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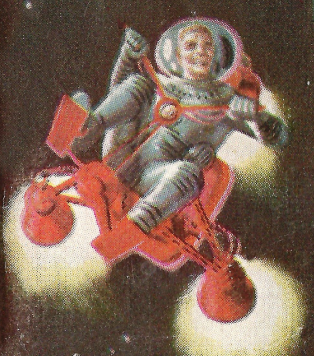

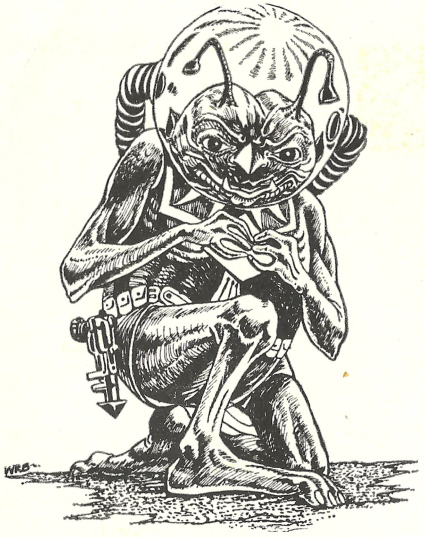

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SCIENCE FICTION

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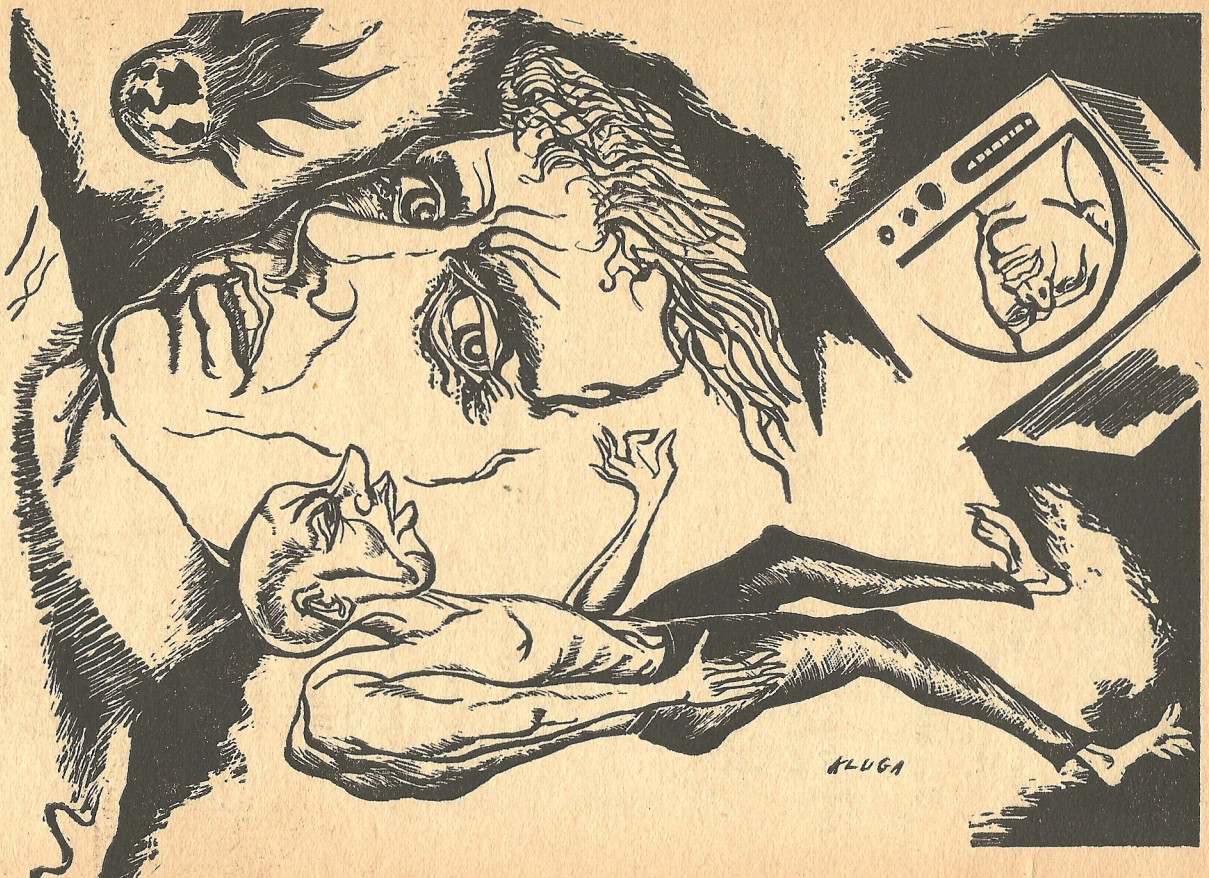

KLUGA

The Last Man Left in the Bar

Are you always a jump ahead of the hero at solving the problem in a science fiction story? Okay, try this one. . . .

by C. M. KORNBLUTH

Illustrated by KLUGA

YOU KNOW HIM, Joe—or Sam, Mike, Tony, Ben, whatever your deceitful, cheaply genial name may be. And do not lie to yourself, Gentle Reader; you know him too.

A loner, he was.

You did not notice him when he slipped in; you only knew by his aggrieved air when he (finally) caught your eye and self-consciously said "Shot of Red Top and a beer" that he'd ruffle your working day. (Six at night until two in the morning is a day? But ah, the horrible

alternative is to work for a living.)

Shot of Red Top and a beer at 8:35.

And unbeknownst to him, Gentle Reader, in the garage up the street the two contrivers of his dilemma conspired; the breaths of tall dark stooped cadaverous Galardo and the mouse-eyed lassie mingled.

"Hyü shall be a religion-isst," he instructed her.

"I know the role," she squeaked and quoted: " 'Woe to the day on which I was born into the world! Woe to the womb which bare me! Woe to the bowels which admitted me! Woe to the breasts which suckled me! Woe to the feet upon which I sat and rested! Woe to the hands which carried me and reared me until I grew! Woe to my tongue and my lips which have brought forth and spoken vanity, detraction, falsehood, ignorance, derision, idle tales, craft and hypocrisy! Woe to mine eyes which have looked upon scandalous things! Woe to mine ears which have delighted in the words of slanderers! Woe to my hands which have seized what did not of right belong to them! Woe to my belly and my bowels which have lusted after food unlawful to be eaten! Woe to my throat which like a fire has consumed all that it found!' "

He sobbed with the beauty of it and nodded at last, tears hanging in his eyes: "Yess, that religion. It iss one of my fave-o-ritts."

She was carried away. "I can do others. Oh, I can do others. I can do Mithras, and Isis, and Marduk, and Eddyism and Billsword and Pealing and Uranium, both orthodox and reformed."

"Mithras, Isis and Marduk are long gone and the resst are ss-till tü come. Listen tü your master, dü not chat-ter, and we shall an artwork make of which there will be talk under the green sky until all food is eaten."

Meanwhile, Gentle Reader, the loner listened. To his left strong silent sinewy men in fellowship, the builders, the doers, the darers: "So I told the foreman where he should put his Bullard. I told him I run a Warner and Swasey, I run a Warner and Swasey good, I never even *seen* a Bullard up close in my life, and where he should put it. I know how to run a Warner and Swasey and why should he take me off a Warner and Swasey I know how to run and put me on a Bullard and where he should put it ain't I right?"

"Absolutely."

To his right the clear-eyed virtuous matrons, the steadfast, the true-seeing, the loving-kind: "Oh, I don't know what I want, what do you want? I'm a Scotch

drinker really but I don't feel like Scotch but if I come home with muscatel on my breath Eddie calls me a wino and laughs his head off. I don't know what I want. What do you want?"

In the box above the bar the rollicking raster raced.

VIDEO	AUDIO
GAMPA smashes bottle over the head of BIBBY.	GAMPA: Young whippersnapper!
BIBBY spits out water.	BIBBY. Next time put some flavoring in it, Gramps!
GAMPA picks up sugar bowl and smashes it over BIBBY's head. BIBBY licks sugar from face.	BIBBY: My, that's better! But what of Naughty Roger and his attempted kidnapping of Sis to extort the secret of the Q-Bomb?
cut to LIMBO SHOT of Reel-Rye bottle.	ANNOUNCER: Yes, kiddies! What of Roger? But first a word from the makers of Reel-Rye, that happy syrup that gives your milk **grown up flavor!** YES! **Grown up flavor!**

SHOT OF RED TOP and a beer. At 8:50.

In his own un-secret heart: Steady, boy. You've got to think this out. Nothing impossible about it, no reason to settle for a stalemate; just a little time to think it out. Galardo said the Black Chapter would accept a token submission, let me return the Seal, and that would be that. But I mustn't count on that as a datum; he lied to me about the Serpentists. Token submission *sounds* right; they go in big for symbolism. Maybe because they're so stone-broke, like the Japs. Drinking a cup of tea, they gussie it all up until it's a religion; that's the way you squeeze nourishment out of poverty—

Skip the Japs. Think. He lied

to me about the Serpentists. The big thing to remember is, I have the Chapter Seal and they need it back, or think they do. All you need's a little time to think things through, place where he won't dare jump you and grab the Seal. And this is it.

"Joe. Sam, Mike, Tony, Ben, whoever you are. Hit me again."

Joe—Sam, Mike, Tony, Ben? —tilts the amber bottle quietly; the liquid's level rises and crowns the little glass with a convex meniscus. He turns off the stream with an easy roll of the wrist. The suntan line of neon tubing at the bar back twinkles off the curve of surface tension, the placid whiskey, the frothy beer. At 9:05.

To his left: "So Finkelstein finally meets Goldberg in the garment center and he grabs him like this by the lapel, and he yells, 'You louse, you rat, you no-good, what's this about you running around with my wife? I ought to—I ought to—say, you call *this* a *button*hole?"

Restrained and apprehensive laughter; Catholic, Protestant, Jew (choice of one), what's the difference I always say.

Did they have a Jewish Question still, or was all smoothed and troweled and interfaithed and brotherhoodooed—

Wait. Your formulation implies that they're in the future, and you have no proof of that. Think straighter; you don't know *where* they are, or *when* they are, or *who* they are. You *do* know that you walked into Big Maggie's resonance chamber to change the target, experimental iridium for old reliable zinc

and

"Bartender," in a controlled and formal voice. Shot of Red Top and a beer at 9:09, the hand vibrating with remembrance of a dirtygreen el Greco sky which *might* be Brookhaven's heavens a million years either way from now, or one second sideways, or (bow to Method and formally exhaust the possibilities) a hallucination. The Seal snatched from the greenlit rock altar could be a blank washer, a wheel from a toy truck, or the screw top from a jar of shaving cream but for the fact that it wasn't. It was the Seal.

So: they began seeping through after that. The Chapter wanted it back. The Serpentists wanted it, period. Galardo had started by bargaining and wound up by threatening, but how could you do anything but laugh at his best offer, a rusty five-pound spur gear with a worn keyway and three teeth missing? His threats were richer than his bribes; they culminated with The Century of Flame. "Faith, father, it doesn't scare me at all, at all; sure, no man could stand it." Subjective-objective (How

you used to sling *them* around!), and Master Newton's billiard-table similes dissolve into sense-impressions of pointer-readings as you learn your trade, but Galardo had scared hell out of you, or into you, with The Century of Flame.

But you had the Seal of the Chapter and you had time to think, while on the screen above the bar:

VIDEO	AUDIO
Long shot down steep, cobble-stoned French village street. PIERRE darts out of alley in middle distance, looks wildly around and runs toward camera, pistol in hand. ANNETTE and PAUL appear from same alley and dash after him.	
	PAUL: Stop, you fool!
Cut to CU of Pierre's face; beard stubble and sweat.	
	PIERRE: A fool, am I?
Cut to long shot; PIERRE aims and fires; PAUL grabs his left shoulder and falls.	
	ANNETTE: Darling!
Cut to two-shot, ANNETTE and PAUL	
	PAUL: Don't mind me. Take my gun—after him. He's a mad dog, I tell you!
Dolly back. ANNETTE takes his pistol.	
	ANNETTE: This, my dear, is as good a time as any to drop my little masquerade. Are you American agents really so stupid that you never thought I might be—a plant, as you call it?
ANNETTE stands; we see her aim down at PAUL, out of the picture. Then we dolly in to a CU of her head; she is smiling triumphantly.	
	SOUND: click of cocking pistol.

A hand holding a pistol enters the CU; the pistol muzzle touches ANNETTE's neck.

HARKRIDER: Drop it, Madame Golkov.

Dolly back to middle shot. HARKRIDER stands behind ANNETTE as PAUL gets up briskly and takes the pistol from her hand.

PAUL: No, Madame Golkov; we American agents were not really so stupid. Wish I could say the same for—your people. Pierre Tourneur **was** a plant, I am glad to say; otherwise he would not have missed me. He is one of the best pistol shots in Counterintelligence.

Cut to long shot of street, HARKRIDER and PAUL walk away from the camera, ANNETTE between them. Fadeout.

HARKRIDER: Come along, Madame Golkov.

MUSIC: theme up and out.

TO HIS RIGHT: "It ain't reasonable. All that shooting and yelling and falling down and not one person sticks his head out of a window to see what's going on. They should of had a few people looking out to see what's going on, otherwise it ain't reasonable."

"Yeah who's fighting tonight?"

"Rocky Mausoleum against Rocky Mazzarella. From Toledo."

"Rocky Mazzarella beat Rocky Granatino, didn't he?"

"Ah, that was Rocky Bolderoni, and he whipped Rocky Capacola."

Them and their neatly packaged problems, them and their neatly packaged shows with beginning middle and end. The rite of the low-budget shot-in-Europe spy series, the rite of pugilism, the rite of the dog-walk after dinner and the beer at the bar with co-celebrant worshippers at the high altar of Nothing.

9:30. Shot of Red Top and a beer, positively the last one until you get this figured out; you're beginning to buzz like a transformer.

Do they have transformers? Do they have vitamins? Do they have anything but that glaring green sky, and the rock altar and treasures like the Seal and the rusty gear with three broken teeth? "All smelling of iodo-

form. And all quite bald." But Galardo looked as if he were dying of tuberculosis, and the letter from the Serpentists was in a sick and straggling hand. Relics of mediaeval barbarism.

To his left—

"*Galardo!*" he screamed.

The bartender scurried over—Joe, Sam, Mike, Tony, Ben?—scowling. "What's the matter, mister?"

"I'm sorry. I got a stitch in my side. A cramp."

Bullyboy scowled competently and turned. "What'll you have, mister?"

Galardo said cadaverously: "Wodeffer my vriend hyere iss havfing."

"Shot of Red Top and a beer, right?"

"*What are you doing here?*"

"Drink-ing beferachiss . . . havf hyü de-site-it hwat tü dü?"

The bartender rapped down the shot glass and tilted the bottle over it, looking at Galardo. Some of the whiskey slopped over. The bartender started, went to the tap and carefully drew a glass of beer, slicing the collar twice.

"My vriend hyere will pay."

He got out a half dollar, fumbling, and put it on the wet wood. The bartender, old-fashioned, rapped it twice on the bar to show he wasn't stealing it even though you weren't watching; he rang it up double virtuous on the cash register, the absent owner's fishy eye.

"What are you doing here?" again, in a low, reasonable, almost amused voice to show him you have the whip hand.

"Drink-ing beferachiss . . . it iss so cle-an hyere." Galardo's sunken face, unbelievably, looked wistful as he surveyed the barroom, his head swiveling slowly from extreme left to extreme right.

"Clean. Well. Isn't it clean there?"

"Sheh, not!" Galardo said mournfully. "Sheh, not! Hyere it iss so cle-an . . . hwai did yü outreach tü us? Hag-rid us, wretch-it, hag-rid us?" There were tears hanging in his eyes. "Haff yü de-site-it hwat tü dü?"

Expansively: "I don't pretend to understand the situation *fully,* Galardo. But you know and I know that I've got something you people [think you] need. Now there doesn't seem to be any body of law covering artifacts that appear [*plink!*] in a magnetron on accidental overload, and I just have your word that it's yours."

"Ah, that iss how yü re-member it now," said sorrowful Galardo.

"Well, it's the way it [but wasn't something green? I think of spired Toledo and three

angled crosses toppling] happened. I don't want anything silly, like a million dollars in small unmarked bills, and I don't want to be bullied, to be bullied, no, I mean not by you, not by anybody. Just, just tell me who you are, what all this is about. This is nonsense, you see, and we can't have nonsense. I'm afraid I'm not expressing myself very well—"

And a confident smile and turn away from him, which shows that you aren't afraid, you can turn your back and dare him to make something of it. In public, in the bar? It is laughable; you have him in the palm of your hand. "Shot of Red Top and a beer, please, Sam." At 9:48.

The bartender draws the beer and pours the whiskey. He pauses before he picks up the dollar bill fished from the pants pocket, pauses almost timidly and works his face into a friend's grimace. But you can read him; he is making amends for his suspicion that you were going to start a drunken brawl when Galardo merely surprised you a bit. You can read him because your mind is tensed to concert pitch tonight, ready for Galardo, ready for the Serpentists, ready to crack this thing wide open; strange!

But you weren't ready for the words he spoke from his fake apologetic friend's grimace as you delicately raised the heavy amber-filled glass to your lips: "Where'd your friend go?"

You slopped the whiskey as you turned and looked.

GALARDO GONE.

You smiled and shrugged; he comes and goes as he pleases, you know. Irresponsible, no manners at all—but *loyal*. A prince among men when you get to know him, a prince, I tell you. All this in your smile and shrug—why, you could have been an actor! The worry, the faint neurotic worry, didn't show at all, and indeed there is no reason why it should. You have the whip hand; you have the Seal; Galardo will come crawling back and explain everything. As for example:

"You may wonder why I've asked all of you to assemble in the libr'reh."

or

"For goodness' sake, Gracie, I wasn't going to go to Cuba! When you heard me on the extension phone I was just ordering a dozen Havana *cigars*!"

or

"In your notation, we are from 19,276 AD. Our basic mathematic is a quite comprehensible subsumption of your contemporary statistical analysis and topology which I shall now proceed to explain to you."

And that was all.

With sorrow, Gentle Reader, you will have noticed that the marble did not remark: "I am chiseled," the lumber "I am sawn," the paint "I am applied to canvas," the tea leaf "I am whisked about in an exquisite Korean bowl to brew while the celebrants of *cha no yu* squeeze this nourishment out of their poverty." Vain victim, relax and play your hunches; subconscious integration does it. Stick with your lit-tle old subconscious integration and all will go *swimmingly,* if only it weren't so damned noisy in here. But it was dark on the street and conceivably things could happen there; stick with crowds and stick with witnesses, but if only it weren't so . . .

To his left they were settling down; it was the hour of confidences, and man to man they told the secret of their success: "In the needle trade, I'm in the needle trade, I don't sell anybody a crooked needle, my father told me that. Albert, he said to me, don't never sell nobody nothing but a straight needle. And today I have four shops."

To his right they were settling down; freed of the cares of the day they invited their souls, explored the spiritual realm, theologized with exquisite distinctions: "Now *wait* a minute, I didn't say I was a *good* Mormon, I said I was a Mormon and that's what I am, a Mormon. I *never* said I was a *good* Mormon, I just said I was a Mormon, my mother was a Mormon and my father was a Mormon, and that makes me a Mormon but I *never* said I was a *good* Mormon—"

Distinguo, rolled the canonical thunder; *distinguo.*

Demurely a bonneted lassie shook her small-change tambourine beneath his chin and whispered, snarling: "Galardo lied."

ADMIT IT; you were startled. But what need for the bartender to come running with raised hand, what need for needle-trader to your left to shrink away, the L.D.S. to cower?

"Mister, that's twice you let out a yell, we run a quiet place, if you can't be good, begone."

Begob.

"I ash-assure you, bartender, it was—unintenable."

Greed vies with hate; greed wins; greed always wins: "Just keep it quiet, mister, this ain't the Bowery, this is a family place." Then, relenting: "The same?"

"Yes, please." At 10:15 the patient lassie jingled silver on the parchment palm outstretched. He placed a quarter on the tambourine and asked politely: "Did you say something to me before, Miss?"

"God bless you, sir. Yes, sir, I did say something. I said Galardo lied; the Seal is holy to the Serpent, sir, and to his humble emissaries. If you'll only hand it over, sir, the Serpent will somewhat mitigate the fearsome torments which are rightly yours for snatching the Seal from the Altar, sir."

[Snatchings from Altars? *Ma foi,* the wench is mad!]

"Listen, lady. That's only talk. What annoys me about you people is, you won't talk sense. I want to know who you are, what this is about, maybe just a little hint about your mathematics, and I'll do the rest and you can have the blooming seal. I'm a passable physicist even if I'm only a technician. I bet there's something you didn't know. I bet you didn't know the tech shortage is tighter than the scientist shortage. You get a guy can tune a magnetron, he writes his own ticket. So I'm weak on quantum mechanics, the theory side, I'm still a good all-around man and be-*lieve* me, the Ph.D.'s would kiss my ever-loving *feet* if I told them I got an offer from Argonne—

"So listen, you Janissary emissary. I'm happy right here in this necessary commissary and here I *stay.*"

But she was looking at him with bright frightened mouse's eyes and slipped on down the line when he paused for breath, putting out the parchment palm to others but not ceasing to watch him.

Coins tapped the tambour. "God bless you. God bless you. God bless you."

The raving-maniacal ghost of G. Washington Hill descended then into a girdled sibyl; she screamed from the screen: "It's *Hit* Pa-*rade*!"

"I like them production numbers."

"I like that Pigalle Mackintosh."

"I like them production numbers. Lotsa pretty girls, pretty clothes, something to take your mind off your troubles."

"I like that Pigalle Mackintosh. She don't just sing, mind you, she plays the saxophone. Talent."

"I like them production numbers. They show you just what the song is all about. Like last week they did *Sadist Calypso* with this mad scientist cutting up the girls, and then Pigalle comes in and whips him to death at the last verse, you see just what the song's all about, something to take your mind off your troubles."

"I like that Pigalle Mackintosh. She don't just sing, mind you, she plays the saxophone and cracks a blacksnake whip, like last week in *Sadist Calypso*—"

"Yeah. Something to take

your mind off your troubles."

Irritably he felt in his pocket for the Seal and moved, stumbling a little, to one of the tables against the knotty pine wall. His head slipped forward on the polished wood and he sank into the sea of myth.

GALARDO came to him in his dream and spoke under a storm-green sky: "Take your mind off your troubles, Edward. It was stolen like the first penny, like the quiz answers, like the pity for your bereavement." His hand, a tambourine, was out.

"Never shall I yield," he declaimed to the miserable wretch. "By the *honneur* of a Gascon, I stole it fair and square; 'tis mine, knave! *En garde!*"

Galardo quailed and ran, melting into the sky, the altar, the tambourine.

A HAM-HAND manhandled him. "Light-up time," said Sam. "I let you sleep because you got it here, but I got to close up now."

"Sam," he says uncertainly.

"One for the road, mister. On the house. *Up*-sy-daisy!" meaty hooks under his armpits heaving him to the bar.

The lights are out behind the bar, the jolly neons, glittering off how many gems of amber rye and the tan crystals of beer? A meager bulb above the register is the oasis in the desert of inky night.

"Sam," groggily, "you don't understand. I mean I never explained it—"

"Drink up, mister," a pale free drink, soda bubbles lightly tinged with tawny rye. A small sip to gain time.

"Sam, there are some people after me—"

"You'll feel better in the morning, mister. Drink up, I got to close up, hurry up."

"These people, Sam [it's cold in here and scary as a noise in the attic; the bottles stand accusingly, the chrome globes that top them eye you] these people, they've got a thing, The Century of—"

"Sure, mister, I let you sleep because you got it here, but we close up now, drink up your drink."

"Sam, let me go home with you, will you? It isn't anything like that, don't misunderstand, I just can't be alone. These people—look, I've got money—"

He spreads out what he dug from his pocket.

"Sure, mister, you got lots of money, two dollars and thirty-eight cents. Now you take your money and get out of the store because I got to lock up and clean out the register—"

"Listen, bartender, I'm not drunk, maybe I don't have much money on me but I'm an impor-

tant man! Important! They couldn't run Big Maggie at Brookhaven without me, I may not have a degree but what I get from these people if you'll only let me stay here—"

The bartender takes the pale one on the house you only sipped and dumps it in the sink; his hands are iron on you and you float while he chants:

"Decent man. Decent place.
Hold their liquor. Got it here.
Try be nice. Drunken bum.
Don't—come—back."

The crash of your coccyx on the concrete and the slam of the door are one.

Run!

Down the black street stumbling over cans, cats, orts, to the pool of light in the night, safe corner where a standard sprouts and sprays radiance.

THE TALL black figure that steps between is Galardo.

The short one has a tambourine.

"Take it!" He thrust out the Seal on his shaking palm. "If you won't tell me anything, you won't. Take it and go away!"

Galardo inspects it and sadly says: "Thiss appearss to be a blank wash-er."

"Mistake," he slobbers. "Minute." He claws in his pockets, ripping. "Here! Here!"

The lassie squeaks: "The wheel of a toy truck. It will not do at all, sir." Her glittereyes.

"Then this! This is it! This must be it!"

Their heads shake slowly. Unable to look his fingers feel the rim and rolled threading of the jar cap.

They nod together, sad and glitter-eyed, and The Century of Flame begins.

∞ ∞ ∞

DIAGNOSIS: DEATH-WISH

An orgy of suicidal impulses was destroying the last few humans on Earth. The only doctor available was a military man who already bore the guilt for a planet's death. Could he find the cure? Read *The General and the Axe* by Gordon R. Dickson in the next issue of INFINITY —on sale September 17.

WELCOME HOME

a novelet by DEAN McLAUGHLIN

The road to space is all uphill, and before we get there, somebody may have to get out and push!

Illustrated by BOWMAN

CHAPTER I

IN THE NATIONAL—and only—office of Space Flight Associates, ignoring the dust that filmed his desktop, Joe Webber read The Washington-Baltimore *Sun-Post-Tribune.*

There was nothing else to do.

Once in a while, he glanced out through the one-way glass partition to the outer office. His receptionist—a gray-haired, tired

looking woman—seemed always to be manicuring her fingernails. Or knitting.

Maybe he should try the Sunday magazines again. A piece there would reach a lot of people. But the editors hadn't been in—to him—the last time he made the rounds. It was no use thinking they'd be any more eager if he tried again.

But maybe if he emphasized the adventure, the excitement, the *achievement* of space flight —there were people he could win with a piece like that. The young and star-eyed, the seeking and imagining, the restless ones for whom a colorless, Earth-bound life held no attraction.

It weren't as if space-flight were irretrievably dead. It would come back. It *had* to come back.

Even if he had to build the rockets with his own bare hands. Even if he had to snatch men off the streets, and seal them in the rockets, and shoot them off at the high, cold stars.

There had been a fine beginning. The ships had gone out—to the moon first, and then to Mars, Venus, and Mercury. And Murchison ventured into the asteroids, and Quintero dared the sun's flaming atmosphere.

Men—all heroes—had ranged the new frontier.

But then the politicians killed it. They slashed it out of the budgets. They voted to scrap the fine ships, and to pay off the men who had flown them. They brought the spacemen home as if they were truants and set their feet on the earth.

And the people let the politicians do it. The sheep-stupid, foolish people. There had been talk of a tax cut, and the fumble-wits fell for it.

They dragged home the venturous ones—the ones who dared —the only ones who still possessed the qualities that made men men. Robbed them of the only life worthwhile, and took away from them Man's most challenging frontier.

There wasn't any tax cut, of course. Instead, there was a lot of public works construction all over America. A little something for everybody.

You couldn't tell the people they'd been fools. You couldn't tell them they were suckered—that their votes had been bought with a cheapskate promise, and a broken one at that—that in letting themselves be bought they had betrayed the human race.

You couldn't even hint they'd made a small mistake.

You had to forget what they'd done. You had to start over, as if nothing had happened. As if space-flight had never happened.

And you had to *sell* them. You had to make them believe

in space-flight the way they believed in the right to worship as they pleased, and maybe even as they believed in the very gods they worshipped.

You had to make them think of space-flight as Man's unalterable destiny. You had to make them send their sons, and maybe even their daughters, and to wish there was some way they could go themselves.

But first you had to make them listen. And nobody listened to Joe Webber, of Space Flight Associates. Nobody had for years. . . .

WHEN THE MAIL came, Mrs. Crowder brought it in. There were only three pieces. Two of them were bills. The third bore the letterhead of Brent & Perrault Biologicals.

Webber dropped the bills unopened in the wastebasket. He opened the letter. He recognized Andrew Perrault's sprawling scrawl at once.

Dear Joe—

The missus is plotting a fish fry, and the brat is beginning to wonder what came of her Uncle Joe. So if you're not too busy, you're welcome.

Drew

Webber got out a sheet of Space Flight Associates stationery.

Drew—

Can't make it to the fish fry, whenever it is. My foot's in the door of something big. Can't leave it for a minute. May be our last chance.

He signed it. Then, reconsidering, he added a postscript.

Tell the girl I'm on a trip to Mars. Maybe she'll believe it.

An amber light gleamed suddenly from the panel of his desk; Mrs. Crowder was on the phone.

Webber snapped the listen-in switch.

"—sorry," Mrs. Crowder was saying. "Captain Webber has a visitor. He can't be disturbed."

Mrs. Crowder was following orders perfectly. Joe Webber smiled.

"When can I talk to him?" the man at the other end of the wire persisted.

"He has a very full schedule," Mrs. Crowder apologized. "I might have him call you when he has a minute."

"I'd rather call him."

"He might have a few minutes free at four this afternoon," Mrs. Crowder suggested. "You might—"

"Not till then?" The man's anguish was real. "I've got to get him before then. There's a

big story breaking, and we've got a deadline to meet. You're sure I can't get him sooner than that?"

