN
CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

MNARRA MOBILIS
Sidney J. Van Scyoc

PROMISE THEM ANYTHING
Dean McLaughlin

The first two novels in
PHILIP JOSÉ FARMER'S
stunning Riverworld Trilogy!





TO YOUR SCATTERED BODIES GO

"An imaginative science fiction novel ...[set] in an unfamiliar barren land. ...Intellectually challenging."—*Publishers Weekly.* "Intriguing and ingenious."—*Library Journal.* "A fascinating, exciting book." —*St. Louis Post-Dispatch.* "I couldn't put it down." —*Minneapolis Tribune.* WINNER OF THE 1972 HUGO AWARD FOR BEST SCIENCE FICTION NOVEL OF THE YEAR.

Putnam edition, $4.95
Berkley paperback, 75¢

THE FABULOUS RIVERBOAT

"A wild romp across a landscape that Hieronymous Bosch might have dreamed up. . . . Clever, fast-moving, and really different." —*Publishers Weekly.* "An intriguing, multi-charactered novel set on the planet Riverworld where all humanity has been reborn." —*The Booklist.* "A highly imaginative story." —*Boston Globe.*

Putnam edition, $5.95
Berkley paperback, 75¢

From your bookseller, or order direct from the publisher.

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS 200 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016

These scifi writers have a curious outlook on the future... it's their faith!

Barry Malzberg finds the institutional church deaf to the trumpets of the Apocalypse. But for *Raymond Jones* all the lions of Rome can't stop the "new men" of Trelawney's World.

With *Clancy O'Brien* Christianity comes up from its sewage chamber chapel for full-screen entertainment. While *George Smith* finds Christianity compatible with Vertality according to the Mark 184B.

Dean Koontz sees a sinless child contaminated. *Raylyn Moore* sees a mountain mystic electrocuted. *Gail Kimberly* sees centaurs; *Roger Lovin,* winged boatmen; *Leigh Brackett,* gentle Hywl; *Thomas Scortia,* the Wandering Jew.

Ten farsighted authors see humans and aliens and believable peoples in search after a common language. . . . As the Lorsii asked the Apostle, "What means this 'wrong'?"

Flame Tree Planet and Other Stories

An Anthology of Religious Science Fantasy

Edited by
Roger Elwood
Paperback,
12-2528,

$1.35

Please send me _____ copies of **FLAME TREE PLANET** (12-2528), $1.35 each. Add 10¢ per dollar for postage and handling.
I enclose $_____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ ZIP _____

CONCORDIA
PUBLISHING | HOUSE
3558 SOUTH JEFFERSON AVENUE
SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI 63118

Dept. 290 B

WORLDS OF IF SCIENCE FICTION

May-June 1973
Vol. 21, No. 11
Issue 166

ALL NEW STORIES

Cover by Brian Boyle Studio, suggested by MNARRA MOBILIS

Worlds of IF is published bimonthly by UPD Publishing Corporation, a subsidiary of Universal Publishing & Distributing Corporation. Arnold E. Abramson, President. Main Offices: 235 East 45 Street, New York, N.Y. 10017. Single copy: 75¢. 12-issue subscription: $9.00 in U.S., $10.00 elsewhere.

Worlds of IF is published in the United Kingdom by Universal-Tandem Publishing Company. Ltd., 14 Gloucester Road, London SW7 4RD. Arnold E. Abramson, Chairman of the Board. Ralph Stokes, Managing Director. Single copy: 25p. 12-issue subscription in the United Kingdom: £3.60.

Strategy & Tactics

The paper time machine

STRATEGY & TACTICS is a magazine. It's also a tool: a time machine that enables you to replay the crucial events — past, present, and future — that shape our lives.

Now, instead of merely reading about what's happening, you can explore and experience the alternatives and decision points through the technique of Conflict Simulation.

What is Conflict Simulation?

Conflict Simulation is a way of analyzing a political or military conflict situation. A way that is as intellectually stimulating as a game of chess, and as thorough as a written analysis.

Through the use of the Conflict Simulation (or "game") format, the conflict situation is re-created — so that you are in a position to make the vital decisions and, in the game at least, change the way things were, are, or will be.

What you get

STRATEGY & TACTICS magazine is published bi-monthly. Each issue contains:

★ A ready-to-play conflict-simulation game with a 22 x 28" playing surface, die-cut playing pieces, and complete rules.

★ An analytical article on the same subject as the game in that issue.

★ Other feature articles on historical and military subjects.

★ Game and book reviews, commentary on existing games, and discussions of subscribers' questions.

The magazine is 48 + pages long, and all material is handled in a highly organized (and easily understandable) graphic format.

Games recently published in STRATEGY & TACTICS were: *GRUNT* (ground combat in Vietnam), *LOST BATTLES* (tactical combat in Russia, 1941-44), *USN* (the war in the Pacific, 1941-43), *COMBAT COMMAND* (tactical combat in Western Europe, 1944).

We also publish a separate line of conflict-simulation games, which you will find listed in the coupon.

Free to new subscribers

NAPOLEON AT WATERLOO, history's greatest battle presented in a game-design specially created to introduce new readers to Conflict Simulation.

Send check or M.O. to:
Simulations Publications Inc.
Dept. 491 44 East 23rd St., New York, N.Y. 10010

Please enter my subscription to S. & T. for:

- ☐ **1 Year (6 issues)—$10**
- ☐ **2 Yrs. (12 issues)—$17**
- ☐ **3 Yrs. (18 issues)—$24**
- ☐ **Current issue $4**

Send me the following Simulation Games:

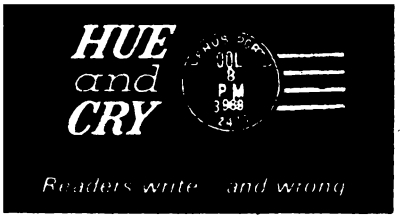
- ☐ **Kursk** (Russia, 1943)—**$6**
- ☐ **Korea** (1950-51)—**$6**
- ☐ **Phalanx** (ancient Greece)—**$6**
- ☐ **Barbarossa** (Russia, 1941-45)—**$6**
- ☐ **Leipzig** (Napoleonic Wars, 1813)—**$6**
- ☐ **Normandy** (the D-Day Invasion)—**$6**

☐ Please send me your free brochure.

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ State_____ Zip_____



Dear Mr. Jakobsson:

I'm beginning to believe you have a particular taste for sf stories dealing with androids and/or cyborgs, because I find a high percentage of such stories in both Galaxy Magazine *and* Worlds of If. *The February issue of* If *contains two of that kind:* The Never Girl *and* Ghosts. *And surprisingly (to me) both were on the better side of mediocre, most stories of that kind today, when almost every aspect of the general field has been explored barely short of the point of diminishing returns, being mediocre.*

Rarely are any as original or interesting as those by Michael Coney and Robert Young in this issue.

Although a lot of the history provided to us in the footnote in The Never Girl *seemed unbelievable as far as necessity and/or logical or likely consequences are concerned, it was indeed a fascinating treatment of the general field known to many as "the new biology." And* Ghosts *was just long enough for its uniqueness to hold interest until the end.*

But the best story in the magazine by far was Clifford Simak's Contruction Shack. *Written by a man who is probably one of the twenty all-time greatest writers of sf in the world, a Simak story is always good and usually among the best. His story in this issue of* If *was one of the latter.*

Pluto itself is probably the most intriguing of all the known planets, being, as Simak brings out so well in his story, at the outermost rim of the solar system. And Simak exploited its mystery as few other sf writers could do.

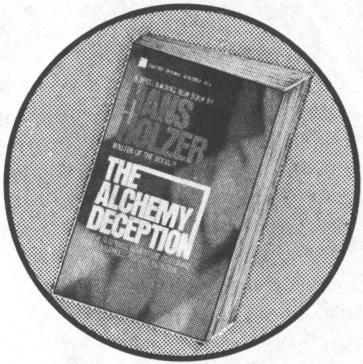
I was expecting a different outcome of the explorers' investigation—something on the order of their discovering that the aliens who built Pluto were originally the guardians of the universe, similar to the Watchers from The Fantastic Four, *with sentries in each galaxy and one in every star system (not solar system; there's only one Sol). But I wasn't disappointed at the real revelation at the end of the story. And the only other flaw in the piece was the overemotionalism of the expedition's leader after he found out how his creators had*

(Continued on page 174)

Great new science-fiction titles from . . .

AWARD BOOKS

From HANS HOLZER – master of the occult – a chilling novel of intrigue and adventure...



HANS HOLZER –

World renowned ghosthunter perhaps the greatest living authority on parapsychological phenomena, combines his great talent and experience to make this hair-raising tale featuring Randy Knowls, psychic detective.

AN1059 95¢

* *

THE BEST–OF–THE–BEST COLLECTIONS FROM THE FOREMOST S.F. MAGAZINES...

95¢

THE BEST FROM GALAXY AN1039

"Excellent"--N.Y. Post.

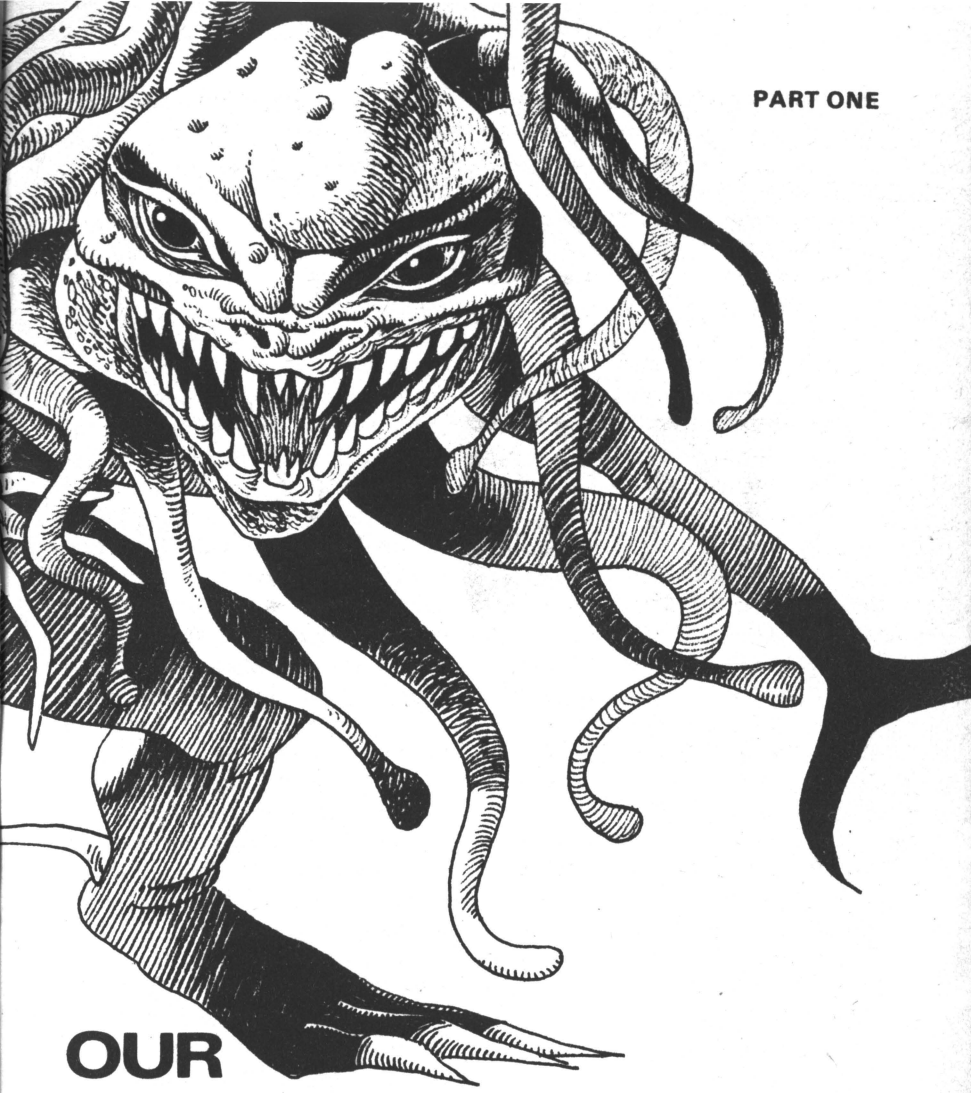
Including top stories by John Brunner, R.A. Lafferty, Michael G. Coney, Harlan Ellison.

95¢

THE BEST FROM IF AN1065

Including stories by Hugo award-winners James Blish, Keith Laumer, and the Nebula award-winning "Occam's Scalpel, by Theodore Sturgeon.

ORDER FROM YOUR BOOKSTORE, OR DIRECTLY FROM:
AWARD BOOKS, Dept. G-MJ-73, P.O. Box 500, Farmingdale, N.Y. 11735
(please add 25¢ for shipping)



PART ONE

OUR CHILDREN'S CHILDREN

Fleeing Earth's end they come—to give their "elders" another chance!

CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

1. Bentley Price, photographer for Global News Service, had put a steak on the broiler and settled down in a lawn chair, a can of beer in hand, to watch it, when the door opened under an ancient white oak tree and people started walking out of it.

Many years had passed since Bentley Price had been astounded. He had come, through bitter experience, to expect the unusual and to think but little of it. He took pictures of the unusual, the bizarre, the violent, then turned around and left, sometimes most hurriedly, for there was competition from such as the AP and the UPI, and an up-and-coming news photographer could allow no grass to grow beneath his feet. And while picture editors certainly were not individuals to be feared, it was often wise to keep them mollified.

But now Bentley was astounded, for what was happening was not something that could easily be imagined or ever reconciled to any previous experience. He sat stiff in his chair, the beer can rigid in his hand and a glassy look about his eyes, watching the people walking from the doorway. Although now he saw that the opening was not exactly a door, but a ragged hole of darkness that quivered at the edges and was somewhat larger than any common door, for people were emerging four and five abreast.

They seemed quite ordinary, although they were dressed a bit outlandishly. If they all had been young he would have thought they were from a university or a youth center and wearing the crazy kind of clothes that college students affected. But while some of these people were young, a lot of them were not.

One of the first to have walked out onto the lawn was a tall thin man, graceful in his leanness. He had a great unruly mop of iron-gray hair and his neck looked like a turkey's. He wore a short gray skirt that ended just above his knees. A red shawl draped across one shoulder was fastened at his waist by a belt that also held the skirt in place. He looked, Bentley told himself, like a Scot in kilts, but without the plaid.

Beside him walked a young woman dressed in a white and flowing robe that came down to her sandaled feet. The robe was belted and her intensely black hair, worn in a ponytail, hung down to her waist. She had a pretty face, thought Bentley—the kind of prettiness one seldom saw—and her skin, what little could be seen of it, was as white and clear as the robe she wore.

The two walked toward Bentley and stopped in front of him.

"I presume," said the man, "that you are the proprietor."

Something was wrong with the way he talked. He slurred his

words. But he was entirely understandable.

"I suppose," said Bentley, "you mean do I own the joint."

"Perhaps I do," the other said. "My speech may not be of this day, but you seem to hear me rightly."

"Sure I do," said Bentley, "but what about this day? You mean to tell me you speak different every day?"

"I do not mean that at all," said the man. "You must pardon our intrusion. It must appear unseemly. We'll endeavor not to harm your property."

"Well, I tell you, friend," said Bentley, "I don't own the place. I'm just holding down the homestead for an absent owner. Will you ask those people not to go tramping over flower beds? Joe's missus will be awful sore if she comes home and finds those flowers messed up. She sets a store by them."

All the time that they'd been talking, people had been coming through the door and now they were all over the place and spilling over into the yards next door and the neighbors were coming out to see what was going on.

The girl smiled brightly at Bentley. "I think you can be easy about the flowers," she said. "These are good people, well-intentioned and on their best behavior."

"They count upon your sufferance," said the man. "They are refugees."

Bentley took a good look at them. They didn't look like refugees. In his time, in many different parts of the world, he had photographed a lot of refugees. They were grubby and usually packed a lot of plunder, but these people were neat and clean and they carried very little, a small piece of luggage, perhaps, or a sort of attache case, like the one the man who was speaking with him had tucked under one arm.

"They don't look like refugees to me," he said. "Where are they refugeeing from?"

"From the future," said the man. "We beg utmost indulgence of you. What we are doing, I assure you, is a matter of our life or death."

That shook Bentley up. He went to take a drink of beer and then decided not to and, reaching down, set the beer can on the lawn. He rose slowly from his chair.

"I tell you, mister," he said, "if this is some sort of publicity stunt I won't lift a camera. I wouldn't take no shot of no publicity stunt, no matter what it was."

"Publicity stunt?" asked the man and there could be no doubt that he was plainly puzzled. "I am sorry, sir. What you say eludes me."

Bentley took a close look at the door. People still were coming out of it, still four and five abreast and there seemed no end to them. The opening hung there as he first

had seen it, a slightly ragged blob of darkness that quivered at the edges. It blotted out a small section of the lawn, but behind and beyond it he could see the trees and shrubs and the play-set in the back yard of the house next door.

If it was a publicity stunt, he decided, it was a topnotch job. A lot of PR jerks must have beat their brains out to dream up one like this. How had they rigged that ragged hole and where did all the people come from?

"We come," said the man, "from five hundred years in the future. We are fleeing from the end of the human race. We ask your help and understanding."

Bentley stared at him. "Mister," he asked, "you wouldn't kid me, would you? If I fell for this I would lose my job."

"We expected, naturally," said the man, "to encounter disbelief. I realize there is no way we can prove our origin. We ask you, please, to accept us as we define ourselves."

"I tell you what," said Bentley. "I will go with the gag. I will take some shots, but if I find it's publicity—"

"You are speaking, I presume, of taking photographs."

"Of course I am," said Bentley. "The camera is my business, understand?"

"We didn't come to have photographs taken of us. If you have some compunctions about this matter, please feel free to follow them. We will not mind at all."

"So you don't want your pictures taken," Bentley said fiercely. "You're like a lot of other people. You get into a jam and then you scream because someone snaps a picture of you."

"We have no objections," said the man. "Take as many pictures as you wish."

"You don't mind?"

"Not at all."

Bentley swung about, heading for the back door. His foot caught the can of beer as he turned and sent it flying.

Three cameras lay on the kitchen table, where he had been working with them before he'd gone out to broil the steak. He grabbed up one of them and was turning back toward the door when he thought of Molly. Maybe he'd better let Molly know about this, he told himself. The guy had said all these people were coming from the future and if that were true, it would be nice for Molly to be in on it from the start. Not that he believed a word of it, of course, but it was mighty funny, no matter what was going on.

He picked up the kitchen phone and dialed. He grumbled at himself. He was wasting time when he should be taking pictures. Molly might not be home. It was Sunday and a nice day and there was no reason to expect to find her home.

Molly answered.

"Molly, this is Bentley. You know where I live?"

"You're over in Virginia. Mooching free rent off Joe while he is gone."

"It ain't like that at all. I'm taking care of the place for him. Edna, she has all these flowers—"

"Ha!" said Molly.

"What I called about," said Bentley, "is would you come over here?"

"I will not," said Molly. "If you have in mind making passes at me you have to take me out."

"I ain't making passes at no one," Bentley protested. "I got people walking out of a door all over the back yard. They say they're from the future, from five hundred years ahead."

"What! Impossible—"

"That's what I think, too. But where are they coming from? There must be a thousand of them out there. Even if they're not from the future it ought to be a story. You better haul your tail out here and talk with some of them. Have your byline in all the morning papers."

"Bentley, this is on the level?"

"On the level," Bentley said. "I ain't drunk and I'm not trying to trick you out here and—"

"All right," she said. "I'll be right out. You better call the office. Manning had to take the Sunday trick himself this week and he's not too happy with it, so be careful how you say hi, there.

But he'll want to get some other people out there. If this isn't just a joke—"

"It's not any joke," said Bentley. "I ain't crazy enough to joke myself out of any job."

"I'll be seeing you," said Molly.

She hung up.

Bentley had started to dial the office number when the screen door slammed. He looked around and the tall thin man stood just inside the kitchen.

"You'll pardon me," the tall man said, "but there seems to be a matter of some urgency. Some of the little folks need to use a bathroom. I wonder if you'd mind—"

"Help yourself," said Bentley, making a thumb in the direction of the bath. "If you need it, there's another one upstairs."

Manning answered after a half-dozen rings.

"I got a story out here," Bentley told him.

"Out where?"

"Joe's place. Out where I am living."

"Okay. Let's have it."

"I ain't no reporter," said Bentley. "I ain't supposed to get you stories. All I do is take the pictures. This is a big story and I might make mistakes and I ain't paid to take the heat—"

"All right," said Manning wearily. "I'll dig up someone to send out. But Sunday and overtime and all, it better be a good one."

"I got a thousand people out in the backyard, coming through a funny door. They say they're from the future—"

"They say they're from the what?" howled Manning.

"From the future. From five hundred years ahead."

"Bentley, you're drunk."

"It don't make no never mind to me," said Bentley. "It's no skin off me. I told you. You do what you want."

He hung up and picked up a camera.

A steady stream of children, accompanied by some adults, was coming through the kitchen door.

"Lady," he said to one of the women, "there's another one upstairs. You better form two lines."

2. Steve Wilson, White House press secretary, was heading for the door of his apartment and an afternoon with Judy Gray, his office secretary, when the phone rang. He retraced his steps to pick it up.

"This is Manning," said the voice at the other end.

"What can I do for you, Tom?"

"You got your radio turned on?"

"Hell, no. Why should I have a radio turned on?"

"There's something screwy happening," said Manning. "You should maybe know about it. Sounds like we're being invaded."

"Invaded?"

"Not that kind of invasion. People walking out of nothing. Say they're from the future."

"Look, if this is a gag—"

"I thought so, too," said Manning. "When Bentley first called in—"

"You mean Bentley Price, your drunken photographer?"

"That's the one," said Manning, "but Bentley isn't drunk. Not this time. Too early in the day. Molly's out there now and I have sent out others. AP is on it and—"

"Where is this all going on?"

"One place is over across the river. Not far from Falls Church."

"One place?"

"There are others. We have it from Boston, Chicago, Minneapolis. AP just came in with a report from Denver."

"Thanks, Tom. I owe you."

He hung up, strode across the room and snapped on a radio.

". . .so far known," said the radio. "Only that people are marching out of what one observer called a hole in the landscape. Coming out five and six abreast. Like a marching army, one behind the other, a solid stream of them. This is happening in Virginia, just across the river. We have similar reports from Boston, the New York area, Minneapolis, Chicago, Denver, New Orleans, Los Angeles. As a rule, not in the cities themselves, but in

the country just beyond the cities. And here is another one—Atlanta, this time." A quiver in the deadpan voice betrayed momentary unprofessional excitement. "No one knows who they are or where they come from or by what means they are coming. They are simply here, walking into this world of ours. Thousands of them and more coming every minute. An invasion, you might call it, but not a warlike invasion. They are coming empty-handed. They are quiet and peaceable. They're not bothering anyone. One unconfirmed report is that they are from the future, but that, on the face of it, is impossible—"

Wilson turned the radio to a whisper, went back to the phone and dialed.

The White House switchboard answered.

"That you, Della? This is Steve. Where is the President?"

"He's taking a nap."

"Could you get someone to wake him? Tell him to turn on the radio. I am coming in."

"But, Steve, what is going on? What is—"

He broke the connection, dialed another number. After a time Judy came on the line.

"Is something wrong, Steve? I was just finishing packing the picnic basket. Don't tell me—"

"No picnic today, sweetheart. We're going back to work."

"On Sunday?"

"Why not on Sunday? We have problems. I'll be right along. Be outside, waiting for me."

"Damn," she said. "There goes my plan. I had planned to make you, right out in the open, on the grass under the trees."

"I'm going to torture myself all day," said Wilson, "thinking of what I missed."

"All right, Steve," she said. "I'll be outside waiting on the curb."

He turned up the radio. "...fleeing from the future. From something that happened in their future. Fleeing back to us, to this particular moment. There is, of course, no such thing as time travel, but there are all these people and they must have come from somewhere..."

3. Samuel J. Henderson stood at the window, looking out across the rose garden, bright in the summer sun.

Why the hell, he wondered, did everything have to happen on Sunday when everyone was scattered and it took no end of trouble to get hold of them? It had been on another Sunday that China had exploded and on still another that Chile had gone down the drain and here it was again—whatever this might be.

The intercom purred at him and, turning from the window, he went back to his desk and flipped up the key.

"The secretary of defense," said the secretary, "is on the line."

"Thank you, Kim," he said.

He picked up the phone. "Jim, this is Sam. You've heard?"

"Yes, Mr. President. Just a moment ago. On the radio. Just a snatch of it."

"That's all I have, too. But there seems no doubt. We have to do something, do it fast. Get the situation under control."

"I know. We'll have to take care of them. Housing. Food."

"Jim, the armed forces have to do the job. There is no one else who can move fast enough. We have to get them under shelter and keep them together. We can't let them scatter. We have to keep some sort of control over them for a time at least. Until we know what is going on."

"We may have to call out the guard."

"I think," said the President, "perhaps we should. Use every resource at your command. You have inflatable shelters. How about transportation and food?"

"We can handle things for a few days. A week, maybe. Depends upon how many of them there are. In a very short time we'll need help. Welfare. Agriculture. Whoever can lend a hand. We'll need a lot of manpower and supplies."

"You have to buy us some time," said the President. "Until we have a chance to look at what we have. You'll have to handle it on an emergency basis until we can settle on some plan. Don't worry too much about procedures. If you have to bend a few of them we'll take care of that. I'll be talking to some of the others. Maybe we can all get together some time late this afternoon or early evening. You are the first to call in. I've heard from none of the others."

"The CIA? The FBI?"

"I would imagine they both might be moving. I haven't heard from either. I suppose they'll be reporting in."

"Mr. President, do you have any idea—"

"None at all. I'll let you know as soon as possible. Once you get things moving, get in touch again. I'll need you, Jim."

"I'll get on it immediately."

"Fine, then. I'll be seeing you."

The intercom purred.

"Steve is here," said the President's secretary.

"Send him in."

Steve Wilson came through the door.

Henderson motioned toward a chair. "Sit down, Steve. What have we got?"

"It's spreading, sir. All over the United States and Europe. Up in Canada. A few places in South America. Russia. Singapore. Manila. Nothing yet from China or Africa. So far, no explanation. It's fantastic, sir. Unbe-

lievable. One is tempted to say it can't be happening. But it is. Right in our laps."

The President removed his glasses, placed them on the desk, pushed them back and forth with his fingertips.

"I've been talking with Sandburg. The army will have to get them under shelter, feed them, care for them. How's the weather?"

"I didn't look," said Wilson, "but if I remember correctly from the morning broadcasts, good everywhere except the Pacific Northwest. It's raining there. It's always raining there."

"I tried to get State," said the President. "But, hell, you never can get State. Williams is out at Burning Tree. I left word. Someone's going out to get him. Why does everything always have to happen on Sunday? I suppose the press is gathering."

"The lounge is filling up. In another hour they'll be pounding on the door. I will have to let them in, but I can hold them for a while. By six o'clock, at the latest, they'll expect some sort of statement."

"Tell them we're trying to find out. The situation is under study. You can tell them the armed services are moving rapidly to help these people. Stress the help. Not detention—help. The guard may have to be called out to do the job. That is up to Jim."

"Maybe, sir, in another hour or two we'll know more about it."

"Maybe. You have any thoughts on the matter, Steve?"

The press secretary shook his head.

"Well, we'll find out. I expect to be hearing from a lot of people. It seems incredible that we can sit here, knowing nothing."

"You'll probably have to go on TV, sir. The people will expect it."

"I suppose so."

"I'll alert the networks."

"I suppose I had better talk with London and Moscow. Probably Peking and Paris. We're all in this together—we should act together. Williams, soon as he calls in, will know about that. I think I'd better phone Hugh at the U.N. See what he thinks."

"How much of this is for the press, sir?"

"The TV, I guess. Better keep the rest quiet for the moment. You have any idea of how many of these people are invading us?"

"UPI had an estimate. Twelve thousand an hour. That's in one place. There may be as many as a hundred places. The count's not in."

"For the love of God," said the President, "a million an hour. How will the world take care of them? We have too many people now. We haven't got the housing or the food. Why, do you suppose, are they coming here? If they are from the future they ought to have

historical data. They ought to know the problems they're creating."

"They must have a compelling reason," said the secretary, "whoever they are. They're acting from some sort of desperation. Certainly they know we are limited in our capacity to put them up and keep them."

"Children of our children," said the President, "many times removed. If they're truly from the future they are our descendants. We can't turn our backs on them."

"I hope everyone feels the same about it," said Wilson. "They'll create an economic pinch if they keep coming and in an economic pinch there will be resentment. We talk about the present generation gap. Think of how much greater that gap will be when not two generations, but a number are involved."

"The churches can help a lot," said the President, "if they will. If they don't, we could be in trouble. Let one loud-mouthed evangelist start some pulpit-thumping and we've had it."

Wilson grinned. "You're talking about Billings, sir. If you think it would be all right, I could get in touch with him. We knew one another back in college. I can talk with him, but I don't know what good I'll do."

"Do what you can," said the President. "Reason with him. If

he refuses to see reason we'll find someone who can really lean on him. What bothers me is the welfare population. Bread out of their mouths to feed all these extra mouths. It'll take fast footwork to keep them in line. The labor unions may be scared by all the extra manpower, but they are hardheaded people, all of them. A man can talk to them. They understand economics and you can make some sense to them."

The intercom came to life. The President thumbed the lever.

"Secretary Williams on the line, sir."

Wilson stood up to leave. The President reached for the phone. He looked up at Wilson.

"Stay close," said the President.

"I intend to, sir," said Wilson.

4. All the buttons on Judy's phone were blinking. She was talking quietly into the transmitter. The spindle on her desk was festooned with notes.

When Wilson came into the office she hung up. The lights kept on blinking.

"The lounge is full," she said. "There is one urgent message. Tom Manning has something for you. Said it is top important. Shall I ring him?"

"You carry on," said Wilson. "I'll get him."

He sat down at his desk, hauled the phone close and dialed.

"Tom, this is Steve. Judy said you have something important."

"I think we do," said Manning. "Molly has someone. Seems to be a sort of leader of the gang out in Virginia. Don't know how his credentials run, if there are credentials. But the thing is, he wants to talk with the President. Says he can explain. In fact, he insists on explaining."

"Has he talked with Molly?"

"Some. But not important stuff. He is reserving that."

"It has to be the President?"

"He says so. His name is Maynard Gale. He has a daughter with him. Name of Alice."

"Why don't you ask Molly to bring them along? Back way, not out in front. I'll notify the gate. I'll see what can be done."

"There's just one thing, Steve."

"Yes?"

"Molly found this guy. She has him hidden. He is her exclusive."

"No," said Wilson.

"Yes," insisted Manning. "She sits in on it. It has to be that way. Goddamn it, Steve, it's only fair. You can't ask us to share this. Bentley snagged him first and Molly hung onto him."

"What you're asking me to do would ruin me. You know that as well as I do. The other press associations, *The Times, The Post,* all the rest of them—"

"You could announce it," said Manning. "You'd get the information. All we want is an exclu-

sive interview with Gale. You owe us that much, Steve."

"I'd be willing to announce that Global brought him in," said Wilson. "You'd be given full credit for it."

"But no exclusive interview?"

"You have the man right now. Get your interview. Get it first, then bring him in. That would be your privilege. I might not like it, Tom, but there's not a thing I could do to stop it."

"But he won't talk until he's seen the President. You could release him to us once he's talked."

"We have no hold on him. Not at the moment anyhow. We would have no right to release him to anyone. And how do you know he's what he says he is?"

"I can't be sure, of course," said Manning. "But he knows what is going on. He's part of what is going on. He has things all of us need to know. You wouldn't have to buy his story. You could listen, then exercise your judgment."

"Tom, I can't promise anything at all. You know I can't. I'm surprised you asked."

"Call me back after you've thought it over," Manning said.

"Now, wait a second, Tom."

"What is it now?"

"It seems to me you might be running on thin ice. You're withholding vital information."

"We have no information."

"A vital source of informa-

tion, then. Public policy may be at issue. And what is more, you are holding the man against his will."

"We're not holding him. He's sticking tight to us. He figures we are the only ones who can get him to the White House."

"Well, impeding him. Refusing to give him the assistance that he needs. And—I can't be sure of this, I can only guess—you might be dealing with the equivalent of an ambassador."

"Steve, you can't lean on me. We've been friends too long."

"Let me tell you something, Tom. I'm not going along with this. Friendship or not. I have a hunch I could get a court order within the hour."

"You couldn't get away with it."

"You'd better talk to your lawyer. I'll look forward to hearing from you."

He slammed down the phone and stood up.

"What was that all about?" asked Judy.

"Tom tried to bluff me."

"You were pretty rough on him."

"Damn it, Judy, I had to be. If I had knuckled under—I couldn't knuckle under. In this job you don't make any deals."

"They're getting impatient out there, Steve."

"Okay. You better let them in."

They came in with a rush, quietly, orderly, finding their accustomed seats. Judy closed the doors.

"You have anything for us, Steve?" AP asked.

"No statement," said Wilson. "Really not anything at all. I guess all I have to say is that I'll let you know as soon as there is anything to tell. As of less than half an hour ago, the President knew no more about this than you do. He will have a statement later, as soon as he has some data to base a statement on. I guess the only thing I can tell you is that the armed forces will be assigned the job of getting these people under shelter and providing food and other necessities for them. This is only an emergency measure. A more comprehensive plan will be worked out later, perhaps involving a number of agencies."

"Have you any idea," asked the *Washington Post*, "who our visitors are?"

"None at all," said Wilson. "Nothing definite. Not who they are or where they come from or why they came or how."

"You don't buy their story they are coming from the future?"

"I didn't say that, John. We maintain the open mind of ignorance. We simply do not know."

"Mr. Wilson," *The New York Times* asked, "has any contact been made with any of the visitors who can supply us facts? Have any conversations been initiated with these people?"

"At the moment, no."

"Can we assume from your answer that such a conversation may be imminent?"

"Actually no such assumption would be justified. The administration is anxious, naturally, to learn what it's all about, but this event began happening not a great deal longer than an hour ago. There simply has been no time to get much done. I think all of you can understand that."

"But you do anticipate there'll be some conversations."

"I can only repeat that the administration is anxious to know what is going on. I would think that some time soon we may be talking with some of the people. Not that I know of any actual plans to do so, but surely that would seem to be an early logical course. It occurs to me that members of the press may already have talked with some of them. You may be way ahead of us."

"We have tried," said UPI, "but none of them is saying much. It's almost as if they had been coached to say as little as possible. They will simply say they have come from the future—from five hundred years ahead—and they apologize for disturbing us, but explain it was a matter of life and death for them to come. Beyond that, nothing. We are simply getting nowhere with them. I wonder, Steve, will the President be going on television?"

"I would think he might. I can't tell you when. I'll let you know immediately when a time is set."

"Mr. Wilson," asked the *Times*, "can you say whether the President will talk with Moscow or London or some of the other governments?"

"I'll know more about that after he talks with State."

"Has he talked with State?"

"By now perhaps he may have. Give me another hour or so and I may have something for you. All I can do now is assure you I'll give you what I have as soon as the situation develops."

"Mr. Press Secretary," said the *Chicago Tribune*, "I suppose it has occurred to the administration that the addition to the world's population of some two and a half million an hour—"

"You're ahead of me there," said Wilson. "My latest figure was something over a million an hour."

"There are now," said *The Tribune*, "about two hundred of the tunnels or openings or whatever you may call them. Even if there should be no more than that it means that within less than forty-eight hours more than a billion people will have emerged upon the Earth. My question is how is the world going to be able to feed that many additional people?"

"The administration," Wilson told the *Tribune*, "is very

acutely aware of the problem. Does that answer your question?"

"Partially, sir. But how does it propose to meet the problem?"

"That will be a matter for consultation," said Wilson stiffly.

"You mean you won't answer it?"

"I mean that at the moment I can't answer it."

"There is another similar question," said the *Los Angeles Times*, "concerning the advanced science and technology that must exist in a world five hundred years ahead. Has there been any consideration given—"

"There has not," said Wilson. "Not yet."

The *New York Times* arose. "Mr. Wilson," he said, "we seem now to be moving far afield. Perhaps later some similar questions will be possible to answer."

"I would hope so, sir," said Wilson.

He stood and watched the press corps file back into the lobby.

5. The army was having trouble.

Lieutenant Andrew Shelby phoned Major Marcel Burns. "Sir, I can't keep these people together," he reported. "They are being kidnaped."

"What in hell are you talking about, Andy? Kidnaped?"

"Well, maybe not that, actually. But people are taking them in. One big house is full of them. There must be twenty or more of them inside. I talked with the owner. Look here, I told him, I have to keep these people together. I can't let them get scattered. I've got to load them up and take them where they have shelter and food. Lieutenant, said this man, you don't have to worry about the people I have here. If food and shelter are your only worry you can stop worrying. They are my house guests, sir, and they have food and shelter. And he was not the only one. That was only one house. Other houses, all up and down the street, they have them, too. The whole neighborhood has them. Everyone is taking them in. That's not the whole story, either. People are driving in from miles away to load them up and take them off to take care of them. They're being scattered all over the countryside and I can't do a thing about it."

"Are they still coming out of that door or whatever it is?"

"Yes, sir, they are still coming out of it. They have never stopped. It's like a big parade. They just keep marching out of it. I try to keep them together, sir, but they wander and they scatter and they are taken up by all the people in the neighborhood and I can't keep track of them."

"You've been transporting some of them?"

"Yes, sir. As fast as I can load them up."

"What kind of people are they?"

"Just ordinary people, sir. Far as I can see. No different from us, except that they got a sort of funny accent. They dress funny. Some of them in robes. Some of them in buckskins. Some of them in—oh, hell, they have all kinds of clothes. Like they were at a masquerade. But they are polite and cooperative. They don't give us trouble. It's just that there are so many of them. More of them than I can haul away. They scatter, but that ain't their fault. It's the people who invite them home. They are friendly and real nice, but there are just too many of them."

The major sighed. "Well, carry on. Do the best you can."

6. The buttons on Judy's telephone had never stopped their blinking. The lounge was jammed with waiting newsmen. Wilson got up from his desk and moved over to the row of clacking teletypes.

Global News was coming up with its fifth new lead.

> Washington (GN)—Millions of visitors who say they are from 500 years in the future continued to come to the present world this afternoon, pouring in steady streams from more than 200 "time tunnels."
>
> There has been general public reluctance to accept their explanation that they are from the future, but it is now beginning to gain some acceptance in official quarters, not so much in Washington as in some capitals abroad. Beyond the assertion that they are from the future, however, the refugees will add little else in the way of information. It is confidently expected that in the next few hours more information may be forthcoming. So far, in the confusion of the situation, no one who can be termed a leader or a spokesman has emerged from the hordes of people pouring from the tunnels. But there are now some indications that such a spokesman may have been located and that soon his story will be told. The distribution of the tunnels is worldwide and they have been reported on every continent. An unofficial estimate places the number of people passing through them at close to two million an hour. At this rate...

"Steve," said Judy, "Tom Manning is on the phone."

Wilson went back to his desk.

"Have you got your court order yet?" Manning asked.

"Not yet. I gave you time."

"Well, you can get it any time you want to. Our attorney says you can."

"I don't think I'll need it."

"Matter of fact, you won't. Molly is already on her way. With Gale and his daughter. She'll be there in twenty minutes, more or less, depending on the traffic. It is getting hairy out there. Sightseers pouring in and a slew of army trucks."

"Tom," said Wilson, "there is something I want to say. I know why you had to do it. You simply had to try."

"Steve, there's one thing more."

"What is it, Tom?"

"Gale talked a little to Molly. Not much. There was one thing he asked her to pass along. Something he said couldn't wait."

"You're passing it along?"

"He said to station an artillery piece in front of each of the time tunnels. High-explosive rounds. If anything happens, fire straight into the tunnel. Don't pay any attention to the people who may be in it, just fire. If necessary, keep on firing."

"Any idea of what could happen?"

"He wouldn't say. Just that we would know. Said the explosion would knock out the tunnel, collapse it, put an end to it. You'll take it from here?"

"I'll take it from here."

"I'm not going to use it now," said Manning. "Not right away."

Wilson hung up, picked up the Presidential phone.

"Kim," he asked, "when can I get in?"

"He's on the phone now. Other calls are holding. There are people with him. How important is this, Steve?"

"Top important. I have to see the man."

"Come on in. I'll slip you in as soon as possible."

"Judy," said Wilson. "Molly Kimball is coming in the back way. She'll have two of the refugees with her."

"I'll call the gate," said Judy. "And security. When they get here?

"If I'm not back send them in to Kim."

7. Sandburg, the secretary of defense, and Williams, the secretary of state, sat on a davenport in front of the President's desk. Reilly Douglas, the attorney general, held down a chair at its corner. They nodded to Wilson when he came into the room.

"Steve," said the President, "I know that what you have must be important." The words were barely short of a rebuke.

"I think so, Mr. President," said Wilson. "Molly Kimball is bringing in one of the refugees who says he is a spokesman for at least the Virginia group. I

thought you might want to see him, sir."

"Sit down, Steve," said the President. "What do you know about this man? Is he really a spokesman? An accredited spokesman?"

"I don't know," said Wilson. "I would suppose he might have some credentials."

"In any case," said the secretary of state, "we should listen to what he has to say. God knows no one else has been able to tell us anything."

Wilson took a chair next to the attorney general and settled into it.

"The man sent a message ahead," he said. "He thought we should know as soon as possible. He suggested an artillery piece, firing high-explosive rounds, be placed in front of every door or time tunnel or whatever the people are coming out of."

"There is some danger, then?" asked the secretary of defense.

Wilson shook his head. "I don't know. He apparently was not specific. Only if anything happened at any tunnel we should fire an explosive charge directly into it. Even if there were people in it. To disregard the people and fire. He said the explosive would collapse the tunnel."

"What could happen?" asked Sandburg.

"Tom Manning passed on the word from Molly. He quoted the spokesman as saying we would know. I got the impression the measure is precautionary only. He'll be here in a few minutes. He can tell us."

"What do you think?" the President asked the others. "Should we see this man?"

"I think we have to," said Williams. "It's not a matter of protocol, because in the situation as it stands we have no idea what protocol might be. Even if he isn't what he says he is he can give us information—and so far we have none at all. It isn't as if we were accepting him as an ambassador or official representative of those people out there. We can use our judgment as to how much of his story we'll accept."

Sandburg nodded gravely. "I think we should have him in."

