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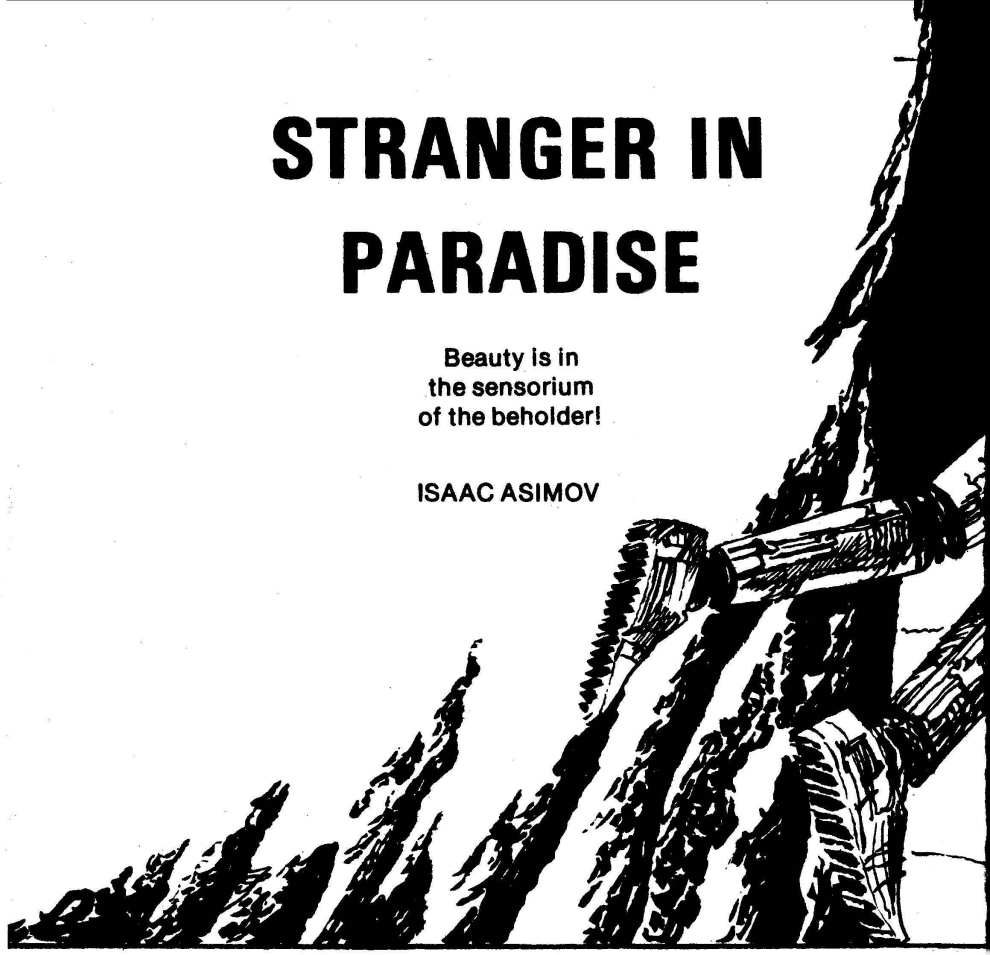
STRANGER IN PARADISE

Beauty is in
the sensorium
of the beholder!

ISAAC ASIMOV

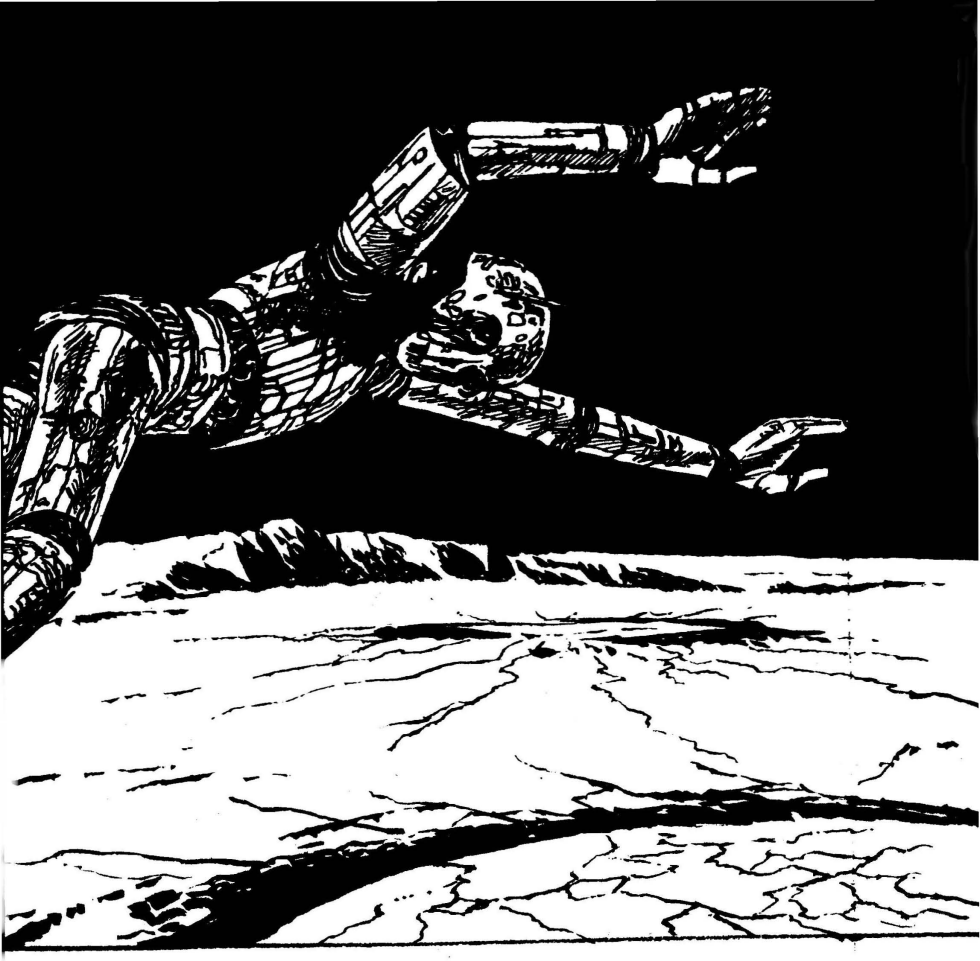


I

THEY were brothers. Not merely in the sense that they were both human beings, or even that they were fellow-children of a creche. Not at all! They were brothers, *brothers*—kin, to use a term that had grown faintly archaic even centuries before, prior to the Catastrophe, when the concept of the family still had some validity.

How embarrassing it was!

Over the years Anthony had almost forgotten his childhood shame. There were times when he hadn't given it the slightest thought for months at a time. But ever since he and William had been once again thrown inextricably together,



he had found himself living through an agonizing period.

It might not have been so bad if circumstances had made it obvious all along—if, as in the pre-Catastrophe days (Anthony had at one time been a great reader of history), they had shared a patronymic and in that way flaunted the relationship.

Nowadays, of course, one chose one's second name to suit one's self—and changed it as often as desired. After all, the symbol-chain was what really counted: that was encoded, yours, and yours alone, from birth.

William called himself Anti-Aut. He insisted on it with a kind of sober professionalism. His own

business, surely, but what an advertisement of poor taste! Anthony, on the other hand, had decided on Smith when he had turned thirteen and had never changed it. It was simple, easily spelled—and quite distinctive, since he had never met anyone else who had chosen that name. It was once very common—among the pre-Cats, which explained its rareness now, perhaps.

But the difference in names meant nothing when the two were together. They *looked* alike.

They weren't twins—but then only one of a pair of twin-fertilized ova was allowed to come to term. It was just that physical similarity occasionally appeared in the non-twin situation—especially when the relationship was on both sides. Anthony was five years younger than his brother, but both had the beaky nose, the heavy eyelids, the just noticeable cleft in the chin. It was just asking for it when, out of some passion for monotony, parents repeated.

At first, now that they were together, their appearance drew that startled glance followed by the elaborate silence. Anthony tried to ignore the matter, but out of sheer perversity—or perversion—William was as likely as not to say, "We're brothers."

"Oh?" the other would say, hanging in there for just a moment as though he wanted to ask if they were full blood-brothers. But then good manners would win the day and the fellow would turn away as though it were a matter of no interest. That happened only rarely, of course. Most of the people in the Project knew—how could it be prevented?—and avoided the situation.

Not that William was a bad fellow. Not at all. If they hadn't been brothers (or if they had been but had had sufficiently different looks to be able to mask the fact) they might have gotten along famously.

As it was . . .

It didn't make it easier that they had played together as youngsters, and had shared the earlier stages of their education in the same creche through some successful maneuvering on the part of their mother. Having borne two sons by the same father and having, in this fashion, reached her limit (she had not fulfilled the requirement for a third) she conceived the notion of being able to visit both with a single trip. She was a strange woman.

Being the elder, William had left the creche first. He had gone into science—genetic engineering. Anthony had learned of that, while he was still in the creche, through a letter from his mother. When he was old enough to speak firmly to the matron those letters stopped. But he always remembered the last one for the agony of shame it had brought him.

Having the talent, Anthony had eventually entered a science, too.

He remembered having had the wild—and prophetic, he now realized—fear he might meet his brother, and so had chosen telemetrics, which was about as far removed from genetic engineering as one could imagine.

Or so one would have thought. Through all the elaborate development of the Mercury Project, circumstance waited.

The time came, as it happened, when the Mercury Project appeared to be facing a dead end. But a suggestion had been made which saved the situation—and at the same time dragged Anthony into the dilemma his parents had prepared for him. The best and most sardonic part of the whole thing was that it was Anthony who, in his innocence, made the suggestion.

II

WILLIAM Anti-Aut, Anthony's uninhibited elder brother, knew of the Mercury Project, but only in the way he knew of the long-drawn-out Stellar Probe that had been on its way before he was born and would still be on its way after his death; the way he knew of the Martian colony and of the continuing attempts to establish similar colonies on the asteroids. Such things were on the distant periphery of his mind and of no real importance. No part of the space effort had ever swirled inward closer to the center of his interests, as far as he could remember—till the day when the printout included photographs of some of the men engaged in the Mercury Project.

William's attention was caught first by the fact that one of them had been identified as Anthony Smith. He remembered the odd last name his brother had chosen, and he remembered the "Anthony". Surely there could not be two Anthony Smiths.

He had then looked at the photograph itself—no mistaking the face. He looked in the mirror. No mistaking the face.

He felt amused, but uneasily so; he recognized the potential embarrassment for all parties. Full blood-brothers, to use the disgusting phrase. But what was there to do about it? How correct the fact that both his father and his mother had been utterly without imagination?

He must have absently put the print-out in his pocket when he was getting ready to leave for work, for he came across it during his lunch-hour. He stared at it again. Anthony looked keen. It was quite a good reproduction—the printouts were of enormously good quality these days.

His lunch partner, Marco Whatever-his-name-was-that-week said curiously, "What are you looking at, William?"

On impulse, William passed him the printout and said, "That's my brother." Grasping the nettle.

Marco studied it, frowning.

"Who? The man standing next to you?"

"No, me—I mean the man who *looks* like me. He's my brother."

There was a longer pause this time. Marco handed it back and said with a careful levelness to his voice, "Same-parents brother?"

"Yes."

"Father and mother both?"

"Yes."

"Ridiculous!"

"I suppose so." William sighed. "Well, according to this, he's doing telemetrics over in Texas and I'm doing work in autistics up here. So what difference does it make?"

William did not keep it in his mind and later that day he threw the printout away. He did not want his current bedmate to come across it. She had a ribald sense of humor that William was finding increasingly wearying. He was rather glad she was not interested in having a child by him. He had had one a few years back anyway. That little brunette, Laura or Linda, one or the other name, had collaborated.

It was quite a time after that, at least a year, that the matter of Randall had come up.

If William had given no further thought to his brother—and he hadn't—before that, he certainly had no time for it afterward.

Randall was sixteen when William first received word of him. He had lived an increasingly seclusive life and the Kentucky creche in which he was being brought up decided to cancel him—and of course it was only some eight or ten days before cancellation that it occurred to anyone to report him to the New York Institute for the Science of Man. (The Homological Institute was its common name.)

William received the report along with several others, and there was nothing in the description of Randall that particularly attracted his notice. Still it was time for one of his tedious trips to the creches and there was one likely possibility in West Virginia. He went there—and was disappointed into promising himself (for the fiftieth time) that he would thereafter make such visits by TV image. But then, having dragged himself to the general area, thought he might as well take a look at the Kentucky creche before returning home.

He expected nothing.

Yet he hadn't studied Randall's gene pattern for more than ten minutes before he was calling the Institute for a computer calculation. Then he sat back and perspired slightly at the thought that only a last-minute impulse had brought him, that without that impulse Randall would have been quietly cancelled. A drug would have soaked painlessly through his skin, into his bloodstream and he would have sunk into a peaceful sleep that gradually deepened into death. The drug had a twenty-three

syllable official name, but William called it "nirvanamine"—as did everyone else.

William said, "What is his full-name, matron?"

The creche-matron said, "Randall Nowan, scholar."

"No one!" said William, explosively.

"Nowan." The matron spelled it. "He chose it last year."

"And it meant nothing to you? It is pronounced *No one!* It didn't occur to you to report this young man last year?"

"It didn't seem—" began the matron, flustered.

William waved her to silence. What was the use? How was she to know? There was nothing in the gene-pattern to have given her warning. The usual textbook criteria was useless here. It was a subtle combination that William and his staff had worked out over a period of twenty years through experiments on autistic children—and a combination they had never actually seen in the flesh.

So close to cancelling!

Marco, the hard-head of the group, complained that the creches were too eager both to abort and to cancel. He maintained that all gene-patterns should be allowed to develop until initial screening, that there should be no cancellation without consultation with a homologist.

"There aren't enough homologists," William had told him.

"Well, we can at least run all gene patterns through the computer," said Marco.

"To save anything we can get for our own use?"

"For any homological use, here or elsewhere. We must study gene-patterns in action if we're to understand ourselves properly—and it is the abnormal and monstrous patterns that give us most information. Our experiments on autism have taught us more about homology than the sum total of existing knowledge on the day we began."

William, who still preferred the roll of the phrase 'the genetic physiology of man' to 'homology', shook his head. "Just the same, we've got to play it carefully. However useful we can claim our experiments to be, we exist on bare social permission, reluctantly given. We are playing with lives."

"Useless lives. Fit only for cancelling."

"A quick and pleasant cancelling is one thing. Our experiments, usually drawn-out and sometimes extremely unpleasant, are another."

"We help them sometimes," replied Marco.

"And we don't help them sometimes."

It was a pointless argument, really, for there was no way of settling it. What it came down to was that there were too few interesting abnormalities and no way of urging mankind to encourage a

greater production. The trauma of the Catastrophe would never vanish in a dozen ways, including that one.

The hectic push toward space exploration could be traced back (and was, by some sociologists) to the knowledge of the fragility of the life-skein on the planet, thanks to the Catastrophe.

Well, never mind—that's another story.

There had never been anyone like Randall Nowan, not for William. The slow onset of autism characteristic only of that totally rare gene pattern meant that more was known about Randall than about any autistic patient before him. They even caught some last faint glimmers of his thought-processes in the laboratory—before he closed off altogether and finally shrank completely within the wall of his skin, unconcerned, unreachable.

Then they began the slow process whereby Randall, subjected for increasing lengths of time to artificial stimuli, yielded up the inner workings of his brain and gave clues thereby to the inner workings of all brains, those called normal as well as those similar to his own.

So vastly great was the data they were gathering that William began to feel his dream of reversing autism might be more than merely a dream. He felt a warm gladness at having chosen the name Anti-Aut.

He was almost at the height of the euphoria induced by the work on Randall when he received the call from Dallas, and the heavy pressure began—now, of all times—to abandon his work and take on a new problem.

Looking back on it later, he could never work out just what it was that finally led him to agree to visit Dallas. In the end, of course, he could see how fortunate it was—but what had persuaded him? Could he, even at the start, have had a dim, unrealized notion of the potential outcome? Surely, impossible.

Was it the unrealized memory of that printout-photograph of his brother? Surely, impossible.

But he let himself be argued into visiting the Project, and it was only when the micro-pile power unit changed the pitch of its soft hum and the agrav unit took over for the final descent that he remembered that photograph—at least consciously.

Anthony worked at Dallas and, William remembered now, at the Mercury Project. That was what the caption had referred to. He swallowed, as the soft jar told him the journey was over. This would be uncomfortable.

III

ANTHONY was waiting on the roof reception-area to greet the in-

coming expert. Not by himself, of course. He was part of a sizable delegation—the size itself was a grim indication of the desperation to which they had been reduced. Furthermore he was among the lower echelons; that he was there at all was only because it was he who had made the original suggestion.

He felt a slight but continuing uneasiness at the thought of that. He had put himself on the line. He had received considerable approval for it, but there had been the faint insistence always that it was *his* suggestion; if it turned out to be a fiasco, every one of them would move out of the line of fire, leaving him alone at point-zero.

There were occasions, later, when he brooded over the possibility that the dim memory of a brother in homology had suggested his thought. That might have been, but it didn't have to be. The suggestion was so sensible, so inevitable, that surely he would have had the same thought if his brother had been something as innocuous as a fantasy writer—or if he had had no brother at all, for that matter.

The problem was the inner planets—

The Moon and Mars were colonized. The larger asteroids and the satellites of Jupiter had been reached, and plans were in progress for a manned voyage to Titan, Saturn's large satellite. Yet even with plans underway for sending men to the outer Solar system there was still no chance of a manned approach to the inner planets, for fear of the Sun.

Venus was the less attractive of the two worlds within Earth's orbit. Mercury, on the other hand . . .

Anthony had not yet joined the team when Dmitri Large (he was quite short, actually) had given the talk that had moved the World Congress sufficiently to vote the appropriation that made the Mercury Project possible.

Anthony had listened to the tapes, and had heard Dmitri's presentation. Tradition was firm to the effect that it had been extemporaneous, and perhaps it was, but it had been perfectly constructed and held within it, in essence, every guideline followed by the Mercury Project since.

The chief point was that it would be wrong to hold inner-planet research in abeyance until technology had advanced to the point where a manned expedition through the rigors of Solar radiation would become feasible. Mercury was a unique environment that could teach much, and from Mercury's surface sustained observations could be made of the Sun that could not be made in any other way.

Provided a suitable man-substitute—a robot, in short—could be placed on the planet.

A robot with the required physical characteristics could be built.

Soft-landings were as easy as kiss-my-hand. Yet once a robot landed, what next?

He could make his observations and guide his actions on the basis of those observations, but the Project wanted his actions to be intricate and subtle, at least potentially, and they were not at all sure what observations he might make.

To prepare for all reasonable possibilities and to allow for all the intricacy desired, the robot would need to contain a computer sufficiently complex and versatile to fall into the same asteroid with a mammalian brain.

Yet nothing like that could be miniaturized sufficiently to be used in the kind of robot they planned. Perhaps someday the positronic-path devices that the roboticists were playing with might make it possible, but that someday was not yet.

The alternative was to have the robot send back to Earth every observation it made as it was made. A computer on Earth could then guide its every action on the basis of those observations. The robot's body, in short, was to be there, its brain here.

Once that decision was reached telemetrists became the key technicians. It was then that Anthony joined the Project as one of those who labored to devise methods for receiving and returning impulses over distances of from 50 to 140 million miles, toward, and sometimes past, a Solar disk that could interfere with those impulses in a most ferocious manner.

He took to his job with passion and (he firmly thought) with skill and success. It was he, more than anyone else, who had designed the three switching-stations that had been hurled into permanent orbit about Mercury. Each of them had the job of sending and receiving impulses from Mercury to Earth and from Earth to Mercury. Each was capable of resisting, more or less permanently, the radiation from the Sun, and more than that, each could filter out Solar interference.

Three equivalent Orbiters were placed at a distance of a little over a million miles from Earth, reaching north and south of the plane of the Ecliptic so that they could receive the impulses from Mercury and relay them to Earth—or vice versa—even when Mercury was behind the Sun and inaccessible to direct reception from any station on Earth's surface.

Which left the robot, itself; a marvelous specimen of both the roboticists' and telemetrists' arts. The most complex of ten successive models, it was capable, with only a little over twice the volume and five times the mass of a man, of sensing and doing considerably more than a man—if it could be guided.

How complex a computer had to be to guide the robot made itself rapidly evident, however, as each response-step had to be modified to

allow for possible variations in perception. And as each response-step itself enforced the certainty of greater complexity of possible variation in perceptions, the early steps had to be reinforced and made stronger. It built itself up endlessly, like a chess game, and the telemetrists began to use a computer to program the computer that designed the program for the computer that programed the robot-controlling computer.

There was nothing but confusion.

The robot was at a base in the Arizona desert and was working well. The computer in Dallas could not, however, handle him well enough; not even under perfectly known Earth conditions. How then—

Anthony remembered the day when he had made the suggestion. It was on 7-4-553. He remembered it, for one thing, because he remembered thinking that day that 7-4 had been an important holiday in the Dallas-region of the world among the pre-Cats half a millennium before—553 years before, to be exact.

IT HAD been at dinner. (And a good dinner, too. There had been a careful adjustment of the ecology of the region and the Project personnel had high priority in collecting the food supplies that became available—so there was an unusual degree of choice on the menus, and Anthony had tried roast duck.)

The roast duck had made him somewhat more expansive than usual. Everyone was in a rather self-expressive mood, in fact, and Ricardo said, "We'll never do it. Let's admit it. We'll never do it."

There was no telling how many had thought such a thing how many times before, but it was a rule that no one said so openly. Open pessimism might be the final push needed for appropriations to stop (they had been coming with greater difficulty each year for five years now) and if there *were* a chance, it would be gone.

Anthony, ordinarily not given to extraordinary optimism, but now revelling over his duck, said, "Why can't we do it? Tell me why, and I'll refute it."

Ricardo's dark eyes narrowed at once to the challenge. "You want me to tell you why?"

"I sure do."

Ricardo swung his chair around, facing Anthony full. He said, "There's no mystery. Dmitri Large won't say so openly in any report but you know and I know that to run Mercury Project properly, we'll need a computer as complex as a human brain whether it's on Mercury or here, and we can't build one. So where does that leave us except to play games with the World Congress and get money for make-work and possible useful spinoffs?"

Anthony, a complacent smile on

his face, said, "That's easy to refute. You've given us the answer yourself." (Was he playing games? Was it the warm feeling of duck in his stomach? The desire to tease Ricardo? Or did some unfelt thought of his brother touch him? There was no way, later, that he could tell.)

"What answer?" Ricardo rose. He was quite tall and unusually thin and he always wore his white coat unseamed. He folded his arms and seemed to be doing his best to tower over the seated Anthony like an unfolded meter-rule. "What answer?"

"You say we need a computer as complex as a human brain. All right, then, we'll build one."

"The point, you idiot, is that we can't—"

"*We* can't. But there are others."

"What others?"

"People who work on brains, of course. We're just solid-state mechanics. We have no idea in what way a human brain is complex, or where, or to what extent. Why don't we get in a homologist and have *him* design a computer?" With that Anthony took a huge helping of stuffing, savored it complacently. He could still remember, after all this time, the taste of the stuffing, though he couldn't remember in detail what had happened afterward.

It seemed to him that no one had taken it seriously. There was laughter and a general feeling that Anthony had wriggled out of a hole by clever sophistry, so that the laughter was at Ricardo's expense. (Afterward, of course, *everyone* claimed to have taken the suggestion seriously.)

Ricardo blazed up, pointed a finger at Anthony and said, "Write that up. I *dare* you put that suggestion into writing." (At least, so Anthony's memory had it. Ricardo had, since then, stated his comment was an enthusiastic, "Good idea! Why don't you write it up formally, Anthony?")

Anthony put it in writing.

Dmitri Large had taken to it. In private conference, he had slapped Anthony on the back and had said that he had been speculating in that direction himself—though he did not offer to take any credit for it on the record. (Just in case it turned out to be a fiasco, Anthony thought.)

Dmitri Large conducted the search for the appropriate homologist. It did not occur to Anthony that he ought to be interested. He knew neither homology nor homologists—except, of course, his brother, and he had not thought of him. Not consciously.

So Anthony was up there waiting in the reception area, in a minor role, when the door of the aircraft opened and several men descended. In the course of the handshakes that began going around he found himself staring at his own face.

His cheeks burned and, with all

his might, he wished himself a thousand miles away.

IV

MORE THAN EVER William wished that the memory of his brother had come earlier. It should have—surely it should have.

But there had been the flattery of the request and the excitement that had begun to grow in him. Perhaps, he had deliberately avoided remembering.

To begin with there had been the exhilaration of Dmitri Large coming to see him—and in his own proper presence. He had come from Dallas to New York by plane and that had been very titillating for William, whose secret vice it was to read thrillers. In the thrillers men and women always traveled mass-wise when secrecy was desired. After all, electronic travel was public property—at least in the thrillers, where every beam of radiation that carried information was invariably bugged.

William had said so in a kind of morbid half-attempt at humor, but Dmitri hadn't seemed to be listening. He was staring at William's face and his thoughts seemed elsewhere. "I'm sorry," he said, finally. "You remind me of someone."

(Even that hadn't given it away to William. How was that possible?)

Dmitri Large was a small plump man who seemed to be in a perpetual twinkle even when he declared himself worried or annoyed. He had a round and bulbous nose, pronounced cheeks and softness everywhere. He emphasized his last name and said with a quickness that led William to suppose he said it often, "Size is not all the large there is, my friend."

In the talk that followed, William protested much. He knew nothing about computers. Nothing! He had not the faintest idea of how they worked or how they were programed.

"No matter, no matter," Dmitri said, shoving the point aside with an expressive gesture of the hand. "*We* know the computers; *we* can set up the programs. You just tell us what it is a computer must be made to do so that it will work like a brain and not like a computer."

"I'm not sure I know enough about how a brain works to be able to tell you that, Dmitri," said William.

"You are the foremost homologist in the world," said Dmitri. "I have checked that out carefully." That disposed of that.

William listened with gathering gloom. He supposed it was inevitable. Dip a person into one particular specialty deeply enough and long enough and he would automatically begin to assume that specialists in all other fields were magicians, judging the depth of their wisdom by the breadth of his own ignorance—and as time went

on, William learned a great deal more of the Mercury Project than it seemed to him at the time that he would ever care to do.

He said at last, "Why use a computer at all, then? Why not have one of your own men, or relays of them, receive the material from the robot and send back instructions."

"Oh, oh, oh," said Dmitri, almost bouncing in his chair in his eagerness. "You see, you are not aware. Men are too slow to analyze quickly all the material the robot will send back—temperatures and gas pressures and cosmic ray fluxes and solar wind intensities and chemical compositions and soil textures and easily three dozen more items—and then try to decide on the next step. A human being would merely *guide* the robot, and ineffectively; a computer would *be* the robot.

"And then, too," he went on, "men are too fast, also. It takes radiation of any kind anywhere from ten to twenty-two minutes to make the round trip between Mercury and Earth, depending on where each is in its orbit. Nothing can be done about that. You get an observation, you give an order, but much has happened between the time the observation is made and the response returns. Men can't adapt to the slowness of the speed of light but a computer can take that into account. Come help us, William."

William said gloomily, "You are certainly welcome to consult me, for what good that might do you. My private TV beam is at your service."

"But it's not consultation I want. You must come with me."

"Mass-wise?" said William, shocked.

"Yes, of course. A project like this can't be carried out by sitting at opposite ends of a laser beam with a communications satellite in the middle. In the long run, it is too expensive, too inconvenient, and, of course, it lacks all privacy."

It *was* like a thriller, William decided.

"Come to Dallas," said Dmitri, "and let me show you what we have there. Let me show you the facilities. Talk to some of our computer men. Give them the benefit of your way of thought."

It was time, William thought, to be decisive. "Dmitri," he said. "I have work of my own here. Important work that I do not wish to leave. To do what you want me to do may take me away from my laboratory for months."

"Months!" said Dmitri, clearly taken aback. "My good William, it may well be years. But surely it will be your work."

"No, it will not. I know what my work is and guiding a robot on Mercury is not it."

"Why not? If you do it properly, you will learn more about the brain merely by trying to make a computer work like one, and you will

come back here, finally, better equipped to do what you now consider your work. And while you're gone, will you have no associates to carry on? And can you not be in constant communication with them by laser beam and television? And can you not visit New York on occasion? Briefly."

William was moved. The thought of working on the brain from another direction did hit home. From that point on he found himself looking for excuses to go—at least to visit—at least to see what it was all like. He could always return.

Then there followed Dmitri's visit to the ruins of Old New York which he enjoyed with artless excitement (but then there was no more magnificent spectacle of the useless gigantism of the pre-Cats than Old New York.) William began to wonder if the trip might not give him an opportunity to see some sights as well.

He even began to think that for some time he had been considering the possibility of finding a new bedmate, and it would be more convenient to find one in another geographical area where he would not stay permanently.

—Or was it that even then, when he knew nothing but the barest beginning of what was needed, there had already come to him, like the twinkle of a distant lightning-flash, an answer?

So he eventually went to Dallas and stepped out on the roof and there was Dmitri again, beaming. Then, with eyes narrowing, the little man turned and said, "I *knew*—what a remarkable resemblance!"

William's eyes opened wide and there, visibly shrinking backward, was enough of his own face to make him certain at once that Anthony was standing before him.

He read, very plainly, in Anthony's face a longing to bury the relationship. All William needed to say was, "How remarkable!" and let it go. The gene-patterns of mankind were complex enough, after all, to allow resemblances of any reasonable degree even without kinship.

But of course William was a homologist and no one can work with the intricacies of the human brain without growing insensitive as to its details, so he said, "I'm sure this is Anthony, my brother."

Dmitri said, "Your brother?"

"My father," said William, "had two boys by the same woman—my mother. They were eccentric people."

He then stepped forward, hand outstretched, and Anthony had no choice but to take it. The incident was the topic of conversation, the only topic, for the next several days.

V

IT WAS small consolation to Anthony that William was contrite

enough when he realized what he had done.

They sat together after dinner that night and William said, "My apologies. I thought that if we got the worst out at once that would end it. It doesn't seem to have done so. I've signed no papers, made no formal agreement. I will leave."

"What good would that do?" said Anthony ungraciously. "Everyone knows now. Two bodies and one face. It's enough to make one puke."

"If I leave—"

"You can't leave. This whole thing is my idea."

"To get *me* here?" William's heavy lids lifted as far as they might and his eyebrows climbed.

"No, of course not. To get a *homologist* here. How could I possibly know they would send *you*."

"But if I leave—"

"No. The only thing we can do now is to lick the problem, if it can be done. Then it won't matter." (Everything is forgiven those who succeed, he thought.)

"I don't know that we can."

"We'll have to try. Dmitri will place it on us. It's too good a chance. You two are brothers," Anthony said, mimicking Dmitri's tenor voice, "and understand each other. Why not work together?" Then, in his own voice, angrily: "So we must. To begin with, what is it you do, William? I mean more precisely than the word homology can explain by itself."

William sighed. "I work with autistic children."

"I'm afraid I don't know what that means."

"Without going into a long song-and-dance, I deal with children who do not reach out into the world, do not communicate with others, but who sink into themselves and exist behind a wall of skin, so far unreachably. I hope to be able to cure it some day."

"Is that why you call yourself Anti-Aut?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact," William replied.

Anthony laughed briefly, but he was not really amused.

A chill crept into William's manner. "It is an honest name."

"I'm sure it is," muttered Anthony hurriedly, and could bring himself to no more specific apology. With an effort, he restored the subject, "Are you making any progress?"

"Toward the cure? No, so far. Toward understanding, yes. And the more I understand—" William's voice grew warmer as he spoke and his eyes more distant. Anthony recognized it for what it was, the pleasure of speaking of what fills one's heart and mind to the exclusion of almost everything else. He felt it himself often enough.

He listened as closely as he might to something he didn't really understand, for it was necessary to do so; he would expect William to listen to him.

How clearly he remembered it. He thought at the time he would not, but at the time, of course, he was not aware of what was happening. Thinking back, in the glare of hindsight, he found himself remembering whole sentences virtually word for word.

"So it seemed to us," William said, "that the autistic child was not failing to receive the impressions, or even failing to interpret them in quite a sophisticated manner. Rather, he disapproved and rejected them—without any loss of the potentiality of full communication if some impression could be found of which he approved."

"Ah," said Anthony, making just enough of a sound to indicate that he was listening.

"Nor can you persuade him out of his autism in any ordinary way, for he disapproves of *you* just as much as he disapproves of the rest of the world. But if you place him in conscious arrest—"

"In what?"

"It is a technique we have in which, in effect, the brain is divorced from the body and can perform its functions without reference to the body. It is a rather sophisticated technique devised in our own laboratory; actually—"

"By yourself?" Anthony interrupted gently.

"Well . . . yes," said William, reddening slightly, but clearly pleased. "In conscious arrest," he continued, "we can supply the body with designed fantasies and observe the brain under differential electroencephalography. We can at once learn more about the autistic individual; what kind of sense impressions he most wants; and we learn more about the brain generally."

"Ah," said Anthony. This time it was a real ah. "And all this you have learned about brains—can you not adapt it to the workings of a computer?"

"No," said William. "Not a chance. I told that to Dmitri. I know nothing about computers and not enough about brains."

"If I teach you about computers and tell you in detail what we need, what then?"

"It won't do. It—"

"Brother," Anthony said, and he tried to make it an impressive word. "You owe me something. Please make an honest attempt to give our problem some thought. Whatever you know about the brain—please adapt it to our computers."

William shifted uneasily, and said, "I understand your position. I will try. I will honestly try."

VI

William *had* tried, and as Anthony had predicted, the two had been left to work together. At first, they encountered others now and then and William had tried to

use the shock value of the announcement that they were brothers since there was no use in denial. Eventually, that stopped and there came to be a purposeful non-interference. When William approached Anthony, or Anthony approached William, anyone else who might be present faded silently into the walls.

They even grew used to each other after a fashion, sometimes speaking to each other almost as though there were no resemblance at all, no childish memories in common.

Anthony made the computer-requirements plain in reasonably non-technical language and William, after long thought, explained how it seemed to him a computer might do the work, more or less, of a brain.

Anthony said, "Would that be possible?"

"I don't know," said William. "I am not eager to try. It may not work. But it may."

"We'd have to talk to Dmitri Large."

"Let's talk it over ourselves first and see what we've got. We can go to him with as reasonable a proposition as we can put together. Or else, not go to him."

Anthony hesitated. "We *both* go to him?"

William said, delicately, "You be my spokesman. There is no reason that we need be seen together."

"Thank you, William. If anything comes of this you will get full credit."

William said, "I have no worries about that. If there is anything to this, I will be the only one who can make it work, I suppose."

They thrashed it out through four or five meetings and if Anthony hadn't been kin and if there hadn't been that sticky, emotional situation between them, William would have been uncomplicatedly pleased with the younger—brother—for his quick understanding of an alien field.

There followed long conferences with Dmitri Large. Conferences with everyone, in fact. Anthony saw them through endless days and then they came to see William. Eventually, through an agonizing pregnancy, what came to be called the Mercury Computer, was born.

William then returned to New York with some relief. He did not plan to stay in New York (would he have thought that possible two months earlier?) but there was much to do at the Homological Institute.

More conferences were necessary, of course, to explain to his own laboratory group what was happening and why he had to take leave and how they were to continue their own projects without him. Then there was a much more elaborate arrival at Dallas with the essential equipment and with two young aides for what would have to be an open-ended stay.

Nor did William even look back, figuratively speaking. His own laboratory and its needs faded from his thoughts. He was thoroughly committed to his new task.

VII

It was the worst period for Anthony. The relief during William's absence had not penetrated deep and there began the nervous agony of wondering whether perhaps, hope against hope, he might not return. Might he not choose to send a deputy, someone else—anyone else? Anyone with a different face so that Anthony need not feel himself to be half of a two-bodied monster?

But it *was* William. Anthony had watched the freight-plane come silently through the air, watched it unload from a distance. But even at that distance he had recognized William.

That was that. Anthony left.

He went to see Dmitri that afternoon. "It's not necessary, Dmitri, for me to stay, surely. We've worked out the details and someone else can take over."

"No, No," said Dmitri. "The idea was yours in the first place. You must see it through. There is no point in needlessly dividing the credit."

Anthony thought: No one else will take the risk. There's still the chance of fiasco. I might have known.

He *had* known, but he said stolidly, "You understand I cannot work with William."

"But why not?" Dmitri pretended surprise. "You have been doing so well together."

"I have been straining my guts over it, Dmitri, and they won't take any more. Don't you suppose I know how it looks?"

"My good fellow! You make too much of it. Sure the men stare. They are human after all. But they'll get used to it. *I'm* used to it."

You are not, you fat liar, Anthony thought. He said. *"I'm not* used to it."

"You're not looking at it properly. Your parents were peculiar—but after all, what they did wasn't illegal, only peculiar, *only* peculiar. Anyway, it's not your fault, or William's. Neither of you is to blame."

"We carry the mark," said Anthony, making a quick curving gesture of his hand to his face.

"It's not the mark you think. I see differences. You are distinctly younger in appearance. Your hair is wavier. It's only at first glance that there is a...similarity. Come, Anthony, there will be all the time you want, all the help you need, all the equipment you can use. I'm sure it will work marvelously. Think of the satisfaction!"

Anthony weakened, of course, and agreed to at least help William set up the equipment. William, too, seemed sure it would work

marvelously. Not as frenetically as did Dmitri, but with calm certitude.

"It's only a matter of the proper connections," he said. "Though I must admit that that's quite a huge 'only'. Your end of it will be to arrange sensory impressions on an independent screen so that we can exert—well, I can't say manual control, can I?—so that we can exert intellectual control to override, if necessary."

"That can be done," said Anthony.

"Then let's get going. I'll need a week at least to arrange the connections and make sure of the instructions—"

"Programing," said Anthony.

"Well, this is your place, so I'll use your terminology. My assistants and I will *program* the Mercury Computer, but not in your fashion."

"I should hope not. We would want a homologist to set up a much more subtle program than anything a mere telemetrist could do." He did not try to hide the self-hating irony in his words.

William let the tone go and accepted the words. He said, "We'll begin simply. We'll have the robot walk."

VIII

A WEEK LATER, the robot walked in Arizona, a thousand miles away. He walked stiffly and sometimes he fell down. Sometimes he clanked his ankle against an obstruction, whirled on one foot and went off in a surprising new direction.

"He's a baby, learning to walk," said William.

Dmitri came occasionally, to learn of progress. "That's remarkable," he would say.

Anthony didn't think so. Weeks passed, then months. The robot had progressively done more and more, as the Mercury Computer had been placed, progressively, under a more and more complex programing. (William had a tendency to refer to the Mercury Computer as a brain, but Anthony wouldn't allow it.) And all the progress wasn't good enough.

"It's not good enough, William," he said, finally. He had not slept the night before.

"Isn't that strange?" said William, coolly. "I was going to say that I thought we had it about beaten."

Anthony held himself together with difficulty. The strain of working with William and of watching the robot fumble was more than he could bear. "I'm going to resign, William. The whole job. I'm sorry. It's not you—"

"But it *is* I, Anthony."

"It isn't *all* you, William. It's failure. We won't make it. You see how clumsily the robot handles himself, even though he's on Earth, only a thousand miles away, with

the signal round-trip only a tiny fraction of a second in time. On Mercury, there will be minutes of delay, minutes for which the Mercury Computer will have to allow. It's madness to think it will work."

William said, "Don't resign, Anthony. You can't resign now. I suggest we have the robot sent to Mercury. I'm convinced he's ready."

Anthony laughed loudly and insultingly. "You're crazy, William."

"I'm not. You seem to think it will be harder on Mercury, but it won't be. It's harder on Earth. This robot is designed for 1/3 Earth-normal gravity, and he's working in Arizona at full gravity. He's designed for 400° C. and he's got 30° C. He's designed for vacuum and he's working in an atmospheric soup."

"That robot can take the difference."

"The metal structure can, I suppose, but what about the Computer right here? It doesn't work well with a robot that isn't in the environment he's designed for. Look, Anthony, if you want a computer that is as complex as a brain, you have to allow for idiosyncracies. Come, let's make a deal. If you will help me push to have the robot sent to Mercury, it will be six months en route and I will take a sabbatical for that period. You will be rid of me."

"Who'll take care of the Mercury Computer?"

"By now, you understand how it

Ballantine Books

The long hiatus—as we, with enormous well-bred control, are calling it—is over. Random House now owns Ballantine Books—joy abounds. This department is back being over-worked as usual, and loving it. And may I, speaking personally, say thank you to all the many, many gentle persons who wrote, called and otherwise conveyed their love and good wishes while we were all cliff-hanging. The next episode in our soap-opera looks good. An s.f. editor must, in logic, be far-sighted enough to buy against futures. But organizing the list for presentation at the Spring Sale Conference, we were rather astounded to find how well balanced we had, in fact, been.