"Well . . ."

Joe Webber pressed the I'll-talk-to-him button.

Mrs. Crowder took the signal smoothly. "Just a minute," she said sweetly. "You're a very lucky man. Captain Webber's guest is leaving, and his next appointment isn't here yet. If you can wait a minute, I'll see if he can talk to you."

"Please," the man said urgently.

After a pause, Webber opened his phone. The man in the screen touched his temple.

Joe Webber gestured to his brow in reply.

"I'm George Seeback, with Transocean Press," the man introduced himself quickly. He had slick black hair, crowfooted eyes, and a small brush mustache. "We've got a story breaking down here, and we need some background."

"What kind of background?" Webber narrowed his green-gray eyes and leaned his compact, small-boned body forward. It was the first time in years a newsman had come to him. They'd all given him up as a source of news long ago.

"We want anything you can tell us about the *Jove*."

For a moment, it didn't mean a thing to him. And then it tumbled out of his memory and it was all there.

"The *Jove*?" He tilted back his chair and repeated it as it came to him.

"That was the ship of the first Jupiter expedition," he said. "The only one. Bill Milburn was Captain. Rog Sherman was pilot. Crew and survey team altogether—twenty-five men. They left Orbitbase on June 14th of '91—supposed to get back . . ."

He clapped a hand to his head. "*My Gawd!*"

The clock on his desk said October 29, 1998.

"You mean they're back?" he exploded.

"Well, not exactly," Seeback said. "Uh—how do you spell their names?"

"Hell with their names!" Webber shouted. "Whattaya mean, not exactly?"

"They're on their way down from the Orbitbase," Seeback said.

"Orbitbase?" Webber echoed. "But that was abandoned four years—"

He tightened. "What are they coming down *in*?"

"The *Jove*," Seeback said, as if it was obvious. "What else?"

Webber felt a clammy cold hand clutch his guts. "The *Jove*'s not built for atmosphere!" he cried protestingly.

Seeback shrugged. "All I

know is what they tell me. What's wrong with coming down in the *Jove?*"

"What's wrong with it?" Webber said. "It's suicide, that's what! She's a spaceship. The real thing. Not one of those streamlined atmosphere jobs like those goddamned intercontinentals. Atmosphere'll burn her like a meteor."

"Then they don't stand much chance of getting down, do they?" Seeback asked.

"The chance of a snowball in hell," Webber snapped. "All because a bunch of pork-barrel politicians melted down all the shuttles into nickels!"

An arch of interest showed on Seeback's face. "Can we quote you?" he asked.

Webber caught his breath. "Can you! You'd damn well better!"

But then, remembering the bitter lesson he'd learned, he said hastily, "No. You'd better not. Just say . . ."

He paused and calculated. "Say I think it's unfortunate—there's a damn good word!—unfortunate there wasn't an atmosphere shuttle kept in commission so it could go up and get them."

Seeback looked disappointed, but he didn't say anything. There was a pause while he made notes. Then . . .

"Something I don't see," he said uncertainly. "Why'd they try coming down if they don't have a chance?"

"Because they can't stay up there," Webber told him shortly. "They don't have the air and they don't have the food. And —well, with Rog for a pilot, maybe they do have a chance. Not a big one, but maybe a chance."

But he didn't believe it. Not even Rog Sherman could do a thing like that.

"They figure to crash-land somewhere in the Pacific," Seeback said helpfully.

IT SEEMED a long time to Webber, but he finally got rid of the newsman. He buzzed Mrs. Crowder.

"Find out when the next rocket lifts for Tahiti," he said. "Or Hawaii. I'm going to be in it."

TIME AFTER TIME, the *Jove* slashed through the thin upper atmosphere. Each time her hull was glowing red when she passed on again into space, where she cooled, and the men went outside to renew her protective sheath of black plaster.

Each time, they dropped the exhausted oxygen bottles, and just before the *Jove* re-entered the atmosphere they fired off a set of the probe projectiles, whose motions, observed on a

radar screen, would gauge the density and turbulence of the air ahead of the *Jove*.

Roger Sherman watched the radar screen and the hull temperature gauge. His life and the life of every man aboard depended on them. One small miscalculation and the *Jove* would turn briefly to flame, and leave only a trace of vapor to mark where it had ceased to be.

He had figured the orbit almost perfectly, but the atmosphere through which the *Jove* passed could not be predicted exactly. Several times the projectiles wavered, or slowed too quickly, or the hull temperature rose too fast. Quickly, then, but not so quickly that everything was not gauged and estimated in his mind, Sherman fed a precious trickle of water to the irreparably overheating drive-reactor; the fierce jet forced the ship up out of the atmosphere to the safety of space.

There wasn't much left of the *Jove*. She was only a shell with a stripped skeleton inside to hold it rigid. They had cut the *Jove* down to her naked essentials, to reduce her deadly inertia. They had even let the air out of her. Sherman prayed they had dropped enough weight; if they hadn't, the water would give out. And there was nothing left now to jettison.

The passages through atmosphere came closer and closer together. Air leaked in through weakened seams. Each brief respite out in space was shorter than the one before. The hot hours passed, and Sherman sweated and chafed in his pressure suit, and doggedly fought the ship down.

Finally, almost with a sigh, he let the ship down into air for the last time. She thundered endlessly through air, her hull burned almost to the brilliance of a star.

Now Sherman turned the gyro and set the *Jove*'s jet against the direction of her flight. He fed water into the reactor, but now not frugally. The *Jove* slammed hard at the sudden force, but her skeleton held, and she slowed.

Slowly, then, she began truly to fall.

He let her fall, while the chronometer ticked around and around, and then he turned the jet toward Earth and—ignoring the lateral motion of the ship—fought against the implacable pull of gravity.

The *Jove* drifted Earthward like a bubble floating on the wind.

He kept tight control on the flow of water to the reactor. He couldn't waste a drop. He watched the acceleration gauge and held the jet to a steady one-grav drive.

If he had figured everything right, the *Jove* was falling slowly—not too slowly, but slowly enough — toward the watery, open spread of the Pacific.

He didn't *know,* though. He couldn't be sure. The *Jove* was sealed, and there was no way of seeing out.

But she *had* to hit water. He didn't care where she hit, so long as she hit water. The *Jove* didn't have the precision control that would make a normal grounding possible. It would be suicide to try bringing her down on land. Only water offered hope. Only water could absorb enough of the shock when the *Jove* hit that it would not be smashed into junk.

Then the tank went dry. The jet surged, faltered, and ceased. The *Jove* fell free.

Sherman braced himself. All bets were off.

He had time to think about the men in the ship with him: twenty-one lives.

They had trusted him to bring them down alive. They had gambled on his ability. But he wasn't good enough. He'd failed.

He wondered what they were thinking—they at the other end of the empty shell, their backs against the thick lead shield of the reactor. He wondered what they were thinking in their last moments of life.

At the last moment, he remembered to relax. You had a better chance if you relaxed.

Then the *Jove* hit.

CHAPTER II

JOE WEBBER cooled his heels at the rocket field. His courtesy card had got him a ticket, but the rocket to Tahiti was full up and he couldn't get a berth. Unless there was a cancellation —and that didn't happen often with rockets—he'd have to wait for the Hawaii rocket. And the Hawaii rocket wouldn't lift for another ten hours.

At forty-five minutes to shiplift, Webber checked again at the reservations counter. The girl told him there wouldn't be any cancellations.

"I'm sorry," she said. She was pretty and black-haired, and she looked like she really meant it.

"I've got to be in that rocket," Webber insisted. "Look—I'll take the shiplift on a deckplate. It won't be the first time I've done it. I'll even pay fare if I have to."

"I'm sorry," she said again. "It's against the company's regulations. And there's the matter of weight."

He told her what she could do with company regulations. "Let's see the weight schedule," he demanded.

"I don't have it," she said. She wasn't apologetic now. She

was stiff and pale and trembling angrily.

"Get it," Webber snapped.

"Just who do you think you are!" she flared.

"I'm a spaceman," Webber said. He made it sound as if that fact gave him a right to anything he wanted. "I was going to space before you wet your first pair of diapers. Now let's see that schedule."

"There's no place for you in the rocket," she said firmly.

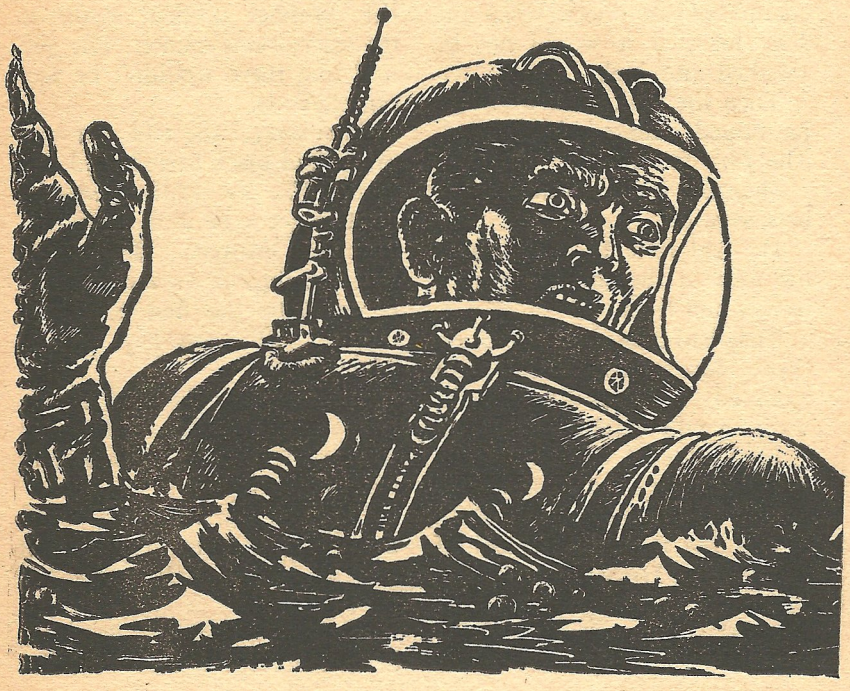
Joe Webber stepped back from the counter. "How much do you think I weigh?"

The question was totally unexpected. The girl looked down at the small, profane, blond man. He was shorter than she was, and she was not tall. If it wasn't for the bitter maturity of his face, she might have thought he was a boy.

"A hundred forty pounds?" she asked.

"A hundred twenty-five," Webber told her. "And no baggage. You can squeeze that much aboard any ship that can lift."

The girl's mouth turned stubborn-mad. She picked up a hand phone from the narrow ledge



behind the counter. It had a hush filter built into it, so Webber couldn't hear what she said, but there was a barbed quality to the way she said it.

He felt a burn of satisfaction. Maybe now he'd get a little action.

A door in the wall back of the counter opened. A man came out. He wasn't a tall man, but he was taller than the girl.

He wore the uniform of an Intercontinental Rockets pilot. "What's the trouble, Millie?" he asked.

Then he saw Webber. "Joe!" he exclaimed. He came over and stuck out his hand. "Joe, you old birdman. How are you!"

"You're still with this bunch of thieves?" Webber asked.

The man decided to take it as a joke. "It's a living I know," he said deprecatingly. "And if you don't think too much about it, it's just like the old days. You even get a look at the stars—I mean, the way they really are. They don't look the same, down here."

"No. They don't," Joe Webber said. He smiled. He was as good as in that rocket now.

AROUND THE WORLD, aircraft traffic monitor stations watched the *Jove*'s descent on their screens. They watched it ellipse through the fringe of atmosphere, loop out into space, come back again. Each time, it was a little deeper, a little less swift, until it hardly left the atmosphere at all. And then it slowed, and it began to fall.

The stations tracked it halfway around the world. It fell slowly—almost balloonlike—on a spiral that would intersect the surface of Earth somewhere west of the Americas. When it passed over the African coast, it was only sixty-five miles up. Singapore reported it at forty miles. Rabaul saw it down to thirty-five. The Christmas Island station lost it below the horizon.

The Trans-Pacific watch-ship failed to pick it up.

It had been very low over Christmas Island. The news went around the world that the *Jove* was down.

Fleets of search planes left Papeete and Hawaii hours before dawn. They were slow, lumbering craft, aptly fit for their purpose. They would arrive in the area where the *Jove* had gone down not long after sunrise.

JOE WEBBER had hated Intercontinental Rockets ever since the company got its weather observation contract. He had worked for the company for the several years since his retirement, mandatory at 35, from the Space Service (space-flight was a young man's game, they said) but he quit when the contract was signed.

He knew what it meant. Weather observation was one of the functions of Orbitbase—the only one of any Earthbound importance.

It meant the end of space-flight.

Less than a year from the day the contract was signed, Orbitbase had been abandoned. The last shuttle was on the scrap heap, and the last man had collected his pay and vanished into history. Space-flight was dead.

But just now Webber didn't hate the company, because it got him to Tahiti.

It was shortly after dawn. The air was cool and the sky was pale blue and clear when Webber rode the baggage cart in from the field with the rest of the passengers.

In the terminal building, he paused at the newsstand. Bold headlines boasted their news to him. The *Jove* was down. He snatched up a paper and tossed the attendant the first coin that came to his fingers.

He read as he walked, and he didn't watch where he went. He let the flow of the crowd carry

him along through the terminal.

As he read, one thought stood out in his mind above everything else. Rog had done it. He had brought the *Jove* down. She hadn't burned up.

He read about the search that had started.

When he looked up, he was on the 'copter platz, on the other side of the terminal building from the rocket field.

He climbed into a cab. The 'copter lifted. "Where?" the driver asked.

"The Air-Sea Rescue station," Webber snapped. "Where else?"

There would be newsmen there. Lots of them—and nothing on their minds but space-flight.

They would listen to him while they waited for the *Jove* to be found. And he would be there when the search planes found the *Jove*.

Handled right, the story of the *Jove* would do everything he had wanted to do for four bleak years.

Because the *Jove* had gone to the limits of the far frontier, and had returned to tell the tale. It had put men's feet on the moons of the monster of planets.

Told right, that story would make people think about space-flight again. And he could tell them—and make them believe—that space-flight wasn't something dead and finished, but something barely begun. He would make them realize that the destiny of Man was not only the planets, but the stars.

He could do it—now that the *Jove* had come back, now that America would think about space-flight again.

THE WATER lifted him, and let him fall.

And lifted him.

And let him fall.

Miraculously, he was alive. Bouyed up just enough by the airspace in the helmet and the torso of his pressure suit, he floated with his tight-sheathed limbs trailed downward in the water like sea anchors. The keel-weight of the oxy-bottles on his back kept his face turned up to the star-spattered sky.

The night was dark and cloudless, but the stars looked wrong. In space, they would be sharp as pin-pricks, hot as rage, and dusted across the heavens like chips of a shattered diamond.

Down here, most of them were blotted out, and the ones you could see were sick little gleams, lifeless, and they flickered like candles about to go out.

He couldn't remember much of what happened when the *Jove* hit. It had all been too fast. There was shock and tumult, pain and blackness. That was all he remembered. When he came out of it, he was alone

in the water and the night.

Above him, the stars moved slowly in their tantalizing, astronomical procession. Hours passed, while softly his helmet radio crashed and whispered.

He had kept his radio when the others jettisoned theirs, in the vague hope it would help searchers find them after they were down. The set didn't have much power, but maybe it was possible.

And the others had to be somewhere nearby.

He hoped they were all right.

His legs twinged faintly, naggingly, each time the water lifted him—each time the water let him fall. They were useless. He couldn't move them. He tried not to wonder what was wrong with them.

For the moment, he was all right.

But, when the air in his oxybottles gave out, he would have to take off his helmet to breathe. His suit's weight would sink him like a stone. He would have to get out of it quickly, or drown.

He didn't know if he could peel the pressure sheaths off his useless legs.

So he tried not to think about it. He watched the slow procession of the stars.

Orbitbase was up there, somewhere. It had been a shock to find it abandoned—lifeless corridors, barren rooms—not even the air left in it any more. . . .

Orbitbase. Man's stepping-stone to the moon, the planets, and someday the stars.

Deserted.

Man had escaped from Earth, the Mother and tyrant, had felt the eruption of a new, precarious maturity, and had seen the vision of a grand, high destiny.

And, abruptly fearful, he had crawled back into the racial womb.

It made Sherman sick. He wanted to rage, to slash, to pulverize. He wanted to cry his protest to the stars.

But a wave crested over him. Water sluiced down upon him. It blotted out the sight of the stars.

The water lifted him and let him fall. It was a drowsing rhythm, and he was weary to death. He dozed in the pulse of the sea.

CHAPTER III

THE BLOODY SUN inched up from the horizon. Sherman watched.

He hadn't seen the dawn for seven years.

The sea spread smooth as far as he could see. There was no sign of the others. No sign of the *Jove*—not even a scrap of wreckage. And no sign of land. He was alone.

He wondered what had hap-

pened to the others. He hoped they were all right.

They were his friends, his companions in the greatest adventure of all time. They had gone to Jupiter and back with him. And they had trusted him that he could pilot the *Jove* down through the perilous atmosphere. They'd had no choice —no atmosphere shuttle would come for them, ever—but they had not hesitated. They had put their lives in his hands.

He hoped they were all right.

"Hello, the *Jove*!"

His radio spoke.

"Hello, the *Jove*," the voice repeated. "Do you receive us?"

"Who's that?" His throat was thick with thirst, and his voice was a croak. "I hear you."

"Hello, the *Jove*," the voice said maddeningly. "We understand your radio is set to this frequency. We are listening for your signals. Do you receive us?"

"I hear you plain," Sherman managed, nettled. "What's the matter? Can't you hear me?"

". . . This is the search plane *Hula Fanny,* Air-Sea Rescue Service. We are listening for your signals. Do you receive us? Hello, the *Jove.* Hello, the *Jove* . . ."

Sherman searched the sky. It was almost cloudless—a high, thin cirrus misted the stratosphere. He searched up and down, all around the horizon, but saw nothing. Once he thought he saw the plane, but when he looked again it was only a bird.

The plane would have to come nearer, he decided, before his small transmitter could reach it.

His oxygen meter said he had three and a half hours' oxygen.

He watched his helmet's small time-dial. Every two minutes he spoke into the voice-automatic transmitter. He couldn't know if the search plane would come close enough to get his signals, but if it did he wanted to be sure it heard him.

It seemed a long time—though the time-dial said it wasn't — before the search plane's message changed.

"We are receiving you," the voice said suddenly. "We are receiving you. Keep transmitting. We receive you."

Then it hesitated. "You *are* the *Jove,* aren't you?"

"Roger Sherman, pilot of the *Jove*," Sherman said. It was getting easier to talk, though it hurt his dry throat. "I'm in the water. My ship broke up when she hit."

"You're what we're looking for," the voice said. "Where are you? Can you see us?"

Sherman searched the sky again. It was empty. "I don't see you," he said.

"All right—hold on and we'll

put a radio fix on you. Keep transmitting."

"Have you picked up any of the others?" Sherman asked.

"No. Aren't they with you?"

"I haven't seen them since we hit," Sherman said. "They must be in the water somewhere near me, but I haven't seen them. They don't have radios in their suits—we took them out to cut weight. Look for them, will you?"

"That's what we're paid for," the man in the search plane said. "Don't you worry. If they're afloat, we'll find them. Keep transmitting. We are getting a fix on you."

AT THE Air-Sea Rescue Station, the 'copter settled on the gravel in front of the operations building. Webber handed the driver a wad without stopping to count it.

He slipped out, a poised little cat of a man. The 'copter lifted and windmilled off across the bay.

Webber's feet scattered gravel as he approached the operations building.

Inside, out of the morning's brightness, he had to pause to let his eyes adjust before he could find his way. The halls were deserted, and there were no signs to point the way, but he had no trouble finding the plot room.

It was in the center of the building. It was a large room. One of the long walls was a translucent plotting map of the area the station served.

In the northwest sector, a red line circled the area where the *Jove* had most likely gone down. Imperceptibly slow, a wide-winged formation of green dots approached it. The search had started.

On the floor, facing the map, men wearing radio-monitor helmets sat at consoles. They were silent and engrossed, their minds hundreds of miles away, keeping contact with the search planes.

A balding, plump, part-Oriental man patrolled the room, pausing first at one console and then at another. He smoked a large pipe. He spotted Webber and came over.

"Who are you?" he asked. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm Joe Webber," Webber said. "You're looking for some friends of mine."

The plump man glanced back uncertainly at the plot-map.

"That's right, Jack," Webber said.

"You may wait with the newsmen in the gallery," the plump man decided. "I am sure you do not want to interrupt our work."

Joe Webber nodded agreeably. Getting put with the newsmen was just fine with him.

For the first time in years,

people were thinking of space-flight again. Maybe they wondered what it was like. Maybe they even felt a little uncomfortable because the *Jove* had crashed, and because it was their elected representatives who had knifed space-fight, which was why the *Jove* had crashed.

With a little of the right kind of working on, maybe they'd back space-flight again.

And newsmen were the people to start with. Get them in the right mood and feed them the right kind of news and they would do most of the work for you.

They would be like a direct wire from you to the people. And from the people it would go to Congress, and from there . . .

Well, anyway, the planets. Maybe someday the stars.

The gallery was a glassed-in balcony that looked across the room at the plotting map. It was crowded. Every seat had a reporter in it. More reporters sat on the aisle steps, or stood, pressed together, in the space behind the last row of seats.

The place was full of cigarette smoke. For a moment, Joe Webber didn't want to go in. The stink of wasted air rankled his keen spaceman's sense of fitness.

But he took a deep breath and pushed into the mob. He elbowed and burrowed through the mess, and finally got to a place where he could see the map.

The man he was crowded against noticed him for a newcomer. "Who're you with?" he asked, bored.

"Space Flight Associates," Webber said.

The newsman looked puzzled. "What's that?" he asked.

Webber snapped his eyes up at him. He was young, thin, and droop-shouldered. "Kid," he said, "you're new in this game."

The man on Webber's other side spoke up. "It's an oufit you couldn't help but hear about a few years back," he said. "Very noisy. Never did hear what happened to it. It was an American lobby and publicity outfit to promote space-flight—a bunch of old spacemen who got hopping mad when the Congress voted down the space-flight appropriation for the '93-'94 fiscal year."

Someone behind Webber leaned forward. "Say—you're Webber, aren't you?" he said.

"That's me," Webber said.

He was quick to sniff a bit of news, maybe. "What brings you here?" he asked.

Webber was aware that a lot of hands suddenly had open notebooks in them. He nodded at the operations map. "Those are friends of mine out there."

Faces were turned toward him

from all directions. "Care to make a statement?" someone invited.

Webber almost jumped at the chance, but stopped himself. Some inner sense warned him to take it slow. It would be bad to look eager. He had waited a long time for a break like this, and now that it had come he had to use it just right.

He shook his head. "I'm not here on business," he said, watching the operations map. "I just hope they find them, that's all."

On the map, the search planes were going into the critical area. There was no sign of anything happening yet.

"Think there's much chance they lived through it?" someone asked.

"Rog is a good pilot," Webber said uneasily.

"Who?"

"Rog Sherman," Webber said. "He's the boy who jockeyed her down. If anyone could bring them through it, he's the man. But . . ."

He shrugged. "It's a tough assignment," he admitted. "He's already done more than I thought any man could."

Step number one. Give them a hero.

"These death watches bore hell out of me," a grim old veteran muttered, hands in pockets.

THE PLANE finally came in sight. It was tiny, far off, and close to the horizon. For a moment, Sherman thought it was a bird.

Then he knew it was a plane. Sun glinted on it. "I can see you," he said.

"What's our bearing?" the man in the plane asked.

But the plane was too far away. It didn't seem to move. The surging water under him made it impossible to be sure.

But, minutes later, it was perceptibly larger, and he could see it move.

"You're coming at me," Sherman said. He watched it with a practiced eye. "Just a couple points off."

"Talk us down," the radio voice said. "We'll pick you up."

"Circle," Sherman said. "Look for the others. I can wait."

"Don't be a fool, man. Talk us down. We can hunt for them after we've got you aboard."

The plane was still coming toward him. It was crabbing into the wind. Sherman estimated the wind and the plane's speed, and ordered a series of course changes that would land the plane into the wind and put it near him at the end of its run.

The man on the radio hadn't expected anything so complicated. He boggled.

"Are you sure of those figures?"

"Just do as I say," Sherman said.

After a silence, the man on the radio said, "Let's have those figures again."

The plane had passed the first course change point. Sherman figured a new set of courses and recited them slowly enough for the man in the plane to write them down.

The plane made the first turn. It was exactly right in time and bearing, and the changes to follow checked out. Sherman grinned. It wasn't half as tricky as conning a spaceship.

The plane passed over him, a hundred yards to the left. It was big and slow, with high wings and tail. Four massive engines pulled it through the air. Its body had a pontoon bottom. Windows glinted brightly on its flanks.

"We see you," the man in the plane said abruptly. "Or somebody. Have you got some kind of suit on—red above the waist, and the rest of it blue?"

"Those are my colors," Sherman acknowledged.

"How about that helmet—how can you see through it? It looks like a mirror from here."

"Some light gets through—enough," Sherman said. "If it wasn't made like that, the sun 'd broil your brains in about five seconds."

The plane reached the end of the dogleg, rose slightly, and turned. Coming toward him, headed into the wind, it began to settle.

It skimmed the water. Its pontoon body cut through wave crests. It cut a trough in the water and breasted into it. Water foamed around it, and then it was placid among the waves.

It taxied toward him, but it veered off course. "Bear to ten o'clock," Sherman ordered. But the plane didn't turn.

"Don't fret yourself," the radio man said. "We don't want to run you down."

When it was abreast of him, a hundred yards off, it stopped. The engines idled. It settled deeper in the water.

A hatch opened under the wing. A boat was swung out and launched. Men piled into it. It cut the water toward him.

A man stood up in the prow. He hefted a coil of rope, swinging it, ready to throw. Sherman waved, and the man's eyes were right on him.

When the boat was close enough, the man hurled the rope. Sherman watched it uncoil toward him. It dropped in the water a few feet from him, floating. He reached and grabbed it.

It was hard to hold on to because of the thick gloves of his pressure suit. He wound it around his hand and closed his fist on it.

The man in the boat hauled on the rope. The boat maneuvered broadside to Sherman, and men reached over the side to grab his arms. Their mouths moved—they seemed to be saying something, but through his helmet Sherman couldn't hear.

They hauled him up. When they had him half out of the water, they bent him over the gunwale and began to drag him into the boat. He felt a warning twinge in his legs.

"Hold up a minute!" he shouted. "Stop!"

They didn't hear him. They dragged him into the boat. His legs turned to fire.

He screamed, but still they didn't hear. Somebody grabbed his legs and wrestled them over the gunwale. They tumbled him to the floor of the boat. He screamed and screamed, but they didn't hear.

CHAPTER IV

HE WOKE with the drone of engines in his ears. It had been in his ears a long time before he was conscious of it, and his body felt with a spaceman's fine sensitivity the minute dip and lift of a plane in flight.

He opened his eyes. He was lying on his back, flat, and a man stood over him. A middle-aged man with old-fashioned glasses and a long, solemn face.

The light was strong, but it didn't hurt his eyes. The doctor glanced down. "You're awake," he said. "Good."

He moved down toward Sherman's feet. Sherman couldn't see his feet: the sheet that was spread over him was propped up like a tent over his legs.

The doctor reached out and did something. "Feel anything?" he asked.

Sherman shook his head. "I don't feel a thing."

There was no feeling in his legs. He tried to push himself up, to see, but a thick strap across his chest held him down.

"It's a local anesthetic," the doctor said. "Just relax. You're going to be all right."

The doctor was still down near his feet, doing something. Sherman couldn't see what. "You're a very lucky man," the doctor said. "Lucky to be alive, I mean."

"What about the others?" Sherman wanted to know. "Have they been picked up yet?"

The doctor shrugged, not pausing at his work. "Don't know," he said. "Haven't heard."

He went on doing whatever he was doing.

THE PLANE came levelly down from the sky until it touched the water. It paused then, turned, and taxied across

the smooth bay toward the station.

Impatiently pacing, Joe Webber waited in the cluster of newsmen near the ambulance. He watched the plane come toward them. The bright noon sunlight made him squint.

The announcement had said only that one man had been picked up. No name was given, nor had it been said whether or not he was injured.

As it approached the concrete ramp that sloped up out of the water, the plane slowed. Carefully, it nosed up to a yellow flag that stuck up out of the water. Then it gunned its engines and rolled up the ramp on a dolly that cradled its body.

Slowly, it trundled across the concrete field.

The ambulance spurred out to meet it. The reporters yelped and set out in pursuit. Their shirt-tails flapped in the air.

Joe Webber tried to keep up with them, but his short legs were a handicap. He lost ground steadily.

The ambulance pulled up under the plane's wing. Its panel side opened and two men bounded out with a basket stretcher. The big hatch in the plane's side opened and they climbed in.

The reporters arrived and surrounded the opening. A man appeared in the opening and blocked the way. They shouted questions at him. He shook his head, refusing to answer.

By the time Webber reached the scene, a squad of watchmen had arrived. They cleared an aisle through the mob of reporters between the plane and the ambulance. They were handling the stretcher through the opening when Webber got there.

He squeeezed and elbowed his way through the crowded newsmen to the line held by the watchmen. He watched as the stretcher was carried past.

The newsmen were shouting. "Who is it?" they yelled. "Who is it?"

The men handling the stretcher said nothing. They trudged slowly along the aisle the watchmen had cleared.

The man in the stretcher was almost too big for it, and he was thickly bundled. Only his face showed. It was a rough-hewn, big-boned and pock-marked face. He was either asleep or unconscious.

Webber ducked under the watchmen's arms and stepped out into the aisle. "It's Rog Sherman," he said loudly.

They all know who Sherman was. He didn't have to say any more.