"I don't like the idea of a press association's bringing him in," said the attorney general. "The news media are not particularly disinterested parties. There would be a tendency to palm their own man off on us."

"I know Tom Manning," said Wilson. "Molly, too, for that matter. They won't trade on it. Maybe they would have if this spokesman had given an interview to Molly, but he hasn't talked to anyone. The President, he said, is the only man he'll speak with."

"The act of a public-spirited citizen," said the attorney general.

The secretary of state said, "We won't, of course, be seeing him in any official capacity unless we make it so. We won't be bound by anything he says or anything we say."

"But," said the secretary of defense, "I want to hear more about blowing up those tunnels. I don't mind telling you they have bothered me. I suppose it's all right as long as only people are coming out of them. But what would we do if something else started coming through?"

"Like what?" asked Douglas.

"I don't know," said Sandburg.

"How deeply, Reilly, does your objection go?" the President asked the attorney general.

"Not deeply," said Douglas. "Just a lawyer's reaction against irregularity."

"Then I think," said the President, "that we should see him." He looked at Wilson. "Do you know, has he got a name?"

"Maynard Gale," said Wilson. "He has his daughter with him. Her name is Alice."

The President nodded. "You men have the time to sit in on this?"

They nodded.

"Steve," said the President. "You as well. He's your baby."

8. The village had known hunger, but now the hunger ended. For some time in the night a miracle had happened. High up in the sky, just beyond the village, a hole had opened up and out of the hole had poured a steady stream of wheat. The foolish boy with the crippled leg who belonged to no one, who had simply wandered into the village, who was crippled in his mind as well as in his body, had been the first to see it. Skulking through the night as well as he could with one leg that dragged, unable to sleep, looking for the slightest husk that he could steal and chew on, he had seen the grain plunging from the sky in the bright moonlight. He had been frightened and had turned to run, but his twisting hunger had not let him. He had not known what the cascade was at first, but then it was something new and it might be something he could eat and he had not run away. So, frightened still, he had crept upon it and finally, seeing what it was, had rushed upon it and thrown himself upon the pile that had accumulated. He had stuffed his mouth, chewing and gasping, gulping to swallow the half-chewed grain, strangling and coughing, but stuffing his mouth again as soon as he managed to clear his throat. The overloaded stomach, unaccustomed to such quantities of food, had revolted, and he had rolled down off the pile and lain upon the ground, weakly vomiting.

It was there that others found him later. They kicked him out of the way, for with this wondrous

thing that had happened and that had been spotted by a man of the village who had happened to go out to relieve himself, they had no time for a foolish, crippled boy who had merely attached himself to the village and did not belong there.

The village was aroused immediately and everyone came with baskets and with jars to carry off the wheat, but there was far more than enough to fill all receptacles, so the headmen got together and made plans. Holes were dug in which the grain was dumped, which was no way to treat good wheat. But it had to be hidden, if possible, from the sight of other villages and it was the only thing the people could think of to do immediately. With the dryness and the drought upon the land there was no moisture in the ground to spoil the wheat and it could be safely buried until that time when something else could be devised to store it.

But the grain kept pouring from the sky and the ground was baked and hard to dig and they could not dispose of the pile.

In the morning soldiers came and, thrusting the villagers to one side, began hauling the wheat away in trucks.

The miracle kept on happening. The wheat continued to pour from the sky, but now it was a less precious miracle, not for the village alone, but for a lot of other people.

9. "I would suppose," said Maynard Gale, "that you would like to know exactly who we are and where we're from."

"That," agreed the President, "might be an excellent place to start."

"We are," said Gale, "most ordinary, uncomplicated people from the year twenty-four hundred ninety-eight, almost five centuries in your future. The span of time between you and us is about the same as the span of time between the American voyages of Christopher Columbus and your present day.

"We are traveling here through what I understand you are calling, in a speculative way, time tunnels, and that name is good enough. We are transporting ourselves through time and I will not even attempt to try to explain how it is done. Actually I couldn't even if I wanted to. I do not understand the principles except in a very general way. If, in fact, I understand them at all. The best I could do would be to give you a very inadequte layman's explanation."

"You say," said the secretary of state, "that you are transporting yourselves through time back to the present moment. May I ask how many of you intend to make the trip?"

"Under ideal circumstances, Mr. Williams, I would hope all of us."

"You mean your entire population? Your intention is to leave your world empty of any human beings?"

"That, sir, is our heartfelt hope."

"And how many of you are there?"

"Give or take a few thousand, two billion. Our population, as you will note, is somewhat less than yours at the present moment and later I will explain why this—"

"But why?" asked the attorney general. "Why did you do this? You must know that our world's economy cannot support both your population and our own. Here in the United States, perhaps in a few of the more favored countries of the world, the situation can be coped with for a limied period of time. We can, as a matter of utmost urgency, shelter you and feed you, although it will strain even our resources. But there are other areas of Earth that could not manage to sustain you even for a week."

"We are well aware of that," said Maynard Gale. "We are trying to make certain provisions to alleviate the situation. In India, in China, in some African and South American areas we are sending back in time not only people, but wheat and other food supplies, in the hope that whatever we can send may help. We know how inadequate these provisions will be. And we know as well the stress we place upon all the people of this time. You must believe me when I say we did not arrive at our decision lightly."

"I would hope not," said the President, somewhat tartly.

"I think," said Gale, "that in your time you may have taken note of published speculations about whether or not there are other intelligences in the universe, and the almost unanimous conclusion that there must surely be. Which raises the subsidiary question of why, if this is so, none of these intelligences has sought us out—why we have not been visited. The answer to this, of course, is that space is vast and the distances between stars are great and that our solar system lies far out in one of the galactic arms, far from the greater star density in the galactic core, where intelligence might have risen first. And then there is the speculation concerning what kind of people, if you want to call them that, might come visiting if they should happen to do so. Here I think the overwhelming, although by no means unanimous body of opinion is that by the time a race had developed star-roving capability it would have arrived at a point of social and ethical development where it would pose no threat.

"And while this may be true enough, there would always be exceptions and we, it seems, in our

own time, have become the victims of one of these exceptions."

"What you are saying," said Sandburg, "is that you have been visited, with what appears to have been unhappy results. Is that why you sent ahead the warning about the planting of artillery?"

"You haven't yet set up the guns? From the tone of your voice—"

"We have not had time."

"Sir, I plead with you. We discussed the possibility that some of them might break through the defenses we set up and invade the tunnels. We have strong defenses, of course, and there are strict orders—to be carried out by devoted men—to destroy any tunnel where a breakthrough might occur but there is always the chance that something could go wrong."

"But your warning was so indefinite. How will we know if something—"

"You would know," said Gale. "There would be no doubt at all. Take a cross between your largest, most powerful mammal and your most agile one. Let it move so fast that it seems no more than a blur. Give it teeth and claws and an armament of poison spines. Not that they look like your bears or tigers or even elephants—"

"You mean they carry nothing but claws and teeth and poison darts?"

"You're thinking of weapons, sir. They don't need weapons. They are unbelievably fast and strong. They are filled with thoughtless bloodlust. They take a lot of killing. Tear them apart and they will keep coming at you. They can tunnel under fortifications and tear strong walls apart."

"It is unbelievable," said the attorney general.

"You're right," said Gale. "But I am telling you the truth. We have held them off for almost twenty years, but we can foresee the end. We foresaw it a few years after they first landed. We knew we had only one chance—to retreat. And the only place we could retreat to was the past. We can hold them off no longer. Gentlemen, believe me, five hundred years from now the human world is coming to an end."

"They can't follow you through time, however," said the President.

"If you mean, can they duplicate our time capability, I am fairly sure they can't. They're not that kind of being."

"There is a serious flaw in your story." said the secretary of state. "You describe these alien invaders as little more than ferocious beasts. Intelligent, perhaps, but still mere animals. For intelligence to be transformed into a technology such as would be necessary to build what I suppose you would call a spaceship, they would require manipulatory members—hands or perhaps even

tentacles, something of the sort."

"They have them."

"But you said—"

"I'm sorry," said Gale. "It cannot all be told at once. They have members armed with claws. They have other members that end in the equivalent of hands. And they have manipulatory tentacles as well. Theirs is a strange evolutionary case. In their evolutionary development, apparently, and for what reason we do not know, they did not trade one thing for another, as has been the case in the evolution of the creatures of the Earth. They developed new organs and abilities, but they let go of none of those they already had. They hung on to everything. They loaded the evolutionary deck in their own favor.

"I would suspect that if they wished they could build most efficient weapons. We have often wondered why they didn't. Our psychologists postulate that these aliens glory in killing. They may have developed their space-traveling capability for no other reason than to find other life forms to destroy. Killing is an intensely personal experience for them—as religion once was for the human race. And since it is so personal it must be done personally, without mechanical aids. It must be done with claws and fangs and poison tail. They may feel about mechanical killing aids what an accomplished swordsman of some hundreds of years ago must have felt about the first guns—contempt. Perhaps each one of them must continually reassert his manhood—selfhood, perhaps—and the only means by which he can do this is slaughter, personally accomplished. Their individual standing, their regard for themselves, the regard of their fellows for them, may be based upon the quality and the quantity of their killing.

"We know little of them. There has been, as you can imagine, no communication with them. We have photographed them and we have studied them dead, but this is only superficial to any understanding of them. They do not fight campaigns. They seem to have no real plan of battle, no strategy. If they had, they would have wiped us out long ago. They make sudden raids and then retire. They make no attempt to hold territory as such. They don't loot. All they seem to want is killing. At times it has seemed to us that they have deliberately not wiped us out—as if they were conserving us, making us last as long as possible, so we'd still be there to satisfy their bloodlust."

Wilson glanced at the girl sitting on the sofa beside Gale and caught on her face a shadow of terror.

"Twenty years?" Sandburg said. "You held these beasts off for twenty years?"

"We are doing better now," said

Gale. "Or at least we were doing better before we left. We now have weapons. At first we had none. Earth had been without war and weapons for a hundred years or more when their spaceship came. They would have exterminated us then if they had fought a total war, but as I have explained, it has not been total war. That gave us time to develop some defense. We fabricated weapons, some of them rather sophisticated weapons, but even your weapons of today would not be enough. Your nuclear weapons might work, perhaps, but no sane society—"

He stopped in some embarrassment, waited for a moment and then went on. "We killed a lot of them, of course, but it seemed to make no difference. There always seemed as many of them as ever, if not more. Only the one spaceship came, as far as we could determine. It could not have carried many of them, large as it was. The only answer to their numbers seems to be that they are prolific breeders and that they reach maturity in an incredibly short time. They don't seem to mind dying. They never run or hide. I suppose, again, that it is their warrior's code. They seem to know nothing quite as glorious as death in battle. And they take much killing. Kill a hundred of them and let one get through and it more than evens the score. If we had stayed they would eventually have wiped us out. Even trying to conserve us, as they may have been trying, they still would have exterminated us. That is why we're here.

"It is impossible, I think, for the human race to accept the sort of creatures they are. There is nothing that we know that can compare with them."

"Perhaps," said the President, "in view of what we have been told, we should do something now in regard to that artillery."

"We have, of course," the attorney general pointed out, "no real evidence."

"I would rather," said Sandburg sharply, "move without ironclad evidence than find it suddenly sitting in my lap."

The President reached for his phone. He said to the secretary of defense, "Use this phone. Kim will put through the call."

"After Jim has made his call," said State, "perhaps I should use the phone. We'll want to get off an advisory to the other governments."

10. Miss Emma Garside turned off the radio and sat bolt upright in her chair in something approaching silent awe of herself for the brilliance of the idea that had just occurred to her. It was not often (well, actually never before) that she had felt that way, for—although a proud wom-

an—she was inclined to be mousy in both her actions and her thoughts. The pride she had was a secret one, divulged only occasionally and guardedly to Miss Clarabelle Smythe, her closest friend. It was something she held close within herself for comfort, although there were times she flinched a little when she remembered the undoubted horse thief and the man who had been hanged for a rather heinous offense. She had never mentioned either the horse thief or the hanged man to her good friend Clarabelle.

The Sunday afternoon sunlight slanted through the west window, falling on the worn carpeting where the aged cat slept, tightly rolled into a ball. In the garden at the rear of the dowdy house on the dowdy street a catbird was calling sassily—perhaps preparing for a new inroad on the raspberry patch—but she paid it no attention.

It had cost a deal of money, she thought. The pride she had was a ter writing and some traveling, but what she knew had been worth the money and time. For there was no one else in this little town who could trace back his or her blood as far as she—to the Revolution and beyond, back to English days and little English villages that lay sunken deep in time. And while there had been a horse thief and a hanged man and others of somewhat dubious character and undistinguished lineage, they had been offset by country squires and sturdy yeomen, with even the hint of an ancient castle somewhere in the background, although she never had quite been able to authenticate the castle.

And now, she thought, and now! She had carried her family research back as far as human ingenuity and records went. Now could she—would she dare—proceed in the opposite direction, forward into the future? She knew all the old ancestors and here, she told herself, was the opportunity to acquaint herself with all the new descendants. If these people were really what the radio hinted they might be—it surely could be done. But if it were to be done she would have to do it, for there would be no records. She would have to go among them—those who came from the area of New England—and she would have to ask her questions and she might ask many different people before she got a clue. *Are there, my dear, any Garsides or Lamberts or Lawrences in your family tree? Well, then, if you think so, but don't really know—is there anyone who would? Oh, yes, my dear, of course it is most important—I cannot begin to tell you how important . . .*

She sat in the chair, unstirring while the cat slept on and the catbird screamed, feeling in her that strange sense of family that had

driven her all these years and which, given this new development, might drive her further yet.

11. "So," said the President, leaning back in his chair, "as we have it so far, the Earth some five hundred years from now is being attacked by beings from space. It is impossible for the people of that day to cope with them and their only recourse is to retreat back into the past. Is that a fairly accurate summary of what you've told us?"

Gale nodded. "Yes, sir, I would say it is."

"But now that you are here—or a lot of you are here and more coming all the time—what happens now? Or have you had no opportunity to plan ahead?"

"We have plans," said Gale, "but we will need some help."

"What I want to know," said the attorney general, "is why you came back to us. Why to this particular moment in time?"

"Because," said Gale, "you have the technology that we need and the resources. We made a thorough historical survey and this particular time slot, give or take ten years, seemed to suit our purpose best."

"What kind of technology are you thinking of?"

"A technology that is capable of fabricating other time machines. We have the plans and the specifications and the labor force. We will need materials and your forebearance."

"But why time machines?"

"We do not intend to stay here," said Gale. "It would be unfair to do so. It would put too great a strain on your economy. As it is we are putting a great strain upon it. But we could not stay up there in the future. I hope you understand that we had to leave."

"Where will you be going?" asked the President.

"Deeper into time," said Gale. "To the Mid-Miocene."

"The Miocene?"

"A geological epoch. It began, roughly, some twenty-five million years ago, lasted for some twelve million years."

"But why the Miocene? Why twenty-five million years? Why not ten million or fifty million or a hundred million?"

"There are a number of considerations," said Gale. "We have tried to work it out as carefully as we can. The main reason is that grass first appeared in the Miocene. Paleontologists believe that grass appeared at the beginning of the period. They base their belief upon the development of high-crowned cheek-teeth in the herbivores of that time. Grass carries abrasive minerals and wears down the teeth. The development of high-crowned teeth that grew throughout the animal's lifetime would be an answer to this. The teeth are the kind that

one would expect to find in creatures that lived on grass. There is evidence, too, that during the Miocene more arid conditions came about, which led to the replacement of forests by extensive grass prairies that supported huge herds of grazing animals. This, say the paleontologists, began with the dawn of the Miocene, twenty-five million years ago, but we have chosen as our first target twenty million years into the past. The paleontologists' timetable may be in error, although we do not believe it is."

"If that is where you're heading," the attorney general asked, "Why are you stopping here? Your time tunnels, I assume—the ones you used to reach us—would have carried you that far."

"That is true, sir. But we didn't have the time. This move had to be made as rapidly as possible."

"What has time to do with it?"

"We can't go into the Miocene without implements and tools, with no seed stocks or agricultural animals. We have all those in our own time, of course, but it would have taken weeks to gather and transport them to the tunnel mouths. There was also the matter of capacity. Every tool or bag of seed or head of livstock would mean it would take longer to move the people. Given the time and without the pressure of the aliens we would have done it that way, going directly to the Miocene. But the logistics were impossible. The monsters knew something was going on and we knew that as soon as they found out what it was they would attack the tunnel heads. We felt we have to move as swiftly as we could to save as many people as we could. So we arrive here empty-handed."

"You expect us to furnish you with all the things you need?"

"Reilly," the President said quietly, "it seems to me you are being somewhat uncharitable. This is not a situation we asked for nor one that we expected, but it is one we have and we must deal with it as gracefully and as sensibly as we can. As a nation we have helped and still are helping other less favored peoples. It is a matter of foreign policy, of course, but it is also an old American tendency to hold out a helping hand. These people on our soil are, I would imagine our own descendants, hence native Americans, and it doesn't seem to me that we should balk at doing for them what we have done for others."

"If," the attorney general pointed out, "any of this is true."

"That is something," the President agreed, "we must determine. I imagine that Mr. Gale would not expect us to accept what he has told us without further investigation when that is possible. There is one thing, Mr. Gale, that rather worries me. You say that

you plan on going back to a time when grass has evolved. Do you intend going blind? What would happen if, when you got there, you found the paleontologists were mistaken about the grass—or that there were other circumstances that made it very difficult for you to settle?"

"We came here blind, of course," said Gale. "But that was different. We had fairly good historic evidence. We knew what we would find. We can't be as certain when we deal with time spans covering millions of years. But we think we have an answer fairly well worked out. Our physicists and other scientists have developed, at least theoretically, a means of communication through a time tunnel. We hope to be able to send through an advance party that can explore the situation and then report back to us.

"One thing I have not explained is that our travel capability is in one direction only. We can go into the past—we cannot move into the future. So, if any advance party is sent back and finds the situation untenable it has no recourse other than to stay there. Our great fear is that we may have to keep readjusting the destination of the tunnels and may have to send out—and abandon—several advance parties. Our people, gentlemen, are quite prepared to face such a situation. We have men guarding the tunnel heads who do not expect to travel through the tunnels. They are well aware that a time will come when each tunnel must be destroyed and that they and whoever else may not have made it through the tunnels must then face death.

"I don't tell you this to enlist your sympathy. I only say it to assure you that whatever dangers there may be we are quite willing to face. We shall not call upon you for more than you are willing to give. We shall be grateful, of course, for anything that you may do."

"Kindly as I may feel toward you," said the secretary of state, "and much as I am disposed, short of a certain natural skepticism, to believe what you have told us, I am considerably puzzled by some of the implications. What is happening now, right here this minute, will become a matter of historical record. It stands to reason that it now becomes a part of history that is read in the future. So you knew before you started how this all came out. You would have had to know."

"No," said Gale, "we did not know. It was not in our history. It hadn't, strange as it may sound to you, yet happened."

"But it had," said Sandburg. "It must have."

"Now," said Gale, "you are getting into an area that I do not myself understand—philosophical and physical concepts, strangely intertwined and so far as I am con-

cerned, impossible of lay understanding. The point you have made is something that our scientific community gave much thought to. At first we asked ourselves if it lay within our right to change history, to go back into the past and introduce factors that would change the course of events. We wondered what effects such history-changing would have and what would happen to the history that we already have. But now we are told that it will have no effect at all upon the history that already has been laid down. I know all this must sound impossible to you and I admit that I don't fully understand all the factors myself. The human race passed this way once before, when our ancestors were moving toward their future and what is happening now did not happen then. So the human race moved into our time and the alien invaders came. Now we come back to escape the aliens and from this moment forward nothing will be quite as we understand our past. History has been changed, but not our history, not the history that led to the moment that we left. Your history has been changed. By our action you are on a new and different course. Whether on this second time track the aliens will attack we cannot be sure, but the indications are they will."

"This," said Douglas flatly, "is a lot of nonsense."

"Believe me," said Gale, "it is not intended as nonsense. The men who worked it out, who thought it through, are honorable and accomplished scholars."

"This is nothing," said the President, "that we can resolve at the moment. Since it is done, we can safely put it off until another day. After all, what's done is done and we have to live with it. One more thing puzzles me."

"Please say it, sir," said Gale.

"Those twenty million years—why go back so far?"

"We want to go back far enough so that our occupation of that segment of Earth's time cannot possibly have any impact on the rise of mankind. We probably will not be there too long. Our historians tell us that man, in his present state of technology, cannot look forward to more than a million years on Earth, perhaps much less than that. In a million years, in far less than a million years, we'll all be gone from Earth. Once man can leave the Earth he probably will leave it. Give him a million years and he surely will be gone."

"But you will have impact in the Miocene," Williams pointed out. "You'll use up natural resources."

"Some iron. Not enough for the amount to be noticed. So little is left where we came from that we know how to be frugal."

"You'll need energy."

"We have fusion power," said Gale. "Our economy would be a great shock to you. We make things to last. Not for ten years or twenty, but for centuries. Obsolescence no longer is a factor in our economy. As a result our manufacturing is less than one per cent of what yours is today."

"That's impossible," said Sandburg.

"By your present standards, perhaps," admitted Gale. "Not by ours. We had to change our life style. We simply had no choice. Centuries of overuse of natural resources left us impoverished. We had to do with what we had. We had to find ways in which to do it."

"If what you say about man's remaining on Earth for no longer than another million years is true," said the President, "I don't quite understand why you have to travel back the twenty million. You could go back only five and it would be quite all right."

Gale shook his head. "We'd be getting too close, then, to the forerunners of mankind. True, man as we recognize him, rose no more than two million years ago, but the first primates came into being some seventy million years ago. We'll be intruding on those first primates, of course, but perhaps with no great impact. And it would be impossible for us to miss them, for to go beyond them would place us in the era of the dinosaurs, which would not be a comfortable time period. Not just because of the dinosaurs alone. The critical period for mankind, the appearance of the forerunners of the australopithecines, could not have been later than fifteen million years ago. We can't be certain of these figures. Most of our anthropologists believe that if we went back only ten million it probably would be safe enough. But we want to be sure. And there is no reason why we can't go deeper into time. So, the twenty million. And there is another thing—we want to leave room enough for you."

Douglas leaped to his feet. "For us?"

The President raised a restraining hand. "Wait a minute, Reilly. Let's have the rest of it."

"It makes good sense," said Gale, "or we think it does. Consider this—just five hundred years ahead lies the invasion of Earth from space. Yes, I know, because of the new course of events our arrival in your time has created the attack may not happen, but our scholars think it will—they're almost sure it will. So why should you move forward to meet it? Why not go back with us? You've got a five-hundred-year margin. You could make use of it. You could go back, not in a hurry as we'll be going, but over the course of a number of years. Why not leave Earth empty and go back to

make a new beginning? It would be a fresh start for the human race. New lands to develop—"

"This is sheer insanity!" shouted Douglas. "If we, your ancestors, left, you wouldn't be here to start with and—"

"You're forgetting what he explained to us," said Williams, "about a different time track."

Douglas sat down. "I wash my hands of it," he said. "I'll have no more to do with it."

"We couldn't go back with you," said Sandburg. "There are too many of us."

"Not with us. Like us. Together there would be far too many of us. There are too many of you now. Here is the chance, if you will take it, to reduce your population to more acceptable numbers. We go back twenty million years. Half of you go back nineteen million years, the other eighteen million years. Each group of us would be separated by a million years. We wouldn't interfere with one another."

"There is one drawback," said Williams. "We wouldn't be like you. We would have a disastrous impact on the resources of whatever period we inhabited. We'd use up whatever fuels and iron—"

"Not," said Gale, "if you had our philosophy, our viewpoint and our technologies."

"You would give these things to us?"

"If you were going back," said Gale, "we would insist on it."

The President rose. "I think," he said, "we have reached a point where we must stop. There are things to be done. We thank you, Mr. Gale, for coming to us and bringing along your lovely daughter. I wonder if we might have the privilege—later—of talking further with you."

"Certainly," said Gale. "It would be a pleasure. There are others of us whom you should be talking with, men and women who know far more than I do about many aspects of the situation."

"Would it be agreeable to the two of you," asked the President, "to be my house guests? I'd be glad to put you up."

Alice Gale spoke for the first time. She clapped her hands together, delighted. "You mean here in the White House?"

The President smiled. "Yes, my dear, in the White House. We'd be very glad to have you."

"You must pardon her," her father said. "It happens that the White House is a special interest of hers. She has studied it. She has read everything about it she can lay her hands on. Its history and its achitecture, everything about it."

"Which," said the President, "is a great compliment to us."

12. The people were still marching from the door, but now mili-

tary policemen were there to direct them and to keep the mouth of the tunnel free for those who pressed on from behind. Other soldiers held back the crowds of curious sightseers who had flocked into the area. A bullhorn voice bawled out directions and when the bullhorn fell silent, the tinny chatter of a radio could be heard from one of the hundreds of cars parked up and down the street. Some were against the curb—others, in a fine display of the disrespect of property, had pulled up on lawns. Military trucks and personnel carriers trundled down the street, halted long enough to take on a load of refugees, roared off. But the people came out of the tunnel faster than the trucks could cart them away and the great mass of people kept pushing outward.

Lieutenant Andrew Shelby spoke into his phone. "We ain't more than making a dent in them, Major Burns. Christ, I never saw so many people. It would be easier if we could get some of the sightseers out of the area. They don't want to leave and we haven't got the manpower to make them. We've closed off all civilian traffic to the area and the radio has been asking people not to come out here, but they are still coming or are trying to come and the roads are clogged. I hate to think of what it will be like once it gets dark. How about them engineers who were supposed to come out here and put up some floodlights?"

"They're on their way," said Burns. "Hang in there, Andy, and do everyting you can. We got to get those people out of there."

"I need more carriers," the lieutenant said.

"I'm feeding them in," the major told him, "as fast as I can lay my hands on them. And another thing—there'll be a gun crew coming out."

"We don't need no gun. What we need a gun for?"

"I don't know," the major said. "All I know it is on its way. No one told me what it was coming for."

13. "You can't honestly believe this story," Douglas protested. "It's too preposterous to admit of any credence. I tell you, we've been had."

Williams said quietly, "So are all these people coming out of the time tunnels preposterous. There has to be some explanation of them. Gale's may be a bit fantastic, but it holds together in a sort of zany fashion. I admit I have some difficulty—"

"And his credentials," the attorney general pointed out. "Identification rather than credentials. Ombudsman for the Washington community, a social service worker of some kind. No connection with any govermental unit—"

"Maybe," said Williams, "they

have no real government. You must realize that five centuries from now there would be changes."

"Steve," the President asked, "what do you make of it? You're the man who brought him in."

"A waste of time," said Douglas.

"If you want me to vouch for his story," said Wilson, "I can't do that, of course."

"What did Molly say?" asked Sandburg.

"Nothing really. She simply turned him over to me. He told her none of the things that he told us, of that I'm sure, but she wormed out of him and his daughter some sort of story about what kind of world they came from. She said she was satisfied."

"Did Global News try to make a deal?" asked Douglas.

"Of course they did. Any news agency or any reporter worth his salt certainly would have tried. They would have been delinquent in their job if they hadn't tried. But Manning didn't press too hard. He knew as well as I did—"

"You didn't make a deal?" asked Douglas.

"You know he didn't," said the President.

"What I need right now," said Wilson, "is some indication of how much I should tell the press."

"Nothing," said Douglas. "Absolutely nothing."

"They know I've been in here. They know something is going on. They won't be satisfied with nothing."

"They don't need to know."

"But they do need to know," said Wilson. "You can't treat the press as an adversary. They have a legitimate function—the people have a right to know. The press has played ball with us before and they will this time, but we can't ignore them. We have to give them something and it had better be the truth."

"I would think," said Williams, "that we should tell them we have information that tends to make us believe these people may be, as they say, from the future, but that we need some time to check. At the moment we can make no positive announcement. We are still working on it."

"They'll want to know," said Sandburg, "why they are coming back. Steve has to have some sort of answer. We can't send him out there naked. Besides, they will know within a short time, that we are placing guns in front of the tunnels."

"It would scare hell out of everyone," said Williams, "if it were known why the guns were being placed. There would be a worldwide clamor for us to use the guns to shut down the tunnels."

"Why don't we just say," suggested the President, "that the people of the future are facing some great catastrophe and are fleeing for their lives? The guns? I

suppose we'll have to say something about them. We can't be caught in a downright falsehood. You can say they are no more than routine precaution."

"But only if the question is raised," said Sandburg.

"Okay," said Wilson, "but that isn't all of it. There'll be other questions. Have we consulted with other nations? How about the UN? Will there be a formal statement later?"

"You could say, perhaps," said Williams, "that we have contacted other governments. We have that advisory about the guns."

"Steve," said the President, "you'll have to try to hold them off. We've got to get our feet under us. Tell them you'll be back to them later."

By Molly Kimball

Washington —— (Global News)—The people who are coming from the tunnels are refugees from time.

This was confirmed late today by Maynard Gale, one of the refugees. He refused to say, however, why they were fleeing from a future which he says lies 500 years ahead of us. The circumstances of their flight, he insisted, could only be revealed to a constituted government. He said he was making efforts to make contact with an appropriate authority. He explained that he held the position of ombudsman for the Washington community in his future time and had been delegated to communicate with the Federal Government upon his arrival here.

He did, however, give a startling picture of the kind of society in which he lives, or rather, did live—a world in which there are no nations and from which the concept of war has disappeared.

It is a simple society, he said, forced to become simple by the ecological problems that we face today. It is no longer an industrial society. Its manufacturing amounts to no more, perhaps less, than one per cent of today's figure. What it does manufacture is made to last. The philosophy of obsolescense was abandoned only a short distance into our future, he said, in the face of dwindling natural resources; a dwindling about which economists and ecologists have been warning us for years.

Because its coal and fossil fuels are almost gone the future world, said Gale, relies entirely on fusion for its energy. The development of that type of power, he said, is the only thing that

holds the delicate economic fabric of his world together.

The world of 500 years from now is highly computerized, with the greater part of the population living in "high-rise" cities. A half-dozen towers, some of them reaching as high as a mile, will constitute a city. Urban sprawl is gone, leaving vast surface areas free for agricultural purposes. The cities are built in large part from converted scrap metal, which in our day would have been buried in landfills. Administration is almost entirely by computer.

There is, Gale said, none of the great spread of wealth that is found in our world. No one is rich and there is none of the abject poverty that today oppresses millions. Apparently there has been not only a change in life style, but a change as well in life values. Life is simpler and kinder and less competitive—there are few eager beavers in the world of 500 years ahead . . .

14. A crowd, quiet and orderly, was gathering in Lafayette Park as crowds had gathered through the years, to stand staring at the White House, not demanding anything, not expecting anything, simply gathering there in a dumb show of participation in a nation's crisis. Above the crowd Andy Jackson still sat his rearing charger, the patina of many years upon both horse and rider, friends to perching pigeons.

No one quite knew what this crisis meant or if it might even be a crisis. The people had as yet no idea of how it had come about or what it might mean to them, although there were a few who had done some rather specific, although distorted, thinking on the subject and were willing (at times insistently) to share with their neighbors what they had been thinking.

In the White House a flood of calls had started to come in and were stacking up—calls from members of the Congress, from party stalwarts ready with suggestions and advice, from businessmen and industrialists suddenly grown nervous, from crackpots who held immediate solutions.

A television camera crew drove up in a van and set up for business, taking footage of the Lafayette crowd and of the White House, gleaming in the summer sun. A newsman on the van was doing a stand-up commentary against the background.

Straggling tourists trailed up and down the avenue, somewhat astonished at thus being caught up in the middle of history, and the White House squirrels came scampering down to the fence and

through it out onto the sidewalk, sitting up daintily, forepaws folded on their chests, begging for handouts.

15. Alice Gale stood in the window, gazing across Pennsylvania Avenue at the gathering crowd in the park beyond it. She hugged herself in shivering ecstasy, not daring to believe that she actually was here—that she could be back in twentieth-century Washington where history had been made, where legendary men had lived—and at this moment in the very room where crowned heads had slept.

Crowned heads, she thought. What an awful, almost medieval phrase. And yet it had a certain ring to it, a certain elegance that her world had never known.

She had caught a glimpse of the Washington Monument as she and her father had been driven into the White House grounds. And out there a marble Lincoln sat in his marble chair, his arms resting on its arms and his massive, whiskered face bearing that look of greatness, of sorrow and compassion that had quieted thousands into reverent silence as they climbed the stairs to stand face to face with him.

Just across the hallway her father was in Lincoln's bedroom with its massive Victorian bed and the velvet-covered slipper chairs. Although, she recalled, Lincoln had never really slept there.

It was history brought back to life, she thought, history resurrected. And it was a precious thing. It would be something to remember always, no matter what might lie ahead. It would be something to remember in the Miocene. And what, she wondered with a little shiver, might the Miocene be like? If they ever got there, if the people of this time should decide to help them get there?

But whatever might happen she had something she could say: *Once I slept in the Queen's Bedroom.*

She turned from the window and looked in wonder once again renewed at the huge four-poster bed with its hangings and counterpane of rose and white, at the mahogany bookcase-secretary that stood between the windows, at the soft white carpeting.

It was selfish of her, she knew, to be feeling like this when so many others of her world at this very moment stood homeless and bewildered, unsure of their welcome, perhaps wondering if they would be fed and where they might lay their heads this night, but even as she tried she could not rebuke herself.

16. "Terry," said the President, speaking into the phone, "this is Sam Henderson."

"How good of you to call, Mr.

President," said Terrance Roberts on the other end. "What can I do for you?"

The President chuckled. "Maybe you can do a lot for me. I don't know if you will want to. You've heard what's happening?"

"Strange things," said the labor leader. "A lot of speculation. Are you folks in Washington making any sense of it?"

"Some," said the President. "It would seem the people of the future face catastrophe and their only escape is to run back into time. We haven't got the full story yet."

"But, Mr. President—time travel?"

"I know. It doesn't sound possible. I haven't talked to any of our physicists, although I intend to do so and I suspect they'll tell me it's impossible. But one of the people who came through a time tunnel swears that's exactly what he did. If there were any other way to explain what is taking place I'd be more skeptical than I am. But I'm forced by circumstances to accept some explanation—at least provisionally."

"You mean all of them from up ahead are coming back? How many of them are there?"

"A couple of billion or so, I guess."

"But, Mr. President, how will we take care of them?"

"Well, that's really what I wanted to talk with you about. It seems they don't intend to stay here. They mean to go farther back in time—some twenty million years farther. But they need help to do it. They need new time tunnels built and they'll need equipment to take with them—"

"We can't build time tunnels."

"They can show us how."

"It would cost a lot. Both in manpower and materials. Can they pay for it?"

"I don't know. I never thought to ask. I don't suppose they can. But it seems to me we have to do it. We can't let them stay here. We have too many people as it is."

"Somehow, Mr. President," said Terrance Roberts, "I can sense what you want to ask me."

The President laughed. "Not only you, Terry. The industrialists as well—everyone, in fact. But I have to know beforehand what kind of cooperation I can expect. I wonder if you'd mind coming here so a few of us can talk about it."

"Certainly, I'll come. Just let me know when you want me. Although I'm not just sure how much I can do for you. Let me ask around some, talk to some of the other boys. Exactly what do you have in mind?"

"I'm not entirely sure. That's something I'll need some help to work out. On the face of it we can't do the kind of job that's called for under existing circum-

stances. The government alone can't assume the kind of costs involved—I'm not thinking just of the tunnels. I have no idea so far what they would involve. But we would need to furnish the resources for an entire new civilization and that would cost a lot of money. The taxpaying public would never stand for it. So we'll have to turn elsewhere for help. Labor will have to pitch in—industry will have to help. A national emergency calls for extraordinary measures. I don't even know how long we can feed all these people and—"

"We're not the only ones who have that problem," said Roberts. "The rest of the world has it, too."

"That's right. And they'll also have to take some action. If there were time we could put together some sort of international setup, but a thing like that takes time and we haven't got it. To start with, at least, it has to be a national action."

"Have you talked to any of the other nations?"

"Britain and Russia," said the President. "Some of the others. But not about the additional time tunnels. Once we get an idea or two shaped up we can see what some of the others think. Pool our thoughts. But we can't take much time. Whatever we do we'll have to get started on almost immediately and work as fast as we can."

"You're sure there are people who can explain these tunnels—whatever they are? Well enough so that our scientists and engineers can understand the principles involved? And the technology well enough—hell, Mr. President, this is sheer insanity. American labor building time tunnels! This has got to be a bad joke."

"I'm afraid," Henderson said, "it isn't a joke. We're in a mess, Terry. I don't know how bad. I imagine it will be a day or two before we have the full story and know what we really face. All I ask right now is that you think about it. Get a few ideas together. Figure out what you can do. I'll let you know about coming down. No use coming now. We have to get a few things sorted out before we can talk. I'll be in touch as soon as I know a little more about it."

"Any time, Mr. President," said Roberts. "You let me know and I'll be there."

The President hung up and buzzed Kim. "Ask Steve to come in," he said when she opened the door. He tilted back in his chair and locked his hands behind his head, staring at the ceiling. Less than five hours ago, he thought, he'd stretched out for a nap, looking forward to a lazy Sunday afternoon. He didn't get many lazy afternoons and when they came he treasured them. He had no more than shut his eyes than the world had fallen in on him. Christ,

he asked himself, what am I to do? What can I do? What's the wise thing to do? Without even trying a man could make a mistake or a number of mistakes and Henderson sensed that in this situation he could not afford mistakes.

Steve Wilson came in. The President took his hands from behind his head and tilted forward in the chair.

"Have you had the press in, Steve?"

"No, sir, I haven't. They're pounding on the door, but I haven't let them in. I didn't have the guts to face them with the little you gave me. I had hoped—"

"All right, then," said the President. "Your hopes paid off. You can give them all of it with two exceptions. You can't tell them why we have the guns planted. That still has to be simply normal precautions. And there must be no hint of Gale's suggestion that we go back in time with them."

"I can't tell them, then, about why they're leaving the future? Nothing about the aliens?"

The President shook his head. "Simply say that this point has not been sufficiently clarified and needs more study before anything can be said of it."

"They won't like it," said Wilson, "but I guess I can manage. How about the TV? I have alerted the networks you may want time this evening."

"How about ten o'clock? That's a little late, I suppose, but—"

"Ten will be all right."

"Then you set it up. Tell them only ten or fifteen minutes."

"I'll draft up something for you to look at."

"You have your hands full, Steve. I'll ask Brad and Frank to put it together."

"They'll want to know if you've talked with anyone."

"I talked with Sterling in London and Menkov in Moscow. You can tell them Menkov has talked with the Russian equivalent of our Gale and has substantially the same story we got. London still hadn't been contacted by anyone when I spoke with Sterling. You can say I plan to talk with other national leaders before the day is out."

"How about a cabinet meeting? The question is sure to come up."

"I've been seeing cabinet members off and on during the last few hours. This is the first time since it's started there has been no one in this office. And I'll be conferring with people on the Hill, of course. Anything else you can think of, Steve?"

"There'll probably be a lot of other questions. I'll manage to field them. You can't anticipate them all. This will satisfy them."

"Steve, what do you think of Gale? Your own personal opinion. How do you size him up?"

"It's hard to know," said Wil-

son. "No real impression, I'd say. Except that I can't figure out where he'd gain anything by not telling the truth, or at least the truth as he saw it. However you look at it, those people out there are in serious trouble and they look to us to help them. Maybe they have a thing or two to hide—maybe it's not exactly as Gale told it, but I think mostly it is. Hard as it may be to accept, I'm inclined to believe him."

"I hope you're right," said the President. "If we're wrong, they could make us awful fools."

17. The chauffeured car went up the curving drive to the gracious mansion set well back from the street among flowers and trees. When it stopped before the portico the chauffeur got out and opened the rear door. The old man fumbled out of it, groping with his cane. He petulantly struck aside the chauffeur's proffered hand.

"I can still manage to get out of a car alone," he panted, finally disengaging himself from it and standing, albeit a little shakily and unsure of himself, upon the driveway. "You wait right here for me," he said. "It may take a little while, but you wait right here for me."

"Certainly, Senator," said the driver. "Those stairs, sir—they look a little steep."

"You stay right here," said Senator Andrew Oakes. "Go sit behind the wheel. Time comes when I can't climb stairs I'll go back home and let some young man have my seat. But not right yet," he said, wheezing a little. "Not right now. Maybe in another year or two. Maybe not. Depends on how I feel."

He stumped toward the stairs, clomping his cane with weighty precision on the driveway. He mounted the first step and stood there for a moment before attempting the next one. As he mounted each step, he looked to either side of him, glaring into the landscape as if daring someone to remark on his progress. But no one was in sight except the chauffeur, who had gone back to sit behind the wheel, studiously not watching the old man's progress up the stairs.

The door came open when he was crossing the pillared entrance.

"I am glad to see you, Senator," said Grant Wellington, "but there was no need to make the trip. I could have come to your apartment."

The Senator stopped, planting himself sturdily before his host. "Nice day for a drive," he said. "And you said you would be alone."

Wellington nodded. "Family's in New England and it's the servants' day off. We'll be quite alone."

"Good," said the Senator. "At my place you can never be sure.

People in and out. Phones ringing all the time. This is better."

He stumped into the entry. "To your right," said Wellington, closing the door.

The old man went into the study, shuffled across the carpeting, dropped into a huge upholstered chair to one side of the fireplace. He laid his cane carefully on the floor beside him, looked around at the book-lined shelves, the huge executive desk, the comfortable furniture, the paintings on the wall.

"You have got it good, Grant," he said. "I sometimes worry about that. Maybe you have it too good."

"Meaning I won't fight? Will be afraid to dirty my hands?"

"Something like that, Grant. But I tell myself I'm wrong. Did plenty of fighting in your day. Out in the business world." He gestured at the paintings. "Always suspicious of a man who owns a Renoir."

"How about something to drink, Senator?"

"Late enough in the afternoon," said the Senator judiciously, "for a splash of bourbon. Great drink, bourbon. American. Has character. I remember you drink scotch."

"With you," said Wellington, "I drink bourbon."

"You been listening to what is happening?"

"Saw some of it on TV."

"Man could stub his toe on a thing like that. He could stub his toe real bad."

"You mean Henderson."

"I mean everybody. Easy thing to do."

Wellington brought the Senator his drink, went back to the bar to pour his own. The old man settled more deeply into the chair, fondling the glass. He took a drink, puffed out his cheeks in appreciation. "For a scotch man," he said, "you carry a good brand."

"I took my cue from you," said Wellington, coming back and sitting on a sofa.