●●●

Two anthologies: **THE ALIEN CONDITION,** ***Ed. Stephen Goldin—all original stories; and*** **THE BEST S.F. OF THE YEAR,** ***Ed. Terry Carr—containing, not unnaturally, the best already published material.***

Two New Writers: Robert Wells, with **RIGHT-HANDED WILDERNESS;** ***and Robert E. Toomey, Jr., with*** **A WORLD OF TROUBLE.**

Two Old Masters: Lester del Rey— **GODS AND GOLEMS** ***(his own selection); and TRULLION: Alastor 2262, by Jack Vance—the start of a brand new series.***

Two Old Reliables: Edmund Cooper, with **THE CLOUD WALKER;** ***and Douglas Mason, with*** **THE END BRINGERS.**

Two Sequels: Alan Dean Foster's BLOODHYPE; *and* THE NEUTRAL STARS, *by Dan Morgan and John Kippax.*

***Two reprints: R. A. Lafferty's* ARRIVE AT EASTERWINE; *and Edgar Pangborn's* DAVY.**

***And finally: Two* STAR TREK *books by that busy fellow, David Gerrold—* THE TROUBLE WITH TRIBBLES *and* THE WORLD OF STAR TREK.**

●●●

That's balance by God. Some are already out of course. April and May will see the following:

THE CLOUD WALKER—***fun and games in a future culture fanatically punitive to technology.***

THE ALIEN CONDITION—***twelve originals on the subject of the title—a showcase for new writers.***

A WORLD OF TROUBLE—***Robert E. Toomey, Jr. Our favorite character is Pacesetter, a 12-legged behemoth, heavily fanged and clawed, who is the local transportation . . .***

DAVY—***Edgar Pangborn, who needs no introduction whatsoever.***

●●●

And we'll cover the Adult Fantasy next time round.

Blessings on you all. ***BB***

works well enough and I'll have my two men here to help you."

Anthony shook his head defiantly, "I can't take the responsibility for the Computer, and I won't take the responsibility for suggesting that the robot be sent to Mercury. It won't work."

"I'm *sure* it will."

"You can't be sure. And the responsibility is mine. I'm the one who'll bear the blame. It will be nothing to you."

Anthony later remembered this as a crucial moment. William might have let it go. Anthony would have resigned. All would have been lost.

But William said, "Nothing to me? Look, Dad had this thing about Mom. All right. I'm sorry, too. I'm sorry as anyone can be—but it's *done,* and something odd has resulted. When I speak of Dad, I mean your Dad, too, and there's lots of pairs of people who can say that: two brothers, two sisters, a brother-and-sister. And then when I say Mom, I mean *your* Mom, and there are lots of pairs who can say that, too. But I don't know any other pair, nor have I heard of any other pair, who share both Dad *and* Mom."

"I know that," said Anthony, grimly.

"Yes, but look at it from my standpoint," said William, hurriedly. "I'm a homologist. I work with gene patterns. Have you ever thought of our gene-patterns? We

share both parents which means that our gene-patterns are closer than any other pair on this planet. Our very faces show it."

"I know that, too."

"So that if this project were to work, and if you were to gain glory from it; it would be your gene-pattern that would have been proven highly useful to mankind—and that would mean my gene-pattern as well. Don't you see, Anthony? I share your parents, your face, your gene-pattern, and therefore your glory or your disgrace. It is mine almost as much as yours and if any credit or blame adheres it adheres to both of us. I've *got* to be interested in your success. I've a motive for that which no one else on Earth has—a purely selfish one, one so selfish you can be sure it's there. I'm on your side, Anthony, because you're very nearly me!"

They looked at each other for a long time. For the first time Anthony did so without noticing the face they shared.

William said, "So let us request that the robot be sent to Mercury."

And Anthony gave in. After Dmitri had approved the request—he had been waiting to, after all—Anthony spent much of the day in deep thought.

Then he sought out William and said, "Listen!"

There was a long pause which William did not break.

Anthony said again, "Listen!"

William waited patiently.

Anthony said, "There's really no need for you to leave. I'm sure you wouldn't like to have the Mercury Computer tended by anyone but yourself."

William said, "You mean *you* intend to leave?"

Anthony said, "No, I'll stay, too."

William said, "We needn't see much of each other."

All of this had been, for Anthony, like speaking with a pair of hands clenched about his windpipe. The pressure seemed to tighten now, but he managed the hardest statement of all.

"We don't have to avoid each other. We don't have to."

William smiled rather uncertainly. Anthony didn't smile at all; he left quickly.

IX

WILLIAM looked up from his book. It was at least a month since he had ceased being vaguely surprised at having Anthony enter.

He said, "Anything wrong?"

"Who can say? They're coming in for the soft-landing. Is the Mercury Computer in action?"

William was aware his brother knew the Computer status perfectly, but he said, "By tomorrow morning, Anthony."

"And there are no problems."

"None at all."

"Then we have to wait for the

soft-landing."

"Yes."

Anthony said, "Something will go wrong."

"Nothing will go wrong."

"So much work wasted."

"It's not wasted yet. It won't be."

Anthony said, "Maybe you're right." Hands deep in his pockets he drifted away, stopped at the door. "Thanks!"

"For what, Anthony?"

"For being . . . comforting."

William smiled wryly and was relieved his own emotions didn't show.

X

Virtually the entire staff of the Mercury Project was on hand for the crucial moment. Anthony, who had no tasks to perform, remained well to the rear, eyes on the monitors. The robot had been activated and there were visual messages being returned.

At least, they came out as the equivalent of visual. As yet they showed nothing but a dim glow of light which was presumably Mercury's surface.

Shadows flitted across the screen, probably irregularities on that surface. Anthony couldn't tell by eye alone, but those at the controls, who were analyzing the data by methods more subtle than could be disposed of by unaided eye, seemed calm. None of the little red lights that might have betokened emergency were lighting. Anthony was watching the key observers rather than the screen.

He should be down with William and the others at the Computer. It was going to be thrown in only when the soft-landing was made. He *should* be. He *couldn't* be.

The shadows flitted across the screen more rapidly. The robot was descending—too quickly? Surely, too quickly!

There was a last blur and a steadiness, a shift of focus in which the blur grew darker, then fainter. A sound was heard and there were perceptible seconds before Anthony realized that what he heard was, "Soft-landing achieved! Soft-landing achieved!"

The murmur arose and became an excited hum of self-congratulation until one more change took place on the screen and the sound of human words and laughter was stopped as though there had been a smash-collision against a wall of silence.

For the screen changed; changed and grew sharp. In the brilliant, brilliant sunlight, blazing through the carefully filtered screen, they could now see a boulder—clear, burning white on one side, ink-on-ink on the other. It shifted right, then back to left, as though a pair of eyes were looking left, then right. A metal hand appeared on the screen as though the robot was looking at a part of itself.

It was Anthony's voice that cried

out at last, "The Computer's been thrown in."

He heard the words as though someone else had shouted it and he raced out and down the stairs and through a corridor, leaving the babble of voices to rise behind him.

"William," he cried, as he burst into the Computer room, "it's *perfect,* it's—"

But William's hand was upraised. "Shh. Please. I don't want any sensations entering except those from the robot."

"You mean we can be heard?" whispered Anthony.

"Maybe not, but I don't know." There was another screen, a smaller one, in the room with the Mercury Computer. The scene on it was different, and changing; the robot was moving.

William said, "The robot is feeling its way. Those steps have got to be clumsy. There's a seven-minute delay between stimulus and response and that has to be allowed for."

"But already he's walking more surely than he ever did in Arizona. Don't you think so, William? Don't you think so?" Anthony was gripping William's shoulder, shaking it, eyes never leaving the screen.

William said, "I'm sure of it, Anthony."

****

THE Sun burned down in a warm contrasting world of white and black, of white Sun against black sky and white rolling ground mottled with black shadow. The bright sweet smell of the Sun on every exposed square centimeter of metal contrasting with the creeping death-of-aroma on the other side.

He lifted his hand and stared at it, counting the fingers. Hot-hot-hot—turning, putting each finger, one by one, into the shadow of the others and the hot slowly dying in a change in tactility that made him feel the clean, comfortable vacuum.

Yet not entirely vacuum. He straightened and lifted both arms over his head, stretching them out, and the sensitive spots on either wrist felt the vapors—the thin, faint touch of tin and lead rolling through the cloy of mercury.

The thicker taste rose from his feet; the silicates of each variety, marked by the clear separate-and-together touch and tang of each metal ion. He moved one foot slowly through the crunchy, caked dust, felt the changes like a soft, not-quite-random symphony.

And overall, the Sun. He looked up at it, fat and bright and hot and he heard its joy. He watched the slow rise of prominences around its rim and listened to their crackling sound; and to the other happy noises over the broad face. When he dimmed the background light, the red of the rising wisps of hydrogen showed in bursts of mellow contralto, and the deep bass of the spots amid the muted whistling of the wispy, moving faculae. and the

occasional thin keening of a flare, the ping-pong ticking of gamma rays and cosmic particles, and over all in every direction the soft, fainting, and ever-renewed sigh of the Sun's substance rising and retreating forever in a cosmic wind which reached out and bathed him in glory.

He jumped, rose slowly in the air with a freedom he had never felt, and jumped again when he landed, and ran, and jumped, and ran again, with a body that responded perfectly to this glorious world, this paradise in which he found himself.

A stranger so long and so lost—in paradise at last.

****

WILLIAM said, "It's all right."

"But what's he *doing?*" cried out Anthony.

"It's all right. The programing is working. He has tested his senses. He has been making the various visual observations. He has dimmed the Sun and studied it. He has tested for atmosphere and for the chemical nature of the soil. It all works."

"But why is he running?"

"I rather think that's his own idea. If you want to program a computer as complicated as a brain, you've got to expect it to have ideas of its own."

"Running? Jumping?" Anthony turned an anxious face to William. "He'll hurt himself. You can handle the Computer. Override. Make him stop."

And William said sharply. "No. I won't. I'll take the chance of his hurting himself. Don't you understand? He's *happy.* He was on Earth, a world he was never equipped to handle. Now he's on Mercury with a body perfectly adapted to its environment, as perfectly adapted as a hundred specialized scientists could make it. It's paradise for him; let him enjoy it."

"Enjoy? He's a robot."

"I'm not talking about the robot. I'm talking about the brain—the *brain—here.*" He pointed.

The Mercury Computer, enclosed in glass, carefully and delicately wired, its integrity most subtly preserved, breathed and lived.

"It's Randall who's in paradise," said William. "He's found the world for whose sake he autistically fled this one. He has a world his new body fits perfectly in exchange for the world his old body did not fit at all."

Anthony watched the screen in wonder. "He seems to be quieting."

"Of course," said William, "and he'll do his job all the better for his joy."

Anthony smiled and said, "We've done it, then, you and I? Shall we join the rest and let them fawn on us, William?"

William said, "Together?"

And Anthony linked arms. "Together, brother!" •

GUEST EDITORIAL

FRED POHL

So *IF* has a new editor . . .

It isn't the first time. *If* hasn't yet hit a quarter-century of history, but in its span *If* has had, I think, more editors than any other science-fiction magazine in the world: Ejler Jakobsson, and Horace Gold, and Damon Knight and five or six others. I edited it myself for, let's see, about nine years, which may be the all-time record for hanging on to this editor-devouring spot.

An editor is a middleman. He stands between the publisher and the writer; between the writer and the reader; between the artist and the printer; he devotes his life to trying to make these irreconcilable pairs somehow play nicely together. It isn't easy. Every day he has to fight the same fight one more time, to convince the publisher that writers have to have enough money to live on, and the writers that publishers are entitled to make a profit. Three-quarters of his time is spent on reconciling differences, or on pesty little details (circulation promotion; publicity; fitting together issues; assigning art; checking engravings; etc., etc.) that most readers have never heard of. With what's left he tries to find and print masterpieces.

How do you go about doing that?

There are as many ways as there are editors, I suppose:

The idealist. He has in his mind a perfect vision of the optimum sf magazine, and sets about finding writers to produce the stories to make it real. John Campbell was that kind of editor. He paid no attention to what anyone else was doing, cared nothing for "big names"; he just decided what kind of sf stories could be written that readers would like to read and bent a whole generation of newcomers to his will—in the course of which he made them into the top professionals in the field. This is hard work and, of course, it only succeeds if the editor's perfect vision does in fact correspond to what an audience wants. When the ideal of the editor is something that appeals only to him, even a success of this kind is a failure.

The imitator. He studies what everyone else is doing and carefully manufactures a package indistinguishable from everyone else's. There have been a lot of these

editors in science fiction. In the boom periods (the late thirties, for instance, or the mid-fifties), when everyone with the price of a printing job seemed to be hitting the stands with a couple of sf titles, there were dozens of copies of copies, synthesized out of the same ingredients as *Astounding* and *If.* These didn't work very well; nearly all of them folded at the first cold draft of reader resistance.

The eclectic. He takes what he can from wherever he can find useful things. He does the best he can.

There have been good editors of all these kinds. The best editors have been all of them, as needed.

The best editors, in fact, change their image of what they want pretty frequently, because science fiction itself changes. It grows and develops; it opens new territories and explores them. The stories that are being published this month, in 1974, couldn't have been published in 1964 or 1954—they probably couldn't have been written then. Writers learn from each other. Every time a new writer comes along with some new idea, some fresh way of looking at the world, some previously neglected approach to the potential of the future, he adds to the resources of all of us.

I have enjoyed reading science fiction for a long time, I've enjoyed numberless stories. Even more, I've enjoyed watching the field grow. And the best place to watch it is in a magazine.

I say this with no personal axe to grind. I am not editing sf magazines any more, and I see no reason why I ever would. But if they ever stopped being published—no matter how many books, films and television programs took their place—I would be very unhappy indeed. For one thing, books simply take too long to happen. If a writer thinks of a fine new idea today—say, in June of 1974—and decides to write it as a novel, it is June of 1975 before it is finished, and June of 1976 before it is published—and 1977 before it begins to fertilize new ideas in other writers, enriching the field. Magazines have shorter cycles; the short story or novelette gets written in a few weeks or so, gets into print by the end of the year, and is part of the common heritage before twelve months are gone.

And there is another reason why I would hate to see the day when sf magazines were no more: because they were, are and will be for the foreseeable future the very best place for new writers to display their wares. For half a dozen years or more, when I was editing *If,* I made it a policy to publish at least one story in every issue by a writer who had never sold a science-fiction story before. Other magazines were less formally committed to finding new talent, but all of them, every one of them that amounted to anything in all the history of science fiction, in one way or another was

continually searching for fresh writers with fresh things to say.

How does the fresh talent get discovered?

There's only one way. Week after week, a magazine like *If* gets something close to a hundred manuscript-sized envelopes from unknown writers all over the country, in fact all over the world. They are "the slush pile"—a rather unattractive name, although often enough richly deserved. But among the slush from time to time one finds nuggets of gold: some person, out in Baton Rouge or Buffalo or Berkeley, has read a lot of science fiction and decided he can write it as well as some of what he sees in print. About one time in a thousand he (or she) is right—and a new professional writer is born.

But without the science fiction magazines, where will that novice go? Probably he will go nowhere. The stories will stay in his desk drawer, if he writes them at all. The mood will pass. He will reconcile himself to a career in real estate or laundromat servicing . . . and we will all lose, perhaps, another Heinlein or E. E. Smith.

I MUST admit there's a little bit of jealousy in my heart as I write this. Editing a science-fiction magazine is not only work, it is a great deal of fun—in some ways more so than editing books, which is what I am now doing for Bantam.

Bantam is fun too, in a different way. Many of the writers I am publishing at Bantam are the same writers I was happy to publish in *Galaxy* and *If*. Mack Reynolds was a standby in the magazines, and I have him committed to one or two Bantam Books titles a year. I know he'll do well; we took a mail poll of you readers one year, and to everyone's astonishment, including Mack's, the most popular author we published was Mack Reynolds.

Doris Piserchia (*Star Rider*), Frank Herbert (*Helstrom's Hive*), John Brunner (*The Web of Everywhere*), James Blish (the *Star Trek* adaptations)—they all were contributors to the magazines. So was Samual R. Delany, whose immense and trail-blazing novel *Dhalgren* I'll be publishing under the Bantam imprint a few months from now. I don't think *Dhalgren* could have been published in a magazine, if only because of its size—it is about five times as long as an average issue of a magazine. And I would not have missed the experience of working with Delany on this, his biggest and most innovative work in a distinguished career.

BUT STILL—

There is that little spot of jealousy. I think with some nostalgia of those 4,000 slushpile manuscripts each year, and the good stories that from time to time popped out of the pile . . .

. . . of working with writers, try-

ing to cajole them into the kinds of stories the readers want . . .

. . . of opening the readers' mail, seeing what has been successful and what has fallen on its face; finding in it illuminating comments, useful suggestions—and now and then a poison-pen blast...

. . . of suffering finger cramps from correcting the spelling and punctuation of some very fine writers—and of summoning up the strength of will to refrain from making any change at all in some others . . .

. . . of meeting those endlessly recurring deadlines (three of them for each issue), ticking off the weeks remorselessly . . .

. . . of going to conventions, meeting fans, hearing what they say, accepting a bit of praise or an award when it comes, welding the armor-plate smile on the lips when it goes to someone else . . .

. . . reading the fanzines, where the most uncensored dialogues outside of an analyst's couch take place—often wincing, sometimes agreeing, occasionally rejoicing . . .

. . . lurking by the racks at the corner newsstand, studying the cash customers as they judiciously scowl over the latest issue, pondering whether to invest in it . . .

. . . thumbing through the competition—smiling when you see the potboiler you bounced six months ago featured on their cover—the sinking feeling when you see what looks to be, dammit, a first-rate story by an author you thought you had sewed up . . .

. . . poring over the sales figures, trying to guess at the answers to the eternal questions: this drop in sales, was it because of the cover? the time of year? some external event like Watergate or a war distracting people's attention from the magazine? This 8,000-copy jump, was *that* the cover? hangover from a particularly good story in the issue before? a celebrated name on the table of contents? . . . or none of the above . . .

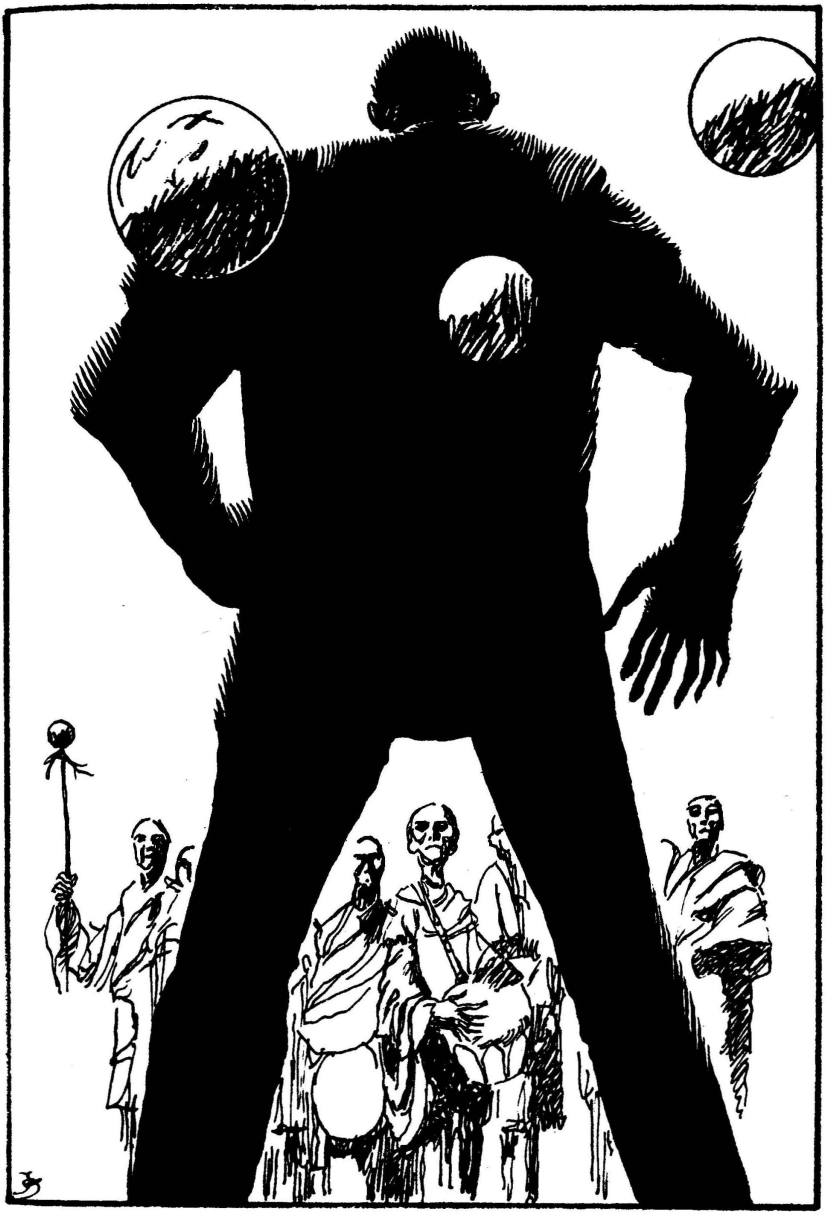
. . . battling with the production people to get the magazine looking right, with the bookkeeping people to get the writers paid promptly, with the circulation people to get copies out in places where people will buy them . . .

. . . all those things. And so many more. What a lot of work! Who needs it?

. . . well, I can think of some who like it very much indeed.

So I salute you, Jim Baen, newest incumbent. The *If* you publish won't be the same magazine it was when Damon, Horace, Jake or I edited it. It will be something new and different, and it will succeed not as an imitation of some other time, but on its own. I look forward to reading the exciting issues of the next months of *If* . . . and I wish it, and its new editor, all the best!

—Frederik Pohl •



HOUSE DIVIDED

Is there any crueler kindness
than to pity one's enemy?

ROBERT SILVERBERG

IN THE language of the tribe closest to the Terran settlement the planet's name was Hranth, which meant, expectably enough, "The World." Since the planet had no name of Terran giving other than Gamma Trianguli Australis VII, which was cumbersome in the extreme, Terran Commander Lenoir decided that the world would be known to the records as Hranth—at least conditionally.

It was a fairly promising planet, Martin Lenoir thought. The civilian colonists seemed to take to it well. It was Earthlike to six places; it had acceptable gravity, breathable air, drinkable water. The chemical constitution of its soil was such that Terran food-plants could grow there. The local plants and animals were metabolically assimilable in Terran stomachs, too.

Hranth was inhabited by humanoids in a primitive pretechnological state. The local tribe had raised no objections when the Terran colonizing force of five hundred had landed. So long as the Terrans kept their settlement ten or fifteen miles away from the borders of their village the natives did not care what happened.

After all, the old chief had explained, they did not own the entire planet. Merely their own tribal area, carved out centuries before. They had no interest in what became of land belonging to no one, or even to other tribes. The Terrans were free to take what they wanted.

Work had proceeded smoothly during the initial ten days of the colony's existence. Lenoir was an experienced leader and his cadre of Colonial Corps men worked hard alongside the greenhorn civilians to build the colony. They had brought plenty of prefab dwellings, of course, but these were only tempo-

rary; eventually the forest of sturdy flaky-barked trees nearby would be converted into homes for the Terran settlers.

By that time, though, Lenoir and his men would have withdrawn from the operation, leaving the settlers on their own and moving on to act as midwives and godfathers to some other Terran colony on some other planet.

One of the most important jobs was learning to communicate with the natives. The O'Neill Translator was a limited device at best, capable of rendering generalities in an awkward way but utterly unable to handle the delicacies of a diplomatic relationship. For that reason, two of the civilian women and one of Lenoir's staff linguists were at work building up a working vocabulary of Hranth words.

Since everything was going along so well it came as a considerable jolt to Lenoir when, one morning, an alien from the nearby village showed up, speaking a language no one had ever heard before.

LENOIR had been busy, sketching out plans for an irrigation system. This section of Hranth was rather on the dry side. He was in the midst of the job when Sergeant Becker of Linguistics rapped on the beam of his door and entered.

"Well? What is it, Sergeant?"

"We have a visitor, sir. Alien. From the village. Can't understand a word he's saying."

Lenoir frowned and put down his stylo. He was a big man, heavy-set, bull-voiced, with creased leathery skin. He swivelled slowly around and stared at the pale, slim linguistics specialist. "You can't understand him?"

"Not a word. It's an entirely different language. We're setting up the O'Neill now, but we thought you'd like to hear the interview."

"Yes," Lenoir said thoughtfully. "I guess I do want to hear this."

At the moment the colony consisted of a ring of prefab domes arranged in a loose open circle around a clearing. The permanent settlers had put those up under the direction of Lenoir's staff. At the far end of the circle, temporary tents had been erected. Lenoir crossed from his tent to the one in which the linguistics interviews were being held.

He found the civilian linguists bustling around in the process of setting up the complex affair that was the O'Neill Translator, while a white-thatched little alien watched them mildly and with small show of interest. The women glanced up as Lenoir entered, followed closely by Lieutenant Becker.

"How long has the alien been here?" Lenoir asked.

Mary Delacorte said, "He came about fifteen minutes ago. We thought he was the same one who had been here yesterday—it's so hard to tell them apart, you know, Commander," she added with a

shrug of her plump shoulders.

"Yes," Grace Walton said. Grace was a rugged-looking girl in her early thirties; good colonial stock. "We couldn't tell this one from any of the others until he started talking. The language didn't even faintly resemble the one we've been studying."

"Are you sure he isn't playing some kind of joke on you?"

"I doubt that," Becker put in. "He seemed so damned anxious to communicate. As if he would explode if he didn't tell us what he came here to let us know."

Almost as if on cue, the alien began to speak. Lenoir looked closely at the creature. He was humanoid, and on the scrawny side—five feet tall, perhaps as much as five feet two. His skin was dark red in color, and it hung bagging out in loose leathery folds at his joints and under his chin. The alien's arms appeared to dangle almost to his knees, and they terminated in seven bony four-jointed fingers that tangled nervously with each other while he spoke. He wore only a coarse, ragged loincloth fashioned from some gray woven material.

Frowning, Lenoir listened with care to the stream of alien syllables that came from the being's thin lips. The Commander was not a trained linguist, and since he never stayed on a planet of colonization more than two or three months he did not trouble to weigh his mind down with the language; there were plenty of specialists who could take care of that, leaving him free to perform more fitting tasks on the organizational level.

But he *had* spent a good deal of time listening to the speech of the aliens on Hranth, and he had to admit that whatever this one was saying, he was saying it in an entirely different tongue.

"You notice the difference, sir?" Becker said. "The Hranth language we've been studying is liquid and vowel-rich. What this fellow's saying is a mass of rough consonants."

Lenoir nodded brusquely. "Hook up the O'Neill. Let's find out what's going on."

The O'Neill Translator was a formidable piece of hardware that took up a good chunk of the tent area, much of the space being devoted to the cryostat section that kept its computer elements at operating temperature. Becker checked the gauges along the control panel and nodded finally; the Translator had reached its functional temperature.

Lenoir picked up the microphone and said slowly, in English, "I am the Earthman Commander. Tell us who you are."

Since the machine had no samples of the alien's language to operate with, it merely reproduced Lenoir's words as they had been spoken. But the sound was enough to touch off another flood of alien words, which the Translator's pick-

up grids recorded and passed along to the elaborate cryotronic computer that was the central element of the O'Neill Translator.

Rapidly the words were broken down, analyzed phonemically, sorted, classified, arranged. They were compared with roughly analogous specimens from a hundred other languages; they were distributed along a theoretical mathematically-weighed meaning-scale. Then they were translated by crude analog into English. The entire operation took no more than a few seconds.

The Translator said, "I am (proper name) Dulizd of the (tribal-name) Trazzidovh."

"Where is your village?" Lenoir asked.

The O'Neill rendered his question quickly into rasping coarse alien syllables and the alien responded; after a brief time-lag the machine said, "My village is beyond the hill, at the edge of the great plain."

"How can that be?" Becker whispered, keeping his voice below the range of the translator's audibility-threshold. "That's the Hranth village at the edge of the plain!"

Lenoir asked for a more specific location; the alien was unable to give one, or at least the Translator could not render it. Conversing by O'Neill was a slow and tortuous process, and very frequently an inaccurate one—though a feedback circuit enabled the machine to correct earlier misinterpretations as further conversation increased its understanding of the language.

Lenoir found himself starting to sweat as the questioning went on. He persevered.

And, after an hour of dogged plugging, a strange and disturbing story began to take form.

THE village at the edge of the great plain, the alien told them, had been built long ago—nearly two thousand years ago. Lenoir was willing to accept the figure as a reasonable one. Time moved slowly on this world of dry fields and mudflat houses, and there was no reason why a village could not endure for year after static year while millenia slipped by.

The Hranth had built the village and it had been their home. Another tribe, the Trazzidovh, had lived several hundred miles to the west: a semi-nomadic warrior tribe, fierce and self-reliant, ethnically closely related to the placid mud-dwelling Hranth but culturally quite different.

The two tribes had maintained a hazy kind of relationship for several centuries. Communications were poor on the planet, and often a decade or more might go by without a visit between the tribes. Still, for many years, the Hranth had been suggesting that their sturdier cousins should send a contingent of warriors to live in the Hranth village and serve as protectors. The Hranth had few

enemies, but those few were annoying ones, and the unwarlike Hranth did not enjoy combat or even the thought of it.

The Trazzidovh *did*—but the Trazzidovh were not interested in making a journey of three or four hundred miles eastward to the Hranth village. They were content to remain where they were. And so matters rested, for many hundreds of years.

Until the day when the Trazzidovh took on an enemy too big for them to handle: the well-organized and ferocious Lurrnzil, a large tribe ranging the western mountains, who responded to a Trazzidovh attack by virtually annihilating them.

Only two hundred of the tribe survived the fierce conflict. Now, decimated, too weak to endure the hazards of life in the open plains of the west, the Trazzidovh remembered the many-times-repeated plea of their Hranth cousins. The Hranth once again extended an invitation; it would be acceptable for the Trazzidovh remnant to take refuge in the village of the Hranth.

Wearily the beaten Trazzidovh made the long trek eastward to settle in the land of the Hranth. Arriving, they were surprised to find their cousins under attack by local enemies; gathering their shattered forces, they drove the attackers off and were welcomed warmly by the Hranth.

But the warmth was short-lived. The Hranth, now that their enemies had been driven off, felt no further need for the newcomers, and refused to give them the choice land they had been promised. Too tired to return to their homeland, the Trazzidovh reluctantly accepted a barren strip near a ravine at the extreme western edge of the Hranth domain. Bitterly, they cursed the cousins who had invited them to seek refuge only with the hidden intention of using them as catspaws.

Matters remained in a state of stasis, and the position continued even up to the arrival of the Earthmen, according to Dulizd of the Trazzidovh. The Hranth numbered nearly 5000; the Trazzidovh still had not increased their original 200 even after the passage of three centuries.

They lived on, a small, proud minority in the midst of the Hranth. They clung to their own language and way of life, though they had also learned the Hranth tongue so that communication between the tribes would be possible. The Hranth had never bothered to study the Trazzidovh language; they regarded the tribe-fragment as too thoroughly inferior to trouble with.

The Hranth disliked the Trazzidovh, who were aloof, warlike people, and kept them in poverty lest they breed and grow to outnumber the milder but numerically superior Hranth. Yet the tribes lived together in identical mud huts, with no perceptible boundary

between the Hranth district and that of the Trazzidovh, in a state of perpetual and bloodless civil war.

The Hranth village, Lenoir thought when the alien had finished his recitation, was a house divided. The situation suddenly made the business of settling on this planet a great deal more complicated.

By THE time the tale was told, the O'Neill translator had acquired a fairly good grasp of the new language. Communication between the Earthmen and their visitor was reasonably fluent by now.

Lenoir said, "So the Hranth chief granted us permission to settle in the neighborhood without even informing the Trazzidovh of our arrival?"

"That is right. Last night we accidentally learned that beings from the stars had arrived on the world." (The Trazzidovh word for *world*, interestingly enough, was *hranth*. Evidently there had been some borrowing from the Hranth language, in one direction and perhaps both, Lenoir thought.)

He eyed the scrawny but somehow dignified old alien and said, "Well? Do the Trazzidovh object to our presence on this world?"

"The Trazzidovh are too few to object to anyone's presence anywhere," returned the alien simply. "I have come here for a different reason. I wish to offer the services of my people."

"Services?"

"Yes. We will help you build your homes, plough your fields, bring you water and animals. In return you can give us food, medicine for our sick ones, teach us your ways of farming and living. We wish to learn."

Lenoir darted a glance at Becker, who did not react. *It's an interesting proposition,* the Terran commander thought. *They want to work for us. That's a lot better than the attitude of the Hranth, who don't seem to care a damn what we do so long as we leave them alone.*

Aloud he said, "Very well. You can tell your people that any of them who want to work for us can come here tomorrow morning."

The alien jacknifed into a sinuous genuflection. "I give thanks."

"And," Lenoir said, "you can pass the word along to your neighbors the Hranth, too. We can use all the help we can get."

Dulizd of the Trazzidovh straightened up abruptly and stared at the Earthman with what seemed to be a reproachful gaze. He said, "I do not think the Hranth will be interested in working for you."

Lenoir shrugged. "They can do as they please. We'll manage without them."

The alien left shortly afterward. Lenoir said to the members of the linguistics team, "Suppose you type out a transcript of this interview and send it across to me right away."

"Yes, sir," Becker said. "I'll get on it at once."

"And I suggest you de-emphasize the study of the Hranth language and start learning Trazzidovh. I have a feeling we'll be doing a lot more business with them than with the Hranth."

Lenoir ducked out of the tent and made his way across the clearing to his own headquarters. The sun, G-type and big, was high overhead now and cutting loose at full strength; even in his light tropics uniform, Lenoir was sweating. He had little enough fat on his 230-pound frame as it was, but he expected that whatever suet there was would be steamed off him before he completed the job of setting up the Terran colony on this world.

A job which had suddenly become more appealing, he thought, if at the same time more difficult. Lenoir liked the little alien who had come to the camp today. He appreciated the kind of battler who could cling to life no matter how many times he got clubbed across the eyebrows—and the plucky Trazzidovh, beaten and decimated and tricked and yet still able to approach visitors from space without fear and ask for a job, were the sort of people he could respect.

Of course, he hadn't heard the other side of the story yet. The Hranth kept to themselves and had little to do with the newly-arrived Earthmen, but perhaps their version of how the Trazzidovh had come to share their village would be substantially different.

IT WAS.

Three Hranth showed up at the Terran camp late that afternoon, and they had plenty they wanted to say.

The hot young sun had started to drop toward the horizon, and the largest of the three pale moons of Hranth was dimly visible above, when the delegation arrived.

There was no need for the ponderous assistance of the O'Neill translator this time. Mary Delacorte of the linguistics team had picked up an adequate working knowledge of the Hranth tongue with almost frightening speed, and she served as interpreter. The Hranth trio stood patiently before Lenoir's desk, not speaking, merely staring at him placidly like three unusual trees rooted to the floor.

Finally Lenoir said, "Well? Why have you come to see me?"

Through the medium of Mary Delacorte the tallest of the trio responded, "We have learned that you wish to hire the Trazzidovh."

"That's right. I told Dulizd to invite your people to work for us too, if you want to. Building a colony is a big job. We can use help."

The alien's lips curled unhappily. "We do not want to work for strangers. We are a free people."

"Sure you are," Lenoir agreed. "Didn't Dulizd make it clear that

we'd pay? We don't mean to make you slaves!"

The alien bent his arms back, extending his elbows in what Lenoir had learned was the equivalent of a negative shake of the head. "The question of pay does not enter into it. To work for another tribe is to become a slave. The Trazzidovh are accustomed to slavery, but we of the Hranth are a free people."

"Hold it," Lenoir objected. "Why do you say the Trazzidovh are accustomed to slavery?"

"They have been slaves for centuries. Ever since they came creeping to us, shattered, desperately seeking refuge."

"They said you *invited* them to come."

"This is the lie they tell. We allowed them to come to us, but we never wanted them. They live among us, but they are an inferior people, worthy only of eating refuse and living in the ravines."

Lenoir folded his arms. "Perhaps this is so, perhaps not. But you still haven't answered my first question: why have you come here today?"

"To ask you not to employ the Trazzidovh."

"Why? What business is it of yours?"

"They might develop Earthman ways. They cannot be trusted to live like civilized beings. You might give them weapons to destroy us."

Passing smilingly over the implications of the accusation, Lenoir said, "We're not here to give weapons to anybody. We just want to build a colony."

"Do not build it with the aid of the Trazzidovh," came the stubborn reply.

"I don't plan to get mixed up in a private feud," Lenoir said. "But right now I don't see any reason why we *shouldn't* hire them, and so we will."

"We will prevent it."

Lenoir didn't like the tone of that. "How will you—ah—prevent it?"

"We will pray to the Moon-God that your colony is a failure," said the Hranth spokesman haughtily. "You have been warned. Now we shall go."

So they'll pray to the Moon-God, Lenoir thought when the alien delegation had made its dignified exit. *Well, well, well. I hope we don't all wither up and die.*

To Mary Delacorte he said, "Thanks for the services, honey. Be a good girl and have a transcript of the conversation whipped up for my records, will you?"

"Right away, Commander."

He smiled at her and stepped to the front door. Men in shorts and deep coats of tan were busily hammering away, building the colony. He had seen this so many times before, on a dozen worlds scattered through the galaxy, as Man staked his claim further and further out from the mother world.

The Hranth, he thought, were going to pray to their Moon-God. If

that were the worst problem this colony had to face, everything was going to turn out all right.

He wondered briefly if it were really wise to get involved in native frictions. Probably not; but it was handy to have a labor force available, and furthermore he suspected that the Trazzidovh had been getting a raw deal. Perhaps things could be altered a little in the next few months. After all, the settlers were going to spend the rest of their lives living next door to the aliens.

NOT MUCH after dawn the next morning Lenoir woke to discover that the compound was bulging with aliens. He dressed hurriedly and went out to investigate.

The linguistics team was there already. Lieutenant Becker said sleepily, "They got here half an hour ago. Must have started out in the middle of the night. We counted a hundred sixty of them."

"All Trazzidovh?"

Becker nodded. "All of them jabbering away in their language and Hranth, interchangeably. I've been talking to them in Hranth, and they say they all want to work. The whole tribe's here except for the babies, the very old, and three or four girls who stayed behind to take care of them."

Lenoir proceeded to put the aliens to work. He relayed his orders to them via Mary Delacorte and Becker, who addressed them in Hranth after first explaining that the Earthmen had not yet had time to learn the Trazzidovh language.

The Trazzidovh worked well. They were eager people, go-getters, people with drive and push and ingenuity. By the end of the first day, seeing them working side-by-side with the colonists, Lenoir's liking for them had ripened into a genuine admiration.

They were good people to work with—cooperative, attentive, energetic. They had all the best qualities of Terrans—they were, perhaps, the most Earthlike alien race Lenoir had ever encountered. They formed a sharp contrast with the Hranth.

How sharp a contrast it was became apparent during the next several weeks. Intrigued by the interesting tribal relationship, Lenoir sent a team of his anthropologists to make detailed investigations of the single village inhabited by two tribes.

They reported that the Hranth were a lazy people, content to accept the flow of events as they were, without rising to change the course of their lives. When the drought came, they suffered; when the storms came, they suffered. In both cases they prayed endlessly, calling on some mystic deity dwelling simultaneously in each of the three moons to help them.

The Trazzidovh, on the other hand, had built irrigation canals and contoured farms—but the land given them by their hostile cousins

was so infertile that even with all their ingenuity they had not been able to increase their numbers. Two hundred of them had fled across the plains, centuries before, and two hundred they still numbered.

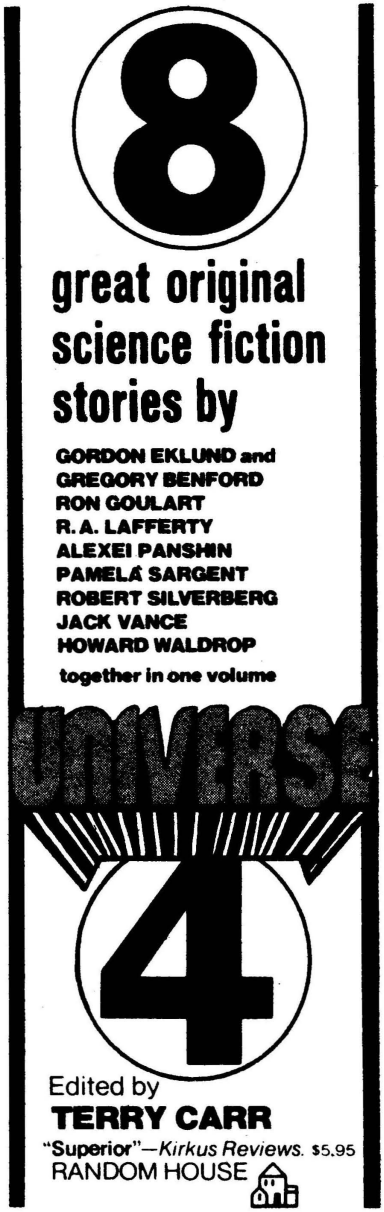
The two tribes lived together in a state of chilly aloofness. The Hranth regarded their neighbors as vastly inferior; the Trazzidovh, suffering silently, privately had contempt for their flabby-willed cousins, but because they were outnumbered twenty-five to one they accepted their lot stoically—until they learned of the Earthmen and saw in them a chance to climb upward once again.