A tall, solemn man in white climbed down out of the plane. He carried a black satchel. His

whites were bloodstained. "Are you a friend of his?" he asked gravely.

"Yeah," Webber said. "I know him."

"Good," the tall man said. "He will need a friend."

"I can imagine," Webber said. "After the deal he's had." He was careful to say it loud enough for the newsmen to hear.

"Yes," said the doctor.

The ambulance orderlies loaded Sherman into the ambulance. They climbed in themselves, and the doctor joined them.

Webber started to get in, too. The doctor leaned out. "I am sorry," he apologized. "There is no room for you. You will come to the hospital?"

Webber hesitated. "What about the rest of them?"

"His companions?" The doctor cocked his head. "I have not heard. I presume they are still being looked for."

"They haven't been found?"

The doctor looked helpless. "I've heard nothing."

Webber accepted it. He stepped back from the ambulance. The orderlies leaned over and pulled down the panel, and the lower panel rose up to meet it and lock. The ambulance crawled out from under the plane's wing, unfurled its rotors, and lifted. It windmilled out across the bay.

A tractor hooked onto the seaplane's dolly and towed it off toward the hangers. The watchmen climbed into their car and drove away. Webber faced the newsmen alone.

Their first question came quickly. "Are you sure it's Sherman?"

Webber nodded. "The rest were all little guys," he said. "He had a tough time to make spaceman's rating with that hulk of his. You've got to be something special when you're that big. But you've seen the kind of pilot he is. There isn't another man living who could have brought the *Jove* down."

It was all true, and he could see they were impressed.

It was a dirty trick to pull on Rog, though, to make a hero of him. But it had to be done.

He smiled at the newsmen. Mentally, he rubbed his palms together.

He had them all to himself.

WHEN SHERMAN woke again, he was in bed, in a room with drawn shades on the windows. In a corner, a nurse sat watching him.

He tried to prop up on his elbows. He couldn't make it. The nurse got up quickly and came over to the bed.

"Lie back," she said softly, touching his shoulder with a gentle pressure. "Lie back. Rest.

You're going to be all right."

Her words relaxed him. He was very tired.

But then he remembered. "Have they found the others?" he asked.

"Don't try to talk," she told him gently.

"Have they found the others?" he repeated insistently. Again he tried to rise.

She shook her head. "I don't know. There hasn't been anything in the papers yet."

"Will you find out?" he pleaded, slumping back on the pillow. "Will you find out for me?"

"If I can," she said kindly.

"Please. I've got to know."

The nurse crossed over to a small stand against the far wall. She took the lid off an enamel pan—took out a syringe, took out something else, and came back.

Sherman looked at the needle. "What's that for?" he asked suspiciously.

"Something to make you sleep," the nurse said honestly, face grave. She took his arm and wiped it with an alcohol swab.

Sherman tried to push her hand away—the hand with the needle in it. "I don't want to sleep," he said.

"You need rest," she said, gently firm. She drove the needle into the sterilized patch on his arm, and emptied it.

"Get a good sleep, spaceman," she said.

He slept.

WEBBER didn't get in to see Sherman. They told him Sherman was sleeping, and that he would be able to see no one for at least several days—that as soon as it was possible, he would be notified.

Webber accepted it. He didn't care how long he had to wait, so long as he could talk to Rog before the newsmen got at him. He went back to the Search and Rescue station to wait for news of the others.

He couldn't understand why they hadn't been found.

They should have been in the water near Sherman. They should have been picked up.

But he watched the search planes come in, long after dark. They hadn't found a thing. Another day passed, and still they found nothing.

He heard that ships were also patrolling the area where Sherman was found. But there wasn't a trace of the men who were with him.

He got very little sleep. He didn't shave. He drank coffee and ate sandwiches, and called the hospital every hour.

And he talked to the newsmen. He filled them full of stories of the old days—stories of space-flight, and Mars, Mer-

cury, Orbitbase, and the moon. Stories that made good telling. Stories which, repeated, would stir young blood.

Often as not, the way Joe Webber told them, they were about Rog Sherman.

Finally, news came. But it wasn't news of the men of the *Jove*. It was about the *Jove* herself.

The *Jove* had been found.

CHAPTER V

IT WAS HUMILIATING to be spoon-fed like a baby, by a girl. But Sherman had to endure it. He hadn't the strength to sit up. He couldn't feed himself.

He lost track of time. He slept a lot, and when he woke he did not know if it was afternoon or morning. Sometimes it was dark and the hospital sounds were softer. He lost count of the days.

But the day came when they propped him up with pillows and he could look down at himself on the bed.

Under the white sheet, his left leg was a round mound like the burrow of a giant mole, down to the tent-peak of his foot. But his right leg wasn't there.

He lifted the sheet and looked. The half-thigh stump was swathed in bandage. It looked oddly like a head with a bandage on it.

He looked at it, and wondered why he felt no more emotion than he did. But the fact he had lost a leg meant strangely little to him. As if it were someone else's leg that was gone.

He hoped the others were all right. He wished he could find someone who knew something about them.

That night, his stump began hurting. He didn't sleep at all, and he had a bad time of it all the next day.

THERE WAS SOMEONE to see him, they said. He scratched his itching stump through the bandage and said to let him in. It might be someone who could tell him what had happened to the men who had been in the *Jove* with him.

His visitor was a small man. He had pale blond hair, and he looked like a boy except for the lines and the hardness on his face. At first Sherman didn't recognize him.

"Hi, Rog," he said, and then Sherman knew him. Joe Webber.

"How've you been?" Webber smiled.

"All right," Sherman lied. The pain in his stump had flamed for two days, defying all the drugs the doctors permitted him. Then it had faded slowly,

leaving him weak and exhausted.

He saw Webber's glance at the flat sheet where his leg should have been.

"Yeah," he said carelessly. He shrugged. "I don't miss it."

Webber wet his lips. Uncomfortably, he hadn't a thing to say.

"Joe," Sherman said. "What happened to the boys?"

Webber's face stayed the same. He did not speak.

"Doesn't *anybody* know?" Sherman cried.

Webber went over to the wall and brought back a chair. He straddled it, folded his arms on the backrest, and rested his chin on them.

"They didn't make it," he said, looking at the wall beyond Sherman.

"They're dead?" Sherman murmured unbelievingly. "Jack —Harry—Hugh . . . ?"

"All of them, Rog."

"They can't be dead," he protested. He felt wretchedly sick. "*I* got out all right."

Webber shook his head. "You were lucky, Rog. Damn lucky," he said. "I saw the pictures they took of her. She's on the bottom, and she's smashed to hell, and everybody but you was trapped inside."

Doggedly, he had to argue. "They had their suits on. They could breathe," he cried despairingly.

"Rog," Webber said harshly. "They're dead. Don't fight it."

"But . . ." He wanted to cry.

"She's two miles down," Webber said. "The pressure killed them."

A terrible heaviness filled Sherman. "I told them I wasn't good enough," he said. "I warned them."

"You were good enough," Webber said. "And you had to do it, didn't you?"

"Well, we . . ."

"You could have sat up there and starved to death, if your air didn't give out first," Webber snarled. "Look—you want to know who's really to blame? It's the people who killed space-flight. They're the ones who made you do it."

He was right. They were the ones to blame. It burst on Sherman's thoughts like the blaze of the unfiltered sun.

"God damn them," he said angrily. Purpose firmed in him. "They'll hear about it," he promised.

"No, Rog — no," Webber said quickly. "There's something more important than that."

"What is more important than . . . ?"

"Space-flight's more important," Webber said quietly.

Sherman was baffled, speechless. There wasn't any connection. And anyway, space-flight was dead.

"Listen," Webber said. "I've

been trying to put us back in business for four whole years."

He told Sherman all about Space Flight Associates, and all he had tried to do.

"I couldn't get people to listen to me," he said. "That's what I want you for."

"What can I do?" Sherman asked. It sounded hopeless to him. "Sure, I want space-flight as bad as you do, only . . ."

"You can tell them the things I tried to tell them," Webber said. "They'll listen to you."

"Why me?" Sherman wondered. He felt horribly inadequate. "I mean, who am I? I . . ."

"You're the perfect picture of a guy who was wronged," Webber said. He smiled wryly. "You got put on the spot and you did everything you could, but the luck was against you. That puts a lot of people on your side. If anyone can talk them into backing space-flight again, you're the guy who can do it."

"Joe," Sherman said. "I'm with you. If you think I can swing it, I'll try. But the first thing I'm going to say . . ."

His voice turned angry, and his face turned hard.

"Rog — no!" Webber said. "You don't get people on your side if you call them a son of a bitch. I found that out. I was mad when they killed space-flight. I was damn mad, and I didn't care much how I said it. We're not going to make that mistake again. If I have to cut your throat, we're not going to make that mistake."

"We were forgotten," Sherman said bitterly. "They left us up there and we had to get down by ourselves. Well, I'm *not* forgetting, and I'm not letting them forget, either.

"Rog—listen to me," Webber begged. "If space-flight means anything to you—believe me, I *know.*"

Sherman's face looked like something hammered out of stone. "We went out there—farther than anyone went before," he said bitterly. "Do you think we did it for fun? Do you think we did it for ourselves?"

"You did it for space-flight," Webber said. "It was the way you had to do."

"No," Sherman said, white-lipped. "We did it for *them.* For *people.* Because it's the way people have to go, and we had to blaze the trail."

His fist tightened on the edge of his sheet. "And then we came home, and they hadn't even cared enough to remember us!"

WHIPPED, sullen, Webber watched them get Sherman ready for the press conference. They helped Sherman into a robe and lifted him into a wheelchair. He was surly and awkward, learning for the first time how handi-

capped he was without his leg.

When Sherman was ready, Webber brushed the attendants aside and took charge of the wheelchair himself.

It rolled easily. He steered it through the door out into the corridor.

He went slowly. "Rog—will you listen?" he pleaded. "Look—you can't do anything for them. They're dead. But you *can* do something for what they believed in. That makes sense, doesn't it? *Doesn't* it?"

Sherman did not speak. His big hands gripped the wheelchair's rests, and he looked stiffly straight ahead.

Webber wheeled the chair slowly along the corridor. The corridor was clean and well lighted, and the walls were glazed white tile. The place smelled of harsh soap.

The one thing he hadn't expected was that Rog might not cooperate. Walking along the corridor, he thought soddenly of men walking to their execution, and he knew he was walking to his—to the death of everything he had believed in and labored for.

The press conference was in the old part of the hospital, in an operating theater long out of use. As they approached, Webber made a last, desperate appeal.

"Rog," he said. "For the last time . . ."

Sherman's square-shouldered body did not move. Webber might as well have been talking to stone.

"No," Sherman said.

And then they were at the door, and the door swung open to let them through. The newsmen were already there, waiting, sitting in the seats of the steep-tiered gallery, smoking. Webber's nose twitched at the smell of tobacco. Grimly, he hunched his shoulders and went in.

He trundled Sherman into the center of the theater, turned him to face the reporters, and stepped up beside him.

"Gentlemen," he announced. "Roger Sherman, astrogator-pilot and only survivor of the First Jupiter Expedition. He has just been appointed vice-president of Space Flight Associates, and he will be working closely with me for the advancement of space-flight.

"As a memorial to his companions," Webber went on, "when the first ship of the second age of space-flight lifts from Earth—that ship will be named the *Jove* II."

Then, because he had to—because they didn't care much what he said, only cared about Sherman — Webber stepped aside. He had played his last, futile card. He had done all he could. He couldn't possibly do any more.

"Gentlemen," he said. "Roger Sherman."

In his wheelchair, Sherman straightened his body and squared his shoulders. He gripped the arm-rests.

"Before you ask any questions," he said, looking up at the gallery with agate-hard eyes, "I've got something I want to say."

He had a perfect speaking voice. It was just the right kind of voice to go with his hewn-rock face and bull-muscled body.

"Twenty-one men are dead because there was no atmosphere shuttle to meet us at Orbitbase. They were my friends. I did all I could for them, and I almost made it. But I didn't."

His voice rang to the skylight with superbly controlled rage. "They died because the American Congress forgot us—because Congress killed space-flight and sold all the shuttles for junk. That Congress, and every man and woman who voted it into office, is responsible for the death of my friends."

He paused. He looked up at the gallery unflinchingly, like a gladiator damning the mob.

"Any questions?" he asked.

MASK-FACED, shiny-eyed, Joe Webber climbed the steep stairs toward the empty seats in the top tier of the gallery. The hero he had made had spoken.

God damn you, Rog, he thought. God damn you. If I have to fight you too, I'll fight you too.

Because we're going back. We're going back, I-don't-care-how-long-it-takes, we're going back . . . out there . . . next time . . .

Joe Webber, climbing, his small, catlike body tightly controlled, his gray-green eyes fixed straight ahead, seeing nothing.

Except—

The stars.

∞ ∞ ∞

Dr. Vickers' Car

by EDWARD WELLEN

Texas Bill was an expert on such matters as gaols, and fleas, and faster-than-light travel . . .

SATURDAY, July 28, 1945.

It was six in the evening, but a hot sun still shone down on Spouters' Corner in Hyde Park. After shopping the other speakers a bit, the largest number of people had clotted around Texas Bill.

He was standing on the narrow top step of a small folding ladder and having trouble holding his balance. He was either tired or drunk.

"I'll give you ten minutes more," he said in a loud hoarse voice, "then I'm going home to the little woman and our six kids." And he showed in a grin two upper and three lower teeth so spaced they meshed like gears.

Two or three days' beard darkened his cheeks and jaws. The wide-brimmed high-crowned straw hat that had moved the hecklers to name him Texas Bill shadowed the rest of his face. His

once tan jacket hung open—not because the afternoon was hot but because the buttons were missing. The sleeves had raveled; threads fluttered as he gestured with grimy hands. His soiled collarless shirt, open at the throat, tucked into faded gray trousers. The end of the belt dangled from the buckle, and the trousers bagged at knees and seat. The toes of his shoes had cracked, the laminated leather soles had separated into flapping tongues.

A girl with a saucy face tugged at the ragged cuffs of his trousers.

"Texas Bill, did you hear that Mr. Churchill went to his doctor this morning? . . . He had Labour pains."

Texas Bill kept a poker face while the crowd laughed. He waited quietly long after the laughter had died out.

A man pointed to a pigeon that was buzzing the crowd.

"Look out, Texas Bill," he shouted, "he thinks yer a bloody statue."

Texas Bill ducked and swayed and almost toppled. With tremendous dignity he steadied himself, took off his straw hat, and with a dirty rag mopped his brow and the inside of the hat. He scratched through a tangle of graying brown hair, then replaced the hat. He surveyed the crowd and cleared his throat.

"Mr. Speaker," a man called out. "What is your subject?"

Texas Bill hooked his thumbs in his lapels and rocked back on his heels. He grabbed air to regain his balance.

"I'm for bigger and better gaols," he said. He scratched his ribs.

A man took a pipe from his mouth to shout, "Mr. Speaker, I'm engaged to a woman with a wooden leg. Shall I break it off?"

Texas Bill scratched his ribs again. "Why aren't you alive?" he snapped.

"Alive?" the man with the pipe said. "The only thing alive about you is on your clothes."

"Be a man," Texas Bill said.

"I'm more a man than you," the man with the pipe said. "The trouble with you is you're too heavy for light work and too light for heavy work."

"I can handle your sort," Texas Bill said.

"Step down," the man with the pipe said. "The last man I hit was arrested in Paris for flying without a license."

Texas Bill drew himself up after a dangerous moment and magnificently ignored the man with the pipe, who after a few baiting attempts wormed his way out of the crowd.

"I'm for bigger and better gaols," Texas Bill said. "Now when I was in God's own country—America, to you—"

The girl said, "If you like America so much, why did you come here?"

"I came to Edinburgh to go to the University—" He bent from the waist, and held the position until the mocking clamor his words evoked died down. When he straightened, his bombed-out mouth gaped in smiling appreciation of the reaction. "But I wound up in gaol for a year. And that's what I'm for—bigger and better gaols. America has gaols worth seven-and-a-half million dollars; you haven't got an hotel worth that. And look at Boulder Dam and Grand Coulee Dam and Hood River Dam—"

"What about Potsdam, Texas Bill?"

"Look, girlie, why don't you get yourself a Yank? They know how to do things right."

"I've never gone out with a Yank. Tell me about it, Texas Bill. What would you do on a date with a girl in America?"

Texas Bill's face pleated with thought. He looked past the girl and projected his voice across the crowd. "Well, you go calling on a girl and you say, 'Where'll we go, sugar?' 'Oh, I don't know. Where do you think?' 'Oh, wherever you want, sugar.' 'Well, let's go for a ride on Long Island—' "

"Long Island is shorter since you were there last," a man said.

"—And you say, 'Oh, no, sugar, we can't go riding.' And she says, 'Well, either we go riding or it's no date.' And you say, 'Okay, sugar.' So you borrow Dr. Vickers' car—you just take it; whenever anybody wants to use a car in America they just take the nearest one. So there you are, riding in Dr. Vickers' car, and you stop at a bar. Now, you order drinks, say rum and Coca Cola. But you don't notice that while you're drinking rum she's just drinking the Coca Cola. That's the way American girls are—they're on their guard. And you, girlie, ought to be on your guard."

The man with the pipe had wormed himself back into the inner rim of the crowd. He held up a paper bag to Texas Bill.

Texas Bill took it, opened it, and pulled out a plum. He turned the plum around and around in one hand, examining all its surface impassively.

"He's got a bellyful," he said, "now he gives me his slops."

He let the bag parachute to earth and placed the plum in his mouth. He sucked half the plum down his gullet. As he brought the half plum away from the bite in a sweeping movement, his little finger delicately extending, plum drippings showered a man. The man, quiet-looking, wiped his face as someone shouted, "It's you needs the bath, Dirty Dick." Texas Bill drew a sleeve

along his mouth and then dovetailed his five teeth in a grin.

"I'll give you ten minutes more," he said, "then I'm off to the little woman and our six kids."

An old man took over the job of baiting now as Texas Bill launched into an account of his travels in America. The old man tried continually to trap him—not so much because he doubted that Texas Bill had been there as to prove that *he* had been there. He kept asking Texas Bill if he had been in the Imperial Valley, if he knew what greasers and gringos were, and if he had ridden the rods. "I have," he kept saying, turning to those around him and looking for favor in their eyes.

"Go away, sonny," said Texas Bill finally.

Not only sonny but most of the gathering went away soon, with the coming of darkness, and Texas Bill stepped down and folded his ladder and started off slowly into the no-longer-blackout of post-VE London.

He got no farther than Marble Arch.

Ladder and all, Texas Bill vanished into space.

THURSDAY, November 29, 1956.

It was five in the cold gray afternoon when Texas Bill reappeared. No one noticed or would admit to noticing the reappearing. A wondering look around showed Texas Bill that whatever else had changed Marble Arch itself had not.

He exhumed a dustbinned *Daily Mail*. The writing above the fold told him the date and that some bloke name of Khrushchev attended a Yugoslav National Day reception in Moscow and laughed when he heard the reason for Prime Minister Eden's rest cure in Jamaica was inflammation of the Canal. Nasty sense of humor this Khrushchev had.

Eden Prime Minister? Forty-five from fifty-six. Eleven years. Have to expect changes in eleven years. All the same, Texas Bill felt no change in himself. This faster-than-light business, he supposed.

He whirled at a tap.

"Thought it was you, Texas Bill. Where've you been?"

Texas Bill stared. It was the man with the pipe, eleven years older.

"I said, 'Where've you been?' "

Texas Bill's head swam against an undertow. Where *had* he been?

It came flooding back to him on waves of memory. First a dreamlike flight through space, a strange kind of flight in which he knew himself to be at rest in a safe warm enveloping aura

while the universe itself streamed by. Then what he took to be a laboratory, from which he could look out on an eerie but not unpleasant world, where eerie but not unpleasant beings showed more interest in his clothes than in him. And last the dreamlike return flight.

"I know where you've been," the man with the pipe said.

Texas Bill gaped. "You do?"

The man puffed away, nodding authoritatively. He took the pipe from his mouth. "America." He raised an eyebrow and looked Texas Bill up and down. "For all the good it's done you, eh?"

Just you wait till I tell you where I've really been, Texas Bill thought swellingly, and you won't think yourself so clever.

"I know something more about you."

Texas Bill smiled tolerantly. "And what might that be?"

"You've not been back long."

Texas Bill's smile faded. "How'd you know that?"

"You'd have a free pair of choppers by now, that's how." Maliciously, "There's something you didn't get in your precious American paradise."

"That's all *you* know."

"But I'll soon know more, eh?"

"What do you mean?"

The man pointed the pipestem and Texas Bill became aware that his left arm was wefting the ladder.

"Oh, yes." Bet your life you'll soon know more, Texas Bill thought, the like of which was never heard on Earth. And he strode to Spouters' Corner, the man puffing after him, and set up his ladder and mounted it.

With pride of ownership the man with the pipe said to those around him, "That's Texas Bill, you know."

Texas Bill gazed upon the gathering. He had a real adventure to tell.

A man called out, "Mr. Speaker, what's your subject?"

Tell them. Wondrous beings had transported him to a wondrous world. Suddenly, a terrifying thought. *Why?*

Texas Bill eyed the waiting faces and felt awkward. He didn't know what to do with his hands. All at once, a shocking realization. He wasn't scratching himself. There was nothing to scratch for.

Had those beings transported him merely as host for—?

Texas Bill cleared his throat. "I'm for bigger and better gaols." He put up his coat collar. "I can give you only ten minutes. Got to get back to the little woman—and our nine kids. Now I've just seen gaols in America worth—"

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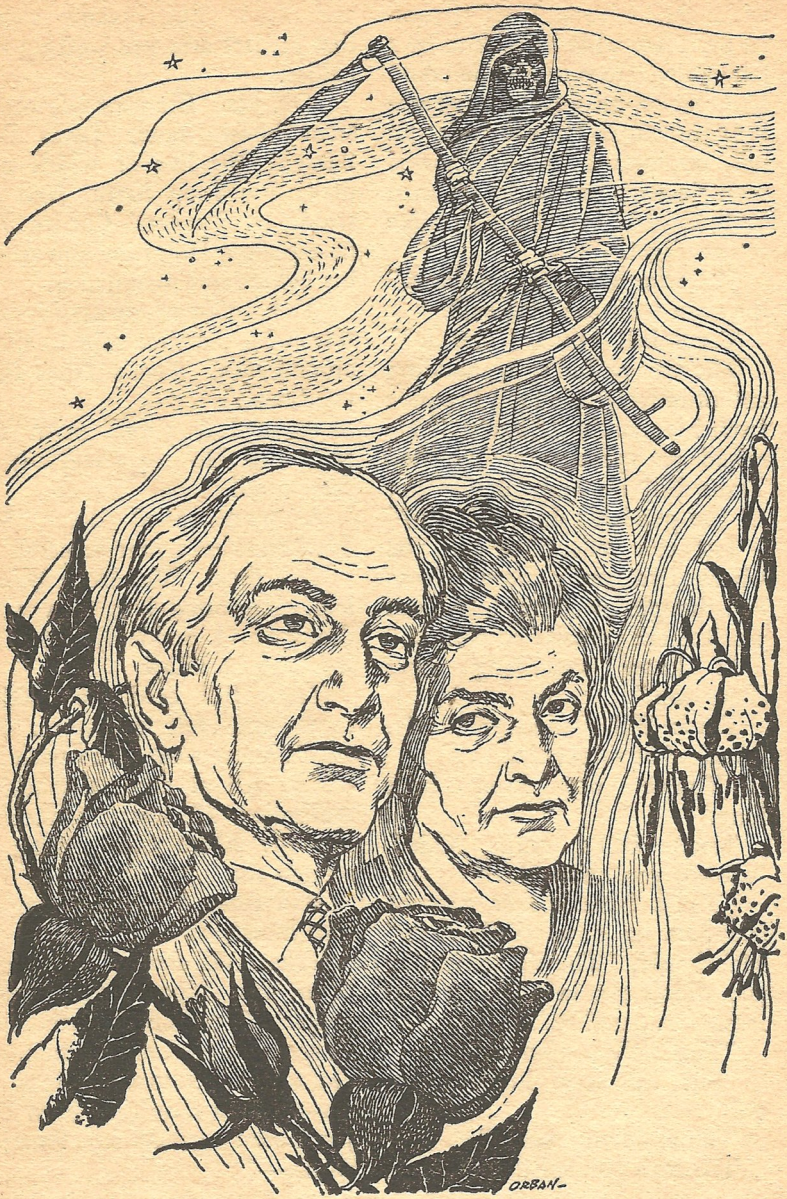
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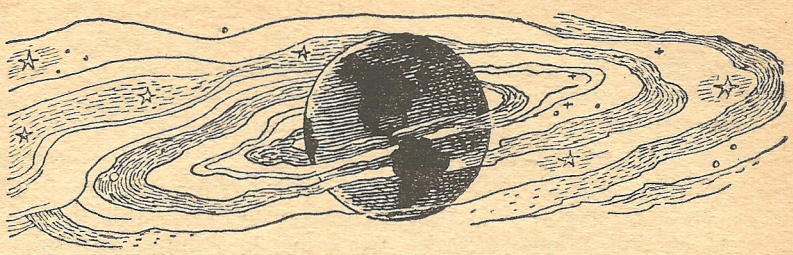


Illustrated by ORBAN

Death Scene

The new way was, of course,

much better than the old.

It just took some getting

used to, that was all....

by CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

SHE WAS WAITING on the stoop of the house when he turned into the driveway and as he wheeled the car up the concrete and brought it to a halt he was certain she knew, too.

She had just come from the garden and had one arm full of flowers and she was smiling at him just a shade too gravely.

He carefully locked the car and put the keys away in the pocket of his jacket and reminded himself once again, "Matter-of-factly, friend. For it is better this way."

And that was the truth, he reassured himself. It was much better than the old way. It gave a man some time.

He was not the first and he would not be the last and for some of them it was rough, and for others, who had prepared themselves, it was not so rough and in time, perhaps, it would

become a ritual so beautiful and so full of dignity one would look forward to it. It was more civilized and more dignified than the old way had been and in another hundred years or so there could be no doubt that it would become quite acceptable. All that was wrong with it now, he told himself, was that it was too new. It took a little time to become accustomed to this way of doing things after having done them differently through all of human history.

He got out of the car and went up the walk to where she waited for him. He stooped and kissed her and the kiss was a little longer than was their regular custom—and a bit more tender. And as he kissed her he smelled the summer flowers she carried, and he thought how appropriate it was that he should at this time smell the flowers from the garden they both loved.

"You know," he said and she nodded at him.

"Just a while ago," she said. "I knew you would be coming home. I went out and picked the flowers."

"The children will be coming, I imagine."

"Of course," she said. "They will come right away."

He looked at his watch, more from force of habit than a need to know the time. "There is time," he said. "Plenty of time for all of them to get here. I hope they bring the kids."

"Certainly they will," she said. "I went to phone them once, then I thought how silly."

He nodded. "We're of the old school, Florence. It's hard even yet to accept this thing—to know the children will know and come almost as soon as we know. It's still a little hard to be sure of a thing like that."

She patted his arm. "The family will be all together. There'll be time to talk. We'll have a splendid visit."

"Yes, of course," he said.

He opened the door for her and she stepped inside.

"What pretty flowers," he said.

"They've been the prettiest this year that they have ever been."

"That vase," he said. "The one you got last birthday. The blue and gold. That's the one to use."

"That's exactly what I thought. On the dining table."

She went to get the vase and he stood in the living room and thought how much he was a part of this room and this room a part of him. He knew every inch of it and it knew him as well and it was a friendly place, for he'd spent years making friends with it.

Here he'd walked the children of nights when they had been

babies and been ill of cutting teeth or croup or colic, nights when the lights in this room had been the only lights in the entire block. Here the family had spent many evening hours in happiness and peace—and it had been a lovely thing, the peace. For he could remember the time when there had been no peace, nowhere on the world, and no thought or hope of peace, but in its place the ever-present dread and threat of war, a dread that had been so commonplace that you scarcely noticed it, a dread you came to think was a normal part of living.

Then, suddenly, there had been the dread no longer, for you could not fight a war if your enemy could look ahead an entire day and see what was about to happen. You could not fight a war and you could not play a game of baseball or any sort of game, you could not rob or cheat or murder, you could not make a killing in the market. There were a lot of things you could no longer do and there were times when it spoiled a lot of fun, for surprise and anticipation had been made impossible. It took a lot of getting used to and a lot of readjustment, but you were safe, at least, for there could be no war—not only at the moment, but forever and forever, and you knew that not only were you safe, but your children safe as well and their children and your children's children's children and you were willing to pay almost any sort of price for such complete assurance.

It is better this way, he told himself, standing in the friendly room. It is much better this way. Although at times it's hard.

HE WALKED across the room and through it to the porch and stood on the porch steps looking at the flowers. Florence was right, he thought; they were prettier this year than any year before. He tried to remember back to some year when they might have been prettier, but he couldn't quite be sure. Maybe the autumn when young John had been a baby, for that year the mums and asters had been particularly fine. But that was unfair, he told himself, for it was not autumn now, but summer. It was impossible to compare summer flowers with autumn. Or the year when Mary had been ill so long—the lilacs had been so deeply purple and had smelled so sweet; he remembered bringing in great bouquets of them each evening because she loved them so. But that was no comparison, for the lilacs bloomed in spring.

A neighbor went past on the sidewalk outside the picket fence and he spoke gravely to

her: "Good afternoon, Mrs. Abrams."

"Good afternoon, Mr. Williams," she said and that was the way it always was, except on occasions she would stop a moment and they'd talk about the flowers. But today she would not stop unless he made it plain he would like to have her stop, for otherwise she would not wish to intrude upon him.

That was the way it had been at the office, he recalled.