"I imagine the man at sixteen hundred has a lot on his mind. Maybe more than he can handle. Batch of decisions to be made. Yes, sir, a lot of them."

"I don't envy him," said Wellington.

"Most terrible thing that can happen to a man with election coming up next year. He'll have that on his mind and it won't help him any. Trouble is he has to say something, has to do something. Nobody else has to, but he has to."

"If you are trying to say that I should say nothing or do nothing, you are succeeding very well," said Wellington. "Never try to be subtle, Senator. You're not very good at it."

"Well, I don't know," said the Senator. "You can't come straight out and tell a man to keep his mouth shut."

"If these people are really from the future—"

"Oh, they're from the future, all right. Where else could they come from?"

"Then you can't go wrong on them," said Wellington. "They are our descendants. What they are doing is like a bunch of kids running home after they got hurt."

"Well, now, I don't know," said the Senator. "Anyway they're not exactly what I came to talk about. Not the people—but old Sam up there in the White House. He's the one who's got to do something about them and he's bound to make mistakes. We got to watch carefully and evaluate those mistakes. We can jump on some of them and some of them we can't. There may be even a few things he does that we have to go along with—we can't be too unreasonable. But the thing right now is not to commit ourselves. You know and I know there are a lot of people want that nomination next summer to run against old Sam and I mean, if I can imagine it, that you are the one who gets it. Some of the other boys will think they see some opportunities in what the man up there does and they'll get anxious and start shooting off their mouths—and I tell you, Grant, that the people won't remember who was first, but the one who happens to be right."

"Of course I appreciate your concern," said Wellington, "but it happens that you made this trip for nothing. I have no intention whatever of taking a position. I'm not sure right now there is a position one can take."

The Senator held out his empty glass. "If you don't mind," he said. "Another little splash."

Wellington poured another little splash and the Senator settled back again.

"That matter of a position," he said, "is something that is going to require some long and prayerful thought. It has not yet become apparent, but there will be positions practically begging to be taken and a man must look over good and select very carefully. What you say about these folks being our descendants is all well and good. You being a man whose family history is long and proud would think that way, of course. But you got to remember that there are a lot of people with little family history and not proud of what they have and these people—who make up the greatest part of the good old USA—are not going to give a damn about these particular descendants. Maybe them being our descendants will make it all the worse. There are a lot of families these days that are having lots of trouble with their own immediate progeny.

"Several millions of these people are already through the tunnels and they are still pouring

through. But while we can hold up our hands in pious horror and ask how we are going to take care of them, the real gut reaction will come when those extra millions begin to have an effect on the economy. Food may suddenly get scarce and other things, too. Then prices will go up and there'll be a housing problem and a labor problem and there won't be goods enough to go around. And while all this is now just economic talk, in a little while it will cease to be just talk and every man and woman in this fair land will feel the impact of it and that's when there's hell to pay. And that's the time when a man like you must pick out his position and study all the angles before settling on one."

"Good God!" said Wellington. "This thing happening out there is made up of our own people fleeing back to us—and here we sit, the two of us, and try to figure out a good, safe political position—"

"Politics," said the Senator, "is a very complicated and a most practical business. You've got to be hard-headed about it. You can't ever afford to get emotional about it. That's the first thing that you must remember—don't get emotional about anything at all. Oh, it's all right to appear to be emotional. Sometimes that has a certain appeal for the electorate. But before you can afford to feel anything you must have every angle figured out. Emotions are for effect only."

"The way you put it, Senator, is not too attractive. It leaves a slightly dirty taste."

"Sure, I know," said the Senator. "I know about that dirty taste myself. You just shut your mind to it, is all. It's all right, of course, to be a great statesman and a humanitarian, but before you get to be a statesman you have to be a dirty politician. You have to get elected first. And you never get elected without feeling just a little dirty."

He placed the glass on the table beside his chair, fumbled for his cane and found it, heaved himself erect.

"Now, you mind," he said, "before you go saying anything you just check with me. I been through all this many times before. I guess you could say I have developed a political instinct for the jugular and I am seldom wrong. Up there on the Hill we hear things. There are some real good pipelines. I'll know when anything's about to happen—so we'll have time to study it."

18. The press conference had gone well. Arrangements had been made for the President's TV appearance. The clock on the wall ticked over to 6 P.M. The teletypes went on clucking softly.

Wilson said to Judy, "You'd bet-

ter call it a day. It's time to close up shop."

"How about yourself?"

"I'll hang on for a while. Take my car. I'll pick it up at your place."

He reached into his pocket, pulled out the keys and tossed them to her.

"When you get there," Judy said, "come up for a drink. I'll be up and waiting."

"It may be late."

"If it's too late, why bother going home? You left your toothbrush last time."

"Pajamas," he said.

"When did you ever need pajamas?"

He grinned at her lazily. "Okay," he said. "Toothbrush, no pajamas."

"Maybe," said Judy, "it'll make up for this afternoon."

"What this afternoon?"

"I told you, remember. What I planned to do."

"Oh, that."

"Yes, oh, that. I've never done it that way."

"You're a shameless child. Now run along."

"The kitchen will be sending coffee and sandwiches to the press lounge. Ask them nice and they'll throw a crust to you."

He sat and watched her go. She walked surely, but with a daintiness that always intrigued and puzzled him, as if she were a sprite who was consciously trying to make an Earth creature of herself.

He shuffled the loose papers on the desk into a pile and stacked them to one side.

He sat quietly then and listened to the strange mutterings of the place. Somewhere a phone rang. There was the distant sound of someone walking. Out in the lounge someone was typing and against the wall the wire machines went on with their clacking.

It was all insane, he told himself. The entire business was stark, staring crazy. No one in his right mind would believe a word of it. Time tunnels and aliens out of space were the sort of junk the juniors watched on television. Could it, he wondered, be a matter of delusion, of mass hysteria? When the sun rose tomorrow would it all be gone and the world be back on the old footing?

He shoved back the chair and stood up. Judy's deserted console had a couple of lights flashing and he let them flicker. He strode out to the corridor and followed it to the outer door. In the garden outside the heat of the summer day was waning and long shadows stretched across the lawn. The flower beds lay in all their glory—roses, heliotrope, geraniums, nicotiana, columbines and daisies. He stood, looking across the park to where the Washington Monument reared its classic whiteness.

Behind him he heard a footstep and swung around. A woman stood a short distance away. She wore a white robe that came down to her sandaled feet.

"Miss Gale," he said, a little startled. "What a pleasant surprise."

"I hope," she said, "I have done nothing wrong. No one stopped me. Is it all right to be here?"

"Certainly. As a guest—"

"I had to see the garden. I had read so much of it."

"You have never been here, then?"

She hesitated. "Yes, I have. But it was not the same. It was nothing like this."

"Well," he said, "I suppose that things do change."

"Yes," she said, "they do."

"Is something wrong?"

"No, I guess not." She hesitated again. "I see you don't understand. I can't imagine there is any reason why I shouldn't tell you."

"Tell me what? Something about this place?"

"It's this," she said. "In my time, five hundred years ahead, there isn't any garden. There isn't any White House."

He stared at her.

"See?" she said. "You don't believe it. You won't believe me. We have no nations there—we just have one big nation, although that's not exactly right. There aren't any nations and there isn't any White House. A few ragged, broken walls is all, a piece of rusted fence sticking from the ground that you stub your toe on. There isn't any park and there aren't any flower beds. Now can you understand? Can you know what all this means to me?"

"But how? When?"

"Not right away," she said. "Not for a century or more. And now it may never happen. The history you will make will not quite be ours."

She stood there, a thin slip of a girl in her chaste white robe, speaking of a future when there would be no White House. He shook his head, bewildered.

"How much do you understand," he asked, "of this time-track business?"

"There are equations that you have to know to grasp it all," she said. "There are, I suppose, only a few people who really do. But basically it's quite simple. It's a cause and effect situation and once you change the cause or, more likely, many causes, as we must have done in coming here—"

He made a motion of futility with his hand. "I still can't believe it," he said. "Not just the time track, but all the rest of it. I woke up this morning and I was going on a picnic. You know what a picnic is?"

"No," she said. "I don't know what a picnic is. So we're even."

"Some day I'll take you on a picnic."

"I wish you would," she said. "Is it something nice?"

19. Bentley Price came home a bit befuddled, but somewhat triumphant, for he had talked his way past a roadblock set up by the military, had yelled a jeep off the road and honked his way through two blocks clotted by refugees and spectators who had stayed in the area despite all efforts by the MPs to move them out. The driveway was partly blocked by a car, but he made his way around it, clipping a rose bush in the process.

Night had fallen and it had been a busy day and all Bentley wanted was to get into the house and collapse on a bed. But first he had to clear the car of cameras and other equipment, for it would never do, with so many strangers in the neighborhood, to leave the stuff locked in the car, as had been his habit. A locked car would be no deterrent to someone really bent on thievery. He hung three cameras by their straps around his neck and was hauling a heavy accessories bag out of the car when he saw, with outrage, what had happened to Edna's flower bed.

A gun stood in the center of it, its wheels sunk deep into the soil, and around it stood the gun crew. The gunsite was brightly illuminated by a large spotlight that had been hung high in the branches of a tree and there could be no doubt of the havoc that had been wrought upon the flowers.

Bentley charged purposefully upon the gun, brushing aside one astounded cannoneer, to square off, like an embattled bantam rooster, before a young man who had bars on his shoulders.

"You have your nerve," said Bentley. "Coming here when the owner happens to be gone—"

"Are you the owner, sir?" asked the captain of the gun crew.

"No," said Bentley. "I am not, but I am responsible. I was left here to look out for the joint and—"

"We are sorry, sir," said the officer, "if we have displeased you, but we had our orders, sir."

Bentley yelled at him, "You had orders to set up this contraption in the middle of Edna's flower bed? I suppose the orders said to set up in the middle of a flower bed; not a few feet forward or a few feet back, but in the middle of a bed a devoted woman has slaved to grow to perfection—"

"No, not precisely that," said the officer. "We were ordered to cover the mouth of the time tunnel and to do that we needed a clear line of fire."

"That don't make no sense," said Bentley. "Why would you want to cover the tunnel with all them poor people coming out?"

"I don't know," said the officer. "No one bothered to explain to me. I simply got my orders and

I'm about to carry them out, flower bed or no flower bed, owner or no owner."

"Somehow," said Bentley, "you don't sound like no gentleman to me and that's what you're supposed to be, ain't it, an officer and a gentleman? There wouldn't be any gentleman set up no gun in the middle of a flower bed and there wouldn't be any officer aim his gun at a bunch of refugees and—"

A shrill scream split the night. Bentley spun and saw that something was happening in the tunnel. People were still coming out of it, but they weren't marching out four and five abreast as before. They were running out, fighting to get out and overriding them and plowing through them was a horror that Bentley never quite got sorted in his mind. He had the impression of wicked teeth and mighty talons—of terrible power and ferocity—and quite by habit his hands went down to grip a camera and bring it to his eye.

Through the lens he saw that there was not one, but two of the creatures, one almost through the tunnel and the other close behind. He saw the bodies of people flying through the air like limp dolls thrown about by children and others were crushed beneath the monster's treading feet. And he saw writhing tentacles, as if the creatures could not quite make up their minds if they were animals or octopi.

Sharp orders rang out behind him and almost at his elbow the gun belched sudden flame that lit up all the houses and the yards and gardens. A thunderclap knocked him to one side and as he hit the ground and rolled he saw a number of things. The tunnel had suddenly blinked out in an explosion that was little more than a continuation of the thunderclap, although it was more mind-numbing and nerve-shaking. There were dead people and a dead creature that smoked as if it had been fried. But while one of the animals lay on the lawn beneath the great oak tree that had marked the tunnel, the other was very much alive. That one and the gun and its crew became mixed up and people were running, screaming in terror.

Bentley scrambled to his feet and saw the gun crew dead, ripped and flung and trampled. The gun had tipped over. Smoke still trailed from its muzzle. From down the street came shrill, high screams and he caught—for an instant only—the flickering motion of something large and dark whipping across a corner of a yard. A picket fence exploded in a shower of white slivers as the dark thing vanished through it.

He sprinted around the corner of the house and burst through the kitchen door, clawing for the phone, dialing almost by instinct, praying the line was open.

"Global News," said a raspy voice. "Manning."

"Tom, this is Bentley."

"Yes, Bentley. What is it now? Where are you?"

"I am home. Out at Joe's place. And I got some news."

"Are you sober?"

"Well, I stopped by a place I know and had a drink or two. Sunday, you know. None of the regular places open. And when I come home I found a gun crew right in Edna's flower bed—"

"Hell," said Manning, "that's no news. We had that a couple of hours ago. They set up guns at all the tunnels for some reason."

"I know the reason."

"Well, now, that's nice," said Manning.

"Yeah, there was a monster come through the tunnel and—"

"A monster? What kind of monster?"

"Well, I don't know," said Bentley. "I never got a real good look at it. And there wasn't only one monster. There was two of them. One of them the gun killed, but the other got away. It killed the gun crew and tipped over the gun and all the people ran screaming and it got away. I saw it bust right through a picket fence—"

"Now, Bentley," said Manning, "stop talking so fast. Take it a little slow and tell me. You say one got away. There is a monster loose—"

"There sure is. He killed the gun crew and maybe other people, too. The tunnel is shut down and there's a dead beast out there."

"Now tell me about the monster. What kind of monster was it?"

"I can't tell you that," said Bentley, "but I got pictures of it."

"Of the dead one, I suppose."

"No, the live one," said Bentley, his voice bright with scorn. "I wouldn't never bother with no dead monster when there's a live one."

"Now, listen, Bentley. Listen closely. Are you in shape to drive?"

"Sure, I'm in shape to drive. I drove out here, didn't I?"

"All right. I'll send someone else out there. And you—I want you to get in here as quickly as you can with the pictures you have. And Bentley—"

"Yes?"

"You're sure you're right? There really was a monster?"

"I'm sure I'm right," said Bentley piously. "I only had a drink or two."

20. Steve Wilson strode into the press lounge in search of coffee and sandwiches. A dozen or so newsmen were still there.

"Anything new, Steve?" asked Carl Anders of AP.

Wilson shook his head. "Everything seems to be quiet. If anything of consequence were going on I think I would know it."

"And tell us?"

"And tell you," Wilson said sharply. "You know damn well we've played fair with you."

"Yeah? How about the guns?"

"Simply routine emergency precaution. How about some sandwiches or did you guys eat them all?"

"Over there in the corner, Steve," said John Gates of the *Washington Post.*

Wilson piled two sandwiches on a plate and got a cup of coffee. As he came back across the room Gates slid over on the davenport where he had been lounging and patted a place beside him. Wilson sat down, putting his plate and cup on the coffee table.

Anders came over to take a nearby chair. Henry Hunt, the *New York Times* man, sat down on the davenport on the other side of Wilson.

"It's been a long day, Steve," he said.

Wilson bit into a sandwich. "Rough," he said.

"What's going on right now?" asked Anders.

"Perhaps quite a bit. Nothing that I know of. There's nothing I can tell, nothing that I know."

Gates chuckled, "You can talk, can't you?"

"Sure I can talk. But I can't give you anything. You guys know procedure. If I should happen to say something that makes sense it's off the record."

"Well, hell—yes, of course," said Anders. "You newspapered yourself. You know how it is."

"I know how it is," said Wilson.

"What bothers me," said Hunt, "is how anyone, even the President, knows where to take hold of a thing like this. There's no precedent. Nothing like this has ever happened before, nothing remotely like it. As a rule a crisis will build up—you can see it coming and be halfway ready for it. But not this one. This one exploded without warning."

"That's bothering me, too," said Anders. "How do you find a handle?"

"You're stuck with it," said Wilson. "You can't just ignore it. You do the best you can. You try to find out what it's all about. In a case like this you have to be somewhat skeptical and that doesn't allow you to move as fast as you'd like to move. You have to talk with a lot of people—you have to check around and develop some sort of judgment. I suspect you might pray a lot."

"Is that what the President did?" asked Anders.

"That's not what I said. I was just trying to think through a hypothetical question."

"What do you think of it, Steve?" asked Gates. "You, not the President."

"It's hard to tell," said Wilson. "It's all too new. I found myself just a while ago wondering if it

was all delusion, if it might not be gone by morning. Of course, I know it won't be. But it boggles the mind to think of it. I have brought myself to believe these people are really from the future. But even if they're not—they're here and we have to deal with them. I suppose it doesn't really matter where they came from."

"You, personally, still have doubts?"

"You mean are they from the future? Their explanation holds up. Why should they lie? What would they gain by lying?"

"But, still you—"

"Now, wait a minute. I don't want you to start speculating that the answer we have is wrong. That would be unrealistic. This is among friends, remember? Just sitting down and talking."

The pressroom door came open. Wilson looked up. Brad Reynolds stood in the doorway. His face wore a pitiful, stricken look.

"Steve," he said. "Steve, I have to see you."

"What's going on?" asked Hunt.

Through the open door came a frantic clanging as a bell on one of the teletypes signaled a bulletin.

Wilson rose to his feet so swiftly that he joggled the coffee table, tipping his cup. Coffee ran across the table and dripped onto the carpet.

He strode across the room and gripped Reynolds by the arm.

"A monster got through!" Reynolds blurted out. "Global has it. It's on radio."

"For the love of God," said Wilson. He glanced back over his shoulder at the newsmen and saw that they had heard.

"What's this about monsters?" shouted Anders. "You never told us about any monsters."

"Later," said Wilson savagely. He pushed Reynolds back into the pressroom and slammed the door behind him.

"I thought you and Frank were working on the TV speech," he said. "How did you—"

"The radio," said Reynolds. "We heard it on the radio. What will we do about the TV talk? He can't go on TV without mentioning this and it's only an hour away."

"We'll take care of that," said Wilson. "Does Henderson know?"

"Frank went to tell him. I came to you."

"Do you know what happened? Where it happened?"

"Down in Virginia. Two of them came through the tunnel. The gun got one of them. The other one got through. It killed the gun crew—"

"You mean one of them is running loose?"

Reynolds nodded miserably.

21. Tom Manning turned from his desk, and ran fresh paper into the typewriter. He wrote:

Third Lead: Monster

Washington, D.C. (Global)—An alien beast is loose on Earth tonight. No one knows where it is. It came out of a time tunnel in Virginia and disappeared after killing the crew of an artillery piece posted in front of the tunnel, placed to prevent the very thing that happened. A second beast came through with it, but this one was killed by the gun.

There are unconfirmed reports that several other people, in addition to the gun crew, were killed by the tunnel monster.

Eyewitnesses said that the beast was large and unbelievably quick in its movements. No one got a good look at it. "It moved too fast for anyone really to see it," said one eyewitness. Within seconds after emerging from the tunnel it disappeared. There is no clue as to where it may be now.

"Mr. Manning," said someone at his elbow.

Manning looked up. A copy boy stood there.

"Mr. Price's pictures," said the copy boy, handing them to him.

Manning looked at the one on top and drew in his breath sharply. "Jesus H. Christ," he said aloud to himself, "will you look at that!"

It was the sort of picture that some press flack would dream up to advertise a horror movie, but without the phoniness of such a drawing. The creature was in motion even in the still photo, and probably moving fast, for there was a sense of power and swiftness in it. Bentley's super-fast film had frozen it in all its ferocity—the fangs, the talons, the nest of writhing tentacles positioned around its squat, thick neck. The very shape of it was evil. It was beast, but more than beast. There was in it some quality that sent a shiver up Manning's spine—not a shiver of horror, but of outlandish, unreasoning fear.

Manning swung back to the desk and laid the pictures on its top. With a swipe of his hand he fanned them out. All of them were horrifying. A couple of them showed the fleeing crowd—dark shadows in a hurry. Another showed, somewhat less well than Manning would have liked, the shambles where the tunnel mouth had been, with the dead creature crumpled on top of the trampled human bodies.

"That goddamned Price," said Manning soulfully. "He never got a shot of the monster and the gun crew."

22. "We can't cancel your TV appearance," Wilson told the President. "The situation is bad enough right now. It will be worse

if we cancel. We can fix it with a paragraph or two. Say that the Virginia incident is too recent to comment on. Give assurance that it will be run down, that the beast will be found and killed. That we're already closing in on it—"

"But we aren't," said the President. "We don't know where the hell it is. There's been no report of it. You remember what Gale said—how fast they could move. Traveling in the dark, this thing could be deep into the mountains of West Virginia and well hidden before daylight."

"There's more reason right now than there ever was," said Frank Howard, who had been working on the speech text with Reynolds, "for you to talk to the people. The entire country will be in an uproar and we'll have to tame them down."

"You know, Frank," said the President, "I don't seem to care right now to tame the country down. Can't you get it through your head that this is not a political matter? It's far more than that. I can't be sure just how much danger the country may be facing, but I know that there is danger. I've asked Gale to step down here and tell us what he thinks. He knows more than we do."

"What you refuse to understand, sir," said Wilson, "is that the country's waiting to hear from you. The people would like some sort of assurance, but if you can't give them that you can let them know that we are on the job. Seeing and hearing you will be visible proof that everything has not entirely gone to pot. They need some physical evidence that the government is aware of what is going on—"

The box on the President's desk purred. "Yes?" Henderson said.

"A call for Mr. Wilson, sir, an urgent call. Can he answer it in there?"

The President lifted the receiver and handed it to Wilson.

"This is Henry," said Hunt's voice. "Sorry for breaking in, but I thought you should know. One of the other tunnels failed out in Wisconsin. It just came in on AP."

"Failed, you say? Not like Virginia. Nothing came through?"

"Apparently. The message said it failed. Blinked out. Wasn't there any more."

"Thank you, Henry. Thanks for telling me."

He said to the President, "Another tunnel is out. Cut off. Disappeared. I suppose the people did it at the other end. Gale told us, if you remember, that they had men on guard who were prepared to collapse the tunnels if anything went wrong."

"I do recall," said the President. "The invaders must be getting at them. I don't like to think about it. It must take a lot of courage to do a thing like that. The ones at the other end of the Vir-

ginia tunnel apparently didn't have the chance."

"About the speech, sir," said Reynolds. "The time is getting short."

"All right. I suppose I have to. Do the best you can. But don't say anything about our having it tracked down and cornered."

"You'll have to tell them what it is," said Wilson. "There has to be an explanation of what the animal is. We'll have to tell the people it's beasts such as this that the tunnel folks are fleeing."

"There'll be a scream to shut down the tunnels," Reynolds said.

"Let them scream," said the President. "We don't know of any way of shutting them except firing into them. And we can't fire into crowds of refugees without reason—our own refugees."

"In a short while," said Howard, "there may be no need. One tunnel has shut down of itself. There will be others. In a few hours maybe all of them will close."

"I hope not," said the President. "No matter what else happens, no matter what problems they may bring us, I can't help but hope all the people do get through."

Kim stuck her head in the door. "Mr. Gale is here, sir."

"Send him in."

Gale came into the room. He stumbled a little as he started across the room, then stiffened and marched to within a few feet of the desk. His face was haggard.

"I am so sorry, sir," he said. "I can't properly express the regrets of myself or of my people. We thought we had taken safeguards."

"Please sit down, Mr. Gale," said the President. "You can help us now. We need your help."

Gale sat carefully in the chair. "You mean about the alien. You want to know more about it. I could have told you more this afternoon, but there was so much to tell and I never thought—"

"I'll accept your word for that. You did make provisions to guard against what happened. Perhaps you did the best you could. Now we need your help to find this creature. We need to know something about its habits, what we can expect. We have to hunt it down."

"Luckily," said Reynolds, "there's only one of them. When we get it—"

"It is, unfortunately," said Gale, "not as lucky as you think. The aliens are bisexual creatures."

"You mean—"

"That's exactly what I mean," said Gale. "The young are hatched from eggs. Any of the adults can lay fertilized eggs. And lay them in great numbers. Once hatched, the young need no care—or at least are given no care."

"Then," said the President, "we must find it before it starts laying eggs."

"That is right," said Gale, "although I fear you may already be too late. From what we know of them I would suspect that the alien would start laying eggs within a few hours after its emergence from the tunnel. It would recognize the crisis. The aliens are highly intelligent. This one knows that it is the sole representative of its species in this particular time and that the future of the species here may depend on it alone. This will not be an intellectual realization only—its body will also respond to the situation. All its physical resources will be aimed now at reproduction. Furthermore, realizing that eventually it will be hunted down and slain, it will scatter its clutches of eggs over as much territory as it can. It will locate them in the least accessible spots. It is fighting, you understand, not only for itself, but for the species. Perhaps not at all for itself, but only for the species."

"I would suspect," said the President, "that it might be heading for the mountains. But that supposition is based only on my knowledge there are mountains to the west."

Gale said, "It has as good a geographical knowledge of this area as any of us here. The geography is the same five hundred years from now as it is today."

"Then," said the President, "assuming that it would have headed for the mountains, we must not only head it off, but we will have to give some thought to evacuating the people from that area."

"You're thinking nuclear," said Wilson. "Blanketing the area with bombs. You can't do that, sir. Only as a last resort—and perhaps not even then. The tonnage would have to be massive and the fallout—"

"You're jumping to conclusions, Steve." Henderson turned to Gale. "You told us your people could supply us with specifications for the building of the tunnels."

"That is true," said Gale.

"The point is this—if we are to do anything at all we should do it quickly. If we delay, a dangerous social and economic, not to say political, situation may build up. And this matter of the alien has given us even less time than I thought we had. For that reason it seems to me important that we have the specifications and talk with your people who can explain them to us as soon as possible."

"Mr. President," said Reynolds, "we have less than two hours to get your talk shaped up."

"Certainly," said the President. "I am sorry to have held you up. Steve, you stay a moment, please."

"Thank you, sir," said Howard, following Reynolds toward the door.

"Now, where were we?" said the President. "Oh, yes, I was saying

that we need to get to work on the matter of the tunnels. I plan to have some of our physicists and engineers come in and confer with your people."

"Does that mean that you will help us?"

"I would think so, although at the moment I'm in no position to make a positive commitment. But I don't see much else that we can do. We can't keep you here. We can't possibly absorb you into our population. The first step would seem to be to talk with your physicists and find out what's involved. Until we know that we can't do any planning. And there's also the matter of selecting sites."

"We have that all worked out," said Gale. "Our geologists have made a study of the Miocene terrain. Stable land surfaces have been pinpointed and mapped out. We can't be entirely sure, of course, but our people, operating within their best knowledge, have done at least the preliminary work."

"Then," said Henderson, "we won't have to worry about that. But we do need something to get started on."

"The men you want to talk with," said Gale, "were among the first to come through the tunnel. I can give you their names, but I'll have to go with whoever is sent to contact them. Without me they'd refuse to come. You can understand our situation, sir. We could take no chances of our men or their information falling into other than official hands."

Henderson frowned. "I'm reluctant to let you leave. You can, of course, walk out of here any time you wish—you are in no way detained. But our information so far is sketchy. You have done an excellent job of supplying us with it, of course, but new situations can arise."

"I understand," said Gale. "Alice, perhaps. They know her and if she carried a note from me on a White House letterhead—"

"That would be fine," said the President, "if she would be willing. Steve, I wonder if you'd undertake to accompany her."

"Certainly, sir. But my car's not here. Judy drove it home."

"You can have a White House car and driver. Perhaps we'd better send along a secret service man. It may seem a silly precaution, but a lot is riding on this."

He put up his hand and made a gesture of wiping his face.

"I hope to God, Mr. Gale," he said, "that you and I, your people and our people, can work together on this. This is just the beginning of it. It's going to get rough. There'll be all sorts of pressure, all kinds of frenzied screaming. Have you got a good strong back and a good thick skin?"

"I think I have," said Gale, trying to sound sure of himself.

23. The attorney general's visitor was an old and valued friend. They had been roommates at Harvard and in the years since then had kept in touch. Reilly Douglas knew that in large part he owed his cabinet appointment to the good offices and perhaps the political pressure commanded by Clinton Chapman, a man who headed one of the nation's most prestigious industrial complexes and was a heavy contributor to the party's funds.

"I know this must be a busy time for you," Chapman told Douglas, "and under the circumstances I'll take very little of your time."

"It's good to see a friendly face," said Douglas. "I don't mind telling you I don't go along with all that's supposed to be happening. Not that there's nothing to it, for there is. But we're rushing into things. The President has accepted at face value this story of time traveling and—while I can see no other explanation at the moment—it seems to me there should be some further study of the matter before we commit ourselves."

"Well, now," said Chapman, "I agree with you—I couldn't agree more completely. I called in some of my physicists this afternoon. You know, of course, that among our several branches, we have a respectable corps of research people. Well, as I was saying, I called a few of them together earlier today and we did some brain-storming on this time-tunnel business—"

"And they told you it was impossible."

"Not exactly that," said Chapman. "Not quite that at all. Not that any of them can see how it's done, but they told me—and this is something that sure surprised me—that the nature of time flows has been a subject of some quiet study and scholarly dispute for a number of years. They talked about a lot of things I didn't understand and used terms I'd never heard before and some that have slipped my mind. They talked about the principle of wave retardation and causality and there was quite a lot of discussion about time-symmetrical field equations and the upshot of it all seemed to be that while, on the basis of present knowledge and research what seems to be happening is plain impossible, there is really nothing hard and fast that says it can't be done."

"So what Gale says could be true," said Douglas. "There seems no other explanation, but my point is that we should not move until we know it's true. And, personally, while I could think of no other explanation, I found a great deal of difficulty in believing it."

"Just exactly what," asked Chapman, "is the government thinking about doing? Building

new tunnels, I understand, and sending the people of the future still farther back in time. Do they have any idea of what it's going to cost? Or how long it might take?"

"They have no idea," said Douglas. "Not a single figure. No inkling of what's involved. But if anything can be done we will have to do it. The people from the future can't be kept here. It would be impossible to contain them. Somehow we must get rid of them."

"My hunch," said Chapman, "is that it will cost a bundle. And there'll be hell's own uproar about the money it will take. The public is more tax conscious than it has ever been and something like this could bring about a confiscatory tax."

"You're getting at something, Clint."

"Yes, I suppose I am. A gamble, you might say."

"You always gambled well," said Douglas.

"It's going to take a lot of money," Chapman said.

"Tax money," Douglas said.

"I know. Tax money. And that could mean we'll lose the election a year from now. You know I've always been rather generous in my campaign contributions and have rarely asked for favors. I'm not asking for one now. But under certain circumstances I would be willing to make what I think of as a somewhat more substantial contribution. Not only to the party, but to the country."

"That would be very generous of you," said Douglas, not entirely sure that he was happy with the turn the talk had taken.

"I'd have to have some figures and some facts, of course," said Chapman, "but unless the cost is higher than I could manage, I think I would be agreeable to taking over the construction of the tunnels. That is, if the tunnels can be built."

"In return for which?"

"In return for which," said Chapman, "I should like exclusive future license for the building of tunnels and the operation of them."

Douglas frowned. "I don't know," he said. "I can't be certain of the legality of an arrangement of that sort. And there is the international angle—"

"If you applied yourself to it," said Chapman, "you could figure out a way. I am sure you could. You're a damn good lawyer, Reilly."

"There must be something I am missing. I don't see why you should want the license. What good would the tunnels be?"

"After all of this is over," Chapman said, "people will be considerably intrigued with the idea of traveling in time. A brand new way of traveling. A way of getting to places they could never get to before."

"But that's insane!"

"Not as insane as you might think. Imagine what a sportsman would be willing to pay for the privilege of going back to prehistoric days for a spot of hunting. Universities would want to send teams of paleontologists back to the Age of Reptiles to study and photograph the dinosaurs. Classical historians would sell their souls to go back and learn what really happened at the siege of Troy."

"And the church," said Douglas, rather acidly, "might want a first-class ticket for a seat at the Crucifixion."

"I suppose that, too," Chapman agreed. "And, as you imply, there would be times when it might get slightly sticky. Rules and regulations would have to be worked out and certain safeguards set up not to change the course of history, but—"

"It wouldn't work," said Douglas, flatly. "Time traveling, we are told, works in only one direction, back toward the past. Once you go back you can't return."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Chapman. "Maybe that's what you were told. Maybe that's true now. But my physicists assured me this afternoon that if you can move in time at all, you can move in both directions. They were sure of that. Sure it could be worked out. It simply makes no sense, they said, that the flow would go only one way. If you can go into the past you certainly can go into the future. That's what we have right now."

"Clint, I can't go along on this."

"You can think about it. You can see how things develop. You can keep me well informed. If it should work out, there would be something very worthwhile in it for you."

24. "So now you'll explain to me, perhaps," said Alice Gale, "what a picnic is. You told me this afternoon you had been going on a picnic."

The secret service man hunched forward on the seat. "Has Steve been talking picnic to you? Don't ever chance it with him."

"But, Mr. Black," she said, "I don't even know what a picnic is."

"It's fairly simple," Wilson told her. "You pack a lunch and you go out in a park or woods and you eat it there."

"But we did that in our own time," she said. "Although we did not call it picnic. I don't think we called it anything at all. I never heard it called anything at all."

The car rolled slowly down the drive, heading for the gate. The driver sat stiffly erect. The car slowed to a halt and a soldier came to the driver's window. Other military men were stationed by the gate.

"What is going on?" asked Wil-

son. "I hadn't heard of this."

Black shrugged. "Someone got the wind up. This place is closed in tight. It's stiff with military. Mortars are scattered through the park and no one knows what else."

"Does the President know about it?"

"I'm not sure," said Black. "No one might have thought to tell him."

The soldier stepped back and the gate came open and the car went through. It proceeded silently along the street, heading for the bridge.

Wilson peered through the window. "Where is everyone?" he asked. "A Sunday night and the tourist season and there's no one here."

"You heard the news," said Black.

"Of course I heard the news."

"Everyone's holed up. Everyone's indoors. They expect an alien to come leaping at them."

"We had such lovely places where we could go on picnics," said Alice Gale. "So many parks, so much wild land. More open spaces than you have. Not as crowded as you have it now, although somehow I like it crowded. There are so many people—there is so much to see."

"You are enjoying it," said Wilson.

"Yes, of course. Although I have the feel of guilt in my enjoyment. My father and I should be with our people. But I was telling you of our time. It was a good age to live in. Until the aliens came, of course. And even then, in the earlier days, before there were so many of them. They were not at our throats all the time, you know, except in the last few years. Although I don't think we ever were unaware of them. We always talked about them. We never really forgot them, no matter what. All my life, I think, they have been in my mind. There were periods in the later years when we were obsessed with them. We continually looked over our shoulders to see if they were there—we were never free of them. We talked of them and studied them."

"You say you studied them," said Wilson. "Exactly how did you study them? Who studied them?"

"Why," she said, "biologists, of course. At times they came into possession of an alien's body. And the psychologists and psychiatrists also examined what they could. The evolutionists—"

"Evolutionists?"

"Certainly, evolutionists. For these aliens were very strange evolutionarily. They seemed to be consciously in control of their evolutionary processes. There are occasions when you are inclined to suspect they can order their evolutionary processes. My father, I think, explained some of this to you. In all their long history they apparently gave up no advan-

tage they had gained. They made no compromises. They kept what they had and needed and added whatever else they could develop. This, of course, means that they can adapt to almost any condition or situation. They respond almost instantly to stresses and emergencies."

"You almost sound," said Black, "as if you—well, not you, perhaps, but your people—might admire these creatures."

She shook her head. "We hated them and feared them. That is quite apparent, for we ran away from them. But, yes, I suppose we might have felt something like awed admiration, although we did not admit it. I don't think anyone ever said it."

"Lincoln is coming up ahead," said Wilson. "You know about Lincoln, of course."

"Yes," she said. "My father has been staying in Lincoln's bedroom."

The memorial loomed ahead, softly lit against the night. The statue sat brooding in the marble chair.

The car moved past and the memorial was left behind.

"If we can find the time," said Wilson, "in the next few days, we'll go out to see it. Or have you seen it? You said the White House no longer existed where you came from."

"It did not, nor did the memorial," she said. "Part of it is left, but less than half. The stones have crumbled."

"What is this?" asked Black.

"In the time the people of the tunnel came from," said Wilson, "Washington had been destroyed. The White House is a wilderness."

"But that's impossible. I don't understand. A war?"

"Not a war," said Alice Gale. "It's hard to explain, even if you know history and I have only small understanding of it. But I have read a little. Economic collapse, perhaps, is the best name for what happened. Probably some ethical collapse occurred as well. A time of mounting inflation that reached ridiculous heights, matched by a mounting cynicism, a loss of faith in government, which contributed to the failure of government, a growing gap of resources and understanding between the rich and poor—all these brought about a social disaster. Not in this nation alone, but in all the major powers. One after one they fell. The economy was gone—governments vanished and mobs ran in the street. Blind mobs struck out—not at anything in particular but at anything at all. You must excuse me, please—I tell it very badly."

"And this is all ahead of us?" asked Black.

"Not now," said Wilson. "Not any more it isn't. Or at least it doesn't have to be. We're on a different time track now."

"You," said Black, "are as bad as she is. You don't either one, make sense."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Black," said Alice.

"Don't mind me," said Black. "I'm not the intellectual sort. I'm just an educated cop. Steve will tell you that."

25. The Reverend Dr. Angus Windsor was a good man. He stood in grace and was distinguished in good works. He was pastor of a church that had its roots in wealth, a long history and a certain elegance, yet this did not prevent him from going where the need was greatest— outside his own parish, certainly, for in that particular parish need was seldom evident. He was seen in the ghettos and was present where the young demonstration marchers had fallen beneath the clubs of the police. When he heard of a family that had need of food he showed up at the door with a bag of groceries and before he left managed to find a few dollars in his pockets that he could get along without. He was a regular visitor at prisons and the lonely old folks put away to die in rest homes were familiar with his stately tread, his stooped shoulders, his long white hair and patient face. That he was not at all adverse to good publicity, sometimes even seemed to court it, was held against him by some of the influential members of his congregation, who subscribed to the belief that this characteristic was unseemly in him. But he went his way without paying attention to this criticism. He was once supposed to have told an old, dear friend that it was a small price to pay for the privilege of doing good—although whether he meant by price the publicity or the criticism was not entirely clear.

So it was thought by the newsmen present not at all unusual when, late in the evening, he appeared at the site where the tunnel had been closed upon the emergence of the aliens.

The newsmen clustered around the old man.

"What are you doing here, Dr. Windsor?" asked one of them.

"I came," said Dr. Angus, "to offer to these poor souls the small shreds of comfort it is in my power to dispense. I had a little trouble with the military. I understand they are letting no one in. But I see they permit you people here."

"Some of us talked our way through. Others parked a mile or so away and walked."

"The good Lord interceded for me," said Dr. Angus, "and they let me through the barricade."

"How did He intercede for you?"

"He softened their hearts toward me and they let me come. But now I must speak to these poor folks."

He motioned at the scattered groups of refugees standing in the yards and along the street.

The dead alien lay on its back, its limp tentacles lying snakelike along the ground. Most of the human bodies at the tunnel mouth had been moved. A few still made shadowed lumps covered by blankets. The gun lay where it had been toppled on its side.

"The army is sending out a team," said one of the newsmen, "to haul in the alien. They want to have a good look at him."

Spotlights mounted in trees cast a radiance over the area where the tunnel mouth had been. A generator coughed and sputtered in the darkness. Trucks pulled in, loaded up and left. On occasion a bullhorn roared out orders.

Dr. Windsor, with an instinct born of long practice, headed unerringly for the largest group of refugees huddled under a swaying street lamp. Most of them were standing on the pavement, but others sat on the curbs and small groups were scattered on the lawns.

Dr. Windsor came to a group of women: he always zeroed in on women. He had found them more receptive than men.

"I have come," he said, "to offer you the comfort of the Lord. In times like this we should always turn to Him."

The women stared at him in some amazement. Some instinctively backed away.

"I'm the Reverend Windsor," he told them, "and I came from Washington. I go where I am called to meet a need. Would you pray with me?"

A tall, slender, grandmotherly woman stepped to the forefront of the group. "Please go away," she said.

Dr. Windsor fluttered his hands, stricken off balance. "I don't understand," he said. "I only meant—"

"We know what you meant," the woman told him, "and we thank you for the thought. We know you intend only kindness."

"You can't mean what you are saying," said Dr. Windsor. "You cannot hope to deprive all the others—"

A man thrust through the crowd and took the pastor by the arm. "Friend," he said. "Keep it down."

"But this woman—"

"I know. I heard what you said to her and she to you. She speaks for all of us."

"I fail to understand."

"There is no need for you to understand. Now will you please go."

"You reject me?"

"Not you, sir. Not personally. We reject the principle you stand for."

"You reject Christianity?

"Not Christianity alone. We rejected all dogma a century ago.

Our nonbelief is as firm a faith as is your belief. We do not thrust our principles on you. Will you please not thrust yours on us?"

"This is incredible," said the Dr. Windsor. "I can't believe my ears. I will not believe it. There must be some mistake. I had only meant to join with you in prayer."

"But we no longer pray."

Dr. Windsor turned, went blundering past the waiting newsmen, who had trailed after him. He shook his head, bewildered. It was unbelievable. It could not be right. It was inconceivable. It was blasphemous.

After all the years of man's agony, after all the searching for the truth, after all the saints and martyrs, it could not come to this.

26. General Daniel Foote, commander at Fort Myer, was waiting with three other men in his office.

"You should not have come alone," he said to Wilson. "I said so to the President—offered to send an escort—but he vetoed the idea. He said he wanted to draw no attention to the car."

"There was little traffic on the road," said Wilson.

The general shook his head.

"These are unsettled times," he said.

"General Foote, may I present Miss Alice Gale. Her father is the man who contacted us."

The general said, "I am delighted to meet you, Miss Gale. These three gentlemen have told me something of your father. And Mr. Black. I'm glad you are along."

"Thank you, sir," said Black.

"I should like the privilege," Alice said, "of introducing my own people. Dr. Hardwicke—Dr. Nicholas Hardwicke, Mr. Wilson, Mr. Black. Dr. Hardwicke is a sort of Albert Einstein of our time."

The ungainly, bearlike man smiled at her. "You must not praise me unduly, my dear," he said. "They'll expect far too much of me. Gentlemen, I am very pleased to be here and to meet you. It is time we were getting on in this matter, which must be quite unpleasant to you. I am glad to see you reacting so promptly and so positively. Your president must be a most unusual man."

"We think so," Wilson said.

"Dr. William Cummings," said Alice. "Dr. Hardwicke was a fellow townsman of ours, but Dr. Cummings came from the Denver region. My father and the others thought it would be best if he were with Dr. Hardwicke when they met your scientists."

Cummings was small, bald, with a wrinkled, elfin face. "I am glad to be here," he said. "We all are glad to be here. We must tell you how deeply we regret what happened at the tunnel."