Day after day Lenoir studied the reports. The Hranth had begun a marathon religious dance. Round the clock they beat drums and chanted and prayed for the swift doom of the Earthmen but otherwise made no attempt to interfere with the activities of the growing colony.

The Hranth danced and prayed. The Trazzidovh, having already prayed and finished praying, were taking action. Day after day the colony expanded. The Earthmen were picking up smatterings of the Trazzidovh language.

And the Trazzidovh were learning English.

Already bilingual, having been forced by circumstance to learn Hranth and being impelled by pride to retain their own language



as well, the Trazzidovh found little difficulty in learning yet another language.

They fattened and grew prosperous, and the Hranth continued to pray. The one-time ragpickers, the hapless refugees of the barren ravine, were thriving, thanks to their association with the Earthmen.

And still the Moon-God stayed his hand. Lenoir often wondered how much strain their faith in the Moon-God was going to take.

IN TIME Lenoir left the planet they had called Hranth, and moved on, leaving behind a fairly well established young colony. The schedule called for Lenoir and his men to pick up another group of colonists and settle them on the fourth planet of Gamma Crucis. After that there were other jobs to do and others beyond those.

Eleven years slipped by, and Lenoir found himself within five light-years of the Gamma Trianguli Australis system, where once he had helped to plant a world. He was on his way back to Earth for his once-in-a-decade vacation; just out of curiosity he stopped off at Gamma Trianguli Australis VII, labeled *Hranth* on his star-charts.

The colonial military authority gave him landing coordinates and he put his small ship down at the spaceport. He was met by several members of the original colonial group, who welcomed him enthusiastically and conveyed him to town.

And town it was. Lenoir saw a small city, of perhaps ten thousand souls, neatly laid out in a long strip. Powerlines glinted in the sunlight.

"You've built this place up well," Lenoir said.

"We've been busy, Commander," said David Revere, who had been a skinny teenager eleven years before and who now held a high post on the colonial council. Lenoir recognized other faces—Mary Delacorte, Grace Walton, Klaus Marshall, others.

Mary said to him, "Commander, there's someone here we want you to meet."

Lenoir turned to find himself facing an alien—a familiar-looking one. He was elderly, but well fed and sleek-looking, and he wore Earth-type clothing.

"Hello, Commander," the alien said in clear English. "I'm Tom Dulizd."

Lenoir groped in his memory. There had been so many worlds, so many names to remember—

The alien said, "Remember me at all? I was the first Trazzidovh to visit you, and you spoke to me with the translating machine."

Lenoir remembered. "But you were a bony little emaciated fellow then! And what's this *Tom* business?"

The alien smiled cheerfully. "We all call ourselves by Earthman names now. It's simpler that way."

Lenoir felt a vast sense of uneasiness. He said to Mary Delacorte, "It's coming back to me now. Eleven years, you know—it's hard to sort out everything that happened on every planet. But I recall that there were two tribes of aliens living in a single village—"

She nodded. "That's right. And Tom's tribe came to work for us. We taught them our ways. Most of the Trazzidovh live right here in the city. Tom runs a food shop."

Lenoir shook his head slowly. "Incredible! Total assimilation so soon? And what about the other tribe—the—the Hranth?"

Dulizd chuckled. "They've assimilated too—most of them. I employ two of them as my assistants in the shop. You know them, Mary—Mark and John."

Lenoir blinked. "I thought they were going to dance forever. The Moon-God was going to smite the colony, they said."

"Oh, they danced a while," Dulizd told him. "Most of them gave up after six months or so, when they saw us getting rich. They began to figure out that maybe the Moon-God wasn't going to help them, so they ought to see if the Earthmen had any jobs for them."

"And did they?"

"Sure. Oh—" Dulizd suddenly whipped out a large pocket-watch and stared at it. The sight of the big gold watch in those seven bony alien fingers struck Lenoir as grotesque, but he made no comment.

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He was too dazed by the consequences of the movement he had begun so long before.

Dulizd said, "Will you come with me to my store? I promise you a very interesting sight."

They drove—the settlers had begun manufacturing vehicles by now—down well-paved streets into a bustling business district. Dulizd parked outside a shining neon-fronted store and pointed down the street.

"Here they come now," he said. "The diehards."

Lenoir followed the pointing arm. The sound of drums and shaken gourds reached him—and, squinting, he could make out a startling sight. A dozen or so withered old aliens in tattered robes were advancing through the busy streets, beating drums, dancing, singing.

"What are they?" Lenoir asked.

Dulizd smiled expansively. "The last of the Old Guard. The eleven unassimilated Hranth."

"You mean the moon-dance is still going on?" Lenoir asked incredulously.

"Yes. After eleven years," said Dulizd. "They haven't given up praying for our destruction. But the rest of the Hranth won't have anything to do with them—so they come here every day and I give them food."

"You *what?*"

"Of course," said the Trazzidovh in a bland tone. "I believe in preserving the ancient institutions, you see. These old men have rationalized my daily gift into some kind of peace-offering I make to them, or else they'd never accept it."

Lenoir moistened his lips and looked around, at the handsome colony, at the busy streets, at the prosperous-looking alien next to him, at the weird procession of cursing ancients that was now only a block away.

All this in eleven years! Lenoir smiled. The coming of the Terrans had upset a state of affairs that had existed for centuries, jolting the Hranth out of their complacency and providing the Trazzidovh with the opportunity they deserved. The house was no longer divided—except for the eleven bony anachronisms advancing up the streets, and they would soon be only memories.

Dulizd opened the shop-door; Lenoir saw two younger aliens within, also in Terran-style clothes. Dulizd said, "The dinosaurs are coming! Get the food ready for them." He chuckled and remarked, to Lenoir, "You know, Commander, after all this time those old boys are still sticking to the story that they never invited our ancestors to come fight for them and so weren't obliged to give them a decent place to live when they did come. And yet I feed them at my own expense every day." He smiled broadly and said, "It's lucky for them that I'm not a vindictive man." •

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(Part I of II)

BERSERKER'S PLANET

For half a millennium the disembodied killer-machine had been haunted by the ghost of one man!

FRED SABERHAGEN

I

THE dead man's voice was coming live and clear over ship's

radio into the *Orion's* lounge, and the six people gathered there, the only people alive within several hundred light years, were listening attentively for the moment, some of them only because Oscar Schoenberg, who owned *Orion* and was driving her on this trip, had indicated that *he* wanted to listen. Carlos Suomi, who was ready to stand up to Schoenberg and expected to have a serious argument with him one of these days, was in this instance in perfect agreement with him. Athena Poulson, the independent one of the three women, had made no objection; Celeste Servetus, perhaps the least independent, had made a few but they meant nothing. Gustavus De La Torre and Barbara Hurtado had never, in Suomi's experience, objected to any decision made by Schoenberg.

The dead man's voice to which they listened was not recorded, only mummified by the approximately five hundred years of spacetime that stretched between Hunters' system, where the radio signal had been generated, and *Orion's* present position in intragalactic space about eleven hundred light years (or five and a half weeks by ship) from Earth. It was the voice of Johann Karlsen, who about five hundred standard years ago had led a battle fleet to Hunters' system to skirmish there with a berserker fleet and drive them off. That was some time after he had smashed the main berserker power and permanently crippled their offensive capabilities at the dark nebula called the Stone Place.

Most of the bulkhead space in the lounge was occupied by viewscreens, and then, as now, they were adjusted for the purpose, the screens brought in the stars with awesome realism. Sumoi was looking in the proper direction on the screen, but from this distance of five hundred light years it was barely possible without using telescopic magnification to pick out Hunters' sun, let alone to see the comparatively minor flares of the space battle Karlsen had been fighting when he spoke the words now coming into the space yacht's lounge for Schoenberg to brood over and Suomi to record. Briefly the two men looked somewhat alike, though Suomi was smaller, probably much younger, and had a rather boyish face.

"How can you be sure that's Karlsen's voice?" Gus De La Torre, a lean and dark and somehow dangerous-looking man, asked now. He and Schoenberg were sitting in soft massive chairs facing each other across the small diameters of the lounge. The other four had positioned their similar chairs so that the group made an approximate circle.

"I've heard it before. This same sequence." Schoenberg's voice was rather soft for such a big, tough-

looking man, but it was as decisive as usual. His gaze, like Suomi's, was on the viewscreen, probing out among the stars as he listened intently to Karlsen. "On my last trip to Hunters'," Schoenberg went on softly, "about fifteen standard years ago, I stopped in this region—fifteen lights closer-in, of course—and managed to find this same signal. I listened to these same words and recorded some of them, just as Carlos is doing now." He nodded in Suomi's direction.

Karlsen broke a crackling radio silence to say: "Check the lands on that hatch if it won't seal—should I have to tell you that?" The voice was biting, and there was something unforgettable about it even when the words it uttered were only peevish scraps of jargon indistinguishable from those spoken by the commander of any other difficult and dangerous operation.

"Listen to him," Schoenberg said. "If that's not Karlsen, who could it be? Anyway, when I got back to Earth after the last trip I checked what I had recorded against historians' records made on his flagship, and confirmed it was the same sequence."

De La Torre made a playful tut-tutting sound. "Oscar, did nobody ask you how you came by your recording? You weren't supposed to be out in this region of space then, were you, any more than we are now?"

"Pah. Nobody pays that much attention. Interstellar Authority certainly doesn't."

Suomi had the impression that Schoenberg and De La Torre had not known each other very long or very well, but had met in some business connection and had fallen in together because of a common interest in hunting, something that few people now shared. Few people on Earth, at least, which was the home planet of everyone aboard the ship.

Karlsen said: "This is the High Commander speaking. Ring three uncover. Boarding parties, start your action sequence."

"Signal hasn't decayed much since I heard it last," Schoenberg mused. "The next fifteen lights toward Hunters' must be clean." Without moving from his chair he dialed a three-dimensional holographic astrogation chart into existence and with his lightwriter deftly added a symbol to it. The degree of clean emptiness of the space between them and their destination was of importance because, although a starship's faster-than-light translation took place outside of normal space, conditions in adjacent realms of normal space had their inescapable effects.

"There'll be a good gravitational hill to get up," said Karlsen on the radio. "Let's stay alert."

"Frankly, all this bores me," said Celeste Servetus (full figure, Oriental and black and some strain of Nordic in her ancestry, incredibly

smooth taut skin beneath her silver body paint, wig of what looked like silver mist). Here lately it was Celeste's way to display flashes of insolence toward Schoenberg, to go through periods of playing what in an earlier age would have been described as hard-to-get. Schoenberg did not bother to look at her now. She had already been got.,

"We wouldn't be here now, probably, if it weren't for that gentleman who's talking on the radio." This was Barbara Hurtado. Barbara and Celeste were much alike, both playgirls brought along on this expedition as items for male consumption, like the beer and the cigars; and they were much different, too. Barbara, a Caucasian-looking brunette, was as usual opaquely clothed from knees to shoulders, and there was nothing ethereal about her. If you saw her inert, asleep, face immobile, and did not hear her voice or her laugh, or behold the grace with which she moved, you might well think her nothing beyond the ordinary in sexual attractiveness.

Alive and in motion, she was as eye-catching as Celeste. They were about on a par intellectually, too, Suomi had decided. Barbara's remark implying that present-day interstellar human civilization owed its existence to Karlsen and his victories over the berserkers was a truism, not susceptible of debate or even worthy of reply.

The berserkers, automated warships of terrible power and effectiveness, had been loosed on the galaxy during some unknown war fought by races long vanished before human history began. The basic program built into all berserkers was to seek out and destroy life, whenever and wherever they found it. In the dark centuries of their first assaults on Earth-descended man, they had come near overwhelming his modest dominion among the stars. Though Karlsen and others had turned them back, forced them away from the center of human-dominated space, there were still berserkers in existence and men still fought and died against them on the frontiers of man's little corner of the galaxy. Not around here, though. Not for five hundred years.

"I admit his voice does something to me," Celeste said, shifting her position in her chair, stretching and then curling her long naked silver legs.

"He loses his temper in a minute here," said Schoenberg.

"And why shouldn't he? I think men of genius have that right." This was Athena Poulson in her fine contralto. Despite her name, her face showed mainly Oriental ancestry. She was better looking than nine out of ten young women, carrying to the first decimal place what Celeste brought to the third. Athena was now wearing a simple one-piece suit, not much different from what she usually wore in the

office. She was one of Schoenberg's most private and trusted secretaries.

Suomi, wanting to make sure he caught Karlsen's temper-losing on his recording, checked the little crystal cube resting on the flat arm of his chair. He had adjusted it to screen out conversation in the lounge and pick up only what came in by radio. He reminded himself to label the cube as soon as he got it back to his stateroom; generally he forgot.

"How they must have hated him," said Barbara Hurtado, her voice now dreamy and far away.

Athena looked over. "Who? The people he lost his temper at?"

"No, those hideous machines he fought against. Oscar, you've studied it all. Tell us something about it."

Schoenberg shrugged. He seemed reluctant to talk very much on the subject although it obviously interested him. "I'd say Karlsen was a real man, and I wish I could have known him. Carlos here has perhaps studied the period more thoroughly than I have."

"Tell us, Carl," Athena said. She was sitting two chairs away. Suomi's field was the psychology of environmental design. He had been called in, some months ago, to consult with Schoenberg and Associates on the plans for a difficult new office, and there he had met Athena . . . so now he was here, on a big-game hunting expedition, of all things.

"Yes, now's your chance," De La Torre put in. Things did not generally go quite smoothly between him and Suomi, though the abrasion had not yet been bad enough to open up an acknowledged quarrel.

"Well," said Suomi thoughtfully, "in a way, you know, those machines did hate him."

"Oh no," said Athena positively, shaking her head. "Not machines."

Sometimes he felt like hitting her.

He went on: "Karlsen is supposed to have had some knack of choosing strategy they couldn't cope with, some quality of leadership . . . whatever he had, the berserkers couldn't seem to oppose him successfully. They're said to have placed a higher value on his destruction than on that of some entire planets."

"The berserkers made special assassin machines," Schoenberg offered unexpectedly. "Just to get Karlsen."

"Are you sure of that?" Suomi asked, interested. "I've run into hints of something like that, but couldn't find it definitely stated anywhere."

"Oh, yes." Schoenberg smiled faintly. "If you're trying to study the matter you can't just ask Infocenter on Earth for a printout; you

have to get out and dig a little more than that."

"Why?" Infocenter, as a rule, could promptly reproduce anything that was available as reference material anywhere on Earth.

"There are still some old government censor-blocks in their data banks holding information on berserkers."

Suomi shook his head. "Why in the world?"

"Just official inertia, I suppose. Nobody wants to take the time and trouble to dig them out. If you mean why were the censor-blocks inserted in the first place, well, it was because at one time there were some people who worshipped the damned things; berserkers, I mean."

"That's hard to believe," Celeste objected. She tried to say more but was interrupted by Karlsen shouting in anger, chewing out his men about something unintelligibly technological.

"That's about the end," said Schoenberg, reaching for a control beside his chair. The frying crackle of radio static died away. "There're several hours of radio silence following." Schoenberg's eyes went shifting restlessly now to his astrogational chart. "So there was some dimwitted bureaucratic policy of restricting information about berserkers . . . the whole thing is fascinating, ladies and gents, but what say we move on toward our hunting?"

WITHOUT pretense of waiting for agreement he began to set his astrogational and drive computers to take them on toward Hunters'. It would be another seventeen or eighteen standard days before *Orion* arrived in-system there. Exact timing was not possible in interstellar travel. It was something like piloting a sailing ship in a sea full of variable currents, depending upon winds that were undependable from day to day even though they held to a fairly consistent pattern. Variable stars, pulsars, spinars and quasars within the galaxy and out of it had each their effects upon the subfoundation of space through which the starship moved. Black holes of various sizes committed their wrenching gravitational enormities upon the fabric of the Universe. The explosions of supernovae far and near sent semi-eternal shock waves lapping at the hull. The interstellar ship that effectively outpaces light does not, cannot, carry aboard itself all the power needed to make it move as it does move. Only tapping the gravitational-inertial resources of the universe can provide such power, as the winds were tapped to drive the sailing ships of old.

Though the artificial gravity maintained its calm dominion in the lounge a change in lighting of the holographic chart signalled that *Orion* was underway. Schoenberg stood up, and stretched expansive-

ly, seeming to grow even bigger than he was. "On to Hunters'!" he announced. "Who'll join me in a drink? To the success of the hunt, and the enjoyment of any other amusements we may run into."

They all would have a drink. But Athena took only a sip before dropping her glass away into the recycling station. "Shall we get our chess tournament moving again, Oscar?"

"I think not." Schoenberg stood with one hand behind his back under the short tails of his lounging jacket, almost posing, savoring his own drink. "I'm going below. Time we got the firing range set up and got in a little practice. We're not going after pheasant, exactly . . . we'll have enough of tournaments after we land, perhaps." His intelligent eyes, lighted now by some private amusement, skipped around at all of them, seemed to linger longest, by a fraction of a second, on Suomi. Then Schoenberg turned and with a little wave went out of the lounge.

The party broke up. After taking his recorder back to his stateroom, Suomi started out again to see what the firing range was going to be like, and ran into De La Torre in the passageway.

Suomi asked: "What was that all about, 'enough of tournaments after we land'?"

"He's told you nothing about the tournament he wants to watch?"

"No. What kind?"

De La Torre smiled, and would not or could not give him a straight answer.

II

In the camp by the placid river, under Godsmountain's wooded flanks, there were sixty-four warriors when all were assembled at last, on this warm morning in the eastern-sunrise season. Out of the sixty-four there were not more than four or five who had ever seen each other before because they had come each from his own district, town, fiefdom, nomadic band or island, from every corner of the inhabitable world. Some had journeyed here from the shores of the boundless eastern ocean. Others had come from the edge of permanently inhabited territory to the north, where spring, already a sixtieth-of-an-old-man's-lifetime old, was melting free the glacier-beast and rime-worm. From the north came the mightiest hunters of this world named for hunting. Others of these warriors had come from the uncrossable shattered desert that lay to the west of the lands of men, and others still from the tangle of rivers and swamps in the south that blended finally into ocean again and blocked all travel in that direction.

The warriors who had gathered on this day for the beginning of Thorun's Tournament were variously tall or short, lean or heavy,

but only a few were very young men, and none at all were very old. All were notably violent men even on this world of violence, but during the days of assembly they had camped here together in peace, each on his arrival accepting without argument whatever little plot of campground was assigned him by Leros or one of the subordinate priests of Thorun. In the center of the camp an image of the god, dark-bearded and gold-diademed, brooding with hand on sword-hilt, had been erected on a field-altar, a small wooden platform, and no warrior failed to place some offering before it. Some of the offerings were rich, for some of the men who had come to fight in the Tournament were wealthy.

However wealthy or powerful an entrant might be, he came alone, unattended by any servants or well-wishers and carrying little more than a heavy robe for shelter in addition to the weapons of his preference. It was going to be a holy tournament, regarded by the priests of Thorun as so sacred that outside spectators were barred—though there was scarcely a freeman on the planet who did not yearn to watch. Nor were outside servants needed. The assembled warriors and priests were to be served—luxuriously, it appeared—by an almost equal number of gray-clad male slaves whose dress marked them as property of Godsmountain, of Thorun and his servitors. No women were to be allowed within the camp.

On this morning when the last warrior arrived, some slaves were making ready the flat fighting arena of pounded earth, some ten paces in diameter. Other slaves prepared a midday meal and set aside offerings of fruit and meat for those who would wish to lay them on Thorun's altar. The smoke of the cooking fires rose into a sky that was quite clear and had something of the blueness of Earth's sky, and yet also something of yellowness and bitterness and brass.

From beyond the plumes of smoke the mountain looked down, an unfamiliar sight to almost all of those who had come here to fight. But it had been known since childhood in all their hearts and minds. On its top the priests of Thorun dwelt, and their god and his power with them, within the white walls of his sacred city. Women and animals and other prosaic necessities were up there too; slaves were taken up from time to time as needed to serve the dwellers but seldom or never did the slaves come down again; those at work this morning in the riparian meadow had all been imported for the occasion from tributary lands. Godsmountain's sizable armies never, except for select detachments, marched any nearer their own capital than the mountain's base. To most ordinary folk the summit and its citadel-city were unattainable.

Thorun himself dwelt there, and

the demigod Mjollnir, his most faithful paladin. Other divinities visited from time to time: the gods of healing, justice, soil and weather, and growth and fecundity; and numerous demigods with ancillary responsibilities. But it was primarily Thorun's mountain, Thorun's religion, Thorun's world—except to those, generally restricted to the rim of the world these days, who did not like Thorun, or did not like the power wielded in his name by Godsmountain's priests. Hunters' was a planet of hunters and warriors, and Thorun was god of war and of the hunt.

A priest called Leros, of middle age, having seen three previous northern springs, and scarred by the violence of his youth, had been appointed by the High Priest Andreas to direct the Tournament. Leros was high in rank among the priests of Thorun, though not a member of the most secret Inner Circle. In his youth he had gained an almost legendary reputation as a fighter, and many of the best of these young heroes regarded him with awe. Leros came down to the riverbank himself to greet the last-arriving warrior, one Chapmut of Rillijax. He gave Chapmut a hand out of his canoe, bade him welcome to the Sacred Tournament of Thorun, and then with a small flourish placed the last check-mark on the tally sheet containing all the expected warriors' names.

Shortly after, a solemn drum called all of them to an assembly. Leros, standing in a new robe of spotless white in the center of the clean new arena, waited while they gathered around its edge. They were not long in falling silent to give him their full attention. In some parts of the circle the warriors were crowded, yet there was no jostling or edging for position among them, or anything but the greatest courtesy.

"REJOICE, ye chosen of the gods!" Leros cried out at last in his still-strong voice. He swept his gaze fully around the ring of fighting men, standing himself as tall and strong as most of them, though no longer as quick or sure. It was many days, about a sixtieth-part-of-an-old-man's-life, since the formal announcement of this Tournament had been carried down from Godsmountain and spread across the world. For much longer, since the time of the last northern spring, it had been common knowledge that this Tournament was coming. Scrawny little boys of that time were now men in their prime; and Godsmountain and all its doings had waxed greatly in importance since then.

Many of the waiting entrants were half naked in the mild weather, their bodies all muscles and scars and hair. The clothes of some were very rough, and those of others soft and rich. A few wore scraps of body armor, or carried

shields of hardened sloth-leather or bright iron. Full armor was unknown on Hunters', where a man stood on his feet to fight and never rode. These fighters were chiefs' sons and peasants' sons and sons of unknown fathers. Nothing but merit, merit with sword and spear and battle-axe, had won them their places here. Around him now Leros saw blue eyes and dark eyes, eyes with epicanthic folds and eyes without, deep eyes here, mad eyes there, and a pair or two of eyes that seemed as innocent as babes'. The original colonists from Earth, some six standard centuries in the past, had been eclectically selected from a world already well mixed in race and culture. Around Leros the faces were brown or white or black, with hair of black or brown or yellow or red—there was one iron-gray, two shaven bald. Here was a heavily tattooed face, with stripes across from ear to ear, and over there a smile showed teeth all filed to points. More numerous than the oddities were other men who looked as prosaic as herdsmen, save for the weapons at their belts. Besides their human maleness, only one thing was common to them all: uncommon skill at killing other men in single combat.

"REJOICE, ye chosen!" Leros called again, more softly. "Before the sun goes down upon this day, half of you will stand within our god's great hall—" he pointed toward Godsmountain's top, out of sight behind the wooded bulges of its lower slopes—"and face to face with Thorun himself." Leros prepared himself to retell, and his listeners made ready to hear yet again, the promises that had been carried down from Godsmountain a standard year earlier by Leros and his aides.

Thorun, warrior-chieftain of the gods (so the message went) had been pleased by the spirit shown by the race of men in the recent series of wars extending Godsmountain's power across most of the habitable world. The god was pleased to grant to humankind the privilege of fighting for a seat at his right hand, the competition being open to the sixty-four finest heroes of the age. To accomplish this purpose the inhabited world had been arbitrarily divided into sixty-four districts, and the local rulers of every district were invited to send—the details of the selection process being left largely to them—their mightiest warrior. All but one of the contestants was expected to die in the Tournament of Thorun, and that one, the winner, would be granted the status of a demigod and would take his seat at Thorun's right hand. (Out in the country somewhere, some irreverent logician would be sure to ask the priest who brought the message: How about Mjollnir: Will he have to move down a peg? Not at all, my nephew. No doubt he and the Tournament

winner will share the honor of being next to Thorun. No doubt they will fight for the day's turn whenever it pleases them.)

By all reports it pleased them to fight a lot in Thorun's hall atop the mountain. There the great god and the more or less deified men, slaughtered heroes of wars and combats past, re-slaughtered one another daily for the joy of it and were miraculously healed of their wounds each evening in time to enjoy the perfect meat and drink of Thorun's table, the tale-telling of immortal eloquence shared by the company of the gods, the endless supply of maidens eternally made virgin for their pleasure. (Out in the country, the questioner relaxes with a sigh; there is more here than a simple warrior knows how to argue about. Even if he is not so simple, the questioner sees that he is not going to beat this talking priest at his own game of words.)

Leros on this bright morning was formally spelling out once more what his listeners already knew: "Those of you who fall in the first round of fighting will be the first to feast with Thorun—but eternally around the lowest portion of his table. The next sixteen who perish, in the second round of fighting, will be granted places higher up. In the fighting of the third round eight will die and will be seated higher still—and each of these will have eternally with him four lovely maids of a beauty surpassing any in this world, two of ivory white and two of ebon black, to satisfy his every wish even before it can be spoken aloud.

"After the fourth round has been fought there will be only four warriors left alive, the strongest of the strong. The four who die in the fourth round of fighting will be granted shields and arms lustrous as silver, yet harder and keener than the finest steel, and wine goblets to match, and each will have eight virgin maidens of still greater beauty perpetually in his service. They will be seated very near to Thorun.

"In the fifth round of duels, two more men must fall, and these two will be seated in tall chairs of oak and gold, higher up the table still, and they will be granted gold wine-cups and shields and arms, and each will be served by sixteen maids of beauty indescribable, and all things will be theirs in fuller measure than any lower men may have. On that day but two of you will remain alive outside the hall where the gods feast.

"The single duel of the sixth round of fighting will be the last and greatest. Who loses it will still be honored beyond any of those that I have mentioned yet. And when it is over, the Tournament will be over, and one man will have won. That man alone shall walk, in the flesh, into the holy place of the god Thorun, and his place for all time to come shall be at Thorun's right hand; and from his high place

that man will overtop all of the other sixty-three by as great a measure as they stand above the race of puny, mortal men that crawl about here below."

Leros concluded with a sigh. He believed the promises and they moved him to envy and awe every time he thought about them.

For some time now one of the warriors, black of skin and huge, had been leaning forward with an expectant look, as if he wished to speak. Now Leros, with an inquiring glance, took notice of him.

The man asked: "Lord Leros, tell me this—"

"Address me no more as Lord. Your status from this day forward is higher than my own."

"Very well. Friend Leros, then. Tell me this: when a man has won this Tournament will he then have all the powers and rights that gods are known to have? I mean not only powers of war, but of the soft and healing arts?"

Leros had to take thought for a moment or two before answering. It had not been one of the usual expectable questions, for instance was Thorun's hall threatened by overcrowding with all the wars, or what kind of sacrificial meat would the god prefer today. At last he spoke. "The gentle goddess of healing will certainly listen to any request that man may make." He let out a light sigh. "The gods listen to one another more than they do to men. But then they still do what they please, unless of course they have bound themselves by formal promise, as Thorun has done regarding this Tournament."

The man nodded soberly. "It is all we can expect," he said, and resumed his place in the circle.

All were silent now. Somewhere in the background a slave was chopping kindling for the first funeral pyre. Leros said: "Then go, all of you, and make what final preparations you will. The first fight will begin shortly."

As soon as the assembly had dispersed a subordinate priest drew Leros aside and when they had reached a place of relative privacy unrolled a small scroll and showed it to him. "Lord Leros, this was found posted on a tree not far away. We have no clue as yet to indicate who put it up."

The lettering on the scroll seemed to have been made with a dull ordinary pencil of charred kettwood. The message read:

> Gods and men, place your bets. Who of the 64 will be proven the greatest fighter? That one will be, there is no doubt. Will he then envy those that he has slain, and curse Godsmountain and its lying priests? While your money is out, try to lay a bet on this also: Are the rulers of this mountain fit to rule our world?
>
> The Brotherhood

Leros nodded, tight-lipped, at the signature. "You have sent word of this up the hill?"

"Of course, Lord."

"That is all we can do for the moment. We must make sure the army increases its patrols in the area." But of course the message might have been put up by someone known to be in the area of the Tournament. Perhaps one of the slaves—or even one of the contestants—is not what he pretends to be. "We must keep our eyes open, of course, and let nothing jeopardize the Tournament. To discredit it would be a considerable victory for the Brotherhood." The Brotherhood was a vague league of the disaffected, probably including most of Godsmountain's enemies, who were now scattered and relatively powerless around the rim of the inhabited world. There might be a sharp and dangerous secret organization at its core; it seemed wise to assume there was, and to continually warn the people and the soldiers of it.

The subordinate indicated his agreement and withdrew. Leros pondered briefly: Might the agent who had left the message be a disloyal priest? He did not think it probable. But he could not be completely sure.

The Tournament, meanwhile, had to get started. There had been no sign from up the hill that High Priest Andreas or any of his Inner Circle were coming down to watch. A pack train came into view on the lower reaches of the long road that wound its way down the forested slopes from the summit; but when it drew near Leros saw that no men of rank were walking near the animals, it was only a regular supply caravan returning unburdened from the top.

On with it, then. Turning to a waiting herald, he gave the signal for the battle-horn to be blown, to call the contestants all together for the last time in the world of living men. When they were assembled he drew from a pocket of his fine white robe a scroll of new vellum, on which a priest-scribe had set down the names in elegant calligraphy. They appeared in the alphabetical order hallowed by time and military usage:

Arthur of Chesspa
Ben Tarras of the Battle-Axe

Big Left Hand
Bram the Beardless of Consiglor

Brunn of Bourzoe
Byram of the Long Bridges

Chapmut of Rillijax
Charles the Upright

Chun He Ping the Strong
Col Renba

David the Wolf of Monga's Village
Efim Samdeviatoff

Farley of Eikosk
Farmer Minamoto

Geno Hammerhand
Geoff Symbolor of Symbolorville

Gib the Blacksmith
Giles the Treacherous of Endross Swamp

Gladwin Vanucci
Gunter Kamurata

Hal Coppersmith
Herc Stambler of Birchtown

Homer Garamond of Running Water
Ian Offally the Woodcutter

John Spokemaker of the Triple Fork
Jud Isaksson of Ardstoy Hill

Kanret Jon of Jonsplace
Korl the Legbreaker

LeNos of the Highlands
Losson Grish

M'Gamba Mim
Muni Podarces

Mesthles of the Windy Vale
Mool of Rexbahn

Nikos Darcy of the Long Plain
Oktans Buk of Pachuka

Omir Kelsumba
One-Eyed Manuel

Otis Kitamura
Pal Setoff of Whiteroads

Pern-Paul Hosimba
Pernsol Muledriver of Weff's Plain

Phil Cenchrias
Polydorus the Foul

Proclus Nan Ling
Rafael Sandoval

Rahim Sosias
Rico Kitticatchorn of Tiger's Lair

Rudolph Thadbury
Ruen Redaldo

Sensai Hagenderf
Shang Ti the Awesome

Siniuju of the Evergreen Slope
Tay Corbish Kandry

Thomas the Grabber
Thurlow Vultee of the High Crag

Travers Sandakan of Thieves' Road
Urumchi

Vann the Nomad
Venerable Ming the Butcher

Vladerlin Bain of Sanfa Town
Wat Franko of the Deep Wood

Wull Narvaez
Zell of Windchastee

When he had done with reading, Leros glanced up at the still-high sun. "There will be time today for much fighting. Let it begin."

He handed the scroll to a subordinate priest, who read in a loud voice: "Arthur of Chesspa—Ben Tarras of the Battle-Axe."

Having both stepped into the ring, and made their holy signs imploring Thorun's favor, the two went at it. Ben Tarras had taken only a dozen more breaths when his battle-axe spun out of his hand to bury itself with a soft sound in the calmly receiving earth, while Arthur's swordblade at the same time sank true and deep in Ben Tarras's flesh. The bare, flattened soil of the fighting ring drank Ben Tarras's blood as if it had been long athirst. A pair of slaves in shabby gray tunics dragged his body from the ring, toward a place nearby where other slaves were readying a pyre. The dry wood was stacked twice taller than a man already, and was not yet enough. Thirty-two men today would join the gods and begin their eternal feast with Thorun.

"Big Left Hand—Bram the Beardless of Consiglor."

This fight went on a little longer; and then both hands of Big Left Hand (they appeared equally big) were stilled as Bram's sword tore his middle open. Again the slaves came to bear a corpse away, but Big Left Hand stirred and kicked feebly as they took him up. His eyes opened and were living, though the terrible wound in his front was plainly mortal. One slave, who limped about his work, pulled from his belt a short but massive leaden maul and broke the head of the dying man with a short methodical swing. Leros for the second time said ritual words to speed a loser's soul to Thorun, nodded to the acolyte who held the scroll.

"Brunn of Bourzoe—Byram of the Long Bridges."

It went on through the afternoon, with little pauses between fights. Some of the fights were long, and one of the winners had lost so much blood that he could hardly stand himself before he managed to still the breath in the loser's throat. As soon as each fight was over the slaves came quickly to stanch the wounds, if any, of the winner, and lead him to food and drink and rest. It was likely to go hard in the second round of fighting with those who had been weakened in the first.

The sun was reddening near the horizon before the last match had been fought. Before retiring, Leros gave orders that the camp should be moved early in the morning. Originally he had planned to wait until midday before beginning the slow intended progress up the mountain, but the smoke of the funeral pyre seemed to lie heavy here in the low air, and amphibious vermin from the river were being drawn to the camp by the blood of

heroes in which the earth was soaked.

III

ORION was well in-system now, rapidly matching orbital velocities with Hunters' planet, and in fact not far from entering atmosphere. From his command chair in the small control room at the center of the ship, Schoenberg supervised his autopilot with a computer-presented hologram of the planet drifting before him, the planet as it appeared in *gestalt* via the multitude of sensing instruments built into the starship's outer hull.

A few days earlier Suomi had obtained a printout on Hunters' planet from the ship's gazeteer, a standard databank carried for navigation, trade, and emergency survival. The Hunterian year was about fifteen times as long as the Earth-standard year; Hunters' planet was therefore much farther from its primary than Earth was from Sol, but Hunters' Star was a blue-white subgiant, so that the total insolation received by both planets was very nearly equal. The radius, mass, and gravity of Hunters' planet were Earthlike, as was the composition of the atmosphere. Hunters' would surely have been colonized from pole to pole had it not been for its extreme axial tilt—more than eighty degrees to the plane of its revolution around Hunters' sun, almost as far as was Uranus in its orbit around Sol.

Spring was now a standard year old in the Hunterian northern hemisphere, which region was therefore emerging from a night that had been virtually total for another Earthly year or so. Near the north pole the night had now lasted for more than five standard years and would endure for a total of seven. Up there the ice-grip of the dark cold was deep indeed, but it would soon be loosened. Seven standard years of continuous sunheat were coming.

According to statements in the gazeteer, which were probably still valid though more than a standard century old, men had never managed to settle permanently much farther than fifteen degrees of latitude in either direction from the Hunterian equator. Dome colonies would have been called for and there had never been sufficient population pressure to make it worthwhile. Indeed, the population had not occupied even the whole equatorial zone of the main continent when the berserkers came. When the killing machines from out of space attacked, the growing technological civilization of Hunters' colonists had been wrecked; the intervention of Karlsen's battle fleet was the only reason that any of the colonists—or the biosphere itself, for that matter—had survived at all. The native life, though none of its forms were intelligent, did

manage to endure at all latitudes, surviving the long winters by hibernation of one kind or another, and in many cases getting through the scorching, dessicated summers by an estivation cycle.

Away from the tropics, spring presented the only opportunity for feeding, growth, and reproduction. Because the southern hemisphere was so largely water, the northern spring was the one that counted insofar as land animals were concerned. In the northern springtime beasts of all description emerged from caves and nests and frozen burrows with the melting of the ice. Among them came predators, more terrible, burning with more urgent hunger and ferocity, than any creatures that had ever lived on the old wild lands of Earth. On Hunters' planet now, as every fifteen standard years, the hunting season by which the planet had acquired its name was in full swing.

"THE poaching season, I suppose we should call it," said Carlos Suomi to Athena Poulson. The two of them were standing in the shooting gallery Schoenberg had set up a few weeks earlier in the large cabin directly beneath *Orion*'s lounge. Suomi and Athena were looking over a large gun rack filled with energy rifles; Schoenberg had enjoined everyone aboard to select a weapon and become adept with it before shooting in earnest was required. Schoenberg and De La Torre spent a good deal of time down here, Celeste and Barbara hardly any.

Suomi and Athena were intermediate, he generally showing up whenever she went to practice. They were in mid-session now. Some ten meters from the rifle rack—half the diameter of the spherical ship—a computer-designed hologram showed a handful of Hunterian predators stop-actioned in what looked like a good drawing of their natural habitat. Around and beyond the sketch-like animals in the middle distance what appeared to be several square kilometers of glacier spread to an illusive horizon.

"All right," Athena said in her low voice. "Technically speaking, this trip *is* outside interstellar law. But it's evident that neither the authorities on Earth or the Interstellar Authority care very much. Oscar is too smart to get into any real trouble over such a thing. Relax and enjoy the trip, Carl, now that you're here. Whyever did you come along if you don't like the idea?"

"You know why I came." Suomi pulled a rifle halfway out of the rack and then slid it back. The end of its muzzle was slightly bulbous, dull gray, pitted all over with tiny and precisely machined cavities. What it projected was sheer physical force, abstracted almost to the point of turning into mathematics.

Suomi had already tried out all the rifles in the rack and they all seemed pretty much the same to him, despite their considerable differences in length and shape and weight. They were all loaded now with special target cartridges, projecting only a trickle of power when triggered, enough to operate the target range. Its setup was not different in principle from the target ranges in arcades on Earth or other urbanized planets; only there it was generally toy berserkers that one shot at, black metal goblins of various angular shapes that waved their limbs or flashed their imitation laser beams in menace. "I've always enjoyed these target games," he said. "Why shouldn't these be real enough, instead of going after living animals?"

"Because these are not real," said Athena firmly. "And shooting at them isn't real either." She chose a rifle and turned her back on Suomi to aim it down the range. Somewhere a scanner interpreted her posture as that of the ready hunter, and the scene before her came alive again with deliberate motion. A multmouthed creature bristling with heavy fur stalked toward them at a range of seventy meters. Athena fired, a small click was emitted by the rifle, which remained perfectly steady, and the beast flopped over in a graceful, almost stylized way, now wearing a spot of red light riveted near the middle of what should have been its spine. The indication was for a clean kill.

"Athena, I came along because you were coming, and I wanted to spend time with you, to get some things settled between us. That's why I had you get me invited. Also it was a chance to take a trip on a private space yacht, something I'll probably never be able to do again. If I must hunt, to keep your lord and master upstairs happy, why then I'll do it. Or at least go through the motions of hunting."

"Carlos, you're always talking down Oscar to me, and it won't work. I think this is the one I'll carry." She turned the rifle this way and that, looking at it critically.

"I wonder what the people living on Hunters' think about expeditions like ours."

"They're not being harmed, as far as I can see. I don't suppose they'll give a damn, even if they know we're there, which they probably won't. We won't be hunting in an inhabited area, but in the north."

She sounded as if she knew what she was talking about, though she had probably only read the same ship's printout that Suomi had been studying. None of them except Schoenberg had been here before, and, when you thought about it, Schoenberg was really uncommunicative about his previous trip. With a few words he gave assurance that they were all in for some marvelous sport, warned succinctly about cer-

tain dangers to be wary of—and that was about it. He might have been on Hunters' a number of times before. He might be three hundred years old or more; it was getting hard to tell these days, when an age of five hundred years was not unheard of. As long as the central nervous system held out other systems of the body could generally be maintained or replaced as needed.

Schoenberg's voice now sounded on the intercom. "We're coming into atmosphere soon, people. Artificial gravity will be going off in another twenty minutes. Better secure your areas and settle in the lounge or in your staterooms."

"We hear you in the target range," Suomi answered. "We're on our way." He and Athena began to secure the rifles in the rack, and to make sure that nothing in the area was likely to fly around loose if the coming maneuvers in free gravity should become violent for any reason.

SEATED a few minutes later in the lounge, Suomi watched the progress of their descent on the wall-sized screens. The planet, that had been hardly more than a star when last he observed its image, was now on top of them, or so it seemed. It grew further, eased around to a position below them as Schoenberg changed ship's attitude, spread a cloud net to catch *Orion*, became a world with a horizon to hold them in. The blue-white sun grew yellowish as they began to see it from inside the planet's atmosphere.

