

NEBULA

SCIENCE FICTION

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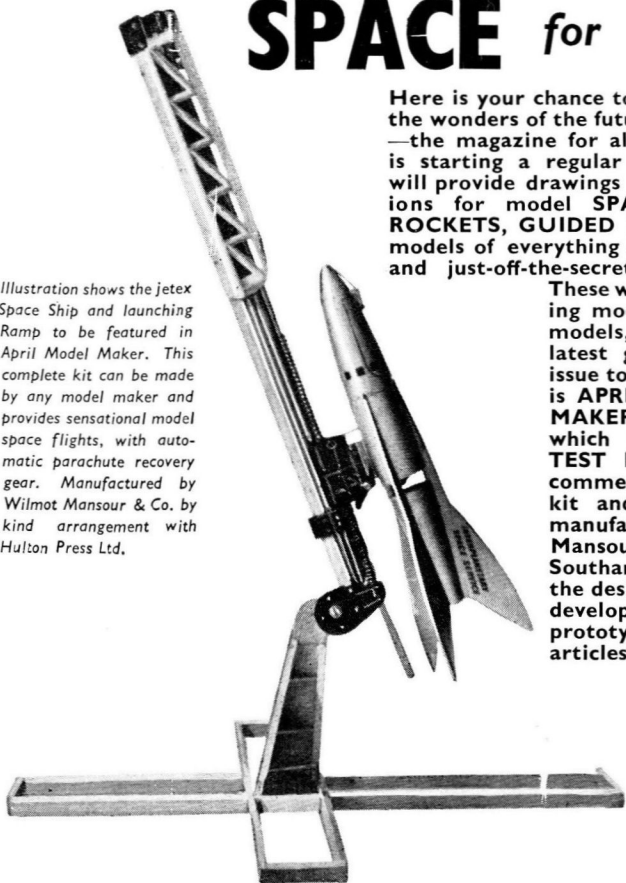
SF FILM NEWS DIRECT FROM HOLLYWOOD

SPACE for YOU!

Here is your chance to enjoy in fact some of the wonders of the future! **MODEL MAKER**—the magazine for all who make models—is starting a regular space feature, which will provide drawings and building instructions for model **SPACE SHIPS**, **SPACE ROCKETS**, **GUIDED MISSILES**, and indeed models of everything appertaining to space and just-off-the-secret-list future projects.

These will include actual working models, sectioned display models, scale drawings of the latest guided missiles. First issue to carry this new feature is **APRIL NUMBER MODEL MAKER** on sale **APRIL 1st**, which will offer readers a **TEST REPORT** of the first commercial model space ship kit and launching ramp as manufactured by **Wilmot Mansour and Co. of Totton, Southampton**, together with the designer's own story of its development through several prototypes. Full supporting articles and features. Play your part in a **PRACTICAL** space future—who knows, your models may be the prototypes of a new Galactic history!

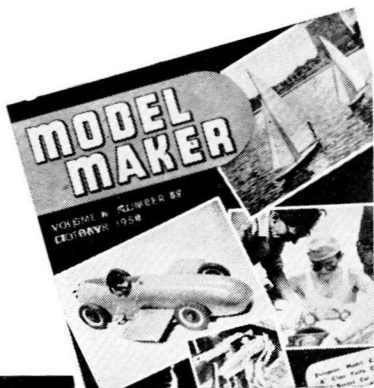
Illustration shows the Jetex Space Ship and launching Ramp to be featured in April Model Maker. This complete kit can be made by any model maker and provides sensational model space flights, with automatic parachute recovery gear. Manufactured by Wilmot Mansour & Co. by kind arrangement with Hulton Press Ltd.