"And, finally," said Alice,

"Dr. Abner Osborne. He is a long-time family friend."

Osborne put an arm about the girl's shoulders and hugged her. "These other gentlemen," he said, are physicists, but I'm a more lowly creature. I am a geologist. Tell me, my dear, how is your father? I looked for him after we came through, but couldn't seem to find him."

General Foote drew Wilson aside. "Tell me what you know of the escaped alien."

"We've had no further reports. The assumption is it would head for the mountains."

Foote nodded. "I think you may be right. We have had some rumors. They all came from the west. Harper's Ferry. Strasburg. Luray. They must be wrong. Nothing could travel that fast. Are you absolutely sure there was only one of them?"

"You should know," said Wilson curtly. "Your men were there. Our information is that one was killed. The other got away."

"Yes, yes, I know," said Foote. "We are bringing in the dead one."

The general was upset, thought Wilson. He was jittery. Was there something he knew that the White House didn't know?

"Are you trying to tell me something, General?"

"No. Not at all," he said.

The son of a bitch, Wilson thought. Foote had simply been trying for an insider scoop from the White House to use for small talk at the officers' club.

"I think," said Wilson, "that we had best get started back."

Once more in the car, Black sat in front with the driver. Wilson and Osborne took the jump seats.

"You may think it strange," said Osborne, "that there's a geologist in the group."

"I had wondered," Wilson said. "Not that you aren't welcome."

"It was thought," said Osborne, "that there might be some questions about the Miocene."

"Anent our also fleeing our time, you mean?"

"It is one way in which the problem could be solved."

"Are you trying to tell me that you were fairly sure some of the aliens would get through? That enough of them might get through for us to be forced to leave?"

"Certainly not," said the geologist. "We had hoped none would get through. We had set up precautions. I can't imagine what could have gone wrong. I'm not inclined to think that this single alien—"

"But you don't know."

"You're right. They're clever. And capable. Some of our biologists could tell you more."

"Then why this feeling we should go back into the Miocene?"

"You're nearing a danger

point," said Osborne. "Our historians could explain it better than I can, but all the signs are there. Oh, I know that our having dropped in on you will alter your future to a point—but our effect may have come too late for you to avoid one great danger.

"What you're talking about is the economic and social collapse. Alice briefed us on it—Washington and the White House are gone in your time. I suppose New York as well, and Chicago and all the rest of the major cities both here and abroad—"

"You're top-heavy," said Osborne. "You've gotten out of balance. I think it's gone too far to stop. You have a runaway economy and the social cleavages are getting deeper by the day."

"And going back to the Miocene would put an end to it?"

"It would be a new start."

"I'm not so sure," said Wilson.

Up in the front Black raised his voice. "It's time for the President's speech. Want me to turn on the radio?"

He didn't wait for an answer. The next voice was Henderson's.

". . .little I can tell you. So I am not going to keep you long. We are still in the process of sorting out the facts and I would be doing you a disservice if I told you less—or more—than facts. You may be assured that your government will level with you. As soon as we know anything for certain, you are going to know it, too. We'll pass it on to you.

"These things we do know. Among us are refugees, apparently from some five hundred years in our future. All details are not yet clear—we do not, for instance, know their exact method of transportation or arrival— but the essential facts are as I have stated them to you. The refugees do not intend to stay here. As soon as possible they intend to go on, to leave us as they came. But to do so they need our help. Not only our help in building equipment and installations, but our help in supplying the bare basics that will enable them to start over again. For economic reasons which everyone must understand, we, in conjunction with the rest of the world, cannot refuse to help them. Not that we would refuse in any case. They are our children's children, several times removed. They are our flesh and blood and we cannot withhold assistance. How we will go about helping them is now under consideration. There are problems and they must and will be solved. There must be no delay and our effort must be wholehearted. It will call for sacrifice and devotion from everyone of you. There are many details you should be told, many questions that must occur to you. These all will be fully given and fully answered later—there is not time to put everything before you this

evening. After all, this all began happening only a few hours ago. It has been a busy Sunday."

The voice was confident, resonant, with no hint of desperation—with even a touch of humor in these last words—and, thought Wilson, there must be in the man a certain sense of desperation. No other President before him had ever been called upon to make such an outlandish announcement. Henderson was still a polished politician. He still could sell himself, still could reassure the nation. Hunched forward on the jump seat, Wilson felt a sudden surge of pride in him.

"All of you know by now," the President continued, "that two alien life forms came through what has become known as a time tunnel in Virginia. One was killed, the other escaped. I must be honest with you and say that we have no subsequent word of it. We are pressing all efforts to find and destroy it and while it may take a little time, we will do exactly that. I ask you most urgently not to place too much emphasis upon the fact that an alien is loose upon the Earth. It is only one of the many problems we face tonight—and not the most important. Given the sort of cooperation that I know we can expect from you we will solve them."

He paused and for a moment Wilson wondered if that was all—although he knew it would not be, for the President had not said good night.

The voice took up again. "I have one unpleasant thing to say and, unpleasant as it may be, I know that on due consideration you'll realize, I think, that it is necessary for the good of all of us. I have, just a few minutes ago, signed an executive order declaring a national emergency. Under that order a bank and trading holiday has been declared. This means that no banks or other financial institutions will open their doors for business or transact any business until further notice. Under the order all trading in stocks, shares, bonds and commodities, will be suspended until further notice. All prices, salaries and wages will be frozen. This, of course, is an intolerable situation and cannot exist for long. Because of this, it is only an emergency order that will be lifted as soon as the Congress and other branches of the government can implement rules and regulations imposing such restraints as are necessary under the situation that has been imposed upon us. I hope that you will bear with us over the few days the executive order will be in force. It was only with the utmost reluctance that I decided it was necessary."

Wilson let out his breath slowly, not realizing until then that he had caught and held it.

There'd be unsheeted hell to pay, he knew. From the country and the White House press corps. *For Christ's sake, Steve, you could have tipped us off. You could have let us know*... And they would not believe him when he told them he had not known himself.

The declaration of a national emergency was such a logical step that the media men should have guessed it—he, himself, should have thought of it. But he hadn't. He wondered if the President had talked it over with anyone and he doubted that he had. There hadn't been much time and there had been other things to talk about.

The President was saying good night to his listeners.

"Good night, Mr. President," said Wilson and wondered why the others looked at him so strangely.

27. The office was dark except for the feeble light from the clacking wire machines ranged along the wall. Wilson crossed to his desk and sat down. He leaned forward to snap on the desk lamp, then pulled back his hand. He had no need of light and there was healing in the dark. He leaned back in his chair—for the first time since this afternoon nothing was pressing him, but inside him still throbbed the nagging sense that he should be up and doing.

The President, Steve thought, should long since have been in bed. It was nearly midnight and well past his usual bedtime and he had missed his nap in the aftrnoon. Samuel Henderson was getting too old for this sort of thing. He had seemed drawn and haggard when the refugee scientists had been escorted to his office to be introduced to the men from the National Academy.

"You heard my speech, Steve?" the President had asked when the others were gone.

"In the car."

"What do you think? Will the country go along?"

"Not at first. Not willingly. But when they think about it, I believe they will. Wall Street will raise a lot of dust."

"Wall Street," Henderson had said, "is something I can't afford to give my time to right now."

"You should be heading for bed, Mr. President. It's been a long, hard day."

"Directly. First I have to talk with Treasury, and Sandburg phoned to ask if he could come over."

Directly...But it would be hours before Henderson got to sleep.

Somewhere in some secret room the scientists were talking. Out there in the vastness of the nation—of the world, in fact—people from the future were walking from their tunnels. In the mountains to the west an alien horror skulked in the night.

The whole scene still was unbelievable. Everything had happened too fast—no man had been given time to catch up with it. In a few hours people would be waking to a new day that in many respects would be utterly unlike any day before in all of human history—face problems and dilemmas no man or woman had ever faced before.

Light showed through the crack under the doors that led into the press lounge. Some media men would still be there, although they were not working. There was no sound of typewriters. Steve remembered that he had never gotten to eat his sandwiches. He had put two of them on a plate and had taken a bite out of one when Brad Reynolds had rushed into the lounge with his story of the alien's escape. Now that he thought of it Steve realized that he was hungry. There might be some sandwiches left, although they would be dry by now—and for some reason he wanted to stay here in the dark, alone, with no necessity of talking to anyone at all.

Although, perhaps, he should see what was on the wires. He sat for a moment longer, unwilling to move, then got up and went across the room to the bank of teletypes. AP first, he thought. Good, old stolid AP. Never sensational, usually solid.

Yards of copy had been spilling out of the machine. It was running down into wads of folded paper on the floor.

A new story was just starting.

> WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP)—A search is being pressed tonight in the mountains west of here for the alien who escaped from a time tunnel in Virginia a few hours ago. There have been numerous reports of sightings, but none can be confirmed. There is reason to believe that most of them arose from fertile and concerned imaginations. A number of troops and contingents from many police and sheriff's departments are being deployed into the area, but there is little hope that a great deal can be done before daylight...

Wilson hauled in the copy paper, let it fall and curl up before his feet. He read rapidly.

> LONDON, ENGLAND (AP)—As dawn came this morning ministers were still in conference at the residence of the Prime Minister. Throughout the night there had been a steady coming and going...

> NEW DELHI, INDIA (AP)—For the last ten hours people and wheat have con-

tinued to pour out of the tunnels from the future. Both present problems...

NEW YORK, N.Y. (AP)—Evidence multiplied throughout the night that dawn may bring an explosion of protest and rioting, not only in Harlem, but in many other minority areas of the city. Fears that the heavy influx of refugees from the future may bring about a reduction in food allotments and other welfare benefits are expected to spark widespread demonstration. All police leaves have been canceled and the police force has been notified that its personnel must be prepared to work around the clock...

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP)—The President's action declaring a business holiday and freezing wages and prices was both attacked and praised...

Moscow, Madrid, Singapore, Brisbane, Bogota, Cairo, Kiev—and then:

NASHVILLE, TENN (AP)—The Rev. Jake Billings, noted evangelist, today called for a crusade to "bring the people of the future back into the arms of Christ."

He issued the call from his headquarters here after learning that a group of refugees who had come through the now-closed time tunnel near Falls Church, Va., had refused the ministrations of the Rev. Dr. Angus Windsor, a celebrated churchman of Washington, D.C., giving as their reason that they had turned their backs, not on Christianity alone, but on all religion.

"They came to us for help," said the Rev. Billings, "but the help that they are seeking is not the help they should be given. Rather than helping them, as they ask, to go farther back in time, we should help them to return to the brotherhood of Christ. They are fleeing from the future for their lives, but they have already lost a thing far more precious than their lives. How their rejection of Christ may have come about I have no way of knowing. I do know that it is our duty to point out to them the road of devotion and of righteousness. I call upon all Christians to join me in my prayers for them."

Wilson let the long sheaf of paper fall and went back to his desk. He switched on the light and, picking up the phone, dialed the switchboard.

"Jane—I thought I recognized your voice. This is Steve Wilson. Will you put in a call to Nashville for the Rev. Jake Billings? Yes, Jane, I know what time it is. I know he probably is asleep—we'll simply have to wake him up. No, I don't know his number. Thank you, Jane. Thank you very much."

He settled back in the chair and growled at himself. When he had talked with the President early in the afternoon Jake Billings had been mentioned. Steve had promised he would call him and then the matter had not crossed his mind again. But who in hell would have thought a thing like this would happen?

Windsor, he thought. It would take an old busybody, a meddling fool like Windsor to go messing into it. And then, when he got his face pushed in, to go bawling to the newsmen, telling what had happened.

Christ, that's all we need, Steve thought, to get the Windsors and the Billings of the country all mixed up in this, wringing their hands and crying for a crusade. . . A crusade, he grimly told himself, was the last thing that was needed. There was trouble enough without a gang of pulpit-thumpers adding to the dustup.

The phone tinkled at him and he picked up the receiver. Jane said, "The Rev. Mr. Billings is on the line, sir."

"Hello," said Wilson. "Is this Reverend Billings?"

"Yes, God bless you," said the deep, solemn voice. "What can I do for you?"

"Jake, this is Steve Wilson."

"Wilson? Oh, yes, the press secretary. I should have known it was you. They didn't say who was calling. They just said the White House."

The bastard, Wilson told himself. He's disappointed. He thought it was the President.

"It's been a long time, Jake," he said.

"Yes," said Billings. "How long ago? Ten years?"

"More like fifteen," said Wilson.

"I guess you're right at that," said Billings. "The years do have the habit—"

"I'm calling you," said Wilson, "about this crusade you're drumming up."

"Crusade? Oh, you mean the one to get the future people back onto the track. I am so glad you called. We need all the help we can get. I view it as fortunate that they came back to us, for whatever reason. When I think of the human race, a mere five hundred years from now, forsaking the human faith that has sustained us all these years I get a cold shiver up

my spine. I'm so glad that you are with us. I can't tell you how glad I am that you—"

"I'm not with you, Jake."

"You're not with us? What do you mean, you're not with us?"

"I'm not with you, Jake—that is what I mean. I'm calling to ask that you call off this silly crusade."

"I can't."

"Yes, you can. We have trouble enough without some damn fool crusade. You'll be doing the country a disservice if you keep it up. We have problems up to here and we don't need any more. This isn't just a situation that will allow Jake Billings to show off his piety. This is life and death, not only for the refugees, but for every one of us."

"It seems to me, Steve, you're using an approach that is unnecessarily rough."

"If I am," said Wilson, "it's because I'm upset at what you're doing. This is important, Jake. We have a job—to get the refugees to where they want to go before they upset our economy. And while we do that we'll be getting plenty of flack. We're going to get it from industry, from labor, from people on welfare, from politicians who will grab the chance to take cheap shots at us. With all of this we can't face flack from you. What difference can it possibly make to you? You're not dealing with a present situation, a present people. You are dealing with the future, with a segment of time that ordinarily would be out of your reach. The refugees are back here, sure, but the windmill you are tilting at wasn't even built until long after you and I were dead."

"God moves," said Billings, "in many mysterious ways."

Wilson said, "Climb down from your pulpit. You're not going to impress me, Jake. You never did."

"Steve, are you calling for the President?"

"If you mean did he ask me to make this call, the answer is no. He probably doesn't know as yet what you have done. But when he finds out about it he is going to be sore. The two of us talked about you earlier in the day. We were afraid you might take some sort of hand. We couldn't, of course, foresee what happened. But you do take a hand in everything that happens. I was supposed to phone you, to head you off beforehand. But so many things were coming up I never found the time."

"I can see your position," said Billings soberly. "I think I can even understand it. But you and I see things from different viewpoints. To me the thought that the human race became a godless people is a personal agony. It goes against everything I have been taught, everything I've lived by, all that I've believed in."

"You can rest easy," Wilson

said. "It will go no further. The human future is ending five hundred years from now."

"But they'll be going back in time."

"We hope they will," Wilson said bitterly. "They'll go back if we aren't completely hogtied by people like you."

"If they go back," protested Billings, "they'll make a new start. We'll give them what they need to make a new start. Into a new land and a new time where they'll build a godless culture. They may in time go out in space, out to other stars, and they'll go as godless people. We can't allow that, Steve."

"Maybe you can't. I can. It doesn't bother me. There are a hell of a lot of other people it won't bother either. You're blind if you can't see the beginning, the roots of their rejection of religion in the present. Maybe that is what is really bugging you."

"That may be so," Billings admitted. "I haven't had time to think it through. Even if what you say were true it would make no difference. I still would have to do exactly what I'm doing."

"You mean you intend to go ahead? Even knowing what it means to all of us? Stirring up people, riding that white horse—"

"I have to do it, Steve. My conscience—"

"You'll think it over? I can call again?"

For there was no use arguing further. No point in trying to talk reason to this pious madman. Steve had known Billings since their undergraduate years. And he should have known from the very first that it would be useless to try to make Jake see another's point of view.

"Yes, call again," said Billings, "if you wish. But I won't reconsider. I know what I must do. You cannot persuade me otherwise."

"Good night, Jake. Sorry that I woke you up."

"You didn't wake me up. I expect no sleep this night. It was good to hear your voice, Steve."

Wilson hung up and sat quietly in his chair. Maybe, he thought, if he had spoken differently—if he had not come on so strong—he might have accomplished something. Although he doubted it. There was no such thing as talking reason to Jake Billings—never had been. Perhaps if he had phoned this afternoon, after he first had talked with the President, he might have been able at least to have moderated Billings' action, but he doubted that as well. It had been, he told himself, a hopeless business from the start. Billings himself was hopeless.

He looked at his watch. It was almost two o'clock. Picking up the phone, he dialed Judy's number. Her sleepy voice answered.

"Did I wake you up?"

"No, I've been waiting for you. Steve, you're awful late. What happened?"

"I had to go to Fort Myer to pick up some refugees. Scientists. They're here, talking to the academy people. I won't make it, Judy."

"You're not coming out?"

"I should stay in touch. Too much is happening."

"You'll be dead on your feet, come morning."

"I'll stretch out on a couch in the lounge and get some rest."

"I could come down. Stand watch."

"No need. Someone will get hold of me if I'm needed. You go to bed. Be a little late in the morning if you want. I can get along."

"Steve?"

"Yes?"

"It's not going good, is it?"

"It's too soon to tell."

"I saw the President on TV. It'll be an awful mess. We've never faced anything like this before."

"No, not quite like this before."

"I'm scared, Steve."

"So am I," said Wilson. "It'll be different in the morning. We'll feel different in the morning."

"I have a terrible sensation," Judy said, "that the solid ground is slipping out from under my feet. I've been thinking about my mother and sister out in Ohio. I haven't seen Mom in a long time."

"Phone her. Talk with her. You'll feel better."

"I tried to. I tried and tried. But the circuits are jammed. Everyone is calling everyone. Like a holiday. The country is upset."

"I just made a long-distance call."

"Sure you did. You're the White House. They clear the lines for you."

"You can call her tomorrow. Things will quiet down tomorrow."

"Steve, you're sure you can't come out. I need you."

"Sorry, Judy. Truly sorry. I have this horrible feeling that I should stay in reach. I don't know why, but I do."

"I'll see you in the morning then."

"Try to get some sleep."

"You, too. Try to shut this out, try to get some sleep. You'll need it. Tomorrow will be bad."

They said good night and he put the receiver back into its cradle. He wondered why he was staying here. There was at the moment no real need for him to stay. Although one could never know. Hell could break loose at any time.

He should try to get some sleep, he told himself, but somehow he resisted sleep. He didn't need it—he was too strung out, too tense to sleep. Later he'd need sleep, when there was no chance of sleep. A few hours from now all this would catch up with him. But right now

his nerves were too tight, his brain too busy to allow for sleep.

He went out and around the walk to the front lawn. The night was soft, resting for the heat and turmoil of the coming day. The city was quiet. Somewhere a motor growled, but there were no cars on the avenue. The pillars of the portico gleamed softly in the night. The sky was clear and a million stars hung there. A red light went blinking across the sky and from far overhead came the thrum of motors.

A dark figure stirred at the edge of a group of trees.

"You all right, sir?" a voice asked.

"Yes," said Wilson. "Just out for a breath of air."

He saw now that the dark figure was a soldier, his rifle held aslant his chest.

"Don't go wandering," said the soldier. "There are a lot of us out here. Some of the boys might be a little nervous."

"I won't," said Wilson. "I'll go back in directly."

He stood listening to the quietness of the city, feeling the softness of the night. Something was different about it. Despite the quiet and the softness a certain tenseness seemed to reach out to touch him.

28. A sound brought Elmer Ellis out of a sound sleep. He sat up in bed, befuddled, unable for a moment to orient himself. On the night table beside the bed the clock was ticking loudly and beside him his wife, Mary, was levering herself up on her elbows.

Her sleepy voice asked, "What is it, Elmer?"

"Something's at the chickens," he said, for now the reason for his waking came churning into his consciousness.

The sound came again, the frightened flapping, squawking of the chickens. He threw back the covers and his feet hit the cold floor so hard they hurt.

He groped for his trousers, got his legs into them, slid his feet into his shoes, did not stop to tie the laces. The squawking still went on.

"Where is Tige?" asked Mary.

"Damn dog," he growled. "Probably off chasing possum."

He charged out of the bedroom and into the kitchen. Groping, he found the shotgun, lifted it from its pegs. From the game bag that hung beneath the pegs he took a handful of shells, jammed them into a pocket, found two more and thrust them into the chambers of the double-barrel.

Bare feet pattered toward him. "Here's the flashlight, Elmer. You can't see a thing without it."

She thrust it at him and he took it.

The night was pitch black outside and he switched on the light to see his way down the porch steps. The squawking in the henhouse

continued and there was no sign of Tige.

This was strange. In a flare of anger he had said the dog was probably out hunting possum and that couldn't be true. Tige never went out hunting on his own. He was too old and stiff in the joints and he loved his bed under the porch.

"Tige," he said, not too loudly.

The dog whined from under the porch.

"What the hell is wrong with you?" asked Elmer. "What is out there, boy?"

Suddenly he was afraid—more afraid than he had ever been before. Even more afraid than that time he had run into the Vietcong ambush. This was a different kind of fear—like a cold hand reaching out and gripping him and holding him and he knowing he'd never get away.

The dog whined again.

"Come on, boy," said Elmer. "Come on out and get them."

Tige did not come out.

"All right, then," said Elmer. "Stay there."

He went across the farmyard, shining his light ahead of him, picking out the henhouse door.

The frightened squawking was louder than ever now, insane and frantic.

Long ago, he told himself, he should have repaired the henhouse, plugged up the holes. The shape it was in, a fox would have no trouble gaining entry. Although it was strange, if what bothering the chickens were a fox, that the animal should still be there. At the first flash of light, the first sound of a human voice, a fox would have been gone.

What was in there? A weasel, maybe, or a mink? Even a raccoon?

Outside the door he paused, reluctant to go on. But he couldn't turn back now. He'd never be able to live with himself if he did. Why, he wondered, should he be so frightened? It was Tige, he thought. Tige was so scared that he refused to come from beneath the porch and some of that fright had rubbed off on him.

"Damn that dog," he said.

He reached out and lifted the latch, slammed the door back against the side of the building. He balanced the gun in his right hand and directed the flash with his left.

The first thing he saw in the circle of light were feathers—feathers floating in the air. Then the running, squawking, flapping chickens and in among the chickens . . .

Elmer Ellis dropped the flash and screamed and in mid-scream jerked the gun to his shoulder and fired blindly into the henhouse, first the right barrel, then the left, the shots so close together that they sounded as one explosion.

Then they were coming at him, leaping from the open door, hundreds of them, it seemed, faintly

seen in the light of the flash that lay on the ground—horrible little monsters such as one would never see except in some sweating dream. He reversed the gun, scarcely realizing that he did so, grasping the barrels in both his hands, using it as a club, flailing with it blindly as they came swarming out at him.

Jaws fastened on an ankle and a heavy body struck him in the chest. Claws raked his left leg from hip to knee and he knew that he was going down and that once he was down they would finish him.

He sagged to his knees and now one of them had him by the arm and he tried to fight it off, while another clawed his back to ribbons. He tipped over on one side and ducked down his head, covering it with his one free arm, drawing up his knees to protect his belly.

And that was all. They no longer chewed or ripped him. He jerked up his head and saw them, flitting shadows, moving out into the dark. The beam of the fallen flashlight caught one of them momentarily and for the first time he really saw the sort of creatures that had been in the henhouse and at the sight of it he bawled in utter terror.

Then it was gone—all of them were gone—and he was alone in the yard. He tried to get up. Halfway there, his legs folded under him and he fell heavily. He crawled toward the house, clawing at the ground to pull himself along. He felt a wetness on one arm and one leg and a stinging pain was beginning in his back.

The kitchen window glowed with a lighted lamp. Tige came out from beneath the porch and crawled toward him, belly flat against the ground, whining. Mary, in her nightgown, was running down the stairs.

"Get the sheriff!" he yelled at her, gasping with the effort. "Phone the sheriff—"

She raced across the yard and kneeled beside him, trying to get her hands under his body to lift him.

He pushed her away. "Get the sheriff. The sheriff has to know right away."

"You're hurt. You're bleeding."

"I'm all right," he told her fiercely. "They're gone. But the others must be warned. You didn't see them. You don't know."

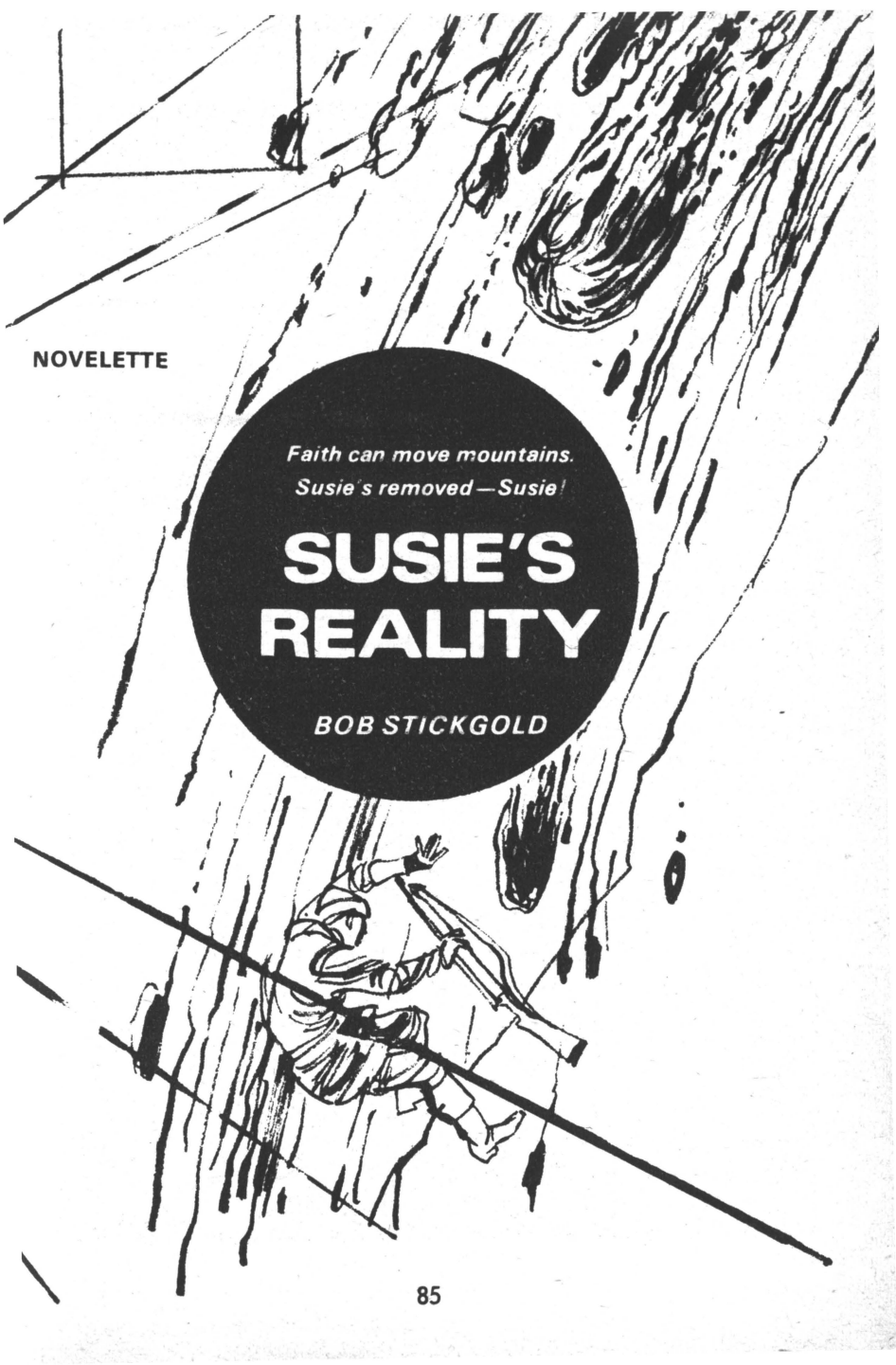
"I have to get you in and call the doctor."

"The sheriff first," he said. "Then the doctor."

She rose and raced back to the house.

He tried to crawl, covered only a few feet and then lay still. Tige came crawling out to meet him, edged in close to him and began to lick his face.

TO BE CONCLUDED



NOVELETTE

Faith can move mountains. Susie's removed—Susie!

SUSIE'S REALITY

BOB STICKGOLD

I

Steve Spencer tried to hide all of his six-two frame behind the lichen-covered rock and comprehend the magnitude of the slide which had somehow failed to kill him. A huge slab of granite had cleaved his protective boulder in half seconds earlier and he was not yet convinced that a hard shove wouldn't turn that life-saving stone into a joint executioner and gravemarker. His body ached from fatigue. He hadn't moved a muscle in an hour and a half and his hair was tickling his nose. It was at times like this that he promised to have his shoulder-length blond hair chopped to a crewcut.

These old mountains will never be the same, he thought. *But unless my aim improves, neither will the rest of the world . . .*

He stared dumbly at the carbine by his side and tried to justify murdering poor, scared Susie. It would make a pretty lousy ending for his doctoral thesis.

WHEN the doctoral research committee approved his proposal Steve was jubilant. His lean frame arranged itself randomly over the old stuffed chair that adorned his living room. Chuck Dorin, his roommate and co-worker, tried to ignore him. Chuck's upcoming psychology test would definitely keep Chuck from being in a good mood for the next twenty-four hours.

"You know," commented Steve, "this just might set a departmental record for the laziest doctoral project ever to pass the research committee. All I have to do is take toys away from them when they're not looking. It's just that simple, stealing from babies."

Chuck's broad shoulders, topped by a tangle of curly black hair that looked as if it might or might not be hiding a head, gave no sign that he might be listening.

"You know?" taunted Steve.

Chuck turned his large frame and caromed a box of tissues off Steve's left shoulder. "Get off it," he grumbled. "You're about as cynical as a pair of newlyweds. I've never seen you so excited about anything—"

When he thought about it Steve doubted that newlyweds got nearly this excited.

The whole project had come up more or less by accident and, in the end, Steve had to give Sue Malor credit for giving him the idea in the first place. They had gone out for pizza after an unusually bad movie and Steve had tried to explain to her the develop-

ment of the "object concept" in infants.

"It was way back in the nineteen-twenties that Piaget first introduced the 'object concept' into his studies of the development of intelligence in infants," he began. Sue's lithe figure sat back in the chair, a straw tenuously running from her lips to a coke. "According to Piagetian theory a newborn infant has no idea that the objects he sees are real. To him they are merely parts of a picture, with no reality of their own. But as the infant gets older he starts to experience the objects in other ways. He learns that what can be seen can also be felt and sometimes heard or smelled. In time, he realizes that these properties go together. But the object still is real only in his perception. If the object is covered—or hidden—the infant shows no sign that he is aware that it still exists." Steve was building steam, his long, bony arms gesturing as he spoke.

"By six months he starts to understand that the objects have independent existences. If you put a watch—or toy—under a pillow and then show him where it is he will learn to look for it there. Even so, if you then put it under—say—his blanket, he's still likely to look for it under the pillow. It isn't until the infant is eighteen months old that he finally realizes that objects have truly independent existences—that they are not present merely by virtue of his perception of them. So the child only slowly evolves the concept of the inherent reality of objects—and only through constantly recurring reinforcements in his everyday life." By now Steve's comments were only vaguely aimed at Sue.

She pushed a strand of long black hair from her eye and absently tucked it behind her ear. "No one has convinced me that some things really exist." She was still foul-tempered from a chemistry class where she had just been told that sometimes electrons were waves and sometimes they were particles. "All you scientists ever do is make up stupid theories and then cram everything into them. Time is relative, momentum is quantized, matter is waves and light is particles. Good thing those infants decide that objects are real. They would look pretty dumb trying to fit them into any other theory." She blew through the straw into Steve's face. "Not that an illustrious graduate student couldn't get the data to fit, but I just thought it might be kind of tricky for a two-year-old." She attempted a horrible face and then settled for sticking out her tongue at him. Steve's face was blank. His eyes were focused on infinity. "Are you all right, Steve?" she asked. "Do you feel sick?" He had consumed quite a large pizza.

"No, no," cried Steve. "What you just said—what did you mean?" Sue could feel the eyes of everyone in the restaurant turn toward her idiotic Steve. She had no idea what he was talking about, but the symptoms were clear. "It's a great idea!" he continued.

Another brainstorm had struck him in the head, she decided, and in the next instant he would be lecturing her wildly, scribbling on napkins and demanding instant comprehension from her. In a couple of days, after he had calmed down, he would explain it again more simply and she would finally find out what it was all about. But she hated these restaurant scenes.

"No sarcasm, please," he said. "You've brought up a fantastic question. What if the child developed a different object concept? What if he decided that when an object disappeared from sight it no longer existed? Don't you see? We can test it in the lab. With monkeys. Use trap doors, stuff like that. We can convince an infant monkey that objects have no independent reality. It's a beautiful project. Can they learn that an object isn't real? And what will happen if we change things and let them find out that the objects *are* real? It's beautiful! Absolutely beautiful!" His voice trailed off as he began scribbling notes on one napkin after another. Sue was surprised. Fon once she had understood what he was talking about the first time through.

LATER that night Steve went through it again, explaining this time to Chuck. "The basic question, then, is: If the experiences of the infant indicate that objects exist only as extensions of its own perceptions, what sorts of conclusions will it draw? Is the development of the concept that objects are real—with independent existences—automatic? Or is it something infants learn through experience?"

Chuck asked, "Why limit yourself to whether objects can exist independently? Why not explore all types of 'realities' the infant can be convinced of? What if some objects could never be touched? You could use holograms. And monkeys for infants. That way you could take something like, say, fruit—which we know monkeys like—and present it only as an image. Rig up some gadget to spray the smell in with the image. What would the monkeys do with that?"

Steve was catching on. "Fantastic. We could let them play with a pocket watch and after a while just introduce the sound, and see how the monkeys respond to that—"

The sky was turning a pale blue when they finally gave up and went to bed. They had worked out an even dozen key experiments

Micronite filter.
Mild, smooth taste.
For all the right reasons.
Kent.

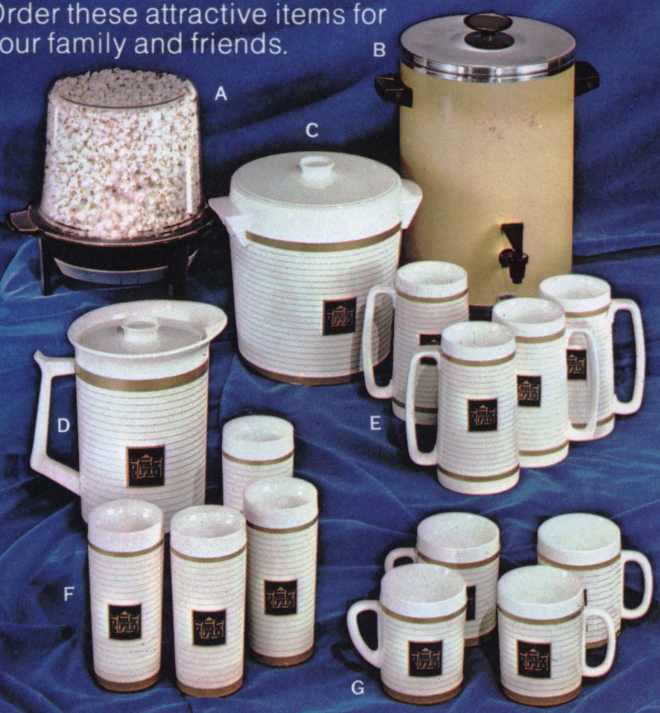
America's quality cigarette.
King Size or Deluxe 100's.

Kings: 17 mg. "tar," 1.1 mg. nicotine; 100's: 19 mg. "tar," 1.3 mg. nicotine av. per cigarette, FTC Report Aug. '72.

Warning: The Surgeon General Has Determined That Cigarette Smoking Is Dangerous to Your Health.

Collect the Kent "Collectables."

Take advantage of this special Kent offer. Order these attractive items for your family and friends.



Please send me the following Kent Collectables:

- ☐ **A.** 4 qt. corn popper $9.95
- ☐ **B.** 30 cup insulated party perk $12.95
- ☐ **C.** 4 qt. insulated ice bucket $5.00
- ☐ **D.** 55 oz. beverage server $5.00
- ☐ **E.** Set of 4-16 oz. insulated steins $5.00
- ☐ **F.** Set of 4 insulated tumblers $2.50
- ☐ **G.** Set of 4-10 oz. insulated mugs $2.50

I am enclosing 10 Kent end flaps (KENT) for each item ordered, plus check or money order. Offer continues as long as supply lasts. Allow 3 to 4 weeks delivery. I certify I am 21 years of age or over.

Name_____ Address_____

City_____ State_____ Zip_____

Mail to: Custom Service Co., P.O. Box 888, Maple Plain, Minnesota 55359

and both men were exhausted. Steve rose in time to keep a lunch date with Sue.

"I'm going to write up what we were talking about yesterday," he said before they had even found a table. "Chuck and I tossed it around all night and I'm sure I can get it approved as my Ph. D. project. That'll mean I'll get all the materials and money that I need, plus the time to work on it." Sue was delighted. Something in the back of her head told her that she would be rooting for the monkeys and not for Steve, but it did seem that for once she might be able to keep track of what he was doing.

"You know," she suggested, "it'll be sort of tricky if the monkeys accept whatever reality they are shown."

"How so?" asked Steve.

She realized that was the result he really wanted and saw no problems in accepting it.

"Well, then you'll say that the monkeys were taught that something was real that wasn't—and they accepted it, right?"

"Yeh." Steve seemed to know that he was being set up, but to have no idea just where she was heading.

"Then how will you know that you don't have your realities backward?"

She waited, but he simply stared as if he had already considered the question and its implications long before she asked it. She decided she would have to wait and see.

BY THE end of the week a heavily documented research proposal was in the hands of the chairman of the doctoral project committee. Ten days later Steve defended the proposal before the committee and it was approved.

It took him and Chuck another week to build the first experimental cage and they unveiled it for Sue with paternal pride. "Every part of the floor is a trapdoor," explained Steve. "We can remove any object from any section of the cage instantly." The contraption stood in one corner of the laboratory, across from the door. It was large—six feet square and four feet high. The floor was a grid of six-inch square tiles. A vast number of wires ran to a series of controls in front of the cage.

"Or put things in," added Chuck. "One of the stages of infant learning is the discovery that when an object disappears from sight one may expect it to show up again—perhaps randomly or in a specific place, but not necessarily where it went out of sight. So we've rigged up some loading platforms that will shoot objects up into the cage so that they just seem to materialize."

"Remember, Sue?" Steve asked. "We were talking that night about a watch placed under

the pillow and then moved in earlier experiments with infants? Well we're going to do something just like that. Whenever our pocket watch 'disappears' through a trapdoor, we'll simultaneously sneak another one exactly like it into a predetermined location."

"Behind the surrogate mother," Chuck explained.

"The what?" asked Sue.

"She's not going to like this," Steve cautioned Chuck. He would have preferred not to have the point come up.

"Isn't someone going to explain this little tidbit to me?"

"Okay, it's simple." Steve's tone was defensive. "We can only have one monkey in a cage—otherwise we can't control the experiment. But each cage will contain a surrogate mother—a phony made of wire and cloth, with nipples attached to bottles for feeding the experiment's subject."

"The poor things will go crazy without real mothers to give them affection."

"They won't," countered Chuck. "In previous experiments caged monkeys definitely have not gone crazy. But ours won't even lack affection. Steve and I will be handling them and giving them love as part of the deal. They've got to be able to trust us completely for us to get the right readings."

"If it'll make you feel better," Steve suggested to Sue, "you can pitch in—feed them by bottle whenever you want. It'll be all to the good."

"What are all these other gadgets for?" she asked. She definitely did not like the use of the surrogate mothers and now she was becoming suspicious and worried.

"These were the most fun," Chuck told her, pointing. "They're tiny nozzles—these tubes are attached to aerosol dispensers, so that we can add various smells to the cage without showing the objects the scents belong to."

Steve pointed out a number of buttons located at various points around the cage, each with a single wire running from it. "And these are minispeakers, so that we can do the same thing with sounds—like suggest a rattle or a tom-tom. They're grounded to the cage, so we need only a single thin wire running to each speaker."

Sue looked at a huge piece of equipment sitting on a cart next to the cage. "And this, I suppose, is to dissect their brains with when you're done with them?"

Chuck laughed. "It's a laser. We're using it to produce holograms, three-dimensional images of an object that isn't really there. We can project the image of, say, an orange into the cage. We can use aerosol spray to add the smell to go with the image.

Every once in a while the monkey will be able to see and smell an orange, but he'll never be able to grab it."

Sue was impressed. She couldn't imagine how the monkeys might react. Steve told her not to try.

"We're not supposed to assume or try to predict—the purpose of the experiment is to find out what will happen under the test conditions. All we can do now is wait. The shop says it can have the other five cages for us in two weeks. Then we'll be ready to start."

"I'M NOT so sure I appreciate having one named after me," Sue whispered. She watched the infant monkey named Susie as it fed itself from the surrogate mother. "I don't care what you say, it just isn't natural for that poor thing to have to nurse from a mother made of cloth and wire." Steve was edgy. He didn't care for the isolation of the monkeys any more than Sue did, but it had to be done. The big question was how the monkeys were going to respond to their "realities." Sue seemed to read his mind. "And what you're going to convince those poor creatures is real is going to drive them insane. I'm certain it will."

"Why?" argued Steve. "Do dogs go crazy when they're confronted with radios and television sets? And what about elevators? They go into this little room. Thirty seconds later they leave by the same door and they're in an entirely different place. They don't even seem to notice it."

"But that's different," Sue insisted. "Dogs basically know that objects exist. Radio and television are just things that won't work for them. They probably throw them out the way you throw out what you can't use."

"You don't know that's how they react," protested Steve.

"But neither do you," she persisted. "But with these monkeys you're going to switch things around, so that what used to be real will start disappearing and what used to be untouchable will become solid. What's that going to do to the poor things?"

"Just one poor thing," said Steve. "Just Susie."

"Thanks," Sue growled.

The addition of this new series of experiments was the last change that had been made in the plans for the project—and Steve and Chuck agreed it was the most important. One of the monkeys would find, after twelve months, that objects changed from one "reality class" to another. "Reality classes" referred to the apparent characteristics of a set of items—the classifications had been worked out while they had waited for the cages to be fin-

ished. The whole program had finally shaped up into a comprehensive whole. In all, six monkeys would be used—three experimental and three control. The control monkeys would merely live in the special cages, dubbed "reality cages" by Sue. No objects would disappear or reappear, no smells, sounds or images would be presented out of normal context. These three would be raised in the generally accepted "real" world. Only the three experimental monkeys would be subjected to altered realities—one for six months, one for twelve months and one for eighteen. After their time was up they would be transferred into other cages, where they would experience standard realities. Steve and Chuck planned to watch carefully the reactions and adaptations of the monkeys to this change.