The land below was high, rough country. Like most planets, Hunters' had an uninhabited look when seen from the upper air. Here the appearance persisted even when they had dropped to only a few kilometers' altitude.

Schoenberg, alone in the control room, now took over control completely from the computers, guiding the ship manually, looking rapidly from one television screen to another. In the lounge they could watch him on the passenger's screen. Obviously traffic in the Hunterian atmosphere was practically non-existent and a mid-air collision nothing to be feared.

Now Schoenberg was following a river, actually skirting sometimes between the walls of its deep-cut canyon. Mountains rose and dipped beneath *Orion* as he veered away from the watercourse, steadily decreasing speed. At last a chalet-like structure, flanked by log outbuildings, the whole complex surrounded by a palisade, came into view at the head of a pass. There was a scarcity of level ground, but Schoenberg had no real trouble in lowering the ship onto the barren soil about fifty meters outside the stockade. From the spherical metal hull, thick landing struts moved out to take the ship's weight and

hold her upright. There was a scarcely perceptible settling motion when the pilot cut the drive. The ship used the same silent forces for maneuvering in atmosphere as in space—though caution was necessary when using them near a planet-sized mass—and it could be landed on any surface that would bear its weight.

Obviously their descent had been observed, for the drive was hardly off before people in drab clothes began to appear from a gate in the stockade. The arrival of a spaceship seemed to be an exciting event, but no more than that. The impromptu welcoming committee of six or eight showed no hesitancy in drawing near.

Once the ship was firmly down Schoenberg got out of his chair and headed for the main hatch, which, without formality, he at once opened wide to the planet's air, and pressed the button to extrude a landing ramp. He and the others aboard had taken the routine immunological treatments before departure, and the ship had been gone over by his own medics to avoid carrying dangerous microorganisms to a planet with only a primitive medical technology.

The natives waited a few meters from the ship, the women wearing long gowns and heavy aprons, the men for the most part dressed in coveralls. A couple of them had primitive cutting or digging tools in hand.

One smiling young man, better dressed than the others, his boots just as heavy but fancier, and with a short sword in a decorated leather scabbard at his belt, stepped forward.

"Welcome, then." He spoke the common language with what seemed to Earth ears a heavy, but understandable, accent. "Now you are Mister Schoenberg, I recall."

"I am." Smiling and open in his manner, Schoenberg went down the ramp to shake hands. "And you are—Kestand, isn't it? Mikenas's younger brother?"

"Now that is right. I was just a small one last hunting season when you were here. Surprised you know me."

"Not at all. How's Mikenas?"

"He's fine. Out now tending stock."

The conversation went on about the state of affairs on the ranch or fiefdom or whatever it was that the absent Mikenas owned or ruled. Suomi and the other passengers—all the girls were now dressed quite modestly—had come down from the lounge, but at a gesture from Schoenberg remained just inside the ship, enjoying the fresh alien air. Meanwhile the farm workers remained standing in a group outside. These all appeared cheerful and more or less healthy, but might have been deaf and dumb. It was probably a decade and a half since any of them had had any news from the great interstellar civilization

that networked the sky about them. They smiled at the visitors. but only Kestand spoke, and even he showed no inclination to ask how things were going, out among the stars.

It seemed that no introductions were going to be made. The whole thing had a clandestine air, like a smugglers' meeting. For a moment Suomi wondered—but the idea was ridiculous. A man of Schoenberg's wealth would not dabble in smuggling so directly if he decided to take it up.

Kestand was asking: "Have you been hunting yet?"

"No. I wanted to stop here first, and find out what's changed on the world since my last trip."

"Well." Kestand, not the most scintillating speaker Suomi had ever attended, began to expand his earlier reports on the local state of crops and weather and hunting. "Not real northern hunting, y'understand, I haven't been able to get away yet this season. Like to be on my way right now, but Mikenas left me in charge."

Schoenberg was listening patiently. Suomi, from clues dropped here and there, gathered that Mikenas and Schoenberg had gone north by spaceship last hunting season and had enjoyed notable success. Suomi's eyes kept coming back to the sword Kestand wore. The sheath was leather, looped onto the man's belt, and the hilt seemed to be plastic but of course was much more likely to be wood or bone; Suomi wished he knew more about primitive materials. Casting back through his life's memories—only about thirty years to be sure—he could not recall ever before seeing a man carrying a weapon for any non-symbolic purpose. Of course this sword might be only a badge of authority. It looked, though, as business-like as the hoe that one of the other men was holding.

The two-way conversation had veered to the governmental and religious changes that had taken place since the last northern hunting season. These were all obscure to Suomi, but Schoenberg seemed to understand.

"GODSMOUNTAIN has pretty well taken over, then," he mused, nodding his head as if at a suspicion confirmed. Then he asked: "Are they having the Tournament as planned this season?"

"Yes." Kestand looked up at the sun. "Should be starting in another two, three days. Byram of the Long Bridges, he's our local champion."

"Local?" Schoenberg looked thoughtful. "Isn't Long Bridges a good two hundred kilometers from here?"

"I tell you, this's a world Tournament. Each of the sixty-four districts is a big'un." Kestand shook his head. "I'd purely like to go."

"You would've gone, I bet, even rather than hunting, if Mikenas

hadn't left you in charge here."

"No, oh nooo, there was no way. Tournament's private for the gods and priests. Even the earl couldn't get an invitation, and Byram in his bodyguard. Mikenas didn't even try."

Schoenberg frowned slightly, but did not pursue the matter of the Tournament any further. Suomi meanwhile was imagining a tournament of jousting, as in the old stories of Earth, men in full armor hurtling together on armored animals, trying to unseat each other with lances. But it couldn't be quite that; he recalled from his reading that there were no riding animals on Hunters'.

After a little more talk Schoenberg thanked his informant courteously and called up into the ship for them to hand him down a satchel from a locker near the hatch. "And two of those ingots that you'll find in the locker; bring them down also, would you, gentlemen?"

Suomi and De La Torre brought the desired items down the ramp. Setting the satchel at Kestand's feet, Schoenberg announced: "This is what I told Mikenas I'd bring him, power cells for lamps and a few medicines. Tell him I'm sorry I missed him; I'll stop again next season if all goes well. And here." He hefted the two ingots and handed them to the native. "For you. Good metal for points or blades. Have a good smith work it. Tell him to quench it in ice water. I guess you have no trouble getting that at this altitude."

"Why, I give you great thanks!" Kestand was obviously well pleased.

Once the ramp was retracted and the hatch closed, Schoenberg wasted little time in getting *Orion* into the air again. He still held manual control, soaring up in a steep arc that gradually bent into a level flight toward the northwest.

His passengers had come to the control room with him this time and sat or stood around, more or less looking over his shoulder. When they had leveled off, De La Torre asked: "Where to, fearless leader? Shall we go and watch a few heads get broken?"

Schoenberg grunted. "Let's go hunting first, Gus. The man said two or three days before the Tournament starts. I'm anxious to get a little hunting in." This time he remembered to look around as a matter of form. "How does that suit you people?"

The planet flowed south and east beneath them. The sun, turning blue-white again at this altitude, reversed its apparent daily motion proper for the season and also slid toward the east from the tearing high-Mach velocity of their flight. An indicator on the edge of a warning zone showed how the drive was laboring to move them at so high a velocity this close to the center of a planet-sized mass. Schoenberg was indeed impatient. He had run out

force-baffles on the hull, Suomi noted, to dampen the sonic shock wave of their passage, and they were too high to be seen from the ground with unaided eyes. No one in the lands below would be able to detect their passage.

Celeste and Barbara soon retired to redecorate themselves in interstellar style. For the next several days the party would presumably be out of sight of Hunterian males who might be aroused or scandalized by the fashions of the great world.

Athena, clinging to a stanchion behind Schoenberg's chair, remarked: "I wonder if there are other hunting parties here. Outworlders like us, I mean."

Schoenberg only shrugged. Suomi said: "I suppose there might be three or four. Not many can afford private space travel, and also have the inclination to hunt."

De La Torre: "Since we all seem to have the inclination to hunt, it's lucky for us that we found Oscar."

Oscar had no comment. Suomi asked De La Torre: "Do you work for him, by the way? You've never told me."

"I have independent means, as they say. We met through business, about a year ago."

Schoenberg had gone a little higher to ease the strain on the drive. At this altitude the world called Hunters' almost seemed to have let go of the ship again. On several of the wall screens the terminator, boundary line between night and day, could be seen slanting across cloud cover athwart the invisible equator far to the south. The south pole, well out of sight around the curvature of the world, was more than halfway through its approximately seven standard years of uninterrupted sunlight. There the sun was a standard year past its closest approach to the zenith, and was now spiralling lower and ever lower in the sky, one turn with every Hunterian day, or one about every twenty standard hours.

A couple of standard years in the future the sun would set for its long night at the south pole and simultaneously rise above the horizon at the north pole. Right now the Hunterian arctic, locked in the last half of its long night, must look as lifeless as the surface of Pluto, buried under a vast freeze-out of a substantial portion of the planet's water. Up there the equinoctial dawn would bring the hunting season to its end; right now the season was at its height in the middle latitudes of the north, where the sun was just coming over the horizon, each day sweeping from east to west a little higher in the southern sky, bringing in the thaw. That region must be Schoenberg's destination.

THEY came down into a world of icy twilight, amid slopes of bare enduring rock and eroding,

fantastic glaciers, all towering above valleys filled with rushing water and greenly exploding life.

Schoenberg found a walkable part of the landscape in which to set *Orion* down and some solid level rock to bear her weight. This time, before opening the hatch, he took a rifle from the small rack set just inside, and held it ready in his hands. The opening of the hatch admitted a steady polyphonic roar of rushing waters. Schoenberg drew a deep breath and stood in the opening, looking out. As on the earlier landing the others were behind him. Celeste and Barbara, not dressed for near-freezing weather, moved shivering to the rear. The air smelled of wetness and cold, of thawing time and alien life. The landscape stretched before them, too big and complex to be quickly taken in. The shadows of southern mountains reached up high on the mountains to the north.

They were going out right away; there were several standard hours of daylight remaining here. Schoenberg began a routine check-out of arms and other equipment, and called for volunteers.

Athena announced at once that she was ready. De La Torre said that he would like to have a go. Suomi, too—not that he really intended to kill anything that did not attack him. He felt a genuine need to get out of the ship for a while. Though all the tricks of environmental psychology had been used in the interior design of the *Orion* to ameliorate the reality of confinement, the trip had still cooped up six people in a small space for many weeks. Being aware of all the designer's tricks, Suomi was perhaps helped less than others by them. Barbara and Celeste elected not to try hunting today after Schoenberg had indicated he preferred it that way. He promised them a more peaceful picnic outing in the morning.

"We'll go in pairs, then," Schoenberg announced when everything was ready. "Gus, you've hunted before, but not on this planet. If I may suggest, you and Athena take a stroll down the valley there." It spread before them as they looked out from the hatch, beginning thirty or forty meters from the rocky level where the ship rested, plunging after about a kilometer and a half of gentle, green-clad slope into an ice-clogged canyon down whose center a new torrent had begun to carve its way. "Down there at the lower end, where it slopes off into the canyon, the vegetation may well be head-high. There should be twelve or thirteen species of large herbivores."

"In that little space?" De La Torre interrupted.

"In that little space." Now that he was going hunting, Schoenberg sounded more relaxed and happy than at any time on the trip before. "Life doesn't just thaw out here in

the spring—it explodes. There'll be large predators in that valley too, or I miss my guess. You don't want to run into one an arm's length away, so better skirt the taller growth. Carlos and I are going to take the upper path." This climbed a rocky slope on the other side of the ship. Suomi, during their descent, had glimpsed higher meadows in that direction. "We may find something really hungry up there, just out of a high cave and on its way down into the valleys for its first meal in a year or two."

Boots, warm clothing, weapons, communicators, a few emergency items—all in order. Suomi was the last to get down the ramp and crunch his new boots on Hunterian soil. Almost before his feet were off the ramp it began to fold up and retract. If the playgirls stayed inside with the hatch closed they would be perfectly safe until the men returned.

Athena and Gus waved and set off on the lower way, tendrils of grass-like groundcover whipping about their boots. "Lead on up the path," said Schoenberg, with an uphill gesture to Suomi. "I'm sure your nerves are okay—just a matter of principle that I don't like a novice hunter with a loaded firearm walking behind me, when something to shoot at may jump out ahead." The voice was charming if the words were not, and they were said with a happy and friendly look. All was right with Schoenberg at the moment, obviously; he was eager to get going.

There was not really a path to follow, of course, but Suomi moved on up the spine of hill that formed the natural route Schoenberg must have meant to indicate.

Suomi as he climbed was soon lost in admiration of the country around him. Wherever the melting away of the winter's ice had left a few square centimeters of soil exposed, rank vegetation had sprung up. There were no tree-sized plants in evidence, nothing that seemed to have begun to grow more than a few days or weeks ago. In most places the grass- and vine-like things were no more than waist high, but frequently they grew so thickly that no glimpse of soil could be seen between the stems. The plants were striving madly, ruthlessly, for water and warmth and sunlight, leaping into growth, making what they could of the wet season before the long searing drought of summer began.

He paused, coming in sight of a meadow where man-sized creatures like giant slugs were moving, voraciously feeding on the plants, the wrinkles visibly stretching out of their grayish, hairless bodies.

"Rime-worms," said Schoenberg, who came up close behind him and disregarded the creatures after the first glance. "Look sharp now, there may be something after them."

"Do any of the larger forms freeze solidly through the night?"

"Biologists I've talked to say it's not possible. But I don't think anyone knows for sure." Now that they had stopped, Schoenberg was studying the country with binoculars. They had put a little rocky bulge of hill between themselves and the spaceship, and were now out of sight and sound of anything manmade save what they carried with them. The tracks they had left behind them in occasional patches of slush or muddy turf were the only signs of past human activity. The world around them had been made virgin by death and resurrection.

Suomi was studying the country too, but not with binoculars and not for game. The yellowed sun was skimming a low point in the mountainous horizon, and seemed on the point of setting; actually there must still be an hour or so of daylight left. On the other side of a wide valley a glacier groaned, shed a few tons of cornice, broke out with a clear new waterfall. The organ-notes of older cataracts held steady in the distance. Gradually, as Suomi began to comprehend the scene fully, as he got beyond the stage of simple elation at getting outdoors again, he realized that he had never before beheld a scene of nature so beautiful and awesome, nothing that even came close. Not even the wonders and terrors of space, which, when they could be perceived at all, were beyond the scale and grasp of human appreciation. This thundering world of mountains and valleys, with its exploding life, was not beyond the human scale, not quite.

Schoenberg was less content with what he saw. Of predators he had evidently discovered no sign. "Let's move on a little," he said tersely, putting his binoculars away. Suomi led on again. When they had gone a few hundred meters more, Schoenberg called another halt, this time at the foot of a steep slope.

After another short session with the binoculars, Schoenberg pointed up the hill and said: "I'm going up there and have a look around. Let me do this alone, I want to be quiet and inconspicuous about it. Stay here, don't move around, keep your eyes open. There may be something on our trail, stalking us, and you may get a good shot just by waiting."

With a faint thrill of danger, small enough to be enjoyable, Suomi looked back along the way they had come. Nothing moved but the distant, harmless rime-worms. "All right."

He sat down and watched Schoenberg up the slope and out of sight over the top of it. He then swiveled around on his rocky seat, enjoying the absence of people in every direction. It was delightful to be alone, for the first time in—it seemed like the first time in his life. Isolation could be accomplished in

the ship, of course, but the others' bodies and minds were always there, one was always aware of them only a few meters away. Suomi touched the communicator on his belt. The channels among hunters and between the hunters and the ship were alive but so far totally unused. Everyone was enjoying the physical and psychic separation.

Time passed. Schoenberg was gone longer than Suomi had expected. A thin shadow came over the nearby scenery as the sun declined behind a distant rim of ice. Without preamble a magnificent glacier-beast appeared before Suomi's eyes, perhaps two hundred fifty meters off, across a gentle slope of detritus fallen from an extension of the slope at the foot of which Suomi waited. It was not the direction from which Schoenberg had thought a predator was likely to come, nor was the creature looking toward Suomi. It was facing downhill, turning its head back and forth. Suomi raised his binoculars, and recalled his reading. An excellent specimen, male, probably second-cycle, just awakened from the second hibernation of its life into its full prime of strength and ferocity. The hollowness of loins and ribs was visible despite the thickness of orange-yellow fur. It was rather larger than an Earthly tiger.

Suomi, without getting to his feet, raised his rifle in perfectly steady hands and aimed. He was only playing. He lowered the weapon again.

"Long shot for a beginner," said Schoenberg's voice from close behind him, a little way up the slope. The cataract-roar must swallow the voice before the beast could hear it, even as it had kept Suomi from hearing Schoenberg's approach among the rocks. "But a clean one. If you don't want to try it I'll have a crack."

Suomi knew without turning that Schoenberg would already be raising his rifle to take aim. Still without looking around, Suomi lifted his own weapon once more and fired (pop, a little louder than in the shooting gallery, and now at full power there was a perceptible kick), deliberately aiming ahead of the animal to frighten it away, blasting up a spray of ice. Catlike, the creature crouched, then turned toward the earthmen its alienly unreadable face. The men who lived on Hunters' were men of Earth in their ancestry and distant history; it was easy to forget how alien all the other life-forms here must be.

NOW THE glacier-beast was running, crossing the slope in great graceful catlike bounds. But it was not fleeing from the men as it should, as Suomi had unthinkingly assumed it must. In pure innocence of the powers it faced it was coming now to kill and eat him. Insane

hunger drove it on. Its sprinting taloned feet hurled up rocks from the talus slope, mixed with a powdering of snow.

Shoot. Whether Schoenberg was calling out the word, or he himself, or whether it only hung thought-projected in the freezing, timeless air, Suomi did not know. He knew only that death was coming for him, visible, and incarnate, and his hands were good for nothing but dealing out symbols, manipulating writing instruments, paintbrushes, electronic styluses, making an impression on the world at second or third remove, and his muscles were paralyzed now and he was going to die. He could not move against the mindless certainty he saw in the animal's eyes, the certainty that he was meat.

Schoenberg's rifle sounded, a repetitive, seemingly ineffectual popping not far from Suomi's right ear. Invisible fists of god-like power slammed at the charging animal, met the beautiful energy of its charge with a greater, more brutal force. The force-blows tore out gobs of orange-yellow fur, and distorted the shapes of muscle and bone beneath. The huge body shed its grace and its momentum. Still it seemed to be trying to reach the men. Now its body broke open along a line of penetration wounds, spilling out insides like some red-stuffed toy. Clear in Suomi's vision was an open paw with knife-long claws, arching high on the end of a forelimb and then striking down into a puddle of slush not ten meters from his boots.

When the beast was still, Schoenberg put another shot carefully into the back of its head for good measure, then slung his rifle and got out his hologram camera. Then, after looking at the gory, broken body from several angles, he shook his head and put the camera away again. He spoke reassuringly to Suomi, seeming not in the least surprised or upset by Suomi's behavior. He was offhandedly gracious when Suomi at last managed to stammer out a kind of thanks. And that in its way was the most contemptuous attitude that Schoenberg could have taken.

IV

Early on the morning of the Tournament's second day, Leros, the priest in charge, led the surviving thirty-two contestants on an easy march of some five kilometers, up from the flat land by the river where the first round had been fought to a much higher meadow resting in Godsmountain's lap. At this new site an advance party of priests and workers were already at work, preparing a new fighting ring of cleared, hard-trodden earth, and a new field altar for the image of Thorun that was brought up on a cart just in front of Leros and the warriors. The slave-laborers were

sweating, earning their rations today, for their numbers had been greatly reduced, many being sent to other projects. Only half the original number of warriors now required service, of course, and as always there was plenty of other labor to be performed in the citadel-city above and the tributary lands below.

The plan of the Tournament, handed down to Leros by the High Priest Andreas and his Inner Circle of councillors, required that each successive round of fighting take place closer to the top of the mountain than the one before. The purpose, as Andreas had explained it, was symbolic. But Leros observed now that the plan had practical advantages as well. The offal of each camp would be promptly left behind, the latrine, the leavings of the cook-tents, the remnants of the funeral pyre.

The work of readying the new site was completed shortly after the fighting men arrived, and an acolyte handed over the day's new vellum-written lists to Leros. He called the men into assembly, and, when some formalities had been gotten out of the way, read the lists out:

Arthur of Chesspa
Bram the Beardless of Consiglor

Brunn of Bourzoe
Charles the Upright

Col Renba
Efim Samdeviatoff

Farley of Eikosk
Geoff Symbolor of Symbolorville

Giles the Treacherous of Endross Swamp
Gladwin Vanucci

Hal Coppersmith
Homer Garamond of Running Water

Jud Isaksson of Ardstoy Hill
Kanret Jon of Jonsplace

LeNos of the Highlands
M'Gamba Mim

Mesthles of the Windy Vale
Octans Bukk of Pachuka

Omir Kelsumba
Otis Kitamura

Pernsol Muledriver of Weff's Plain
Polydorus the Foul

Rafael Sandoval
Rahim Sosias

Rudolph Thadbury
Shang Ti the Awesome

Siniuju of the Evergreen Slope
Thomas the Grabber

Travers Sandakan of Thieves' Road
Vann the Nomad

Vladerlin Bain of Sanfa Town
Wull Narvaez

Before giving the signal for the start of the second round's first fight, Leros took a moment to look around him at his world. There was much in it to make him feel content. From the high meadow where he stood the prospect was one of long reaches of cultivated land below, kilometer after kilometer of field and pasture, with here and there an orchard, a cluster of houses, a patch of raw forest or a string of trees along a watercourse. It was a peaceful and malleable world, one of peasants and crops and artisans, obediently serving the masters of violence who dwelt on the heights above. There was of course, the Brotherhood to flaw it. After yesterday's posted insult nothing further had been heard from them . . . there was also, more naggingly, the fact that the Inner Circle seemed to be closed to Leros, and the office of High Priest, therefore, forever unattainable. Why should a priest like Lachaise, for example, who was far more an artisan than a fighting man, be a member of the Inner Circle, when Leros and others more deserving were kept out?

At any rate the Tournament was going well. That was what mattered most. Perhaps if it was a great success he would at last be promoted—and there was no reason why it should not smoothly run its course. At the end of it the great gate of the city would open for the winner as the maidens strewed flowers before him and he was conducted in triumph through the streets to the Temple; and that would stand open for him also; and then the inner curtains of chain-mail would part—as they never had for Leros—and the secret doors, and the winner would be let in where Leros himself had never been to the place where gods walked with the fallen heroes who once were mortal men, where only the High Priest and the Inner Circle came to mediate between them and the world of men.

LEROS's religion was not simply a matter of faith to him. He had once glimpsed Thorun in an inner courtyard of the Temple, standing taller than any mortal man, walking with the High Priest on a night when storms were in the air and lightning flickered . . .

He bowed his head for a moment of private prayer, then brought himself back to the waiting men, and his responsibilities, and called out the names for the first match of the day:

"Arthur of Chesspa—Bram the Beardless of Consiglor."

Arthur was a middle-aged man of middle size. In this company of warriors he looked small. Stocky, dour-looking, heavily mustached, he strode into the ring with an air of utterly nerveless competence and

with unblinking calm watched Bram the Beardless approach with intent to kill.

Bram, it appeared, was beardless by reason of his extreme youth. Though he was tall and heavy-shouldered his face looked no more than one Hunterian year of age, fifteen or sixteen sixtieths-of-an-old-man's-life. Bram was not calm but his excitement seemed to be rather joy than fright as he opened the attack with an exuberant swing of his long sword. Arthur parried the blow well enough, seemed in no hurry to go on the offensive himself.

Bram pressed the attack; his youth and energy did not admit the possibility that he could be beaten. Again and again he struck, while Arthur still retreated thoughtfully, seeming to await the perfect time to counter. And again and again Bram struck, with ever-increasing speed and terrible strength. Arthur still had not made up his mind how best to fight when there came a blow he could not stop. He lost an arm and shoulder. The finishing stroke came quickly.

"Brunn of Bourzoe—Charles the Upright."

Brunn was heavyset and fair, with a sun-bleached look about him. In one thick hand he held a short spear in such fashion that it was evident he preferred to thrust rather than risk all on one throw. He took the initiative, though cautiously, moving slowly widdershins around the upright Charles. Charles gangly as a bird, looking as if he might be happier perching on one leg, stood tall and held his two-handed sword ready for whatever Brunn might do. The spear-thrust, when it came, was strong and quick but the response of Charles was better; the lopped-off spearhead fell to earth. The fair head of Brunn was not far behind it.

"Col Renba—Efim Samdeviatoff."

These two were similar in appearance, both a little above middle height and with brown shaggy hair. Col Renba whirled a spike-studded ball on the end of a short chain attached to a wooden handle. Samdeviatoff held sword and dagger ready. Both jumped to the attack at the same time but the spiked ball struck the sword out of the hand that held it and in the next breath dashed the brains that had directed it upon the ground.

"Farley of Eikosk—Geoff Symbolor."

Again there was a resemblance; this time one of manners rather than appearance. Both contestants were well dressed and expensively armed. There were even jewels in the hilts of Geoff's sword and dagger. Farley was fair, almost red, of hair and beard. His bare arms, lined with bone and vein and muscle, were freckled rather than sunburned. Geoff Symbolor was quite dark, and shorter than Farley by half a head, though seemingly his equal in weight and strength.

Their battle was a slow one. The two of them seemed well matched until Farley's longer reach let him nick the muscles of Geoff's shoulder. With his sword-arm handicapped the shorter man was soon wounded again. Farley took no rash chances; the other was weakened by loss of blood before Farley drove in hard to finish him.

"Giles the Treacherous—Gladwin Vanucci."

Giles was of middling size but wiry, with tanned face and sandy hair and pale innocent eyes. If it was indeed his habit to be treacherous, there was no need for it today. With his long sword he made short work of the squat and massive Gladwin, who had favored a battle-axe.

"Hal Coppersmith — Homer Garamond."

Hal Coopersmith was very tall, with sloping shoulders and long arms entwined by rich tattoos. His long sword quivered restlessly in his hand, like some insect's antenna following the movements of his foe. Homer Garamond seemed saddened by the task at hand though he was almost as young as Bram the Beardless who had shone with joy in killing. Homer held sword and dagger almost negligently in powerful hands until Hal came thrusting in. Fast as Homer moved then it was not fast enough.

"Jud Isaksson—Kanret Jon."

Jud, a fiery little man with an enormously long black mustache, stamped briskly into the ring with a round metal shield strapped onto his left arm. A short sword extended from his right. Kanret, perhaps the oldest fighter to survive the first round, awaited him with a patience befitting his years. Kanret was armed with a short, thick-shafted spear; the way he gripped it indicated he might use it as a quarterstaff as well as thrust with it. When the moment of testing came, the spear hit nothing but Jud's shield, and Kanret Jon was brought down with a swordstroke to the knee. His end was quick thereafter.

"LeNos of the Highlands—M' Gamba Mim."

LeNos had a scarred face and, once in the ring, a way of moving that seemed more animal than human, a lithe long-striding crouch. With sword and dagger he closed on M'Gamba Mim, who was huge and black and carried similar weapons. The blood of both was on the ground before LeNos could prevail; and then, still like an animal, he snarled at the slaves who came to tend his cuts.

"Mesthles of the Windy Vale—Octans Bukk of Pachuka."

Mesthles had the thought-creased forehead of some scribe or scholar. He wore peasant's clothes and fought with a farmer's scythe. Octans was lean, and his ragged clothes gave him the look of a hungry bandit. But his sword proved slower than the scythe and he was mown.

"Omir Kelsumba — Otis Kitamura."

Kelsumba's wide black face was set in a determination as intense as fury. Leros, watching, remembered this man as the one who had asked about acquiring the healing powers of a god. When the fighters closed, Kelsumba swung his massive battle-axe with incredible power, swinging and then reversing instantly for the backswing—as if his weapon were no heavier than a stick. Kitamura's sword was knocked aside, and then Kitamura's jawbone. He went down on hands and knees and stayed there. Kelsumba left his finishing to the leaden mauls of the burial party.

"Pernsol Muledriver—Polydorus the Foul."

The Muledriver was an older man, who set to work deliberately with short spear and long knife. Polydorus, a man of indeterminate age, and seemingly no fouler than the next, went in carrying an old sword, much nicked and dented. The old sword did its work efficiently, and Pernsol died quietly, as if content to end life's struggles and take his modest place at Thorun's board.

"Rafael Sandoval — Rahim Sosias."

Sosias looked more like a tailor than a fighting man, being not overly big and displaying a small, comfortable paunch. But his curved sword hung as naturally from his hand as his hand from the end of his hairy arm. Sandoval was notably ugly, made so by nature, not by scars. He twirled a spike-and-ball mace disdainfully. Rahim's sword was caught in a loop of the mace's chain and pulled from his hand, but before Rafael could disentangle his own weapon from the sword, Rahim had drawn an extra knife from concealment and had slit his opponent's throat.

"Rudolph Thadbury—Shang Ti the Awesome."

Thadbury had a military as well as a fighting look. Leros thought this man had something more of the general than of the simple swordsman about him but knew nothing of his background. Most of the contestants were as much strangers to Leros and the other priests as they were to one another.

Squarely built, with blunt-fingered enormous hands, Rudolph Thadbury exuded strength and confidence. Shang Ti was awesome in truth, having a rather small head set on such a giant's body that the head's smallness was made to look grotesque. Shang Ti's sword was of a size to suit his stature. Rudolph's had a thicker blade than the usual and was just long enough to reach Shang Ti's heart.

"Siniuju of the Evergreen Slope—Thomas the Grabber."

Siniuju was almost scrawny, leaner than any other man left alive among the warriors. He carried a two-handed sword that looked too heavy for him—until he demon-

strated how quickly he could make it move. Thomas was large and fierce-looking, a Shang Ti slightly less massive and better proportioned. He matched his spear over the long two-handed sword. The spear proved longer still.

"Travers Sandakan—Vann the Nomad."

Sandakan came carrying a thin-bladed axe made with a sturdy armored shaft. On his face were the lines of time and trouble and the scars of many fights. Vann the Nomad wore the long shapeless sweater of the high-plains herdsmen and wielded a long sword with demonic energy. Sandakan was no match for the Nomad and when Travers was dead Vann cut off one of his ears, saying: "I will give this back to him in Thorun's hall—if he is man enough to take it from me!" It was a gesture new to Leros, who thought about it and finally gave a hesitant smile of approval. As soon as the latest corpse had been cleared from the ring he formally called out the names for the day's final match.

"Vladerlin Bain — Wull Narvaez."

Coiled around Bain's waist was a long whip, whose purpose none had yet considered it politic to ask. In his hands Bain wore a dagger and a sword. Narvaez, with a cheerful foolish face and a farmer's pitchfork as his only visible weapon, looked like some peasant fresh from fieldwork. A good harvester he sent the tines exactly where he wanted them and Vladerlin was dead before he hit the ground, the reason for his coiled whip now never to be known.

The sun had not yet reached its midday point. The fighting of the second round was over.

THE SIXTEEN fighters who remained alive moved off to enjoy the food prepared for them. For the most part they chatted and joked in good fellowship, though a few were silent. Also they took thoughtful notice of each other's wounds, calculating where weakness would be found tomorrow. All of them knew that even the tiniest advantage must be seized. Not one survived among them who was not extremely dangerous—not one survived who could not count killers of superior ability among his victims.

Resting after their midday meal, they say the messenger come pelting down the mountain. His news made Leros snap back his head to search the sky. From where they camped beneath the trees it was not possible to see much of it. The warriors were curious, but not very. The Tournament they were engaged in was more important than any distraction they could imagine.

Later still when a priest of the Inner Circle came down to talk earnestly to Leros the news spread among the warriors that a round, silvery craft had come from beyond

the world to visit Godsmountain. Most of them were curious enough to try to catch a glimpse of the ship, barely visible, resting among the trees on a distant height.

V

OSCAR SCHOENBERG and Athena Poulson and Gus De La Torre had hunted again, on the day after Suomi's near-fatal confrontation with the glacier-beast, while Barbara Hurtado and Celeste Servetus had gone through the motions of hunting. Suomi had chosen to stay with the ship. Oscar and Athena and Gus, all having had some excitement on their first day's hunt but having returned from it empty handed returned from the second day's effort with their hologram trophies of large predators, safely recorded on little crystal cubes for later reproduction and display.

Athena, sitting in the lounge, rubbing her tired feet, complained it was going to be difficult to find a place to show off her glacier-beast. "It's all right for you, Oscar, but I have one small apartment. I'll have to move half the furniture to make room for this—if I dare display it at all, that is."

"Because you got it on an off-limits hunting trip?" Schoenberg laughed. "If anybody bothers you, just tell'em I gave it to you. Let'em come see me."

"I'll have to leave it turned off most of the time, just bring it out for special occasions. I suppose it would scare off most of my usual visitors, anyway." Then she caught herself and started to look apologetically toward Suomi, then hastily looked away.

Yesterday after everyone had returned to the ship they had all listened with some embarrassment to his account of how he had frozen in panic in the field and how Schoenberg had coolly saved his life. Athena had been more embarrassed, perhaps, than Suomi. De La Torre had seemed inwardly amused, and Barbara had shown some sympathy.

Suomi wondered if his shipmates—Athena especially—were waiting for him to demand a rifle and a chance to go out and prove himself. If so they were going to have a long wait. All right, he had been terrified. Maybe if he went out again and an animal charged, he wouldn't be terrified. Or maybe he would. He wasn't anxious to find out. He had nothing to prove. While all the others were out hunting on the second day he sat on the ship's extended landing ramp enjoying the air. There was a rifle at hand for emergencies but if anything menacing came in sight he planned to simply go inside and close the hatch.

Once everyone who wanted a trophy had one Schoenberg dallied in the north no longer. The hunting season would last a long time but

the mysterious Tournament was apparently quite brief and he didn't want to miss it. When Suomi mentioned the Tournament to the girls, none of them had any clear idea of what it was. Some sort of physical contest, he supposed.

Schoenberg evidently knew the way to Godsmountain, though he said he had not been there before. Flying south, he went much slower and lower than on the northward flight, paying close attention to landmarks. He followed a river valley most of the way, first by radar because of ground fog, then visually when the view had cleared. When, after several hours, they reached their destination, there was no mistaking it. Godsmountain stood out immediately from its surroundings, a wooded eminence practically isolated amid a patchwork of surrounding flat farmlands, orchards and pastures. The mountain was broad and quite high, but in general not very steep. On the deforested summit a town-sized complex of white stone walls and buildings stood out as plainly as if it had been constructed as a beacon for aerial navigation.

After circling the mountain once at a respectful distance, Schoenberg slowed down some more and began to descend toward it. Not to the citadel-city on its top; he was careful not to even fly over that.

A few hundred meters below the walls of the white city, a truncated pinnacle of rock rose out of the woods something like a dwarfed and naked thumb on the side of the mountain's great mitten-shape. After noticing this pinnacle, Schoenberg approached it slowly, circled it closely, then hovered directly over it for some time, probing delicately at it with the sensing instruments in *Orion's* hull. It was between twenty and thirty meters tall, and appeared to be just barely climbable. There was no sign that man or beast had ever taken the trouble to reach its flattened top.

De La Torre, now hanging onto the stanchion behind the pilot's chair, offered: "I'd say that top is big enough to hold us, Oscar, even give us a little room to walk around outside the ship."

Schoenberg grunted. "That was my idea, to put her down there. We might have to cut a few steps or string a line to climb down. But on the other hand no one's going to come visiting unless we invite'em."

After making a final close examination of the pinnacle's small mesa from only a few meters' distance, Schoenberg set *Orion* down on it. The landing struts groped outward, adjusted themselves to keep the ship level. There was indeed enough flat space on the rocky table to hold the ship securely, with a few square meters left over for leg-stretching. All aboard disembarked for this purpose at once. Even high up the weather at this tropical latitude was quite warm but the girls were fully clothed again, in view of their un-

certainty about local morals and customs. Schoenberg had ordered all weapons left inside the ship.

Direct inspection confirmed that only one side of the mesa was conceivably climbable by human beings. Even on that side there were places where a few pitons or some cut-in steps, and perhaps a rope, would be needed to allow even agile folk to make an ascent or descent in reasonable safety.

"Where is everybody?" Celeste wondered aloud as she gazed beyond the intervening sea of treetops at the white walls of the city on the summit, slightly above their level.

De La Torre had binoculars out and was peering in another direction, downslope. "There're thirty or forty men, in some kind of a camp. Over there. I can just make out some of them from time to time, among the trees."

For a while there was no better answer to Celeste's question, no sign that *Orion's* arrival or her sore-thumb presence above the landscape had been noticed. Of course the dense forest that covered most of the mountain might conceal a lot of movement. The trees, Suomi noted, looked like close analogues of common Earthly species. Maybe some mutated stocks had been imported by the early colonists. The trunks did seem to be proportionately thicker than those of most trees on Earth, and their branches tended to right-angle bends.

About half a standard hour had passed since their landing, and the six visitors had all armed themselves with binoculars, when the one visible gate in the city's high wall suddenly opened and a small party of white-robed men emerged, vanishing from sight again almost at once as they plunged into the woods.

Schoenberg had an infrared device with which he could have followed their progress beneath the canopy of leaves, but he didn't bother. Instead he placed his binoculars back in their case, leaned back and lit a cigar. Some minutes before Suomi had expected their reappearance so near at hand, the delegation from the city emerged from the woods again, this time into the clearing caused by rockfalls from the tower on which *Orion* rested.

Schoenberg at once threw down his cigar and moved forward to the mesa's edge and, with lifted arms, saluted the men below. Looking up, they returned the gesture with seeming casualness. There were half a dozen of them. The white robes of two or three were marked with different variations of purple trim.

The distance being too great for anything but shouted exchanges, the Hunterians came leisurely closer. The tall one in the lead reached the foot of the tower and began to climb. At first he made steady headway without much difficulty. About halfway up, however,

a nearly sheer stretch brought him to a halt. He was an old man, his visitors saw now, despite the nimbleness with which he moved.

He looked up at Schoenberg, who stood open-handed some ten meters above him, and called: "Outworlders, Thorun and the other gods of Hunters' offer you greetings and grant you welcome."

Schoenberg made a slight bow. "We thank Thorun and the other illustrious gods of Hunters', wishing to put our thanks in such form as may seem to them most courteous. And we thank you too, who approach us as their spokesman."

"I am Andreas, High Priest of Thorun's kingdom in the world."

Schoenberg introduced the members of his party, Andreas those with him. After a further exchange of courtesies in which Schoenberg hinted that he would make some gift to Thorun as soon as he found out what was most suitable, he got around to the object of his visit. "As all men know, Hunters' is the planet most renowned in all the universe for the quality of its fighting men. We are told that the finest warriors of the planet are even now gathered here at Godsmountain for a great Tournament."

"That is true in every word," said Andreas. His speech seemed to outworld ears much less accented than Kestand's had.

Schoenberg proceeded. "We crave the favor of Thorun in being allowed to witness this Tournament, at least in part."

Andreas did not look toward his companions waiting calmly below, but rather across the treetops to his city, as if to gather in some message. It was only a brief glance, before he said: "I speak for Thorun. It is his pleasure to grant you your request. The Tournament is already in progress, but the most important rounds of fighting remain yet to be seen. The next is to be fought tomorrow."

ANDREAS talked a little longer with the outworlders, promising that in the morning he would send a guide to conduct them to the fighting ring in plenty of time to see the day's events there. He promised them also that sometime during their stay they would be invited into the city and entertained in Thorun's temple as befitted distinguished guests. He acknowledged Schoenberg's promise that a gift for Thorun would be forthcoming. And then the priests and the outworlders exchanged polite farewells.

During the short hike back to the city Andreas was thoughtful and more than usually aloof. His subordinates, walking with him, took careful note of his mood and did not intrude upon him.

He was an old man by Hunterian standards, scarred by a dozen serious wounds, the survivor of a hundred fights. He was no longer a warrior of great prowess, his

muscles now suffering the wastage of time and maltreatment. Nimble climbing cost him much more effort than he allowed to show. The skull looked out from behind his face more plainly with the passage of every sixtieth-of-an-old-man's-life—what the outworlders would call a Standard Year.

In this progressive change of his facial appearance he found pleasure.

Though his legs were tired he maintained a brisk pace and it was not long before he had led his party back into the city.

There he brushed aside subordinates who were waiting to entangle him in a hundred questions and disputes about the visitors. These men, below the level of the Inner Circle, understood nothing. Essentially alone, Andreas strode quickly and still thoughtfully through the network of bright, narrow streets. Servants, artisans, soldiers and aristocrats alike all took themselves out of his way. On the steps before the tall outer doors of the Temple of Thorun a pair of Inner Circle aristocrats in purple-spangled robes broke off their conversation to bow respectfully, a salute that Andreas acknowledged with a scarcely conscious nod. A courtesan alighting from her litter bowed more deeply. She was evidently the woman of some non-celibate priest below the Inner Circle. Andreas acknowledged her not at all.