He'd put away his work with sure and steady hands—as sure and steady as he could manage them. He'd walked to the rack and got down his hat and no one had spoken to him, not a single one of them had kidded him about his quitting early, for all had guessed—or known—as well as he. You could not always tell, of course, for the foresight ability was more pronounced in some than it was in others, although the lag in even the least efficient of them would not be more than a quarter-hour at most.

He'd often wished he could understand how it had been brought about, but there were factors involved he could not even remotely grasp. He knew the story, of course, for he could remember the night that it had happened and the excitement there had been—and the consternation. But knowing how it came about and the reason for it was quite a different thing from understanding it.

It had been an ace in the hole, a move of desperation to be used only as a last resort. The nation had been ready for a long time with the transmitters all set up and no one asking any questions because everyone had taken it for granted they were a part of the radar network and, in that case, the less said of them the better.

No one had wanted to use those transmitters, or at least that had been the official explanation after they'd been used—but anything was better than another war.

So the time had come, the time of last resort, the day of desperation, and the switches had been flicked, blanketing the nation with radiations that did something to the brain—"stimulating latent abilities" was as close a general explanation as anyone had made—and all at once everyone had been able to see twenty-four hours ahead.

There'd been hell to pay, of course, for quite a little while, but after a time it simmered down and the people settled down to make the best of it, to adapt and live with their strange new ability.

The President had gone on television to tell the world what had happened and he had warn-

ed potential enemies that we'd know twenty-four hours ahead of time exactly what they'd do. In consequence of which they did exactly nothing except to undo a number of incriminating moves they had already made—some of which the President had foretold that they would undo, naming the hour and place and the manner of their action.

He had said the process was no secret and that other nations were welcome to the know-how if they wanted it, although it made but little difference if they did or not, for the radiations in time would spread throughout the entire world and would affect all people. It was a permanent change, he said, for the ability was inheritable and would be passed on from one generation to the next, and never again, for good or evil, would the human race be blind as it had been in the past.

SO FINALLY there had been peace, but there'd been a price to pay. Although, perhaps, not too great a price, Williams told himself. He'd liked baseball, he recalled, and there could be no baseball now, for it was a pointless thing to play a game the outcome of which you'd know a day ahead of time. He had liked to have the boys in occasionally for a round of poker—but poker was just as pointless now and as impossible as baseball or football or horse racing or any other sport.

There had been many changes, some of them quite awkward. Take newspapers, for example, and radio and television reporting of the news. Political tactics had been forced to undergo a change, somewhat for the better, and gambling and crime had largely disappeared.

Mostly, it had been for the best. Although even some of the best was a little hard at first—and some of it would take a long time to become completely accustomed to.

Take his own situation now, he thought.

A lot more civilized than in the old days, but still fairly hard to take. Hard especially on Florence and the children, forcing them into a new and strange attitude that in time would harden into custom and tradition, but now was merely something new and strange. But Florence was standing up to it admirably, he thought. They'd often talked of it, especially in these last few years, and they had agreed that no matter which of them it was they would keep it calm and dignified, for that was the only way to face it. It was one of the payments that you made for peace, although sometimes it was a little hard to look at it that way.

But there were certain compensations. Florence and he could have a long talk before the children arrived. There'd be a chance to go over certain final details—finances and insurance and other matters of like nature. Under the old way there would have been, he told himself, no chance at all for that. There'd be the opportunity to do all the little worthwhile things, all the final sentimental gestures, that except for the foresight ability would have been denied.

There'd be talk with the children and the neighbors bringing things to eat and the big bouquet of flowers the office gang would send—the flowers that under other circumstances he never would have seen. The minister would drop in for a moment and manage to get in a quiet word or two of comfort, all the time making it seem to be no more than a friendly call. In the morning the mail would bring many little cards and notes of friendship sent by people who wanted him to know they thought of him and would have liked to have been with him if there had been the time. But they would not intrude, for the time that was left was a family time.

The family would sit and talk, remembering the happy days—the dog that Eddie had and the time John had run away from home for an hour or two and the first time Mary had ever had a date and the dress she wore. They'd take out the snapshot albums and look at the pictures, recalling all the days of bittersweetness and would know that theirs had been a good life—and especially he would know. And through it all would run the happy clatter of grandchildren playing in the house, climbing up on Granddad's knee to have him tell a story.

All so civilized, he thought.

Giving all of them a chance to prove they were civilized.

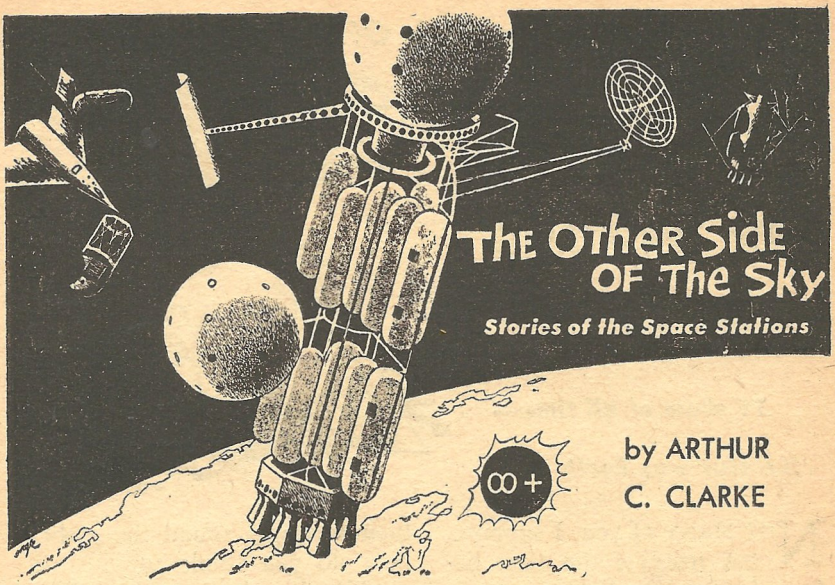
He'd have to go back inside the house now, for he could hear Florence arranging the flowers in the birthday vase that was blue and gold. And they had so much to say to one another—even after forty years they still had so much to say to one another.

He turned and glanced back at the garden.

Most beautiful flowers, he thought, that they had ever raised.

He'd go out in the morning, when the dew was on them, when they were most beautiful, to bid them all good-bye.

∞ ∞ ∞



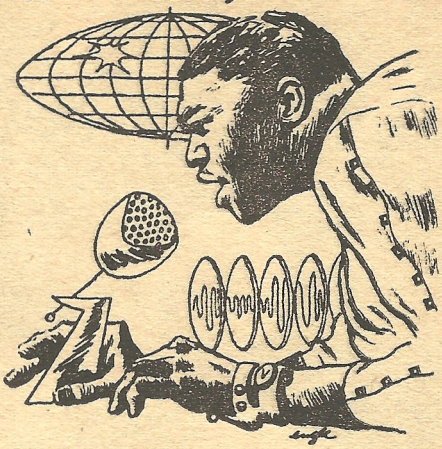
by ARTHUR C. CLARKE

an *Infinity–plus* feature

The space stations will, we have often heard, serve as stepping stones on our journey into space. But it takes a writer of the caliber of Arthur C. Clarke to show exactly how it will happen. In the last three stories of a complete set of six, presented on the following pages, he shows us both the human and the scientific aspects of this great adventure.

The Other Side Of The Sky : 4

Freedom of Space



It was the greatest TV show of all time— the star was Earth

NOT MANY of you, I suppose, can imagine the time before the Satellite Relays gave us our present world communications system. When I was a boy, it was impossible to send TV programs across the oceans, or even to establish reliable radio contact around the curve of the earth without picking up a fine assortment of crackles and bangs on the way. Yet now we take interference-free circuits for granted, and think nothing of seeing our friends on the other side of the globe as clearly as if we were standing face to face. Indeed, it's a simple fact that without the Satellite Relays, the whole structure of world commerce and industry would collapse. Unless we were up here on the space stations to bounce their messages round the globe, how do you think any of the world's big business organizations could keep their widely-scattered electronic brains in touch with each other?

But all this was still in the future, back in the late '70's, when we were finishing work on the Relay Chain. I've already told you about some of our problems and near-disasters; they were serious enough at the time, but in the end we overcame them all. The three stations spaced around Earth were no longer piles of girders, air-cylinders and plastic pressure-chambers. Their assembly had been completed, we had moved aboard and could now work in comfort, unhampered by space-suits. And we had gravity again,

now that the stations had been set slowly spinning. Not real gravity, of course; but centrifugal force feels exactly the same when you're out in space. It was pleasant being able to pour drinks and to sit down without drifting away on the first air current.

Once the three stations had been built, there was still a year's solid work to be done installing all the radio and TV equipment that would lift the world's communication networks into space. It was a great day when we established the first TV link between England and Australia. The signal was beamed up to us in Relay Two, as we sat above the center of Africa, we flashed it across to Three—poised over New Guinea—and they shot it down to Earth again, clear and clean after its 90,000-mile journey.

These, however, were the engineers' private tests. The official opening of the system would be the biggest event in the history of world communication—an elaborate global telecast, in which every nation would take part. It would be a three-hour show, as for the first time the live TV camera roamed around the world, proclaiming to mankind that the last barrier of distance was down.

The program planning, it was cynically believed, had taken as much effort as the building of the space stations in the first place, and of all the problems the planners had to solve, the most difficult was that of choosing a master of ceremonies to introduce the items in the elaborate global show that would be watched by half the human race.

Heaven knows how much conniving, blackmail and downright character assassination went on behind the scenes. All we knew is that a week before the great day, a non-scheduled rocket came up to orbit with Gregory Wendell aboard. This was quite a surprise, since Gregory wasn't as big a TV personality as, say, Jeffers Jackson in the U. S., or Vince Clifford in Britain. However, it seemed that the big boys had canceled each other out, and Gregg had got the coveted job through one of those compromises so well-known to politicians.

Gregg had started his career as a disc-jockey on a university radio station in the American Midwest, and had worked his way up through the Hollywood and Manhattan night-club circuits until he had a daily, nationwide program of his own. Apart from his cynical yet relaxed personality, his biggest asset was his deep velvet voice, for which he could probably thank his Negro blood. Even when you flatly disagreed with what he was saying

—even, indeed, when he was tearing you to pieces in an interview—it was still a pleasure to listen to him.

WE GAVE HIM the Grand Tour of the station, and even (strictly against regulations) took him out through the airlock in a spacesuit. He loved it all, but there were two things he liked in particular. "This air you make," he said. "It beats the stuff we have to breathe down in New York. This is the first time my sinus trouble has gone since I went into TV." He also relished the low gravity; at the station's rim, a man had half his normal, Earth weight—and at the axis he had no weight at all.

However, the novelty of his surroundings didn't distract Gregg from his job. He spent hours at communications central, polishing his script and getting his cues right, and studying the dozens of monitor screens that would be his windows on the world. I came across him once while he was running through his introduction to Queen Elizabeth, who would be speaking from Buckingham Palace at the very end of the program. He was so intent on his rehearsal that he never even noticed I was standing beside him.

Well, that telecast is now part of history. For the first time a billion human beings watched a single program that came "live" from every corner of the Earth, and was a roll-call of the world's greatest citizens. Hundreds of cameras on land and sea and air looked inquiringly at the turning globe; and at the end there was that wonderful shot of the earth through a zoom-lens on the space station, making the whole planet recede until it was lost among the stars. . . .

There were a few hitches, of course. One camera on the bed of the Atlantic wasn't ready on cue, and we had to spend some extra time looking at the Taj Mahal. And owing to a switching error Russian sub-titles were superimposed on the South American transmission, while half the U.S.S.R. found itself trying to read Spanish. But this was nothing to what *might* have happened.

Through the entire three hours, introducing the famous and the unknown with equal ease, was the mellow yet never orotund flow of Gregg's voice. He did a magnificent job; congratulations came pouring up the beam the moment the broadcast finished. But he didn't hear them; he made one short, private call to his agent, and then went to bed.

Next morning, the Earth-bound ferry was waiting to take

him back to any job he cared to accept. But it left without Gregg Wendell, now Junior Station Announcer of Satellite Two.

"They'll think I'm crazy," he said, beaming happily, "but why should I go back to that rat-race down there? I've all the Universe to look at, I can breathe smog-free air, the low gravity makes me feel a Hercules, and my three darling ex-wives can't get at me." He kissed his hand to the departing rocket. "So long, Earth," he called, "I'll be back when I start pining for Broadway traffic jams and bleary penthouse dawns. And if I get homesick, I can look at anywhere on the planet just by turning a switch. Why, I'm more in the middle of things here than I could ever be on Earth, yet I can cut myself off from the human race whenever I want to."

He was still smiling as he watched the ferry begin the long fall back to Earth, towards the fame and fortune that could have been his. And then, whistling cheerfully, he left the observation lounge in eight-foot strides to read the weather forecast for Lower Patagonia. ∞

The Other Side Of The Sky: 5

Passer By

Love will find a way, even if it must cross 900 miles of space

IT'S ONLY FAIR to warn you, right at the start, that this is a story with no ending. But it has a definite beginning, for it was while we were both students at Astrotech that I met Julie. She was in her final year of Solar Physics while I was graduating,

and during our last year at college we saw a good deal of each other. I've still got the woolen tam-o'shanter she knitted so that I wouldn't bump my head against my space-helmet. (No, I never had the nerve to wear it.)

Unfortunately, when I was assigned to Satellite Two, Julie went to the Solar Observatory—at the same distance from Earth, but a couple of degrees eastwards along the orbit. So there we were, sitting twenty-two thousand miles above the middle of Africa—but with nine hundred miles of empty, hostile space between us.

At first we were both so busy that the pang of separation was somewhat lessened. But when the novelty of life in space had worn off, our thoughts began to bridge the gulf that divided us. And not only our thoughts, for I'd made friends with the communications people, and we used to have little chats over the interstation TV circuit. In some ways it made matters worse seeing each other face to face, and never knowing just how many other people were looking in at the same time. There's not much privacy in a space station. . . .

Sometimes I'd focus one of our telescopes on the distant, brilliant star of the Observatory. In the crystal clarity of space, I could use enormous magnifications, and could see every detail of our neighbors' equipment—the solar telescopes, the pressurized spheres of the living quarters that housed the staff, the slim pencils of visiting ferry rockets that had climbed up from Earth. Very often there would be spacesuited figures moving among the maze of apparatus, and I would strain my eyes in a hopeless attempt at identification. It's hard enough to recognize anyone in a spacesuit when you're only a few feet apart—but that didn't stop me from trying.

We'd resigned ourselves to waiting, with what patience we could muster, until our Earth leave was due in six months' time, when we had an unexpected stroke of luck. Less than half our tour of duty had passed when the head of the Transport Section suddenly announced that he was going outside with a butterfly net to catch meteors. He didn't become violent, but had to be shipped hastily back to Earth. I took over his job on a temporary basis and now had—in theory at least—the freedom of space.

THERE WERE TEN of the little low-powered rocket scooters under my proud command, as well as four of the larger inter-station shuttles used to ferry stores and personnel from orbit to orbit.

I couldn't hope to borrow one of *those,* but after several weeks of careful organizing I was able to carry out the plan I'd conceived some two micro-seconds after being told I was now head of Transport.

There's no need to tell how I juggled duty lists, cooked logs and fuel registers, and persuaded my colleagues to cover up for me. All that matters is that, about once a week, I would climb into my personal space-suit, strap myself to the spidery framework of a Mark III scooter, and drift away from the station at minimum power. When I was well clear, I'd go over to full throttle and the tiny rocket motor would hustle me across the nine-hundred-mile gap to the Observatory.

The trip took about thirty minutes, and the navigational requirements were elementary. I could see where I was going and where I'd come from, yet I don't mind admitting that I often felt —well, a trifle lonely—around the mid-point of the journey. There was no other solid matter within almost five hundred miles —and it looked an awfully long way down to Earth. It was a great help, at such moments, to turn the suit radio to the general service band, and to listen to all the back-chat between ships and stations.

At mid-flight I'd have to spin the scooter around and start braking, and ten minutes later the Observatory would be close enough for its details to be visible to the unaided eye. Very shortly after that I'd drift up to a small, plastic pressure bubble that was in the process of being fitted out as a spectroscopic laboratory—and there would be Julie, waiting on the other side of the airlock. . . .

I won't pretend that we confined our discussions to the latest results in astrophysics, or the progress of the satellite construction schedule. Few things, indeed, were further from our thoughts; and the journey home always seemed to flash by at a quite astonishing speed.

IT WAS around mid-orbit on one of those homeward trips that the radar started to flash on my little control panel. There was something large at extreme range, and it was coming in fast. A meteor, I told myself—maybe even a small asteroid. Anything giving such a signal should be visible to the eye: I read off the bearings, and searched the star fields in the indicated direction. The thought of a collision never even crossed my mind; space is so inconceivably vast that I was thousands of times safer than a man crossing a busy street on Earth.

There it was—a bright and

steadily-growing star near the foot of Orion. It already outshone Rigel, and seconds later it was not merely a star, but had begun to show a visible disc. Now it was moving as fast as I could turn my head; it grew to a tiny, misshaped moon, then dwindled and shrank with that same silent, inexorable speed.

I suppose I had a clear view of it for perhaps half a second, and that half second has haunted me all my life. The—object—had already vanished by the time I thought of checking the radar again, so I had no way of gauging how close it came, and hence how large it really was. It could have been a small object a hundred feet away—or a very large one, ten miles off. There is no sense of perspective in space, and unless you know what you are looking at, you cannot judge its distance.

Of course, it *could* have been a very large and oddly-shaped meteor; I can never be sure that my eyes, straining to grasp the details of so swiftly-moving an object, were not hopelessly deceived. I may have imagined that I saw that broken, crumpled prow, and the cluster of dark ports like the sightless sockets of a skull. Of one thing only I was certain, even in that brief and fragmentary vision. If it *was* a ship, it was none of ours. Its shape was utterly alien, and it was very, very old.

It may be that the greatest discovery of all time slipped from my grasp, as I struggled with my thoughts midway between the two space stations. But I had no measurements of speed or direction; whatever it was that I had glimpsed was now lost beyond recapture in the wastes of the Solar System.

What should I have done? No one would ever have believed me, for I would have had no proof. Had I made a report, there would have been endless trouble. I should have become the laughing stock of the Space Service, would have been reprimanded for misuse of equipment—and would certainly not have been able to see Julie again. And to me, at that age, nothing else was as important. If you've been in love yourself, you'll understand; if not, then no explanation is any use.

So I said nothing. To some other man (how many centuries hence?) will go the fame for proving that we were not the first-born of the children of the sun. Whatever it may be that is circling out there on its eternal orbit can wait, as it has waited ages already.

Yet I sometimes wonder. Would I have made a report, after all—had I known that Julie was going to marry someone else? ∞ ∞

The Call Of The Stars

When the moon ships are launched, the greatest heroes may be those who have to stay behind

DOWN THERE on Earth the Twentieth Century is dying. As I look across at the shadowed globe blocking the stars, I can see the lights of a hundred sleepless cities, and there are moments when I wish that I could be among the crowds now surging and singing in the streets of London, Capetown, Rome, Paris, Berlin, Madrid. . . . Yes, I can see them all at a single glance, burning like fireflies against the darkened planet. The line of midnight is now bisecting Europe: in the eastern Mediterranean a tiny, brilliant star is pulsing as some exuberant pleasure ship waves her searchlights to the sky. I think she is deliberately aiming at us; for the past few minutes the flashes have been quite regular and startlingly bright. Presently I'll call communications center and find out who she is,

so that I can radio back our own greetings.

Passing into history now, receding forever down the stream of time, is the most incredible hundred years the world has ever seen. It opened with the conquest of the air, saw at its midpoint the unlocking of the atom —and now ends with the bridging of space.

(For the past five minutes I've been wondering what's happening to Nairobi; now I realize that they are putting on a mammoth fireworks display. Chemically-fueled rockets may be obsolete out here—but they're still using lots of them down on Earth tonight.)

The end of a century—and the end of a millennium. What will the hundred years that begin with Two and Zero bring? The planets, of course; floating there in space, only a mile away, are the ships of the First Martian Expedition. For two years I have watched them grow, assembled piece by piece, as the space station itself was built by the men I worked with a generation ago.

Those ten ships are ready now, with all their crews aboard, waiting for the final instrument check and the signal for departure. Before the first day of the new century has passed its noon, they will be tearing free from the reins of Earth, to head out towards the strange world which may one day be Man's second home.

As I LOOK at the brave little fleet which is now preparing to challenge infinity, my mind goes back forty years, to the days when the first satellites were launched and the moon still seemed very far away. And I remember—indeed, I have never forgotten—my father's fight to keep me down on Earth.

There were not many weapons he had failed to use. Ridicule had been the first: "Of course they can do it," he had sneered, "but what's the point? Who wants to go out into space while there's so much to be done here on Earth? There's not a single planet in the Solar System where men can live. The moon's a burnt-out slag-heap, and everywhere else is even worse. *This* is where we were meant to live."

Even then (I must have been eighteen or so at the time) I could tangle him up in points of logic. I can remember answering, "How do you know where we were meant to live, Dad? After all, we were in the sea for about a billion years before we decided to tackle the land. Now we're making the next big jump: I don't know where it will lead —nor did that first fish when it crawled up on the beach and started to sniff the air."

So when he couldn't out-argue

me, he had tried subtler pressures. He was always talking about the dangers of space-travel, and the short working life of anyone foolish enough to get involved in rocketry. At that time, people were still scared of meteors and cosmic rays; like the "Here Be Dragons" of the old map-makers, they were the mythical monsters on the still-blank celestial charts. But they didn't worry me; if anything, they added the spice of danger to my dreams.

While I was going through college, Father was comparatively quiet. My training would be valuable whatever profession I took up in later life, so he could not complain—though he occasionally grumbled about the money I wasted buying all the books and magazines on astronautics that I could find. My college record was good, which naturally pleased him; perhaps he did not realize that it would also help me to get my way.

All through my final year I had avoided talking of my plans. I had even given the impression (though I am sorry for that now) that I had abandoned my dream of going into space. Without saying anything to him, I put in my application to Astrotech, and was accepted as soon as I had graduated.

The storm broke when that long blue envelope with the embossed heading, "Institute of Astronautical Technology" dropped into the mail-box. I was accused of deceit and ingratitude, and I do not think I ever forgave my father for destroying the pleasure I should have felt at being chosen for the most exclusive—and most glamorous—apprenticeship the world has ever known.

The vacations were an ordeal; had it not been for Mother's sake, I do not think I would have gone home more than once a year, and I always left again as quickly as I could. I had hoped that he would mellow as my training progressed and he accepted the inevitable, but he never did.

Then had come that stiff and awkward parting at the spaceport, with the rain streaming down from leaden skies and beating against the smooth walls of the ship that seemed so eagerly waiting to climb into the eternal sunlight beyond the reach of storms. I know now what it cost my father to watch the machine he hated swallow up his only son: for I understand many things today that were hidden from me then.

He knew, even as we parted at the ship, that he would never see me again. Yet his old, stubborn pride kept him from saying the only words that might have held me back. I knew that

he was ill, but how ill, he had told no one. That was the only weapon he had not used against me, and I respect him for it.

WOULD I have stayed, had I known? It is even more futile to speculate about the unchangeable past than the unforeseeable future; all I can say now is that I am glad I never had to make the choice. At the end he let me go; he gave up his fight against my ambition, and a little while later he gave up his fight with death.

So I said goodbye to Earth, and to the father who loved me but knew no way to say it. He lies down there on the planet I can cover with my hand; how strange it is to think that, of the countless billion human beings whose blood runs in my veins, I was the very first to leave his native world. . . .

The new day is breaking over Asia; a hairline of fire is rimming the eastern edge of Earth. Soon it will grow into a burning crescent as the sun comes up out of the Pacific—yet Europe is preparing for sleep, except for those revellers who will stay up to greet the dawn.

And now, over there by the flagship, the ferry rocket is coming back for the last visitors from the station. Here comes the message I have been waiting for: "Captain Stevens presents his compliments to the Station Commander. Blast-off will be in ninety minutes; he will be glad to see you aboard now."

Well, Father, now I know how you felt: time has gone full circle. Yet I hope that I have learned from the mistakes we both made, long ago. I shall remember you, when I go over there to the flagship *Starfire,* and say goodbye to the grandson you never knew.

∞ ∞ ∞

The Enemy

by RICHARD WILSON

It was a totally new kind of war, and yet not really a new war at all

AT DUSK the sergeant leaned over the parapet, weary, looking south toward the enemy lines. For him this was the worst part of the day. The fighting was done until tomorrow and the enemy casualties were being brought in through the gate below. Their bodies were piled in awful abandon on the big flat-bed trucks.

A phrase from another war came to his mind. Walking wounded. There were no walking wounded in this war. They came in on the trucks, still and tangled, or they didn't come in at all.

He couldn't have merely wounded one of the enemy, as soldiers used to. The thought of inflicting such an injury, in the old conventional way, was obscene. To strike through the breast into the heart. . . . He shuddered with a trembling that came up through the thighs and contracted his stomach.

The lieutenant had come to stand beside him.

"You shouldn't watch, if it bothers you," the lieutenant said.

"It's all right, sir," the sergeant said. He looked down again.

"We had a good day. Three hundred, the colonel said."

"That's good." The sergeant laughed sardonically. "Are we winning?"

"It's hard to say. We're not losing."

"Aren't we, sir?" The sergeant spoke bitterly. "Aren't they? Aren't we all?"

"Look, sergeant—" the lieutenant began. Then he shrugged. The sergeant was older than he was by seven or eight years. There was no need to give him an orientation lecture. He reached in his pocket and took out a fresh pack of cigarettes. He opened it. "Have one. A shipment just got in."

"Thanks." The sergeant took a cigarette. He stared at it and the fingers holding it trembled. "Look at it," he said hollowly. "Look at the freakin' thing!"

The lieutenant looked at it, then at the front of the pack. *Ruby tips to match your lips,* it said under the brand name.

"What are they doing to us?" the sergeant said. He crumpled the cigarette in his fist and threw it down and ground it under his boot. "Isn't it hard enough?"

"It must be a mistake," the lieutenant said. He sounded shaken, too. "Because of the shortage, maybe. Unless it's a fifth column trick. Like the rumor about them not going to wake up again."

"It is just a rumor, isn't it?" the sergeant said. His voice was almost pleading. "We just freeze them for—for the duration, don't we? Don't we, lieutenant? Because I couldn't go on if they were really dead. Nobody could."

The lieutenant spoke sharply. "Snap out of it, sergeant! It's just propaganda. I'm surprised at an old hand like you falling for it."

"I'm not, sir. We couldn't really kill them, could we? It'd be suicide, wouldn't it? It's not total war, is it?"

"Not total, no. There'll be an end to it one day, and then a beginning again. I know it's hard, but it's the only way."

THE LAST of the big trucks had rumbled in from the battlefield. The sergeant watched the gate close in the fading light. Beloved enemy, he thought.

"Three hundred today," he said aloud. "And one was my personal contribution. My platoon was strung out behind me, and she came up over the hill—"

"Sergeant!"

"She was mine. I got her personally. I aimed slow and held the sight on her. Then I let

go. It was almost like—"

"Sergeant!" The lieutenant was trembling. "The third person singular is prohibited! You know that, sergeant!"

The sergeant was calm. "Yes, sir." He looked at the young officer. "But I feel better for having told about it. I'm all right now, sir. I hope I didn't upset you."

"No," the lieutenant said. "No. We'll forget about it."

"I'll have one of those cigarettes now, sir, if you don't mind. It doesn't matter about the tip, now that it's dark."

"Well . . ." The lieutenant hesitated. "I was going to send them back to Quartermaster, with a report. But all right. Here. I'll have one, too."

As the sergeant lit them he could see a bit of the red tip in the lieutenant's mouth. He dragged deep on his own, pretending he could taste lipstick.

"Lieutenant," he said. "It doesn't matter where you hit them, does it? I mean it doesn't hurt them at all?"

"No," the lieutenant said. "No, it doesn't matter. They just go to sleep."

"I'm glad." After a while the sergeant said, "I guess I'll hit the sack."

"It's still early."

"Yes. But I like to get up early. There's always a line in the latrine—at the shaving bowls."

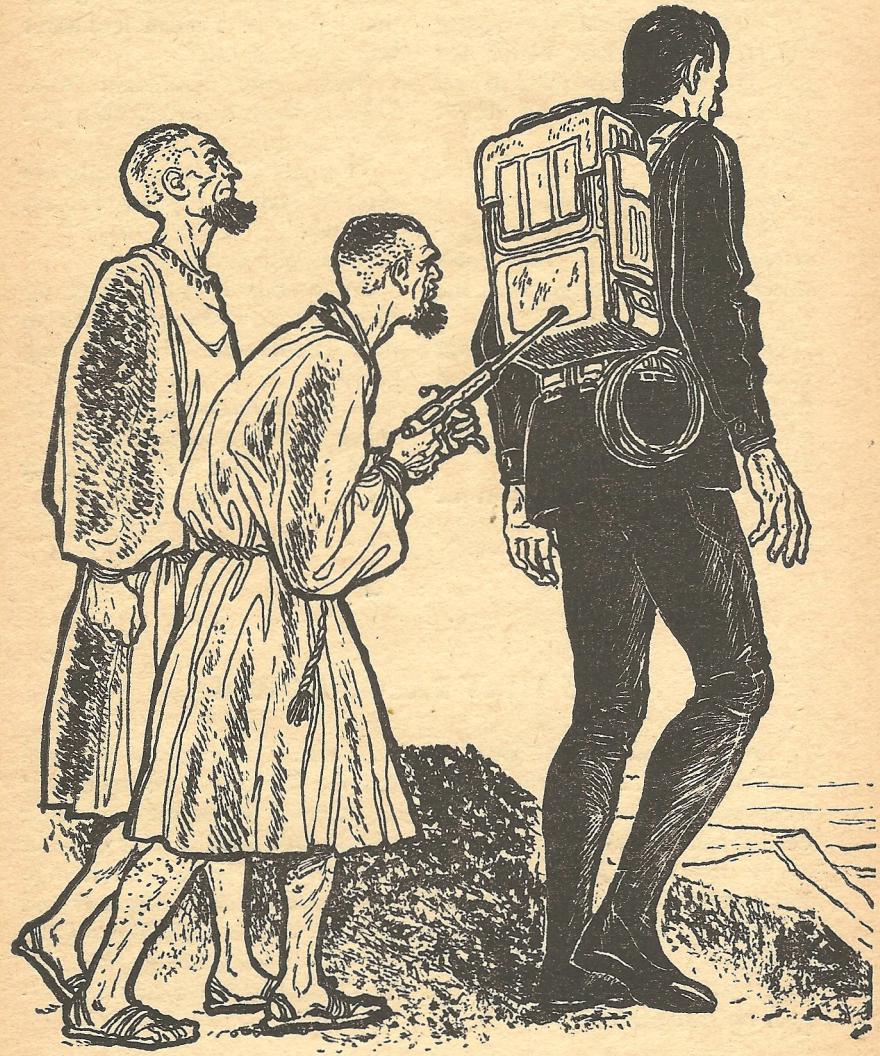
"Combat troops don't have to shave," the lieutenant said.