"Only Susie will have objects changing from one class to another," explained Steve. "For the first six months each of the three experimental animals will be given twelve objects to play with and each will have a different reality or, as we put it, each will belong to a different 'reality class.' Thus, one class will be represented by the orange. It will always be seen and smelled, but the monkeys will never be able to touch it. Another, represented by the watch, will always disappear when out of the monkey's vision, but will reappear immediately in a certain place, behind the surrogate mother. Another class, including a rattle, will disappear, but reappear at a random time and a random place. Bananas will sometimes be real and sometimes only images with smells. And so on. Only the twelve objects will be used. For Fred, who'll spend six months in the reality cages, this will be all that he goes through."

"Go on," said Sue. Steve had never explained the final layout before and Sue was convinced the reason was that he didn't think she would like it. "Paul goes for twelve months and Susie for eighteen. What happens to them?"

"Calm down," Steve said. "I can't explain it to you if you're already convinced that it's going to be something awful. Believe me, it won't be." Sue relented. Her scowl disappeared. "Okay," Steve said. "After the first six months Paul and Susie will be given new objects. Each will be manipulated to fit into one of the twelve reality classes identified by the original twelve objects. Once introduced, each new object will always appear in the same reality class and no contradictons will be made. The question is will the animals learn to categorize objects according to their class? We're hoping that maybe the monkeys will be able

to classify the objects after a very short encounter with them. This would tend to show that they actually are aware of the different realities and have accepted them."

"And Susie?" asked Sue. "What special treats does she get for her last six months?"

"Precisely what you suggested," interjected Chuck. He had come in minutes earlier and had been listening quietly. "We're going to take objects that Susie is familiar with, that have always acted in the same way, and switch them into another reality class. The doll, which had always behaved as a real doll will become just an image. The orange, which she had never been able to grasp, will become a real object. And when the watch is hidden from her it won't reappear behind the surrogate mother. It'll just stay right where it was put—and I really don't know what you're so upset about." He was mad now—and worried that she might convince Steve to modify the experiments in some way.

"It's just so unnatural," she complained.

"So is wearing clothes—and so is driving a car," he snapped and stomped out of the room.

"It's not just that, Steve." She was still unsettled by the whole affair. "The more I think about it, the less I like what Susie is going to have to go through."

"Well, you won't be the first person ever to empathize with an ape."

"I don't feel just empathy," Sue told him. "What Chuck said is true. Man lives in a completely unnatural world. Look, ever since man became a technological creature scientists have been arguing with the rest of us that what we think is true isn't. So when Armstrong landed on the moon reporters found that something like a quarter of the people they interviewed didn't believe that he was really on the moon. They thought it was all a colossal put-on."

Steve started rolling long strands of hair around a pencil. Since he had let his hair grow he had picked up several of Sue's nervous habits. "So what are you getting at? You think they're as dumb as Susie? Or dumber?"

"No, but they're just as lucky." She groped for words. "Don't you see? Science has destroyed modern man's confidence in reality. He doesn't know whether to believe his senses or not and no attempt is made to clarify the contradiction. That's why I get so mad when some bigdome gets up in front of the class and tells me that matter is just waves and not really solid at all. If you were shown an object disappearing and reappearing across the room you would say 'Wow, teleportation!" There is no alteration of

reality that you wouldn't accept. Sure, in some ways that's a good thing. But this is what I meant when I said I wasn't so sure that objects did exist. Those people who insisted that Armstrong was on a movie set would never have any trouble with disappearing objects. To them it would be a gimmick. For you and me—anything we believe we make our senses accept. Some day we're going to have to confront all of this—and I don't see anyone trying to get ready—"

"I'm sorry," said Steve. "I really don't understand what you're getting at."

"You probably never will," she answered.

II

Steve slowly raised a hand to wipe his forehead. *Damn her,* he thought. *She's right down there, somewhere.* He had been stupid to fire at that great a distance and it had never dawned on him that a police carbine would fire any differently from the old twenty-two he had grown up with. All he had managed to do was scare Susie enough to convince her to retaliate and she showed no inclination to reveal her position now.

He had radioed for more men and had been promised a squad of army sharpshooters, but the men refused to approach within line of sight and the squad had been dropped off two miles down the valley. If they didn't spot her by sunset they wouldn't have a chance, and Coleman had radioed in that the Pentagon had decided to level the whole area if they didn't get her. Susie had sealed her own fate. There was no way out. And he had taught her—was that fair? Yes, he, the ultimate buffoon, had taught her to do it. He was tired and worn out. Nothing made sense. Leveling ten square miles of Rockies to kill a single monkey made more sense than most of the day's events. *A lazy doctoral thesis,* he had called it. How was he going to write this one up?

STEVE had somewhat hopefully labeled the occasion a celebration, but a break in the tedium might have been more accurate. The experiment was six months old today and he, Sue and Chuck had ordered pizza and champagne to celebrate the end of Phase One. Tomorrow two of the monkeys would come out of their reality cages and Paul and Susie would be introduced to their first new objects. Despite all this, a half-year of boring repetition

had drained Steve of his enthusiasm.

"Those damn monkeys accept anything," he complained. "There is absolutely no difference between the experimental animals and the controls. Except in what they take for reality. Whenever the watch disappears they look behind Mama for it. When the rattle disappears they don't expect it back. When the banana turns out to be only an image they ignore it. They're completely predictable—so where's the fun? I'd like to hit one of those beasts on the head with an orange!" It had been five months since any of the experimental animals had shown any interest at all in the sight and smell of an orange.

"For Pete's sake, Steve, how can you complain?" argued Sue. "The experiment so far is a success. Your results have been perfectly clear—and better than you had any right to expect."

"Not to mention," Chuck added, "three publications in six months. I know a lot of people who would give their right arms to be bored like that."

"I'm not complaining about the results," Steve said. "You're both absolutely right—there's no doubt that the monkeys accept whatever reality they're given. They've learned and accepted all twelve reality classes without a flinch. What has me climbing walls is that, beyond the obvious, there hasn't been a single event worth getting excited about."

"Well, that's what this celebration is all about," Sue added cheerily. "Tomorrow you're sure to get some interesting results. Fred comes out of the reality cage and you can hit him with that orange. And I bet Paul and Susie will be happy to see their first new toys in six months."

Steve relaxed. "Okay. I admit I am expecting a little change tomorrow. But somehow I'm convinced that they'll make it as dull as possible." He drank a glass of champagne without pausing. "And you—" He pointed a finger accusingly at Sue. "You have every right to be cheerful. As long as those little brats go on without any shocks or confusion your little conscience feels just fine. I'm almost convinced that anything that would cheer me up would turn you sour."

Sue looked suddenly thoughtful. But, "Wait till tomorrow—" was all she said.

"At this point," he muttered, "I'll take whatever I can get."

THE next morning all three were at the lab by eight-thirty. A certain air of confidence was also present. Steve gave each of the monkeys a nut, as he did every morning, then turned to his fellow humans. "Where would you suggest we start?"

"Let's transfer Fred out of the reality cage and give him an orange," urged Sue.

Steve opened Fred's cage and called to Fred. The monk scampered to him and leaped into Steve's arms. "Okay, boy, you're in for a little fun." Steve transferred him to another cage across the room. Sue had already placed an orange near the door of the cage. Fred looked at the orange and wandered away.

"He's sure it isn't real," whispered Chuck. "It might take a while."

"We'll wait," Steve decided. "He's got nothing else in the cage to play with, so it shouldn't take too long."

Within five minutes Fred had returned to the orange. He sat and looked at it, then tried to pass his hand through the image. The orange was sent rolling across the cage. Fred froze, his eyes fixed on the orange. He looked at his hand and back at the orange. He circled in the cage nervously for a few minutes, then returned to the fruit. He batted it lightly. It rolled. He hit it again, harder, and finally sent it flying across the cage. He jumped about, screaming in excitement. Finally he pounced on the fruit, held it firmly in his hands. He turned it over and over, put it down, picked it up and went through the whole procedure again. He was convinced. The orange was real.

In minutes he had devoured it.

Steve was delighted. From her purse Sue produced a bottle of wine.

"I think we need another celebration," she proclaimed. "A toast to crazy monkeys." All three gathered around the bottle.

After a semblance of order had returned to the scene Chuck said, "I want to give Paul or Susie a new toy."

"Something that will disappear and then reappear behind Mama," suggested Sue. For the past six months, the watch had always reappeared behind Mama after disappearing.

"Let's give Paul a bell," Steve said. He pulled one down from a shelf and walked over to Paul's cage. "Paul, I've got a toy for you." Steve rang the bell, then opened the door and set it down in the cage.

Paul took it tentatively, but dropped it when it rang. He picked it up again and it rang again. He dropped it. After going through the same routine a half dozen times he was running around the cage ringing the bell loudly.

"Let's hide it now," said Chuck. He retrieved the bell from Paul. "Here it goes, Paul," Chuck announced and hid it under a large inverted bowl. The bowl was routinely used to make objects "disappear." Steve dropped the bell through the trapdoor beneath the bowl and raised another one into

the cage behind Mama. Paul contemplated the bowl. Chuck righted the bowl, showing the empty space. Paul sat a minute, then went slowly over to Mama. Seeing the bell, he let out a shout, picked it up and ran about the cage, ringing it merrily.

"He looked behind Mama first." Sue was delighted. "He looked behind Mama!" Quickly they put the bell under the bowl again. This time Paul didn't even pause, but headed straight for Mama.

"He was damn sure of himself that time," Sue said. "There was no question. He knew the reality class and put the bell right into it."

"Another resounding success," announced Chuck.

Steve grinned. "Another paper."

Everything was going better than they had expected. They tried another orange with Fred. He attacked and devoured it immediately. They gave a bell to Susie and her reactions were identical to Paul's.

"Let's try Susie's trick with it," suggested Chuck. Susie's trick had been worked out jointly by Steve and Susie. For the effective operation of the trapdoors the monkeys had to be looking elsewhere or the object had to be covered to prevent the animal's seeing the mechanism in operation. Susie, unlike both Fred and Paul, had figured this out. After a while she had started to cover her eyes in order to make things disappear. Steve had quickly sensed that this was Susie's intent and had whisked away the watch when she covered her eyes. When she uncovered them and didn't see the watch she headed straight for Mama. Over the next two or three days she and Steve had perfected the trick. Now the bell was put over an exposed trapdoor, in plain sight of Susie. But instead of covering her eyes she grabbed it and started to play with it. Steve retrieved it and tried again. On the fourth try Susie cooperated. She sat about two feet from the bell and covered her eyes. Steve dropped it through a trapdoor and transferred it behind Mama. Susie uncovered her eyes, glanced toward where it had been and headed for Mama.

"Enough," Chuck said. "I can't take any more of this." She and Steve agreed and the three left for the day. All three were hung over the next morning.

ONCE again things fell into a monotonous routine. In a month's time Fred was indistinguishable from his control. Anything he saw he assumed was real. There was nothing left to do with him. Paul and Susie delighted in the occasional new toys they received, but they would classify each object as soon as enough time and events had passed

to define which reality class it was in. The tedium returned and the next five months crept past unbearably slowly. Only the question of how Susie would react to an object's changing from one reality to another kept Steve's interest alive. Still, the celebration after one year was considerably gayer than the six-month festivities.

III

The sun was slowly creeping toward the mountain peaks and now the lichen-covered boulder cast a dark shadow over Steve. For the first time in two hours he dared to shift his position. Coleman reported that the sharpshooters had taken cover in the brush that surrounded the bottom edge of the scree field, but could catch no sight of Susie. If no one could hit Susie by sunset a helicopter would ferry out all personnel and the bombers would move in. The valley had already been evacuated and Steve had heard a low-flying plane broadcasting warnings to any campers or hikers who might still be in the area. Susie was unable to move without giving away her position, but she could easily sit and wait until dark. Steve broke into a cold sweat as his mind touched on the idea of Susie's bringing about a premature sunset. That way lay madness, he thought, and drove the concept from his mind. If he had any guts he'd take his chances with Susie in the hopes that if Susie got him one of the sharpshooters would get her. God only knew what she could do if she set her mind to it. But he just sat and prayed for the tiny movement that would give away her position.

Susie, you have to die anyhow. Let me do it—I started it . . .

If only he had stopped his experiments at twelve months.

"TOMORROW we start Phase Three," Steve announced, "and once again our *ennui* will give way to a succession of astonishing events." He wasn't really drunk, but wine plus the excitement had made him a bit lightheaded.

"I do worry about Susie, though," said Sue. "She seems so much brighter than the others and I'm afraid that the shift may really mess her up."

"Oh, get off it, Sue. I thought you were the one who wasn't so sure that objects existed in the first place. And Susie definitely

doesn't believe they do. She should be able to cope well with the change. You'll see. Tomorrow morning we'll put the watch under Susie's bowl and it'll just stay there. Want to bet on what happens?"

"I don't know," she muttered. "I just hope that nothing goes wrong." She finished her wine and the three left.

MONDAY belonged to Susie. Steve showed no signs of being tense. He was the scientist now and he was careful to make sure that Susie would get no cue from him of the changes to come. He proceeded through the morning ritual, giving Susie a nut from the jar on the counter. She snatched it from his hand and ran over to Mama. Jumping up and down, she dropped it behind Mama—in a small pile of about a dozen nuts.

The smile disappeared from Steve's face. "What the hell?" He whirled to face Sue. "Is this your idea of an apology to Susie—to give her extra nuts?" Sue's face showed incomprehension. "We went over procedure several times—there were to be no changes in today's routine except for the actual shifting of objects from one reality class to another. So you go and give her a dozen nuts the very morning of the switch!"

"I did not. I couldn't have. Chuck got here before me. He'll tell you I didn't."

"I don't see how she could have, Steve. Someone must have come in before any of us—or else last night."

Steve was in a fury. "Well, if this is someone's idea of a joke it's a pretty poor one." All three stood around, troubled and disappointed.

"Look," said Chuck. "We obviously can't change Susie's schedule today." She was sitting in the far corner of her cage, shivering with fright at Steve's violent outburst. "Let's transfer Paul out of the reality cage today and we can switch Susie's schedule to Wednesday. Two days isn't really going to matter and in a month you'll hardly remember what happened."

"Okay," muttered Steve. "But first I put up a big NO GODDAM FEEDING THE MONKEYS sign. And remind me to make sure that those nuts get moved from Susie's cage. They're right behind Mama, over the loading platform. Whoever put the nuts there had a real sense of humor."

EVERYTHING went smoothly until Steve returned from lunch the next afternoon. He was getting over his anger and had again become excited about Susie's switch, set for the next morning. As he wandered past Susie's cage

he saw a fresh pile of nuts behind Mama.

He dragged Chuck out of the lab and into the hall.

"Have you been here all afternoon?" he asked. "Since I left for lunch?" The anger in his voice was obvious.

"Essentially. Why?"

"What do you mean, 'essentially'?"

"I mean yes, except that I went downstairs for a coke around twelve-thirty. What's going on around here?"

"Did you give Susie any nuts?" Steve snarled through clenched teeth.

"Of course not."

Steve was in a rage. "There's a new stack of nuts on the trapdoor behind Mama. And if I find the funnyman whose pulling this, I'll kill him! Tonight those nuts go home with me and I'll bring two in every day." He turned to leave. "I'll be back later. If I try to work in this mood I'll drive Susie up a wall. But I'm still changing her over tomorrow morning."

When he came back that afternoon he still couldn't concentrate constructively. People didn't mess up other people's experiments for a joke. Had he somehow managed to offend someone enough to have called down this kind of vengeance on himself?

"Steve," Chuck called. "Pay attention to what you're doing."

Steve returned to his senses and realized that Suzie had been covering her eyes, trying to make the rattle disappear. As she repeated the gesture he dropped the toy through the trapdoor.

"Why don't you call it a day?" Chuck suggested. "It would be a real shame if you messed up badly enough for us to have to postpone the transfer again."

Steve nodded. He was tired and discouraged. He trudged out of the lab and took an elevator to the lobby. He was almost out of the building when he realized that he had forgotten the nuts.

In a foul humor he rode back upstairs and slammed into the lab. Chuck was closing the door to Susie's cage.

"You must really be out of it, Steve," chided Chuck. "You left the rattle in Susie's cage. If I hadn't heard her playing with it she would have had it with her all night." The rule that non-real toys should not stay in the cages when the animals were alone was strict.

"How could I have?" insisted Steve. "I dropped it out just before I left."

"Well no one else has been here since you left, Steve. I'd try to get some extra sleep tonight if I were you. A sleeping pill couldn't hurt any. You're starting to look bad." Steve grunted in irritation and headed for the door. "Don't forget the nuts!" called Chuck. Steve snatched the jar from the bench and stomped out.

STEVE was up at six-thirty the next morning. His night had been filled with nightmares featuring Susie and nuts and watches and rattles, appearing and disappearing. He finally awoke in a cold sweat after he himself had disappeared from his last dream. He was tired and groggy and wanted nothing more than to abandon the whole project. Only the realization that in twelve hours the switch would be completed kept him going. Then he could look forward to another six months of luxurious boredom.

He joined Sue for breakfast at eight. She was alert and excited by the day's plans. But she was visibly shaken by Steve's apparent condition. He told her about the nuts and the rattle, and his dreams of the night before. A grin crept across her face.

"I'm sorry, Steve—it's just that we've come full circle." She couldn't wipe the smile off her face. "You got this whole scheme from me when I doubted the reality of certain interpretations of matter and phenomena—and I'm almost convinced now you're not so sure yourself that things are what they seem—or as they sometimes are represented to be."

"That's stupid," he growled.

"Come on," she said, rising. "Let's get down to the lab. We wouldn't want Chuck to start without us, would we?"

She showed him a huge pout and Steve had to smile despite himself.

Chuck was waiting when they reached the lab and he was eager to get started. Steve gave Susie her nut and chatted inanely with her for a couple of minutes. Then he gave Susie the watch to play with. As always, Susie accepted it readily. She danced around the cage, pausing now and then to listen to its ticking. After a few minutes Steve wrestled it away from her and slipped it under the bowl. This time it would stay there. In more than a thousand trials during the past year Susie had always seen it disappear and reappear behind Mama. This time it would not.

As always, Susie ran to the surrogate Mama and reached for the watch. It wasn't there. Susie froze. She sat motionless for exactly thirty seconds and then started screaming wildly. Steve showed Susie the watch under the bowl and then covered it again. She stared at the bowl for long seconds and then slowly lifted her hands to cover her eyes.

"She's trying to make it disappear," whispered Sue. "She wants it to disappear. Oh, God—she will go mad this time."

Susie uncovered her eyes, walked cautiously to Mama, and peered behind the dummy parent. Immediately she started chattering happily. She reached behind Mama. In an instant she had the watch in her hand.

FOR a long time Steve, Sue and Chuck simply stared at Susie and the watch. No one said a word. No one moved. What was there to say? Without breaking the silence Steve examined the cage. The trapdoors were all wired properly. The releases were in position. The loading platforms were all empty and the receptacle beneath the bowl was empty. He opened the door to the cage and lifted the bowl. There was nothing there. Three blank faces stared at the bowl.

Steve turned to the others. "Have I gone crazy? Did either of you see it? It disappeared. Didn't it?" His voice verged on hysteria.

Sue nodded. "Yes—and then it reappeared behind Mama. We all saw it."

"No!" shouted Chuck. "Someone's pulling some sort of a stunt." He didn't sound at all confident of his explanation. "What's the matter with us? It's obviously some sort of a joke. Look out." He pushed past Steve and examined the wires operating the trapdoors and loading platforms. "Everything seems okay," he muttered, but then disconnected the trapdoors and loading platforms. "This reality bit is going to all of our heads." He retrieved the watch from Susie and placed it under the bowl. "Now let's see this work!"

He felt foolish. Whoever had rigged this gag would never let them forget their reactions. All three were in position to look behind Mama as Susie covered her eyes. Instantly the watch appeared behind Mama.

"This is insane." Steve jammed his hands deep into his pockets. "This just isn't real." He paced back and forth, trying to regain his self-control. "There is a nice rational explanation for all of this. And we're going to find it."

Without saying a word Sue retrieved the watch from Susie. The others stared as she placed the watch on top of the inverted bowl, in plain sight. Susie immediately raised her hands and covered her eyes. A split second later the watch vanished, only to reappear simultaneously behind Mama.

"Oh, my God," whispered Chuck. "Steve—the nuts. They appeared behind the surrogate mother. Just like the watch."

Steve stared straight ahead. "Yes." His voice was controlled. "And I know I didn't leave the rattle in there last night."

She turned to Steve. "Susie did it, didn't she? She made her reality work."

Steve started to laugh. "Well, I guess it isn't morning yet. This has got to be just another one of those nightmares I was having last night."

Sue said "Let's break." She turned to Chuck. "Let's go somewhere else—do something else. I

don't want to stay here any longer. Not just now."

"No," said Chuck. "I want to try a couple of things first. Give me the orange." Sue looked at him blankly. "I want to see if it's real to Susie." Susie had never experienced a real orange. Only a hologram and a smell. He took the orange and put it in Susie's cage by the door. All three gazed in silence.

At first Susie simply ignored it. She had seen the holograms many times and had no reason to suspect that this was any different. After a few minutes Steve reached in and gave the orange a shove. He took the watch from the cage and closed the door. Susie studied the orange intently. She had never seen a hologram roll, so this was definitely a novelty. She approached the orange, sat a foot away from it, considering what to do. Finally she reached out an arm and swatted at it. Her hand went right through the orange.

"Let's get out of here," Chuck urged.

"I thought you wanted to test two things," Sue said. She stared at the cage in a trance.

"Forget it," said Chuck. "Right now I want to test a pitcher of beer." The three headed for the door. The watch was still clutched in Steve's right hand. As he followed the others out he pulled the door shut behind him. As it closed he felt the watch vanish from his hand. He hurried away.

They were waiting for him at the elevators. "You can stay here if you want," he said, without slowing down. "I'm taking the stairs." The others followed him.

THEIR conversation was restricted to the weather as they drank their first pitcher of beer. They were halfway through the second when Chuck violated the unspoken taboo. His face was tense.

"I think I believe it," he said and suddenly the clamp that had been holding all three silent was released. "It doesn't make any sense and it can't be and it's crazy—but I believe it. Something in the back of my brain keeps saying 'She did it, so what?' And I have no answer."

"I know," said Steve. "The same thoughts have been going through my head. 'Why not?' my head keeps asking. And I don't know why not. I never really could believe in relativity either. I mean that Sue here could take off in a starship, eat lunch, take a shower, land, get off—and I'd be eighty years old. But I accept it anyhow, because I've been told it's true. Well this is just the opposite. All my training, all my intellect says, 'You're hallucinating, dreaming, undergoing mass hypnosis—' Things like that. But this time something keeps asking,

'Why not?' And I can't answer."

"You know," Sue suggested, "in a way we have gone crazy. I mean I don't really think we have, but if what we saw did actually happen—then maybe all those other people who have been locked up for being crazy aren't—at least some of them. I mean, there's one reality that's accepted—and if you perceive or believe in any other you're crazy. And it doesn't matter whether you saw it because you were on drugs or because it really is like that. You're just as crazy in the eyes of the world." She looked from Steve to Chuck and then down at her empty glass. "It's easier," she whispered. "It's easier if you don't try to fight the question of your sanity. Either we are crazy—or we don't know what the word means any more." She had nothing more to say.

"Okay," argued Chuck, "maybe we are crazy—and maybe Susie did all those things we saw her do. I'm not sure which. But if she did do what we saw her do—how could she? I mean, a lot of people have watched a lot of monkeys do a lot of things and I've never heard of this before. If we did see what we think we saw there still has to be a logical explanation for it. It's not going to bring everything crumbling down around us—any more than when people found out that energy could be changed to matter. Forty years ago no one would have believed it possible—but when the transformation proved out it didn't destroy the rest of our structures. We just had to modify them a bit."

"There's no comparison," objected Steve. "If some physicist had given a completely incomprehensible lecture and then showed us a machine that could do what Susie did—we'd have no trouble accepting it. Even if we couldn't understand the explanation, the knowledge that an explanation existed would be all that we'd need. The problem is that we have no explanation for what we just saw. It contradicts everything we've been taught and everything our senses have told us. We can't fit it in anywhere. When you stop to think about it, an aborigine would have more trouble dealing with New York City than we have had with this." Some of the shock was slipping from Steve's mind. He was slowly constructing a web of support for his wounded reality.

"But why did it happen now?" insisted Chuck. "Why us?"

"That's easy," answered Sue. A picture had slowly been forming in her mind, too, but she was afraid of Steve's reaction to it. He wasn't going to like it. "We taught her. Steve, you always said that you would never go into an experiment unwilling to accept any particular results, but that's exactly what you've done.

"What have we been doing for the past year? We asked the question, 'What happenes when you teach a monkey from infancy that reality is different from what we know it to be? What happens if you convince the monkey that some objects are insubstantial and others can arbitrarily disappear?' Well, we asked the question and we've gotten our answer. The reality they are taught becomes their reality. I don't mean that they believe what is false—I mean that what is true for them is different from what is true for us. We've all been taught one reality, so we all believe it and it is real for us. Our experiment has never been done before."

"That's not actually correct," Chuck put in. "In ancient times people believed in witches, miracles, stuff like that—and there appeared to be a lot to support their convictions. Whenever quack cures and stories about witches and miracles are discredited, the so-called mysteries seem to stop happening. We have assumed that they never did happen but we don't really know that. We just figured that what we found to be true after we got there was true before. But when you stop to think about it, that sure leaves a lot of unexplained stories. We've just never had anything else to do with the data—so we chucked it out."

"But it still doesn't work," argued Steve. "What about our reality? Maybe Susie expected the watch to disappear and the orange to be insubstantial—but I'll be damned if we did. We expected them both to be just what they always have been for us. How come her reality worked and ours didn't? There were three of us, you know."

"That's not fair," replied Sue. "We don't really have that firm a grip on any particular reality. We've all accepted relativity and the wave theory of matter. Steve, you said minutes ago that if some scientist said a fact was reasonable you'd have no trouble accepting it. Well, you'd have a hell of a time convincing Susie. People give up their realities too easily.

"The three of us are already accepting what happened. We've got no faith in our realities. But Susie's never lost her faith—so hers was just that much stronger. I don't think we ever had much chance against her. That's why crazy people get locked up. The whole purpose of therapy is to convince the person that his or her reality is not real. You know that what I'm saying is almost exactly what a shrink would say. He'd just insist that the reality that the crazy person saw didn't exist. That's the only difference."

"Now that's what I call a minor difference," Steve muttered. "So what do we do—write it up and

submit it? That minor difference might just be major enough to get us all locked up for a good long while. We may be convinced—but there are a few billion people out there who would not."

"I'm not sure," Sue protested. "I think you'll find a lot more support than you could imagine."

"Well, I still want to know where we go from here." Steve felt better, but the thought of trying to convince someone else of what he, Sue and Chuck thought they had seen happen brought back all of his fears and doubts.

"Convince other people," said Chuck. "Professor Coleman's head of psychology. Let's talk to him. But first we'd better show him."

"Yes—don't tell him what's going to happen," warned Sue. "I think he's more sure of his reality than all of us and Susie put together. If he knows what we're expecting, I'm not sure that he couldn't stop her."

"Besides," said Chuck. "I'd feel better if someone else saw it, too."

"THREE more nervous, secretive people I've never seen." Coleman was both irritated and interested. "But it's clear that you're going to be insistent, so let's see what this is all about." Steve had practically dragged the short, stocky Coleman from his office, much to the astonishment of his staff. When they reached the lab they found the door ajar and Susie's cage empty. A neat stretch of bars was missing.

Coleman pushed past Steve to examine the cage.

"Strange," he muttered. "Metal doesn't look like it's been cut. There are no marks at all. How was it done?" He turned to Steve. "I gather this isn't what you intended to show me?"

All three started talking at once. In a matter of minutes Coleman was seriously considering calling for three straitjackets.

Steve took over.

"So you see, Dr. Coleman, Susie must have made the bars disappear, too," he finished. "I know this is going to be hard to—"

The blare of a fire alarm interrupted him.

"There's no test schedule for today," muttered Coleman. He grabbed a phone and called his office. "They don't know anything about it," he reported. "Let's go."

They took the stairs to the first floor and headed for the front door. As they passed a corridor, they saw a crowd gathered at its end. Someone saw Professor Coleman and hailed him.

Dr. Lewis Pearson, a younger member of the psychology department faculty, waved from the edge of the crowd and was obviously quite upset. Coleman started down the hall at a jog.

Steve, Sue and Chuck followed

him. The crowd parted to let them through.

They found themselves staring at the outer wall of the building. Or, rather, out through the wall. A circle three feet in diameter and some six inches above the floor had been cut out of the wall. It was a perfectly clean hole and it looked disturbingly familiar to the four.

Pearson was speaking hurriedly to Coleman: ". . . and it appears that that's why she pulled the alarm. She's completely incoherent, but she sticks to her story. She says the monkey just covered its eyes and the hole appeared.

"I've called the hospital for an ambulance, but we still have this crazy hole to deal with. Look at it. The edges are clean. How could anyone make a hole like this and not be noticed?" Pearson looked at Coleman for an answer.

"Where's the girl?" asked Coleman. "I think I'd better talk to her."

"She's in your office—the secretaries are taking care of her."

Coleman wordlessly took off for his office, Steve, Sue and Chuck still a part of his entourage.

"You know she's telling the truth, Coleman, don't you?" Steve said. "We've got to get Susie back. God only knows what she may do if she gets scared."

"When I need your advice I'll ask for it." Coleman spoke over his shoulder as he strode. "If you want to handle the fire department and the police and whatever else—they're yours. But as regards this poor woman, I'm at least temporarily in charge."

Steve walked with him in silence.

They found the girl sitting between two comforting secretaries in Coleman's office. Tears were streaming down her cheeks, and she looked scared.

"I swear I saw it," she said. "I'm not crazy. A monkey just made the hole appear."

Coleman sent the other women away. "We know," he said quietly. "The monkey escaped from one of our labs and we're looking for her. Do you know which way she went after she got out?"

Coleman sounded and looked as if he only half believed his own words.

"Don't play games with me," the girl whispered. "I saw it, I really did—"

Sue came forward and put an arm around the girl.

"Dr. Coleman's not playing games," she said. "He's just having a hard time believing what's happened. So am I. You're not crazy. Not at all. Really."

The girl started to whimper quietly.

"Come on," said Coleman. "We can leave her with my staff. We've got to find that damn monkey of yours.

The fire trucks arrived. Cole-

man spoke to the fire chief and asked to use the car radio.

"Put me in touch with Chief Heninger." Coleman was contacting the police chief. "Chief Heninger? This is Dr. Coleman, I'm head of the psychology department at the university. I'm afraid we're going to need your help."

"What seems to be the problem?"

Coleman hesitated. This would have to be phrased carefully. "I can't explain all the details, I'm afraid. The project is classified. Goverment security. We've been conducting some very important experiments with a group of monkeys and one of them has escaped. We need your help to find her and get her back."

"Have you tried the humane society, Dr. Coleman? They're animal exp—"

"You don't understand," Coleman snapped. "Look, Heninger, this monkey is dangerous. It may be more dangerous at this moment than any other living creature. I can't begin to tell you the damage it could cause if it's not caught. This is an emergency and a big one. Get the humane society, too, but we need every man you've got." Coleman paused for a second. "I'll take full responsibility if there's any problem about your committing so many men to it, but we need literally everything you've got. This monkey could wipe out the whole city!"

Quiet static hummed over the radio and Heninger's breathing could be heard in the background.

"What do you mean dangerous?" he finally asked. "This monkey got some kind of disease? Or does—"

Steve grabbed the microphone from Coleman and signaled to the others to be quiet. He began talking in a deep voice, hoping he remembered lines from an amateur theatrical he had appeared in during his undergraduate days. This was a dangerous gambit, he knew, but it was necessary. "Heninger? Just shut up a second. This is Major Pomeroy, Army—CIA liaison from this district." Some of it was coming back to him, but he was also improvising nicely. His confidence grew. "I'm slapping a complete security blanket on this affair right now. That's official. I don't want you talking to any reporters or anyone else about this. You just tell them you're looking for a missing monkey. Don't say a word more. Understand?"

Heninger sounded impressed. "Yes, Major. I understand."

"Good. Are these lines secured?"

"Secured, sir?" Heninger was not at all sure of what was going on.

"Secured. Are they scrambled? Or can just anyone with a radio pick this up?" Steve was beginning to enjoy reliving the old role

—these last lines were straight out of that long-ago play.

"No, sir, they're not. We're not set up for anything like that."

Steve turned to Coleman and spoke for Heninger's benefit. "Well, Professor, give him any instructions you can, but remember that the lines are not secured." He handed the microphone back to Coleman and sank back into his seat. He found himselt at once exhilarated and scared, but evidently the ploy had worked.

He listened to Coleman.

"Just put every man you have on it. We've got to get her back, and fast." Coleman paused. "And listen, Chief, it's a really strange monkey. When you catch her, tell your men to tie her hands behind her back." He spoke slowly. "And if it looks as if she were going to cover her eyes shoot her—fast. And shoot to kill."

He looked away from Steve. The decision had been his to make and he had made it.

Silence fell at the other end of the line before Heninger asked, "Is that all, Dr. Coleman?"

"Yes, that's all I can think of now." Coleman sounded exhausted and Steve realized the man had been made to act forcefully out of character. "I'll keep in touch. If you'd tell us the location of any sightings of her, I'd appreciate it."

"Very good, sir. I'll send out the alert right away."

TEN minutes later the call came through on the fire chief's radio. "We've just received a call about a monkey spotted at Morheim and Blake. Car Seventeen is almost there and on its way. We'll keep you informed."

"Right," Steve answered for Coleman. "We're also on our way." They took off for the area. It would take several minutes to get there.

They weren't halfway there when Heninger called back. He was clearly upset. "Coleman, what the hell kind of monkey is that?"

"What seems to be the problem, Heninger?" asked Steve.

"How the hell should I know? Nelson in Car Seventeen just called in and he's completely incoherent. Keeps saying something about his partner having disappeared while trying to catch that monkey. I'm trying to find out where he went to, but Nelson keeps saying that he just disappeared. He sounds crazy, Coleman, and I want to know what's going on."

Steve took the mike. "Heninger, this is Pomeroy. I thought I told you that this could not be discussed on unsecured lines. You're just going to have to believe that what you're doing is right. We're approaching Morheim and Blake now. Have there been any more sightings?"

"No," reported Heninger glumly. "But my men are fanning out. If the monkeys keeps going in the

direction she was first heading, she'll be getting into the mountains pretty soon."

The fire chief's car reached Morheim and Blake as Nelson was being taken into another prowl car by fellow cops. As they drove off he looked completely stunned.

"It looks like Susie's taken her first casualty," commented Chuck.

No one answered.

"Coleman, are you there?" It was Heninger.

"I'm here. What do you want?"

"We've lost contact with Car Twelve. We're having all our men on the lookout for it, so that means you, too. Can that monkey . . . Hold it." A pause came while Heninger talked to someone else. "Coleman, they've found our car at Gasser and Blake." Steve gestured and the fire chief's car turned and headed down Blake. It was five blocks to Gasser. Heninger reported intermittently. "It's sitting in the middle of the street . . . the men inside aren't moving . . . they look like they're frozen in place. I'm getting this from Car Eight, they're sending a man over to Car Twelve. Can't you tell me anything about what we're up against?" There was a pleading tone in Heninger's voice. But they had reached Gasser, and Steve got out of the car, followed by Chuck.

Chuck realized what had happened before anyone. "The holograms," he whispered.

The policeman had just reached Car Twelve. "Wait!" called Steve, but he was too late. The man had reached for the handle of the car door and had fallen right through the door, through both of the car's occupants and the floor of the car to land heavily on the street below. He started to get up, saw himself merged with the driver and fainted. His partner, who had watched the whole affair from Car Eight, started babbling hysterically into his radio.

Steve reached into the fire chief's car for the mike and called Heninger.

"Listen, Heninger," he said. "I'm afraid things are getting out of hand. I want to change plans—"

"You're damn right they're out of hand!" shouted Heninger. "I just got a call from Coleman's office that Parker, the man from Car Seventeen who disappeared, showed up in one of Coleman's monkey cages. He's stark raving mad. What is God's name is going on? That's five miles from where he disappeared—"

"Heninger, shut up and listen," Steve barked. "Pull your men back a bit. I don't want them to try to capture the monkey. Just follow it at a distance and keep us informed as to its whereabouts. We'll try to take it ourselves."

"That's fine with me," retorted Heninger. "It's definitely heading for the mountains."

"Heninger, we're going to want

a megaphone and portable two-way radio when we catch up with her," Steve said. He paused for a moment. "And a rifle."

THE fire chief's car caught up with Susie in a clearing just outside the city limits. She was heading for the mountains. Four police cars sat at the edge of the field, some two hundred yards from Susie. They had gotten a vague, illogical story about the Car Twelve affair and wanted nothing to do with the monkey. The police gave Steve the megaphone, radio and a carbine. He had little idea of exactly what he was going to do, but the responsibility was now his. Coleman was a fine administrator, but Susie was Steve's project and would remain so until this issue was settled.

One way or the other, he thought. He took off at a jog after Susie.

"Steve, wait for me," called Sue, running up to him. "I'm coming, too."

Steve said, "You're not coming. First of all, I'd have to worry about you, too. Then—two people are much more likely to panic Susie. Finally—you'll slow me down. I have no idea how fast she's going to be moving."

He started off again before she could argue and Chuck led her back to the car.

For an hour or so Steve simply followed Susie at a distance. She was aware of his presence, but did nothing about it. She moved slowly, being unsure of the world. Until today her whole life had been spent in a cage and now she had much to cope with.

It would not make the situation any easier, Steve realized, if he startled her now. She would be upset until she began to get accustomed to the vaster world. He had tried twice to call her by megaphone. Each time Susie had only responded by speeding up her pace. He followed her into the mountains for another hour and tried the megaphone again.

"Susie, come here, Susie. It's me, Steve. I've got some nuts for you." They were on the scree field now and Susie's size and agility were giving her greater and greater advantage over Steve. He was losing ground fast.

It was then that he had decided he would have to shoot. He pretended that he would be shooting to wound, but he was far from an expert marksman and she was a good hundred and fifty feet away. The carbine turned out to be more powerful than he had expected and his shot hit the boulders twenty feet above and beyond her. Susie got the message fast. She spun around, screaming angrily, looking for Steve. But he was behind a large lichen-covered boulder, out of her sight. The next thing he

knew the mountainside was coming down on top of him.

HE WAS truly frightened now, for the first time in his memory. He had never really considered that his life was at stake in this venture. Losing now would make an even worse ending for his thesis than what had already happened.

It was getting dark and neither Steve nor any of the sharpshooters had seen so much as a hint of Susie. The sun was sinking rapidly. In another fifteen minutes it would be behind the mountains and the helicopter would be coming in to evacuate the area.

The radio came alive with Sue's voice. "Steve, don't do anything until I get there. They're flying me in now. I can stop Susie. The whole situation has changed." Her voice was strained. "I'll be there in five minutes. Tell those army people to hold their fire while I try."

The connection was broken and Steve could already hear the approaching helicopter. He relayed her message to the other hunters just as the aircraft appeared over the ridge. In another minute it was hovering ten feet off the ground and Sue scampered down a rope ladder. The helicopter was gone in an instant, climbing at full thrust.

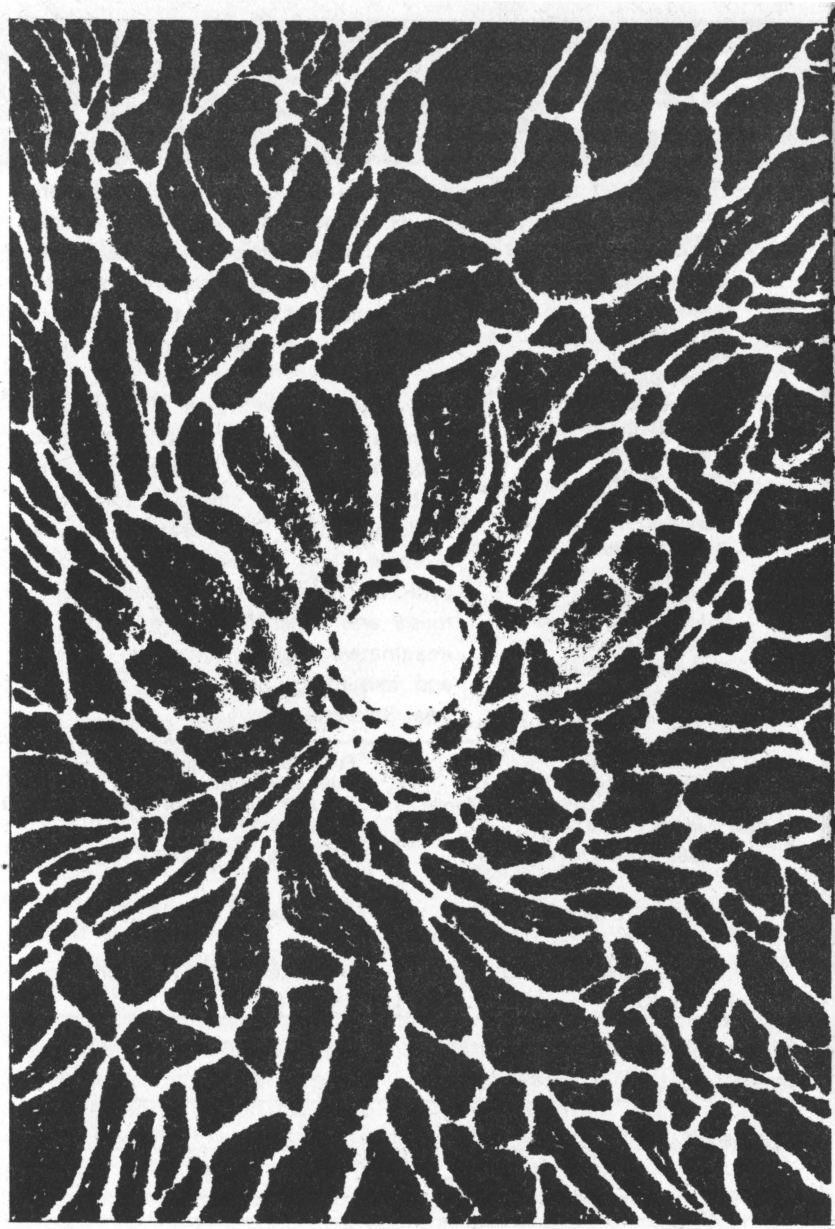
Steve pointed to the general area where he knew Susie had to be. "Be careful," he whispered.