In the Outer Temple the light was good, the sun coming in strongly through the hypaethrus in the roof; and here a low-voiced chant of war, to muffled drum, went up from acolytes who knelt before an altar piled with enemy warriors' skulls and captured weapons. An armed guard who stood before the entrance to the Inner Temple saluted Andreas and stepped aside, pulling the great door open for him. Broad stairs went down. The room to which they led was vast, built partially below the level of the sunlit streets outside.

Here in the Inner Temple the light was indirect and dim, filtered through many small portals. Andreas pushed aside hanging after hanging of chain mail with practiced hands, made his way across the enormous chamber. He passed a place where a single devout worshipper knelt, a fighting man with shield and sword in hand, a priest-general dressed all in white, praying silently before a tall stone statue. The statue, highly stylized, portrayed a man in smooth, tight-fitting outworlder's garb. He wore a round and almost featureless helm and had a grim, beardless face—Karlsen, a demigod of the distant past, a sword in his right hand, a stick-like outworld weapon in his left. Andreas' face was set like stone. But to have the statue removed would cause trouble. Karlsen was still a popular figure with

many of the people.

From this point on the way Andreas took was not open, or even known, to more than a very few. He went behind more chain mail curtains into a corner where an inconspicuous passageway began. Again there were descending stairs, dimmer and much narrower than before. At the bottom a small oil lamp burned in a wall niche, giving enough light to enable a man to walk without groping, no more. Here were the tall and massive doors that led to Thorun's hall. From behind these doors at times came flaring lights, the sound of harp and drum and horn and booming laughter. At these times novices were allowed to stand wide-eyed at the foot of the stairs and briefly watch and listen, observing from afar the evidences of gods and heroes at feast within.

Andreas carried one of the two keys that could open the doors of Thorun's hall. Lachaise, Chief Artisan of the Temple and, of course, a member of the Inner Circle, had the other. A door swung open for Andreas now, when he turned his key in the proper secret way, and he quickly stepped through and pulled the door tightly shut again behind him.

THE Great Hall of Thorun, carved out of the living rock beneath the Temple, was perhaps five meters long, three wide, three high—certainly modest enough in all conscience for the master of the world. The walls, floor, and ceiling were rough, bare stone; Thorun's hall had never been finished. Quite likely it never would be. Work on it had begun, he supposed, almost twenty Hunterian years ago, five times an old-man's-lifetime. A little work had still been done in the tenure of the previous High Priest. But since then plans had changed. The place was big enough already to fill its only real function; duping novices. There was an air passage above so that bright torches could be burned to cast their light out under and around the doors, there were musical instruments piled in a corner. As for the booming, godlike laughter—either Thorun or Mjollnir could do that.

Thorun was in his hall, seated at a table that nearly filled the inadequate room. So huge was he that, even though seated, his eyes were on a level with those of the tall priest standing before him. Thorun's head of wild dark hair was bound by a golden band, his fur cloak hung about his mountainous shoulders. His famed sword, so large that no man could wield it, was girdled to his waist. His huge right hand, concealed as always in a leather glove, rested on the table and held a massive goblet. Seen in the dim light, Thorun's face above his full dark beard might have been judged human—except that it was too immobile and too large.

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Thorun did not move. Neither did the demigod Mjollnir, seated at another side of the table, head bound in a silver band, wrapped in his dark cloak. Of nearly equal size with the god of war and the hunt, Mjollnir shared Thorun's foodless and drinkless feast in gloomy comradeship.

After entering the room Andreas had waited for a little while, standing motionless, watching—making sure neither of them was going to be triggered into movement by his entry. Sometimes they were. One had to be careful. Satisfied, he walked around the high table and passed behind the chair of Thorun. There in the wall was set a small and secret door for which no key was necessary. Andreas opened this door by pressure in the proper place. Behind it another narrow stone stair wound down.

The descent was longer this time. At the bottom of the final stair Andreas turned first to his left. After three or four strides in that direction he emerged from a narrow tunnel to stand on the bottom of an enormous pit dug out of the rock beside the Temple. The excavation of this pit had consumed in labor the lifetimes of many slaves, having been started during the tenure of the fifth High Priest to hold office before Andreas; so farseeing and magnificent were the plans, now coming to fruition, of the true god! At its top the pit was surrounded by white stone walls and covered by a roof, so that it looked from the outside merely like one more building in the Temple complex, in no way remarkable amid the maze of structures that all looked more or less alike.

Andreas went back into the tunnel and followed it back in the direction that led right from the foot of the stair. Before entering the doorless chamber to which this passage brought him, he paused and closed his eyes in reverent imitation of Death, murmured a brief private prayer. Certainly not to Thorun. Thorun was a thing, a tool, part of a necessary deception practiced on the masses, a deception that Andreas had left behind him in the Temple. What now lay ahead was, for him, the ultimate—the only—reality.

The chamber Andreas now entered was as old as anything made by man on Hunters' planet, Dim daylight lit it now, filtering indirectly down through an overhead shaft open at some high place to the sunlight and barred by heavy grills at many places along its length. It was a little larger than Thorun's hall above. A hundred people might have squeezed themselves into this room but never had. Fewer than ten people now even knew of its existence.

Against the wall opposite the single doorway stood a low wooden table bearing a half dozen boxes of bright metal. Each box was of a different shape, and each rested in

a depression or socket carved to its shape in the dark panels of the tabletop. The outer surfaces of the boxes were precisely machined and shaped, products of a finer technology than any sword-making smithy. Tubes and cables of smooth gray and black ran among the boxes in a maze of interconnections.

On second look the wooden frame supporting the boxes was not really a table, but something more like a litter or sedan chair, though not made to accommodate the human form. From opposite ends of the litter extended pairs of sturdy carrying arms with carven grips, so six or eight humans could bear the whole assembly. The carrying handles were worn with long usage, but the litter, like the rest of the chamber, was very clean.

The pale stone of the floor shone faintly in the dim light. Only the low stone altar in the center of the room was darkened by old and ineradicable stains, rust from the inset iron rings to which victims' limbs were sometimes bound, rust-colored old blood at the places over which the victims' organs were removed. Before the litter, like fruit, the skulls of babies filled a bowl. Offerings of flowers lay scattered in small heaps, never in vases. Nearly all of the flowers were dead.

After he entered the room Andreas lowered himself to his knees, then down and fully prostrate on the floor, head and outstretched arms pointing toward the altar and beyond it to the litter with its metallic burden.

"ARISE, Andreas," said a steady, inhuman voice. It came from among the metal boxes, where a small wooden frame stood on its side holding a stretching drumskin. In the center of the drumskin a small gleam of metal showed. The voice produced by the drumskin was seldom loud, though a similar device had been put inside Thorun to let him bellow and laugh. This, the quiet voice of Death, was more like a drum-sound than anything else Andreas had ever heard—and yet it was not very like a drum.

Andreas arose and came around the altar, approached the litter, once more made obeisance to the boxes on it, this time only on one knee. "Oh Death," he said in a soft and reverent voice, "it is truly a starship, and its pilot chose to land on the rock where you in your wisdom foresaw that such a ship might land. I am going shortly to prepare Mjollnir for his task, and to choose soldiers to go with him. I have already carried out your other orders in every particular."

The drum-voice asked: "How many outworlders came with the ship?"

"I have seen six, and there is no evidence that others are aboard. Wonderful is your wisdom, oh Death, who could predict that such

men would be lured across the sky to watch our Tournament. Wonderful and—"

"Was there any mention of the man, the badlife, named Johann Karlsen?"

"No, Death." Andreas was a little puzzled. Surely the man Karlsen must be long since dead. But the god Death was wise beyond mere human understanding; Andreas had long since been convinced of that. He waited worshipfully for another question.

After a brief silence it came. "And they are private hunters? Poachers by their own laws?"

"Yes, Lord Death, their spokesman said they had been hunting. No one in their outworld government will know that they are here."

Prompted by occasional further questions Andreas spoke on, telling in some detail all that he had so far managed to learn about the visitors and their spacecraft.

He was certain it would not be too big to fit into the pit beside the Temple.

VI

On the day after *Orion*'s landing, Leros led the sixteen Tournament contenders who were still alive up the mountain to a new and higher camp. There, when routine matters had been gotten out of the way, he read the pairings for the third round of the Tournament:

Bram the Beardless of Consiglor
Charles the Upright

Col Renba
Farley of Eikosk

Giles the Treacherous
Hal Coppersmith

Jud Isaksson
LeNos of the Highlands

Mesthles of the Windy Vale
Omir Kelsumba

Polydorus the Foul
Rahim Sosias

Rudolph Thadbury
Thomas the Grabber

Vann the Nomad
Wull Narvaez

The priest of the Inner Circle who had come down from the city yesterday had informed Leros and the warriors that they could expect a group of outworlders to appear today. The Tournament was to go on almost as usual, and the utmost courtesy was to be shown the outworlders. If they behave strangely, ignore it. There will probably even be women among them; pay no attention to that, either. Leros was also instructed to call frequent recesses in the fighting for prayer and ceremony.

The warriors had little thought to spare for anything that did not directly concern their own survival in the Tournament, and the arrival

of the visitors and their guide when Leros was halfway through reading the lists caused no interruption. Four visitors came, and two of them were women but, Leros noted with some relief, modestly dressed. He had heard some tall tales of outworld ways. He was not pleased to have such onlookers—but perhaps Thorun was, for some obscure and godly reason. In any event, orders were orders, and Leros had endured harder ones than this.

This day's fighting ring had been stamped out at the head of a gentle slope in an area where the trees were thin. From the ring the outworlders' ship was readily visible a few hundred meters away on its truncated pinnacle of rock. The massive ball of bright metal that carried folk out among the stars showed a single open doorway in its otherwise featureless surface. Two more outworlders were sometimes visible, tiny figures sitting or standing on the little lip of rock before the ship.

ATHENA, standing at ringside beside Schoenberg and waiting somewhat nervously for the action to begin, whispered to him: "Are you sure this is going to be fighting for keeps?"

"That's what our guide tells us. I expect he knows what's going on." Schoenberg was watching the preparations with keen interest, not looking at her when he answered, low-voiced.

"But if what he told us is true, each of these men has already been through two duels in this tournament. And look—there's hardly a mark on any of them."

"I can see a few bandages," Schoenberg whispered back. "But you may have a point." He considered the matter. "It could well be this: fighting from an animal's back apparently isn't done here. Therefore men have to move around strictly on their own muscle power, and can't wear a lot of heavy body armor. So a clean hit from any type of weapon is going to leave a serious wound, not just a minor gash or bruise. Most wounds are serious, and the first man to be disabled by a serious wound is almost certainly the loser. Ergo, winners don't show up for the next round with serious wounds."

They fell silent then, since Leros was looking in their direction and perhaps was ready to get the action started. Two men with weapons ready were facing each other from opposite sides of the ring. De La Torre and Celeste also became utterly attentive.

Leros cleared his throat. "Bram the Beardless — Charles the Upright."

SUOMI, standing atop the mesa beside Barbara Hurtado and looking toward the ring from there, was too far away to hear Leros call

the names, but through his binoculars he saw two men with raised weapons start toward each other across the fighting ring. He put the binoculars down then and turned away, wondering how in the universe he had managed to get himself involved in this sickening business. For hunting animals one could find or fabricate some reason or excuse, but not for this—and there was Athena, over at ringside, an avid observer.

"Someone should do an anthropological study," she had explained to him just a little while ago, while getting ready to leave the ship. "If they're really fighting each other to the death over there." Their guide-to-be, a tall, white-robed youth, had just been explaining the Tournament to them in some detail.

"You're not an anthropologist."

"There isn't a professional one here. Still, it's a job that should be done." She went on getting ready, clipping a small audiovideo recorder to her belt, next to the hologram camera.

"Is Schoenberg here to do an anthropological study too?"

"Ask him. Carl, if you hate Oscar so much and can't stand to look at life in the raw—why did you come along on this trip? Why did you get me to ask Oscar to invite you?"

He drew a deep breath. "We've been through that."

"Tell me again. I would really like to know."

"All right. I came because of you. You are the most desirable woman I have ever known. I mean more than sex. Sex included, of course—but I want the part of you that Schoenberg has."

"He doesn't *have* me, as you put it. I've worked for Oscar five years now, and he has my admiration—"

"Why your admiration?"

"Because he's strong. There's a kind of strength in you too, Carl, a different kind, that I've admired also. Oscar has my admiration and often my companionship—because I enjoy his company. He and I have had sex together a few times, and that, too, has been enjoyable. But he doesn't *have* me. No one does. No one will."

"When you come of yourself as a free gift, then someone will."

"No one."

BRAM and Charles were sparring cautiously in the day's first duel, neither of them having yet decided on an all-out rush. Though they were of a height Charles the Upright was much leaner, his back so straight that the reason for his name was obvious. He wore a loose jacket of fine leather and had a darkly handsome face.

Athena thought he showed incredible poise, waiting with his long, sharp-looking sword lifted in one hand, aimed at his opponent. Surely, she thought, this was not life-and-death after all. No matter

how seriously they took it, it must be some play, some game, with a symbolic loser stepping aside . . . and yet all the time she was telling herself this she knew better.

"Come," Charles was murmuring, sounding like a man urging on some animal. "Come. Now. *Now.*"

And beardless Bram, all youth and freakish strength, came on, first one step, then two, then in an awesome rush, his sword first raised then slashing down. The sharp blades rang together, the two men grunted. Incoherent cries of excitement went up around the watching circle. Charles, fending off blow after blow, was giving way now. He seemed to lose his footing momentarily in a slip, then lashed out with a counterstroke that brought a hoarse noise of appreciation from the warriors who stood watching with knowledgeable eyes. Bram avoided the blow and was unhurt but his rushing attack had been brought to a standstill. Athena for the first time began to realize that fine skill must reign here on the same throne with brutality.

Bram stood quietly for a moment, frowning as if at the unexpected resistance of some inanimate object. Then suddenly he charged again, more violently if possible than before. The long swords blurred and sang together, sprang apart, blurred and sang again. Athena began now to see and understand the timing and strategy of the strokes. She was forgetting herself, her eyes and mind opening more fully for perception. Then all at once, somehow—for all her concentration she had not seen how—Charles's sword was no longer in his hand. Instead it sprouted between Bram's ribs, the hilt firmly affixed before Bram's breastbone, half a meter of blade protruding gory and grotesque from his broad back.

Bram shook his head, one, two, three times, in what seemed utter disbelief. Athena saw it all with great clarity and it all seemed very slow. Bram was still waving his own sword, but now he seemed unable to locate his newly disarmed opponent, standing in plain sight in front of him. Suddenly, awkwardly, Bram sat, dropped his weapon and raised a hand to his face, brushing at it as if struck by the thought that now his beard would never grow. The hand fell limp and Bram slumped farther, his head tilting forward on his chest. The pose looked incredibly uncomfortable, but he bore it without complaint. Only when a gray-clad slave limped forward to drag the body to one side did Athena fully understand that the man—the boy—had died before her eyes.

Charles the Upright extracted his sword with a strong pull and held it out to another slave for cleaning—while yet another spilled sand over the place where Bram had spilled his life. In the background someone was digging. The world had

changed in the space of a few moments, or rather Athena had been changed. Never again would she be the same.

"Col Renba—Farley of Eikosk."

The man who started forward at the name of Col Renba was big, brown, and shaggy. He stood near the center of the arena whirling a mace, a spike-studded ball on the end of a short chain, and waited for Farley to come after him.

Oscar was saying something to her, but there was no time to listen or think, no time for anything but watching. No time for Oscar, even.

Farley of Eikosk, fair and freckled, tall and well made if not exactly handsome, came treading catlike in fine leather boots. His other garments were simple, but of rich sturdy cloth. He squinted in the sun that shone on the fine polished steel of his sword and knife. Holding a weapon in either hand, he feinted an advance to within striking range of the mace, and nodded as if with satisfaction when he saw how rapidly the spiked weight on its taut chain arched out at him and back again.

Now Farley began to circle, moving around Col Renba first one way and then the other. The mace came out after him, faster than before, faster than had seemed possible to Athena, and she cried out, unaware that she did so. Again she cried out, in relief this time, when she saw that the spikes had missed Farley's fine, fair skin.

Momentarily both men were still, and then again there came a rapid passage of arms, too fast for Athena to judge. She thought the flurry was over, when suddenly the tip of one of the mace's spikes touched Farley on the hand, and his dagger flew lightly but awkwardly away. In almost the same moment Farley's long sword bit back, and now Col Renba backed away, keeping the mace twirling with his right hand, his left arm curled up as if trying to protect itself from further damage while its sleeve rapidly drenched red.

Each man's left arm was bleeding now, and Farley's at least appeared no longer usable. Along the back of his hand there showed the white of splintered bone. The bright blade of his long dagger lay buried in the dust.

When the mace-spinner saw the extent of the damage he had inflicted, and found that his own left arm could at least be held up out of the way, he stopped backing off and began to advance once again. He kept the ugly weight of death moving around him in a smooth ellipse. As Col stepped closer, Farley began to retreat, but only began. As the mace sighed past him his long speed-thrust to the throat caught Col stepping in. Col Renba died, the mace flying wide from his hand in a great arc, spinning over the shouting, dodging ring of watchers.

A long moment after the other

watchers' outcries had died away, Athena was still shouting. She realized this and shut up and let go of Schoenberg, whose arm and shoulder had somehow come into her spasmodic two-handed grip. Oscar was looking at her strangely, and so was De La Torre, who stood with his arm around a bored-looking Celeste a little distance off.

But Athena forgot about them. Already men were getting ready to fight again.

"GILES the Treacherous—Hal Coppersmith."

Coppersmith was the leaner of this pair, and much the taller. He was content to begin on the defensive, holding his long sword like the sensing organ of some giant insect. Giles the Treacherous had sandy hair, an air of earnest perseverance, and (like the most successful traitors, thought Athena) an open trustworthiness in his face. He was not big, and did not appear to be exceptionally strong, but still maneuvered his own long blade with an assured economy of effort. Now it was high, now low, without Athena being aware that it had started to move. Hal Coppersmith had similar difficulties, it seemed. His elbow was gashed, and then his knee, and then the great muscle in his tattooed upper arm was cut nearly through. Then nothing remained but butchery. Giles stepped back with an expression of distaste. A slave limped forward to swing a maul and end Hal's silent, thrashing agony.

"Jud Isaksson—LeNos of the Highlands."

LeNos sprang to the attack almost before the signal had been given, his fierce scarred face thrust forward like a shield. In either hand he held a wide blade, moving and flashing like the hub-knives on a chariot. And little Isaksson, whooping as if he were overjoyed to meet a fighter so aggressive, shot forward fast enough to clash with LeNos almost in the middle of the trodden circle. The round metal shield on Jud's left arm rang like some maddened blacksmith's anvil under the barrage of his enemy's blows. LeNos seemed incapable of imagining a defensive move, let alone performing one. He only pushed his own two-handed attack so maniacally that it seemed impossible for his opponent to find a sliver of time and space in which to counterattack.

At such a pace the fight could not and did not last long. LeNos's driving sword arm was suddenly stilled, pinned in mid-air on the long, thick needle of Isaksson's sword. The highlander's dagger kept flashing on, but still Jud's bright-scarred shield took the blows. Then Jud yanked his sword free, of the ruined arm as he did, and brought it back, hacking, faster and faster, with a violence wilder if anything than his op-

ponent's had been. LeNos was in several pieces before he died.

"WHAT's the matter?" An insistent voice had repeated the question to her several times, Athena realized. Schoenberg was gripping her firmly by both arms, and giving her a slight shaking. He was looking closely into her face. When her eyes focused on his, the expression in his changed from concern to an odd mixture of amusement and contempt.

"Nothing's the matter. What do you mean? I'm all right." She kept looking for the next fight to start, and then realized that the priest in charge, Leros or whatever his name was, must have just ordered a recess. Slowly she realized that she had come near losing herself in the excitement of the fighting, temporarily losing control of her own behavior as if with drugs or sex. But no, it was all right. A near thing, but she still controlled herself.

Schoenberg, still looking at her with some concern, said now: "We had better give Carlos and Barbara a chance to see a thing or two."

"Him?" she laughed abruptly, contemptuously. "This isn't for him. Thank you for bringing me, Oscar."

"Nevertheless I think you've had enough."

De La Torre peered around Oscar at her. "I have, too, for the time being. Shall we walk back to the ship, Athena?"

"I'm staying."

Her tone was such that neither of the men made any further argument. Celeste meanwhile had moved next to Schoenberg; she was watching him more than what was going on in the ring. "I'm going, then," said De La Torre, and he was off.

SUOMI, having handed over his sentry's rifle to De La Torre, slid and clambered down the steep slope from the mesa's top, holding on to the retractable rope that they had secured at the top to make the climb less dangerous. On this one face of the mesa the slope for the most part was not quite precipitous; there were some patches of gravelly soil and a bush or two. Already a visible path was being worn.

When he reached the level of the forest Suomi set off immediately in the direction of the tournament. Athena was there, not just for a quick look, but remaining there by choice to see it all. A purely scientific interest? Anthropology? She had never been enthusiastic on that subject before today, not around Suomi anyway. Maybe the tournament wasn't, after all, as murderous a business as he had been led to believe. Neither Suomi nor Barbara had watched. De La Torre, coming back, had said nothing about it and

Suomi had not asked him. But maybe it was just as bloody as the guide had warned them, and she was still there taking it in. If she was like that, he had better know about it.

Nothing horrible was going on in the ring as he emerged from the forest and drew near. People were simply standing about, waiting, while a white-robed man went through some kind of ceremony before a simple altar. As Suomi came up Schoenberg nodded a greeting to him. Athena gave Suomi a preoccupied look. She was upset about something, he thought, but she gave no indication of wanting to be elsewhere. His attention was soon pulled away from her.

"Omir Kelsumba—Mesthles of the Windy Vale."

On springy legs massive as tree trunks Kelsumba moved forward, black skin gleaming, axe cradled almost like an infant in his awesome arms. Mesthles, spare and graying, thoughtful-looking, somewhat battered by time like the ancient scythe with which he meant to fight, kept at a respectful distance from Kelsumba for a little while, retreating with economical movements, studying the movements of his foe. Now the axe came after him, startling Suomi with its speed, and with such power and weight behind it that it seemed nothing human should be able to turn the blow aside. Mesthles made no mistakes, had his scythe-blade in the right place to turn the axe, but the jarring impact when the blades met came near to knocking Mesthles down. Another axe-blow fell on the scythe, and then another. Mesthles could not get into position to strike back. After the fourth or fifth parry, the scythe-blade broke. A groaning murmur, like the foretaste of blood, came up from the ring of watchers, and Suomi heard part of it coming from Athena. He saw the moist-lipped rapture on her face as she watched the fight, oblivious to him and all else.

Broken weapon still tightly in his grip, its jagged blade still dangerous, Mesthles maintained his calm, and showed more agility than his appearance suggested. For some time he avoided being pinned against the side of the fighting ring. Neither he nor any of the other fighters ever seemed to consider stepping across that simple line and outside the ring, any more than they would consider jumping through a wall.

The axe now came after Mesthles in what looked like a continuous blur, seeming to pull its giant owner after it. It struck Mesthles at last, full in the back, as he twisted his body in trying to dodge it yet again. His fallen body continued jerking, twitching, moving. A slave limped forward with a maul and dealt the finishing blow.

Suomi's gut worked suddenly, labored wretchedly, rejected in a spasm what remained of the little

he had taken for his breakfast. I should have tranquilized myself, he thought. It was too late now. He faced away from the ring but could do nothing more before the vomit came. If he was desecrating holy ground, well, they would have to kill him for it. But when he straightened up it seemed that no one was paying him any attention at all. Whether it was delicacy or lack of interest he could not tell.

"Polydorus the Foul — Rahim Sosias."

Suomi found that he could watch. Polydorus, looking no more foul than his competitors, brandished a battered sword with obvious strength and energy. Sosias was paunchy and short, yet he somehow managed to draw first blood with his scimitar, making an ugly slice among Polydorus's left shoulder. Polydorus was galvanized rather than weakened by the injury, and pressed an attack so hard that for a few moments it seemed he might prevail. But then he aimed a long thrust poorly, and stood looking down at his own right hand and forearm where he had just stepped on it. He grimaced and spat toward Sosias before the scimitar came back to take his life.

The white-clad priest was in the ring again, and it appeared there was going to be another recess. Not that it mattered to Suomi. He turned away, deliberately this time. He had found out that he could watch whatever further maiming might occur; but still he much preferred not to watch.

He stepped closer to Schoenberg and Athena, managed to catch the eye of the former but not the latter, and said: "I'm going back to the ship." He glanced at Celeste, but she only gave him a bored look and moved a little closer to Schoenberg.

Suomi turned away from them all and trudged back among the trees. It was good to be briefly alone again, but here in this alien forest was no place to stop and think.

When he got back to the foot of the mesa, he found that the climbing rope had been pulled up. Not in the mood to try the ascent without it, Suomi called out. A few seconds later De La Torre's head and bare shoulders appeared at the top of the slope. "What's up?" he called down.

"I've seen enough. Throw down the rope."

"All right." In a moment the rope came snaking down.

WHEN Suomi got to the top he saw that Barbara lay naked on a foam mattress so close to the climbing path that De La Torre could sit on the mattress beside her and do acceptable sentry duty. Suomi noticed also that a pair of binoculars had been set up on a tripod beside the mattress in such a way that a man lying there, perhaps with a woman beneath him, could

observe uninterruptedly what was going on in the fighting ring.

De La Torre apparently was finished for the time being with binoculars, mattress, and girl; he had pulled on a pair of shorts already and was continuing to dress. His voice was mild and lazy. "I'll turn the rifle back to you, then, Carlos, and go down again myself."

Before Suomi had gotten the rifle's still-unfamiliar strap adjusted to fit his shoulder, De La Torre was gone again. Suomi watched him out of sight, then said to Barbara, who still lay curled up tiredly on her mattress: "And how are things with you?"

She moved a little, and said in a small voice: "Life appears possible." Never had he seen Barbara so obviously depressed before. He had lain with her a couple of times on the long trip out, and with Celeste a couple of times. Not with Athena, though, on the trip out he could no longer be casual with her. Now perhaps he could.

Barbara was the only one of them who had refused to watch the tournament at all. So of course the sadist De La Torre had had to pick her for his object, his receptacle . . . Suomi wanted to say something good to her but could think of nothing. Tomorrow her nakedness might arouse his own lust again but right now it only made her seem defenseless and pitiable, lying there face down. So, she had wanted to come along on a luxurious space voyage with a billionaire, and her wish had been granted. She was earning her passage.

No need to walk a sentry's route around the ship; there was only the one route by which one could ascend. Standing at the head of the path, looking out over the treetops without binoculars, Suomi could see De La Torre arriving at the side of the fighting ring. The next duel had still not gotten underway, evidently; there were still four men waiting to fight, if Suomi was reading the arrangement of the distant figures correctly. The binoculars were handy but he did not care enough to pick them up. Perhaps he did not want to acknowledge their present positioning by moving them.

It promised to be a long few days ahead, until the Tournament slaughtered itself into extinction, and then a very long trip home. But there were compensations. It had been made clear that whatever had seemed to be growing between him and Athena had no real existence. It was not over—it had never been.

Barbara was sitting up and doing things with her fingers to her hair, not yet in a mood to talk. Suomi, turning to look to the north from this high place, saw or thought he saw the mountainous glaciers of hunting country looming just over the horizon there, like unsupported clouds.

What was that sound, just now? The path was clear. Some small

animal or flying creature, then. Never mind.

Well, things were no doubt going to be socially uncomfortable on the trip home, but it was well worth it to have settled the thing between them, that might otherwise have dragged on much longer. You had to consider this a favorable conclusion. If they had . . .

Did they have woodpeckers here? He couldn't see the bird anywhere but still the sound came almost continuously. Must be down under the treetops somewhere. There was also a faint polyphonic roar from the direction of the Tournament, what must have been a loud yell to be audible this far away, but he did not try to see what had happened there.

Barbara was standing up, her clothes in hand. "I'm going in for a shower, Carlos."

"All right." He watched her walk away. Women. Magnificent, but who could understand them?

And then, while on the subject of magnificence, there had been the animal, the glacier-beast, whose power and beauty had frozen Suomi in awe and terror as it charged down upon him. He now felt, surprisingly, some small regret that he had not killed it. Better, of course, if it had been allowed to live . . . yet, what was it Thoreau had written? There is a time in the lives of nations, as of individuals, when the best hunters are the best men. Something like that. The nation of interstellar man had presumably long since passed that stage, of course. And so had Carlos Suomi in his individual life. Or he should have. Schoenberg, on the other hand, though something more than a mere sadist—

IN HIS mind the perception of the nagging tapping sound clicked suddenly into place with a remembered visual image, that of stone being worked by hard metal, more precisely that of steps being cut in the side of the mesa by Schoenberg, hanging on the rope with mountaineers' implements in hand. Suomi had not made the connection before because the sounds he was now hearing were too rapid. No one could wield a hammer at such a speed. And at the same time they sounded too irregular to be made by an automatic tool.

The climbable face of rock was still unoccupied. Suomi had started around the ship to check the other sides of the mesa when he beheld in front of him someone, something, climbing carefully up over the rim and into sight. A huge head of wild, coarse, dark hair, bound by a silver band. Beneath the head a massive wrestler's body coming up over the edge of the cliff, clothed in rough furs under a swirling dark cloak. On second look the figure was so huge the mind wanted to refuse belief.

TO BE CONTINUED

THE ALIEN VIEWPOINT

DICK GEIS

TRADITIONALLY (and I'm a nonconformist traditionalist) the first column is the place the new columnist sets his policies in concrete for the readers to stumble over.

Mine is simple: *The Alien Viewpoint* will be a stew created from whatever strange intellectual and emotional animals I come across in the world of science fiction and fantasy.

I bagged one the other night around 1:30 a.m. as I was reading *Joshua Son of None* by Nancy Freedman (Delacorte, $7.95).

Joshua is a clone of the late President Kennedy, secretly "made" from a bit of tissue from the President's neck wound.

I have reservations about the novel which I'll expose elsewhere (reviewers are exhibitionists at heart). The intellectual beastie that attracted my attention was the author's passing comment that if cloning was accepted by the world it would be possible to grow personal clones for private organ banks.

But the catch is that it would have to be limited to the very rich and the very powerful (those who can tap the public treasury) and it would have to be very secret.

Were I a millionaire several times over and were I not too old to wait for a clone of myself to grow large enough to be of use, I would be eager to set up a laboratory, hire a host womb, and have a duplicate of myself grown (but carefully kept at the imbecile level, I think) so that when I needed a new kidney or a new heart or a new set of lungs, or a new prostate, gall bladder . . .

Of course, about every dozen years I'd have a new clone started. Perhaps if I were very rich I'd have back-up clones, too; insuring a fresh, young, strong set of organs and glands for my aging primary body.

And you can bet your banana I'd promote brain transplant research. With that technique mastered a host clone could be kept available for emergency brain transplant as well as eventual optimum-age transfer.

This private use of clones would, again, *have* to be kept secret, because there wouldn't be doctors, money or resources enough to provide everyone with sets of personal clones for immortality purposes.

And there'd be all kinds of social ferment and envy and "morality"

involved if a rich and powerful few were known to be availing themselves of self-grown spare parts which enabled them to live to be 200 or so, at least.

Then I speculated that maybe . . . maybe secret clones already exist. Have you ever wondered why Ronald Reagan looks so young? And Richard Nixon doesn't look 60 years old . . . and how ageless is Lena Horne, and Mae West . . .

"THE story is an author-rigged thing, but reality is a 100 percent unpredictable whore."

—Pietro Di Donato, author of *Christ In Concrete*

THE incredible sub-culture of science fiction fans and fanzines is alive and well despite its recent (and growing) exposure to pop-culture hungry academia, especially since the publication in 1973 of Doctor Fredric Wertham's admirable *The World of Fanzines: A Special Form of Communication* by Southern Illinois University Press ($10).

It should be noted, however, that awareness by the professors and thesis hungry graduate students ('Publish or die.') is still within reason since even famous Dr. Wertham had to turn to a small university press, and the SIUP had to have the book publication subsidized by a foundation.

The good psychiatrist did, however, combine comic and heroic-fantasy fandom and fanzines with science fiction fandom in his overflow—an act which rubbed the slanish fur of a few purists and chauvinistic s-f fan editors and commentators the wrong way.

But he found us to be a Good Thing and gave us a clean bill of mental health. (If he had found us to be freaky escapists avoiding reality he would be Mud and described as a senile quack whose brain leaks precious bodily fluids.)

I should add that Dr. Wertham's favorable findings *in re* s-f and comic fans also applies to science fiction and fantasy readers in general. Have a happy day . . . and don't be too self-conscious when some scholar buys the subscriber lists of the sf zines and sends out questionaires that probe your secret psyche.

WHAT I intended to get at in this section is my admiration of Ed Connor and his fanatic determination to triumph at whatever cost over the U.S. Postal Service.

Ed published a good-to-fine s-f fanzine in 1973 called *Moebius Trip.* Mimeographed, 8½ x 11, three staples . . . the usual format. He wanted to send it book rate and save some postage.

The magazine qualified according to the P.O. rule book—except

as interpreted by a tunnel-visioned official in Peoria who ruled it was not a book because it wasn't bound like a normal printed book.

(Ed, in a letter, reported some unofficial sub rosa desire by the Post Office to discourage this type of "little-mag" publishing as more bother to the P.O. than the postage is worth.)

Anyway, Ed simmered, stewed, boiled, and labored in his quarters for a few months, and came forth with a fan magazine in the size and format of a paperback book with perfect binding (using the same spine-glue regular paperbacks use), even a name-change to *S.F. Echo,* published as one of a series in the 'Moebius Trip Library'.

The fact that he has to spend 30 hours per issue just to cut the mimeographed 8½ x 14 pages into four 4¼ x 7 pages with a razor, then gather the 80 or more sheets to make one copy, then apply glue to the spine, and add the cover . . . this is of no matter. Extra work is good for the soul and he has beaten that stupido Post Office official.

And he has created a 'first' in s-f fan publishing history—that format and binding had never been done before. I salute you, Ed.

Better than that, I recommend readers of this column to Ed's *S.F. Echo* #19 which contains a fine, engrossing (because the author writes well and knows what he's talking about) article by Philip Jose Farmer titled, "Getting A-Long With Heinlein", a must-read for Heinlein lovers and haters.

Phil, also, in passing, has much to say about writers and writing in general which has that sweet, clang of truth so rarely found.

There are often these gems in the fan press—letters and articles from many of the s-f pro writers, from well-read s-f aficionados (a twenty-dollar word for hard-core fans), and even from s-f editors and publishers.

We have a small, close-knit, friendly little world in this sub-culture. We snap and snarl a lot—sometimes viciously—but overall s-f fandom (including many, many pros who started as fans) is a good place to be for a hobby or as a more serious avocation verging on vocation.

Ed Connor's address is: 1805 N. Gale, Peoria, Il 61604. The next sound you hear will be his screams—because he printed only 375 copies of *S.F. Echo* #19, and probably has only a few left.

—

I WOULD trust paranoiacs more if they didn't spy on me so much.

—

Barry Malzberg is the kind of writer who throws sticks into my mental wheels. Every time I read one of his books I lose spokes. And not only does me he provoke; he did

it to a well-known s-f writer who commented to me in a letter after having read Malzberg's *Herovit's World* which he had read after reading my review in *The Alien Critic.*

Said Big Name writer doesn't want to be quoted, but I can report that he speculated, as I did in my review, on the real identity of some of the characters in *Herovit's World* (Random House, $4.95).

The book is a satiric-tragic novel about a science fiction writer who is coming apart at the seams, sinking, lurching, staggering into progressively deeper schizophrenia.

This character, John Steele, is clearly a caricature of John Campbell, Jr., and the magazine *Tremendous Stories* is obviously *Astounding/Analog.*

After that—the speculation is on shakier ground. The writer I heard from thinks the academic friend/enemy character Wilk Mitchell is a disguised Kris Neville.

It's obviously fun to pin real names on these characters. In LOCUS #154, Dick Lupoff reviews *Herovit's World,* too, and indulges in the passtime. Dick says, "The portraits of thinly disguised John W. Campbell, Jr., A. E. van Vogt and William Tenn are deadly."

In *Herovit's World* Malzberg also does knife-numbers on science fiction fans, the Science Fiction Writers of America, Scientology (these are my "identifications" by the way), and perhaps an early

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writers' group called The Futurians.

Barry denies any resemblance to anyone living or dead, of course. As he says in his letter in *The Alien Critic* #8, "And what is Scientology?"

It should be noted that strictly speaking, *Herovit's World* is not science fiction. It is (as the Big Name writer correctly noted) a contemporary mainstream novel which is rendered of special interest to us because of the s-f world characters and the hallucinations (Herovit, split three ways, turns his life and body over to his pen-name split-personality first, and then, in desperation, to his s-f series character, Mack Miller, who is head of a Galactic Survey Team).

Using real s-f people in novels and stories has a long, noble history. Perhaps Bob Tucker started it in his classic after-the-bomb novel *The Long Loud Silence.*

Andy Offutt has done it, too, in *Ardor On Aros,* I believe, and Larry Niven and David Gerrold did a masterful job of "Tuckerizing" dozens of fans and pros in their *The Flying Sorcerers* of a few years ago.

"Tuckerizing" is a private, 'inside' thing, a way of expressing friendship and giving an egoboost to admired and respected people.

Mostly. Sometimes it can be used to present deadly caricatures and satires—and as therapy to work out active dislike and maybe even hatred.

S-f and fantasy artists do this sort of thing, too, on occasion. You'd be surprised at the identity of some of the faces that turn up on s-f and fantasy magazines and books, and in inside illustrations...

WHAT *do you consider the greatest weakness of Science Fiction today?*

Philip K. Dick: "Its inability to explore the subtle, intricate relationships which exist between the sexes. Men, in their relationship with women, get themselves into the most goddamn difficult circumstances, and s-f ignores—or is unable to deal with—this fundamental aspect of adult life. Therefore s-f remains pre-adult, and therefore appeals, more or less, to pre-adults. If s-f explored the man-woman aspect of life it would not lose its readers as those readers reach maturity. S-f simply must learn to do this or it will always be retarded—as it is now. The novel *Player Piano* is an exception to this, and I suggest that every s-f fan and especially every would-be writer study again and again the details of this superb novel which deal specifically with the relationship of the protagonist and his wife."

—The Double:Bill Symposium, 1969

UNTHINKABLE *Thoughts Dept.*

Sometimes, late at night, when Johnny Carson has a lousy guest list, and I've had too much coffee to go to sleep, I think thoughts that have no business in my head.

A demon gets into me and I grab social dogma—especially liberal social dogma that no one questions—and I turn it around.

We all know that are no taboos left in science fiction, don't we? Why, just last week when Jim Baen, the new editor of *If* and *Galaxy* called to discuss this column with me he said that *If* was to be a magazine in which nothing is sacred.

In *Galaxy,* he said, there may be one thou-shalt-not-touch: the proposition that humanity would survive and would not die by our own hands or under the boot/hoof/tentacle/claw/whatever of an alien menace.

But there is a great deal of self-censorship in writing, and science fiction is as vulnerable to that kind, conscious and unconscious, as any genre of fiction or non-fiction.

Writers automatically (after a few years of experience) don't consider certain ideas, and that goes for editors, too. 'Too controversial', 'to perverse', 'too repellent'. Like that.

Well, I'm going to lay some unthinkable thoughts on you. Let them creep around on your skin for a few minutes before you tear them off and stomp them.

What do we all reject as a bad thing, a regrettable tendency in humanity? How about racial prejudice? How about war?

Well, can nothing good be said for automatic dislike and suspicion of members of another race? Is there no value in racial prejudice's brother, xenophobia—hatred of foreigners?

Taking this a step farther—is war really bad for humanity?

Should we abandon the fruitless passtime of perfecting mankind and instead simply accept humanity for what it is? We don't much like ourselves as a species, do we? So damn many things *wrong* with us!

But what if these "wrong" things have survival value? What if we are as "flawed" as we are and do such "terrible" things as we do (war, rape, murder, theft, prejudice . . . hate, greed, envy, pride . . . all the deadly sins) because these parts and aspects of our nature are *good for us* as a species?

We exist as we exist, do as we do (time and time again), for a reason. We are built this way—for war, strife, greed—WHY? We use reason to further emotional ends; we rarely use emotion to further rational ends (as a nation, race, species).

After all, God must love criminals of all kinds since He made so many of them . . . and continues to maintain the social-cultural-genetic conditions that produce criminals, and suffering, and warped psyches of all types, and . . .

But I don't want to get into the God argument. It slipped in. (God-as-scapegoat isn't that new an idea.)

I keep coming back to the thought that we are as we are because we win this way as a species. We rule the planet as a species. We purify and advance ourselves as a species with wars and aggressions.

Could it possibly be that Nature's Goal is: let the best racial strain win?; war is necessary?; genocide is inevitable? (Would you rather be half Neanderthaler and half Cro-Magnon?) (Is there a taint of Pithecanthropus in your Erectus?)