"I know. But we do. We all do."

∞ ∞ ∞

Fraud? Larceny? Murder? All in a days work

to Leland Hale—the savior of Cardigan's Green!



"One murder makes a villain; millions, a hero; numbers sanctify the crime."

—Porteus

by RANDALL GARRETT

TO MAKE A HERO

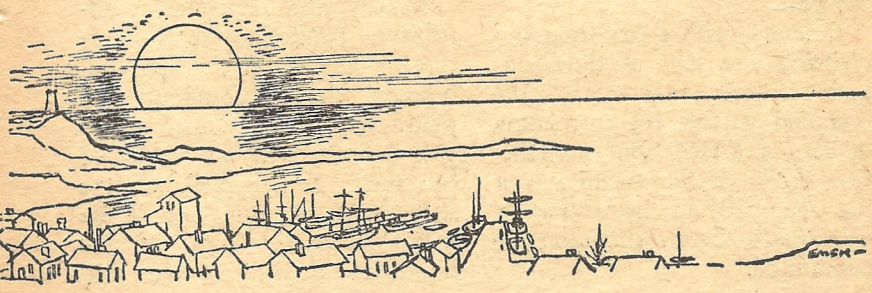
Illustrated by EMSH

CHAPTER I

HISTORY, by any reckoning, is a fluid thing. Once a thing has happened, no instrument yet devised by man can show exactly what it was in minute detail. *All* of the data simply cannot be recovered.

In spite of this, if Man were an intellectually honest animal, it wouldn't be too difficult to get a reasonably accurate picture of the past. At least the data that could be recovered and retained would show a reasonably distinct picture of long gone events and their relationship to the present.

But Man isn't that kind of creature. Once men discovered the fact that the events of to-



morrow are based on what is happening today, it didn't take them long to reach the conclusion that changing the past could change the present. Words are magic, and the more cleverly and powerfully they are connected together, the more magic they become. The ancient "historians" of Babylon, Egypt, Israel, Sumeria, Judea, and Rome did not conceive of themselves as liars when they distorted history to conform to their own beliefs; they were convinced that if what they wrote were accepted as true, then it *was* true. Word magic had changed the past to conform to the present.

Now, one would suppose that, as methods of recording and verifying the contemporary happenings of a culture became more and more efficient and more easily correlated, the ability to change the past would become more difficult. Not true. The actual records of the past are not read by the average man; he is normally exposed only to biased, carefully selected excerpts from the past.

Granted, with a few thousand civilized and tens of thousands semi-civilized planets in the occupied galaxy, the correlation of data is difficult. But, nonetheless, errors of the magnitude of the one made in the history of Cardigan's Green shouldn't be committed.

The average man doesn't give two hoots in hell about historical truth; he would much rather have romantic legends and historic myths. The story of Cardigan's Green is a case in point.

Call this a debunking spree if you wish, but the facts can be found in the archives of the Interstellar Police and the Interstellar Health Commission; and the news recordings on several nearby planets uphold the story to a certain extent, although the beginnings of the distortion were already visible.

Time and space have a tendency to dilute truth, and it is the job of the honest historian to distill the essence from the mixture.

The story proper begins nearly a century ago, just before Leland Hale landed on Cardigan's Green, but in order to understand exactly what happened, it is necessary to go back even farther in time—a full three centuries. It was at that time that the race of Man first came to Cardigan's Green.

Exactly what happened is difficult to determine. It is likely that the captain of the ship that brought the colonists to the planet actually was named Cardigan, but there is no record of the man, nor, indeed, of the ship itself. At any rate, there *was* a ship, and it carried five hundred colonists, if the ship

RANDALL GARRETT *got to wondering, recently, what kind of stories the "true adventure" magazines of the future would publish.* To Make a Hero *is his own answer to the question. It's science fiction told from a historian's viewpoint—an attempt to set the "record" straight on one Leland Hale, a hero who is guaranteed to fascinate you, even if you hate him!*

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was representative of the colonial ships of the time. Evidently, they tore the ship down to make various other equipment they needed, which, of course, marooned them on the planet. But that was what they wanted, anyway; it is usual among colonists.

And then the Plague struck.

The colonists had no resistance whatever to the disease. Every one of them caught it, bar none. And ninety per cent of them died while the rest recovered. Fifty people, alone on a strange planet. And, as human beings always do, they went on living.

The next generation was on its way to adulthood when the Plague struck again. Seventy-five per cent of them died.

It was over a hundred years before the people of Cardigan's Green received another visit from the Plague, and this time less than twenty per cent died.

But, even so, they had a terrible, deep-seated fear of the Plague. Even another century couldn't completely wipe it out.

And that was more or less the way things stood when Leland Hale snapped his ship out of infraspace near the bright G-2 sun that was Cardigan's Green's primary.

LELAND HALE looked at the planet that loomed large in his visiscreen and his eyes narrowed automatically, as they always did when he was in deep thought. The planet wasn't registered in the *Navigator's Manual* or on the stellographic charts. The sun itself had a number, but the planet wasn't mentioned.

Hale was a big man; his shoulders were much wider than they had any right to be, his arms were thick and cabled with muscle, and his chest was broad and deep. Most men who stand six-feet-six look lean and lanky, but Hale actually looked broad and somewhat squat. At one standard gee of acceleration—1000 cm/sec^2—he topped three hundred pounds. There was just enough fat on his body to smooth the outlines a little; his bones were big, as they had to be to anchor tendons solidly; and he had the normal complement of glands and nerves to keep the

body functioning well. All the rest of him seemed to be muscle —pounds and pounds of hard, powerful muscle.

His head was large in proportion; a size 8 hat would have suited him perfectly—if he'd ever troubled to buy a hat. His face was regular enough to be considered handsome, and too blocky and hard to be considered pretty. His dark hair, brown eyes, and tanned skin marked him as most likely being of late-migration Earth stock.

He looked from the visiscreen to the detector plate. There wasn't a trace on it. There hadn't been for days. The skewed, almost random orbit he had taken from Bargell IV had lifted him well above the galactic plane, and he was a long way, now, from where he had started.

If the yellow light from Bargell's Sun could have penetrated the heavy clouds of dust and gas that congregated at the galactic center, it would have taken it more than seventy thousand years to reach Cardigan's Green.

No trace on the detector. Good. There was one advantage in stealing a fully equipped Interstellar Police ship; if his pursuers couldn't be detected on their own equipment, they couldn't detect him either—they were out of range of each other.

There were certain disadvantages in stealing an IP vessel, too. If he hadn't done it, the IP wouldn't be after him; his crime on Bargell IV hadn't come under their jurisdiction. Unfortunately, stealing the ship had been the only way to leave Bargell IV. Hale shrugged mentally; it was too late to worry about such trivialities now.

The empty detector plate meant something else. If there were no interstellar ships at all in the area, it was likely that the planet below was an isolated planet. There were plenty of them in the galaxy; when the infraspace drive had combined with Terrestrial overcrowding to produce the great migration, many of the pioneers had simply found themselves a planet, settled themselves into a community, dismantled their ship, and forgotten about the rest of mankind.

Well, that was all to the good. At top magnification, the viewscreen showed what appeared to be small villages and plowed lands, which indicated colonization. At least there would be someone around to talk to, and —maybe—a little profit to be made.

But the first thing he'd have to look for was a place to hide his ship.

THE PENIYAN RANGE is a bleak, windswept series of serrated peaks that crosses the

northern tip of the largest continent on Cardigan's Green. Geologically young, craggy, and with poor soil, they are uninhabited, for there is too little there to support life in any great numbers; the valleys and low hills to the south are more inviting and comfortable for humanity. Until the press of numbers forces it, there will be no need for the inhabitants of Cardigan's Green to live in the mountainous wasteland.

Finding a place of concealment in those jagged mountains ought to be fairly easy, Hale decided. He settled the spherical vessel gently to the ground at the bottom of a narrow gorge which had been cut out by a mountain freshet for a first look-around.

Grand larceny, fraud, and murder are first-magnitude crimes, but they are far more common than police statistics would lead one to believe. The galaxy is unbelievably vast, and the universe as a whole unthinkably vaster. The really adept criminal can easily lose himself in the tremendous whirlpool of stars that forms the Milky Way. Hale knew he had eluded the IP ships; therefore, unless he were found by the sheerest accident, he would be perfectly safe from the police for a long time to come.

Not that he intended to stay on Cardigan's Green for the rest of his life; far from it. He had five and a half million stellors in negotiable notes in the hold of his ship, and he would eventually want to get back to one of the civilized worlds where he could spend it. But that meant waiting until the scream for Leland Hale's blood had become submerged again in the general, galaxy-wide cry against a thousand million other marauders. Eventually, there would be other crimes, more recent, and therefore more important because they were still fresh in the public mind.

Leland Hale would wait.

For the first two weeks, he had plenty to do. He had to hide the ship well enough to keep it from being spotted from the air. It wasn't likely that the IP would find him, but if the colonists of this world had aircraft, they might wonder what a globe of metal was doing in their mountains.

He finally found a place under an overhanging monolith — a huge, solid slab of granite that would have taken an atomic disruptor to dislodge. Then he began piling rocks and gravel around it, working steadily from dawn until daylight—a goodly stretch of labor, since it was summer in the northern hemisphere and the planet made a complete rotation in a little

less than twenty-eight hours.

It didn't bother Hale. His powerful body was more than a match for ordinary physical labor, and he liked to have something to do to stave off boredom.

That was Hale's big trouble—boredom. Inactivity and monotony made him frantic. So it wasn't surprising that after the first two weeks, when the ship was finally well hidden, he strapped a pack on his back and went exploring.

He had a good reason for it. Leland Hale never did anything without a good, logical reason. He could never say to himself: "I'm bored; I'll just go out and look over the countryside to have something to do." He could not say it, even to himself, because it would be admitting to himself that he actually did not like his own company. And Hale was convinced that he was, in all respects, a thoroughly likable fellow.

His reason for exploration was a need for food. He had plenty in the ship, of course, and the synthesizer could use almost any organic material to make food as long as it had an energy source. But Hale didn't like synthetics, and he didn't want to draw on his power reserves, so he decided to see what kind of menu the local countryside had to offer.

The plant life he found in the mountains wasn't much. There were a few dry, hard bristly bushes, and a tough, gray-green growth that clung to the rocks—a mosslike lichen or a lichenlike moss, take your pick. Neither looked in the least edible.

So Hale headed down the mountains toward the south.

SOME DAYS LATER, as he approached the foothills, he found queer-looking bushes that bore purple berrylike things on their branches. He opened one, and, to his disgust, a white, wormlike thing writhed and squirmed in his hand until he crushed it and wiped his palms on a rock. Every berry he opened behaved the same way. He decided they were none too savory a fare.

He came at last to a warm sea near the foothills of the mountain range. The crags almost seemed to rise out of the water. Hale couldn't see across the body of water, but he knew what its shape was, having seen it from high altitude when he came in for a landing. It was actually a wide channel that cut off a large island from the mainland on which he stood. He narrowed his eyes at the horizon and fancied he could see a shadow of the island, but common sense told him it was an illusion; the island was at least forty miles away.

The water of the channel was quite warm—Hale estimated it at about seventy degrees—and filled with life. Each wave that surged up to the shore left wriggling things behind it as it retreated, and ugly, many-legged things scuttled across the pale blue sand.

It was the blue sand that decided Hale against trying any of the larger sea animals as a meal. The sand was coral sand, and the color indicated a possibility of copper or cobalt. If the animals themselves had an excess of either element in their metabolic processes, they might not be too good for Hale's system.

He shrugged, shouldered his pack, and headed south along the beach. He was in no hurry to find food. He had plenty of concentrate on his back; when exactly half of it was gone, he would head back towards his ship.

Cardigan's Green has no moons, and the relatively mild tides caused by the planet's sun are almost imperceptible, but Hale could see that the broad beach had been built by some sort of regular change in the level of the water—probably a seasonal wind shift of some kind. At any rate, he decided that, soft as it was, the sand was no place to spend the night.

Instead, he slept on a high cliff overlooking the sea. In the mountains, he had slept in his insulation jacket for warmth, but here the heat of the sea and the warm breeze that came from it precluded any need for the jacket, so he used it for a pillow.

Sometime near midnight, the wind changed. The chill wind from the mountains swept downward, and, meeting with the warm, moisture-laden air from the sea, blanketed the coast with a chilling fog.

Leland Hale, untroubled by anything so prosaic as a conscience, and justifiably tired from his long journey on foot, didn't notice the dropping temperature until the fog had actually become a light drizzle. He awoke to find himself shivering and wet and stiff. He put on the insulation jacket immediately, but it took time for his body to warm up and generate enough heat inside the jacket to make him reasonably comfortable. There was absolutely nothing on that rocky coast that could be induced to burn, especially since the rain had begun, so Hale had to forego the primitive comfort of a fire.

Just before dawn, the wind changed direction again, and the fog slowly dissipated under the influence of the sea breeze and the heat of the rising sun. Hale stripped off his clammy clothing and put it on a rock to dry, but

he already had the sniffles and sneezes.

LELAND HALE was nothing if not determined; his record shows that. Once he had decided on a course of action, only the gravest of obstacles could block his path. Most of them could be surmounted, flanked, or, in case of necessity, smashed through by pure brute strength.

Once, on Viyellan, he set up a scheme for selling a piece of bogus artwork to a wealthy collector. He had spent months of loving care in constructing an almost indetectable phony, and his preliminary contacts with the collector had been beautifully successful.

Hale insisted on cash for the artwork, which was to be delivered on a certain date. But the day before the appointed time, Hale's accomplice, thinking he could make a better profit elsewhere, absconded with the imitation.

Hale, knowing that the collector had drawn half a million stellors in cash, burgled his home that night. Then he had the temerity to show up the next morning to complete the agreement. When the collector discovered that there was no cash on hand to pay for the "artwork," Hale indignantly refused to sell, on the grounds that the collector had reneged, was unethical, and not to be trusted in any way.

A week or so later, Hale finally traced his errant accomplice to the small hotel where he was hiding. The next day, the accomplice was found mysteriously dead. On that same day, the wealthy collector, having pleaded with Hale to be given another chance, was forgiven, and he gratefully parted with another half million stellors for Hale's bogus tidbit. Hale was never seen again on Viyellan.

Leland Hale, therefore, was not the kind of man to let a little thing like a runny nose or a slight cough stop him. He put on his clothes when they had dried, adjusted his pack and headed on southwards.

CHAPTER II

HUMAN BEINGS are notoriously rapid breeders. Give a group of men and women a chance, and, with plenty of room to spread, they will nearly triple their population in each generation. Many will die, if the circumstances are adverse, but many more will live. Thus, in spite of the depredations of the Plague, the population of Cardigan's Green when Hale landed was well over thirty thousand souls, scattered thinly across the rich farmland near the coast of the channel.

On the coast itself, near the

edge of a rocky outcropping which sheltered a tiny harbor, was the fishing village of Taun. The colonists of Cardigan's Green had learned quickly enough which of the local fauna and flora were edible and which were not; it was a case of learn or die. Those sea denizens which could be eaten were in great demand, and commanded a fairly large price; those who were successful in catching them were affluent men of position in Taun.

Such a one was Yon the Fisher.

The Fisher was well thought of in Taun; he was a hard worker and a hard dealer in business, but one had to be in order to live on Cardigan's Green. Yon the Fisher had lived in Taun all his life; his father and his father's father had been Fishers before him. He possessed great wealth, as was attested by his ownership of a great many Crystals, which had, in twelve short years, become the medium of exchange on Cardigan's Green. He was the owner of five magnificent twenty-foot fishing smacks and a large, two-story house. The house was of stone, but this, in itself was not a sign of affluence; large trees were rare on Cardigan's Green, and had to be used to build ships, not houses.

But, in spite of his wealth, Yon the Fisher did not have enough. He wanted more. He dreamed of the stars.

Twelve years before, an interstellar ship—the *Morris*—had cracked up near the farm of Dornis the Fat. It had not been a bad accident; the crewmen had been able to repair it, and were almost ready to leave before the Plague had killed them all. Now, no one would go near the ship, in fear of the Plague. It was a shunned and taboo place —to all except Yon the Fisher. Yon simply didn't believe the Plague stayed around places where people had died of it—and, in a manner of speaking, he was perfectly right.

There had been a period when the crew of the downed ship had needed help in repairing their vessel, the like of which had not been seen on Cardigan's Green for two centuries. The crewmen had paid off in Crystals and in small machines that did various things. After the crew had died of the Plague, Yon the Fisher had waited for fifteen days; then, in the dead of night, he had entered the ship. The hold had been almost entirely full of Crystals.

Yon the Fisher was not an uneducated man; the books which had been brought with Cardigan's ship, two hundred years before, had been carefully preserved and used in spite of the heavy death toll of the Plague.

The Crystals alone meant nothing to him; what he wanted was the *Morris* itself. But the Crystals could be used—they represented wealth.

The Commander, the elected head of Cardigan's Green, liked jewels, and the beauty of the Crystals had caught his eyes, as they had everyone else's, and that made them valuable. If Yon played his cards right, he could become one of the wealthiest men on Cardigan's Green.

Eventually, the old Commander would die, and Yon intended to get himself elected in the Commander's place. Then he would finish repairing the spaceship.

He had dreams—big ones. He would rule Cardigan's Green. He would have a spaceship, all his own. He would have . . .

There would be no limit to the things he would have.

That was Yon the Fisher—intelligent, shrewd, and an excellent politician. He had a knack for making people like and respect him. He was wealthy, but he was not greedy for anything material. He wanted only one thing—power.

He, then, was a part of the second factor that entered into this phase of the history of Cardigan's Green.

THE THIRD FACTOR was a hospital ship of the Interstellar Health Commission, the *IHCS Caduceus.*

The ship was *en route* from Praxilies to Aldebaran, but she had to go off course to avoid an ion storm. A star went supernova in the Skull Nebula, and for six months or so the whole area was full of cosmic ray particles and mesons, which blocked the regular route.

Lieutenant Riggs Blair, the sub-radio operator, picked up a very weak distress call as they were making the loop around the Skull Nebula. He listened to it as it was repeated twice and then called the ship's commander, Captain Doctor Latimer Wills.

"Captain, I've got a distress signal. The freighter *Morris* developed generator trouble four weeks ago, when they got caught in that storm. Ruined their infraspace drive and fouled up their subspace radio—almost no power left."

"Put a call through to the police," the captain replied. "Just relay it through, that's all. Why bother me with something as simple as that?"

"There's more to it, sir; the men are dying. They're sick with some sort of disease."

"What are the symptoms?" the captain asked. There was a marked change in the tone of his voice. This was his meat.

Lieutenant Blair tried to raise

the *Morris* again, but got no response.

"Very well," said Captain Doctor Wills, "call Health Central, tell 'em what's happened. We're going down."

"I can't call Central, sir," the lieutenant objected. "That ion storm is between us. I'll try to relay it around."

"Good. We're going down, anyway."

It is a matter of record that the call never reached Health Central. Exactly where it got lost on the way isn't known, but a century ago such losses were by no means unusual.

Lieutenant Blair had pinpointed the spot where the *Morris* had landed within a hundred miles. The *Caduceus* hovered over the area and then settled slowly towards a fairly large offshore island, some forty miles from the mainland.

"There's a level area there," the captain said. "It would be the logical place for them to come down. If they didn't, we'll use the air ambulances to look the place over."

It had taken them twenty days to reach Cardigan's Green since they had heard the distress call.

YON THE FISHER saw the ship in the air. It was only a dot, fifty miles away, but it seemed to be dropping too slowly and too regularly to be anything natural. He was standing on the deck of one of his fishing vessels, looking toward the east, when the ship gleamed suddenly in the rays of the setting sun. Yon watched it for a moment, then he grabbed a small brass telescope. It was a ship—no doubt about it!

Were they coming to rescue the other ship? Whatever it was, they were up to no good, and Yon didn't like to see the vision of his future power go glimmering. He didn't know exactly what he could do, but he knew he'd have to do something.

He turned and bellowed to his first officer: "Prepare to cast off! We're heading for Stone Island!"

Precisely what happened in the next ten days isn't too clear. The crew of the *Caduceus* was in no condition to record it, and their memories were evidently not too good.

This much has been established: Yon the Fisher visited the ship and offered his help. It took the doctors a little time—an hour or so—to decipher his strange dialect, but they finally found that the help offered was worthless. Yon professed no knowledge of the wrecked *Morris*. He was dismissed, and he returned to the mainland. Within the next week, every man jack aboard the *Caduceus* was down with the Plague.

Yon returned, in force, to try to capture the ship. He nearly succeeded, but the crew of the hospital ship fought him off, weak as they were. Yon had not counted on their being ill, evidently, or he would never have gone near them. It was lucky for him they were, or his whole force would have been wiped out.

Yon and his men managed to gain entrance into the ship, and the fighting raged for twenty minutes or so before he and the sailors with him were driven off.

The physicians aboard the *Caduceus* were not in the unfortunate position that the men on the *Morris* had been. They were able to use the medical supplies they had aboard, and came through with less than ten per cent dead, in spite of the Plague.

But the battle between the crew and Yon's men had done irreparable damage to the ship. It could neither leave nor communicate with the outside. The crew of the *Caduceus* was stranded.

They could hold off any attacks; they had plenty of power. But they couldn't, they didn't dare, leave the island. If the Plague struck again—and they had no way of knowing whether it would or not—they would not have enough medicine to be effective.

Stalemate.

And thus it remained for twelve long years, until the day that Leland Hale came plodding along the beach toward the little village of Taun.

CHAPTER III

HALE DID NOT feel well at all. He kept putting one foot in front of the other, pushing himself through the blue sand, but he would much rather have crawled into the shade and gone to sleep. His brow was feverish, and his arms and legs and neck felt stiff. It had been two days since he had been caught in the rain, and his sniffles and sneezed had developed into congested lungs and a stopped-up nose. He felt like hell.

The sun was low in the evening sky, but the air was warm and soothing. He was quite a distance from the mountains now, and there was no longer much of a fog at night.

Hale squinted his eyes at the sun.

"Dab it," he said aloud, "I'm dot godda walk eddybore today! I'b godda sit dowd ad relax."

Fever, plus loneliness, plus acute boredom, had started him in the relatively harmless pastime of talking to himself. He had come a long way on the hard-packed blue sand—which was easier to travel over than the rocky shelf above it—and his

food had almost reached the halfway point.

He sat down in the shelter of the cliff, unstrapped his pack, and rummaged inside. Where the hell was the blasted aspirin? There. He took out the bottle and gave himself a massive fifteen-grain dose. Maybe it would make him feel better. He didn't like to use medicine; it made him seem weak in his own eyes. But there are times when necessity is the mother of prevention.

He ate, although he wasn't hungry. He was grateful for only one thing: the synthetics were absolutely tasteless. The head congestion had taken care of that.

Afterwards, he impatiently took another ten grains of aspirin, and, still feeling terrible, he curled up to sleep.

He woke up when something prodded him. He was instantly awake, but he didn't move except to open his eyes.

Standing over him were two men dressed in long gray-brown robes which were tied at the waist with braided ropes. One of them was pointing a tube at him that looked suspiciously like a missile weapon.

They were heavily bearded, but the beards were neatly trimmed, and their hair was brushed back and cropped reasonably short.

The man with the gun said something in a commanding tone of voice and gestured with his free hand. Hale didn't understand the command, but the gesture plainly meant "Get up!"

Leland Hale was never a man to argue with a gun. He stood up slowly.

As he did, the expressions on the faces of the two men altered slightly. Hale couldn't understand the new expressions at first, hidden as they were by the beards. Then, as they backed away a little, he understood. The men were no more than five eight; he towered a good ten inches above them.

The armed man spoke again, waving the gun. Hale interpreted this as "All right, let's go." He complied. He didn't know where they were taking him, but almost anything was better than being alone. He wasn't too worried; he'd been in plenty of tight spots before. Jailbreaking was nothing new to Leland Hale.

It was just barely dawn. The sky was light, but the edge of the sun had not quite shown itself over the eastern horizon, far out to sea.

The trio walked along silently for a couple of miles, then they topped a little rise and went up a long slope to the top of the cliff. Below him, Hale saw a village. Taun. He realized

that if he had been walking along the ridge instead of on the shore, he would have seen the town the night before.

Down the slope they went, heading for the little cluster of houses surrounding the small bay.

THERE weren't many people in the streets of the small town, although there seemed to be plenty of activity around the docks. Hale could see tilled fields to the west of the settlement, where there were people already at work.

A third man in a gray-brown robe met them in the middle of one of the cobblestone streets and asked something of Hale's guards. They stopped, and a long conversation followed. Hale strained his ears to catch the words.

At first, it was complete gibberish, but Hale knew what key words to listen for, and gradually he picked up more and more.

As on every inhabited planet of the galaxy, the language of Cardigan's Green was derived from Terran—basically English, with large additions of Russian, Chinese, and Spanish. Hale had traveled a great deal in his life—partly by choice and partly because often he had no choice. He had heard and spoken a hundred different dialects of Terran, and the assimilation of a new derivation was almost automatic.

The two guards were telling the new man that they had found a stranger on the beach, and describing in detail how it had come about. They were, it seemed, going to take him to the Village Officer—whoever that might be.

The third man told them that the Officer was away somewhere—Hale didn't catch it.

The guard who carried the gun said that Hale would be taken to "the brig" to await the Officer's pleasure.

The third man nodded and hurried off, while Hale was prodded onward.

"The brig" proved to be a small building with a heavy iron door and thick iron bars at the windows. Hale didn't like the looks of the place, but he didn't like the feel of the missile weapon at his back, either. In he went.

He took his pack off and submitted to search. Then the guards went outside, taking the pack with them. The heavy door rang like a bell when they slammed it. A second clang indicated a bar across the door.

"I'll be damned," said Hale softly. "I run seventy thousand light years to stay out of one jail and walk right into another."

He listened to his own voice and noted with satisfaction that

his congestion was clearing up.

There were voices outside. Hale strolled over to the window to listen.

"What is he? An Islander?" asked a voice. Hale hadn't heard it before; obviously another seeker after knowledge—a local busybody.

"He's an Islander, all right," said one of the guards. "He wears their clothing." Hale was wearing a standard spaceman's zipsuit and his insulation jacket.

"But what would an Islander want to come here for? None of them have left the Island since their ship landed, twelve years ago."

"Isn't that obvious? Their Captain Doctor wants to make a deal with the Fisher."

Hale listened patiently, and gradually the situation became clearer.

Out on the island across the channel was a ship. From the title "Captain Doctor," he gathered that it was an IHC ship. It had been there for twelve years.

Hale kept his ears open as more information trickled in. Several more of the townspeople joined the discussion group, and the conversation became livelier. Hale drank it all in, filing and indexing it in his mind. Some of the words used weren't clear at times, but the context helped.

Now, a confidence man is an opportunist; no successful con man can afford to be anything else. He must, above all, be able to talk his way out of, or into, anything. Leland Hale's record speaks for itself; killer, thief, yes—but he was also a damned good con man. As Interstellar Police Commander Desmon Shelley remarked some years later: "Leland Hale could have sold antigravity belts to the crew of a ship in free fall at double price—and even then he would have cheated by leaving out the energy units."

Slowly, an idea began to form in his mind. Someone called the Fisher wanted to make a deal with the people on the island. If he played his cards right, Hale might be able to make a little profit, one way or another.

IT WAS several hours before the Village Officer showed up, and by then Hale had the set-up pretty well in mind. His information was far from complete, but he knew enough to enable him to run a bluff.

The Village Officer was a taller man that the other villagers, though nowhere near as big a man as Hale. His full beard was slightly touched with gray, and there was a streak of silver at each temple. His eyes were dark, and a hawkish nose protruded from his face, almost overshadowing the beard.

"I am Yon the Fisher," he announced. "And you?"

He stood outside the iron door, looking in through the open grillwork.

"Leland Hale. I've come here to hear your terms."

"They are the same," said Yon. "Repair my spaceship. Use replacement parts from your own, if necessary. In return, I and my men will take you to a planet where there is a spaceport."

"*Your* spaceship?" Hale asked pointedly.

Yon's bearded visage smiled a little. "Mine. I bought it legally from Dornis the Fat ten years ago. It fell on his land, therefore, by law, it was his to sell."

"What about the crew?" Hale asked. "It was their ship."

"True. Unfortunately, they died—ah—intestate. The property therefore reverted to our legal government. But our aged Commander would have nothing to do with it, so he ruled that it was the lawful property of Dornis the Fat."

"Very neatly done," said Hale in honest admiration. "All legally sewed up." He knew the claim wouldn't stand up in a court of interstellar law, but he recognized the machinations of a fellow con man when he saw them.