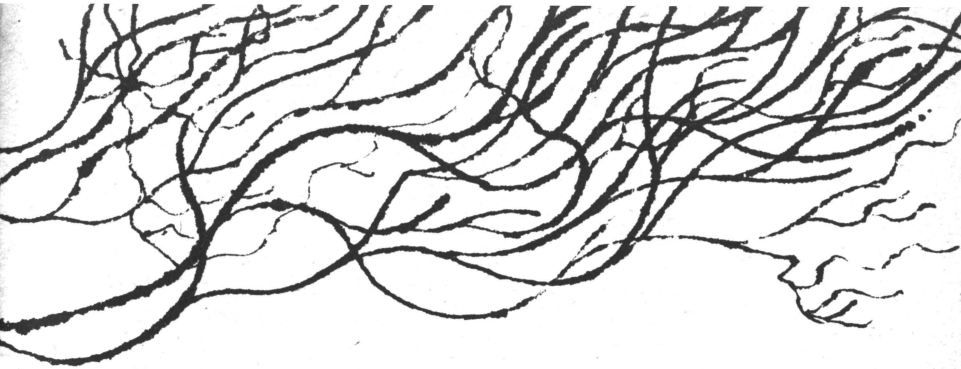
Sue started slowly toward the hidden monkey.

"Susie, Susie—it's all right, Susie. Come on out Susie—it's me." She held her hands out in front of her. "I've got some nuts for you." There was a slight movement about fifty feet down the scree field to her right. Sue came to within ten feet of where Susie was hidden. She stopped. "Good Susie, everything's going to be all right, Susie. Here are some nuts." She threw the nuts just to one side of Susie's hiding place. After a moment Susie appeared. Cautiously, she took a nut and ate it. Her nervousness seemed to abate when she saw no one else and she started into the rest of the nuts, keeping one eye on Sue.

Slowly Sue raised her hands from her sides up to her lips. "Goodbye, Susie. Maybe we'll meet again," she whispered and slowly covered her eyes.

Susie was gone. ●



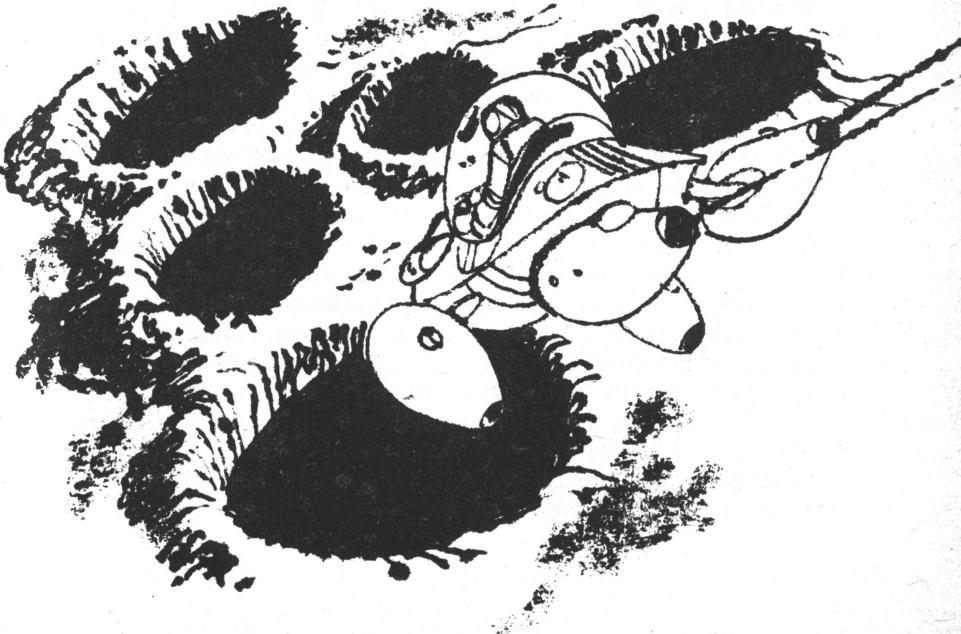


NOVELETTE

The planet was perfect for human seeding. . .but who reaped the harvest?

MNARRA MOBILIS

SYDNEY J. VAN SCYOC



I

When heat began to flee upward through rock and soil, when the leaf clusters she had generated that morning nourished her with steadily diminishing quantities of solar energy, Mnarra knew evening approached. Slowing, stopping, she called back the plasmic arms of herself which had flowed through the soil ahead of her main body.

Reunited, she dissolved the taut cable of elastic root strands that connected her to the leaf clusters, which by now lay two miles south of her position. Then she began to generate a new cable of strands upward. When the strands separated near the surface she spun out glossy new clusters of leaves to tower above the sparse spring vegetation on the hillside. The leaves spread deep green faces to the moons. Faint washes of reflected solar energy reached Mnarra.

She gathered herself into a pocket of limestone for the night. She was an ageless being who traveled alone and neither rock, soil nor water hindered her. She stopped only for night and then she soothed herself with ancient electrochemical conjugations, patterns as old as time.

As old as Mnarra's time.

Hours later the leaf clusters alerted her. Sunlight grayed the darkness. Soon would be dawn, the celebration. Mnarra prepared the scarlet blossoms with which she always greeted the new sun.

The sun rose. Her new leaves transmitted its energy deep. Mnarra shuddered, enraptured. Her blossoms unfurled splendidly, one from the center of each leaf cluster, velvety petals coiling and spiraling out from soft golden eyes.

She began to move again. Northward, always northward during the days of spring. The elastic cable of strands stretched after her. The leaf clusters fed her generously.

On the other hillside, two miles south, the leaf clusters that had served her the previous day wilted. The scarlet flowers that had celebrated the previous dawn drooped and died.

But this was of no real consequence. Mnarra had created. Mnarra had drawn nourishment. Now Mnarra continued her season's journey.

Thus always.

ABOARD the settlement's only hoverscooter Brennan hung briefly at the crest of the hill. Sweeping down its western flank, Earth grasses grew tender and green. At the foot of the hill, on the edge of the plain, New Powell was a collection of domes and dorms, each with its own broad apron of lawn. Then, like rays, the fields spread from the edge of the settlement. Corn stretched due west in a wide swath. Beans, tomatoes, squash, beets grew in thriving rows. And bounding the rays was a deep arc of wheat.

Brennan's eyes swept back up the hill to appraise the grazing Jerseys. It had been a busy ten months since landfall. There had been fields to clear; shelters to erect, the dairy herd to incubate from embryonic motes to birth-stage calves and then to tend carefully through motherless infancy.

But now their first growing season was successfully launched and Brennan could hang here forgetting this was an alien world. He could imagine instead that he and his party had moved back through time to an era when their own Earth was a place of rolling hills and swaying grasses, to a time when the sky was blue, when puffy white clouds moved across it like great mindless gods set adrift. He could hang here and pretend City-America had never been perpetrated upon the North American continent, that the congested gray sky clamminess of total urban development had somehow been averted, the pastoral values preserved, cherished.

And then he could move north from the crest of the hill and find himself upon an alien world again. His shoulders tightened as he did so.

The vegetation below him now was not so different in form from what he might have found in the American wilderness centuries before. Green plants crawled, stood, reached, some with leaves palmate, others with leaves fan-shaped, oval or round. The difference lay in response to season. Brennan had hopped these nearer hills a dozen times in the months since landfall. In late summer the vegetation had been lush and green. In autumn it had remained green. It had never browned for winter.

Then with the onset of spring, despite frequent showers, the vegetation faded. Dark green became pale, even yellow. Now, two weeks after Brennan's last survey, barren soil showed through in large dark patches. Brennan took the scooter low. He had never observed the plants below to bloom or to seed. There appeared to be no other form of regeneration in progress either.

He pulled the scooter high again, hoping that when he crossed the hills directly to the north, he

would find a different scene.

What he found was the same yellow-green carpet, sparse and unencouraging. He hung over the wilting hills, troubled. Perhaps this was normal for spring.

Perhaps it wasn't. Last fall they had cleared their selected fields and hillsides in full expectation that the native vegetation would reappear, that they would have to root it out again. But it hadn't reappeared. Brennan frowned thoughtfully. The survey report, certainly, had told them little about native plant life beyond the fact that most species were inedible, many poisonous to warm-blooded animal life. The logical assumption, in view of the observed phenomena, was that the plant life of this world followed a different seasonal cycle from that of Earth vegetation, that it reproduced by radically different methods.

But he had not checked the hoverscooter out to contemplate the dying hillsides. Today was the day he made his first visit to the crater area some miles north of the settlement. He lofted.

FROM the survey report he had visualized a few dozen small craters — shallow, perhaps five feet in diameter — pocking the arm of the plain that reached around the hills to the north. Half an hour later he crossed the final barricade of hills and caught his breath, startled. Below lay a vast area of land totally disfigured by craters forty feet and more in diameter — and deep. They interlocked in a crazy chain, some with rims sharp and relatively fresh, others worn, filling with soil.

Unbelieving, he swung his scooter to measure the area.

At noon he set down on a hillside, stepped off the scooter. The craters claimed a swath of plain three miles wide and seven miles deep. The entire area was pocked, crater superimposed upon crater. Only a few appeared recent. Most were older. Some had refilled with soil, only slight indentations marking their locations. Still others held water.

Brennan's shoulders tightened with anger. EarthAuthority had permitted his people to erect their settlement and claim their fields a bare ten miles from this devastation zone — without informing them of the magnitude of the phenomenon, without making any attempt to discover the forces behind the pocking, without even drawing charts to show the distribution of crater zones across the face of this continent. That was one of the few concrete facts he had gleaned from the report, that this area was one of dozens scattered across the continent.

Abruptly Brennan reboarded the scooter and lifted off the hillside. Swinging down, he ap-

proached the freshest crater, maneuvered the scooter down into it. Gingerly he avoided the steeply sloping walls. He tilted the vehicle to peer over the side, unclamped the handlamp and shone it down.

He could see nothing at the bottom of the crater but mud.

Did meteorites bury themselves? He frowned. Did meteorites, for that matter, fall within sharply defined geographical belts?

He took the scooter up. Meteorites were one of the many topics his perfunctory CityAmerica education had not touched upon. But if these craters were not the result of meteorite showers, what other explanation was plausible? Explosive deposits of natural gas? If so, what had detonated them?

He returned home over the plain, detouring out and around the jutting line of hills. He hovered low, watching the terrain grimly. He found no trace of any crater beyond the devastation zone. So perhaps there was no actual threat to the settlement.

Nevertheless, later in the week he returned afoot with a crew of men. They lowered into the four most recent craters to attempt to excavate whatever rock or metal bodies might have impacted the soil with such force. They found nothing to excavate, emerged empty-handed.

As they packed their gear for the return trek, DiChiara, Brennan's second in command, scratched the dark soil thoughtfully. "I don't see any sign that this is a volcanic area."

Brennan's gaze moved from the plain to the hills, gentle, sensuous in their almost fleshlike contours. He was all too aware that his eyes were untrained. "I don't either," he said without conviction. "Next week I'll take the scooter south for a recon run."

DiChiara glanced at him sharply. "You think you'll find another crater area down there?"

"I don't know what I'll find."

DiChiara stretched erect. "Maybe I could ride along."

Brennan was noncommittal. "Maybe so, Dick." He hitched his shovel upon his back. The expedition had not been productive. His disquietude was greater now than it had been earlier. There should have been something at the bottom of the craters.

Mlondas moved deep when it was cold, stretching taut the cable of root strands that connected him to his leaf clusters. But on warm days he skimmed near the surface, a thin layer of plasma rippling through the topsoil, unhindered by roots and nodes.

Now it was spring and those roots grew flaccid. But

Mlondas did not mourn the ground cover that withered overhead. Where it thinned, the soil lay bare and the sun's warmth poked through in friendly fingers.

Soon the intensity of heat told him the sun was at zenith. He paused to spread himself molecule-thin in the upper inch of topsoil. Dawn was the celebration, the occasion for creating great waxen white flowers to declare his formal ecstasy. But noon was more dear. Rapturously he basked.

The time passed and Mlondas drew himself together, flowed into a deeper layer and continued on. There weren't many minutes to tarry. An ancient being, Mlondas traveled slowly.

Traveled slowly, traveled south, in spring.

Thus always.

THEY moved a hundred feet above the plain, Brennan and DiChiara. Brennan watched the ground intently, trying to conceal his irritation. He had looked forward to a solitary hover. But DiChiara had talked his way aboard.

Now DiChiara talked his way southward. "You ever wonder how the Latins developed as a talkative, volatile race while Northern Europeans are typically repressed and quite distant?"

"I didn't," Brennan admitted, unencouragingly.

"Well, contrast the climates they evolved from. The Latins never had to contain themselves. They could expand all over the great outdoors — year 'round. But the Scandinavians were sealed up together months at a time, drifted in, surrounded by hostile elements. No way to escape each other but in — into themselves. If they let themselves express every emotion, like the Latins, if they—well, take that dorm blow-up between Swenson and Diaz last winter, during the rains. Swen was simply reacting — "

Brennan's hands tightened on the controls. So they were back to Swenson. "Swenson has permission to erect an individual shelter anywhere within the boundaries of the settlement. I granted that several months ago."

DiChiara nodded. "Sure. Sure. But Swen wants to locate on the other side of the fields. He's of Swedish stock. He wants privacy. He figures that after next month, when he and Tilla are married—"

"No. It's policy, Dick — until the ship checks back we live as a unit. There are half-dozen couple cottages Swen and Tilla can choose from if they don't want to build."

DiChiara moved discontentedly. "Now look, Bren, this isn't CityAmerica. These people

came here to be free — and you're administering New Powell like an Earthside housing development."

Brennan peered at DiChiara. Smiled grimly. He remembered his childhood, remembered a pale finger of sunlight falling onto the asphalt play area at the bottom of the concrete-slab canyon, remembered fighting savagely to occupy it. Now he glanced at the bright sun overhead. "I'm running New Powell like a detachment to a world we know very little about. Over the next four years we'll learn. Then we can disperse and enjoy our freedom."

"For God's sake, Bren! What is there to learn? There's no animal life here. Not even insects. The survey ship determined that much. So if Swen and Tilla clear a place and put in Earth grasses, fence the area after they have children, come out to the fields every day like everyone else — "

Brennan shook his head. "Drop it, Dick." New Powell had been endowed, like every EarthAuthority-sponsored settlement, with equipment, food, supplies and seeds to insure survival through their first five settlement years. The ship would check back at the end of that period. If they had succeeded in making the planet bear, it was theirs. But if they had failed they would be returned to CityAmerica, to the bottom of the planet party list, those of them who chose to try again.

Brennan was aware that his headsman's training had been as perfunctory as his early CityAmerica education. But one principle he had grasped firmly. It was not always the hard worlds, the hostile worlds, that defeated the settling party. Sometimes it was the lush worlds.

The too-easy worlds.

This could be one. The colonists faced no anomalies of terrain or climate here. There was no hostile animal life. The sky was bright, the air fragrant. The fields were already thriving, the young dairy stock flourishing. But Brennan didn't intend to let his people relax and enjoy until they had passed their first five-year test.

They continued across the plain in strained silence. Five miles south of New Powell, Brennan began zigging and zagging, cutting broad swaths across the yellow-green terrain. Ten miles south DiChiara came to life again. "You ever think what's going to happen if all these plants die and the ground is bare when the rains come?"

"I've thought about it. But the heavy rains aren't due before late fall. I'm sure the ground cover will regenerate by then."

DiChiara shrugged. "Nan Perry suggested we sow the hills right away. Just in case."

Brennan's brow rose. "Oh?"

"We have grass seed enough to cover a dozen of the nearest hills. They'd take now and hold the soil. A month from now it might be too late."

Brennan shook his head. "No, we're not scattering seed that far afield until we've had more time to evaluate the local life cycle."

"Well, it's going to demolish our life cycle if the hills come down and we're inundated in mud."

Brennan sighed. "Look, Dick, there's no sign these hills have ever come down. We landed in late summer and the vegetation was thick. Between now and late summer this year, something will happen. The ground will be covered again."

DiChiara appraised Brennan darkly. "Maybe you should put that sentiment in a frame and hang it at the next community meeting. I hear things you don't."

Brennan frowned. "Do you?"

"Some of our people think we've killed this world."

Brennan's brows arched, underscoring his patent disbelief.

"Well, look around. It's spring —and everything is dying. Everything except our crops. Twan Yano says we've pierced the flesh and the beast perishes. Nan Perry says we've already destroyed the planet's ecology by putting down our alien seeds. Nick Sorenson thinks we've introduced a new element, some element that didn't exist here before and now it's poisoned all the plant life. Kerri Rice says— "

His recital was interrupted. Brennan swung the scooter abruptly, his eyes intent on the ground. Describing a broad arc, he brought the scooter down.

"All right, look at that!"

DiChiara looked, clinging to the passenger bar. His speech dribbled away into un-Latinate silence.

BRENNAN dismounted. At his feet a broad patch of dark green foliage sprang from the soil. The leaves grew in clusters, dozens of clusters. young and aggressive. Each cluster was crowned with a single scarlet blossom, its velvety petals corkscrewing gracefully from a deep golden center.

Suddenly DiChiara was beaming, his dark face transformed. "Hey! It's spring, Brennie! The place is blooming!" He laughed. "Hey, do you think— "

"I think we'd better leave the flowers where they are."

"And bring the people instead. Hover them out in pairs. Yano and Nan Perry first. Sorenson and Rice next. Schroeder and Vincinzi. Then—"

Brennan shook his head. "No, even by twos, that would add up to seventy-five round trips. I think we can declare a day off for anyone who wants to hike out."

"Um." DiChiara considered the proposition, nodded vigorously. "Sure. Just run the scooter out with picnic supplies. Make a day of it, a real day. A spring festival."

Brennan was less enthusiastic about festivals than about facts. He stooped, touched a single crisp leaf, turned it, examined it. "I've never seen this plant before," he said, his face serious.

"Yeah? Well, lots of plants only pop up at certain seasons, don't they?"

"Lots of plants — Earth plants — bloom only at certain seasons. Usually the foliage is on display for longer periods." Brennan stood, frowned across the plain. He reboarded the scooter. "Let's see if we can spot another stand of it."

In the hoverscooter they described a series of broadening semi-circles. Some minutes later they spotted the second patch.

Approached it. Landed.

Stood saying nothing.

The second patch of foliage lay two miles south of the first. And it was dying.

DiChiara looked uneasily back in the direction of the first patch. "Well, there's no way to tell how long these leaves have been out," he said. "Who knows? It might be a species that only lives a week or two."

"Might be."

DiChiara paced around the ragged patch of dying greenery. "Or water shortage? We've had showers, but maybe out here — " He shrugged, offering the theory deprecatingly.

Brennan rejected it. "The other patch is only two miles away. It doesn't look parched."

"Um." DiChiara brightened. "Well, maybe if we take another hop we'll find a third patch. In better shape."

Brennan chewed his lip. "Good idea."

They hopped.

The third patch of leaf clusters lay almost three miles farther south. This patch wasn't dying. It was dead.

"I think we'd better bring the ag team out here before we let the others know about these plants," Brennan said when they had paced around the brown vegetation, handled the collapsed flowers.

DiChiara nodded. "It would really shoot morale if everyone heard about this. The only thing coming up — and it's dying as fast as it grows."

"That's not necessarily significant, Dick. We can't expect plant life here to follow the same seasonal schedule we'd expect on our own world."

Good words. Reasonable words. But Brennan's feelings, as he lifted the hoverscooter back toward New Powell, were not of the same order.

"At least we didn't spot another

crater zone in our backyard," DiChiara pointed out.

II

BRENNAN'S feelings became still more confused two days later when he and DiChiara hiked the ag team across the plain expecting to find the patch of flowers ten miles south of New Powell. They found it six miles south instead, fresh and vigorous, blooming in the midmorning sun.

DiChiara checked his pedometer, took visual bearings. He growled, "This isn't where we left our leafy friends. Is it, Bren?"

Brennan was stepping around the clusters of leaves, measuring off the dimensions of the patch. "This isn't the same patch at all. It's more oblong. And has slightly less area."

DiChiara squatted, touching the point of a leaf. He addressed Schroeder, New Powell's chief agtech. "Well, what do you make of it, Schroeder?"

Schroeder's lopsided lips curled up. "What do I make of what?" He examined the leaf clusters perfunctorily. "It's a patch of something. It's growing out of the ground. I think it lives here."

DiChiara stood, embarrassed.

Brennan smiled tightly. With crops booming, Schroeder and Vincinzi were cocky. The hike across the plain had turned into a contest, ag team pushing to outdo command team. "I think the point, Dick, was to compare a healthy patch with an unhealthy patch — and decide what made the difference."

DiChiara rubbed his dark hair. "But the healthy patch we had in mind is four miles on. And the unhealthy patch is two miles past that."

"And you boys can't manage it?" Schroeder suggested.

The command team could manage it. Or could have. But less than two miles from the new patch of leaf clusters, they encountered a second patch, a dying patch.

Two miles beyond that, they reached a dead patch.

"This is the one we were looking at the other day," DiChiara said, shaking his head. "It was in the same condition then that the first one is now. And the one beyond it — two miles farther out — was in the same condition as the one we found two miles ahead today. And two miles beyond that—"

Schroeder groaned.

"Two miles beyond that," DiChiara insisted doggedly, "was a dead patch. Dead like this one."

Vincinzi pulled a pad from her pocket. "Dick, could you run through that again and let me make a pictorial representation?"

"I don't think he can say all that again," Schroeder said.

But DiChiara could. And then they clustered around Vincinzi,

intently studying her diagram.

"It might be significant that all these patches of vegetation are aligned north and south," she said thoughtfully, nibbling the end of her jotter. "And there's a north-south sequence to the life stage, too."

DiChiara nodded. "The freshest patch is always farthest north, the wilting one in the middle, the dead patch south."

"What does that prove?" Schroeder demanded.

Vincinzi was carefully detailing her representation to indicate progressive life stage. "Do you think it would be all right if we dug a few of these withered clusters?" she asked Brennan.

He shrugged. "I don't think it can hurt anything. You might learn something from the roots."

What they learned was that the clusters had no roots. The stems extended inches into the soil. Then there was nothing. They laid the dug clusters out on the ground and stared at them in perplexity.

"What keeps the damn things alive?" Schroeder growled, his interest finally engaged.

DiChiara grinned. "Nothing keeps them alive. They're dead."

Schroeder glowered, kicked the pile at their feet. "All right, let's move north again and dig samples from the other two stands."

THE middle stand, dying, was as rootless as the first. Their selected cluster from the northernmost stand, however, resisted their efforts to remove it from the soil. When they had dug to a depth of two feet, they shoveled dirt out of the area beneath the base of the plant stem. Extending from the stem was a single wiry strand.

Vincinzi brushed the soil from the strand and tested it gingerly with her forefinger. She looked up at the three men. "It's tough. And it's growing toward the middle of the stand. We won't be able to follow it without uprooting other plants."

"You can uproot a plant that has no roots?" Shroeder asked darkly.

"There may be a large communal root," Vincinzi pointed out, standing. "Near the center of the cluster."

Brennan squatted, examined the tough strand. He shook his head. "We don't want to dig any farther into the patch. But we could poke around the edges some more."

They poked. All the wiry strands grew toward the center of the clump.

"All right," Schroeder said vengefully, when they stood back from the patch of green. "We're marching two miles due south again, children, and we're digging out that entire patch. We're digging to a depth of five feet, ten if we have to, to find that central root. Because I want to see it." He

hoisted his shovel over his shoulder. "Objections, Brennan?"

Brennan peered south, narrowed his eyes in thought. The patch there was obviously moribund. "No objections."

This time their trek south was silent. When they reached the dying stand of vegetation, they set to work doggedly, digging, piling the limpening leaf clusters on their flaccid stems to one side.

They dug to a depth of five feet. It grew dusky around them. They dug a foot farther. Then they ate, dispirited.

"Well, I don't know," Schroeder said finally. "There ought to be something down there — somewhere."

"Maybe if we kept digging," DiChiara suggested lamely.

"Sure, sure," Schroeder said in disgust. "Why don't we bring the whole settlement out and dig up the entire plain. If we don't find anything — at least we could plant the area for fall."

It was dark when they began the trek back across the plain. The two moons overhead were gold and gray against the dark sky. In the distance they could see the frail light of New Powell. Soon they saw something else. Four miles from New Powell an entirely new patch of leaf clusters grew, springing green and vigorous from the soil.

Vincinzi took it calmly, Schroeder blackly, Brennan silently. It was DiChiara who had hysterics.

When he was calm again Vincinzi said, "You know, I think these plants are going north for the summer. I think they're migrating."

Brennan nodded, admitting to the inevitability of the conclusion. "I think you could be right, Vin."

"I think no one's going to believe how we spent the day," Schroeder groaned.

DiChiara scrambled to his feet. "Well, I know how I'm going to spend the rest of the night. I'm going to bed." He stumbled away toward New Powell.

The night was disturbed. Strange things occurred above. The soil was jarred in an unsettling fashion. Mnarra quivered and burrowed deeper, stretching her new root strands tight. She huddled, uncertain.

Later she flowed cautiously back to the upper layers of soil. The disturbance had passed. She remained alert for a while, ready to retreat. Finally she relaxed and lulled herself with the conjugations of night. Her fresh leaf clusters caught mellow silver-gold moonbeams and fed her that light sustenance while she dreamed.

IT WAS midmorning when Vincinzi stepped into the head-

man's dome. She hesitated uncertainly at the door to Brennan's office. "I'm a little upset, Bren. There's something we should have caught last night when we decided those plants were migrating."

Brennan nodded, motioning toward the papers that lay on his secretary. "I was just getting to it."

"Oh?" Surprised, she bent, studied the rough map he had drawn.

"They're due to pop up at the south end of the cow pasture some time tomorrow night, if they continue on the same course at the same rate," he said. "Whether they turn up just inside or just outside the fence depends upon how exactly they conform to the average distance of two miles a day."

"Yes, that's how I calculated it, too."

"Mention it to anyone?"

She shook her head. "Not even to Schroeder. We can't let the cattle near that foliage. Can we?"

"We can't." Brennan tapped the microviewer on his desk. "I rechecked the plant files last night. The survey team only tested the most prevalent species. This species wasn't among those. But more local species are poisonous than not."

"If it only appears at this season and only in isolated patches the survey team may not have seen it." Vincinzi frowned thoughtfully. "We don't even have a place to house the cattle temporarily, do we?"

"We're canning beans in the cow barn today." The enclosed cattle structures of the winter before had been disassembled, their components formed into a single open cattle shelter in the pasture and processing sheds near the fields for the first crops. Brennan directed Vincinzi's attention back to his map. "The pasture is five miles long between the hillside portions and the plains portion that reaches behind New Powell. The plants, whatever they are, should erupt inside the fenced area twice."

"Don't we have some spare fence we could throw around the foliage when it appears?" Vincinzi proposed.

"We do. But we're claiming this land, Vin. Just this one small parcel, for the time being. There's half a continent to our east and half a continent to our west. I want that flower bed to learn to detour around us."

Vincinzi smiled palely at the image. "I don't believe any of our people have ever trained a flower bed, Bren."

"It's a skill most CityAmericans neglect to develop," Brennan agreed dryly. "Here's my idea. Tomorrow we disassemble the pasture cow shelter. Around noon we establish a watch in the area where we expect those plants to erupt. As soon as they show, we

cover them with roof sheeting from the cow shelter. That stuff's pretty tough. It should hold them. Then we string fencing around the patch for a few days. The next day we set a guard on the entire pasture, because once we've disrupted the pattern, there's no telling when or where new foliage is likely to reappear. When it shows its head again, we follow the same procedure."

"In other words we smother the plants out?"

"I hope it doesn't amount to that. According to my map, they will pass through the western half of the pasture. I'll be satisfied if we can divert them to the other side of the fence and keep them there."

Vincinzi was troubled. "But the species may not have lateral mobility, you know. It occurred to me that perhaps there is one very deep root that extends for miles, with the foliage and flowers erupting at intervals along it. I'm assuming it lies much deeper than we dug last night."

"Well, if that's the case, maybe we can teach it not to erupt along the interval that includes our lands."

"Maybe. But this seems out of line with the way we treated the plant yesterday. We were very conservative about interfering with it then."

"That was before we realized it was coming through the cow pasture. I wouldn't be so gentle with any other native species that appeared inside our territory."

Vincinzi was still not entirely pleased with the proposed plan. But she could advance none to match it. "We'll have to tell the others about the plant, won't we?"

"I'm calling a community meeting tonight."

It had never happened before. At nightfall Mnarra halted, gathered herself and generated her new cable of root strands. The strands separated and reached to the proper level. Then she began spinning out fresh leaf clusters.

She could tell they did not rise as they should have. She could tell they were in some way blocked. And although there should have been washes of moonlight traveling down the root strands to her, there were none.

None at all.

It had never happened before. She settled, troubled, and tried to follow the night pattern she had established over the centuries. But the dreamlike electrochemical conjugations did not soothe her, did not lull her. Something was wrong above, gravely so.

At last she achieved a state

of semiconsciousness. She rested.

She realized with fearful suddenness that the soil around her was almost noon-warm. Quickly she shuddered to full consciousness and stretched, spreading herself in a thin layer.

It was true. The sun had long risen. But her leaves had sent her no message of dawning light. She had created no flowers in celebration.

It had never happened before.

She moved up through the soil until she hovered in the upper inch of topsoil. She could feel the stems of her own leaf clusters. They were not as they should have been. They were pushed downward through the soil, jammed inches deeper than they should have been. And they were flaccid.

She didn't dare enter the air above to probe for causes. It would be out of order. Instead she moved deep again, gathered herself in a globular formation and thought.

The solar energy the leaf clusters should have been dispatching to her was not sorely missed. Not today. There were elements of her plasma that could be converted back to energy without particular difficulty.

But she was not a being of boundless matter. There were limits.

She could only move ahead and hope that tomorrow's stand of foliage would not be impeded. She would not move far, first because half the day was already gone, second because she did not care to expend energy extravagantly. She would move ahead a short distance and then she would rest. Then she would create new root strands, new leaves.

And she did.

And it did not work.

Nor did it work the day after.

Finally she knew she would have to take a radical step. She would have to deviate. She would have to abandon her established meridian and set an alien course. It was spring, but Mnarra would travel for one day, two if necessary, west. Because she was discovering something she had never suspected. The leaf clusters had given her more than energy. They had provided her stimulation that was essential to well-being, to her will to live.

She knew something now that no being of her race had ever known before.

"WELL, it took a while, but there she blows," DiChiara said triumphantly the evening the leaf clusters finished their precipitant growth at the edge of New Powell's communal lawn.

Brennan nodded. His strategy had worked, though he had suffered qualms. He studied the strange plants at his feet. This patch was smaller than any he had seen on the plain. But the foliage appeared healthy. He glanced around at the gathered members of the community. There was no mistaking their avid interest.

"Now, where does it bloom?"

"No idea," Brennan admitted. "Maybe someone will stay the night to keep watch."

"Ha! I know thirty-two of us who plan to stay the night."

"Well, happy flower-watch. I intend to hit the bunk. Tomorrow we have to think plant again."

"We do?" DiChiara was surprised.

"We do. It traveled almost due west today," Brennan pointed out. "If it heads north again tomorrow, we can let it go. But if it heads west, it's going to surface in the fields."

"Uh, oh." DiChiara glanced toward the fields. "But it couldn't do much damage to the corn or wheat, Bren. I mean, this patch isn't more than twelve feet in diameter."

"The patches on the plain were more like twenty-five feet in diameter. Could be it will lay on extra area tomorrow and next day to compensate for the past few days."

"Oh? You're buying Schroeder's theory about the lateral-growing root twenty feet down?"

Brennan shook his head. "I haven't heard a theory yet I can subscribe to. It just strikes me this species shows interesting adaptive qualities. Maybe part of the adaption to the unusual conditions we've presented is to leash its growth for a few days—and then really to spread wide."

"Um. So what do we do if it tries to take over the wheat?"

Brennan shook his head wearily. "I don't know. I'm going to sleep on the problem."

He did sleep on it. But he was awake soon after dawn, his curiosity tickling. He reached the plant site a quarter hour later.

He reached the plant site a half hour late.

Vincinzi's voice was hushed. "It bloomed just at sunrise, Bren. It was the most moving experience I've ever had. The blossoms appeared from the stalks and unfolded just as the sun came over the hill. It was like a salute. A salute to dawn."

Brennan looked around the circle of faces. Vincinzi wasn't the only one who had been stricken with awe. His people—there were more than thirty-two of them—sat and stood, attention fixed almost reverently, faces dazed. The pet-

als of the flowers spiraled scarlet and graceful from deep golden centers. Dew stood limpid on dark leaves.

"Maybe I'll get to see it tomorrow," Brennan said.

III

Mlondas reached the appointed area at the appointed time. He flowed into position smoothly.

He waited. He waited through the long day, sunning himself in the topsoil. Mnarra did not come.

Sometimes it happened. There was a slight discrepancy in their rates of travel. One arrived before the other. Mlondas waited another day, his leaf clusters turned hungrily to the sun. He gorged himself. He expanded his matter.

Then Mlondas waited another day. The interval between their arrivals had never before stretched to this length. It had never happened.

On the fourth day, Mlondas did something he had never done before. He moved south of the spring mating area. Mnarra had been delayed. He must reach her, because soon he must begin his summer journey north. His arrival at the autumn mating area must coincide with Mrruka's.

He moved quickly, taking no time to sun himself in the upper layers. His waxen white flowers wilted behind.

"THERE'S another one coming."

Brennan looked up from his papers, startled. Schroeder stood in the open door, his face indignant.

"It's coming down from the north, a white one."

Brennan stared at his chief agtech. Slowly he stood. "Where is it?"

"It's four miles out. Swen and Tilla were hiking up to look at the crater area. Swen had the pedometer. This one's traveling fast, Bren. Faster than the other one ever traveled. The wilting patch is almost four miles north of the fresh patch."

"And the third patch?"

"They didn't find it. They ran into the crater area first."

Brennan made a swift decision. "I'd better take the scooter out. Want to come?"

Schroeder did. Lofting into the late afternoon, they soon confirmed Swen's report. The first patch, leaves and white flowers fresh, lay four miles north of New Powell. The second patch, wilting, lay four miles north of the first. And the third, withered and brown, lay near the center of the

crater area. It was difficult to distinguish from the surrounding vegetation, which was now just as brown, just as withered.

"The damn thing's fast, whatever it is."

Brennan nodded. "It's so fast it's going to come up inside the pasture area in just a couple of hours, Guy." Quickly he turned the hoverscooter and headed south to New Powell. Luckily the pasture cow shed had not yet been reassembled. "We've got to get a crew out to the north pasture fast."

They had their crew on duty within the hour. The new plant arrived just after dusk, poking its multiple green heads aggressively through the soil. Moving quickly they smothered it, fenced it.

Then they stood around it. "Any news about the other one?" Schroeder demanded.

Masters had just arrived from New Powell. "It surfaced half a mile up the lawn from its last position."

"In the clear?" Brennan asked. Night before last the plant had attempted to emerge beneath the floor of one of the storage domes. The result had been a dome encircled by a foot-deep flower bed. The next evening foliage had failed to appear anywhere within or around New Powell.

"Yep. It's smack in the middle of the cottage area lawn. It's small again. About fifteen feet diameter."

Brennan nodded, then returned his attention to the crew. "I want you to stay on duty here through the night. Take turns walking the entire pasture with handlamps. This stand doesn't behave quite like the other one. There's always the chance it might surface again before morning."

He and Schroeder returned to New Powell together to appraise the other patch of vegetation. "At least this business keeps minds off what's going on out there," Schroeder said *sotto voce,* motioning behind.

Brennan refrained from glancing in the direction of the night-darkened plain. A week ago the vegetation there had been dying. Now it was dead. His conviction that the land would cover again by late summer wavered painfully.

"We're going to have a mud bath if that stuff doesn't grow back before the rains," Schroeder continued in a low voice. "I took units in erosion control. But there's going to be no controlling this place. Not even our own hillsides and pastures, if the rest of the place turns to slop."

"I know," Brennan said without expression. "There's nothing we can do but wait."

"And hope?" Schroeder was glum. "You sitting flower-watch tonight?"

"I think I may," Brennan said. Discouragement weighed heavily upon him. Their own fields

thrived, but the rest of the world seemed to be dying. Irrationally, he couldn't help feeling responsible for the death that lay across the land.

Mlondas reacted with swift indignation when his leaf clusters were flattened as he unfurled them through the soil. He had traveled for days south from the appointed area and he did not intend to be frustrated. Not in any way.

His days of waiting and engorging had provided him with extra matter. There was no point in conserving it, in waiting here where he was thwarted. He moved forward, breaking connection with the leaves that had been maltreated. He moved quickly, spreading himself thin, riding the top layers of soil, then dodging deep. Searching.

It was hours before he found the first clue that Mnarra had been near. Her charge still clung to the soil.

He decided quickly. He had never deviated before. There had never been necessity, any more than there had ever been necessity to venture south of the mating area.

This time was different. He followed Mnarra's trail.

THE inhabitants of New Powell stood around the giant patch of foliage in awe. It flowed across the entire broad lawn north of the dorm area, rustling in the evening breeze.

Brennan, DiChiara, Schroeder and Vincinzi circled the patch. "It's at least twice as big as any of the earlier patches," Schroeder grumbled when they had measured off the circumference. "And look, it's several hands taller than before."

Brennan looked. Nodded. He could only agree. This new patch lay a bare half mile north of the spot where the red blossoms had greeted the sun that morning, more than three miles from the pasture where they had smothered the other patch of foliage the previous evening.

"Bren, do you think the patches met and combined?" Vincinzi suggested. "That would account for the increased area."

"I don't know." Brennan glanced around. "But I guess everyone in New Powell is pulling flower-watch tonight." He had spread his own blanket on the grass last night for the first time. He had slept the night fitfully, waking frequently to be sure the blossoms had not emerged without him.

Then the sky grayed with approaching dawn and he sat up. Dozens of faces glistened silently in the bare light.

"Don't miss it, Bren," Vincinzi

said softly when he turned his head to check the condition of the eastern sky.

He didn't miss it. First he caught the scarlet rim of the sun above the hill. Then he turned his head to see the scarlet flowers rising majestically from their leafy thrones. They slid slowly up into the crisp morning air and immediately unfurled, tall and proud.

It was a ceremonial salute. He felt it. A salute to the day. Awe moved him, crowding away doubt and worry. It was many minutes before he took his eyes from the scarlet flowers, before he moved. Toward this moment, he felt, his life had been directed. For this brief glimpse of the majesty of creation, of the unity of nature he had endured the empty years, the painful and anxious years.

"What do you think about maintaining a patrol in the pasture tonight?" DiChiara asked.

"Tonight?" Brennan considered, reluctantly, wanting merely to spread his blanket and sit. "I suppose we should, just in case. You've been here for sunrise several times. Mind handling the patrol yourself?"

"I'll take it if there isn't anyone else."

"Maybe you can talk Harder into handling it." Brennan shrugged the matter off. "Staying, Vin?"

She nodded. "I'm eager to see if the two patches have combined. I've promised myself I'll get back to my own bunk after one more evening, though."

The early evening hours were passed convivially. Conversational groups formed, mingled, reformed. Refreshments were passed. Songs were sung, songs that had survived despite the long asphalt-black years of CityAmerica. In the early morning hours the settlers stretched out on their blankets or retired to nearby dorms. The lawn became quiet. Voices were low, conversation fragmentary.

Brennan lay on his back a bare yard from the perimeter of the foliage. "We should do this more often."

Vincinzi rolled to her stomach. "Sit up with a flower bed?"

"No, have spontaneous gatherings. Out in the open. No plans, no formal arrangements. Just everyone together for the evening."

Vincinzi smiled. "That would be fun. I don't think we've thrown off enough of our CityAmerica social habits."

"We've been here less than a year." Some of the settlers had opened up easily, quickly discarding the depersonalized facades imperative for survival in the population crush of urban life. Others—including Brennan—had been slower to emerge. "You know, I signed on the planet party list because I wanted to see

the stars. And there they are." His eyes moved across the diamond-lit blackness.

Vincinzi laughed. "I think they've been up there every night since we landed."

"Well, this is the first time—last night and tonight—that I've actually come out from under the roof long enough to enjoy them." Much of his busyness, he suspected, had been designed to cushion him from the shock of finding his total circumstance, his entire lifelong frame of reference, suddenly and totally changed, permanently changed.

Soon they dozed.

Then the eastern sky was gray, and the inhabitants of New Powell woke. Brennan sat, rocked Vincinzi's shoulder. "Time."

Vincinzi sat, looked around. "Everyone's here."

"Not quite." Brennan surveyed the gathering. Most sat farther back. Behind them others stood in their nightwear. Near the dorms, dozens more huddled in the half-light. "Want to move back? We could probably see better."

"You?"

Brennan shrugged. "I'm happy here."

"All right, I'll take the close view. But I reserve the right to move later." Her hand crept forward.

Into his.

His shoulder moved.

Against hers.

The sun rose.

Vincinzi's hand tightened on Brennan's. "They've mingled."

The flowers rose slowly, proudly, petals streaked, scarlet on white, white on scarlet. They stood in silent homage to the sun. From the settlers, a communal gasp of awe. Brennan's heart squeezed. The moment was again, the moment his days had been directed toward. The moment of unity, sun a scarlet circlet at hilltop, blossoms standing tall—

—and earth blooming before him.

Earth blooming up in a great dark fountain from the center of the flowers. Blooming up in an explosive fountain, a fountain that first knocked Brennan back and then carried him with it.

He heard a cry. Whether it was his own or Vincinzi's, he never knew. They were one with each other, with the bright flowers, with the soil, in their last moment.

It was many days before the explosion-scattered fragments of Mnarra's unexpended plasma tunneled through rock, soil and water to reunite in the limestone pocket many miles south of the new crater. Then Mnarra was whole again, the spring seeding accomplished, the ancient ritual observed. The young she had

created in union with Mlondas grew green and thick on the land to a radius of hundreds of miles. They proliferated, their reaching roots loosening the soil.