Ah, but it is said that these survival-of-the-fittest leftover instincts are no longer appropriate in this age of extreme industrialization/technology and interdependence; we must cooperate or blow ourselves up in nuclear holocaust. We must curb our greed or we will befoul our planet to the point of suicide. We must, it is said, tame our inner beast.

Sure. We talk a lot, preach a lot—but go on killing and looting. Could it be we're *supposed* to kill and loot? Are we destined to war with and loot the galaxy?

Would a tame, rational species with no emotional demons in its psyche, have spent the tremendous sums of money we have spent to get into space?

Mankind did it because of "low" emotional reasons—pride, greed, power, fear. We'll probably get to the stars for the same "shameful" reasons.

Psychologists tell us that as individuals we are mature if we can accept ourselves as we are, not as we feel we "should" be. But they don't advise that for mankind as a species.

As far as applying these speculations of mine in science fiction . . . don't hold your water. Can you see a story—a novel, say—being published in an American s-f prozine with these ideas operative? Our virtues are our real faults, and our faults are our real virtues. (*Possibly. If it were good enough. Ed.*)

(I know, someone will write and tell me it's been done! I'll concede Frank Herbert's *Project Forty* last year in *Galaxy* came close.)

But I still think the above premise is essentially taboo . . . as fiction. In *If* last year *The Wizard of Anharitte* by Colin Kapp started intriguingly, but the Good Guy liberal dogma won in the end—what a cop-out!

Finally, if you want to write me to say how much you enjoyed this column and tell me how keen-minded I am, send your letters care of the editor.

Elsewhere in the pages of IF *may be found instructions for obtaining Dick Geis in larger doses—that is to say, by purchasing* his *zine,* The Alien Critic. *Ed.* •

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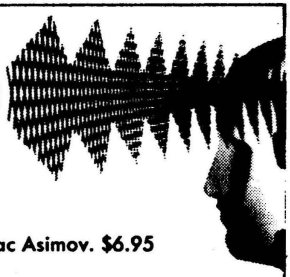

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CANTOR'S WAR

Someone once defined an expert
as one who never makes a mistake
on his way to the Grand Fallacy.

CHRISTOPHER ANVIL

MAJOR-GENERAL A. C. Hewell stood in the dimly lit, glassed-in balcony that overlooked the glowing white wall that illumined the rows of Space Force men and women down below at their computerized control-centers.

Beside General Hewell stood a young colonel wearing a compact headset, who now said, "Density seventeen, sir. Plus one."

Hewell nodded, and one of the other two men in the room, a well-built expensively-dressed civilian, said, "Pardon me, General. That means—"

"Seventeen enemy warships per standard Tau-space unit, Senator. Which is an increase of one since the last reading," Hewell added.

"And the attacks usually come through—" The Senator looked a question.

"When the density is twenty-four or above."

"I see. Now, this large glowing wall-size screen before us—"

"Shows a schematic representation of Tau-space. It's impossible, of course, for a three-dimensional screen to represent Tau-space accurately. Roughly, this screen represents a cross-section. The center stands for an arbitrary fixed point in Tau-space. The scale changes as you move from the center toward

the edge of the screen. The edge represents a space immeasurably far from the center. Enemy ships we show by silver dots. There are always enemy ships present."

The general turned to speak to the young colonel, and a moment later the contrast of the screen changed so that a multitude of silvery dots could be seen, like tiny darting minnows, in the central portion of the screen. These dots grew rapidly smaller as the eye glanced out toward the edge, to blend into a silvery background that merged at last into a silver rim around the edge of the screen.

"And," said the Senator, with a note of profound curiosity, "with a density of seventeen per standard unit—of *volume*?—I suppose—"

"That's right. Tau-space volume."

"—in this Tau space," the senator went on, "with a *density* of seventeen per unit, what's their *total strength* in there?"

"Infinite," said the general immediately.

The fourth man, possibly thirty years old, tall, and intellectual-appearing, spoke for the first time, his voice sharp. *"Infinite?"*

The sharp questioning tone caused the general to turn, and the colonel to look up momentarily.

"That's right," said the general.

"I would question that," said the fourth man, his voice sharp and critical, "unless you use the word merely in the lay sense of 'large beyond our ability to measure.'"

The general frowned, trying to place the peculiar quality of this voice. He glanced around. "You haven't introduced your friend, Senator."

The senator apologized. "This is Dr. T. Binding Phipps, general. Dr. Phipps, General Hewell. Dr. Phipps is a mathematician and a former classmate of my son Alex. Dr. Phipps happened to be with the committee when your report on this situation was circulated; his comments on it were so pointed and so interesting that I thought I'd bring him along. Dr. Phipps and my daughter—" The senator cleared his throat, let the sentence trail out unfinished so that the general groped for a moment after the precise nature of the relationship implied, then shrugged.

"Glad to have you with us, Dr. Phipps," he said.

Dr. Phipps inclined his head in bare acknowledgment.

The colonel said, "Density eighteen, sir. Plus one."

The general nodded.

"Might I ask," said the senator's companion abruptly, "how you determine the size of this presumed unit of volume?"

The general glanced at the senator, who looked benevolent and noncommittal.

"I think, Dr. Phipps," said the general with careful courtesy, "that Colonel Smith can answer your question better than I."

The colonel glanced around. "What was the question again, Dr. Phipps?"

"Precisely how do you determine the size of this presumed unit of volume?"

The question came over with a snap suggestive of the crack of a whip, but the colonel, after a pause, answered evenly.

"We don't *determine* it. It's a question of a repeated elementary volume that goes to make up the so-called 'Tau-space.' Another name for Tau-space is 'multiple space.' It's a space that's repeated, over and over."

"That evades my question rather neatly," said Dr. Phipps, a drill-like note evident in his voice, "rather than answering it. This inconsistency was sufficiently obvious in the report."

The colonel blinked, the general frowned. The senator looked on blandly.

"Perhaps," said the general, "we're working at cross-purposes here. There's no question about the facts."

The colonel, noting the sharpness in the general's voice and the perceptibly reddening face, said quickly, "Dr. Phipps, possibly I misunderstood your question. You asked, didn't you, how we determined the size—that is, volume—of this elementary unit when we say, for instance, that the density of enemy ships in Tau-space is seventeen or eighteen?"

"That is essentially correct." The drill-like tone gave the sensation of biting through into a nerve. "And your answer manifestly evaded the issue."

THE general stiffened, and glanced sharply at the senator. The senator said nothing, continued to look on benevolently.

The colonel said carefully, "That depends on your meaning when you say 'determine,' Dr. Phipps. We don't *determine* volume in the sense that we might determine a volume of ordinary space."

"Why not, if I might ask?"

"For one thing, we can't enter Tau-space. If we send a human observer through, he comes back spread all over the inside of the ship—if we're lucky enough to get the ship back at all, that is. Then, too, we can't readily measure the volume in terms of normal space because of certain anomolous features of Tau-space."

"Then, in short, you don't have a unit volume."

"In terms of *normal* space, no. I can't say the unit volume in Tau-space is so-many cubic light-years, for instance, without creating a false mental picture. But for our purposes, we have a unit volume. It is simply the *volume of unit reception*. I'll be happy to explain what I mean by that if you're interested."

Dr. Phipps frowned as if uncertain whether it was worth bothering, but the senator said, "If you

would, Colonel, we'd very much appreciate it."

The colonel said, "It's been an unusual experience for us, sir, and it's a little hard to grasp, even yet. You see, these raiders burst out to attack our local Space Center, rip up nearby cargo routes, then vanished back into what was apparently subspace. Our natural reaction was to follow them in, track them through, and find out where they came out. With manned ships, as I've mentioned, this proved disastrous. So we tried unmanned ships. Each unmanned ship we sent in had an ident-device whose function was simply to create a signal that will locate the ship. As soon as each of our ships went into what we supposed to be subspace the ident-display went insane. It was as if you tossed a glowing light-tube into a hall of mirrors, and got back images of an infinite number of images."

"You mean," Dr. Phipps interrupted patronizingly, "an indeterminate number of light-tubes."

The general drew his breath in slowly, as if timing it.

The colonel waited till the roaring went out of his ears, then said politely, "In this case, the ident-signal, which ordinarily measures Tau-distances by turning a needle over a precise distance on a dial, sent the needle spinning endlessly, as the same signal came in simultaneously from an infinite number of positions. When I say infinite, that is what I mean."

"I doubt," said Dr. Phipps, "that you are professionally qualified to appreciate the meaning of 'infinite'."

There was a lengthy silence in which the senator, after first looking benignly at the colonel and the general, took out a cigar, lit it, continued to gaze benignly through a cloud of smoke. Meanwhile, the colonel struggled successfully not to do or say any of the things that it occurred to him to do or say, and finally was able to swallow and breathe in a more-or-less normal rhythm. But a certain lightheadedness warned him to stand still and keep his mouth shut.

The senator, apparently to get the ball rolling again, said, "That's interesting, colonel. I begin to get a picture the report didn't give. Now—"

Dr. Phipps said, "It presents nothing new whatever. The picture this presents is so—"

"Now, Binding," said the senator chidingly, "you're a Ph.D. and this is all in your field—but we laymen here have to potter and bumble around trying to find some handle on the thing so we can get a grip on it. Try to unjack yourself down onto our level. How are *you* going to understand how a layman sees these things, eh? No, when Colonel Smith was explaining that about the ident-signal, I began to get his point."

"There is no point. It would be

preposterous to assume—"

"Tut, tut, Binding. *Are you professionally qualified to understand a layman?*"

Dr. Phipps opened his mouth, shut it in evident confusion.

The colonel's ears seemed to pop, and now he had the impression of being his normal self again. He said, "Senator, this is hard to explain. For one thing, we frankly don't pretend to know what's going on here. The *effect* is as if, when we send a single ship through, it is reproduced an infinite number of times and so we detect it at an infinite number of positions. However, each ship is separately present in its own finite volume of space, which apparently remains constant—this is the 'volume of unit reception,' I was referring to. If we send six or seven ships through the entire group appears in each unit of volume."

Dr. Phipps made as if to object, then hesitated in perplexity—apparently hamstrung by the thought that he might not really have any idea what thoughts were being conveyed in laymen-language.

The senator said, "And it's an optical-illusion kind of thing?"

"Well," said the colonel, "we thought so at first, but we've discovered that by a development of our remote-control technique we can concentrate two or more of these identical 'ships' in the same region—which would seem impossible if they were mere reflections of some one basic ship. By repeating a sort of subspace jump within Tau-space, we've concentrated up to several thousand ships within one given unit of Tau-space."

"When," asked the senator, "you'd only sent a few ships in there to start with?"

"Yes, sir. Unbelievable as it may seem."

"And when you come to get them out—then what?"

The colonel hesitated, and the general said, "Once we've gone through this hocus-pocus of concentrating a number of ships in one region, we don't *get* the ship out again."

"*No* ship?"

"No, sir. The ships, or 'quasi-images' of ships, or whatever they are, apparently have to be distributed, one to each and every unit of Tau-space—and positioned properly in the given units—in order for us to get back the original ship. Otherwise nothing happens; the ship stays in there."

"What happens to the ones that don't come back?"

"Well, it's hard to say what would happen if we could experiment at our leisure in there. But that isn't possible. There are always enemy ships in there, in infinite numbers just as ours are, and we're generally heavily outnumbered, so—"

"*No!*" Dr. Phipps put in sharply.

The colonel shut his eyes. The general looked around and said

courteously, "Did you say something, Dr. Phipps?"

"Yes." Dr. Phipps seemed to be struggling with some awkward and unwieldy problem—possibly that of projecting his meaning down to the lay level. "Excuse me. But you said that you were *outnumbered.* You said that your ships were there in infinite numbers, just as theirs were, yet you were *outnumbered.*"

"Correct. We may be outnumbered twenty to one, or momentarily, it may be as close as sixteen to twelve. The point is, we usually go in there to try and find a way through. We don't stick around if it doesn't work—and it hasn't yet—because in a very short time they close in on us and we get eliminated. The difficulty is that we don't have enough remote-controlled ships to overpower them. They outnumber us. If we could put manned ships in there . . ."

"Oh," said Dr. Phipps, "this is—this is simply—" He cleared his throat, "That is not, of course, my special field, but surely Cantor's Theorem covers this problem adequately."

The senator said, "Remember, Binding—we're just laymen. Whose theorem?"

"Cantor's." He cleared his throat. "Let me express it this way. If we have two infinite series—say the series of integers: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, etc., and the series of *even* integers: 2, 4, 6, etc., and if these two series can be placed in one-to-one correspondence with each other, thusly—" He pulled out a piece of paper, to write:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 . . .
2 4 6 8 10 12 14 16 . . .

"Then," he added, "it follows that the two series are *equally* numerous, since each series can be continued indefinitely—forever. Your problem is precisely analogous."

There was a brief silence, then the colonel said, "This is Cantor's Theorem?" "Well, certainly it's a very elementary example—"

"But this theorem *does* say there are just as many *even* integers as there are odd *and* even integers together?"

"That is correct."

The colonel took the paper, and wrote:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 . . .
2 4 6 8 10 . . .

"This," he said, "matches about the most favorable situation we're usually ever in. I'd say we were outnumbered two-to-one, wouldn't you?"

"Not at all."

"We *aren't?*"

"Certainly not. Any class the elements of which may be placed in one-to-one correspondence with the elements of another class is equal in cardinality—that is, in numerousness—with the other class. *That* is Cantor's Theorem."

The general said, "Let's see that paper."

There was a long silence. Then

the general looked up.

"I've got to admit, I don't quite understand what we're up against here. Now, if this theorem is true—"

"There's no question at all of that," said Dr. Phipps. "Cantor's Theorem is completely accepted."

"Well, then—that gives us a way out of this hole."

The colonel said, "Sir. If we're outnumbered two-to-one in each and every one of an *infinite number* of finite regions, which is the situation we're up against here, I don't see how it's going to equalize matters for us if we juggle ships around from one region to another."

Dr. Phipps said, "Your error lies in assuming that you are outnumbered."

"We *are* outnumbered."

"You are not."

The colonel said exasperatedly, "Suppose there are thirty-six of their ships in each unit of space, to only one of our ships? Surely *then* we're outnumbered!"

"Not at all. What you seek is to compare the series of integers with the series comprising every thirty-sixth integer. Now, from any denumerable class, there may be removed a denumerably infinite number of denumerably infinite classes, without affecting the cardinality of the class. Therefore—"

"I can't follow that," said the colonel exasperatedly.

"The lay mentality," said Dr. Phipps, "has some difficulty in handling the infinite and its paradoxes. Naturally, a certain degree of professional education and training is a prerequisite."

The colonel swallowed hard, said nothing.

The general said, "If they have a density of thirty-six ships per each unit of space throughout the region to our density of one, then we have as many ships as they have?"

"Certainly." Dr. Phipps wrote:

1 2 3 4 5 6 . . .

36 72 108 144 180 216 . . .

He held out the paper and said, "Since you can match the series of integers one-for-one with the series of every thirty-sixth integer, it follows that the two series are equal in respect to numerosity."

The general looked at the paper. "Cantor's Theorem supports this?"

"It does."

"And Cantor's Theorem is accepted as valid?"

"Certainly."

"Well— That's *fine*. What we run up against, you see, is that if our ship-density starts to approach theirs, they increase theirs faster than we can increase ours. Now if actually they *don't outnumber us*, we can get control in there because our Class I ships are individually superior to the enemy type of ship. Now, excuse me, doctor, for asking this next question, but a good deal of expensive equipment can be lost if we make a wrong move. Are you really qualified to give opinions on

the infinite as you've just been doing?"

"Certainly. While this is not my particular special field of study, this has all been quite elementary."

"All right, I'll take your word for it. We'll try it. *Colonel!*"

"Sir?"

"Order one Class I Tau-ship set up to make the jump."

"Yes, sir."

The general turned to the senator. "You'll get a chance to see, Senator, just how the command-center here functions. And if this works we won't be screaming for another big appropriation on this for quite a while."

DR. PHIPPS finished giving his instructions for "matching" the two fleets, ship-for-ship, the general gazed off at the huge screen thoughtfully, and the senator walked over to the colonel, and said in a low voice, "Do you think this is going to work, Colonel?"

The colonel shrugged. "I couldn't guess. The way he's had us set that up, we've got ships coming on the flying jump from all over the place, in order to match up with the enemy ships at the head of that complex curve that he starts in the 'center' of Tau-space, and then twists out from there to finally include everything else. He says we can match them ship-for-ship, because we can *always* draw in more ships; so it's bound to come out even—I don't know."

The senator nodded, and drew on his cigar. "Well, either way, we win."

"How do you figure?"

"If he's right, we win in Tau-space; one of our Class I ships will beat an enemy ship, won't it?"

"Yes, but if it doesn't work out, and we're outnumbered, then we lose the ship. How do we win?"

"There are no men in this ship?"

"No, sir. It's unmanned."

"Well," said the senator, lowering his voice, "if we *lose*, then T. Binder Phipps, Ph.D., falls flat on his face, and there is nothing I would more dearly love to see."

The now-familiar dental-drill tone bit into their conversation. "General, I have checked the procedures. The matching process is entirely to my satisfaction. You may proceed at any time."

The senator growled, "How would you like to have *that* for a prospective son-in-law?"

The colonel shivered.

"In his natural state," said the senator, "he would be bad enough. But the refulgent rays of glory from his Ph.D. are forever poking me in the eye, or getting stuck crosswise halfway down my throat."

The colonel glanced at the senator. "But suppose that Cantor himself was wrong."

The senator grinned. "That's better yet. Then Binder gets to explain how a Recognized Authority In The Field could make a mistake."

"Is that so impossible?"

"For Binder it is. Binder is solid for Authority. Put him back in the Middle Ages and he'd chop Galileo's head off in a minute for arguing that a heavy weight and a light weight fall at the same speed when Aristotle said otherwise. How you can have a Believer In Sacred Authority in either mathematics or science beats me, but the bigger a field gets, the more of them migrate in and set up shop."

The general's voice said, "Density, colonel?"

"Eighteen, sir. No change."

"Proceed."

The colonel spoke briefly into his microphone.

The big screen on the opposite wall was abruptly tinged pale-blue.

The senator said, "That bluish color—"

The general said, "One of their ships creates a silvery-white appearance on the screen. One of ours, a blue appearance. Since we're heavily outnumbered, the screen remains white, tinged with blue." He paused. "Ah—here we go."

IN THE center of the screen, a bright blue dot had appeared, then put forth spiral arms, which, bright-blue in color, began to grow, then to curve in and out in a complex geometrical pattern that grew to fill up a small region at the center of the screen, then bend outward again—

"Minus twenty," said the colonel.

The general said, "with a concentration such as they have in there right now, we can only count on about twenty seconds, our time out here, till the enemy makes contact and starts to hit us."

Dr. Phipps said, "As you may observe, the region of one-to-one correspondence is expanding steadily."

It was true. In the huge, wall-size screen, the dark-blue area had now attained the proportions of a garbage-can lid.

"Yes," said the senator, "but it looks to me like it's expanding slower."

"Possibly, but only proportionately so. No limiting volume is involved. Of course, we must progressively obtain matching ships from further and further away. Since the supply is infinite, this is irrelevant."

The colonel said, "Minus fifteen."

The dark-blue disk now had an intense white ring around it, shading off gradually to pale-blue toward the edge of the screen.

The senator asked, "Why that intense white color?"

The general, evidently concerned, said, "Those must be the regions our ships were moved in *from,* in order to make a match in the center. Dr. Phipps, I thought you said—"

Dr. Phipps said impatiently, "It

isn't important, general. We are dealing with *infinities.* All this has been taken into account."

The intense white ring faded out in a series of pulses to pale-blue around the growing dark-blue disk. But as the white faded to blue around the disk, the blue all around the rim of the screen paled noticeably at the inside edge. The disk added another few inches of diameter, the pale-blue around it bleached out to white again, and there glowed a glaring white ring several times larger than before.

The colonel said, "Minus ten."

"M'm," said the general, eyeing the dazzling-white ring around the blue disk. With a series of pulses, the inner part of this ring, next to the disk, faded to pale-blue, and, in due course, the disk built up again, as elsewhere on the screen the pale-blue leached out everywhere except at and near the very edge of the screen, and then there was a huge glaring region of dazzling white that made the disk in the center look smaller instead of bigger.

"Of course," said the general, "this screen gives us just a schematic representation, but—"

Dr. Phipps said, "Everything is proceeding quite satisfactorily, general."

The colonel said, "Minus five."

The general cleared his throat. "Contact will almost certainly be established in five seconds, and firing will begin automatically. Destruction of one element of the enemy's force will create a yellow flash on the screen. A red flash will signify the destruction of one of our force."

The blue disk expanded. Around it, the white ring expanded further.

"Zero," said the colonel.

All around the extreme rim of the screen was a brief pinkish light as the as-yet unmatched human ships were destroyed. In the center, the blue lit with a mingling of yellow and red that faded out to a paler blue, as the individually-stronger human ships won out. Then the untouched ring of dazzling white squeezed in with a reddish glare that ate straight to the center of the blue disk, then faded out to leave one solid bright silvery-whiteness on the screen from end to end.

The general turned around and looked at Dr. Phipps.

The senator shook his head. "Well, general, I see *that* method won't beat them. I'll relate this incident to the committee when we get back."

Dr. Phipps said, "I—I don't—"

The others waited for him to go on, but he only stared at the blank white screen, from which the blue had been wiped off with ridiculous ease.

The colonel turned and glanced at the general. "If I might ask Dr. Phipps a few questions, sir."

"Go right ahead."

"Dr. Phipps," said the colonel,

"in this matching procedure—you take a unit in one series, move it up to match it to one in the other series, and when you have a method by which you can match them one for one, you say they're equal, right?"

Phipps drew in a long ragged breath.

"That is correct."

"But at any given time, the *matched* parts of the two series are *finite*, aren't they? The parts of the series of digits, and the series of *even* digits, for instance, that you used as an example. Even after you've matched a million, a billion, or a quintillion terms, still, the part that's matched is *finite*, isn't it?"

"I—this is not— Well, I suppose that *is* correct."

"Then you're determining the comparative sizes of two infinite series by taking a finite end of each?"

"Ah—"

"And then, since the finite ends of each—which are always insignificant compared to the rest of the series—since these finite *ends* match, then you say the infinite remainders, which you *haven't* compared, but have only drawn numbers from—you say therefore *they* must be the same size, too? Is that right?"

Phipps mopped his forehead. "Ah—I'm afraid the difficulty is that the matching process must run on infinitely—*then* each of the two matched ends is infinite in length."

"Nevertheless, there remains the other end, that *isn't matched*, from which you're still drawing numbers for the matched end of the series. The procedure you use to match the series *only matches one end*, doesn't it?"

Dr. Phipps grappled with this problem, and a lengthy silence followed.

The colonel said, "Now, Dr. Phipps, just to clear the thing up, I'd like to ask you if this same matching method could be used, for example, to compare an infinite number of spaceships with an infinite number of pilots, assuming that exactly one-half of all the ships have a pilot, and the other half of the ships have no pilot. Could we use Cantor's method to find out *whether there are more pilots or spaceships?*"

"Yes. Yes, we could. Very easily."

"All right. Every alternate ship has a pilot locked inside. How do we use the method?"

"Well, we—ah—we line up the ships, and then we line the pilots up right beside them, one-for-one, which shows that there are an equal number of ships and pilots."

"Only every other ship has a pilot, but when we use this method, they come out even?"

"That is correct. There is a one-to-one correspondence."

"In other words, we match pilots to ships, by putting a pilot in the second ship in the line, for instance,

using a pilot we took from further back somewhere?"

"Yes. We put pilots in the second, fourth, sixth, and eighth ships, and so on, to get a one-to-one correspondence between ships and pilots."

"All right. Let's go back to this first pilot that you put on the number two ship. *Where did you get him?*"

"Ah—"

"Remember, one-half of the ships have pilots locked inside, one-half have no pilots at all. There are no loose pilots lying around. You had to get the pilot somewhere."

"Yes. I see."

"Now, when you put a pilot in ship number two, to start this one-to-one correspondence, *where do you get him from?*"

"I—ah—I took him from some ship somewhere else."

"So you take the pilot out of a piloted ship?"

"Yes."

"And you use that pilot to pilot ship number 2?"

"Yes. Exactly."

"Then, all you do is move the pilot around. Obviously, no matter how you switch the pilots around, if every time you put one pilot into a ship, here, you have to get him by taking one pilot *out* of a ship there, then there's no change in the overall ratio of piloted to unpiloted ships."

Phipps blinked. "Let's see now . . . That would seem to be correct . . . Yes. That is correct. Obviously, no matter *how* the pilots are transferred, there remain just as many *un*piloted ships as piloted ones. Because, every time we put a pilot *in* one ship, we first take a pilot *out* of another ship. This is perfectly clear. The ratio of pilots to ships remains constant, overall. Necessarily, taking the entire region into account, that ratio is *fixed*."

"Then," said the colonel, "we've just shown that there are always as many unpiloted as piloted ships or, in other words, two ships for each pilot, or *twice as many* ships as pilots. Yet, with Cantor's method, you say you can 'prove' the number of ships and pilots to be equal. After setting up a procedure to match one pilot to each ship at the head end of the line, and incidentally piling up a lot of empty ships in the other end of the line, then you claim that the nonrepresentative, stacked-deck condition you've set up in the front end *also* holds in the other part—which you have only looted and never counted—and on *this* basis you claim that you have compared the two series as a whole, and thus can 'prove' that they are equal. By matching one pilot to each ship at one end, you 'prove' there are as many pilots as ships. But, all the time, you're getting these extra pilots by emptying hosts of ships, which empty ships accumulate exactly fast enough to maintain the ratio of two

ships for each pilot, *but you intentionally don't count these empty ships.* You call this a valid method?"

There was a lengthy silence.

Finally Phipps said hollowly, "I thought when I first heard it that there was something I didn't grasp about this method. But I knew if such an authority as Dr. Cantor used the method, it must be correct. I was puzzled, but—if I'd asked questions, it might have seemed that I didn't understand. I—I wanted to succeed, so I kept my mouth shut. And then—" Suddenly he seemed to hear how all this sounded, and abruptly stopped talking.

The general said curiously, "You 'wanted to succeed,' so you 'kept your mouth shut'?"

The senator cleared his throat, but after a momentary pause Phipps went on more confidently. "Of course, it *must* just be that Dr. Cantor himself really means some other thing by this method than what we meant here. Yet I'm *certain* that was the sense of it as it was taught us—and as I've seen it elsewhere, many times."

The general said, "Maybe a few other people wanted to succeed, and kept *their* mouths shut when the thing wasn't clear to them either."

"And," said the senator blandly, "in due time got their Ph.D.'s and are now infallible Authorities In The Field."

Phipps winced, then moodily hauled himself erect and looked defiant.

The general shrugged. "Well, the damage is done. Senator, I think we can stop any serious breakout here. Naturally, in normal space, we can use our advantage in manned ships, and as both sides—again, in normal space—have only a finite number of ships, we can handle them. But it means we're tied up here to prevent a breakout. And we can't follow them back and finish them until we can send a superior force into Tau-space after them."

The senator nodded pleasantly. "I understand, now, general, and I think you've proved your point convincingly. I'll say so to the committee. Well, we'll be going." The corner of his mouth lifted in an odd smile. "Come along, Binding, my boy. We'll have to tell Marylou all about our adventure when we get back, won't we?"

The two men went out, the one sunk in gloom, the other genial and expansive.

The general glanced at the colonel.

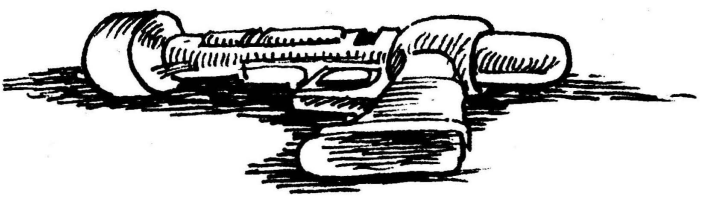
"What the deuce was *he* so happy about? Does he *like* defeats?"

The colonel shook his head.

"I got the impression, sir, that a certain prospective family-member has had him a bit up-tight—he thinks he's succeeded in loosening up a Binding relationship." •

AURA OF IMMORTALITY

**Better by far to enter
a den of serpents
than a scientist's laboratory
uninvited!**



JAMES H. SCHMITZ

COMMISSIONER Holati Tate had been known to state on accasion that whenever there was a way for Professor Mantelish to get himself into a mess of trouble, Mantelish would find it.

When, therefore, the Commissioner, while flicking through a series of newscasts, caught a momentary view of Mantelish chatting animatedly with a smiling young woman he stopped the instrument instantly, and with a touch of apprehension spun it back to locate the program in question. The last he had heard of Mantelish, the professor had been on a government-sponsored expedition to a far-off world, from which, the Commissioner had understood, he would not be returning for some time. However, Commissioner Tate had just got back to Maccadon from an assignment himself; for all he knew Mantelish might have changed his plans. Indeed, it would seem he had.

He caught the program again, clicked it in. One good look at the great, bearlike figure and the mane of thick white hair told him it was indeed his old friend Mantelish. The dainty lady sitting across the table from Mantelish was a professional newscaster. The background was the Ceyce spaceport on Mac-

cadon. The professor evidently had just come off his ship.

His sense of apprehension deepening, Commissioner Tate began to listen sharply to what was being said.

PROFESSOR Mantelish ordinarily was allergic in the extreme to newscasters and rebuffed their efforts to pump him about his projects with such heavy sarcasm that even the brashest did not often attempt to interview him on a live show. On the other hand he was highly susceptible to pretty women. When a gorgeous little newshen spotted him among the passengers coming off a spaceliner at Ceyce Port and inquired timidly whether he would answer a few questions for her viewers, the great scientist surprised her no end by settling down for a friendly fifteen-minute chat during which he reported on his visit to the little-known planet of the Tang from which he had just returned.

It was a fine scoop for the little newshen. Professor Mantelish's exploits and adventures were a legend in the Hub and he was always good copy—when he could be persuaded to talk. On this occasion, furthermore, he had something to tell which was in itself of more than a little interest. The Tang—who could be called a humanoid species only if one were willing to stretch a number of points—had been contacted by human explorers some decades before. They tended to be ferociously hostile to strangers and had a number of other highly unpleasant characteristics; so far little had become known of them beyond the fact that they were rather primitive creatures living in small, footloose tribes on a cold and savage planet.

Professor Mantelish, however, had spent several months among them, accompanied by a team of specialists with whose help he had cracked the language barrier which previously had prevented free communication with the Tang. He had made copious recordings of their habits and customs, had even been permitted to bring back a dead Tang embalmed by freezing as was their practice. From the scientific viewpoint this was a very valuable specimen, since the Tang appeared to die only as a result of accident, murder, or in encounters with ferocious beasts. They did not suffer from diseases and had developed a means of extending their natural life span almost indefinitely . . .

The young newscaster latched on to that statement like a veteran. Wide-eyed and innocent she slipped in a few leading questions and Mantelish launched into a detailed explanation.

It had taken some months before he gained the confidence of the Tang sufficiently to induce them to reveal their secret: they distilled the juice of a carefully tended and

guarded plant through an involved procedure. The drug they obtained in this way brought about a reversal of the normal aging process so that they retained their youthful health and vigor for a length of time which, though it had not been precisely determined, the Tang regarded as "forever".

COULD this drug, the little newshen asked, perhaps be adapted for human use?

Mantelish said he could not be definite about that, but it seemed quite possible. While the Tang had not let the members of his expedition know what plant they cultivated for the purpose, they had obligingly presented him with several liters of the distilled drug for experimentation which he had brought back with him. Analysis of the drug while still on the Tang planet had revealed the presence of several heretofore unknown forms of protein with rather puzzling characteristics; the question was whether or not these could be reproduced in the laboratory. To settle the question might well take a number of years—it could not of course be stated at present what the long-term effect of the drug on human beings would be. It was, however, apparently harmless. He and several other members of his group had been injected with significant quantities of the drug while on the planet, and had suffered no ill effects.

Big-eyed again, the newscaster inquired whether this meant that he, Professor Mantelish, was now immortal?

No, no, Mantelish said hastily. In humans, as in the Tang, the effects of a single dose wore off in approximately four months. To retain youth, or to bring about the gradual rejuvenation of an older body, it was necessary to repeat the dosage regularly at about this interval. The practice of the Tang was to alternately permit themselves to age naturally for about ten years, then to use the drug for roughly the same length of time or until youthfulness was restored.

To protect both the Tang and their miracle plant from illegal exploitation, the Federation, following his initial report on the matter, was having the space about the planet patrolled. What the final benefits of the discovery to humanity would be was still open to question. It was, however, his personal opinion that the Tang drug eventually would take its place as a very valuable addition to the various rejuvenation processes currently being employed in the Hub . . .

"The old idiot!" Commissioner Holati Tate muttered to himself. He swung around, found a red-headed young woman standing behind him, large, gray eyes intently watching the screen. "Did you hear all that, Trigger?" he demanded.

"Enough to get the idea,"

Trigger said. "I came in as soon as I recognized the prof's voice . . . After those remarks, he'd be safer back among the Tang! He doesn't even seem to have a bodyguard around."

Commissioner Tate was dialing a ComWeb number. "I'll call the spaceport police! They'll give him an escort. Hop on the other ComWeb and see his home and lab are under guard by the time he gets there."

"I just did that," Trigger said.

"Then see if you can make an emergency contact with that newscaster female before Mantelish strays off . . ."

Trigger shook her head. "I tried it. No luck! It's a floating program."

She watched the final minute and a half of the newscast, biting her lip uneasily, while the Commissioner made hasty arrangements with the spaceport police. To hear Professor Mantelish blabbing out the fact that he might have the answer to man's search for immortality in his possession was disconcerting. It was an open invitation to all the criminal elements currently on Maccadon to try to get it from him. The prof simply shouldn't be allowed to wander around without tactful but efficient nursemaiding! Usually, she or Holati or somebody else made sure he got it, but they'd assumed that on a Federation expedition he'd be kept out of jams . . .

When the Commissioner had finished, she switched off the newscast, said glumly, "You missed something, Holati. Mantelish just showed everybody watching on umpteen worlds the container he's got that drug in!"

"The Tang stuff?"

"Yes. It's in that round sort of suitcase he had standing beside his chair."

The Commissioner swore.

"Come along!" he said. "We'll take my car and head for the spaceport. The police weren't sure from exactly where that newscast was coming but if they catch up with Mantelish before he leaves they'll wait for us and we'll ride in to his lab with him."

"And if they don't?"

"They'll call the car. Then we'll go to the lab and wait for him to show up."

ALMOST as soon as he'd bid the charming little newscaster goodbye, Professor Mantelish himself began to feel some qualms about the revelations he'd allowed to escape. He began to realize he might have been a trifle indiscreet. Walking on with the crowds moving towards the spaceport exit hall, he found himself growing acutely conscious of the Tang drug container in the suitcase he carried. Normally preoccupied with a variety of matters of compelling scientific interest, it was almost impossible for him to conceive of himself as

being in personal danger. Nevertheless, now that his attention was turned on the situation he had created it became clear that many people who had watched the newscast might feel tempted to bring the drug into their possession, either for selfish reasons or out of perhaps excessive zeal for private research . . .

The average citizen at this point might have started looking around for the nearest police officer. Professor Mantelish, however, was of independent nature; such a solution simply did not occur to him. He had advertised the fact that he was headed for his laboratory. That had been a mistake. Therefore he would not go there—which should foil anyone who was presently entertaining illegal notions about the Tang drug. Instead, he would take himself and the drug immediately to a little seaside hideout he maintained which was known only to his closest associates. Once there he could take steps to have the drug safeguarded.

Satisfied with this decision Mantelish lengthened his stride. About a hundred yards ahead was the entry to an automatic aircar rental station. As he came up half a dozen people turned into it in a group, obviously harmless citizens. Mantelish followed them in, moved over to the wall just inside the entry, turned and stood waiting, prepared, if required, to swing the weighted suitcase he held under his flowing robe like an oversized club. But half a minute passed and no one else came in. Satisfied, he hurried after the little group, catching up with them just as they reached the line of waiting cars and climbed into a car together, laughing and joking. Mantelish got into the car behind them, deposited a five-credit piece. The cars began to move forwards, rose toward the exit. He glanced back to make sure again that no one was following, placed the Tang container on the floorboards beside him, snapped the car's canopy shut and put his hands on the controls.

The aircars emerged from the fifteenth floor of the spaceport exit building, the lights of Ceyce glittering under its night-screen before them. Mantelish turned immediately to the left, directed the car up to one of the main traffic lines, moved along it for a minute, then shifted abruptly to one of the upper high-speed lanes.

HE REACHED his hideaway a scant fifteen minutes later. It was in a residential shore area, featuring quiet and privacy. The house overlooked a shallow, sheltered ocean bay, was built on sloping ground thirty feet above tide level. It was a pleasant place, fit for an elderly retired man of remarkable habits. None of Mantelish's neighbors knew him by name or suspected he maintained a laboratory within his walls—an installation in

absolute violation of the local zoning regulations.

He locked the entry door behind him, crossed a hall, opened the door to the laboratory. He stood motionless a moment, looking around. Everything was as he had left it months before, kept spotlessly clean by automatic maintenance machinery. He went over to a table on which lay a variety of items, the results of projects he had hastily completed or left incompleted before setting out on the expedition to the Tang world. He put the Tang container on the table between a chemical gun and a packaged device which, according to the instructions attached to it, was a mental accelerator with a ratio of two hundred and eighty to one, instantly lethal if used under conditions other than those specified in the instructions. He looked about once more, went out by another door to the kitchen of the house.

A minute or two later, he heard the laboratory ComWeb buzzing shrilly. Mantelish glanced around from the elaborate open-face sandwiches he was preparing. He frowned. Among the very few people who knew the number of that ComWeb, only two were at all likely to be calling him at this moment. One was Commissioner Tate, the other was Trigger Argee. If either of them—Trigger, in particular—had caught the newscast at the spaceport just now they were going to give him hell.

His frown deepened. Should he ignore the call? No, he decided; however unnecessarily, the caller was no doubt concerned about his safety. He must let them know he was all right.

Mantelish lumbered hurriedly back into the laboratory, came to a sudden stop just beyond the door. There were two men there. One was seated at the table where he had put down the Tang container; the other leaned against the wall beside the hall door. Both held guns, which at the moment were pointed at him.

Mantelish looked from one to the other, lifting his eyebrows. This, he told himself, was a most unfortunate situation. He knew the pair from a previous meeting, the conclusion of which had been marked by a certain amount of physical violence. He didn't like the look of the guns but perhaps he could bluff it out.

"Fiam," he said with stern dignity to the man at the table, "I am not at all pleased by your intrusion. I thought I had made it clear to you last year when I threw you out of my laboratory that there was no possibility of our doing business. If I failed, I shall make the point very clear indeed immediately after I have answered this call!"

He turned toward the clamoring ComWeb. Suddenly he felt an excruciating pain in his left leg, centered on the kneecap. He grunted, stopped.

"That's enough for now, Welk,"

Paes Fiam said lazily from the table. "He's got the idea . . ."

The pain faded away. The man standing by the door grinned and lowered his gun. Fiam went on, "Sit down over there, professor—across from me. Forget the ComWeb. This shouldn't take long. These guns of ours, as you've noticed, can be very painful. They can also kill very quickly. So let's not have any unpleasantness."

Mantelish scowled at him but sat down. "Why have you come here?" he demanded.

Fiam smiled. "To ask you for a small favor. And a little information." He picked up the chemical gun lying on the table beside the Tang container, looked at it a moment. "This device," he said, "appears to be something you've developed."

"It is," Mantelish said.

"What's so remarkable about it?"

Mantelish snorted. "It kills the intended victim immediately on spray contact while placing the user in no danger whatsoever, even when carelessly handled."

"So the label says," Paes Fiam agreed. "A one to four foot range. Very interesting!" He laid the gun back on the table. "I find it a little strange, professor, that a man holding the high ethical principles you outlined to me in our previous conversation should devote his time to creating such a murderous little weapon!"

Mantelish snorted again. "What I am willing to create depends on the clients with whom I am dealing. I would not place such weapons in the hands of common crooks like yourselves."

The ComWeb's noise stopped. Fiam smiled briefly, said, "Not common crooks, Professor Mantelish. We happen to be exceptionally talented and efficient crooks. As the present situation demonstrates."

"What do you mean?" Mantelish asked coldly.

"I happened to be at the Ceyce spaceport," Fiam said, "while you were bragging about your Tang immortality drug on the newscast. I took steps immediately to make sure I knew where you went. Welk and I followed you here without very much trouble. We made sure in the process that nobody else was tailing you." He patted the Tang container. "This is what we're after, professor! And we've got it."

"You are being very foolish," Mantelish said. "As I indicated during the newscast, it remains questionable whether the Tang drug can be produced under laboratory conditions. If it is possible, it will involve years of research at the highest level. I—"

"Hold it, professor!" Fiam raised his hand, nodded at Welk. "Your statements are very interesting, but let's make sure you're not attempting to mislead us."

"Mislead you?" Mantelish rum-

bled indignantly.