"Thank you," said Yon the Fisher. "Now let's get down to business. You came here for a reason, I assume. Is it a deal, or isn't it? I can be patient; I am on my own home planet. You, on the other hand, have been virtually prisoners for twelve years."

"True," agreed Hale. "I think we can make some sort of agreement along those lines. I was sent to look at your ship."

Yon the Fisher pondered this for a moment, then countered with: "Why?"

"We have to know how badly it's damaged. If it can't be repaired, there's no sense in making any kind of deal, is there?"

"I see. Very well. We will go to my ship. However, we will have to take precautions. You understand, I'm sure."

"Naturally," Hale said.

Hale's hands were bound behind him, and the guard with the gun followed directly behind him.

There are no animals fit for riding purposes which are native to Cardigan's Green, and eking out a bare living from the planet left the colonists no time to develop mechanical aids to transportation. They walked.

Several hours later, Leland Hale was inside the hull of the freighter *Morris*. Under the watchful eye of Yon and his myrmidons, Hale went over the whole vessel, saying as little as possible, and evading the ques-

tions that were put to him. When he was finished, his face wore a speculative look, but inside he was feeling positively gleeful. In an hour, at the very most, he, alone, could put the vessel in working order! The original crew of the *Morris* had almost finished their work when they succumbed to the Plague.

Surely there must be some way he could turn this to his advantage!

"I think it can be done," he said judiciously. "There's not a lot of work to be done, but there are parts missing and so forth. . . . Hmmmm . . ." He looked around the control room in which they were standing. It looked like a mess. All the paneling had been taken off the circuit housings to work on the control systems. In the engine section, the refractor domes were still off. The ship didn't look in tip-top shape, but all that would have to be done was a half hour's work on the generators and another half hour to close everything up.

"I don't know how long it will take, though," said Hale.

"I've kept it sealed and kept it clean," said Yon. "I'm no engineer, so I kept my hands off of everything."

"Can you pilot her?" Hale asked.

"Easily. I have the piloting instructions that were left in Cardigan's ship, and I have the astrogation charts from this one." He smiled. "I have had twelve years to study."

Hale had to agree that Yon was probably right. A spaceship practically guides and runs itself when it's in working order. An elementary knowledge of astrogation and a good ship can get a man almost anywhere in the galaxy.

"In that case, Yon," said Hale, smiling his best smile, "I think we can get along. Let bygones be bygones."

"Excellent." Yon was trying hard to conceal his excitement and almost succeeding. "Come; let's go back to Taun and I'll buy you a dinner."

CHAPTER IV

YON THE FISHER felt expansive. At last, after twelve long years of waiting, he would have his spaceship! Of course, he had no intention of taking the crew of the *Caduceus* anywhere; he wanted no spaceship but his own on Cardigan's Green. But now that a part of his dream was about to come true, he felt like making a grand gesture. He would throw a party. He was the second most important man on Cardigan's Green now, and eventually the old Commander would die, and Yon the Fisher would be elected.

He would *really* throw a party then, but now he would do a good job. He would entertain this Islander in the grand manner.

The entertainment was held in a large stone hall. It was poorly lighted and almost bare of ornamentation. By the time everything was ready, the sun had set, and the hall was illuminated by oil torches set in sconces along the walls.

It was strictly a stag affair, which, as far as Hale was concerned, made it a very dull party indeed. There were speeches galore, and Yon the Fisher made about every third one.

Hungry as he was, it took a little time for Hale to work up enough courage to try the food placed before him. He had eaten foods on half a thousand different planets, but a thing like a pickled centipede had never been set before him before, and its pale blue-green color and translucent body did nothing to endear it to him. He finally tried one, after closing his eyes seraphically, as though he wanted to enjoy it to the fullest. It was delicious.

The beverage was a purplish, sour-tasting ferment that produced a nice glow. Hale drank three cups of it before he thought to wonder if it were made from the purple berry with the white worms inside. He wisely refrained from asking, and, after a few more cups, it ceased to worry him at all.

As the night went on, the party became more and more boisterous. Everyone had plenty of the purple ferment, and the conversation became more and more interesting as it made less and less sense.

It must have been rather early in the morning when the incident occurred that both shocked Hale back into sobriety and gave him a new zest for life.

As is usual in parties of that sort, the host somehow managed to underestimate the amount of liquor that would be consumed. The supply ran out, and Yon the Fisher had to send out for more.

"La!" he cried as he turned up the last earthenware jug, only to find a bare half-cupful within. "Out of juice! Are we all out? No more?" He gazed around, as though he expected any full jugs to stand up and announce themselves. None did. "Look around!" he bawled. "There must be another."

The whole group of thirty-odd men began turning jugs upside down. One of them had a little in it, but the man who turned it had failed to provide a receptacle, and it splashed on the floor. There were no full jugs.

"Ferek! You, Ferek!" Yon called loudly. One of the men stood up and came toward him.

"Ferek, go get us some more. Wake up Lan the Brewer. Here —take this." He opened a leather bag that hung at the cincture of his robe and spilled out a handful of sparkling, blue-white stones. He selected one and handed it over. "And mind you make it snappy, Ferek; we're all thirsty!"

Ferek turned on his heel and fled, but Leland Hale did not watch his departure. Hale was staring at the handful of stones in Yon the Fisher's palm.

Diamonds! Perfect, blue-white octahedrons! He knew what they were; the vital tuning crystals for the subspace radio. So *that* was what the *Morris* had been carrying! The little crystals that were worth more than all the rest of a subspace radio, including installation. And they were using them as a medium of exchange!

Hale mentally rubbed his hands together, and the glitter of promised profit gleamed in his eyes.

When Ferek came back with the purple juice, fourteen jugs of it, Hale was ready for the fun to begin.

HE WOKE UP the next morning with a head that felt the way it deserved to feel. He vaguely remembered being courteously escorted back to "the brig" and ceremoniously locked in with the best of good wishes. He'd felt fine then; he didn't now.

He sat up, wishing he had his pack back so that he could get a couple of aspirin tablets.

Then the noise came to his ears—an excited muttering outside the window. He got to his feet carefully and walked over to the barred opening.

Outside, a group of men were standing across the narrow street from his cell. They seemed to be staring at the window, and when Hale's face appeared, they moved back a little, almost as though he'd struck at them. At the same time, the muttering ceased.

"What's going on out there?" he asked in his heavy baritone voice.

"It's the Plague," said one of them. Hale recognized him as the gun-wielding guard of the day before.

"The Plague?"

"That's right. Yon the Fisher has it. Seven others. I think you may have it."

"Don't be silly!" Hale snapped. "I feel fine. What kind of a plague is this?"

"Why—it's just the Plague."

"I mean, what are the symptoms?"

"Cough. Watery eyes. Nose runs. Then a fever and you die."

"And you say Yon the Fisher

has it?" Hale felt things were going even better than he had expected. But if the Fisher were to die, the whole deal might fall through. "Look here," he said, "I've got some stuff in my pack that will fix those boys up in no time. Just let me out of here, and I'll—"

The muttering in the crowd began again, and the guard said: "I can't let you out without permission from Yon the Fisher."

"Now, look here," Hale began.

Hale had a persuasive tongue. Even in a strange dialect, he could, given time enough, work men around to his way of thinking. Some years before, according to the court records of the Supreme People's Court of Vega VII, one Leland Hale had been indicted for kidnap-murder, a crime which can only be tried on Vega VII by the SPC. Five learned judges, wise in the law, heard the case. At the same time, a full tape transcript was made. The prosecution presented its case and amply proved motive, opportunity, and identity. Hale defended himself, using the charts and evidence presented by the prosecution.

No logic robot would have accepted the defendant's testimony for more than the first paragraph, but the five learned judges listened carefully, believing that they were weighing both sides impartially.

When it was over, the vote was three-two in favor of acquittal. The majority opinion apologized to Mr. Hale for inconveniencing him by bringing him to trial. There was no minority opinion; the other two judges merely abstained from voting.

When Hale's defense was subjected to semantic analysis, it was discovered that his statements, taken at face value without the emotional content, were a confession and admission of guilt!

The press had a field day. The three judges of the majority were forced to resign by public opinion, and the other two left the bench soon after. The entire judicial system of Vega VII was revamped in a frenzied flurry of legislative activity.

But it was too late to do anything about Leland Hale—he was three sectors away by that time, and the law couldn't touch him anyway.

Hale was glib, clever, and persuasive. Within fifteen minutes, he was heading towards the home of Yon the Fisher with his pack on his back and a goodly crowd following well behind.

Hale rapped on the door and announced himself. A feminine voice from within said: "Go away! The Plague is here!"

"Never mind! I've had it!

I'm immune! Let me in!" He tried the door and found it unlocked. He stepped in—and stopped.

Before him, staring wide-eyed, was the most beautiful honey-blonde he had ever seen.

If all their women look like this, Hale thought, *it's no wonder they keep them at home!*

"Where is Yon the Fisher?" he asked aloud.

"In—in the bedroom," she said softly, pointing.

Hale strode in. Yon was lying on a pallet of the same rough gray-brown material that his robe was made of, his breath heavy and rasping. "You should not have come here, Leland Hale," he said. "You'll get the Plague and die."

"Rot," said Leland Hale. "Here, take these." He gave Yon twenty-five grains of aspirin, two hundred milligrams of thiamine hydrochloride, and five hundred milligrams of ascorbic acid. He made the Village Officer swallow them with a good slug of the purple ferment and told him to relax. For good measure, he put two capsules of a powerful laxative on a dish beside the bed. "Take one of those in two hours, and the other one four hours later." He turned to the woman, who had followed him into the room. "Don't give him any solid food for two days—just soup."

He looked the girl up and down again, then turned back towards the pallet. "I forgot one pill," he said. He gave Yon the Fisher half a grain of narcolene.

"What about Caryl?" asked Yon, indicating his wife. "Will she catch the Plague?"

"Don't worry, Yon," Hale assured him. "I'm going to fix her right up."

He gave her ten grains of aspirin and made her wash it down with a full cup of the purple liquor. Then he gave her ten more, which also had to be followed by a full cup of juice. After that came ascorbic acid, chased with a third cup of liquor.

"Now just sit down a minute while that takes effect," he said ambiguously. She sat down on a stone bench near a big slab of stone which served as a table.

"Will Yon really be all right?" she asked. "Really?"

"I guarantee it," Hale said. Over on the pallet, Yon slowly closed his eyes.

"And I won't catch it?" There was a note of fear in her voice.

"If you do, it will be mild," Hale said. From the pallet came the sound of soft snoring. The narcolene had taken effect.

And something else was taking effect. Caryl looked up at him and blinked. "I feel queer," she said. As Hale had suspected,

drinking was strictly For Men Only on Cardigan's Green.

"It's just the medicine," Hale told her.

"Mr. Hale," she said softly, "you're a very brave and very wonderful man. I don't know how I can ever repay you for what you've done for us."

Succinctly, Hale told her.

She looked at him, wide-eyed. "But—"

"Precisely," said Leland Hale.

CHAPTER V

THERE WERE OTHERS in Taun to be cured. When Yon the Fisher awoke later in the day, he was still a little weak, but his pains were gone, and he declared that he was much better. As soon as word got around, the other seven men who had been stricken begged him to come.

Hale came, but he explained that—naturally—the medicine cost money. Crystals would do.

Had Yon the Fisher paid?

Yon the Fisher had paid a very great price, indeed, Hale assured them. But, of course, Yon was a very wealthy man. Those who had less would be charged less. It would balance out.

Hale charged just a fraction less than the traffic would bear.

When Yon the Fisher heard of this, he was even more grateful to the "Islander." He knew perfectly well he hadn't given Hale a single Crystal.

By the end of the second day, Hale's supply of drugs was running dangerously low, although his collection of diamonds was becoming pleasingly large. He decided to take the whole planet in hand.

The grateful Yon was very happy to lend Hale a boat and crew to get him back to the Island whence he was presumed to have come.

"I'll have to get more medicine," Hale explained. "I'll come back, never fear."

"But will your people let one of my boats land? How will they know you're aboard?" Yon propped himself up on his pallet. "Several boats which have tried to land—peacefully, of course—have been blown out of the water."

"Don't worry, Yon, old friend. All that is over, now that we have come to terms."

Yon lay back again, a smile beneath his beard. "Good. Take the boat, then."

Hale strode out. Caryl held the door open for him. She kept her head bowed and didn't look at him, but there was the faintest trace of a smile on her lips. Hale ignored her.

THE TRIP across the channel, even with a good breeze, took nearly half a day because of the

adverse currents. Hale spent the time thinking.

The IHC ship evidently still had plenty of power, even after twelve years, if they could blow a fishing smack out of the water. It took power to use a space gun in an atmosphere.

But why did they want to keep the people of Cardigan's Green away? Surely they weren't afraid of a raid—or were they? There must be some way to contact them, or Yon the Fisher could not have made the offer that Hale had so cavalierly accepted.

Two of the crew developed the sniffles on the trip, and Hale, with great magnanimity, dosed them for free.

At last, the Island loomed out of the sea. It was a continuation of the mainland mountains, and looked it.

The Peniyan Range, half a million or so years ago, was a solid chain, connecting the offshore island with the mainland. Indeed, what is now the Island was once merely the tip of the old Peniyan Peninsula. But, between earthquake and sea action, a lower section vanished beneath the sea, leaving the jagged cliffs of the Island.

There is only one decent landing place, a beach near the flat plateau of the Island's top. All the rest of the perimeter is composed of sheer cliffs that drop straight into the surf. The lower cliffs at the southern end of the Island have since been blasted away to make a harbor, but at that time only the small beach afforded an approach.

The sailors of the fishing smack dropped anchor a good hundred yards offshore. Above them, on the flat of the plateau, loomed the huge, weatherstained bulk of the *IHCS Caduceus*.

"This is the prescribed distance," said Yon's First Officer, who was now in charge of the little vessel. "I wouldn't want to go in any farther, even with you aboard."

"I wouldn't want you to," Hale assured him honestly.

"You will row in by yourself?" asked the First Officer.

"Naturally," said Hale, although the thought hadn't crossed his mind. He climbed into a little rowboat, was lowered over the side, and propelled himself toward the blue sand of the beach.

Suddenly, a voice boomed out from a loudspeaker in the big hospital ship. "Don't beach that boat! Who is it?"

Hale let the boat drift a few yards from the shore and stood up in it. They must have a directional pickup on him, or they wouldn't be asking questions; he was too far away from the ship for a shout to carry clearly.

"Lieutenant Doctor Leland

Hale, Interstellar Health Commission!" he called out. "What ship are you?"

Although they had challenged him in the dialect of Cardigan's Green, Hale answered in Standard Terran.

There was a choking sound from the loudspeaker. Then, for a full half minute there was only silence. Finally: *"My God—we're saved!"* Another short silence ensued before the voice said, "Lieutenant Hale, this is the IHC Ship *Caduceus.*"

Hale put surprise into his voice. "The *Caduceus?* Good heavens! Why, you were wiped off the slate ten years ago!"

"We—we know." The voice was choked with emotion. "Just a minute, Lieutenant Hale; Captain Doctor Latimer Wills wants to talk to you." Another silence.

"Lieutenant Hale," said a different voice from the speaker, "this is Captain Wills."

"A pleasure, sir. I've heard a great deal about you. I—I hardly know what to say. Imagine—meeting a man who has practically become a legend in the IHC."

Leland Hale had never heard of Wills before; he didn't know if the man had ever done anything in his life. But it's a good bet that a man doesn't become the commander of an IHC hospital ship without doing *something* noteworthy—or at least something that he, himself, thinks is noteworthy.

"Lieutenant," said the captain doctor, in a tone that was strangely husky, "we have been marooned on this planet for twelve years, fighting for our very existence. It is you, not I, who are a hero."

LELAND HALE had said nothing about heroism, but he let it pass. "May I come into the ship, sir? I have something important to talk to you about."

"Well—ah—" This time, the silence was strained. "Ah—Lieutenant Hale—ah—do you know anything about the Plague?"

"The Plague? I don't understand, sir."

"That's what the natives call it. They're deathly afraid of it, although they have no need to be. It killed off great numbers of them at first, but the survivors are descendants of those who were immune. The present population is not susceptible to it; they are carriers. It's a virus of some sort; we haven't been able to do much research on it with our limited facilities here, but we've established that in the body of an immune it just lives in semi-symbiosis, like *Herpes simplex.*"

"I see, sir." Hale had no idea what *Herpes simplex* was, but he got the general idea.

"It strikes within twenty-four

hours after exposure, and kills eighty-five to ninety per cent of a normal population." Pause. "Ah—Lieutenant, how long have you been here?"

"Just forty-eight hours, sir. But there's nothing to worry about. I'm immune." He knew he must be. If he hadn't caught it yet, he never would.

"Immune? Good heavens, man! How do you know?"

"Lagerglocke's serum, sir. Developed seven years ago. Confers universal immunity to any foreign protein substance." Hale hoped it sounded convincing.

There was a stunned silence. "But—but what about the allergy reaction?"

Hale took a breath. "I'm not sure exactly how it works, sir; I'm not an immunologist. I believe that the suppressor is one of the Gimel-type antitoxins."

"Oh." The captain doctor's voice sounded sad and tired and old. "I'm afraid medical technology has passed me by in the last twelve years, Lieutenant. I imagine all of us will have a great deal to learn."

"Yes, sir." Hale sat down again in the boat. Standing up in a rocking skiff is tiring, even if one has excellent balance. "May I ask, sir, why you haven't been sending out distress signals?"

Wills explained in detail what had happened twelve years before. "So you see," he finished, "we've been holding them off all this time. Yon the Fisher has been trying to get us to repair the *Morris,* but we've refused steadily. In the first place, if we exposed ourselves, we'd be dead before we reached another planet. In the second place, we wouldn't dare give these people interstellar ships; if the Plague ever began to spread through the galaxy, it would mean the end of civilization as we know it. Every planet would be like Cardigan's Green. Mankind would have to start all over again from the lowest barbarian stage."

"You mean your sub-radio is wrecked, sir? Completely inoperative?"

"Completely," said the captain doctor. "Oh, it's not wrecked, but we lack a diamond tuning crystal."

Well, well, well, said Hale to himself. *Well, well, well, well, well.*

"Of course" said Captain Wills, with more heartiness in his voice, "now that you're here, we can call Health Central and —and get off this—this—" His voice choked.

Hale took a deep breath. This was it. "I'm afraid it's not as simple as that, sir. You see, I landed my ship here not knowing that the—ah—natives were hostile. I landed near their

village. They pretended to be friendly, so I went out to meet them. They overpowered me and went into my ship. They smashed my sub-radio and took away parts of my drive unit." He paused for effect. "I'm afraid, sir, that their ship will be ready to go shortly, and we have no way to contact Health Central."

The sudden tumbling of a gigantic house of cards was marked by an awful roar of silence.

Hale waited. He had plenty of time.

WHEN IT FINALLY came, the voice of Captain Doctor Latimer Wills was distorted with frustration, anger, fear, and despair. "Then that's the end. It—it isn't your fault, of course, Lieutenant Hale. You couldn't have known." It was obvious that his first emotional reaction had been violently against "Lieutenant" Hale, and he had suppressed it with effort.

"Nevertheless, sir, I feel that it's my responsibility," Hale said nobly. "And I think I see a way out."

"What? What? A way out? How?" Wills didn't dare let himself hope again.

"Well, sir, the Plague seems to have broken out again on the mainland. There are more than fifty down with it in the village now, and it seems to be spreading."

"What? Ridiculous!" The captain doctor was almost sputtering. "Lieutenant, I assure you that they're immune! The population of Cardigan's Green *can't* have an epidemic of the Plague! Oh, I'll admit that an individual might be conceived now and then without the immunity gene intact, but the foetus would never come to term! An epidemic is impossible!"

"Nevertheless, sir," said Hale complacently, "we have a major epidemic on our hands." He knew he was treading on thin ice at that point, so he turned and called loudly to the boat in the local dialect. "Tell Captain Doctor Wills why we are here!" Then, to Wills: "Will your directional pickup reach that man, sir?"

"I think so. Yes."

The first officer of the fishing smack was shouting: "The Plague is here, good sir! Please help us! Give us the medicine!"

Hale snarled under his breath. He wasn't ready to say anything about the medicine yet. Oh, well —water over the dam, spilt milk and all that.

"I'm afraid I don't understand, Lieutenant Hale," said the captain doctor. "How will this help us get off Cardigan's Green? And what's all this about medicine? We don't have any

medicine that will cure the Plague."

"Let me ask you a question, sir. What size frequency crystal do you need for your sub-radio?"

There was a murmured consultation from the speaker. Evidently, the ship's commander was conferring with his communications officer.

"We need a point oh nine seven five," Wills said at last. "Why? What's that got to do with—"

"Just as I thought, sir!" Hale interrupted. "The crystal in my radio happens to be a point oh nine seven five!" It wasn't, but he had several of them in his pack. "Now, my ship is guarded by several armed natives, and they won't let me in again. They think I have a weapon hidden inside. However, my crystal is intact; it was the modulator section they smashed.

"Now; we can do one of two things. We can wait until the Plague has thoroughly decimated the population and they give up guarding my ship, or we can cure them of the Plague and earn their gratitude."

Wills thought that one over. "I'm afraid it will have to be the former, Hale; we have nothing on board to cure that disease. As a physician, I hate to do it, but we'll simply have to let those people die."

"I think not, sir. How much acetylsalicylic acid do you have aboard?"

"Aspirin? Oh, a hundred thousand five-grain tablets, I should imagine, but—"

"How about vitamin C—ascorbic acid?"

"In the pure form? Why, our food synthesizer could be adjusted for almost unlimited amounts of that, but—"

"And you could adjust for thiamine, too?" Hale persisted.

"Of course, but—"

"Excellent, sir. Then we can whip this thing!"

"Now, see here, Hale! Don't tell me you're going to cure the Plague with aspirin and vitamins!" Wills was almost angry.

"Of course not, sir! That's merely to relieve the patient and build up resistance. I happen to have on hand a fairly good supply of Doppeltreden's vaccine."

"Doppeltreden's vaccine?"

"I'm sorry, sir; I keep forgetting you've been away for so long. That's the vaccine that gave Lagerglocke the basis for developing his universal immunity serum. The vaccine works on the E-37 linkage, which is found in every virus; it temporarily suspends the life processes of the virus—any virus—and during that period, the natural body functions take over."

"I see. It seems to me I read something about that back in—But that's neither here nor there,

Lieutenant. I'll see that you get what you need." There were more mutterings from the speaker. Wills was giving the orders. "We're giving you a good supply of the other vitamins, too, Lieutenant. Might as well do the job right."

"Very good, sir," said Hale gratefully.

"And — ah — Hale — would you like to come on in? I'd like to talk to you about the newer advances in the field."

"I don't think it would be wise, sir," Hale said promptly. "Although I'm immune to the Plague, I still might be a carrier. I have two very sick men on board the ship; I really ought to be out there taking care of them."

"You're right, of course. Very well, Lieutenant Hale; carry on. We'll do our part."

"Thank you, sir. Just put the stuff on the beach; the fishing crew and I will pick it up." And with that, he began pulling at the oars, rowing back out to the boat. He had no desire to talk any longer with Captain Doctor Wills; the next slip might be his last.

CHAPTER VI

THE NEXT several weeks Hale spent in going from village to village on the mainland, dispensing the drugs he had received from the *Caduceus*. There were seven major villages, including the capital, where the Commander of Cardigan's Green lived, and twelve smaller ones which were not much more than little clots of houses scattered over the countryside. He had to walk every foot of it, but he didn't mind; it was worth it.

The disease spread like ink on a blotter as Hale tramped from town to town. He took with him three men who had recovered from the epidemic; they carried the drugs while Hale strolled along unburdened. But they didn't mind; it was an honor to help the man who fearlessly helped to stem the tide of the awful Plague.

But in spite of his best efforts, three thousand people, nearly a tenth of the total population, succumbed to the terror. Hale, perhaps, could have sent others around to administer the panacea, but he insisted that only he knew how to do it.

And only he—but of *course*—collected the diamonds for his services. Those who were really poor were treated for nothing, but those who had Crystals were soaked—but good.

And then, at last, it was over; it had burned itself out. The people of Cardigan's Green could relax once again.

Hale wended his way back to Taun, which had become the

new capital. The old Commander had died, and Yon the Fisher, backed by Hale's word-of-mouth propaganda and his own reputation, had been elected to the position.

"Yon, old friend," said Hale when he had been admitted to that worthy's august presence, "we are, I think, ready to do business."

"Business?" asked the new Commander.

"In the matter of your spaceship," Hale reminded him.

They were sitting in the same modest stone house that Yon had always lived in; he had not yet had time to build a larger, more sumptious home—a home fit for a Commander.

Caryl, her eyes demurely lowered, served them cups of the purple ferment as they sat at the stone table.

"Oh, yes; the spaceship. Are your people ready to go back to the stars, then?" Yon asked shrewdly.

"As a matter of fact, no," Hale said. "Actually, we've grown used to Cardigan's Green in the past twelve years. We've decided to stay. Now that we have medicines which will stop the Plague, we feel we should move to the mainland—under your benevolent Commandership, of course."

Yon looked pleased for a moment, then his eyes narrowed. "But what about the spaceship?"

"Oh, you'll get that, naturally. But it will have to be paid for in Crystals." He named a figure.

Yon's eyes grew wide. "But that's almost half of my total wealth!"

"That's true. But there are so many of us aboard the *Caduceus,* and none of us has any of the new coin of the realm. Oh, a little, perhaps, from the sale of our drugs, but we asked so little. And of you, we asked nothing at all to save your life."

"He's perfectly right, Yon," Caryl said suddenly. "We both owe him our lives."

"Besides," persisted Hale, "you have Crystals coming from the estate of the previous Commander. *He* certainly had plenty." Hale didn't mention that the previous Commander had given him almost all of his diamonds in return for Hale's futile attempt to save his life.

"That's true," Yon agreed, brightening perceptibly.

"Furthermore," Hale continued inexorably, "my people will, of course, spend this money, which will be divided evenly among us. I think a man of your proven ability will be able to get most of it back in a short time."

In the end, the bargain was sealed. Hale walked out to the ship and spent two days doing nothing while Yon looked on.

Finally, Yon got bored and went home to Caryl, and Hale wrapped up the repair job in short order—plus one little addition of his own.

Then he lifted the ship on its antigravs and flew to Taun to collect his bill.

YON PAID promptly. He was overjoyed. He positively bubbled. He learned to control it in the atmosphere very quickly, and Leland Hale decided to end the whole job as rapidly as possible.

"I suggest we fly out to the Island," he said. "I'll tell my people that they can move to the mainland, and give them their share of the Crystals."

It was Yon who did the piloting. He did a very creditable job of settling down to the plateau near the *Caduceus*. Hale asked him to remain with the ship while he went to the hospital ship.

Hale stepped out of the ship, and he hadn't gone more than ten paces when the speaker called: "Halt! Stop or we fire!"

Hale identified himself. "You can let me in now," he called. "The Plague has been completely whipped."

Captain Doctor Wills met him at the airlock of the *Caduceus* and wrung his hand. "I'm glad to see you carried it off!" He had once been a tall, strong, lean man; now he was merely lean and bent.

"I haven't much time to talk, sir," Hale said rapidly. "I've got the diamond—here. Call the Health Center as soon as I leave and tell them what's happened."

"Why—why— What's the matter?"

"Can't you see? That ship is the *Morris*—they've repaired it!"

"But I thought you said the Plague had been eliminated!"

Hale shook his head. "Not completely, sir. They're still carriers. I'm not a carrier, myself; I checked that on my own instruments. But these people are; only the virulent phase has been stopped."

"What are you going to do, Lieutenant?"

Hale drew himself up. "The only thing I can do, sir. I'll have to blow up that ship before it reaches an inhabited planet. They insist that I go with them, but they'll leave without me if I stay here too long."

"But you! If you're aboard—"

"I can't see any other way, sir," Hale said bravely. "It's my life against hundreds of thousand—perhaps millions." He stopped and a look of wild hope came into his eyes. "Of course, if you've got enough power to shoot it down now, sir—"

The captain doctor, visibly shaken, said: "No. Not after

twelve years. If we were in space, perhaps, but the atmospheric ionization—"

"I understand, sir. Goodbye, sir." He grasped the captain doctor's hand warmly, then turned and ran back to the *Morris*.

"Take her up, Yon. Head toward the mountains."

"The mountains? The Peniyan Range?" Yon looked puzzled.

"That's right. I want to see how she'll do at higher altitudes."

They flew back and forth over the range until Hale had spotted the place where his own ship was hidden. Then he turned to the new Commander of Cardigan's Green.

"Yon, old friend, I think you're ready to fly her solo. All by yourself."

Yon the Fisher beamed. "Really? Well, perhaps I am."

"Set her down on that level space there." Hale pointed below.

When the ship was grounded, he opened the airlock and climbed out. "Now here's what you do, Yon. Take her up to thirty thousand feet and fly level, due south. Now, don't try to leave the atmosphere; you're not ready for that yet. Go south for fifteen minutes, then make a one-eighty degree turn and come back. Got it? Fine. Now, be careful; don't get yourself hurt."

He stepped out and watched the ship lift and head south. Ten minutes later, he heard a muffled sound, like distant thunder. Smiling with satisfaction, he headed for his own ship with a fortune in diamonds in his pack.

CAPTAIN DOCTOR WILLS sent out the full story as he knew it. Health Center received it and so did most of the galactic news services. Hale was a hero who had sacrificed his life for medicine and humanity. When Health Center found they had no Leland Hale on their register, there was an investigation and an attempt to quash the story, but it was too late.