It had not mattered, then, that this year there had been disturbances and deviations. Even on the night before the formal celebration of the mating, before the explosive dawn distribution of their seed to the winds above, she had felt disturbance overhead, had felt the soil jarred and compacted.

Perhaps it would never happen again.

But she could not pause now. Far and far to the south, Mtunnas had surely completed his spring seeding with Mpurta. Now he would be traveling north, traveling to the mating area where he and Mnarra would meet at the end of autumn to seed that half of her designated lands. Mnarra had a responsibility. If she failed to meet Mtunas, if they failed to mate and seed, the land would lie exposed to wind and rain.

Quickly Mnarra extruded a cable of root strands. They separated. She spun out large, hungry green leaves.

They fed her. She moved south.

A WEEK after the explosion DiChiara stood in the headman's office, weary, eyes dark-rimmed. He stared at the sketch Brennan had made of the deadly flower's course through the village. His own blood-red X marked the spot of the disaster—twenty of their people killed outright, Headman Brennan and Agtech Vincinzi among them; dozens injured, some critically; two dorms badly damaged.

DiChiara had seen it from the pasture, the dawn blooming of the strange flowers, the subsequent blossoming of the land. He had heard the thunderous report, the cries. But he hadn't believed it, not for hours. Sometimes he still didn't believe it. He kept Brennan's sketch tacked near the secretary to hold the reality before him.

Schroeder appeared at the office door, face heavy. "No sign. I sent Swen fifteen miles north this morning, Harder fifteen miles south this afternoon. I don't think we're going to catch those flowers, Dick. Not now."

DiChiara's fist hit the secretary top in frustration. "You sent the boys in search pattern?"

"As usual."

DiChiara sat, his eyes bleak. He had heard dozens of theories concerning that explosion. But DiChiara wasn't interested in theories. "Any reshow of the other species in the pasture?"

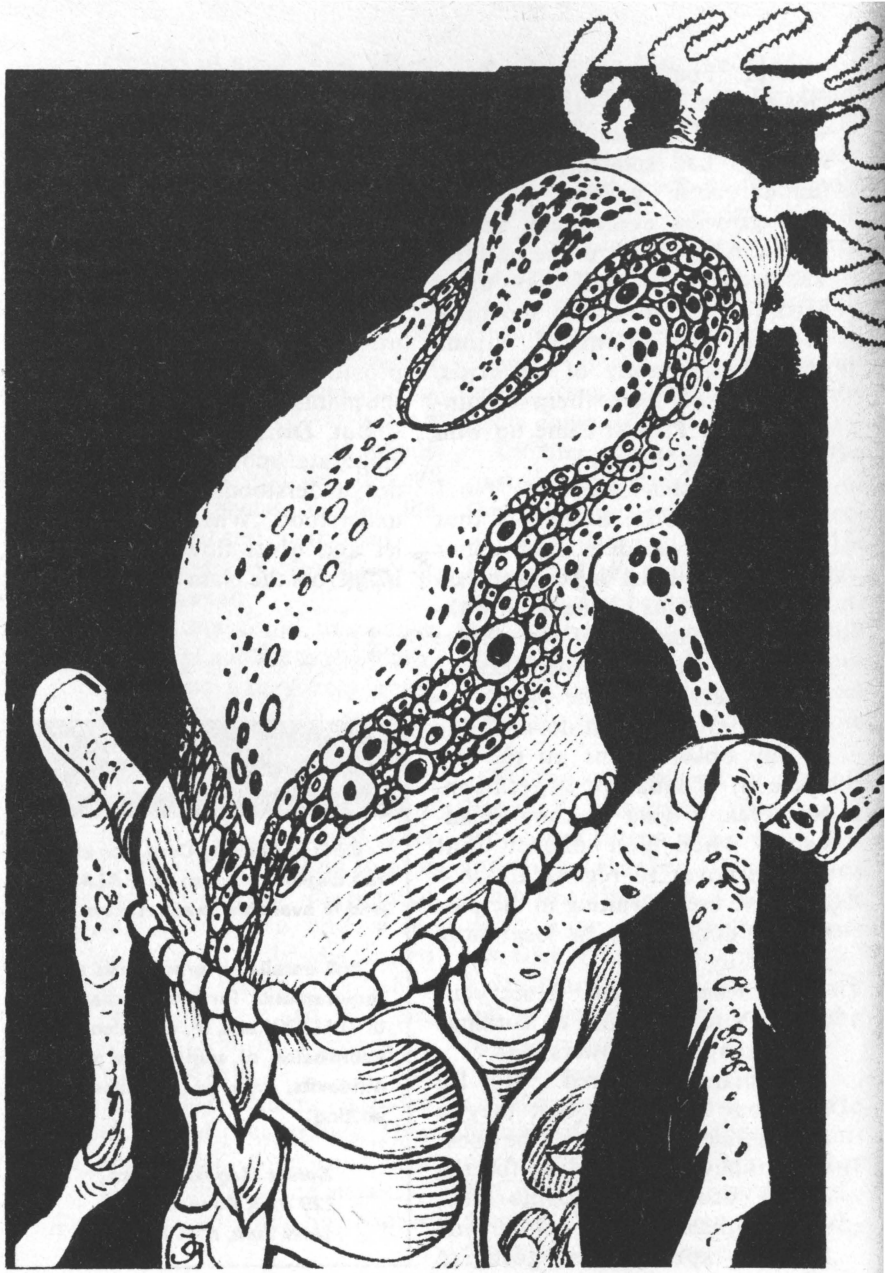
"No." Four days after the explosion the second crisis had descended. Thousands of native seedlings had suddenly sprouted, tender and green, growing fast—growing everywhere, in the lawns, in the fields, in the pasture. The settlers lost half their dairy herd to the poisonous seedlings before their numbed minds grasped the nature of the crisis. "I think we have them eliminated, Dick. Parnell came up with an interesting theory—"

DiChiara shook his head. "No. I want facts, Guy. Somehow that vegetation reseeded right under our eyes. It must have happened before the plants on the plain withered. Now, instead of our people sitting on the lawn theorizing, I want observers on the plain. Every day, Guy. I want detailed day to day observations on the life cycle of the native vegetation. Next year I want to know in advance when you expect that ground cover to regenerate so I can have crews waiting in the pasture. I don't want to lose cattle again, Guy."

Schroeder nodded. "I see your point. You want me to continue the search for the flowers too?"

DiChiara considered. "No. I'll buy your conclusion that they've fled the scene. But they'll be back, Guy. They'll be heading for the crater area again come next spring—that much I'll bet on. And by early spring we're going to have crews watching for them." The colonists would be ready for the treacherous flowers next time. When the foliage appeared, they would dig it out, burn it out, smother it out, exterminate it. There were going to be no more explosions, not within New Powell, not near New Powell—not unless the settlers made the explosions themselves, bombing the plants out of existence.

But DiChiara didn't have to elaborate upon his plans. Schroeder understood. All New Powell understood. When next the scarlet and white flowers came striding across the plain they would die. ●



Knowledge is power and the Bzrabbas knew all—until they met the unknowable!

PROMISE THEM ANYTHING

DEAN McLAUGHLIN

I

MICHAEL DARRAH came out of the conference room like a man stunned. He gripped his portfolio in both hands. A thing as big and frightening as this must not be let get away, get told around.

Someone edged over beside him. Someone else coming out. Kurt Richler. "What do you think?" Kurt asked.

"I think we've got trouble," Darrah said.

"Ach," Richler said, nodding. "Trouble." He wandered away.

A goodly crowd was already waiting at the elevators. Subdued, all talked in low tones. Some of them just stood, looking blankly at blank walls. A car took eight or ten into its mouth and swallowed them whole as Darrah approached. He leaned against the wall, staying apart from the rest of the people. He got out his tobacco pouch and began stuffing his pipe.

Quite a scene it had been. Old Sami up there on the platform like some college professor. Old Sami—Sami Berkan, Secretary General of the United Nations—but for once a Sami Berkan who acted more like a freshman who hadn't studied, now called on to recite.

"I want ideas, gentlemen," he had said. "No matter how absurd, I want them. The demand these creatures have made is—I would say—preposterous. But I must also say that they have made it and we must accept that they have power to force compliance to anything they demand. We are helpless, gentlemen. Helpless."

Then he played the tape.

"YOU shall make note I have taken effort your language to learn," the Bzrabba said. It had a wheezing, raspy voice. "We wish to be cause of as little inconvenience as possible."

Berkan was still trying to make his stomach stay where it belonged. He had been briefed, of course. He had been shown dozens of pictures. He had been tipped off about the smell. (Like rotting wood and dung in an abattoir.) All the same, meeting face to face (more or less) and nose to nose (but where were its olfactory organs placed? Did it have olfactory organs?) took some getting used to. *I will feel all right in a minute*, he told himself.

Or two minutes.

Five?

He glanced out into the heavy gray haze that hung above the East River. On second thought, it would be best not to open the window. He wanted badly to close his eyes—shut out at least the sight of the creature in front of his desk. He had been warned, though—as if he needed warning—that he must do nothing that might offend. All the available evidence indicated that the civilization of the Bzrabba (as they called themselves) was superior to human civilization in about the same proportion as human civilization was superior to that of termites.

"One of our languages—yes," the Secretary General said. "We have many. My own native language is Turkish, but—yes—I am fluent in this one."

"Do you humans possess informational speech from the egg?"

the alien wondered. One of its arms—one of the pair that lacked a grasping appendage—made a limp gesture. "Neglect that. It is mere intellectual curiosity. We have no time for that. It might be interesting to know, but—" The arm's tip cracked like a whip. "We wish to be cause of not more inconvenience than we must," it said again. "We have come only for that which is ours."

If a lobster and a cuttlefish could be mated, something like this creature from the stars might have been the result. Erect, it stood eight feet tall, not counting the four stubby, down-covered, many-branched antlers on top. Its upper torso was a medley of cruves that made Berkan think of free-form sculpture, though in a general way it could be said to resemble the hard parts of a squid's body. In color it was a blotched montage of purple and green. It walked (though that was not exactly the word) on what would have been a lobster's pincers if a lobster could stand on its head and if its pincers were modified beyond recognition. It wore a covering over its midsection that could have been leather and could have been taken for a breastplate, though Berkan had been given to understand that was probably not its function. None of the Bzrabba had been seen without such covering and the most reasonable explanation was that they were worn for essentially the same reason Tarzan wore a loincloth when he lived with the apes—just because one associated with another species one didn't go around showing off what shouldn't be shown. (Since mouth, reproductive organs or excretory organs had not yet been identified there was considerable debate over exactly what was concealed and, of course, it would be poor diplomacy to inquire. Ask a Scotsman what he wore under his kilt?)

But the communication receptors—sight and sound—had been at least located. Their locus was also the approximate source of that ghastly voice. The creature's face, therefore, was down there under the arch of its legs. It was going to take some getting used to.

Berkan moved from his desk to the settee. "I would invite you to sit down," he said. "I must apologize that we are not well equipped to accommodate—we did not expect—I can only suggest you adopt the stance that is most restful to you. I have no wish to be formal. This is our first meeting. I would like it to be as friendly as possible." Unobtrusively—he hoped—Berkan reached over to adjust the air-conditioner. Perhaps its filters would do something to moderate that stench.

"I offer gratitude," the creature said. "Your gravity—" It

flopped on its back, the end containing its face pointed toward Berkan. It was something of an improvement, but Berkan still had the feeling he was talking to the creature's reproductive organs. He would just have to shut that idea out of his mind.

"I should make a point of information clear to you," Berkan said. "Perhaps it has been done, but I see no harm in being positive you've understood it."

"What is told three times is true," the creature said. Berkan took it to signify agreement.

"The point is this," Berkan said. "It is true I am Secretary General of the United Nations, and someone not familiar with the true situation—such as yourself—might interpret this to mean I am the person most nearly in power over all the people in the world. However, the situation is not that simple. Our people are divided into many groups and the men who control each of those individual groups hold far more power than I, while I myself have only the most tenuous influence over what they do. Therefore I am not in a position to make agreements with you—your civilization. I can only serve as an intermediary."

"That will satisfy," the Bzrabba said equably. Its feet were still planted squarely on the carpet, legs elbowed up grasshopper style, as if it were going to do pushups with them. "I myself am not exactly voice-bearer of all the Bzrabba. This person has been led to understand you humans speak of myself to be a thing called ambassador. That is not an accurate description of the true facts. Most nearly in your language, myself should have the appellation of Agent of the Consortium."

For practical purposes, Berkan supposed, it was a distinction without a difference. This particular member of the Bzrabba landing party (as identified by the decorations on its breastplate, but did the same one always wear the same breastplate?) had shown itself to be their spokesman. If it were not an ambassador, willy-nilly it was fulfilling the role of one.

"It is possible my understanding of the language is not perfect," the Bzrabba said. "My grasp would be an ambassador is a person who represents a thing called government to another thing also called government, the two things being same, only separate. Our civilization do not have this thing called government."

"Then how do you—" Berkan stopped. It would be interesting to learn the political structure of their civilization, but there would be time for that later. Just now other matters were more important. The whole question of

relationships with the Bzrabba would have to be settled.

THAT uncertainty had been hanging over the world ever since the Bzrabba ship appeared in orbit around the Earth-moon system. (It was an orbit that sent astronomers scrambling to derive new solutions to the famous three-body problem, whatever that was.) The ship was 673 miles long, 244½ miles wide in its major axis, not counting the five shark's fin projections from its bellied midsection. Betraying no detectable propulsion system, the ground party's dome-shaped landing craft came down as gently as a drifting balloon. On entering the atmosphere, which it did at meteoric speed, the hull displayed not the slightest temperature rise from friction with the air. When the craft touched down in front of the terminal building at O'Hare International Airport in Chicago its weight punched through the pavement. It still stood there, many miles high. Aircraft had to divert to other fields.

"I hope that our conversation can at least form the basis for mutual understanding," Berkan said. The air-conditioner wasn't doing a bit of good.

"Yes," said the Bzrabba. "That is our hope also. We desire to cause as small inconvenience as possible."

A civilization that could build a ship as gigantic as theirs—propelled by a system men could not imagine—could crush humanity like a beetle. Berkan was thankful their attitude was peaceful. Through his mind flashed the endless lists of possible motives and submotives the think-tank scenario builders had been cranking out—with all the frantic haste of a berserk computation machine—ever since the Bzrabba had come. Some of the ideas had been chilling horrors.

"I do not know what our civilization can possibly offer yours," Berkan said. "But—" He gave an inquiring, expectant glance.

"Perhaps I make myself better understood by telling you of many things," the Bzrabba said. "It shall be permitted?"

"Certainly." Berkan settled himself to listen. Inevitably a visitor from the stars would have far more to tell Earth than Earth could tell in return. An intellect that could master a totally strange tongue in a mere six weeks—what wonders could it not relate?

"It is to begin," the Bzrabba said. "You must be told that the Bzrabba have existed a very great length of time. Since before the time of many stars that now you see."

Truth? Boasting? Did it make a difference? Berkan nodded but reserved judgment.

"Our worlds—our civilization has such age that no meaning be carried in the mention of where the Bzrabba had origin. Our worlds, you could say, are primordial, having taken composition out of matter clouds in an eternity when in all the cosmos were only small portions of any but the least complex configurations of matter. The equivalent concept in your science would be elements, though such rudimentary procedures for distinguishing one from another ignore almost all the finer details. Only scant abundances of matter more complex than approximately the number twenty in your nomenclature—called by you calcium—can be found in our worlds. You will notice that I have taken effort to familiarize this person with the state of your scientific knowledge. It is most interesting—primitive, but possessed of striking instances of true insight. Unfortunate that one cannot expend more time to absorb such pleasures."

"I'm flattered," Berkan said. He wasn't sure that he was, but it seemed a polite thing to say. "We are all flattered."

Again that whipcrack gesture with one of the pincerless arms.

"Though scarcity of them prevail, there does exist in our technology myriad aspects to which more elaborate matter structures are useful. On these, it is a consequence, we place high value."

BERKAN crossed his legs. He was beginning to understand. "You want to establish a trading relationship?" In all the think-tank scenarios, that possibility had stood high on the list of probable developments.

"Please to allow the making of complete understanding in our purpose," the Bzrabba said. "It has been our perception that not all humans have full education in the scientific information other humans hold—a very strange circumstance that this person is bemused by. So you may not know that the more elaborate matter structures have their creation at the innermost part of large stars—larger, I would say, than the star around which this world has orbit. That one is too small and constructs only the number two element of your nomenclature, which you call helium, from the number one, named hydrogen."

"I remembr being told," Berkan said. "It is the same process as with our hydrogen bombs. Or—" He cocked his head, trying to remember. It was one of those distinctions scientists were always making—distinctions he couldn't understand. "Sometimes they tell me it is, sometimes not."

"We have found," the Bzrabba went on, "it is most practical to secure the more complex con-

figurations of matter in quantities needed by use of a technique that removes from suitable stars the outer portions whose weight, by gravitational power, have forced matter construction into more elaborate forms. Then it is necessary, of course, to leave the remaining part—which is almost the pure material desired—to dissipate in radiation the superfluous energy heat possessed in it. Your language would say, 'to cool,' but such terminology is sadly inexact. After a space of time the process arrives at completeness and the material is ripened for our usage."

"Entire stars?" Berkan wondered. His grasp of astronomy was minimal in spite of his briefing, but still the casual assertion of such abilities—even for the Bzrabba—was hard to accept.

"It is no difficulty to be done," The Bzrabba said. "Merely to adjust the dispositions of a two-star system in such fashion that a lesser star shall draw, by gravitation, from the surface of the larger streams of matter which are thrown in winding outward spiral into space surrounding it. Such events are now in process elsewhere and are noticed by those of you humans that have interest in such matters, who say 'Beta Lyrae type' and believe their selves to understand the thing proceeding."

"I am—" Berkan fumbled for adequate words. He felt as if a wind were blowing through him—as if the floor under his feet were only empty space and distant stars.

"Please to be reminded," said the Bzrabba, "our civilization is advanced in technology beyond the comprehension of your most all-knowing minds. Our worlds scatter through all this galaxy and the globular clusters that surround. Some portion of us have journeyed farther. We are vast."

Berkan could only nod. The Bzrabba might only be boasting but—

"Go on. I'm not sure what this has to do with us, but—" He waited.

"We are a patient people," the Bzrabba said. "Foresighted. Like your farmers who plant seeds that in a future season they might harvest—similarly do the Bzrabba prepare the cores of stars for later gathering. It happens, though, that often much else has taken place in the expanse of time while our core is becoming ready for usage. Frequently the matter removed from the star has condensed into planets around the other star—the star that was employed to do the removing. The core itself, in the course of discharging its superfluous energy heat, has undergone minor changes—has developed a husk of waste materials outside it as a shell, a slag that has risen outward to cover its surface. It is true, that husk-shell often does include

much matter of desirable configuration, but in such complicated mixture and such small abundance that to separate the wanted from the not-wanted would be not efficient. It becomes necessary therefore to remove that husk and discard. We have come to do that now."

Berkan frowned. "I think I do not understand."

"But it should be obvious," the Bzrabba said. "As I have said, we do not wish to cause more inconvenience than is necessary, nor have we want for anything not ours. But our civilization has great need and places great value on the matter structure number twenty-six in your nomenclature, which you call iron. That substance exists in good quality as the inner parts of this, which you mistakenly describe to be, your world. It is not yours, but ours. It has discharged sufficiently now and we have come to gather it. I am very sorry, but we must request you humans please to get off.

DARRAH struck a match and got his pipe going.

For all his shock, Old Sami was still a seasoned diplomat. Driven numb, back to the wall, his final words on the tape had been calm.

"I thank you for your frankness," he had said. "As I have told you I am not in a position to reply at this time. I trust it will be acceptable to defer a response while I confer with my staff and advisors and consult with various heads of state."

An Earth-born diplomat would have known he was being put off. Maybe the Bzrabba knew it, too, but it did not demur. It had not, it said, expected instant compliance. Adequate time would be allowed.

In the conference room Berkan had admitted not knowing what the Bzrabba meant by adequate time—nor had he thought it wise to ask. He had won a little time, but that was all.

"We need ideas, gentlemen," he had said again and waited.

No one had said a word.

II

BACK in his office Darrah slouched behind his desk. His pipe had gone out. After a while he lit it again. He opened his portfolio and spilled the briefing papers in front of him. Each report had a folder of its own. He flipped through them, made sure they were all there. They summarized—so he was told—everything known about the aliens. Everything. He leaned back and drew on his pipe.

After a while he picked up the phone, dialed home. Kris answered.

"Kris?"

She knew his voice. "Mike? Something the matter?"

"I'll be working late tonight," he

said. "Won't be home—not till very late."

"But you never work late."

True enough, he never had. "Tonight I'm working late. Something's come up. No, I can't talk about it."

After he had hung up he looked at the phone for a while. He didn't know if she really believed, but she would have read the papers and would know the Bzrabba had talked with Sami. If she couldn't figure out why such news meant that an economist working on international trade problems had to work late—well, it was too bad.

He stared through his window. The skyline lifted out of afternoon shadows, all angular shapes like a hodgepodge of battlements. After a while he picked up the phone again.

He got Jorge Kipnis. "Jorge, let me talk to his nibs."

"He's not—"

"Jorge, I was at that meeting and you were there, too. Let me talk to him."

Jorge made no argument. After a moment's wait Darrah was talking to Berkan "I'd like to hear that tape again. Can you send someone down with a copy?"

"Best not," Berkan said. "I took a chance letting so many hear it. Journalists would—"

"I've been thinking," Darrah said. "I'd like to hear it again. If it's as I remember, it's just possible I'll want to have a talk of my own with—well, you say what he is. Superman?"

"Not 'man,'" Berkan said. "On the rest of it, I'm sorry to admit, you are probably correct. Why don't you come up and we'll hear the tape together? And then, perhaps, talk. Of you have anything at all to suggest I'll very much want to talk."

Darrah could believe that. "Now?"

"Now is the best time, is it not?"

THE Secretary General listened. Other men drifted in. They listened, too. They asked questions. They rubbed their jaws.

"What do you think?" Berkan asked at last.

Paul Shimer stubbed a cigarette. "I'd say it hangs on too many assumptions. Too many things we don't know."

"That's why I want to talk to him," Darrah said. "I want to find out how close I'm guessing."

"The chance that you're right all down the line is about one in a hundred," Shimer said.

Reluctantly Darrah nodded. "Okay. But look," he said. "They're talking to us. If they thought we were nothing—they wouldn't. They'd just start chopping and not pay us any more attention than you'd give the bugs under the bark of a tree. And that one on tape—he kept saying that bit about not causing us any inconvenience—"

"Huh!" Colin Corcoran muttered with scornful irony.

"Maybe they mean it," Darrah said. "Maybe they really do. And if that's so we should try to find out how much inconveneince they think is necessary."

"We already know," Corcoran said flatly.

"I'm not so sure," Darrah said. "We know one thing they want. It's a lot—it's frightening—but it does leave a lot of other aspects—well, indefinite. If we take them at their word—"

Corcoran frowned. "You're really serious, aren't you?"

"Aren't you?" Darrah asked. "Aren't we all?"

Berkan tapped a pencil on his desk. "I think," he said, "our chances are probably small. Nevertheless, we have a possibility here—a small hope. It should be explored. Now—" He leaned back, gazing at the far wall.

"You're going to let him talk to that creature?" Shimer objected.

Berkan raised an eyebrow. "He should be there. It is, after all, his thought and he will understand the ramifications more clearly than someone else. But—yes, you are right. For the talking it is necessary to have a man who will say neither too much nor too little."

He turned his chair and looked out into the late afternoon. The sky was full of a yellowish haze. He thumbed the intercom. "Helga? Find out if Walter Lewis is still in the building. If he is—ask him to come up. If he's gone home or somewhere, locate him."

To the men arranged before his desk he said, "Merely because a quest is doubtful is not a reason to reject it without trial."

THE Bzrabba had been quartered in a Waldorf Towers suite. Darrah left the elevator a half step behind Walter Lewis. The weight of the tape recorder was almost pulling his arm from its socket. They turned down the hall.

A squad of aides received them—UN people assigned to serve as the Bzrabba's errand boys. They knew Walter Lewis by sight. Darrah and Lewis were ushered into the alien's presence with a minimum of bother.

The room had been stripped of its usual furnishings, though a painting still hung on the wall and drapes still framed the window casements. The Bzrabba was leaning into what looked like a fishnet supported at an angle by a chrome-shiny cantilevered frame. A paperback in an advanced state of dismemberment lay on the floor between its feet. As Lewis and Darrah entered it carefully tore still another page from the tattered spine and held it up to its visual organ—first one side, then the other—and added it to a neat pile on its left. As its tricorn pincer reached for another page it deigned to notice them. The room

was full of a stink like something dead in a swamp.

"Quaint, the form of artistic effort in which you humans dabble," the Bzrabba said. It placed the remnant of *Finnegans Wake* on top of the loose pages and came erect. "May this one welcome offer into this, which temporarily be its place of occupation?"

Lewis chattered something about how the Bzrabba surely didn't object if they made a tape of everything that was said. Darrah found an outlet that would take the machine's cord and diddled with the reels and switches. The aides hurried in with an armchair and a small divan, saw them placed to everyone's satisfaction and withdrew. The Bzrabba flopped on its back. Lewis waited until the door clicked shut, then nodded to Darrah.

Darrah got the tape started and backed away from the machine. The stench was making him physically ill. If Lewis was affected he showed no sign of it.

"We've come about the request you made to the Secretary General this morning," Lewis said.

"Transfer of information has been done," said the Bzrabba. The words had an implacable flatness.

"That's true," Lewis said. He shifted uneasily in the armchair and leaned forward, his hands laced together. "We feel, however, there are some considerations we should explore together. I'm sure you've no objection to our discussing the matter."

"It is not to make refusal of communication," the Bzrabba said. "The fact has been said. Describe what more must be done."

Lewis let his breath out slowly. His body relaxed like a balloon beginning to deflate. Darrah looked down at the tape machine. It was running just fine.

"We believe conflicts can be averted by mutual understanding," Lewis said. He even sounded relaxed. "However, before we go on, we'd like to satisfy a point or two of curiousity. Do you mind?"

"Objection be not given." In spite of the huskiness of its speech the complete indifference of the Bzrabba's attitude could not be mistaken.

"It's simply this," Lewis said, keeping to a diffident manner. "What you want—the only thing you want—is the iron. Is that right?"

"Statement does correctness have."

Lewis was slow with the next question. "Our cosmologists think—aren't there a lot of worlds with iron inside them? Ones you can take without bothering anybody?"

The Bzrabba clacked its pincers. It was a sound like chopsticks being rattled. "Worlds having core of substance called by humans iron in natural course do not

happen," it said. "Bother be to the Bzrabba that humans have discourtesy to occupy without permission or even to make presence known. Nevertheless, the Bzrabba choose to force no greater inconvenience than be not avoidable."

Lewis betrayed his dismay only in a momentary glance in Darrah's direction. Darrah, under orders to say nothing, could only nod. Lewis went back to the job.

"Tell us," he said. "We've inferred from things you've said that you've encountered life—living things—on many worlds. We've been wondering, though—arguing, I should say—whether you've found intelligent creatures before."

"Not only worlds," the Bzrabba said. "The interrelated chemical processes in complexity—called by you humans life—exists many places, possessing of myriad forms. To the Bzrabba are location-places known to the number beyond enumeration. But of the ongoing multifarious process—called by you life—that which is possible to have description as creative intellect—such have the Bzrabba made count only to the quantity of six, of which two still have existence. Humans now be with the numbers of seven and three."

Darrah saw the diplomat's eyes twitch at the corners as if in pain. He waited, holding very still.

"What has been the attitude of the Bzrabba toward them?" Lewis asked.

"Bemusement," said the Bzrabba. All four pairs of pincer-tipped arms clasped hands across its body. Darrah thought of a grotesque Santa Claus holding its belly while it laughed.

"In a universe old, a peculiar new item," it went on. "Inferior, but having possession of queer interest. A rare trifle. Deep has been regret in the Bzrabba to have witness borne at demise of the four—to have to see the wilt of the two that yet are remnant."

"Thank you," Lewis said, swallowing hard. "Our scholars will be very interested." He looked around. Darrah gave him a slow, grave nod. He might have hoped for better. But this would do.

"Did these others have anything the Bzrabba wanted?" Lewis asked. "Did their presence obstruct the Bzrabba from anything?"

The Bzrabba made a rude noise. "They did not dare."

Lewis bent to open his briefcase. He took out his notebook. His face was a plain mask. His hand wasn't quite steady.

"Quaint also, such an artifact, that storage of date and retrieval are done," the Bzrabba observed.

"What we need is this," Lewis said, looking up from his notes. "The Secretary General anticipates considerable difficulty in convincing the leaders of some

nations—most, in fact—of how seriously you mean your request. People in some parts of the world aren't too well informed about scientific concepts. It may be extremely hard to persuade them you mean what you say."

"Persuasion shall be done," the Bzrabba said. Cold as a banker collecting the widow's mortgage.

"The Secretary General," Lewis said, tapping his thumb on the notebook, "thinks it's possible they're more likely to be convinced if the Bzrabba would send emissaries to explain your position directly to various government leaders in—well, a number of countries. In some nations it might even be a good idea to speak directly to the people. We'd supply as much help with learning the languages as we're able, but in some cases that might not be much. Could we expect your cooperation?"

The Bzrabba's pincers unclasped, one pair at a time, while it spoke. "If, by such course, activity be expedited, the Bzrabba shall enjoy the giving of assistance. We have intent, well declared, to be stimulant of not more inconvenience than be made imperative."

"You've said that several times," Lewis said. He held to a casual, conversational tone. "Can we rely on it?"

"Against that which to the number of three occasions be spoken no deviation from real fact does prevail," the Bzrabba said. "Fact exists. Fact is."

Darrah frowned. He and Lewis would have to study hard and long to be sure what it had said just then. He became aware of Lewis looking at him, one brow raised. *Yes,* Darrah nodded. Time to close it down.

Lewis rose to his feet. "I think that takes care of our immediate problem," he said. "We may have more questions later. But for now—well, I do want to thank you for being so willing to help us."

"It be toward mutual purpose," said the Bzrabba.

Darrah was ready when Lewis signaled to stop the recorder. He buttoned it up while Lewis kept the Bzrabba's attention with small talk. As they left the Bzrabba was dipping again into *Finnegans Wake,* remarking as it tore out another page that the glue humans used left a ragged edge.

THEY went back and reported to Berkan and the dozen men waiting with Berkan. The Secretary General sat at the end of a table, so large there was space for a man on either side of him. They all listened to the tape and then they talked. They smoked until the air in the room was blue. They talked for a long time.

Some while after midnight Darrah knocked out his pipe on the edge of an ashtray and began to

fill it for the dozenth time. "I've based my proposal on two points," he said. "They're both conjectural, but I think one of them has now been borne out. It's true they're contemptuous of us and I'll have to admit that from their point of view we're somewhat below the status of an underdeveloped nation. In spite of that, they've elected to talk with us. I think that indicates their contempt is not absolute. For a guess, I'd say they think of us about the same way we think about whooping cranes. We arouse the conservationist in them. That's not much—but it's something."

He gave up fumbling with his pipe and laid it on the table. Hard enough keeping clear in his mind what he wanted to say. "Beyond that," he went on, "my ground isn't solid. But by obliging them to send representatives to every country in the world—and I think we should include every government and pseudogovernment and subgovernment, as many as we can think of—we can maybe impress them with the level of resistance they'll have to contend with."

Pierre Laffont made a flamboyant gesture. "Pardon. Do you honestly think they are not able?"

Darrah shrugged. "No," he admitted. "I'd have to say they probably can. I'm hoping that once they understand the situation they won't want to."

"And do you believe that will happen?" Laffont asked.

Darrah slouched farther down in his chair. "I don't think anything else will help, either. The thing is, we don't have much to lose."

Carefully, Berkan laid his pencil on the table. "More to the point, gentlemen—if we do nothing we shall certainly have lost."

IT WAS some time after three in the morning when Darrah let himself into the apartment. He tried to be quiet, but Kris awoke anyway. "Mike? What time is it?"

"Late," he said. "Didn't mean to wake you."

"What's that funny smell?"

The Bzrabba's odor had permeated his clothes. "Guess this suit will have to go to the cleaners," he said.

Kris stretched sleepily. "What were you doing all this time?"

He didn't answer right away. He didn't feel much like talking.

"All right. Don't answer." She sounded hurt. She turned over, face away from him.

He sat down to take off his shoes. "Kris?"

"Uhh?"

"Would you believe if I told you I was trying to save the world?"

"Oh?" Too sleepy to be really interested. "How?"

"Making it cost too much."

Silence. He thought she'd gone back to sleep. "Well? Did you?"

He got his other shoe off, set it down quietly. "I don't know. We'll just have to see how it goes."

III

HE FOUND himself transferred to the diplomatic section. He felt awkward there, among the carefully speaking, baby-step-progress people, but that was where Old Sami wanted him and it was a vantage point from which he could watch what happened.

Besides, there were more plans to build.

Language instruction had not been a serious problem. The UN's staff included people skilled in virtually all Earth's major tongues. File searches turned up people who could teach most of the others. That still left the several hundred dialects and tribal languages found in the forests and deserts of the southern continents, Asia and the Australasian islands. For most of those, the Bzrabba appeared quite willing to fall back on their capacity to absorb a strange language quickly from scratch.

The emissaries went out. Several thousand of them. Reports trickled back from such hinterlands as Nepal and the Faroe Islands and disturbing rumors about the Bzrabba's intentions were heard from Yemen and the Malagasy Republic. The sophisticated press dismissed such tales as the kind of reaction to be expected of people only recently exposed to civilization of any kind and—while the more sensational press made what they could of garbled dispatches—not many people were persuaded that the Bzrabba were more than they seemed which was big and freaky.

At his new desk, Darrah studied reports from a thousand agencies. His planning group met daily.

The Bzrabba were spat on in Catania, mobbed in Singapore and charged with porcine ancestry in Baghdad. The Shah of Iran was seen to hold his nose in public. An emissary returned from the Sepik region of New Guinea still alive, but pincushioned by a half-hundred spear shafts. In Australia a band of aborigines bounced boomerangs off one for half an hour, then disappeared into the outback. One was harpooned.

Some Bzrabba didn't return. In Bogota there was uncertainty whether the shot that killed the emissary might have been meant, instead, for the President of Colombia, who had been standing beside it at the time. In Peking there was less doubt. A crowd tore one to scraps. From the African bush came the whisper that, roasted over a slow fire, Bzrabba was very tasty.

"BUT they are behaving as if nothing happened," Guido Falcone said, dropping the latest

sheaf of reports on the desk.

Darrah nodded. "Looks as if maybe that Rand study was right."

Falcone started to speak, then frowned. "Which one was that?"

"The one that says they may not think the way we do, may not value the same things—may not even have the concept that they're individuals. There's some evidence for it."

"Hah. Big help. So? What do we do now?"

"Wait," Darrah said, containing his feelings and his fears behind a mask of imperturbability. "Play the game. Pretend we're fumbling for a way to give them everything they want, if they'll give us a few things. Some way that doesn't wipe us out. That, and keep moving up the price. There's got to be a limit somewhere."

"And then?" Falcone asked. "What is to stop them from deciding we want too much? What is to stop them from scraping us off like vermin?"

That had been a terror in Darrah's thoughts for some time. "I'm hoping they'll think it would be an inconvenience to us," he said. "I'm hoping they don't want to do that. Have you got a better idea?"

IT WAS a long and nervous wait, but the time came. The Bzrabba spokesman—the one that wore the breastplate of Agent of the Consortium—arrived at Berkan's anteroom. There had been no warning, but Darrah had been expecting the visit for a week. He plucked a folder from his security file and met Walter Lewis on the way up. It was only a couple of flights—they took the stairs. A dozen men were scrambling into a room that adjoined Berkan's.

"Luck, Mr. Darrah," one of them stage-whispered.

Berkan was speaking as they walked in. The stench that met them was like being slapped with a week-old haddock.

"I know that some of us have behaved badly," Old Sami said. "I should apologize for them. But you should understand they do not welcome the prospect you give them. Without a more effective persuasion than has been done, resistance must be expected."

"Negligible is," the Bzrabba said. "All must vacate our property."

"I have a question. May I?" Walter Lewis asked. He was still getting settled in a chair next to Berkan's desk. He unzipped his portfolio, but left it lying in his lap without taking anything out.

"No objection be," said the Bzrabba.

Darrah slipped into a chair off to the side. He wished he could do some of the talking himself, but Old Sami knew best. He gave Lewis a nod to proceed.

"You realize, I'm sure, that asking us to evacuate our planet is going to cause more than a little in-

convenience," Lewis said quietly.

The Bzrabba lay almost at his feet. "That much, necessary is," it replied. "We have done work for purpose of obtaining useful measure of that configuration of matter, called by you—inspecifically—iron. Of this world that part be property to us."

"Until now, we've always thought this was our world," Lewis said.

"In many things opinion of humans be a not equivalent to most rudimentary level of correctness," the Bzrabba said. "To claim this be your world, this one must announce a not true fact."

Lewis appeared to ponder the response, then let it pass.

"We have some considerations that need to be explored," he said. "Assuming for the moment we're willing to evacuate, exactly how much do you mean by necessary inconvenience?"

"Explain, please," the Bzrabba said.

Lewis drew some papers out of his portfolio. He didn't really need them, Darrah thought. It was all right, though.

"I believe you're more or less familiar with our technological abilities," Lewis said. "What we're able to do and what we're not able to do. Am I correct?"

"Not all abilities does this person know in absolute," the Bzrabba said. "In many realms of purpose, it is known. Not all."

Lewis nodded. "Yes. Well, then, I'm sure you must be aware —and this is a fact—we don't have the capability of evacuating everybody. Altogether, we might be able to send perhaps two dozen people into space for a very limited time—and not very far. That's as much as we can do."

The Bzrabba's arms writhed like a tangle of snakes. "Does this person receive information that you make refusal to remove selves from our property?"

Lewis' voice now became precise, the words clipped. "I'm not saying we refuse," he said. "Nor am I saying we shall. I'm telling you, though, the plain fact: we do not have the capability of doing what you ask."

"This one must say again," it said, "this property be ours. Humans shall depart from it."

Berkan's chair squeaked as he leaned forward. "Are you prepared to take measures if we do refuse?" he asked. "Mind you—" he held up a hand—"I am not saying we shall or that we shall not. I ask your position."

"Should it be not-escapable—the Bzrabba shall in deep reluctance use force necessary to ensure the removal be done." Implacable.

"I see," Berkan said. Darrah caught the hint of a shudder in his voice.

Lewis took it up again, briskly efficient. "All right, assuming

we're willing—I'll admit, we're very reluctant; but assuming otherwise—could we hope the Bzrabba will give us the assistance we would need?"

"To the purpose of removing humans?" the Bzrabba asked. "That in time after, the Bzrabba shall the iron substance capability to remove have? Without more hindrance from fact of their presence? By reason they be not?"

"Uh, yes," Lewis said after a long, thoughtful pause. "Because without considerable help from you—the Bzrabba—our cooperation would simply not be possible. To be specific, we're not able to transport ourselves into space. Could we hope that the Bzrabba are willing to provide the transportation?"

"We wish to be cause of not more inconvenience than be made imperative," the Bzrabba said for what must have been the thousandth time. "Should humans not create conveyance the Bzrabba must—for alternative—supply."

DARRAH slowly let out his breath and resumed breathing. Lewis was looking his way. He nodded gravely. One for our side.

Lewis went on as if the Bzrabba's response had meant nothing. "Where can we go?" he asked.

"That be not a known place," the Bzrabba said.

"Let me explain further," Lewis said. He hunched down, close to the creature's equivalent of a face. "There's not another habitable planet in the solar system. Not for us, especially not with our present level of technology. I'm told Mars might be just faintly possible if we had enough of the right kind of equipment, but we don't. And I'm afraid that even if we did, the planet wouldn't have the resources to support our whole population. So we've discussed this among ourselves and it's been suggested there might be planets around some of the nearby stars and that some of them might be suitable. If you could tell us where they are—and something about them—it would save a lot of difficulty."

"Worlds in gravitational captivity of stars be more numerous than stars," the Bzrabba said.

Lewis nodded. "We've always suspected that." Darrah had to smile. When Lewis first heard the idea he had been incredulous.

"What we still don't know but must surmise," Lewis went on, "is that only some of them—probably only a few—will be planets that are really suitable. In fact—" he checked his notes—"within certain limits we're rather diverse when it comes to habitat. Some of us might be comfortable on one world—others might be more so on another. And with the present state of our science, we haven't a way of

knowing where or which these are. So—we don't have much choice—we'll have to ask you for help in finding them."

"That will enlarge the degree of less inconvenience?" the Bzrabba asked.

"Very much so," Lewis said. "Perhaps I should remind you—it's you who are asking us to move."

A silence came, then, which grew colder as it lengthened. Lewis sat up straight, waiting with austere patience. Darrah began to fidget until Berkan fixed him with a frosted steel eye.

Finally, the Bzrabba spoke. "Survey shall be needed," it said. "Data taking. Many things the Bzrabba know, but information of that category until now the Bzrabba did not have necessity to know. It shall require to be discovered."

Lewis nodded. "We suspected that might be the case. Our question, though, is whether you'll do it."

The Bzrabba struck a pincer against its breastplate, making a sound like a taut-skinned drum. "To make small the inconvenience to you humans, that activity shall undertaking have."

Lewis looked to Darrah, who nodded gravely, without enthusiasm. It wasn't going exactly the way he'd hoped. It wasn't even going the way he'd feared. He wasn't sure what to think.

Lewis turned to the Bzrabba again. "We'll be very grateful," he said. No irony tinged his voice. "Now, one other consideration we ought to mention. We don't know if you've thought of this, but our scientists say it's very probable that any planet or—for that matter—any group of planets we might occupy might be similar to this one, but they still won't be as perfect an environment as the one we've got now. We're adapted to this one and—" back to his notes again, quickly flipping the pages—"even a subtle difference—say, a few percentage points of solar radiation or something in the atmosphere—might have serious consequences. Can you understand that?"

"Nevertheless," said the Bzrabba.

Lewis pursed his lips—took a breath. "It's been suggested that some of the problems might be alleviated if our technological capability were raised and our scientific knowledge increased. Also—you might consider this a separate point—if we do find ourselves on a number of different worlds they probably wouldn't all be around the same star. It would be helpful—minimize the inconvenience, you might say—if we had some method of communication between them. Some mode of transportation, perhaps."

"To achieve, you are more assistance requesting?"