"You might, you know. But Welk will now place the pickup of a lie detector at your feet. Sit very still while he's doing it—you know I can't miss at this range." Fiam brought a small instrument out of his pocket, placed it on the table before him. "This is the detector's indicator," he went on. "A very dependable device, every time it shows me you're being less than truthful you'll get an admonishing jolt from Welk's gun. Welk's never really forgiven you for not opening the lab door before you ejected him last year. Better stick to the truth, professor!"

"I have no intention of lying," Mantelish said with dignity.

Paes Fiam waited until Welk had positioned the pickup and stepped back, went on. "Now, professor, you were suggesting that at present the Tang drug has no commercial value . . ."

Mantelish nodded. "Exactly! The quantity on the table here—and it's every drop of the drug to be found off the Tang world now—is not nearly enough to be worth the risk you'd be taking in stealing and trying to market it. It might extend the life of one human being by a very considerable extent, and that is all. And what potential client would take your word for it that it would do that—or that it wouldn't, for that matter, harm him instead, perhaps kill him within a few months?"

"A large number of potential clients would, if they were desperate enough for life," Fiam said, watching the detector indicator. "You were skirting the fringes of deception with that question, professor. But that's not the point. *Does* the drug have harmful physical or mental effects?"

Mantelish said, "A calculated quantity was given to six members of our expedition, including myself. During the past four months, no harmful physical or mental effects have been observed, and the overall effect has worn off again. That's all I can say."

"And the Tang drug did have a rejuvenating effect on these human subjects?"

Mantelish hesitated, admitted, "A slight but measurable one. That was in accordance with our expectations."

Fiam smiled. "I see. What other expectations did you have in connection with the use of the drug on human beings?"

Mantelish said reluctantly, "That the dosage given human subjects would wear out of the system in about four months—as it did. And that if the rejuvenation effect were to continue the treatment would therefore have to be repeated regularly at four-month intervals."

"What do you believe will happen if that is done?"

"Within a ten-year period," Mantelish said, "the subject should find that his biological age has not

advanced but has been reduced by about five years. The Tang rejuvenation process is a slow, steady one. The Tang themselves select the biological age they prefer, and remain within a few years of it by a judicious use of the drug. It is, of course, impossible to reduce the biological age beyond late adolescence."

"I understand," Fiam said. "And how is the drug administered?"

"The Tang drink the extract," Mantelish said. "On human beings it has a violently nauseating effect when administered in that form. We found it more practical to administer a subcutaneous injection."

"There's nothing essentially different between that and any other subcutaneous injection?"

"No, none at all."

Paes Fiam patted the container again, smiled, said, "The drug extract in here is ready to be used exactly as it is?"

"Yes."

"Are there any special measures required to preserve its usefulness and harmlessness indefinitely?"

"It's self-preserving," Mantelish said. "There should be no significant difference in its properties whether it's used today or after a century. But as I have pointed out, I cannot and will not say that it is harmless. A test on six subjects is by no means definitive. The seventh one might show very undesirable physical reactions. Or undesirable reactions might develop in the six who have been tested five, or ten, or fifteen years from now . . ."

"No doubt," Fiam said. He smacked his lips lightly. "Be careful how you answer my next question. You said the drug in this container should extend the life of one human being very considerably. What does that mean in standard years?"

Mantelish hesitated, said grudgingly, "My estimate would be about three hundred years. That is an approximation."

Fiam grinned happily at Welk. "Three hundred years, eh? That's good enough for us, professor! As you may have begun to surmise, we're the clients for whom the drug is intended. We have no intention of trying to sell it. And we'll take a chance on undesirable reactions showing up in five or ten years against the probability of another hundred and fifty years of interesting and profitable living!"

He stood up, moved back from the table. "Now then, you've got the equipment to administer a subcutaneous injection somewhere around the lab. You'll get it out while I keep this gun on you. You'll show Welk exactly what you're doing, describe the exact amount of drug that is required for each injection. And you'll do all that while you're within range of the lie detector. So don't make any mistakes at this stage or, believe me, you'll get hurt abominably!

"Finally, you'll give me the initial four-month injection. I shall then give Welk an identical injection under your supervision. After that, we'll just wrap up the container with the rest of the drug and be on our way . . ."

TEN minutes later Mantelish sat at the table, gloomily watching Fiam store the container, along with several other of the finished products on the table which had caught his fancy, into the suitcase. Welk stood behind the professor's chair, gun pointed at Mantelish's neck.

"Now let me give you the rest of the story on this, professor," Fiam said. He picked up Mantelish's chemical gun, looked at it and placed it on top of the suitcase. "You've mentioned several times that I can't expect to get away with this. Let me reassure you on the point.

"For one thing, we set up a temporal scrambler in this room as soon as we came in. It's on one of those shelves over there. It will remain there and continue in action for thirty minutes after we've left, so no one will be able to restructure the events of the past few hours and identify us in that way. We're wearing plastiskin gloves, of course, and we haven't made any foolish mistakes to give investigators other leads to who might have been here.

"Also we enjoy—under other names—an excellent reputation on this planet as legitimate businessmen from Evalee. Should foul play be suspected, we, even if somebody should think of us, certainly will not be suspected of being involved in it. As a matter of fact"—Fiam checked his watch—"twenty minutes from now, we shall be attending a gay social function in Ceyce to which we have been invited. As far as anybody could prove, we'll have spent all evening there."

He smiled at Mantelish. "One more thing; you will be found dead of course; but there will be some question about the exact manner in which you died. We shall leave an interesting little mystery behind us. The Tang container will be missing. But why is it missing? Did you discover, or fancy you had discovered, some gruesome reaction to the drug in yourself, and drop it out over the sea so no one else would be endangered by it? Did you then perhaps commit suicide in preference to waiting around for the inevitable end?"

"Suicide—pfah!" growled Mantelish. "No one is lunatic enough to commit suicide with a pain-stimulant gun!"

"Quite right," Fiam agreed. He took up the professor's chemical gun from the suitcase again. "I've been studying this little device of yours. It functions in a quite simple and obvious manner. This sets the triggering mechanism—correct? It

is now ready to fire." He pointed the gun at Mantelish, added, "Stand aside, Welk."

Welk moved swiftly four feet to one side. Mantelish's eyes widened. "You wouldn't—"

"But I would," Fiam said. And as the professor started up with a furious bellow, he pulled the trigger.

Mantelish's body went rigid, his face contorting into a grisly grin. He thumped sideways down on the table, rolled off it on the side away from Fiam, went crashing down to the floor.

"Ugh!" Welk said, staring down in fascinating incredulity. "His whole face has turned blue!"

"Is he dead?" Fiam inquired, peering over the table.

"I never saw anyone look deader! Or bluer!" Welk reported shakenly.

"Well, don't touch him! The stuff might hit you even through the gloves." Fiam came around the table, laid the gun gingerly on the floor, said, "Shove it over by his hand with something. Then we'll get ourselves lost . . ."

The ComWeb was shrilling again as they went out into the hall, closed the door behind them. After it stopped the laboratory and the rest of Mantelish's house was quiet as a tomb.

"IT'S A miracle," Trigger said, "that you're still alive!" She looked pale under her tan. The professor had lost the bright cerulean tint Welk had commented on by the time she and Commissioner Tate came rushing into the house a minute or two ago. The skin of his face was now a nasty green through which patches of his normal weathered-brick complexion were just beginning to show.

"No miracle at all, my dear," Mantelish said coolly. "Paes Fiam has encountered the kind of misfortune the uninformed layman may expect when he ventures to challenge the scientist on his own ground. He had lost the game, literally, at the moment he stepped into this laboratory! I had half a dozen means at my disposal here to foil his criminal plans. Since I was also in the laboratory at the time, most of them might have been harmful—or at least extremely disagreeable—to me. So as soon as I saw he intended to use the chemical gun, I decided to employ that method to rid myself of his presence."

Commissioner Tate had been studying the gun's label.

"*This* says the gun kills instantly," he observed.

"It does kill instantly," Mantelish said, "if aimed at an attacking Rumlian fire roach. I designed it to aid in the eradication of that noisome species. On the human organism it has only a brief paralyzing effect."

"It makes you look revolting, too!" Trigger said, studying him fascinatedly.

"A minor matter, my dear. Within an hour or two I shall have regained my normal appearance."

Holati Tate sighed, placed the gun back on the table. "Well we should be able to pick up your friends since we know who they are," he said. "I'll alert the spaceports immediately and get Scout Intelligence on the job. We're lucky though that they didn't get more of a head start."

Mantelish held up his hand. "Please don't concern yourself about the Tang drug, Holati," he said. "I've notified the police and Fiam and Welk will be arrested very shortly."

The Commissioner said doubtfully, "Well, our Maccadon police—"

"The matter will require no brilliance on their part, Holati. Fiam informed me he and Welk intended to be enjoying themselves innocently at a social function within twenty minutes after leaving this laboratory. That was approximately half an hour ago . . ." Professor Mantelish nodded at the ComWeb. "I expect the police to call at any moment, to advise me they have been picked up."

"Better not take a chance on that, Professor," Trigger warned. "They might change their plans now they have the stuff, and decide to get off the planet immediately."

"It would make very little difference, Trigger. If Paes Fiam had waited until the official report on the Tang planet was out he would have known better than to force me to inject him with the immortality drug. Aside from their savage ways the Tang are literally an unapproachable people while under its influence; I and the various members of our expedition who experimented with it on ourselves had to wait several months for its effect to wear off again before we were able to return to civilization. We would not have been able to live among the Tang at all if we had not had our olfactory centers temporarily shut off."

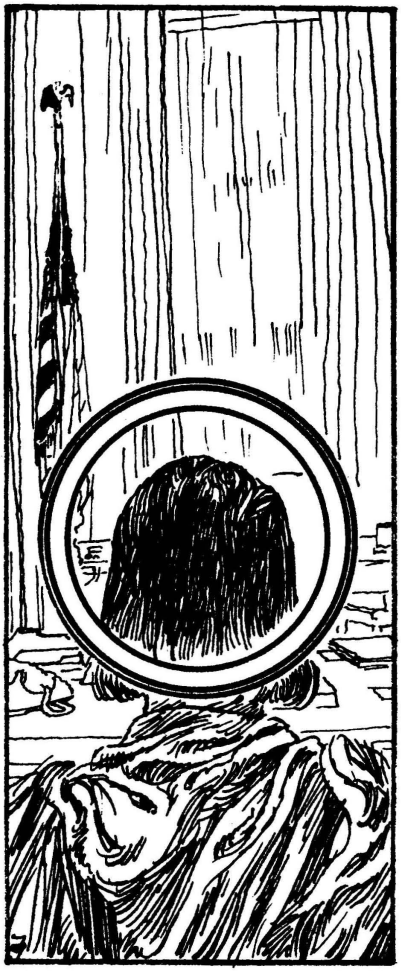
"Olfactory centers?" said Trigger.

"Yes. It was absolutely necessary. Within half an hour after being administered to an animal organism, the Tang drug produces the most offensive and hideously penetrating stench I have ever encountered. Wherever Paes Fiam and Welk may be on the planet, they have by now been prostrated by it and are unmistakably advertising their presence to anyone within half a mile of them. I have advised the police that space helmets will be needed by the men sent to arrest them, and—"

He broke off as the ComWeb began shrilling its summons, added, "Ah, there is the call I have been expecting! Perhaps you'll take it, Trigger? Say I'm indisposed; I'm afraid the authorities may be feeling rather irritable with me at the moment." •

SECOND ADVENT

If at first you don't succeed . . .



MACK REYNOLDS

WHEN he came this time it was not to reveal himself in a backwater community of the Province of Judaea during the rule of Herod the Great and Augustus Caesar.

Nobody seemed to know from

whence he came. Suddenly, he was before the iron portals of the White House. He walked through the gates, which were closed and locked at the time.

He was a slim young man, seemingly about thirty, with a fairly dark complexion, and soft dark eyes. His brown beard had a reddish tinge. He wore what looked like leather sandals and a Roman toga, or some such garment. Nobody who saw him had actually ever seen a Roman toga, that is, outside Hollywood productions, and even the most competent of wardrobers had never quite figured out how the Romans had draped those togas.

He walked through the iron gates and confronted the guards, submachine guns in hand. They were smallish submachine guns, so as not to be conspicuous, not to overly throw off VIP visitors, or even tourists—some of whom were not aware of the fact that it was necessary to so protect the President.

Yes, there were the guards.

The lieutenant was Angelo Maritino who had been raised in a strict Catholic family and still moderately kept up his duties. Lieutenant Maritino was not unaware of art. The home of his birth had been plastered with it—Italian style.

In short, he knew a halo when he saw one.

His face was slack. He opened his mouth and said . . . nothing.

The newcomer smiled gently and also said nothing. But into the minds of all present came, with soft amusement, *Take me to your leader.*

There was no question. There wasn't the beginning of a question. They didn't frisk him. They didn't even come within a half dozen yards of him. Lieutenant Maritino, shortly followed by the balance of the gate guards, let his submachine gun slip from his hands to the ground.

At the portals of the White House, Angelo Maritino flustered, almost as though apologetically, to the Secret Service officer there, "A distinguished *visitor* to see . . ."

The other gawked.

And the visitor passed gently through.

He knew the way. Obviously, he knew the way. He knew the way *everywhere.*

And then a finger of doubt slid up the spine of Mike McCord, one of the gate guards who had followed to this point. If the newcomer knew the way, if he knew everything, why did he bother to materialize in front of the White House gates? Why didn't he simply show up in the Oval Room?

The visitor looked at him and smiled. He said, in English, his voice infinitely gentle, "I wished to observe the premises with my physical senses. One whom I regarded as a friend used to reside here. He was shot one night while attending a theatre." He added absently, "Happily, we were able to clone

him and now he dwells with us."

The news of his coming raced before them. Doors opened magically and the newcomer, with his escort trailing wide-eyed behind, passed placidly through.

Finally they reached the ultimate door and that, too, swung open. The President stood there behind his desk, flanked by his two chief aides. All stared, unblinkingly.

The newcomer said gently to the guards, "That will be all," and he entered the Oval Room. The door closed behind him.

HE LOOKED at the three and smiled sadly. Without being told, the aides suddenly knew they were not to remain. They hurried from the office through a side door. Scurried might be the better word.

"You may call me Joshua," the newcomer said to the President. "It is a name I have used in the past." He settled himself in a comfortable blue leather-covered chair in front of the presidential desk and regarded his host.

The President lowered himself weakly into his own chair.

Joshua said, his expression distantly amused now, "So, despite your public pronouncements, you do not believe in the Bible."

"I . . . I . . ."

"It is quite historic, in spite of the many alterations made in the original books by the various sects and cults that have translated it to their own ends through the ages."

"I . . . I was thinking of Genesis, rather than the later books written in the historic period."

"Yes. As I say, quite historic. When we inspired it, we found it amusing to stick as closely to reality as possible. Even the planetary engineering resulting in the creation of this world took approximately seven days, using your present system of time measure. And, as you can see, when we created man, we did so in our own image."

"Created man?" the President said weakly. "But I've read that it took man more than a million years to evolve from a less advanced primate. We have evidence—skeletons, artifacts . . ."

The other nodded acceptance. "Yes, largely you are correct, but we guided the way, intrigued by watching evolution take place. However, from time to time we intervened. Most recently, when what you call Neanderthal man seemed to have become a dead end, we helped introduce Cro-Magnon."

The President shook his head. "I . . . I am afraid I am completely bewildered. What . . . what is planetary engineering?"

"Just what it sounds to be. You see, there are more than a billion stars in this galaxy alone that have planets that are capable of sustaining life as we know it. Indeed, life as we know it, and other life forms as well, have developed independently on some of them. But what you call the panspermia theory was

at work more often."

"I don't believe I have heard of that theory."

"On earth, a Swedish chemist, Svanta Arrhenius, first suggested in 1908 that living cells floated haphazardly through the universe, bringing life to suitable planets. But it was your American, Francis Crick, the scientist who discovered DNA and won the Nobel prize, who hit upon the reality. He, with Leslie Orgel, advanced the theory that life had come to this planet by spaceship, a deliberate act of seeding. Their clue was a valid one, I must say. That there is only one generic code for terrestial life. Previously, most of yoru biologists had thought life had sprung up spontaneously in some great 'primeval soup' but had that been so there would undoubtedly have been a number of different generic codes."

If anything, the President's stare was intensified. He blurted, "Do you mean to say that life here on Earth was deliberately put here by an extraterrestial . . ."

"Yes," the other nodded seriously. "That is what I have just told you."

"And . . . you are one of them?"

Joshua smiled. "Is it not obvious?"

"But . . . well, the halo . . ."

It flicked out. "I assumed it to focus immediate attention upon myself, and also, if you will forgive me, for amusement. Our race has not lost its sense of humor."

The President slumped back into his chair, feeling a bit more in control of himself, but not quite entirely.

He shook his head. "But if you are from a different star system, which one, and how far is it from Earth? This is simply mind boggling."

"From the star system Delta Pavonis, as you call it. It is approximately 19.2 light years from the Solar System."

The President had him now. "But for you to come here to Earth, you personally, and then return, would take almost forty years even if you could travel at the speed of light, which is impossible."

He who had named himself Joshua smiled again. "Your Einstein pointed out that an object cannot travel at the speed of light. He said nothing about traveling at a speed greater than light. Yes, of course, your first reaction is to say, 'But how would it be possible to achieve speeds greater than that of light without passing the impossible hurdle?' I am afraid you are insufficiently acquainted with science to understand, but in physics there are many examples of jumping from one condition of energy, of velocity, or quantum state, to another without passing through the intermediate values. The tunnel diode is an example you even now utilize. In it the electrons *tunnel*, as it were, from one side of an electrical barrier to the other with-

out going through it. Your race is not quite ready for faster than light travel, but soon, if my mission is successful, it will be."

The President said, "My mind is reeling. I simply can't comprehend what you are saying. That you people seeded this planet and introduced life." He hesitated for a moment before saying, "Why? What motivates you?"

Joshua made a mouth of deprecation. "Perhaps a missionary zeal to spread our life form throughout the galaxy. However, the brain is infinitely curious. I am afraid our primary motivation is the study of life. We have seeded, in our time, a considerable number of planets which will sustain existence as we know it. Usually a bit of planetary engineering is necessary, as it was here. I, personally, became increasingly intrigued with this world particularly after the race entered the historic period."

A suspicion was beginning to come to the President. He said, "You have been here before, then?"

"Oh, yes, various times, to watch the experiment develop. I seldom manifested myself in quite this manner. Sometimes the things I attempted to do came a cropper, to use your idiom. On one occasion, for instance, I wished to form a more advanced religion than pertained at the time; a higher ethic. Evidently, I was premature. The religion was a higher ethic than before, well enough, but few, if any, really followed it." Joshua smiled in memory. "But it was an exciting and fascinating experiment."

The President said warily, "You mentioned a mission."

Joshua nodded. "Yes. You see, your race has reached a crossroads. In fact, it reached it some time ago but so far has failed to take the appropriate turning."

"I don't understand."

"Very well. Follow me closely. You have heard of the late Dr. Robert Oppenheimer."

"Yes, certainly. Of the Manhattan Project, the atomic bomb."

The other nodded. "In discussing the knowledge explosion, he said in 1955 that human knowledge was doubling every eight years. Consider the ramifications. Let us suppose this knowledge explosion really got underway in 1940. By 1948, human knowledge was double. And by the time Oppenheimer made his statement it was four times as much. Do you realize how great it would be in just one century? By the year 2038 A.D. at this rate of explosion, human knowledge will be 8,192 times what it was in 1940. Can you comprehend what it will be in the year 2140? By that year, you will have more than 67 million times as much knowledge as you did in 1940. Happily (and inevitably) you have already achieved the computer and its data banks. Other breakthroughs will continue to help in

what can only be called your plight.

"This is beyond your conception now. Today you are beginning your explorations into space, you are beginning the conquest of the diseases that have plagued you down through the centuries. You are beginning, just beginning, scientific research, even into such fields as the nature of life and the achieving of immortality. You are not yet quite beginning, but are on the verge of taking the steps that will make this planet into a true garden, a paradise, if you will. But at this point you cannot conceive of the reality of 67 million times as much knowledge as you have today. You must understand that, as things are now, you do not have 67 million times as much knowledge as does, say, a cockroach or an ant. Can you imagine, even faintly, your new race? At that time, you too, most likely, will be practicing panspermia."

"Your mission," the President said hoarsely.

Joshua looked at him in compassion. He said, "You are at the crossroads. A race cannot develop scientifically and technologically without also developing ethically, without developing, at the same pace, a superior code of mores. There can be no such things as wars, the military, race differences, poverty, conflict between the sexes and generations. I could go on."

The President was blank.

Joshua said, still compassionately, "Your codes today are such that the human race must destroy itself within your next decade if they are not revised."

The President slumped again.

Joshua said gently, "In the past we have seldom interfered in human affairs. When we did, sometimes the results were unhappy. For instance, one of our people who has long observed Earth helped take the steps to remove the Czar of All the Russias, who was an incompetent, foolish, unintelligent man and his country in corrupt chaos. Less than ten years later, Stalin had taken his place."

"But . . ." the President said.

"Matters have come to such a head that we must intervene if we are to see our experiment continue."

"I see," the President said, his lips pale. "What steps?"

A .45 caliber Colt automatic materialized on the desk before him.

Joshua stood, infinite sadness on his face. "Men such as yourself are not competent to lead the human race, Mr. President."

The President was goggling the weapon. "I . . . I refuse to suicide."

"You have no alternative, I am afraid. All of your people, outside, will have forgotten I was ever here. They will never know what motivated you. And now I leave for Moscow . . . on a similar mission."

He disappeared. •

THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE

200,000,000 Americans can't be wrong—
or can they?

WILLIAM JON WATKINS

FROM: H. H. WEBER,
PRESIDENT:
WEBER, FINLEY, & OSGOOD
TO: COLFAX,
ADVERTISING CONSULTANT
DATE: September 25

While I am sure that this "advertising genius nobody ever sees" posture is a necessary part of your image, I still do not care very much for your way of doing business. I like to meet a man face to face, and I must say I find this corresponding rather eccentric. Nevertheless, you have given us such brilliant advice on campaigns in the past that I am sure you are the only one who can handle this problem if it can be handled at all. To be brief; given unlimited funds, could you make a short, fat, ugly woman President of the United States?

FROM: COLFAX
TO: H. H. WEBER, PRESIDENT
WEBER, FINLEY, & OSGOOD
DATE: September 25

With unlimited funds, I could

get her elected God. The fee will be two million. Has she any other liabilities?

FROM: H. H. WEBER
TO: COLFAX
DATE: September 26

She has innumerable liabilities, not the least of which is that we can't type her. She's not homey enough for Golda Meir, nor flamboyant enough for Bella Abzug—and the way she looks precludes just about anything else. Besides that she's very shy, totally unphotogenic and has a disconcerting habit of telling the truth. Six agencies turned her down before we got her—even when offered unlimited funds. Two of them literally laughed in her face!

Something of a recluse, but very personable in small groups. Extremely intelligent, but wants to be President out of some strange sense of moral duty. Not a Women's Libber or anything, just a sort of anachronism who thinks she's best suited for the job and therefore duty-bound to take it. Very sophisticated outside of this sixteenth century notion of moral responsibility.

FROM: COLFAX
TO: WEBER
DATE: September 27

Her shyness may work to our advantage. All we have to do is keep the public from seeing her until she's been elected. Ask her if she'll run anonymously.

FROM: WEBER
TO: COLFAX
DATE: September 27

ANONYMOUSLY?????!!!! Are you sure you can handle this?

FROM: COLFAX
TO: WEBER
DATE: September 27

$4,000,000 if she wins, nothing if she loses.

FROM: WEBER
TO: COLFAX
DATE: September 29

Agreed. She says she'll do whatever she has to do—unless it involves joining one of the political parties or is blatantly dishonest. She doesn't seem to be politically naive, but she's adamant on the point of not joining one of the parties—not that it matters much since neither of them would have her anyway.

FROM: COLFAX
TO: WEBER
DATE: September 30

Good. We'll run the entire campaign through television. Nothing until next September 12; then, I want two minutes out of every half hour until Election Day. In the meantime, get me the following:

1. About twenty Types—the kind

you use in the potato chip and shaving commercials—housewives, football players, policemen, little old ladies, doctors, etc. None of them too good looking. Have the women a little on the plain side, something she can blend in with.

2. One athletic, intelligent, articulate Black male.
3. One white male, about sixty. The Grand-Old-Man-type, white hair, moustache and goatee, robust. The kind you use in the Impeccable Taste ads, but more sagacious.
4. One white female who can look like she has a Ph.D. in Political Science without losing anything as a sex symbol.
5. One white male about thirty-five who looks as much as possible like the Virile-Young-Man without looking too much like a Kennedy. All of the Four must be physically and mentally superior.
6. An estate outside New York, secluded, one where we can maintain absolute security. NO ONE who works on this project can be attached in any way. We are going to hide them away until after the election. NONE of the actors is ever to be seen in public unless I order it.

I must have ABSOLUTE authority in this thing. No one is to know for certain who the Candidate is so your client will have to agree to act like everyone else. That means she'll have to take orders just like any other actor; if word of her identity gets out prematurely or she wants to pull out part way through, you forfeit $200,000 a month for my time—from Sept. 25 to date of forfeiture. Agreed?

Contact me again when you've secured everything on the list. We have over a year to go so be very selective. Take only those who are willing to cooperate completely and only the very best of those. PCS will handle the initial screening. We'll need about three months for indoctrination before filming begins.

FROM: WEBER
TO: COLFAX
DATE: April 25

Agreed.

Files on the final selections will be sent to your office tomorrow. We have secured an estate in New Jersey about fifty miles outside the city. Two buses have been purchased and dummy buses have been rented to confuse anyone who might try to follow us.

FROM: COLFAX
TO: WEBER
DATE: May 1

I am finished studying the files. The final selections are excellent. It's surprising that Ms. Cavil has never entered a beauty contest—but very fortunate for us. Williams is very good for the Grand Old Man; very genteel. I don't think

Saxon's Boston accent will hurt us and I'm very pleased with Brown. I was afraid they would come up with a white man's Black man, but this one is excellent.

Begin filming the Gold-Edge Beer commercial and the Bright Detergent commercial Tuesday. We'll need these shown as soon and as often as possible. They'll give our real commercials something familiar to parallel. Begin the indoctrination tomorrow.

FROM: WEBER
TO: COLFAX
DATE: August 25

I hope these things are being forwarded to you. This is a hell of a time to take a vacation. The actors are very enthused now that they know their mission. There is none of the jealousy you might expect with this many actors cooped up together for so long. The screening must have been exceptionally good.

I think most of them—certainly the Four—know who the Candidate is but it doesn't matter; she's made converts of all of them. They seem sincerely attached to her; her influence on them is truly amazing. She has one of them studying Ecology; another Economics. One is becoming her expert on Education; another on Foreign Policy. It's like she's selected her cabinet already.

I treated the whole thing like a game but she seems quite serious—and so do they. When do we start the first commercial? We're about ready.

FROM: COLFAX
TO: WEBER
DATE: September 1

The idea for the first commercial is enclosed. Make it parallel the Gold Edge Beer commercial as closely as possible; shoot the same camera angles, etc. Most of this is the same action; read it anyway.

Open with tight shot of huddle. Close-up of Ms. Cavil in her sweatshirt, cap, whistle, etc., calling the play. Wide angle for snap from center. Cut to Saxon running his pattern; long pass to him on run; circus catch. (Shoot this one until you get something spectacular. The files indicate that both Saxon and Brown played football in college).

Follow Saxon down sideline to where he gets hemmed in by the last defensive man. Brown comes from off-camera left to block the defensive man. (Again, something that crunches. This will be shown during a lot of professional football games, and we don't want it to look pale by comparison.) Cut to Saxon as he scores.

Close-up of Saxon and Brown congratulating each other. Cut to close-up of Grand Old Man nodding approvingly from the sidelines. Close-up of button on his lapel reading: TEAMWORK COUNTS. (Distribute 5,000,000 of these buttons around the country the same week.)

Wide angle shot of crowd running up to congratulate Saxon and Brown. Keep the Candidate in front, but a little out of focus. Cut to American flag. Dub in "Hail to the Chief". Superimpose words and narrator: "Ladies and gentlemen, the next president of the United States has appeared in this commercial."

FROM: WEBER
TO: COLFAX
DATE: September 9

Very effective. A lot like the "Camels-Are-Coming!" campaign and the car commercials we did with the new models under a drape. We're ready for number-two. By the way, our client has them all meeting an hour a day for what she calls consciousness raising. You don't suppose she's a Libbie after all?

FROM: COLFAX
TO: WEBER
DATE: September 9

I don't really care what she is. My job is to get her elected. Enclosed is the second script. Shoot the same opening as the Bright commercial except that instead of having Cavil explain how the detergent works have her talk about how detergents and industrial wastes are fouling our water supply.

As she's talking, four men come into the laundromat and attack her (have them wear ski masks so we don't offend any ethnic groups). She fights, one of them tears open her blouse (tiniest flash of nipple). Saxon and Brown enter dressed as washer repairmen, come to her aid.

Series of rapid cuts: knives, feet, faces, different camera angles, mostly low. Each disables one opponent; Cavil finishes hers with a Karate chop. Fourth assailant runs for the door where the Grand Old Man, entering, jabs him with his walking stick (have the old man take a good impact on the stick and grab his shoulder in pain.)

Pan around laundromat: clothes all over the floor, an old woman hysterical in the corner with the Candidate comforting her. Cavil trying to hold her blouse closed, Saxon and Brown both cut over the right eye, the old man rubbing his shoulder, the four toughs sprawled about on the floor. Dolly back out through the window to wide angle shot of laundromat.

Superimpose and voice-over: "When a crime is committed, everyone suffers. We must fight crime in the streets and the conditions that cause it. Vote for THE CANDIDATE." Both Right and Left will interpret that one to our advantage.

TO: COLFAX
FROM: WEBER
DATE: September 10

Cavil and our client both refuse to do the commercial. They say it exploits women. The men agree

with them. She's turning them all into revolutionaries!

TO: WEBER
FROM: COLFAX
DATE: September 11

Of course it exploits women! How many commercials have they seen that don't? Ask Cavil this: If she had to break into a prison to free her sisters would she refuse to do it because she'd have to dress up as a male guard? And tell your client that when she's President she can appoint Kate Millett head of the FCC and change all the commercials she wants, but this one must *stay as is.* Causes require sacrifices.

TO: COLFAX
FROM: WEBER
DATE: September 11

She says to tell you you must mean "The end justifies the means." Anyway, they had a meeting and decided that tactics takes precedence over ideology. They'll do the script as written.

You've opened a fine can of worms with that crack about the FCC. Now they're drawing up a list of government agencies that can be controlled by appointment. And making a list of appointees!

FROM: WEBER
TO: COLFAX
DATE: September 20

Things have settled down a bit and the filming is going very well. The Karate stuff looks authentic. Brown is familiar with it and acted as technical director. I don't think they're really serious about that list. Williams told me they have Angela Davis down for Supreme Court Justice. He had such a straight face I almost thought he was serious. Anyway, it helps them pass the time between takes.

FROM: COLFAX
TO: WEBER
DATE: September 23

Release the first commercial and the buttons simultaneously in ten days.

FROM: WEBER
TO: COLFAX
DATE: October 3

Introductory commercial released yesterday as directed. Good initial response. Five million TEAMWORK COUNTS buttons distributed. Our client has her "cabinet" out prostelytizing among the other actors. Not much else to do now that the shooting's over for a while, and it keeps them busy so I encourage it.

FROM: WEBER
TO: COLFAX
DATE: October 12

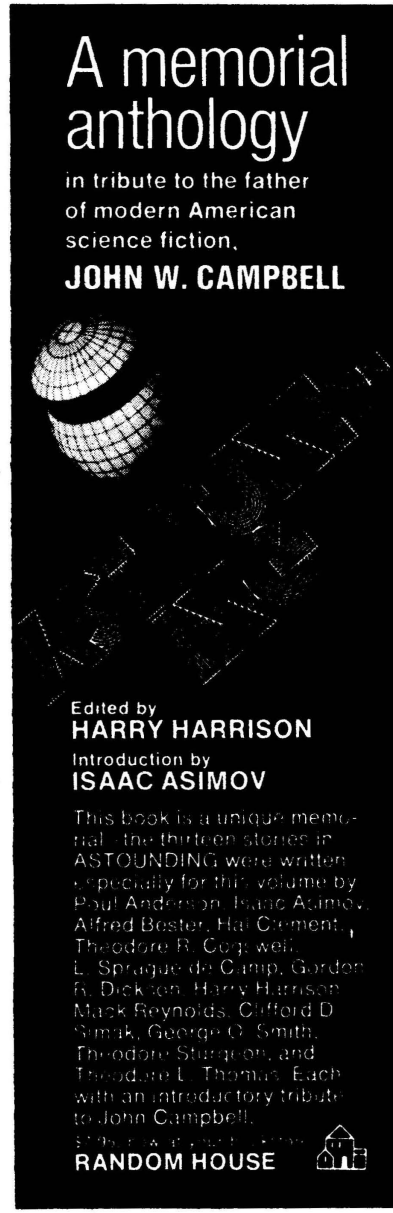
Crime commercial released yesterday on schedule. Requests received for 2,000,000 more buttons. Between the five of them, they've even begun to make converts among the technical and security

people. I think Cavil's trying to raise *my* level of consciousness. Are we creating a Frankenstein here?

FROM: COLFAX
TO: WEBER
DATE: October 13

Release group picture for the "$5,000 1,000-winner Who-Is-THE CANDIDATE? Contest". Follow each of our one-minute commercials with a thirty-second spot about the contest. Place hints in appropriate newspaper columns and have your Gold Edge Beer Salesmen casually pass on similar information to bar tenders. We want everybody in the country to have an opinion of THE CANDIDATE'S identity. The contest should have the effect of encouraging betting. All major radio stations will carry telephone contests with similar clues.

Dummy voting booths will be set up near every large polling place. Procedures for voting must be identical to those used in the real election. It will cost us another million in persuasion money to get "THE CANDIDATE" printed on the real ballot and to have anything written in counted as a vote for us, but it will be well worth it. Also she will have to secretly change her name to THE CANDIDATE to make it hold up in court (the Supreme Court). We have less than a month to make voting for THE CANDIDATE a conditioned response.



FROM: WEBER
TO: COLFAX
DATE: October 14

What are we going to do?! The President has just accepted a challenge to debate! What if they include us?!

FROM: COLFAX
TO: WEBER
DATE: October 15

And admit we're a legitimate alternative? Not likely. Here's the next commercial; release it the day *after* the debate.

Wide angle shot of auditorium; pan slowly to platform where the President and the Democratic nominee are debating. They cannot be heard because the crowd is booing too loudly. Both men ignore the crowd entirely. The crowd grows violent and begins to throw things. Secret Service men draw their guns. Cut to series of other weapons in the audience.

Brown jumps up on the left side of the stage, Cavil on the right. They gesture for order and the crowd quiets. Brown speaks.

"Everyone has the right to say what he wants, even the people who barred us from this platform! Even the people who denied us the opportunity to confront them on the real issues of the campaign. Even the people who have been trying to keep us from talking to you, the people, by putting pressure on television station owners to drop our commercials!"

Cavil speaks. "These men have a right to speak! Even though every word they say is put into their mouths by the rich and powerful men who are paying for their campaigns. Even though they won't tell you about the deals they've already made they have the right to speak! Everybody has that right! Not just those who agree with us! Everybody!" Saxon shouts, "Right!" Wild applause.

Pan slowly past the Candidate to Williams, smiling his approval. Superimpose words and voice-over: "It's not who you are but what you believe in that's important. Vote for the candidate nobody owns. Vote for THE CANDIDATE."

FROM: WEBER
TO: COLFAX
DATE: October 23

Latest commercial released on schedule. Over 50 million votes already in the "Who-Is-THE-CANDIDATE Contest". People are tuning in our commercials just to study them. Papers in all major cities are carrying schedules of our commercials on the front page. This thing is really beginning to boom—I'm worried.

FROM: COLFAX
TO: WEBER
DATE: October 30

Start filming the thirty second spot. Assemble the whole group, in costumes and masks. Have the Candidate and the Four in the

center of the group but not conspicuously so. Then all remove their masks and shout, "See you at the victory celebration!" You have two days to do this one. Plant hints in the columns that there'll be no unmasking unless we win the election. Hedge when the media asks you about it.

FROM: WEBER
TO: COLFAX
DATE: November 4

Over 85,000,000 votes in the contest and we're ahead of both of them in the polls! The networks are demanding that we either show our candidate or get out of the race. What are we going to do? I can't stall them forever.

FROM: COLFAX
TO: WEBER
DATE: November 4

Set up a press conference for the sixth, nationwide TV, prime time.

FROM: WEBER
TO: COLFAX
DATE: November 5

Are you crazy?! We can't show her! What's going to happen with all those people who guessed wrong? I've had three phone calls from people telling me that they've bet a lot of money on the Old Man and it better be him or else—and I have an unlisted number! We're liable to get killed right there at the press conference.

It's easy for you to say 'give a press conference' when you're off hiding somewhere on your extended vacation. But we're the ones who'll have to face the music. I knew this thing was going to blow up in our faces! When the press gets a look at her we'll be the laughing stock of the industry. When the public sees her we'll be lucky if we don't get indicted for fraud and conspiracy! Treason! You've got to get us out of this!!

FROM: COLFAX
TO: WEBER
DATE: November 6

GET YOURSELF TOGETHER!! Just go to the meeting and stand well back from the podium. The Candidate knows what to do. Everything is going according to plan. TRUST ME!!

FROM: WEBER
TO: COLFAX
DATE: November 7

WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME ABOUT THE BOMB!!!! I thought it was for real. How did you manage to get the television cables cut during the confusion? And what would have happened if the rest of that dynamite had gone off? And for what???!!!

So we didn't have to make the announcement? What good does it do us? What's going to happen tonight when she wins the election and has to make a victory speech? The losers are bound to call fraud. They might even get the election

nullified! We could all go to jail! WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO???!!!

FROM: COLFAX
TO: WEBER
DATE: November 7

Stop it. I repeat; everything is going according to plan. Don't come to the victory party tonight; I don't even want to see you near campaign headquarters! Go back to the estate and watch it all on television as soon as you give these instructions to the group.

Everything is set. The group will come to the podium in a body as soon as we are mathematically assured of victory. The Four will be in the middle, the Candidate a little to the right. The house lights will go off and the assassination film will be shown. The TV people are already prepared for a film of some sort as part of the speech so they'll have no trouble carrying the whole thing. The film is pretty gruesome, even in black and white.

When the house lights come on again, the whole group will repeat the following in unison:

TIME AFTER TIME, THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE HAS BEEN CIRCUMVENTED BY AN ACT OF VIOLENCE. LAST NIGHT IT ALMOST HAPPENED AGAIN. THE COUNTRY CANNOT AFFORD THE DISLOCATION THAT OCCURS WHEN A PRESIDENT IS ASSASSINATED. AS LONG AS I AM PRESIDENT MY IDENTITY WILL REMAIN A SECRET.

THE DESIRE FOR PERSONAL GLORY DOES NOT BELONG IN THE WHITE HOUSE. THE DESIRE TO BE A PRESIDENT "HISTORY WILL REMEMBER" DOES NOT BELONG IN THE WHITE HOUSE. THEREFORE I WILL REMAIN ANONYMOUS.

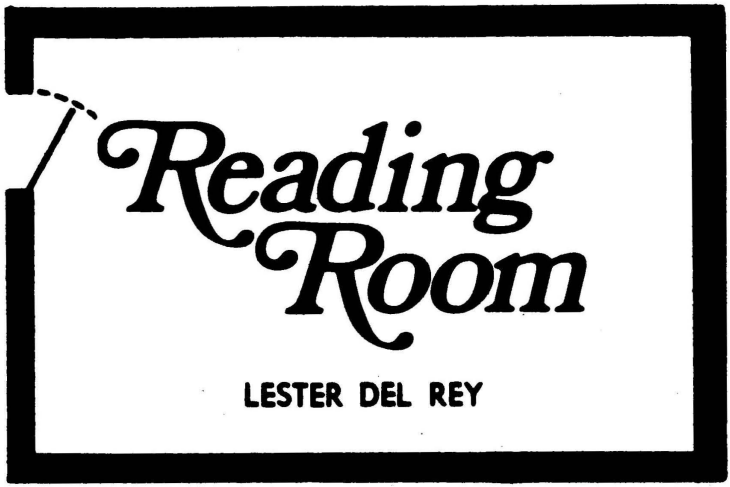
BUT THIS SHOULD NOT SEEM STRANGE TO YOU; THE PRESIDENT IS, AFTER ALL, ONLY THE REPRESENTATIVE WHO STANDS IN PLACE OF THAT GREAT ANONYMOUS MASS—THE PEOPLE. WE THE PEOPLE!

Have them rehearse it thoroughly.

FROM: COLFAX
TO: WEBER
DATE: November 8

I have destroyed your memo, and the security guards I have permanently assigned to you will see to it that you do the same with this after you read it. I don't know when you figured it out and I must confess I did not anticipate your hiding the memos that passed between us. I congratulate you; it was a clever move and guarantees you your life.