The fact that Hale himself had knowingly spread influenza across the face of Cardigan's Green meant nothing to anyone; no one even suspected it. Blowing up the *Morris* with his "old friend" Yon the Fisher inside was not an act of altruism; Hale didn't care what happened to the rest of the galaxy, but he could not make a fortune from empty planets, and he couldn't have spent it on worlds decimated by disease.

He didn't care for people in general, but he thought Leland Hale was a nice guy.

And the people of Cardigan's Green agreed with him. He had given his all for them and died with their Commander in trying

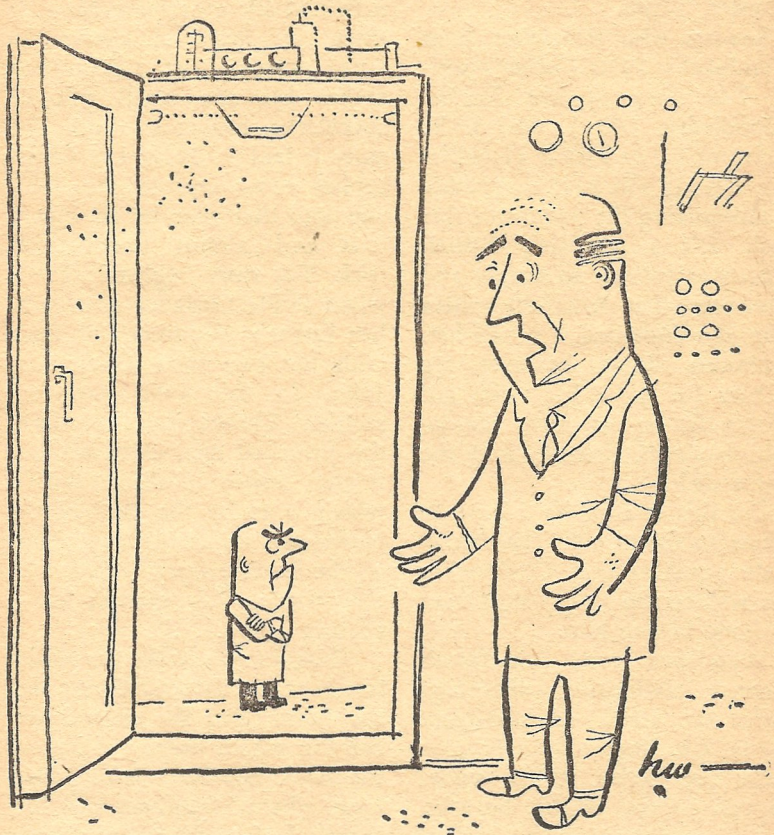
to free them from their planet.

Even today, standing in the central square of the city of Taun on Cardigan's Green, the populace (long since rid of the virus that caused the actual Plague) can see a heroic statue of a nobly visaged man in a zipsuit and insulation jacket, hands on hips, staring at the sky with narrowed eyes.

On the base of the statue, the inscription reads:

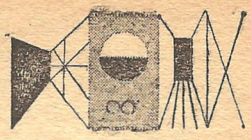
LELAND HALE
Who Risked His Life That
Others Might Live

∞ ∞ ∞



"But, Dr. Elsworth, I assumed you understood the nature of the experiment!"

Infinity's Choice



by DAMON KNIGHT

NO BLADE OF GRASS, by John Christopher. Simon & Schuster, $2.95.

Readers who remember John Wyndham's 1950 *Collier's* serial, *The Day of the Triffids* (Doubleday, 1951), and J. T. McIntosh's *The Fittest* (Doubleday, 1955), will have no trouble in recognizing the pattern of this book. It's a peculiarly British export—a pattern so simple and elementary that American writers long ago discarded it as old hat. American editors, however, are suckers for it—it has twice put science fiction, or some reasonable facsimile thereof, into the major slicks.

But this is a riddle I leave to others to figure out. The immediate point is that Christopher has written the story better than anybody before him.

Wyndham and McIntosh showed civilization dissolving under the attack of intelligent beasts. Christopher quietly goes them one better. What would happen to our world, he asks, if a virus arose somewhere that would attack the family *Gramineae*—the grasses?

This hits so close to home that it hardly seems like science fiction at all: everybody has seen grass, and heard of viruses. In every possible way, Christopher makes his one small pill of speculation easy to swallow. The story is laid in 1958; but Christopher never says so; he slides you into that year by an ingenious and almost unnoticeable trick. The story begins in 1933, when Hilda Custance returns to her father's Westmorland farm with her two sons, David and John. In this brief prefatory section, Christopher introduces the principal characters and the remote valley ("Blind Gill") which is to be the goal of the book later on. Then, chapter one of the book proper begins with the words, "A quarter of a century later . . ."

Thus, in one stroke the reader has been shoehorned a year into the future, and the groundwork for the whole human drama of the book has been laid. Moreover, where Wyndham and McIntosh had to hunt up refuges for their fleeing survivors at the last moment—refuges which in-

evitably seemed improvised—Christopher has planted his at the very beginning.

The book is full of unobtrusive touches like this, evidences of consummate craftsmanship. The material is sensational in places, enough so to make Ben Hibbs sit up straight in his chair, but the approach is consistently quiet and reasonable.

Christopher's people are undistinguished, ordinary Englishmen. With two exceptions, none of them stands out, none of them is what an American writer would call "well characterized"; and yet, with the same two exceptions—Pirrie and his adulterous wife—all of them are perfectly plausible. When they speak, they seem to be saying what they would naturally say, and not what the author has put into their mouths.

Their development as the book proceeds is a little less believable to me, particularly in the way John Custance and Roger Buckley seem to exchange characters, John acquiring Roger's cynical toughness while Roger falls back into John's passive idealism. Neither of these changes seems exactly impossible under the circumstances, but they don't seem necessary to the plot, either, and they bother me a little.

For most of its length, the book blithely ignores the American convention that a story must be told as much as possible from a single viewpoint. Since this is a story of a group of people, not of any one man, the result is a definite gain in clarity and simplicity. Toward the end, it's true, the story does focus on John Custance during his character change from a civilized man to a ruthless autocrat, but this seems to me a lapse in taste. Very much as in John Masters' *Coromandel!*, this process tends to be unconvincing, because it's shown entirely from the viewpoint of the hero himself: and he can't see the changes, except as they're reflected in those around him; if he could, very likely, they wouldn't happen.

The texture of the narrative, the stream of small details which makes the difference between a fascinating story and an irritating or a dull one, is extremely good. The novel is continuously entertaining, and in some sense rewarding, although it never says anything particularly new or profound. It seems to have a beginning and a destination, and on reaching the destination you have a sense, not only of having been entertained along the way, but of having got somewhere.

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THE STARS MY DESTINATION, by Alfred Bester. Signet, 35¢.

The Stars My Destination, otherwise known as *Hell's My*

Destination, Tiger! Tiger!, and/or *The Burning Spear,* is everything Bester's *The Demolished Man* was, only a little too much more so.

There is the extravagant future society (hedonist in *TDM,* Victorian in *TSMD*); the psi factor which alters the society (in *TDM,* telepathy; in *TSMD,* "jaunting"—i. e., teleportation); there is the ruthless and inhumanly strong-willed villain-hero (Ben Reich; Gully Foyle) with his secret need for punishment; there are the typographical tricks and the funny names, all cranked up to a more breakneck pace, a more hysterical pitch.

The villain-hero is now opposed by no image of good, but by a gang of ruffians more coldly venal and merciless than himself. The playful name-coining of *TDM* here becomes a kind of maniacal doodling which Signet was utterly unable to handle: the typography of this book is a mess. The controlled violence of *TDM* here runs unchecked: Bester, the caustic satirist of neurotic science fiction, has turned himself into a sort of literate maso-Spillane. Foyle is pulped, slashed, tattooed, burned, frozen, etc., etc., ad naus.

The novel piles idea on idea, some of them good as gold—the underworld jaunters who follow the darkness around the world; the Skoptsies, self-mortifying ascetics who have had their sensory nerves cut; Sigurd Magsman, the 70-year-old child telepath; and enough others to stock six ordinary novels. Not content with this, Bester has added enough bad taste, inconsistency, irrationality, and downright factual errors to fill six more.

Having described the book's heroine, Olivia Presteign, as a blind girl, Bester immediately reveals that she is not blind at all, but sighted in a peculiar way: she sees in infra-red wavelengths, "from 7,500 angstroms to one millimeter . . . heat waves, magnetic fields, radio waves, radar, sonar, and electromagnetic fields." (We will pass by, if you please, the interesting question of how she manages to focus all this assorted noise on her retinas; Bester says she does it.) After which, he goes right on calling her blind, treats her as if she were blind, even to having her unable to jaunt, and finally reveals that she has turned criminal because of her bitterness at being blind!

In the opening section of the book, when Gully Foyle is adrift on an airless spaceship, Bester's assertion that "Much of the canned goods had lost their containers, for tin crumbles to dust in the absolute zero of space" would be idiotic, even if tin cans were made of tin. And the

stream of debris that follows Gully as he moves, "like the tail of a festering comet," is picturesque but inexplicable, unless Bester thinks there are convection currents in a vacuum.

Then there's Presteign of Presteign, head of the clan, sept and family, who is so rich and proud that he will not jaunt like ordinary mortals, but uses old-fashioned means of transportation, and even has a private telephone system. (Bester's notion that jaunting would replace the telephone is peculiar enough, considering that nobody can jaunt to an unfamiliar destination; but taking that on faith, *whom* does Presteign call on his telephone?)

The horrifying thing about all this is that its does eventually get somewhere, assume a shape and meaning. Bester ties up the major loose ends, including some you would swear he had never noticed. His puppet characters take on a sort of theatrical brightness; and the ending of the book, in mystical penitence and transfiguration, is grotesquely moving. Like the California hobbyist who builds graceful towers out of old bottles and rusting iron, Bester has made a work of art out of junk.

∞

THE WINDS OF TIME, by Chad Oliver. Doubleday, $2.95.

Here is a good idea for a short novelet, expanded by repetition and mismanagement into a short novel.

Dr. Weston Chase, caught by a storm while on a fishing vacation in the mountains, takes shelter in a cave, where he is captured by a goblin. He teaches the goblin English—using a pretty flossy vocabulary, to judge by the dialogue that results—and then we get a long flashback, in which we learn that this goblin-type is one of five survivors of an interstellar ship that crashed on Earth 15,000 years before, and has been here in suspended animation ever since.

The interstellar visitors, seen from their own viewpoint, are flatly incredible from the first time they open their mouths, because they all talk idiomatic 1957 eastern-seaboard American. This just simply is not the way you translate an alien language, as Oliver, an anthropologist, ought to know. You may gain sympathy for your Melanesians, let's say, or your Frenchmen or Chinese, by making them talk and react exactly as we do; but in the process you lose everything that makes them Melanesians, or Frenchmen or Chinese.

Even if Oliver's point is that the star-travelers really are like us to about nine decimals, as he seems to suggest in the closing chapters, this is not only incredi-

ble in itself, but it negates the basic function of science fiction. If your aliens, or distant planets, or far futures, are going to turn out to be just like here and now, what the hell is the use of leaving home in the first place?

The flashback takes up nearly a hundred pages, about half the book; a third of that is pure travelogue, and about as much again is pure lecture. Short as the book is, there is no room left for adequate characterization, background, significant detail. The narrative is one limp string of straight-line story-telling. Oliver keeps telling you what's happened, or even what's going to happen, instead of letting you see and hear it for yourself.

The author's own boyish, likeable personality comes through very clearly, but this is no story —it's an inflated synopsis.

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THE CASE AGAINST TOMORROW, by Frederik Pohl. Ballantine, 35¢.

Here is a mixed bag of six brilliant and incomplete stories, by one of science fiction's most scattered talents.

"The Census Takers," from *F&SF,* is a beautifully compact exercise in indirection. Entirely successful in its own terms, it plays one speculative idea (mass executions as a solution to overpopulation) against another (superior beings from the center of the earth) without wasting a word or a motion.

"The Candle Lighter," from *Galaxy,* is negligible—a feeble paradox, with one of those impossibly stupid come-to-realize heroes. Also negligible is "The Celebrated No-Hit Inning" from *Fantastic Universe*—a dismal attempt to combine science fiction with the slick funny baseball story, complete with dialogue by Ring Lardner.

"Wapshot's Demon," from *Science Fiction Stories,* has a fascinatingly impudent idea in the "Semantic Polarizer." Pohl mixes it adroitly with murder; the story is compact and well visualized, and would rate at least a B in my book, if it weren't for the leaky logic of the ending.

"The Midas Plague" is a distressing example of the kind of story which has become identified with *Galaxy* during the last five years or so: the inside-out future society, played poker-faced for snickers, in which the author, whenever he comes across an inconvenient fact or consequence, slaps a coat of paint over it and goes right ahead.

In this case, the thinking behind the story goes something like this: Expanding technology means overproduction. The solution to this is compulsory overconsumption, with ration points.

Therefore the rich are poor, and the poor are rich.

This is good for one laugh, or possibly two, but there is something gaggingly irrational after a while in the spectacle of Pohl's hero choking down more food than he can eat. The question, "Why doesn't he flush the stuff down the drain?" comes up several times during the story, but Pohl never answers it, he only makes vaguely relevant-sounding noises and changes the subject. The alternate solution, that of putting robots to work using up all the stuff the hero is supposed to consume, comes thirty pages too late in the story, but is hailed by everybody as a revolutionary idea.

This is something new in idiot plots—it's second-order idiot plotting, in which not merely the principals, but everybody in the whole society has to be a grade-A idiot, or the story could not happen.

The story proper is just as dull as it ought to be, but Pohl has embellished it with some additional scenes that are better than it deserves—fine, zany drunk episodes, involving a couple of very sharp minor characters and some highly agreeable mock poetry and politics.

The subject of "My Lady Green Sleeves" is race prejudice, and the story attacks it in a typical display of *Galaxy's* agonized irony, by substituting "wipes" (common laborers) for Jews, "figgers" (clerks) for Negroes, "greasers" (mechanics) for Mexicans, and, variously, "civil service people" and "G. I.'s" for white Anglo-Saxons. The point of all this, when we eventually get to it, seems to be that fostering class distinctions based on occupations has canceled out others based on race or religion —so that the heroine can ask, in honest ignorance, " 'What's a Jew?' "

In its own corkscrew fashion, I suppose, this is intended as a contribution toward racial equalitarianism. But it seems to me that rubbing the reader's nose repeatedly into racial hate-words like this is the worst possible way to go about it. The story is such a mishmash of viewpoints that it's impossible to tell where (if anywhere) the author's sympathies lie; reading it as straight satire, it seems to me, you could easily construe it as an expression of bigotry. And on top of everything else, a pure racial stereotype turns up in the story itself, in the description of a man named Hiroko: "Beads of sweat were glistening on his furrowed yellow forehead." (For God's sake, Fred, "yellow man" is an epithet—Japanese have brown skins.)

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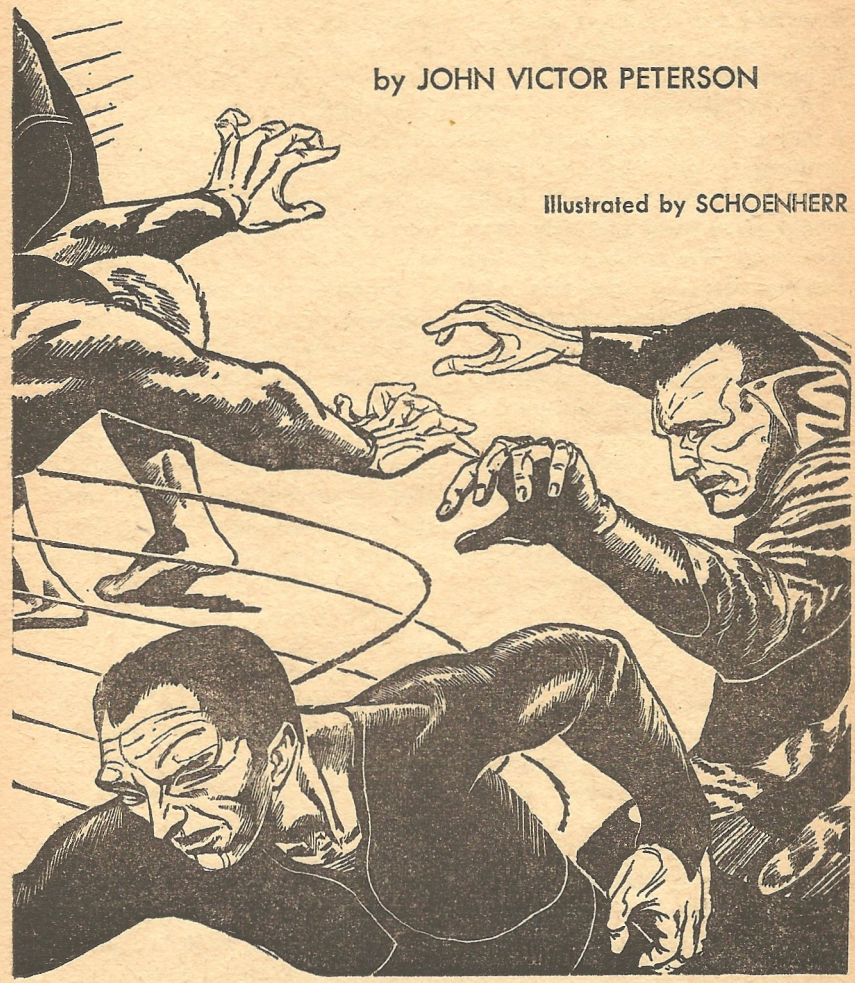
Second Census

Quintuplets alone would be bad enough, without a census taker who could count them in advance!

by JOHN VICTOR PETERSON

Illustrated by SCHOENHERR



Second Census

by John Victor Peterson

IN ADDITION to being a genius in applied atomics, Maitland Browne's a speedster, a practical joker, and a spare-time dabbler in electronics.

As far as speed's concerned, I had a very special reason for wanting to get home early tonight, and swift straight flight would have been perfectly okay with me. The trouble was that Browne decided that this was his night to work on Fitzgerald.

Browne lifted the three passenger jetcopter—his contribution to our commuterpool—from the flight stage at Brookhaven National Laboratories in a strictly prosaic manner. Then the flight-fiend in him came out with a vengeance. Suddenly and simultaneously he set the turbojets to full thrust and dived to treetop level; then he started hedgehopping toward Long Island Sound. His heavy dark features were sardonic in the rear-view mirror; his narrowed, speculative eyes flicked to it intermittently to scan Ed Fitzgerald beside me.

Browne's action didn't surprise, startle, or even frighten me at first. I'd seen the mildly irritated look in his eyes when Fitzgerald had come meandering up—late as usual!—to the ship back on the stage. I had rather expected some startling development; provoking Ed Fitzgerald to a measurable nervous reaction was one of Browne's burning ambitions. I also had a certain positive hunch that Fitzgerald's tardiness was deliberate.

In any event my mind was ninety per cent elsewhere. Tessie—my wife—had visifoned me from Doc Gardiner's office in New Canaan just before I'd left my office at the Labs and had told me with high elation that we were destined to become the proud parents of quintuplets! I was, therefore, now going back bewilderedly over our respective family trees, seeking a precedent in the genes.

I was shocked out of my genealogical pursuits when Browne skimmed between the tall stereo towers near Middle Island. I prayerfully looked at Fitzgerald for assistance in persuading Browne to cease and desist, but Fitzgerald was staring as imperturably as ever at Browne's broad back, a faintly derisive smile on his face.

I should have expected that. Even a major cataclysm couldn't budge Fitzgerald. I've seen him damp an atomic pile only milliseconds from critical mass without batting an eye before, during or after.

I tried to console myself. But while I knew Browne's reaction time was uncommonly fast and his years of 'copter flight singularly accident-free, I still could not relax. Not tonight, with the knowledge that I was a prospective father of not just the first but the *first five*. I wanted to get home to Tessie in a hurry, certainly, but I wanted to get there all in one proud piece.

Browne went from bad to worse and began kissing the 'copter's belly on the waves in Long Island Sound. The skipping stone effect was demoralizing. Then, trying to top that, he hedgehopped so low on the mainland that the jets blew the last stubbornly clinging leaves from every oak tree we near-missed crossing Connecticut to our destination on the Massachusetts border.

Fitzgerald was the only one who talked on the way. Browne was too intent on his alleged driving. I was, frankly, too scared for intelligible conversation. It wasn't until later, in fact, that I realized that Ed Fitzgerald's monologue had clearly solved a problem we were having on adjusting the new cosmotron at the Labs.

"We made good time tonight," Browne said, finally easing up as we neared home.

Fitzgerald grinned.

I found my voice after a moment and said, "It's a good thing radar doesn't pick up objects that low or C.A.A. would be breathing down your fat neck! As it is, I think the cops at Litchfield have probably 'cast a summons to your p. o. tray by now. That was the mayor's 'copter you almost clipped."

Browne shrugged as if he'd worry about it—maybe!—if it happened. He's top physicist at the Labs. In addition to his abilities, that means he has connections.

WE DROPPED imperturbable Fitzgerald on his roofstage at the lower end of Nutmeg Street; then Browne dropped a relieved me two blocks up and proceeded the five blocks to his enormous solar house at the hill's summit.

I energized the passenger shaft, buttoned it to optimum descent and dropped to first. There was a note from Tessie saying she'd gone shopping with Fitzgerald's wife, Miriam. So I'd start celebrating alone!

I punched the servomech for Scotch-on-the-rocks. As I sat sipping it I kept thinking about Maitland Browne. It wasn't just

the recollection of the ride from Brookhaven. It was also the Scotch. Association.

I thought back to the night Tessie and I had gone up to Browne's to spend the evening, and Browne invited me to sit in a new plush chair. I sat all right, but promptly found that I was completely unable to rise despite the fact that I was in full possession of my faculties. He'd then taken our respective wives for a midnight 'copter ride, leaving me to escape the chair's invisible embrace if I could. I couldn't.

Luckily he'd forgotten that his liquor cabinet was within arm's reach of the chair; I'd made devastating inroads on a pinch bottle by the time they'd returned. He switched off his psionic machine but fast then, and didn't ever try to trap me in it again!

The visifone buzzed and I leaped to it, thinking of Tessie out shopping in her delicate condition—

I felt momentary relief, then startlement.

It was Fitzgerald—Fitzgerald with fair features flushed, Fitzgerald the imperturbable one *stammering with excitement!*

"Now, wait a second!" I said in amazement. "Calm down, for Heaven's sake! What's this about a census?"

"Well, *are* they taking one now?"

"By 'they' I presume you mean the Bureau of the Census of the U. S. Department of Commerce," I said, trying to slow him down, while wondering what in the name of a reversed cyclotron could have jarred him so.

He spluttered. "Who else? Well, *are* they?"

"Not to my knowledge. They took it only last year. Won't do it again until 1970. Why?"

"As I was trying to tell you, a fellow who said he was a census taker was just here and damn it, Jim, he wanted to know my considered ideas of natural resources, birth control, immigration, racial discrimination, UFO's and half a dozen other things. He threw the questions at me so fast I became thoroughly confused. What with me still thinking about the cosmotron, wondering if Brownie will stop riding me before I do break down, and wondering where Miriam is, I just had to slow him down so that I could piece together the answers.

"Just about then he staggered as if a fifth of hundred-proof bourbon had caught up with him and reeled out without a farethee-well. I didn't see which way he went because Jim Moran —he's the new fellow in the house just down the hill—Jim called to see if the fellow had been here yet and what I thought

of him. If he hit Jim's before me, that means he should be getting to you within the next half-hour or so."

My front door chimed.

"Sorry, Fitz," I said. "This must be Tessie. She was coming home on the surface bus. Miriam's with her, so that's one worry off your mind. Take it easy. I'll call you back."

BUT IT WASN'T Tessie. It was a man, dressed in a dark brown business suit that was tight on his big frame. His face was a disturbing one, eyes set so wide apart you had trouble meeting them up close and felt embarrassed shifting your gaze from one to the other.

"Mr. James Rainford?" he asked rhetorically.

"Yes?"

"I'm from the Bureau of the Census," he said calmly.

This couldn't be the same fellow Fitzgerald had encountered. There must be a group of them covering the neighborhood. In any event, this man was cold sober. Further, the fastest Olympic runner couldn't have made the two long blocks from Fitzgerald's house in the time that had elapsed and this fellow wasn't even breathing hard.

"Let's see your credentials," I said.

I wasn't sure whether he hesitated because he couldn't remember which pocket they were in or for some other reason; anyway, he did produce credentials and they were headed U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, and looked very proper indeed.

But I still couldn't quite believe it. "But the census was taken last year," I said.

"We have to recheck this area," he said smoothly. "We have reason to believe that the records are inaccurate."

His eyes were harder to meet than ever.

"Excuse me," I said and stepped out on the stoop, looking down the hill toward Fitzgerald's house.

Not only was Fitzgerald standing on his tropic forelawn, but so were the dozen household heads in between, each and every one of them staring fixedly at the pair of us on my stoop.

"Come in," I said perplexedly and led the way.

When I turned to face him I found that he'd swung a square black box which resembled a miniature cathode ray oscilloscope from behind his back and was busily engaged in punching multi-colored buttons ringing the dim raster. I'm a gadget man—cybernetics is my forte—but I'm afraid I stared. The most curious wave-forms I have ever seen were purple-snaking across the 'scope.

"It's a combination memory storage bank and recorder," he explained. "Electronic shorthand. I'm reading the data which your wife gave to us and which I'll ask you to verify."

The gadget was a new one to me. I made a mental note to renew my subscription to *Scientific American.*

"Married," he said. "Ah, yes, expecting!"

"Now will you stop right there!" I cried. "That couldn't be on your records! A year ago we certainly weren't expecting! Now, look—"

But he kept on with most peculiar enthusiasm. "Quintuplets! Sure! Three boys and two girls! My congratulations, Mr. Rainford. Thank you for your time!"

I stood there dazed. Nobody but Doctor Gardiner, Tessie and myself—well, maybe Miriam Fitzgerald by this time—knew we were expecting. Even Gardiner couldn't know the division of sexes among the foetal group at this early stage of development!

I had to find a way to delay this strange man.

"Let's see your credentials again," I demanded as my mind raced: *Oh, where's Tessie? What was it Fitz had said? Brownie, maybe Brownie, can explain—*

The census taker pulled papers from his pocket, then reeled as though drunk. He staggered backward against and out of the door, the autoclose slamming it behind him.

I jerked open the door and jumped out on the stoop.

In those few seconds the man had vanished—

No! There he was fifty feet away ringing Mike Kozulak's bell. And he was erect, completely steady!

But *nobody* could move *that* fast!

I TURNED BACK and picked up the papers he'd dropped. There was a little sheaf of them, printed on incredibly thin paper. The printing resembled the wave-forms I had seen upon the 'scope. It was like some twisted Arabic script. And this strange script was overprinted on a star-chart which I thought I recognized.

I plumbed my mind. I had it! In a star identification course at M. I. T. they had given us star-charts showing us the galaxy as seen from another star which we were asked to identify. One of those charts at M. I. T. had been almost exactly the same as this: the galaxy as viewed from Alpha Centauri!

I was stunned. I staggered a bit as I went back out on the stoop and looked down the street. I welcomed the sight of

Ed Fitzgerald hurrying up across the neighbors' forelawns, uprooting some of the burbanked tropical plants en route.

By the time Fitzgerald reached me, the census taker had come out of Mike Kozulak's like a fission-freed neutron, staggered a few times in an orbit around one of Mike's greenhouse-shelled shrubs, and actually *streaked* across the two vacant lots between Mike's and Manny Cohen's.

"He's not human," I said to Ed. "Not *Earth*-human. I'll swear he's from Alpha Centauri; look at these papers! What he's after Heaven knows, but maybe we can find out. It's a cinch he'll eventually reach Maitland Browne's. Let's get there fast; maybe we'll be able to trap him!"

I dragged Fitzgerald inside and we went up the passenger shaft under optimum ascent.

My little Ponticopter's jets seared the roof garden as I blasted forward before the vanes had lifted us clear of the stage. I think I out-Browned Browne in going those five blocks and I know I laid the foundation for a Mrs. Browne vs. Mr. Rainford feud as I dropped my 'copter with dismaying results into the roof garden which was her idea of Eden. I had to, though; Brownie's is a one-copter stage and his ship was on it.

We beat the alien. We looked back down the hill before we entered Brownie's passenger shaft. The fellow was just staggering out of Jack Wohl's rancher at the lower end of this last block.

We found Browne working on a stripped-down stereo chassis which had been carelessly laid without protective padding in the middle of the highly polished dining table. I knew then that his wife couldn't possibly be home.

Browne looked up as if he were accustomed to unannounced people dropping into his reception chute.

"To what do I owe the honor of—" he started. Fitzgerald interrupted him with a stammered burst that brought a pleased grin to his broad features.

"Well, Fitz," Browne said. "Where's the old control?"

Fitzgerald fumed. I took over and explained swiftly.

"Well, this *is* a problem," Browne said thoughtfully. "Now why in the world—"

His front door chimed and became one-way transparent. We saw the alien standing on the stoop, erect and calm.

"Now what will—" Fitzgerald started. "We thought maybe—the chair, Brownie!"

Browne grinned and pressed a button on the table console. He has them in every room—to

control at his whim any of the dozens of electronic and mechanical equipments located throughout his enormous house.

The front door opened and the alien entered as Browne cried "Come in!"

Browne flicked over a switch marked *Lock 1st Fl* as he rose and went into the living room. We followed him warily.

THE ALIEN glanced back at the closed door with a trace of annoyance on his broad features; then regarded us imperturbably as we advanced.

"Mr. Fitzgerald and Mr. Rainford," he said flatly. "Well, this is a surprise!"

He didn't sound sincere.

"Have a seat," Browne said, waving a big hand toward *the* chair.

The alien shook his head negatively.