Inwardly Darrah winced. The creature had them figured out—maybe it was far ahead of them.

"Actually we'd much prefer to rely on ourselves," Lewis said. "What we'd suggest, if you'd be willing—you could let us have some assistance toward upgrading our technology, so we could cope with the problems ourselves. Then we wouldn't have to ask for help."

The Bzrabba's handless arms twined around each other, then unwrapped. "Such action would some aspects simplify, nor would much difficulty cause. Information given does also in possession of those who give remain. Uncertainty stands only that you, who name selves human, be of limited capacity. Dubious would hope be that even rudiments of ours could humans mastery achieve."

Lewis casually slipped his notes back inside his portfolio. "If you want our cooperation—" he began.

"No. Let me," Berkan said. He addressed the Bzrabba. "We have a saying," he said. "We say, you never know until you have made the attempt. I think that has some relevance to what you have said, don't you think?"

"To experiment," the Bzrabba said. "That has been done."

"But not with humans," Lewis said.

"A consideration," the Bzrabba said. "With humans, not."

"So?" Berkan asked.

"At small effort and small risk involved to the Bzrabba—" one of the handless arms writhed snakelike, cracked like a whip—"you humans shall have warning, choice—and consequence."

"I think we shall elect the choice," Berkan said affably. "Yes. Definitely the choice."

AGAIN they sat around a table. Again they talked far into the night. Every man and woman—and there were more than twenty—seemed to feel compelled to give his/her evaluation and opinion at tedious length, as if otherwise they couldn't justify their presence at what was certainly the most crucial conference in the history of *homo sapiens*. Darrah would have commented on that, except he had some thoughts of his own which—he felt—had to be brought out.

"He didn't object enough," Darrah said. "Everything we asked for they're willing to give. Either he's incredibly naive—and I can't believe that—or he's thinking something we simply have no way to guess at."

"There is another possibility," Leon Vazquez said. Unwatched, his hand sketched perfect polygons on his doodle pad. "Perhaps the astrophysicists are correct—the Bzrabba want the iron that bad."

"Which leaves us where?" Lazlo Wiesel asked. He was a fat, bald man. Without the mustache he would have looked like Churchhill.

"Committed to a deal we can't go through with," Nicholas Pelikan said from across the table.

"Are you certain?" Berkan said.

They looked at him.

"Of course we're certain," Pelikan said.

"Speak only for yourself," Berkan said, but he said it softly and his nod was genial. He put his fingertips together. "Let us consider rationally, gentlemen. The Bzrabba would seem agreeable to provide virtually all things we might need if we will only vacate our world. Admittedly the thought of leaving it seems at first unthinkable. But—and here I borrow a fragment of Mr. Darrah's thinking, although even he might not acknowledge it, for I mean to turn it around. It's simply this—everything has a value. A price."

"That is not true," Jules de Bray's quick gesture spilled the ashtray beside his wrist. "That is simply not true."

Berkan nodded wearily. "Nothing is absolutely true," he conceded. "Including what I have just said. But in the present case—let us think. We are accustomed to our world and the thought of abandoning it seems unbearable. Yet, when we examine the question carefully, what do we find?"

Tewfik Habib banged a fist on the table. Things rattled. "It is our world!" He looked like an eagle screaming in the wind.

"That seems to be a point under dispute," Berkan said mildly. "Perhaps I should ask, what kind of world is it? If we are thoughtful and honest with ourselves we discover it to be one whose most valuable resources are being rapidly used up and whose air and land and waters have become increasingly contaminated by the wastes of our industry, our carelessness—a world, in short, now under threat by a population growth that seems impossible to control. We are offered an indefinite number of worlds, all of them habitable, with ample and intact resources. We are also promised the technical knowledge to use those resources wisely and to not foul our nest. There is even a hope there will be power to do many things we are not presently able to do—things we consider not possible. Let us not be too hasty in rejecting such a proposition. Faults it may have, but virtues also."

"How do we know they'll keep their promises?" Darrah didn't even see the man who asked.

"Admittedly, that is a question," Berkan said. He glanced at his watch. "Equally, it is possible that everything the creature

seems to promise is of no great value to them—is perhaps the equivalent of the twenty-four dollars for Manhattan Island I have been told about. Or it is possible—as Leon has said—that these creatures need iron so desperately that, to them, it is truly worth the price."

"Or it may be," Juan de Castro suggested, "that they have not yet totaled the bill."

"Many things we do not know," Berkan said. "We know only what they tell us they are willing to do. What we must keep in mind are not the uncertainties—but rather the simple fact that, having little to be hoped for, we actually are risking very little. I would suggest, gentlemen, rather than inventing new objections—new things to fear—we should put our minds to ways and methods to insure that further negotiations may be conducted to our advantage and that the best shall be made of this uncomfortable situation." He looked at his wrist again. "It is very late now. I would suggest that we go to our homes and sleep. And that we come to the problem with fresh minds in the morning."

NOT until long after midnight did Darrah get home. As he groped for his shoelaces in the dark, Kris came drowsily awake.

"That you, Mike?" Then: "You've got that stink again."

"My suit," he said. "I'll take it to the cleaners tomorrow."

"Incinerator," she said. "They never got it out of the other suit."

It wasn't a thing to argue about. Not at this hour. "All right. The incinerator. In the morning."

A silence. Then: "Mike?"

"Hmm?"

"This time, did you save the world?"

He thought a while. The facts were one thing, the possibilities another. "No," he said at last, uncomfortably. "But there's a chance we'll get a good price. Might be very good, considering the goods are second-hand."

"IT really is strange," Berkan shook his head and passed the report across his desk to Darrah. "I can only say, they want the iron very much."

The Bzrabba had supervised the design and building of a data readout machine in Zurich. It was gigantic—a mountain had to be hollowed out to contain it and a glacier was pressed into service to keep it cool. Most of its structure, the aliens explained, was needed to convert Bzrabba concepts into human frames of reference. It was, they implied, disgustingly inelegant.

At the last, the information cube was fixed in place. It was 17.7598329 inches on a side, dull red, and the data it contained was coded into the individual mole-

cules of its substance by isotopic variation. Some anonymous technician touched a key and the printout spat:

$$E = mc^{1.99999699433141593\ldots}$$

The Bzrabba said the cube included the whole summation of Bzrabba science. Maybe it did—maybe it didn't. At that point it made little difference, for—so far—the Bzrabba had not yet repeated their request for the iron. There was still the remaining part of their bargain to fulfill.

The last Bzrabba, Agent of the Consortium, had whisked back to Chicago. The landing craft lifted as if by its bootstraps, without noise or fuss or even a show of powerful energies being used. When worlds suitable for men were found or—if necessary—made habitable, they would return. For the iron.

Darrah consigned a future suit to the incinerator.

"I'll have to admit I don't understand them," he said. He dropped the report back on the desk. "If we'd asked them for different things— They can't think what we asked for has much value. Of course, it's possible they think the iron's worth it all. I don't know. Maybe to them it actually is. They never did say what they use it for."

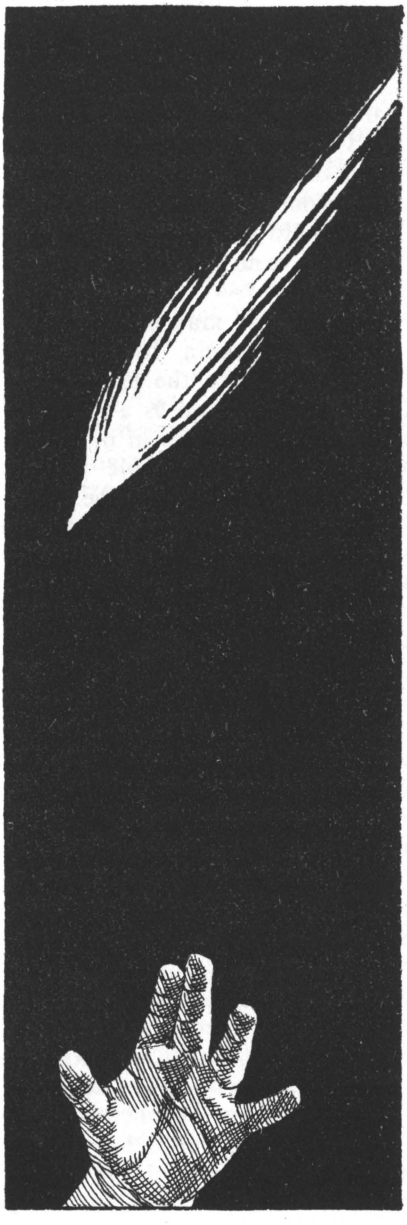
"Does it make a difference?" Berkan asked.

"Maybe it's us," Darrah went on, frowning at the new thought. "Maybe *we're* the thing that has value."

"Us?" Berkan wondered. "How could that be?"

"I wouldn't know," Darrah admitted. He shrugged. "Whooping cranes? I've no idea in the world."

NEITHER man ever saw the Bzrabba again. The Secretary General lived to the age of four hundred eighty-two as a direct result of the advances in molecular biology made possible by the Bzrabba information cube. Darrah, having been younger at the time, lived to six hundred nineteen. Not for seven full centuries did the Bzrabba come back to claim their iron, but when they did—with 927 great ships to evacuate all humans from the world of their origin—humanity was armed with the knowledge the Bzrabba had given, plus what men had gained for themselves, for Man was not an old and stagnant race and had already spread to the near stars to live on many worlds that were not naturally hospitable before men made them so. The fleet's leading elements were met first out near Altair. The meeting was cordial. Neither side wished to inconvenience the other. Nowhere on the spherical perimeter did a Bzrabba craft penetrate closer to Sol than the vicinity of Tau Ceti. ●



In an alternate Eden, would men love, hate—or simply forget?

EXPERIMENT

BEVERLY GOLDBERG

PLAYNIA pulled herself to her feet, using the branches of the nearby yookal tree for support. It had been a lovely day and now she would join the others for a sleep. She walked slowly to the place of night gatherings, wondering at the ache of her body. She did not feel as she used to. She could not move as easily—none of them could. Things had happened to their bodies and one day they would play the tapes and find

out why. She passed her hidden place on the way to the others, but the memory of that day so long ago was dim and easily pushed aside. It had never happened again.

Lyria and Sera were there already and Cumny and Treece were approaching from the waterside. It was strange not to have Jaycee with them any more. She had stopped just a short time before and it was hard to remember that she would not begin again.

Playnia sat down and nodded at the others. Each put the food she had gathered on the ground and all shared the meal. Hunger stopped. They spoke of the day that had been and they wondered if they would all be there after sleep. Sera suggested looking at the tapes. Lyria had suggested it the sleep before. No one answered and they each curled up in the shallow depressions their bodies had worn into the soil through the years and they slept.

Playnia had the dream she often had. When she awoke she was still stunned by its vividness and she recalled Jaycee's dreams—they had begun just before she stopped. Playnia decided that she would look at the tapes after one more sleep—or two. Looking at the tapes meant going into the darkness of the ship—the ship that once shimmered in the light of the sun was now shining softly from the bite of the sands that shifted around it. Playnia did not really want to go into that darkness or to see the tapes she knew she should have seen a long time ago. She slowly returned to her sleep.

"I TELL you, Karl, my original paper will stand. We'll find a civilization without war, without harmful strife of any kind—gentle and cultured."

But Karl thought he knew human nature. "Altman, you are wrong. Their civilization—as you call it—will be the same as those we know—humans are always the same. We're going to see battles, feuds, hostility. Environment had no basic effect on shaping human society. Man himself is the cause of his problems."

"I have been studying the original reports again. The planets seeded offered so much that with all needs easily satisfied, man could develop without strife—"

Altman stopped as the captain entered their quarters to say, "Gentlemen, I must ask your indulgence. It is necessary that you tell the crew what is expected of them when we reach Socex, One."

The captain looked at them to see who would decide on procedure after landing. His worst fears were realized.

"I will," calmly stated each of the experts.

The captain, who had been privileged to hear their conflicting views through many a meal, decided to leave his problem where it was.

"Altman," he said, "you will talk at nine. Karl, you may address the crew at three."

PLAYNIA awoke this time with a slight hunger. She walked over to the grove to her left and ate of the fruit there. When she was satisfied she left the sleep area and ambled down toward the ship. When she arrived she saw that Sera had come there before her. They greeted each other and turned back—the tapes could wait another day. Sera had discovered a place of particular color and the two of them went to the grove to look and feel the peace of the color and the touch of the breeze. They spent the day there—days were beginning to pass ever more quickly. Playnia had to push thoughts of the old days, the one different day, many times from her head. Sera, too, seemed often to be elsewhere.

That night the five of them decided to hear a tape after they slept. They had made such decisions twice before. The first time the tape had told them of the joys of the place where they lived and had identified the words for all the things around them. The second time they had not listened. The place itself and the strangeness of their bodies that had occurred for a time had kept them from it—they knew it was wrong not to keep listening, but they did not return. Now, so many, many years later (if the one tape they had heard were right about time) they thought they should hear another tape. But as they were about to leave for the ship after their sleep, Sera did not waken. Playnia and the others put her under the sand far from the places they used.

They did not see the tapes.

ALTMAN began his lecture with the eighty-year-old tape of Socex-1. It was a lush and green place. A place of little temperature variation and abundant foodstuffs. There were no predators on the planet.

Socex-1 was one of the many worlds that man had been startled to find scattered through the universe. Planets that were Earthlike, and yet offered even more than Earth, abounded. Man had settled many of them, but always to destroy them—and often himself. Hence the experiment. Send to each of a given number of plan-

ets a group of women—six was picked as the optimal number—all about to give birth. Amnesia would be induced and they would be set down on the planet to produce young. Amniocentesis allowed the choosing of various combinations of male and female offspring. Each planet would be left strictly alone for a predetermined period before being revisited. Perhaps a cure would be found to the problems man seemed to bring with him wherever he went. Each of the groups would be taught a language—a language developed to keep out preconceived behavioral patterns. There were no words for *love* or *war* or *hate* or *fear*. The lifeship that landed them contained tapes first acclimating them to the planet, then giving them information as needed.

"They will return to the ship and play the tapes as a result of suggestions implanted at the time their amnesia was induced. Man is an enterprising animal. We shall probably find a peaceful culture—a culture devoted to the arts. There may be as many as two hundred people—and we must not alarm or influence them. This experiment will continue—we are merely to record the results to date. Then we can begin our analysis. The World Federation, which sponsors and supports the project, will then decide, on the basis of results, on the next step. This is the first of ten experimental planets. I just want to remind you that these are in all probability a peaceful, loving people. Professor Karl feels differently. Think carefully before deciding whether or not you want to be part of the first landing unit."

KARL began his lecture with the same eighty-year-old tape of Socex-1 that Altman had used. He, too, pointed out that the planet was lush and green, a place of little temperature variation and abundant foodstuffs. There were no predators.

". . . thus man, becoming bored, is likely to engage in all manner of competitive sport. This is likely in turn to lead to real conflict. We will probably find a world not unlike that of the early stone age on Earth. You must be prepared to protect yourselves and the recording equipment as well. But we must not interfere with the experiment. Please bear that in mind when you decide whether or not you wish to be a part of the first landing unit."

PLAYNIA walked quickly down to the lake. She spent some time in the cool, quiet wa-

ter. She sensed a dullness in herself. It was like the feeling she had on that day long gone. She wondered why she kept thinking back to that—then realized that there was something about it she wished to remember. She left the water and walked over to her hidden place—where she had put the thing that day. She stared at the ground for many hours. At last, hungry, she walked back to the grove and Cumny and Treece. Lyria had stopped the sleep before.

"Perhaps we should see the tapes before we, too, are no more," she almost pleaded.

Cumny lay down the fruit she was holding.

She said, "No. We have not for so long—we ought not."

Treece agreed.

Playnia and the other two lay down to sleep—all seemed to sleep more these days. As they were drifting off Playnia heard a mumbled comment about the thing that had come from Cumny on that day.

She sat upright. "Cumny, Cumny, what thing? Please."

But Cumny had stopped. Treece looked at Playnia and shrugged.

"On the day we came apart," Treece said, "we were all so ashamed. I never could speak of it. Now there is no shame. *Shame* —that is a word like *sorrow.* It is an old word." A flicker of a long-forgotten past seemed to flash through her old mind.

Playnia said, "I thought something was happening to all of you, too. But it was over so quickly. The hurt of it—I can still remember the hurt. The tearing and rending of my body. But I did not let it destroy me. Perhaps we should have listened to the second tape. But the days before that one were so lovely. When the hurt ended and I saw the horror that had tried to destroy me—I stopped it."

"Did you feel empty—a lack?" Treece asked.

"Not so much a lack as a fear that you would discover my secret and not want me with you. Perhaps the tapes could tell us what happened to each of us on that day. Do you want to find out?"

Treece shook her head. "No. It has been over for so long. The days since have been good. Oh, for years there was the reminder every month, but that stopped long since. It may all be over. We are not reminded—not anymore."

Playnia glanced up at the sky, her attention caught by a large shadow. She took Treece by the hand and they wandered off into the grove. They would come back later perhaps. And see if the shadow returned. ●

Reading Room

LESTER DEL REY

THEY like to call it nostalgia. When people begin to listen again to the old swing records, go to revivals of old shows or read books of the type popular forty years or more ago, it's easy to blame it on nostalgia, a sentimental yearning for things past. It's much more convenient for tunesmiths, dramatists, writers and critics to dismiss it all as nostalgia than it is to wonder if perhaps their values have somehow been corrupted and if people are simply turning to what will again give them the things they've always liked and wanted.

The sentimental or "camp" sense of nostalgia is only a lesser definition of the word, not even mentioned in Webster's Second. The original and still most important definition is homesickness—an honest feeling, devoid of condescension and sentimentality.

Many people want to go home again to where their roots have always been. Maybe they want to be able to hum and whistle tunes and laugh and have fun at movies and plays. The success of playwright Neil Simon has not so far been attributed to nostalgia, yet he is one of the few who never seems to leave home from the older virtues of the drama. And heresy though it be now, I suggest that maybe people want to go home to the kind of fiction that quickened their pulses, kept them reading for pleasure and excitement long after they should have gone to sleep. I think we've had the novelty of trying to be great thinkers and daring innovators in our reading

matter and now at least some of us want to go home—go back to where strong men tingled with powerful emotions, where creeps crept off into the night and were forgotten, where romance had something warm to it other than the blankets—return to adventure, to life with endocrines that work, and to fun.

In witness whereof: seven of the books lying before me for review hark back to fiction and writers popular forty or fifty years ago. These represent the work of three publishers and four writers. And one is part of a series that has been one of the most popular in recent years among science-fiction and fantasy readers.

The last is *Captive of Gor,* by John Norman (Ballantine, 95¢). This is advertised as Volume VII in the Chronicles of Counter-Earth, and the earlier volumes in the series are still selling very well indeed. I think the only good way to describe the series is also the best way to explain its success—these novels are the closest thing now being written to the Martian books of Edgar Rice Burroughs. They don't imitate slavishly. They make no attempt to copy style directly and the mechanical device of the lost princess is pretty well forgotten after the first book. But at their best (particularly in the third volume, *Priest Kings of Gor*) they are darned good adventure stories with the feeling and reach of Burroughs. Their faults have sometimes been great and highly annoying, but somehow their virtues—the virtues of good fiction—save them.

The current volume, however, falls rather short. Tarl, the series hero, doesn't appear until some ten pages before the end of a very long book and then only under the name of Bosk of Port Kar. The viewpoint character here is Elinor Brinton, a spoiled rich girl of New York City, who is captured and taken to Gor to be a slave. Aha! Any student of Gor should know most of what occurs from there on. Yep, Norman has decided that maybe he didn't quite get his message across from the male viewpoint—maybe some readers weren't quite able to understand, even after all those hundreds of previous pages, that women like to be enslaved and beaten. So he has taken a woman character and shown us how much fun it is, and how no woman can resist any strong man who knows how to subdue her properly.

It takes up 370 pages of text, so we get our money's worth of words, at least. But otherwise, the book

isn't worth the price, except to those really hung up on Gor or unable to beat their own women as they'd like!

LIN CARTER belongs to a chivalrous school (in the modern sense of chivalry, of course). No women are beaten in his books, though his male characters take enough blows to satisfy the most blood-thirsty. He has written three books about a gentleman from Virginia—sorry, I got mixed up—about a modern American on the fabulous planet of Callisto. These are *Jandar of Callisto, Black Legion of Callisto* and *Sky Pirates of Callisto.* All are from Dell, at 95¢ each. They are frankly imitative of the Burroughs' Martian series, as Carter admits elsewhere. They are independent (in the sense that Burroughs' early books were independent, but with cliff-hangers) yet the three readily form one continuous story devoted to Jandar's discovery of the strange and entrancing world of Callisto and of the princess Darloona—as pure and noble a girl as Burroughs ever penned and one as nobly loved.

In these, Carter has copied every trick of Burroughs, including those that are faults. The story begins with the usual business of the hero being forced to hide in ruins, from which he escapes to another world; and we're given a full frame of how the manuscript reached Carter, etc. etc. At the end of the first two books, we find our hero, having lost his princess, sitting down to write out the account for shipment back to Earth before he goes out to find her. Yet once we're in action, it moves pretty well. Carter substitutes an insect-man for the green Martian friend of John Carter, and that comes off rather well. The beasts and the backgrounds are copies of Burroughs, in a sense, but they have sufficient originality. And the Sky Pirates who take up much of the story are a good invention and generally well worked out. (Exception: When a light gas, such as hydrogen, is compressed, it will *not* have greater lifting power—on the contrary, putting twice as much gas in the same space means the gas weighs twice as much, and hence will be able to lift less!)

The only fully original touch of the plotting, however, is a mistake. Carter has his hero—logically, probably—as a somewhat incompetent fighter. This simply doesn't fit the pattern. It's only after he's taught to be a sword-master that the action perks up. And I wonder why Jandar had none of

the advantages of Earthly muscles on a light world that John Carter enjoyed on Mars?

Carter defends imitation by stating elsewhere that people can no longer read new Burroughs' books, much as they want to. So someone has to write such books. Maybe. But I suspect that's not quite true. No modern man can really think in Burroughs' head. I suspect that Norman's Gor is better than any direct imitation can be, simply because it permits the writer to exercise his own talents toward the same end that Burroughs sought.

The Jandar novels, within their limitations, make for fairly entertaining reading. Certainly they are better than many of the imitations of Burroughs written when Burroughs was still writing.

When Lin Carter isn't imitating so directly he does a better job of getting the Burroughs effect, I think. In his *Under the Green Star* (DAW, 95¢), he has an epilogue (from which I've quoted him) in which he deals quite frankly with imitation versus being influenced by Burroughs. I find that Carter considers the Jandar novels to be imitations and the Green Star story to be merely influenced. In some ways, I see the difference. And yet, there is a considerable imitative factor here, too. While there is no prologue on how Carter "found" the manuscript—a device I consider clumsy and ineffective—there is a prologue in which we are told how our hero gets to the world of the Green Star. On this device, which was a literary trick used by many writers, I'm undecided—today it is seldom used. Yet perhaps it should be whenever the means of getting there is interesting in itself. Here Carter does fairly well. He uses mysticism and astral projection, but he avoids the error Burroughs made in having his hero leave a body on Earth and then wake up on Mars fully embodied—in the same body! I've always shared Carter's annoyance at this. Then he winds up with the straight Burroughs technique of having his hero back on Earth, not knowing whether his princess has escaped doom or not.

There are other differences. An important one is that our hero has been a hopeless invalid on Earth, so his lust for the active, healthy life he can lead on another world is both more convincing and more deeply felt than would otherwise have been the case. There is originality under the Green Star. Yet I end up feeling that the Lin Carter who is not directly imitating Burroughs is

really writing much more truly like Burroughs! I preferred this book to the Jandar ones and recommend it to those who really are hopefully looking for the books that Burroughs, the Master, can no longer give us. There must be millions of such readers.

I WON'T say whether *Transit to Scorpio,* by Alan Burt Akers (DAW, 95¢), is influenced or imitative. It begins badly enough with an "explanation" from Akers on how he acquired the tapes from which the story is transcribed. It then moves on to a fairly good beginning. We discover that the hero, Dray, reached Kregen (in the Constellation of Scorpio) long ago, having been born in 1775. Not bad—we are led to expect a somewhat different hero by his background alone. We are also introduced to a group of beings who explain Dray's arrival on scene—they gather people from many worlds. All of this leads in time to the fact that Dray has been bounced back and forth between Earth and Kregen several times.

Could be interesting, but somehow nothing much seems to come of it. Maybe because he's had time to become modern, Dray shapes up as no more than any other Earthman falling for a beauteous damsel on another world. And the returns to Earth don't amount to much, after all, except to give him a chance to be stranded here at the end, longing to go back to his damsel in the same old way.

In between we have the rise of our hero as a warrior, his pursuit of his damsel and so on. But sadly lacking is the texture of a Burroughs world. Somehow the animals and the cultures Dray finds don't have that alien touch of romance that can be found in the Master—or in Carter, for that matter. It seems to boil down to a pretty standard set of experiences, after the first indication that Kregen was going to be truly different. It isn't bad—but I didn't find it particularly good either.

ANOTHER way to imitate, unfortunately, is to make fun of something, to satirize it. That is what John Jakes has done in his *Mention My Name in Atlantis* (DAW, 95¢). His satire is good-natured and sometimes amusing, but I can't see it, though the back cover calls it an uproarious cliff-hanger. The whole idea of turning Robert E. Howard's type of sword and sorcery into something uproarious strikes me as about on a par with trying to make a limerick out of an Edgar Guest poem.

But if you feel turned on by discovering "How Conax the Chimerical Helped Sink the Lost Continent!" you're not my type of reader anyhow, so go ahead.

AND now I find that I owe a deep apology to those who are at least somewhat my type of reader. For some reason I can't understand, I seem not to have reviewed a darned good book that I thoroughly enjoyed. This is *Other Days, Other Eyes,* by Bob Shaw (Ace, 95¢). If it is still available on your stands, don't neglect it.

When it first came out I was almost afraid to read it. Shaw's first "slow glass" story was so exceptionally good as a short story that I hated to see it forced into a novel. I needn't have worried. It isn't forced. This novel includes the short story and the other stories that Shaw did on slow glass—that marvelous substance that holds back light so we can see what has happened days or even years before. But the book does far more than put a frame around the contents—it begins at the beginning and traces the whole affair in such a way that each story now means more to me than when I first read it. It also goes on with excellent and controlled inventiveness to work out a logic that could not have been expected from the invention of slow glass. It's the novel I've wanted from Shaw since he first did the short story—and the fact that the novel is on the same background is pure serendipity to me. Most highly recommended.

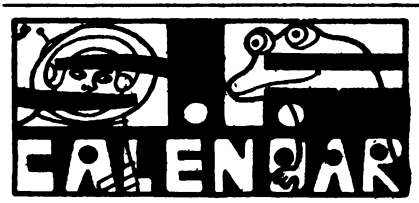
I'D ALSO loke to recommend Keith Laumer's *The Glory Game* (Doubleday, $5.95), but with a few reservations. This is a story of a potential war between the forces of Earth and the alien Hukk and of the man who is put squarely in the middle. Earth is divided—the militants want to strike now, while we can still beat them. As a man in the Space Navy, Commodore Dalton might be expected, of course to be one of the Hardline boys. On the other hand, the diplomatic Softliners believe the Hukk can be dealt with without any dreadful war—and they can offer Dalton more than the Navy can. But on t'other hand, he's interested in a girl whose father, Senator Kevin, is a Hardliner. And around and around we go as Dalton gets caught in the Glory Game. To make matters worse, during some supposedly peaceful maneuvers he has full responsibility for mankind—unofficially—and no authority—officially. And the Hukks aren't playing the same game. And no matter

what he does he's going to get pure hell on Earth.

It's that kind of a situation and it's beautiful. Laumer handles it with both logic and zest as the situation becomes more tangled.

But, toward the end of the book there's a curious change of pace. Laumer has given a nicely developed and detailed story of conflict on all levels through most of the novel. But suddenly Dalton is isolated and the story seems to halt. Truthfully it doesn't. It picks up again. But in the final stages the elements of crisis seem to become telescoped and reduced to a much smaller scale. I'd suggest that the first eight chapters be read quickly—as they will be, since they have a fine pace of their own; but from chapter nine on, readers might well go slowly, examining everything against the events preceding. It may not seem like the same fracas, but it is. And careful reading will make this stand out.

I wish Laumer had used another 20,000 words to let us know more about Arianne and others later, as well as to keep a bit more complexity at the end. But it's still a novel that must be recommended. Laumer is a writer with enough different ways of writing not to have to imitate even himself. •



June 30-July 4, 1973. WESTERCON 26. At San Jose Hyatt House. Guest-of-Honor: Larry Niven. Membership: $5.00 in advance, $6.00 at the door. For information: Sampo Productions, 195 Alhambra, No. 9, San Francisco, California 94123.

•

August 24-26, 1973. DEEP SOUTH CON. At Marriott Hotel, New Orleans. Guest-of-Honor: Joseph Green. Membership: $3.00. For Information: John Guidry, 5 Finch Street, New Orleans, Louisiana 70124.

•

August 31-September 3, 1973. TORCON 2—31st World Science Fiction Convention: At Royal York Hotel, Toronto, Canada. Guest-of-Honor: Robert Bloch. Fan Guest-of-Honor: William Rotsler. Toastmaster at Hugo Awards Banquet: Lester del Rey. Membership: $7.00 attending and $4.00 supporting (until 8/1), $10.00 at the door. For information: Torcon 2, Box 4, Station K. Toronto 12, Ontario, Canada.

bungled. They had created him—hadn't they? Well?

The rest of the issue was good as usual, but I did miss the letter column.

Lester Boutillier
New Orleans, La.

It bothers me, too, when uncontrollable story lengths accidentally coincide in one issue to crowd out *Hue and Cry*. This is where the reward and research live for you and for me. In letters such as the above—and the one following.

Dear Mr. Jakobsson:

When we began reading Construction Shack (If *February '73) by Clifford D. Simak, one of our favorite writers, we expected good science fiction. Unhappily, as we soon discovered, the story is less science fiction than fictional science! Mr. Simak's scientific knowledge is surprisingly and deplorably deficient.*

Among his major errors:

1) Mr. Simak states that 60 grams per cubic centimeter was the "previously supposed" density of Pluto. But since this value is about three times that of the densest known metal, the majority of scientists have never supposed anything of the sort!

(Continued from page 4)

2) He ascribes calculation of Pluto's mass to "measurement of . . . eccentricities." But eccentricity is only a measure of the departure of an ellipse from circularity. Simak should say "perturbation," which is a deviation in an orbit due to a gravitational field other than the sun's.

3) Simak's unmanned Plutonian probe must return to Earth since its films are far better than its transmissions. Ridiculous! It is much easier to build a one-way probe with any desired quality of transmission than a necessarily heavier two-way probe (the mass-ratio of a two-way probe equals the square of that for a one-way probe).

4) He declares a "manned craft could pile on velocity that could not be safely programed into a probe." What's he afraid of—collisions? With what—meteor storms? They went out with the science of the 'thirties.

5) From Pluto, he says, "The sun . . . is not much more than a slightly brighter star." In reality, from Pluto the sun is 300 times brighter than the full moon on (from?) Earth!

6) He claims an unsuited astronaut would explode in a vacuum. Blood vessels will rupture, yes. But explode? No! Again, science of the 'thirties.

7) "For hundreds of years Pluto has been the last outpost," Simak says. But Pluto was not discovered until 1930. So are we to think the story occurs centuries from now? If so, the flights to Mars he mentions are also centuries away. Rather unreasonable!

8) Simak states communications time lag between Pluto and Earth is 60 hours. Actually it's no more than seven.

9) Simak thinks electrostatic attraction is needed to maintain Pluto's surface dust, which would otherwise fly off into space. But the .08-G field he assumes is more than adequate for the task. Dust simply lies there. Only agitated molecules of a would-be atmosphere escape into space!

There are other mistakes, none of them trivial.

Science fiction has two functions: to entertain and to inform. Construction Shack *has miserably failed in the second function—indeed, it has misinformed.*

We have always liked Simak's writing. We hope it will return to its usually high standards.

Rick Conley
Conley Powell, Ph.D.
Department of Mechanical Engineering
University of Kentucky
Lexington, Ky.

My personal feeling is that "the last outpost" was there long before it was discovered—and that Cliff Simak was indeed writing about a moment remote from this time, distance measured perhaps in wisdom rather than calendar years or centuries.

You're perfectly correct about the inapplicability of the science of the 'thirties today. Many scientific myths were exploded in our lunar landings and Mars flybys. Cliff invented, I thought, a few implausible ones to explode in the future—he was telling us to expect the unexpected when we study the blueprints of creation. And saying it in depth.

If he failed to inform you—perhaps you weren't looking.

Dear Mr. Jakobsson:

I never take time to write to publishers, but I enjoyed Death and Designation Among The Asadi *by Michael Bishop so much that I decided to write and tell you.*

Jo Anne B. Cavender
Dayton, Ohio

GALAXY/IF S-F MART

Galaxy

235 East 45 Street
New York, N.Y. 10017

if

50¢ per word (including name and address). 10-word minimum. Payment with order.

ASTROLOGY

COMPLETE HOROSCOPES done by Professional Psychic. Send Name, Birthdate, Time, Location and $15.00. ASTARTE, 3424 Central, Cicero, Illinois 60650.

BOOKS AND MAGAZINES

WANTED: Scientifiction, fantasy, weird books, pulp magazines. Arkham House, Fantasy Press, Lovecraft GERRY DE LA REE, Cedarwood, Saddle River, N.J. 07458.

ADULT S-F FAN MAGAZINE. Praised by top s-f authors. Shocking fiction, uncensored opinions, outrageous reviews. $1, per issue. RICHARD GEIS, POB 11408. Portland, OR 97211.

SPECIALISTS: Science Fiction, Fantasy, Weird Fiction Books—Pocketbooks. Lists Issued. STEPHEN'S BOOK SERVICE, P.O. Box 321, Kings Park, L.I., N.Y. 11754.

FREE copy SIGNS Magazine. BAGBY, Box 1303, Longview, Washington 98632.

FREE CATALOGS SF/FANTASY—100's of titles listed from Rarities to Reading Copies. MIDLAND BOOK SERVICE, 22 S. Fullerton Ave., Montclair, N.J. 07042.

SF—FANTASY Paperbacks. Send wants. THE WEREWOLVES, 325 Parkman, Altadena, Calif. 91001.

NEMETON: New Pagan Magazine. Articles by Poul Anderson and others. $1.50 for Premier Edition to Box 13037, Oakland, California 94661.

OUT OF PRINT BOOKS. Send Wants. BOOKDEALER, 39 North Browning Ave., Tenafly, N.J. 07670.

ALGOL: MAGAZINE ABOUT SCIENCE FICTION. Current issue features Silverberg, Pohl, Bradbury, White, Lupoff, others. Four issues $3.00. From: ANDREW PORTER, POB 4175, NY 10017.

TAKE A STRANGE ADVENTURE into your mind. The book Dianetics: Modern Science of Mental Health by L. Ron Hubbard has an applied philosophy to show you how. Send $5.00 to Bookstore-IF, Founding Church of Scientology, 1812 19th St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

EDUCATION

EARN COLLEGE DEGREES at home. Many subjects. Florida State Christian College. Post Office Box 1674. Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33302.

GAMES AND PUZZLES

COMMAND STARSHIPS IN ALIEN SPACE. Send $4 for this All Skill, Adult Wargame. LOU ZOCCHI, 388G Montana, Victorville, Calif. 92392.

MISCELLANEOUS

SLEEP-LEARNING—HYPNOTISM! Strange catalog free. Autosuggestion, Box 24-GY, Olympia, Washington 98501.

FORGED from the FUSION of Science, Religion and Philosophy: THE ORACLE. Free information. P.O. Box 491, Stanwood, Washington 98292.

STUDY WITCHCRAFT. Secret Book, Newsletters, $1. STARWISE SOCIETY, Box 9094-GIF, Cleveland, Ohio 44137.

LIE DETECTOR! She Love You? Learn the Truth! Fully assembled Science Fair Psychogalvanometer reveals nervousness $17.35. KOGON ELECTRONICS, Box 975, Hamilton, Montana 59840.

WANTED—Original Fantasy Stories. For info write Al D. Cockrell, Box 125, Bronson, Mich. 49028.

RECORDS AND TAPES

"X MINUS ONE" and other outstanding Science Fiction radio programs are now available on tape. 7" reels or cassettes. Send 50¢ for catalog. REMEMBER RADIO, INC., Box 2513, Dept. NYA, Norman, Oklahoma 73069.

MAIL ORDER ACTION

DIRECT ACTION AT LOW COST—with resultful advertising in HOME GARDENER'S MARKET. Classified section every issue in NATURAL GARDENING Magazine. $1.10 a word buys mail order sales and highly qualified inquiries from more than a million readers. Low rates for schedules. Write or call Frank Brennan, Classified Advertising Manager, HOME GARDENER'S MARKET, 235 East 45th St., New York, N.Y. 10017. (212) MU3-3000.

the man who lived in inner space

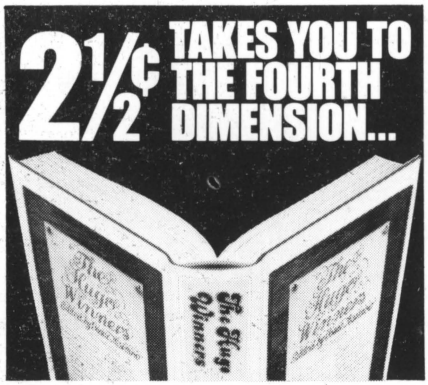
a brilliant novel of a man who finds liberation from the imprisonment of his body by returning to the sea. He travels to ever deeper places and rarer wonders until he becomes a part of the watery world itself.

"A strange and often fascinating book."
— *Kirkus Reviews*

"Most excitingly written."
— ARTHUR C. CLARKE

$5.95 at your bookstore
Houghton Mifflin Company

By ARNOLD FEDERBUSH



A total of 10¢ gets you quite a trip to the furthest reaches of the 4th dimension...the fabulous realms of the science fiction mind...with the most brilliant writers of the decade as your guides. Just 10¢ can bring you great books like these...THE HUGO WINNERS, an 864-page anthology of 23 prize-winners. They're the tales awarded The Hugo, speculative fiction's equivalent of the Oscar—by people who really know, The World Science Fiction Convention. A great beginning for your science fiction adventure.

Then, there's DUNE, by Frank Herbert, the acclaimed winner of both the Hugo and Nebula awards. It takes you to the frightening world of Arrakis...as fearsome as the creatures who inhabit it.

Or consider THE GODS THEMSELVES, Isaac Asimov's first novel in fifteen years. And, the great master's never been in better form.

More greatness! AGAIN, DANGEROUS VISIONS with 46 original pieces from authors such as Bradbury, Blish, Vonnegut and LeGuin. Bizarre, erotic, brilliant—nearly 800 pages of excitement.

Yes, choose these or *any* four books on this page for just 10¢ (to help cover shipping), and you're on your way to mind-bending membership in the Science Fiction Book Club.

Science Fiction

SCIENCE FICTION BOOK CLUB 36-S135

Dept. CL-682, Garden City, N.Y. 11530

Please accept my application for membership in the Science Fiction Book Club and send me the 4 books whose numbers I have written in the boxes below. Bill me just 10¢ (to help cover shipping) for all 4. About every 4 weeks, send me the club's bulletin, "Things to Come," describing the 2 coming Selections and a variety of Alternate choices. If I wish to receive both Selections, I need do nothing; they will be shipped to me automatically. Whenever I don't want 1 of the 2 Selections or prefer an Alternate, or no book at all, I will notify you by the date specified by returning the convenient form always provided.

I need take only 4 Selections or Alternates during the coming year, and may resign any time thereafter. Most books are only $1.49, plus a modest charge for shipping and handling. Occasionally, extra-value Selections are slightly higher.

NO-RISK GUARANTEE: If not delighted, I may return the entire introductory package within 10 days. Membership will be cancelled. I owe nothing.

Mr.
Mrs. _____
Miss Please Print

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

ANY 4 SCIENCE FICTION BEST SELLERS FOR JUST 10¢

when you join and agree to buy only 4 books during the coming year.

8037. **Again, Dangerous Visions,** Harlan Ellison, ed. Forty-six pieces, short stories & novels. **Explicit scenes and language may be offensive to some.** Pub. ed. $12.95

6270. **Dune** by Frank Herbert. Celebrated winner of Hugo and Nebula. Gripping tale of family exiled from their private planet to another, a barren desert. Pub. ed. $5.95

7518. **Thuvia, Maid of Mars and The Chessmen of Mars** by Edgar Rice Burroughs. 2-novel, 1-volume sci-fi special. Adventures of man on planet Mars. Spec. Ed.

3152. **Cities in Flight** by James Blish. At last, the four masterpieces in one volume—an underground classic—that encompasses all mankind, his universe, and their relationship. Spec. Ed.

2717. **Nebula Award Stories Seven,** Lloyd Biggle, Jr., Ed. The latest novellas and short stories—prize-winners picked by Sci-Fi Writers of America. Includes Anderson, Silverberg, and others. Pub. ed. $6.95

6023. **The Gods Themselves** by Isaac Asimov. The master's first novel in 15 years ...and worth the wait for a fabulous trip to the year 3000. Pub. ed. $5.95

6171. **The Dancer From Atlantis** by Poul Anderson. Four people—from different ages and cultures—are catapulted by a time machine back to 1400 B.C. Spec. Ed

1008. **The Man Who Folded Himself** by David Gerrold. Inheriting a time belt promises the joys of the world—but something goes wrong. Pub. ed. $4.95

6577. **The Sheep Look Up** by John Brunner. The celebrated author, of **Stand On Zanzibar,** a mind-bender that chronicles the collapse of civilization. Pub. ed. $6.95

7633. **The Overman Culture,** Edmund Cooper. The author of **Sea-Horse In The Sky** spins a tale of a city encircled by a moat... roads that lead to one place...and a new culture. Pub. ed. $5.95

8532. **The Hugo Winners,** Vol. I & II. Giant 2-in-1 volume of 23 award-winning stories, 1955 to 1970. Asimov introduces each. Pub. ed. $15.45

4432. **The Wind from The Sun** by Arthur C. Clarke. 19 sci-fi short takes by a master of the medium. **The Cruel Sky and Dial F For Frankenstein** are two of the featured fantasies. Pub. ed. $5.95

The Science Fiction Book Club offers its own complete, hardbound editions, sometimes altered in size to fit special presses and save members even more. Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members will be serviced from Toronto. Offer slightly different in Canada.