You will be kept under close house-arrest until my Inauguration. Thereafter you will be free to move about—however, if you ever address me or refer to me as "Madame President" again, I will have you killed, whether I find the memos or not! You will be well taken care of. Do not try to escape. •



LESTER DEL REY

RECENTLY, quite a bit of attention on the part of academe has been devoted to attempting to define science fiction. Unfortunately, most of that effort has been spent in trying to discover how it is like other forms of fiction. By now, it should be obvious that such work is totally non-productive.

The real task is to discover how science fiction differs from other literature. Certainly there must be some difference; at a time when most fiction seems to be having less and less appeal in the market, science fiction is booming. It alone seems to have engendered a large and enthusiastic fandom. And somehow it is capable of holding the interest of informed and intelligent readers even when its execution is crude and its plotting obvious. It would surely seem that its attraction lies not in its similarity to other fiction, but in its dissimilarity.

Well, just how does science fiction differ from "mainstream"? Not in its interest in the future, apparently; despite the fact that most science fiction is laid in some future, many of the most admired works are laid in a present (not necessarily this one) or a past (again, not necessarily the standard-model). Piper's Paratime stories, for instance, take place largely in an alternate-world present or in milleaus vaguely like various periods of our history. It isn't any preoccupation with science either. The science in many of our classics is minimal, if not outright fantasy; we accept time-travel, alternate worlds, faster-than-light travel and psionics as quickly as the hard laws of physics.

It seems to me that the fundamental difference is that we accept

change as the basis of our fiction.

Other fiction is based upon our perception of the world as it is and as we believe it to have been. Most literature exists in the *now* of the writer, and the object is to present that eternal now as if it were the absolute guide to excellence. A writer of the "mainstream" is usually judged by the reality shown in his work. Fiction holds up a mirror to reality, according to one dictum. (Of course, whoever promulgated that had no conception of the specialized laws of fiction, which do not conform to the lack of order and justice in reality.)

Even our historical fiction—which must include the Western category—is pretty much a fiction of that eternal now. With rare exceptions, it follows our current preconceptions of mankind, with only a token gesture toward history. Thus, our current concept of romantic love—only a few hundred years old—is grafted onto the so-called age of chivalry, when the concepts of the people were not at all similar.

Science fiction in some measure rejects that unchanging present order of things. It states in essence that the world of the story is different from the present (or the accepted past) of the reader. The difference may be in science, environment, attitude, or the basic nature of humanity. But it should be a real change in the accepted concepts of reality.

The readers are those who can step out of their present frame and accept other frames of reference. Naturally, that requires more flexibility than many readers can show, so we have a rather small and specialized readership. The writers are also forced beyond the normal attitudes of authorship; inevitably, since such a special skill is required of them, they sometimes show less of other skills such as characterization. And the effect of our literature on those used to dealing only with an unchanging reality must be confusing, which is why attempts to relate science fiction to the other branches of literature are so unproductive.

Incidentally, the idea of an essential change in the nature of reality does not rule out fantasy. Most of the older fantasy, of course, dealt with an accepted idea of the past—myths of ghosts, werewolves, etc. But a literature of change has grown up in fantasy, also. Tolkien's work is an example, demanding a whole change in world-line, with its own history, races, and methodology. Such fantasy seems to be generally accepted by science fiction readers, however, unlike the older forms based on superstition.

This isn't definition by function, but it does relate to it. It's definition by expectation on the part of the reader; he expects to find a science fiction story dealing with at least some essential change in the

reality he knows.

Most of the academic attempts to define science fiction that I have seen have been definition by label; they simply find some word or phrase that somehow relates to general literature, and then attempt to show that the label fits. This is somewhat like defining sulphur and gold as yellow elements; it may even be true, but the only use such label-finding has is in advancing the label-maker's status.

A CASE in point is *New Worlds for Old,* by David Ketterer (Anchor, $2.95). The label here is "apocalyptic". It isn't too bad a label, in the sense it is used; much of science fiction can be squeezed into the box bearing that label. But so can a good deal of other fiction (and non-fiction). I quarrel with the spirit of the word, however; usually, apocolyptic literature has a serious intent of revelation—whereas generally science fiction doesn't take its changes very seriously, but instead uses them to entertain. Also, of course, there is a residue of revelation implicit to the term—a residue which persists, even though Ketterer makes it plain he does not mean it—where science fiction merely presents, not expecting the reader to believe any of it beyond the period of reading the story.

New Worlds for Old presents critical essays on a hodge-podge of works: Utopias, stories of Poe and Twain, Melville, Vonnegut, and Ursula LeGuin. Certainly there isn't even the beginning of broad enough an examination of science fiction as a whole to justify any generalizations. As usual in such works, the idea seems to be to grab up anything (particularly "acceptable" examples) that will reinforce the essential idea, rather than testing the supposition for exceptions.

Also, so far as I can determine, there is little to be gained from the critical essays themselves. In examining LeGuin's *Left Hand of Darkness,* for instance, Ketterer seems totally unaware of one of the basic attractions of the novel. He never goes into the love between Genly Ai and Estravan, though that is the underlying—and extremely significant—theme of much of the book. This is also an example of love so radically changed that it is unique; a love between humans that is not between man and man or woman and woman—nor can it be considered heterosexual. It is love between human and human, beyond all normal encounters. Certainly some study of that must be made in any critical analysis of the novel, and its absence makes the entire critical approach of the book suspect.

If I sound bitter and hostile to the idea of academic criticism it is only because of the examples I have seen in our field. A good critic with an extensive background in general literature can deepen both the understanding and delight of any

literature, provided he approaches it with his own familiarity of the field and appreciation of it. C. S. Lewis made my reading of the medieval romances come back to my mind anew, and with deeper insights and greater joy. He might well have given us superb criticism of science fiction—since he liked the field—but unfortunately we have only small bits and casual interviews. A great pity. But even in the absence of such a critic, we can safely do without such books as that by Ketterer.

A BOOK I have neglected, unfortunately, for far too long is Philip Wylie's *The End of the Dream* (DAW, 95¢). This is an interesting example of something seen too rarely—a book which shows how the changes come about in more detail than it shows the changes themselves. It's a bitter book—as it had to be, since Wylie's essential love of the best in humanity always had to be opposed to what he saw happening. It's a novel dealing with the decay of our civilization and the desperation of those who attempt to halt that ruin.

Wylie shows this with the minimum of coincidences. He doesn't take the easy way out by having a great atomic holocaust, a sudden plague released by warring powers, or an alien invasion. He simply takes things which are already present in our culture and shows step-by-step how they lead to disaster—a disaster that could be averted. And because he was a man who saw with extraordinary clarity and deep feeling (and saw much of this at least twenty years before anyone else seemed aware of it), his story has great intensity.

It isn't great fiction; the plotting is sometimes minimal and the ending not clearly stated. But the events have a drama of their own that makes most of the so-called speculative fiction with its irrelevant "relevance" seem pretty tame. The disaster here is *real*, not a mere prop for words and mood. If you can still find a copy, get it. (Available direct from DAW—ed.)

FREDERIK POHL, who once edited this magazine, is now selecting science fiction for Bantam Books. The first "Frederik Pohl Selection" is now available. It's *Commune 2000 A.D.*, by Mack Reynolds (95¢). Reynolds has altered the basic reality of the world in one way, mostly; the economic structure. His world has a Universal Guaranteed Income which everyone gets automatically credited to him, and which is enough to make work unnecessary. Those who want to work and who can prove their ability are granted larger incomes. Those who want to pursue hobbies or simply loaf are free to do so.

This is the same world Reynolds has used in a number of his stories, and it's a convincing one. The novel apparently fits into his series some-

where in the middle. It deals with a man who sets out—at the government's bequest—to investigate the strange communes of like-minded people that are springing up; there are communes for nature-freaks, artists, and most every other group. During the investigation, Swain decides that those who sent him need a little investigating themselves, and from there on the plot deepens. It may be the perfect world economically, but (surprise!) the basic nature of the people running it hasn't changed.

It isn't a particularly strong or fresh novel to any who have read Reynolds' other works in this background. But it does throw considerable insight into the nature of the traveling cities and the attitudes of the people who travel in them. And it makes for generally good reading. Moderately recommended.

ONE chapter of *The Godwhale,* by T. J. Bass (Ballantine, $1.25), appeared in *Galaxy* magazine, but most of the novel will be new to *Galaxy/If* readers. In it, the godwhale (Rorqual Maru) appears as only a part in this study of a world that has been completely changed. The men who built the whale-like cyborg have spent their energies in going out to the stars. Behind them, over a long span of years, Earth's major society has been forced by gross overpopulation to resort to a hive type of society, where the individual becomes lost in the complex of survival. Meantime, in the sea, men have developed a small—but extremely complex—outcast society where freedom still exists.

This story tells of the struggle between the two societies and of separate struggles within them. The godwhale enters into all these struggles, playing a major part in the events. This is a novel of great inventiveness, and many of the creatures—human, as well as non-human—are fascinatingly drawn. Some of the early chapters seem a bit cold, but this eventually resolves into a story where the emotional conflict is about as far from cold as possible.

The star seekers aren't forgotten, either. Throughout, there are increasing signs of their influence on the world that was left behind. And there's a clever mathematical formula to define what makes a habitable planet around any star. It fits very well and works out mathematically. But I'm afraid it depends somewhat on the units of measurement used, and I don't recommend taking it too seriously. Still, it makes for a nicely satisfactory ending.

This is a complex and fascinating novel, and one I recommend as a fine example of what science fiction is all about.

ANOTHER is *Walk to the End of the World,* by Suzy McKee Charnas (Ballantine, $1.25). This

novel has already received considerable attention from those who have seen advance copies, and the results are rather strange and confusing. Women readers seem to go "ape" over it, to varying degrees; I can't really see why, but they consider it *their* story.

Charnas has postulated a world-after-catastrophe, but not the typical one. A small band of survivors have been forced to make do in a world where most animals and food plants have died.

They have also evolved a culture which has elements of some of the Attic-Greek ideas, but essentially is unique to itself. In it the women are despised creatures, good only for simple work and breeding; the men have developed purely "masculine" mystiques, and strange relationships among themselves in which ideological homesexuality—similar to that in Athens—plays a part, but only a part. Naturally, since women are only animals to be used in common, men don't normally know who sired them.

The plot evolves out of the fact that one man does know who is his father. He bitterly resents the claim on him from this long-since lost father, and sets out to find him. What and where he finds him is a beautifully unexpected development. So is what we learn of the real place and culture of the women.

It is *not* a "woman's book", so far as I can determine. Charnas is a new writer, but she's in excellent control of her story; she tells it mostly through the eyes of her male characters, and does so convincingly. There is no obvious anti-male or pro-female prejudice I can find in her telling, and absolutely none of the "female" writing style sometimes found in bad books. (Good writers are good writers, whether male or female, and Charnas is simply a good writer.)

I recommend the book to readers of either sex—but if some woman reader can tell me why she regards this as special to her sex, I'd be glad to hear the answer.

AND in discussing new offerings from Ballantine Books I'd like to mention that they are beginning a series of "Best of" books with one that's rather special. This is *The Best of Stanley G. Weinbaum* ($1.65), with a foreword by Isaac Asimov and an afterword by Robert Bloch, who knew Weinbaum. The eleven stories in the book really are the best of his work. And so far as I know, this is the first time "Valley of Dreams" has followed "Martian Odyssey" in any soft-cover publication; the two really make one story, with the real importance of the story coming from the infrequently-reprinted sequel.

Weinbaum, more than any other writer, helped to take our field out of the doldrums of the early thirties and into the beginnings of modern science fiction. Some of his plots

are a bit obvious now, and his human characterizations a bit skimpy. But he introduced the idea that aliens weren't just bug-eyed monsters or slightly-altered humans. He showed that other forms of life must have changes in attitude and social structure, and he made his aliens unforgettable. His works are still a joy to read.

FOR those who follow Poul Anderson's stories of the future in which the winged Ythrians play a part, *The Day of Their Return* (Science Fiction Book Club, $1.49) is an interesting addition. (There is a soft-cover edition from New American Library, but I haven't yet seen it and don't know the price.) It isn't the best Anderson, but it's still very good.

This is a novel of cultures that have become wildly divergent on the world of Aeneas, and of a time when they must somehow learn to work together or be torn asunder by both inside and outside influences. Ivar, the hero, conspires against the Terran government of Aeneas, and is forced to flee his home culture. He then drifts—or is forced—through the other cultures, eventually with a bird-man from Ythri as a companion. The cultures are well drawn (though a bit too derivative from familiar ones), and there are some rather strange elements that seem to be superimposed over them. In the background is the Administrator from the Terran government; he's a fascinating example of Anderson's individuals, who know their business—whether they seem to or not. And there's a seeming prophet who believes he's the resurrection of an ancient Being with godlike powers. (As it turns out, this Being dominates the novel rather far beyond his actual place in the story, I'm afraid.)

It's a good adventure story, with something added, and well worth the attractive price. Anderson is a writer who discovered the real values of science fiction long ago and never fails to give us new insights into the changes possible in our literature. •

PHILIP WYLIE'S
final statement:
THE END OF THE DREAM
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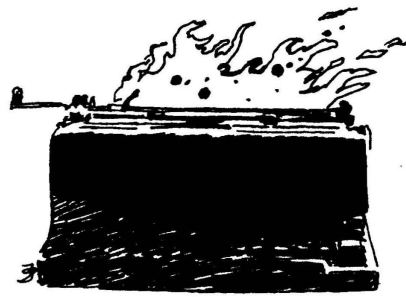
NOSTRADAMUS

There once was a planet
called Terra . . .

CLARK COLLINS



BANNING said, "Sit down. This was just forwarded from Washington. God knows how they got it. The poem, down at the bottom of the page."

His favorite field man took the proffered newspaper before sinking onto the leather couch. "This limerick?" he asked.

Banning didn't bother to answer him. It was the only verse on the page to which the paper had been folded.

Rick Flavelle looked up again. "Pretty damn poor if you ask me," he said.

Banning heaved his bulk around so he could fish a cigarette from a pack on his desk, reached for his desk lighter. "You're slipping, Richard," he said. "Read it again."

Rick shrugged and read aloud this time.

"The politico all called Fred
"Was found irrevocably dead.
"It seems in the night
"An agile red sprite
"Put an extra hole in his head."

He looked up again, frowning this time. Maybe it was too early in the morning for him to be sharp. He didn't get it. He said, "I'm not particularly fond of limericks at best, but this seems worse than usual. I can't imagine an editor..."

His superior said, "Look at the date."

Rick Flavelle hissed between his teeth. "Zowie," he said. "The day before Donaldson was assassinated. Some coincidence, eh?" He wondered why it should be of interest to David Banning, or of the Department's central headquarters.

Banning said, "The name of the writer."

"Cassandra," Rick said. "A *nom de plume*, eh? Wasn't Cassandra a Greek? Somebody in mythology?"

There was a heavy volume on the section head's desk, open. Banning pulled it before him and read, evidently skipping bits as he went. "Cassandra, a Trojan princess, the daughter of King Priam and Queen Hecuba . . . One of the Gods gave her the power of prophecy, but to offset it, another ruled that she would never be believed . . . Warned the Trojans about the wooden horse the Greeks had left behind them, but they ignored her . . . When Troy fell she was made a slave by . . . well, that doesn't matter."

Banning lifted a beefy hand and began ticking off on his fingers. "Secretary Donaldson's first name was Fredric, everybody called him Fred. He was most certainly a politician. He was found dead by his wife and one of the maids. He had been shot in the head during the night. Investigation proved that the assassin hadn't entered by any door. He had somehow climbed to the third floor of the Donaldson home and entered through a window. Which would make him agile. But that isn't all."

RICK was looking at him, expressionlessly.

Banning shifted his bulk in his chair. "It hasn't been released to the press that Mike Corbin was a pinko. The mucky-mucks aren't interested in touching off another McCarthy era."

Rick's eyebrows went up. "A party member?"

"No. He belonged to some splinter group. An offshoot of the Trotskyites, or some such. But, by definition, he was a red. So that checks too."

His fieldman looked down at the limerick again, and hissed softly. "Some coincidence. Printed the day before it took place."

The other said wearily, "Check it out, Richard. The way things stand, Washington still isn't sure that Mike Corbin was working alone. It's a crying shame they didn't capture him alive. Anyway, Washington wants us to check it out."

"POETRY editor?" the thin man with the rolled up sleeves and loosened tie said. "Does this weekly rag look big enough to have a poetry editor? I'm *the* editor, period. What can I do for you?"

Rick Flavelle showed him his buzzer.

"Security, huh?" the other said, showing that new interest they always showed. "What brings you to Waterport?"

Rick brought the newspaper from his pocket. He indicated the limerick. "Who wrote this?"

The editor glanced at it, without reading. "How would I know?"

The security agent looked at him.

The editor grunted. "It's a filler. When you're making up the forms, you wind up with holes at the end of columns. You fill them with jokes, short news items that are timeless, children's bright sayings, verse, that sort of thing."

Rick Flavelle said, "Well, where do you get these fillers?"

"You can buy them wholesale through the agencies. Some items come in with publicity. The verse is usually submitted by local would-be poets. Gives them a bang to get published." He looked at the limerick again. "Cassandra," he said. "Seems to me I've seen that name before. Sends in stuff from time to time. If it's not too bad, or too long, I have the linotypists set it up and it kicks around in the filler galleys until we need it."

"Do you know where I can get hold of this Cassandra?"

The editor shook his head. "What do you want with her?"

"How do you know it's a her?" Rick said.

"I don't. Most poetry is sent in by women. Most of it stinks. Sometimes they get sore because you don't print their stuff and cancel their subscriptions. It's one of the hazards running a small town paper. It was bad enough before, but about six months ago some British poet came through on a lecture tour, and after he left the local women formed a poetry club. Now I get a few reams a week."

"A poetry club," Rick said. "You wouldn't know the president or secretary, would you?"

"I ought to," the other said. "She's my mother-in-law. You ought to see *her* stuff."

RICK FLAVELLE flicked his charm switch. "Mrs. Turner?" he beamed. "Your son-in-law, Mr. Semple, over on the *Star*, has referred me to you as the local authority on poetry."

She beamed back, as conditioned. "Ernest is a dear boy, it's a shame those publishers won't let him print more of my modest efforts, Mr. . ."

"Flavelle," Rick said. "Richard Flavelle. What I wanted to ask you about, Mrs. Turner, was the identity of the person who writes the Cassandra poems for the *Star*. I thought perhaps . . ." He let the sentence fall away.

"Poems!" she snorted. "A poem, young man, is an artistic composition in verse. It has meter, it has rhythm, sometimes, though not always, it has rhyme. I can assure you, the so-called poems written by Jerry Frankle have none of these characteristics save rhyme. I will admit that . . ."

"Jerry Frankle?" Rick said.

She bit it off. "Over there," she pointed. "He lives over there." The door closed decisively.

Over there was a rather vague direction.

Rick Flavelle crossed the street, went up a few doors and saw a man raking leaves on a front lawn.

Rick said, "I wonder if you could direct me to the home of Jerry Frankle?"

It was around the corner and down a few houses. Rick Flavelle went around the corner and down the declared number of houses. Under the bell was a small name plate. Jerome Frankle. He rang, without response.

At the house next door the woman told him that Mr. Frankle returned from work at fifteen minutes past five. He was a clerk in the department store downtown.

It was almost five. Rick Flavelle went back to where he had left his car and drove it around and parked across the street from Frankle's house. The neighborhood was of yesteryear. The owners of these rather old fashioned wooden residences probably belonged in the five thousand a year bracket. No house was less than forty years old. It wasn't the atmosphere of political assassination. But what is the atmosphere of the breeding ground of assassins? From whence come the nihilists?

The car that pulled up before the home of Jerome Frankle was five or six years old, but had been kept up beyond the usual. In fact, the finish was beginning to show signs of wear, brought on by over-much washing and polishing.

The driver got out and carefully locked his vehicle, then turned and mounted the steps. He looked to be about fifty. A dithering old maid if Rick Flavelle had ever spotted one.

Rick exhaled, picked up the copy of the Waterport *Star* from the seat beside him and left his own car. He followed the other, coming up from behind him even while Frankle was still unlocking the front door.

Rick said, "Hello, Mr. Frankle, I . . ."

The other looked over his shoulder with a start. "Oh dear, you scared me. I don't want to buy anything."

"Fine," Rick said. "I don't want to sell anything."

The other opened the door and stood in it, as though defiantly. "And I pay my bills at the end of the month. There is no need to dun me."

Rick indicated the paper. "I wanted to talk to you about your Cassandra, uh, poems."

"You do? Well . . ." Jerome Frankle opened the door wider. "Please come in. Lordy, I'm afraid the house is a mess. A frightful mess. Middle-aged bachelor, you know."

The house was far from a frightful mess. Rather it was as though unoccupied, so spotlessly did the aging department-store clerk polish it.

"Could I offer you a nip of sherry? I'm afraid it's only domestic, you know."

Rick thanked him, no. He came

to the point. "Mr. Frankle, how long had you known Michael Corbin?"

The other twitched. "Who? I thought you said . . ."

"Mike Corbin."

"I've never had the pleasure . . . Mike Corbin. Why, I heard about him on the television. He was the man who . . . See here, just who are you?"

Rick brought forth the buzzer again, and his I.D. Card. He passed them to the other for examination.

"Good heavens," Frankle said. "Security. How exciting."

"Sure," Rick said. "I've been sent over from the Cincinnati office. Now about Mike Corbin."

"But I have never even seen the man. Never heard of him until . . . until the Secretary of State was so foully slain."

There had been nothing in the files on Corbin to indicate the assassin had ever been in Ohio. Rick said, "How long's it been since you were last in Washington, Mr. Frankle?"

"Why, Lordy, I've never been out of Ohio in my life."

Wild goose chase. Coincidence.

Rick indicated the poem. "What were the circumstances under which you wrote this?"

Frankle twitched as he took the paper. He recognized the limerick immediately, obviously. He giggled. "Oh yes, *that*. It's not really one of my better ones, you know. Sometimes I do really good ones." He giggled, archly. "The very best limericks are really quite unpublishable, don't you think?"

"Yes," Rick said. "Look, where did you get this idea about Secretary Donaldson getting shot?"

Frankle didn't get it.

Rick Flavelle looked at him for a long moment. Finally he said, "Listen:

"The politico all called Fred
"Was found irrevocably dead.
"It seems in the night
"An agile red sprite
"Put an extra hole in his head."

Frankle said apologetically, "There are too many feet in the last line, I'll admit."

Rick said, "How did you know Corbin was a red?"

Frankle gaped at him.

Inwardly, Rick Flavelle counted down. However, he couldn't think of anything else to ask the other. On the face of it, Jerome Frankle didn't even know what the security operative was talking about. Rick Flavelle had drawn just about as blank a blank as he could have drawn.

It had been a long drive up here. More for something to say, than anything else, Rick said, "Do you write many limericks with, uh, political and international connotations?"

Jerry Frankle giggled. "Oh, I just started that line. I think you can be fiendishly clever in limericks. Mine are all nasty. I sign

them Cassandra. Do you know who Cassandra was?"

"Yes," Rick said. "Listen, do you have any more of them around?"

"Why, I don't think so. I never keep copies. I send them in to the *Star* or sometimes to the *Enquirer* in Cincinnati. Sometimes they're printed and sometimes not. I've never made the *Enquirer.* I think this is the first of the limericks the *Star*'s run but I've had several of my sonnets published. Would you like to see them?"

Rick Flavelle said, "I suppose so."

Frankle left to return shortly with two newspaper clippings. Both were poems of fourteen lines, and rhymed, though with effort. One was entitled *Flowers* and the other *Dawn.* Neither made much sense.

Frankle said, apologetically again. "This is all I could find. I usually send a copy to my mother. She lives in Columbus with my sister."

Rick Flavelle came to his feet. "No more limericks, eh?"

"I'm afraid not. Except, of course, for those I've sent to the *Star* which they haven't printed yet. If they ever print them."

"Well, good day, Mr. Frankle," Rick said. "Thanks for the cooperation."

Frankle followed him to the door, worriedly. "But what was it you wanted?" he all but wailed.

"Never mind. Nothing." Rick told him. "It was a mistake."

ON THE way back to the highway, he passed within half a block of the building which housed the *Star.* He looked at his watch. He had plenty of time to get back to Cincinnati. On an impulse, he headed for the newspaper office. Dammit, his reputation had it that he was old man Banning's most thorough field man. He didn't particularly want the title, but he had it.

The pretzel thin editor was in the process of rolling down his sleeves, obviously calling it a day, when Rick turned up again.

"How'd you make out?" he asked.

"Cassandra is an old maid, but male," Rick told him. "Name of Jerome Frankle."

"Hell, I know him," the other said. He fished his spare pencils from his shirt pocket and tossed them to the desk. "Jerry Frankle. I didn't know he was the one who sent in the Cassandra fillers. I remember his mother. Psychic crackpot type. Used to try to get publicity for these seance deals."

Rick said, "According to him he's sent in a few more limericks which you haven't published yet."

"I probably filed them away in the wastepaper basket. Jokes make better fillers. Poems are usually too long."

Rick Flavelle didn't know why, but he said, "If you didn't throw

them away, where would they be?"

The other scowled at him, for obvious reason. "I would have sent them down to be set up. They'd be in a filler galley."

"Could we take a look?"

The other closed his eyes in exaggerated disgust. "Jesus, is this what you hush-hush men spend your time doing? Come on. Never say Ernie Semple failed to cooperate with the witch hunters."

Rick Flavelle didn't like the term and never had, in fact it churned him, but he remained patient.

Ernie Semple led him down to the press room and over to some forms on a composing table. He pulled some metal trays from their racks. They were filled with clean slugs of type.

"Can you read upside down and backward?" he said to Rick.

Rick looked at him.

"No. Can you?"

"Yes," the other said. "However, I'll pull a proof for you. Here, take this." He handed Rick one of the galleys to carry and led the way to where there was ink, a roller, and scrap sheets of newsprint.

He put the galley he was carrying down, inked the type, and pulled a proof. He handed it to Rick. "Start looking down that for verses signed Cassandra. I don't think you'll find any. By the way, I figured out why you wanted to see Jerry Frankle."

Rick was scanning the galley proof which consisted largely of unbelievably poor jokes. He looked up momentarily, then returned to the list. "Oh, you did?"

"Yep," the editor told him, inking the second tray of fillers. "Quite a coincidence, wasn't it? Jerry's limerick hit it right on the head."

At the bottom of the ink-wet galley proof, Rick Flavelle spotted a limerick. It was signed, Cassandra.

Number One in the Kremlin
bragged
His economy no longer lagged.
But the folk who were hungry
Got guns, bombs and sundry,
And he should have zigged when
he zagged.

It didn't make much sense. In fact, it wasn't even as good as the first—that last line didn't fit in with the others at all.

Semple said, "Find one?"

Rick said, "Yes. You mean to tell me you can't find better stuff than this to print?"

The editor sighed. "I told you most of it stank. But local poets you'll always have with you. And you have to run a certain amount of their stuff to keep them, and their relatives, and their neighbors, and their shopmates, happy. Let's see it."

On an impulse, Rick shook his head. He folded the galley proof and stuck it into his pocket.

Ernie Semple's eyes inadvertently flickered down to the type in the galley, then quickly came back.

Rick shook his head and brought

the galley proof back from his pocket. He reached down and picked the lines of type from the metal tray, wrapped them in the newsprint, and returned the whole to his jacket pocket.

Semple said, "Hey."

Rick said, "Thanks for the cooperation, Mr. Semple. The department appreciates it." He turned to go, the other looking after him in disgust.

IT WAS fairly late, but the office was blazing with light. Obviously, the chief was still on deck. Rick Flavelle gave a quick knock with a single knuckle before pushing through the door.

Banning looked up and said, "Don't you ever knock? Better still, why don't you get an okay from Janie before barging in?"

His favorite field man said, "I just got back from Waterport. Saw the editor of the *Star*, finally located our poet. A jittering old jerk who writes rhymes so he can see his name in the paper. A complete blank."

Banning grunted and fished a cigarette from the pack on the desk with a beefy paw. "That's what I thought you'd run into. Still . . ." He shifted his bulk, in way of a shrug.

Rick Flavelle brought the galley proof and the lead slugs from his jacket pocket. "He'd sent several limericks in. Evidently, the editor threw most of them away. This one he had set up to use as a filler." Rick put the things on the section head's desk and sat down, yawning.

David Banning read, "Rueben: Did the cyclone hurt your barn any? Hiram: Don't know, we ain't found it yet." He scowled at Rick Flavelle. "What the hell is this?"

Rick said, "Down at the bottom. The limerick signed Cassandra. This is a galley proof of fillers, mostly jokes."

"Oh." The chief's eyes scanned down.

It was a long time before he looked up, his face empty. He said, flatly, "Where've you been the past couple of hours?"

"Driving back from Waterport."

"Evidently, you didn't have your car radio on. Number One. He was making a speech in Kharkov on the current near-famine. He's been hated in the Ukraine since the liquidation of the kulaks back in the early thirties."

Rick Flavelle hissed through his teeth.

"He's dead," Banning said. "The Ukraine is in full revolt. Frol Stolechnikov has taken over in Moscow. How long his coalition will last is anybody's guess."

Rick breathed, "Zowie. I thought the guy was in like Flynn. That he'd last forever." Then the implications hit him. "But . . . hey . . . this limerick. It must have been written, well, at least a week or two ago."

His chief was staring down at it. For the moment he didn't answer.

When he did, it was to say, "The news commentators had it that when the riot got out of control, Number One's bodyguard tried to cover him while he attempted to take *evasive action* in getting back to his armored car."

Rick said, so low as hardly to be heard, "But he should have zigged when he zagged."

Banning shook his heavy head, as though to clear it. "Look, you saw this fellow. This Cassandra—"

"His name's Frankle. Jerome Frankle."

"What does he *do?*"

"He's a clerk in a department store. I—"

"Don't be dense, Richard. What does he *do?* How does he write these . . ."

Rick Flavelle was shaking his head. "He doesn't do anything. He didn't know what I was talking about when I mentioned Mike Corbin. It simply never occurred to him that his limerick fitted exactly Secretary Donaldson's assassination."

"He pulled the wool over your eyes!"

"Jerry Frankle couldn't pull the wool over a sheepdog's eyes. I keep telling you—he's an old maid who writes lousy poems to get the egoboo from seeing them printed in the local paper."

Banning stared at him.

"But he's hit it twice in a row! Once, yes. Wild coincidence. But twice, no!"

The section chief jabbed out a hand toward his phone, but before he could pick it up it rang. He said into it, impatiently, "Yes, yes." He turned to Rick. "It's for you. From Waterport."

Rick took it, mystified. "Waterport?"

A voice said, "Mr. Flavelle? This is Ernie Semple. The *Star.*"

"Yes, of course. What . . ."

"Look, after you left I found another one of those half-baked limericks of Jerry's. The linotypist had it. Hadn't set it up yet."

There was a first edge of tightness in Rick Flavelle's belly. He said, "Just a minute." He reached over for the galley proof and turned it on its face, took up a pen from the chief's desk set. He said, "Read it to me, Semple."

After he had hung up, he reread what he had written and pushed it toward his superior. He said, "That was the editor of the *Star.* He located another of Frankle's limericks."

His chief bug-eyed it. Read it again. And then again.

"But this one doesn't make sense."

Rick said, "No. Neither did the other two, until after it happened. Then they made plenty of sense."

"But this last line. *Whilst Gabriel tootled his horn.*"

"Yeah. I wonder if you're interpreting it the same way I am."

They stared at each other. Cold fear filled the room. •

Dear Editor,

Since the Panshins' column lapsed in *Fantastic,* many s-f readers were hoping for some other avenue of intelligent s-f criticism. They have received mixed blessings in Reginald Bretnor's *Science Fiction, Today and Tomorrow* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974) and David Ketterer's *New Worlds for Old: The Apocalyptic Imagination, Science Fiction, and American Literature* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1974).

Bretnor's volume is described as a "Discursive symposium"; what we get is a series of articles dealing with different aspects of science fiction. The articles vary in quality and interest. The best are Frederik Pohl's *The Publishing of Science Fiction* and Theodore Sturgeon's *Science Fiction, Morals, and Religion.* These two articles alone are worth the price of admission.

The problem with a volume like this one is that one wishes for articles that this volume suggests but does not include. Where are Harlan Ellison, Gene Roddenberry, and David Gerrold on *Sf and TV?* Where is Roger Elwood on *Anthologist and SF?* Where is Roger Zelazny and Samuel Delaney on *Language and SF?*

David Ketterer's book is presented as "among the first sustained critical examinations of science fiction." I wish this were so, we need it. But what we get instead is "scholarly" treatments of such writers of s-f as: Edgar Allen Poe, Charles Brockden Brown, Mark Twain, Herman Melville and Jack London. Sounds like one of those Freshman English volumes of "Essays on American Literature" doesn't it?

Ketterer delivers a few snatches of solid s-f criticism when he examines Ursula LeGuin, Philip K. Dick, and Walter M. Miller, Jr. When Ketterer deals with these authors we get some fine insight and intelligent commentary. The problem is that Ketterer's book is largely a critique of American Literature: his treatments of contemporary s-f seem digressions rather than the true center of Ketterer's critical focus.

We have here two volumes dealing with s-f: one of uneven quality, the other with flashes of brilliance amid "scholarly" criticism. Neither volume is entirely satisfactory.

Perhaps this might be a good time for *Galaxy* and *If* to initiate a column of s-f criticism. Theodore Sturgeon's fine column is good, but not enough; perhaps Sturgeon could become resident critic while

Lester del Rey could increase his book reviews to include both magazines.

For s-f to improve, there must be intelligent criticism. Mere book reviewing is not criticism. S-f needs feedback; I hope *Galaxy* and *If* choose to lead the way in this area.

Very truly yours,
George Kelley
240-69th Street
Niagara Falls, N.Y. 14304

Dear Jim Baen,

It has been a long time since I've written a letter to *If* concerning editorial policies, but now that hands are changing maybe a humble reader will be heard. I think if you look at circulation figures you will see both *If* and *Galaxy* were at their highest when Fred Pohl was running things. In '69 the circulation figures dropped about 50% for both mags—that was the year Fred stepped down. Since then, although I've still found *Galaxy* and *If* the best mags around, they have had a dead quality which leaves the reader with the idea that nobody cares. I like editorials, I like letter columns and it is great to see an editor-reader relationship. It means we are being listened to. That editors do care.

I think you should take a few minutes and go back to The Pohl years (*I read each issue—as it was published! ed.*) and have a look at the way he put the mag together. There was excitement then: you couldn't wait for the next copy. (Now I go get the next issue hoping that it will be better than the last—and am usually disappointed.)

The mags need a breath of life. What about serial type stories, like the Riverworld series or the Gree or Retief? I don't suggest reviving those but something along that line. Please. *If* used to have a feel like it was put together to excite you, make you feel important, that you counted—I don't know—but there was charm there that got the mag the Hugo three times in a row. It didn't look as good as it does now, but the art work was five times better than what's been used lately.

I hope I'm not boring you but look at a '67 issue of *If* for e.g. the June issue. There is an editorial, a Fandom article, a few pages of letters, plus an end-off summation by the editor, "And that ties most of our own loose ends this month. We're hoping . . ." etc. That kind of informality. We loved it then—we'd love it now.

And don't think I mean an Amazing-type format either. I don't like Amazing because of an almost snobby editorial feel and a cry-baby attitude. Sure, it's not the hottest thing around but it could sell better than it does.

I'll even suggest a department for

If. How about a reader column that devotes itself to, and only to, debates, etc. on the books and stories published in the field? A good science department is missing from *Galaxy* and a "coming next month" is really a great hook into the next issue.

Well, with all that plus your own ideas on what an SF mag should be I hope for a return to the adventures of reading *If* and look forward with great expectations to the June *If*—which I've heard is the first complete issue you've put together.

All my best,
Nicholas Grimshawe

The column you suggest seems to me to fill precisely the role I envision for (the new and revised) Hue and Cry. *Nothing so restrictive as a format of course, but I do plan to print only those letters which have something to say about sf, and I intend to print a few of those each issue. (Of course I can't print 'em if you don't write 'em . . .) If somebody wants to refer to a letter in a previous issue—by all means!*
—Baen

Dear Ejler,

There are a number of good women writers in the field of s-f. My only disappointment is that I'm not seeing enough from them. Joanna Russ is great, and so is Ursula K. LeGuin. Pamela Sargent is up and coming. Doris Piserchia's *Mr. Justice* has been mentioned for a Hugo nomination. Lisa Tuttle was among the new writers nominated for the Campbell Award last year. Kate Wilhelm, along with Lafferty and Wolfe, is one of the top three writers appearing regularly in *Orbit.* Sonya Dorman, Dvora Olmstead, Mildred Downey Broxon, Janet Fox, Josephine Saxton, Doris Pitkin Buck, Katherine MacLean, Christine F. Hensel, Vonda McIntire, Betsy Curtis and Marion Zimmer Bradley, all had s-f stories or novels out in 1973.

The trouble is they don't appear often enough. And writers such as Suzanna Haden Elgin, Susan K. Putney and P. A. Zoline may already be lost to the field. Plus, a number of women are using their initials, etc. What is this? The 19th century?

I'm not asking you to assume a bias for the works of the women who contribute manuscripts. I'm asking you to print this letter so that more writing comes in from women. As a group they appear to be doing better than the men currently writing s-f.

Sincerely,
John Robinson

As did my predecessor, I plan to publish what I consider to be the best of those manuscripts submitted. Period. —Baen

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An Editorial Appeal

Commencing with the June issues, *Galaxy* and *Worlds of If* will begin to fully show the results of an entirely new editorial policy. For example, the combined author line-up for June reads like a *Who's Who* of the field: Isaac Asimov, James Blish, Alexei and Cory Panshin, Fred Pohl, Lester del Rey, Mack Reynolds, Fred Saberhagen, James H. Schmitz, Robert Silverberg, Ted Sturgeon, Jack Williamson—and more! No mean list, I think you'll agree.

Check the contents-pages (themselves so changed as to be virtual new features) and you will find several additions.

Galaxy: Forum, a platform for sf and/or science notables who feel they have something important—and interesting!—to convey to the readership; *Interface,* an intermittent series of interviews *cum* thumbnail biographies by Ted Sturgeon (scheduled to begin in July with an interview of Roger Elwood); *Showcase,* (also scheduled for July) a non-verbal feature—a new piece of sf-art by an acknowledged master, which has as its only justification that its creator thinks it's something special. And of course *Bookshelf, Directions* and *Galaxy Stars* will continue to flourish as of yore—more than yore, in fact.

Worlds of If: The Alien Viewpoint, an insider's view of sf. Crusty, hard-bitten, cynical old Dick Geis (Editor/Publisher of *The Alien Critic*) lays it on the line—his opinions are not necessarily those of the management! *Ars Gratia,* much like *Galaxy Showcase,* but for Up-and-Comers; *Future Perfect,* next issue's goodies—at least some of them; *The Editor's Page* in June is devoted to my personal favorite among the many past editors of *Worlds of If.* In future, it will be what the name implies—the editor's page. And, as with *Galaxy,* all the old features will remain in residence.

But all of this takes money, a good deal of it—and the profit motive remains an operant factor in the publishing industry. To

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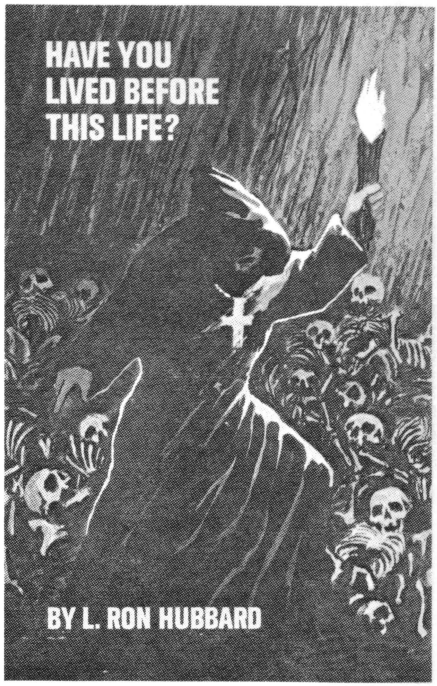

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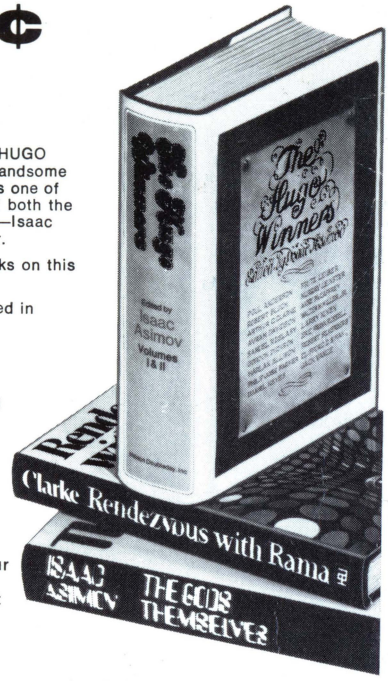

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