Browne gave Fitzgerald and me a quick glance, inclining his head forward. We promptly accelerated our advance.

"Look," Browne said, his dark face intense, "we know you're not what you pretend to be. We know you're not of our country, not of our world, not even of our solar system. *Sit down in that chair!*"

He lunged forward, grasping with his big hands, as we leaped at the alien from either flank.

The alien didn't just move—he *streaked,* shooting between Browne and Fitzgerald, heading unerringly toward the open passenger shaft—into it!

Browne leaped to a console and punched the roof-lock button. A split second later we heard a riveting machine burst of what was obviously Centaurian profanity coming down the shaft as the alien found the exit closed. Browne's fingers darted on the console, locking all the upstairs windows.

"Browne," I said, "what good will that do? If we do manage to corner him, just how long do you think we can stand up against him? With his speed he could evade us until doomsday, to say nothing about beating our brains out while we tried to land one solid punch!"

Fitzgerald said, "If we can keep him on the run, maybe he'll get tired."

"Yeah, maybe," I said. "What if that's his normal speed? And who's likely to get tired first? I'm dragging as of now."

"Well," Fitzgerald said, "we could get more people in and go at him in shifts—or, well, what about tear gas or an anesthetic gas or—"

"Now, wait!" Browne snapped, unquestionably seizing command. "I'll admit I started him on the run just now. Perhaps it was the wrong approach. After all, he's done nothing

wrong as far as we know. I—I guess all of us—leaped to the illogical conclusion that he's out for no good just because he's an alien. Sure, he's after *something* or he wouldn't be going from door to door posing as a census taker. The way you talk, Jim, would seem to indicate you're not curious. Well, I am, and I'm going to do everything in my power to find out what he's after.

"We've got to make him tell us. We can't deduce anything from the data we have now. Sure, we know he has what you, Jim, say look like bona fide credentials from the Census Bureau, but we also have right here I. D. papers or something which show he's apparently from Alpha Centauri. We know he speaks our language perfectly; ergo he either learned it here first-hand or acquired it from someone else who had learned it here.

"Whatever he's after, his approach certainly varies. He asked you a lot of questions, Fitz, but, Jim, practically all he did in your house was tell you your wife was pregnant with quintuplets. And whatever his approach has been, he never seems to finish whatever he comes to do. Something about you two—and from what you two have said, Kozulak and Wohl—seems to have a most peculiar effect on him; you say he's staggered out of every house he's entered only to recover again in a matter of seconds.

"Just try to equate that!"

He stopped, pondering, and we didn't interrupt.

"Look," he said, "you two go upstairs. Take opposite sides of the house and find him. Go slowly so that he won't be alarmed. Try to talk with him, to persuade him we mean him no harm. If you find you can't persuade him to come willingly, try to work him back to the passenger shaft. I'll watch through the console—I've kinescopes in every room—and I'll lock off one room at a time so that he can't reverse himself. I won't activate the kinescopes until you're upstairs; he might deactivate them if he weren't kept busy. Get him back to the passenger shaft and I'll take over from there."

"But what—" Fitzgerald started.

Browne scowled and we went. Fitzgerald should have known better; there are no buts when Browne gives orders.

WE REACHED the second floor, floated off the up column into the foyer, and separated.

Browne's first floor rooms are spacious, but most of those on the second floor are not. I'd never been on the second floor

before; I found it a honeycomb of interconnected rooms of varying sizes and shapes. I was apparently in Mrs. Browne's quarters; there were half a dozen hobby rooms alone: a sewing room, a painting room, a sculpture room, a writing room, others— And here was her spacious bedroom and on its far side the alien was vainly trying to force one of its windows.

He turned as I entered, his curious eyes darting around for an avenue of escape.

"Now, wait," I said as soothingly as I could. "We don't mean any harm. I think we're justified in being curious as to why you're here. Who are you anyway? What are you looking for and why?"

He shook his head as if bewildered and seemed suddenly to become unsteady.

"One question at a time, please," he said, temporizingly. "Your school system isn't exacting enough; you all think of too many things at once. It shocks a mind trained to single subject concentration, especially when one has been educated in telepathic reception."

He grinned at me as I mentally recalled his staggering moments of seeming drunkenness.

One question at a time, he'd said. Well, I'd ask him the one that was burning at the threshold of my mind. I said quickly:

"I realize that you probably read in my mind that my wife and I are expecting quintuplets, but how did you know the rest—about the division of sexes—or did you guess?"

"I'll have to explain," he said; then hesitated, seeming to debate mentally with himself as to whether he should go on. Suddenly he started to talk so fast that the words nearly blurred into unrecognizability, like a 45 rpm record at 78.

"I am Hirm Sulay of Alpha Centauri Five," he burst. "My people has warred with the race of Beta Centauri Three for fifty of your years. We secretly bring our children here to protect them from sporadic bombing, insuring their upbringing through placing them in orphanages or directly into homes."

A horrible suspicion flamed in my mind. I'd tried vainly to account for the multiple birth we were expecting. I cried at him: "Then my wife—" and he said,

"She will have twin girls, Doc Gardiner tells me. We had planned to have three newborn boys ready in the delivery room."

"Then Doc Gardiner—"

"He and his staff are all of my race," Hirm Sulay said. "I see how your mind leaped when I said 'newborn boys.' Your UFO sightings frequently describe a 'mother' ship. Consider-

ing the gravid women aboard I'd say the description is quite apt."

FOR SOME REASON anger flared in me, and I rushed at him. He blurred and went around me and out the way I'd come. I raced after him and heard Fitzgerald cry, "Oh, no you don't!" and machine-gun footfalls were doubling back toward me.

I hurried on and he flashed at and by me, then turned back as he came to a door Browne had remotely locked. Back at and past me again. I gave chase.

Fitzgerald yelled, "He's slowing down, Jim. He's tiring!"

And the doors kept closing under Browne's nimble fingering at the console down below. Suddenly the area was cut down to the passenger shaft foyer, and the three of us were weaving about, like two tackles after the fastest fullback of all time. I leaped forward and actually laid a hand on the alien for a split second, just enough to topple him off balance so that Fitzgerald, charging in, managed to bump him successfully into the shaft. A surprised cry came ringing back up the shaft; Browne had obviously cut the lift's power supply completely.

Browne's voice came ringing up: "Come on down, fellows; I've got him!"

The shaft guard light flicked to green. Fitzgerald and I dropped down to first.

Browne had apparently had his chair directly under the shaft; it was back from the touchdown pad now and Hirm Sulay was in it, vainly wriggling, shamefaced.

"Now maybe we'll find out a thing or two—" Browne said meaningfully, bending toward the alien.

"Wait a minute," I cut in and related what Hirm Sulay had told me upstairs.

"Is it true?" Browne demanded.

Hirm Sulay nodded.

"But why are you going from door to door? Surely you know where those children are!"

"Sorry," Hirm Sulay said, "we don't. Some of the older and more important records were lost. I say more important because the missing ones I seek are grown. We're fighting a war, as I told you, Jim. You can't keep fighting a war without young recruits!"

Browne's nearly fantastic dexterity came to my mind then. It apparently came to his simultaneously; he asked abruptly,

"Could I be one of you?"

"What do you think?" Hirm Sulay countered, his face enigmatic.

"Well, I certainly can't move as fast as you!"

"Have you ever tried? Have you ever gone in for athletics? I'd say no. Most scientists are essentially inactive — physically, that is."

"Are you saying *'yes'?"* Browne cried.

Hirm Sulay looked us over, one by one. "Each of you is of our blood," he said. "I knew Jim and Fitz were when Fitz said I was slowing down upstairs. I wasn't; they were speeding up to normalcy for the first time."

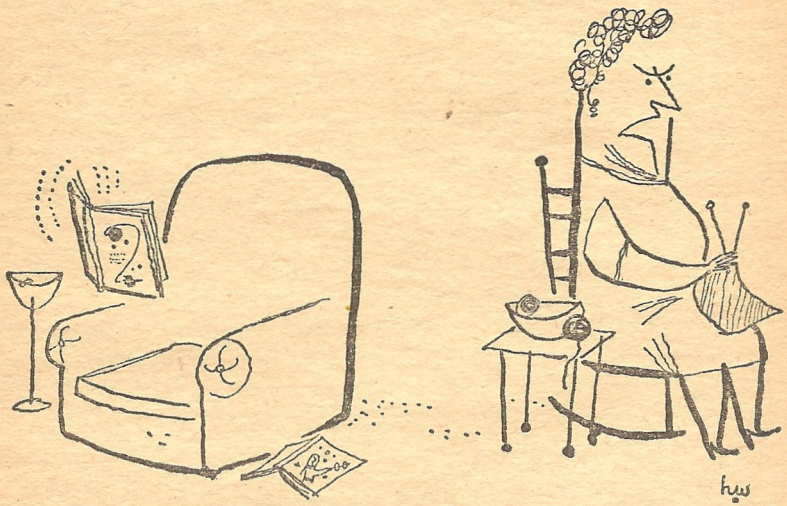
I was stunned for a moment, only dimly aware that he went on to say, "Now please turn off this blasted chair and tell me how it works. The principle applied as a tractor beam could win our war!"

"I haven't the vaguest idea," Browne said. "But I bet *you* can figure it out!"

Browne went to the servomech for drinks. He was gone for precisely three seconds. Of those the servomech took two. Slow machine.

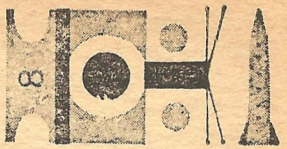
I don't know what to tell Tessie. Maybe she'd feel strange with the boys if she knew. I'll certainly have to tell her part of the truth, though, because I just can't let Browne and Fitzgerald go to help win *our* war without me.

∞ ∞ ∞



"Trouble with you, George, is you spend all your time reading that escape literature!"

By the editor



REFLECTIONS WHILE FLEXING

IF YOU HAD the opportunity to redesign the human body to your own specifications, what changes would you make?

Personally, having just suffered for a couple of weeks with an abscessed tooth, I might be tempted to eliminate teeth altogether.

I know a couple of people, though, who will settle for nothing less than being equipped with wheels instead of feet.

I've often heard proposals in favor of knees or laps that would bend in both directions instead of only one; and eyes in the backs of heads are cliches by now. Certainly, changes of this nature would make sense if you were aiming for bodies that would fit comfortably into modern automobiles. (The eyes in the backs of heads would replace rear view mirrors, which just don't function any more.)

Like most pleasant fantasies, however, these ideas tend to fall apart if you examine them very closely. Without teeth, for instance, I could undoubtedly live on yoghurt—but what would I clamp my pipe between?

Wheels are horribly limited, when you stop to think about them. They'd be terrible for climbing stairs, or kicking people. And how many women could you persuade to carry spare tires?

And suppose you did revamp human beings so they'd fit through the two-foot high doors of modern cars? Those fiends in Detroit would probably turn around and design cars with doors three feet high, making us all look pretty silly. And if you had rear-view eyes, you'd only have to go out and buy an extra television set. So where does that leave you?

Actually, the human body is admirable for its flexibility—luckily for us.

A Martian science fiction writer, knowing Earth's surface is largely water, might well imagine Earthmen as having scales and fins. It would be an intelligent guess, if a wrong one.

And, of course, there *are* fish on Earth. Physically, they would satisfy the Martian's picture of

Earthmen. The only trouble is, they're not the dominant species, and when science fiction writers describe other worlds, they usually devote most of their attention to the dominant species on each. How many stories have there been about Martian garter snakes?

It's a safe guess that if there are intelligent forms of life on other planets, they are not perfectly adapted to their environments, physically speaking. Intelligent life forms adapt their environments to themselves, not vice versa.

I'm for flexibility. But don't let me spoil your fun. Go right ahead and redesign the human body if you want to.

INFINITY tries to be a flexible magazine. This issue, there was a big stack of interesting letters from readers on hand, so "Feedback" is longer than usual and set in slightly smaller type. (It would be nice to keep it that way —but it's up to you to supply the letters.) Story lengths in this issue vary from an 800-word short to a real short novel—and we're beginning to schedule some genuine, full-length novels for future issues.

A LETTER from Isaac Asimov, received too late for inclusion in "Feedback," strikes me as worth quoting in full here:

"In the September, 1957, issue of INFINITY, Damon Knight reviews my book *The Naked Sun* and expresses his approval of that facet of the book which deals with the romance of Lije and Gladia. (Thanks very much, Damon.)

"He ends by saying, 'Ike, if you can do this, why are you bothering to write science fiction at all?'

"Of course, this is probably just a rhetorical question that requires no answer, but I would like to take this opportunity to answer it, just the same. There are lots of angles I could harp on. There are lots of pleasures in science-fiction writing: intellectual pleasures, emotional pleasures, even—yes, yes—financial pleasures. There are the wonderful people you meet and the wonderful things you find yourself thinking of.

"But I need no details and no complications. I can put it very simply—

"Damon, I write science fiction because I love science fiction. That is the whole of my reason; all else is rationalization."

My sentiments too, Ike. Thank you for saying it, and stick by your guns!

—LTS

∞ ∞ ∞

Feedback

AFTER reading "The Men Return" I can only say it was wonderful. The best sf story I have ever had the pleasure of reading. Anybody who says this is not science fiction has rocks in his head! This (in my insignificant opinion) is sf at its ultimate ∞+.

Now about Sgt. Billings, his charges, and his extremely critical critics. I, personally, am inclined to agree wholeheartedly with him. I read Clarke's *Childhood's End* and although I enjoyed it immensely, I found it to be all that Sgt. Billings says it is. One A/1C Robert S. Adams states that "It is silly to mix the two for one is on the right and the other is on the left and you are in between. You can't mix the two (God & Science) only yourself." I say the man who has the gall to say this must be excruciatingly immoral and sacrilegious. Science is an important part of our daily lives. But are we forgetting the One who brought all this in existence? God is more a part of our lives than science can ever hope to be. I ask you A/1C Adams, why can't they mix? Sgt. Billings states ". . . scientists of the highest caliber confess to being religious and daily practice their faith." Now, A/1C Adams, if this is not the mixing of the two, then kindly explain just what is? Anybody want to argue?

I like science fiction very much and although I agree with Sgt. Billings 100%, I shall keep reading it and keeping up with INFINITY and just hope that sf writers will follow Sgt. Billings' suggestion and ". . . re-examine their worship of the God of Science . . ."

Let's have some more Jack Vance soon.—Cleve Chapman, R.F.D. 2, Box 1, Newport, North Carolina.

∞

About that Jack Vance story "The Men Return," the idea was really good; it was one of the best *new* ideas I've seen in a while now. It has real promise for forming the basis for a real classic. What I can't understand is why Vance had to make the story so short. As it now stands I could hardly rank it as better than average. Someone—Hal Clement, or perhaps Frederic Brown—ought to make a full length novel out of the idea. Vance's story just didn't come off.

Damon Knight hit the bullseye with his review of *The Shores of Space*. I really was disappointed by the way in which Matheson let me down with the endings of his stories. I also agreed in general with the review of Clarke's book —it probably is the poorest Clarke

to appear in six or seven years. On the other hand, I disagree with the dissection of *The Human Angle.* I found all of the stories except the title story and "A Man of Family" good, and "The Servant Problem," "Party of the Two Parts," and "The Flat-Eyed Monster" outstanding gimmick stories. Finally, a suggestion to Knight: How about adding about five pages to your column and reviewing six or seven more books each month. You have the ability and intelligence to rank right up at the top of the SF book reviewers; all you need is more space. *(Damon has nothing to say about it; we simply don't have any more space to give him.—LTS)*

In closing, I have a request to make. Please, please! Let's have some stories by Robert Sheckley once more. No good SF magazine should be without him.—Roland Hirsch, 14 Pershing Avenue, Trenton 8, New Jersey.

∞

Since I always read editorials and things first I read your discussion of Vance's "The Men Return" and, of course, had to read the story immediately thereafter. I did. May I vote, too, just as though it were 1938 again and I was a vociferous fan?

Of course, "The Men Return" is science fiction. It pictures a world where the law of causality doesn't hold and does that very well indeed. I liked it.—Isaac Asimov, West Newton, Massachusetts.

∞

Honestly can't figure out what you are so excited about concerning Vance's off-beat fantasy. Seems to be an average pot-boiler for my money, though the theme has not been overworked lately.

The real gem of the whole issue was David Mason's "Rockabye, Grady." After reading all the SF I could find since "Dr. Hackensaw's Secrets" and "Around the Universe" in Gernsback's *Science and Invention* back around 1921 and subscribing to six SF mags now, I should easily include Mason's effort among the top hundred I have ever read.

As an old professional soldier, now retired for combat disability, I have been quite interested in observing the effects of religious training on men under the stresses of combat. Time after time I have seen the "Sunday School Boys" fold up and wash out in time of stress and under combat conditions. Their religious training has built in their minds a reservoir of guilt feelings, anxieties, and gnawing fears of eternal punishments so they are the *first* to go into screaming hysterics, nervous crackups, or psychosomatic illness. The stupid cliche "no atheists in foxholes" has been disproven thousands of times. The chap who remains in there fighting long after the religious fanatics have been led or dragged away is the chap who has not been frightened from babyhood up by preachers and priests promising him everything from bad luck to eternal fire for doing the things any normal human would naturally be expected to do in a lifetime.

I believe, along with Benjamin Franklin, Abraham Lincoln, Tho-

mas Payne, Luther Burbank, Thomas Edison, and thousands of other thinking people, in a Grand Architect of the Universe, and like all of them I believe that no book ever written can contain a true description of His laws, wishes, or commands to man on how to order his life.

A decent person of normal intelligence does not need any guide books of dubious authenticity to help him live a clean, moral, helpful life.—Oliver R. Franklin, Lt. Col. USAF Retired, Route 2, Box 202, Fort Myers, Florida.

∞

Due to my somewhat peculiar habit of going through prozines from the hindmost item forward, I encountered your July editorial before reading "The Men Return." Judging from the description you gave it there, plus what little information I was able to glean from the blurb, I fully expected to find one of those nauseatingly stylized, "literary" type things. The creation of the Earth or some-such profound concept, I nodded knowingly as I prepared to go through the ordeal of reading it.

Need I tell you that I was dead ringing wrong? Why I ever suspected that a craftsman like Vance would sink to such depths, I really can't say; in any case, just as you predicted, I'm forced to go to extremes to express my feelings for the story. I have, by no means, read everything that Vance has published, but of the material I *have* seen, none even comes close to this.

I can't see how anyone with a speck of knowledge could term "The Men Return" a fantasy; the scientific premise is far more clear and pronounced than in 50% of the science fiction currently being published, and certainly more original than 95%. In fact, I disagree with you that its elements obey no laws: within the frame of the yarn itself, the protagonists are obeying their instincts for self-preservation, the world around them is obeying a "law," if you can call it that, of effect without cause, and so on.

In short, (a) this is the best story, bar none, you've printed to date that falls into the short story category, and (b) I feel a pang of sorrow for those who fail to appreciate it. It's impossible to ask for more of the same, as this is it . . . thanks, anyway.

The remainder of the issue is uniformly good, the one outstanding flop being Wellen's overlong and dreary tale. A far cry indeed from "The Superstition Seeders"; this one should have been cut by approximately half and so stepped up. Great passages are totally unnecessary, and in a story of this nature such can do naught but bog things down. The overall plot is sound, and the ending a good one. "The Burning World," on the other hand, is taut and well-paced, yet filled with brainfood that doesn't impede the unfolding of events. Budrys' novelets for INFINITY and SFA have been among his best recent output.

Am I correct in assuming that someone cut the ending of "Rockabye, Grady" to leave room for the final paragraphs of the Wellen

novelet? *(No.—LTS)* Whoever is responsible did a poor job of it; anyone who is capable of writing as literate a story as this won't spoil the effect of the climax by chiseling it out of bare rock and leaving the bare, sharp corners exposed, when the rest is so smooth. The cut-job didn't spoil things overmuch, luckily; it's Mason's best of a brief career.

Slesar and Stearns are up to their usual standards, which isn't anything flabbergasting, merely good solid stuff.

A good issue, your best this year.—Kent Moomaw, 6705 Bramble Avenue, Cincinnati 27, Ohio.

∞

My opinion, eh?

I thought that "The Men Return" was both science fiction and fantasy. It had to be. I enjoyed the story only slightly, though, as I am not so very fond of Vance's style of writing. I think that, undoubtedly, it was his worst stroke of luck so far. His best—I'll just have to refer you along to *To Live Forever.*

If you can get a real-good serious novel from him, though, and soon, then that'd be good. *(We'll try.—LTS)*

I enjoy your magazine leaps and bounds, but I think that I get a lots better kick out of "Feedback." We, who are the poor creatures that derive such pleasure from such stuff, can happily say that yours is the best letter department in the whole line of business anywhere and you'll always have my say so on such thrilling fine stories like "The Burning World" and "Deeper Than the Darkness."—James W. Ayers, 609 First Street, Attalla, Alabama.

∞

In the July INFINITY, page 76, O'Reilly is outraged at the idea of going east on 51st, a westbound street, but seems to be completely unconcerned on page 68 about the fact that there is southbound traffic on 8th Avenue, which, of course, is one-way *uptown.*—Ed Bonoff, 100 Bank Street, New York City.

∞

This issue of INFINITY requests comment on Jack Vance's "The Men Return." That's only fair; I confess I'd never have bought this issue had it not promised a new story by Jack Vance. Vance is a dandy writer, I've liked everything he's written so far, and I wouldn't miss this one.

Now I wish I'd passed it up. I didn't like it. Why not? Well, it's been a long time since I sat down and forced myself to make noises like a letterhack, but basically I think it was because it *was not science fiction.* No, it was *not.* Argue all you like, but science is the orderly exploration of cause and effect, and talk about non-causality is semantic nonsense. Hence a story about non-causality is something other than science fiction. Fantasy? I wouldn't know. But not science fiction, and not the kind of fantasy I like much.

However, I'm glad I bought this copy of INFINITY, for it had two better-than-average stories . . . "Sweet Dreams," which was one of the most personally-involving

adventure stories I've read in a Bem's age, and "Rockabye, Grady," which (spite of sounding like it was written with one eye on Margaret Mead's works and the other on Chad Oliver's latest) had an amusing twist in the tail! "The Show Must Go On" was mildly marvelous; it stopped short of perfection only because the hero somehow didn't make me *care* whether he ever got out of his predicament or not. "Even Stephen" was readable, faintly funny, with a stinging shocker in the last paragraph (cute, clever!), while Budrys' "The Burning World" was smoothly written, as all his stories are, *but* . . . somehow drab. I confess I am fed up with wrangling Utopias. And I have a taste for the highly colored anyhow.—Marion Zimmer Bradley, Rochester, Texas.

∞

I like INFINITY. I think you're here to stay. Count me, if you like, as another monster of distinction. *(Glad to.—LTS)*

But there is one thing about your mag I *don't* like, and I feel strongly enough about it to write and tell you so.

I refer to the boil that writes like a man—Damon Knight.

When I first heard via the grapevine that Knight was trying to be more than a book reviewer, that he was trying to apply the principles of literary criticism to science fiction, I was delighted. One step more, I thought, in the advance of a field to which I am devoted (or, perhaps, addicted).

That delight soon turned to disgust and anger when I read his column. Knight is no critic. He's God.

I hold no special brief for any of the writers whose work He has deigned to Criticize. Nor do I object to satire, and irony, and exposure of flaws where they exist —if it's done in proportion. But I do have an old-fashioned prejudice: I believe in fair play, and this bitter quill is unfair. Even when He finds something to praise, He manages to do it in such a way as to be insulting.

Knight is not applying the principles of literary criticism to science fiction. He is relieving an innate sadism by means of a poisoned pen. The man should be psychoanalyzed —or better, let him take up voodoo. It's too bad, because he *does* have great talent.

I realize as I read this that it sounds like a personal attack. It is not intended as such, it is an objection to what he is *doing,* which I think is outrageous. There is also a feeling of sorrow at the betrayal of a great idea. And it is also retaliation in kind, a criticism of the critic in his own vein, so that he may perhaps feel what his lash is like. Tone it down, Mr. Knight! Try a little milk of human kindness, it won't curdle *you,* and you will be doing yourself and science fiction a service.

Otherwise I shall sentence you to a fate worse than death. I'll stop reading your column!—Art Coulter, 297 Canyon Drive, Columbus 14, Ohio.

∞

First of all, the Budrys novelet. Budrys seems to be doing some-

thing that Sturgeon has been doing for years: he has taken the concept of "freedom" and is exploring it in its various meanings and contexts, as Sturgeon did with the concept of "love." At least this is the impression I get from Budrys' several most recent stories. I hope I'm right, because Budrys is one of the few authors in present-day sf who seems genuinely concerned with that theme, and its attendant problems. His stories are all rather grim, but they have valid questions to raise, and valid things to say. I don't think anything more can or should be asked of an author.

Second, the Vance story. I am frankly rather puzzled at your expectance of some sort of wild reaction on the part of your readers. Vance has tried this same sort of thing before—the creation of a totally unreal situation, in which one cannot possibly find a point of reference to tie down to—and with the same unsatisfying lack of success. (The other example I have in mind is "The Mitr," which appeared a few years back in a now-defunct magazine.) I have my own private suspicions that the convincing depiction of the completely unreal and alien situation can never be achieved fully; to my mind, the situation in which the unreality stems from, and relates to, a still partially unrecognizable and believable world, is both easier and far more effective: witness the highly effective episodes in the various dream-worlds in Philip K. Dick's *Eye in the Sky.* I don't think the lack of success of Vance's story is traceable to his writing style or ability; the story is still readable and enjoyable, even though it aims toward something it cannot reach.

I still prefer Vance when he turns his talents to creating such semi-alien but completely real worlds as the Big Planet of his 1952 novel of that title, or the world of the immortals in *To Live Forever,* or that gloriously fantastic world of sorcery, *The Dying Earth.* If only he would write more novels like these. . . . *(This seems to be a popular idea.—LTS)*

As for this supposed lack of stories with a religious background, what about Philip Jose Farmer's stories of Father John Carmody and Walter M. Miller's chronicles of the Albertian Order of St. Liebowitz. And Tony Boucher's "Quest for St. Aquin," Arthur Clarke's "Nine Billion Names of God." And even C. S. Lewis' great trilogy, although those novels might better be classified as fantasy. I, too, keep a checklist of memorable stories, and a quick glance through it fails to disclose a significantly smaller percentage of *good* science fiction on religious themes than on any other subject.

A final remark: that cover by Emsh is tremendous!—Robert E. Briney, 521B Graduate House, M.I.T., Cambridge 39, Massachusetts.

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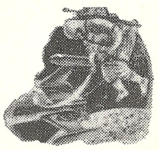

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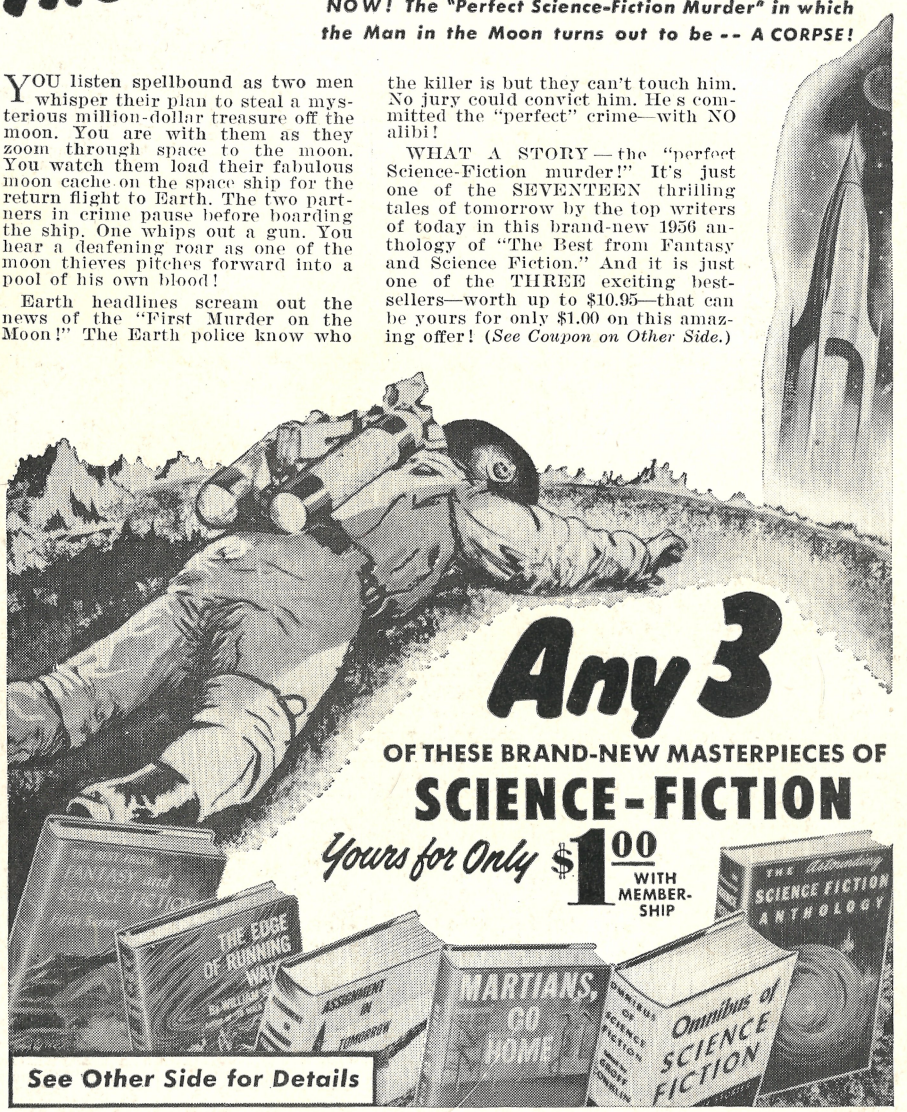

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