MODEL MAKER

MODEL MAKER is the magazine for all who make models. Its 60 fact-packed pages, profusely illustrated with photos and drawings size $9\frac{3}{4} \times 7\frac{1}{4}$ ins. deal exclusively with model cars, ships, boats, yachts locomotives, workshop accessories . . . the whole range of models . . . and now the **NEW SPACE FEATURE** bringing **MODELS OF THE FUTURE** to the public for the first time. Get your copy on **APRIL 1st** from your usual newsagent or model shop, or in case of difficulty send 2/- for your copy direct to:

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NEBULA

SCIENCE FICTION

Edited by PETER HAMILTON

Issue Number Twelve

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REPORT ON ADAM **E. R. James** 77

In an age of enlightenment many useful things may be done with a convicted murderer. This is a story of one of these.

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With immortality had come back-sliding and complete decadence. Some people however, preferred the alternative.

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Black and White Illustrations by Turner, Greengrass, Frew and Hunter.

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Look here . . .

The other day I received a letter which contained the highly unusual question, "which author do you, as editor of Nebula, like best?"

Well, of course, this is a very difficult question to answer. Let it suffice to say that I believe that all the authors whose stories you have read in NEBULA have their own individual qualities and that the stories which represent them on these pages **must** reach a very high standard or they would never have seen print (not in NEBULA, anyway).

But, looking deeper, I suppose any editor has a soft spot for those authors who are most popular with his readers as they have the power to retain large readerships for his magazine and naturally enhance its prestige with the profession. On the other hand he likes to discover as much new talent as possible as this, when successful, brings a certain amount of reflected glory to both editor and magazine.

Following this train of thought, I decided to work out, from the "Fanalysis" poll we run in each issue, just who were the most popular NEBULA authors in 1954. The results were absorbing, especially when compared with similar figures for 1953, but alas they were very incomplete. Only a very small minority of readers bother to send me their preferences on the stories in each issue and until YOU co-operate with me and the authors who give us both so much reading pleasure, it would be unfair to everyone to pay too much attention to the results of the incomplete figures available.

It seems from these figures, however, that my friend E. C. (Ted) Tubb was your favourite author in 1954, though, in fairness to the others, you should bear in mind the fact that his fine stories appeared in every issue of Nebula in the year concerned. Second came that prominent writer, Eric Frank Russell, while third place went to Sydney J. Bounds. The most popular of my own discoveries was Richard P. Ennis, while the favourite American author in Nebula last year was Robert A. Heinlein.

So, here is the idea that I have been leading up to all this time: From this current issue of Nebula (the first in 1955) I'm launching a special appeal to all my readers to let me have their preferences on the stories in each issue of this magazine so that the percentage-results will be much more accurate than before. The score for each author will be kept carefully and at the end of 1955 the name of the most popular author will be announced and he (or she) will be presented with a signed certificate to this effect, as well as a cash prize of Ten Guineas.

Decision Deferred

With immortality had come back-sliding and complete decadence. Some people however, preferred the alternative.

Illustrated by Harry Turner

HE WAS TALL AND BROAD SHOULDERED, and he had to turn sideways to pass through the narrow doorway. The room was large and dimly lit with one small cone of light. Directly facing the door, man-sized letters sprawled across the furthest wall, casting a ruddy glow that reached as far as the desk. They were there for a purpose. They were a psychological stratagem.

MINISTRY OF DEATH

Seated at the desk was a man clad in lilac coloured casuals. He looked up as the stranger coughed, and his painted eyebrows lifted slightly in surprise. In one swift fluid motion he had cut off the private reader and risen to his feet. The chair creaked slightly as he said, "Good morning, Citizen —."

"Levere," the man supplied. "Mark Levere."

The Minister studied him in silence for a moment. Dark eyes over a hooked nose took in the plain grey tunic and brief shorts. They paused on a bronzed face filled with cool assurance, and lips and eyes

which seemed to derive a sense of grim amusement from the words of flame. They looked away.

"My name is Schofield. Sit down."

Levere leaned forward in the straight-backed chair. "I want a Life Release."

Schofield glanced down at his nails and buffed them on his sleeve. The nails were three inches long and were dusted with silver and gold. His lips were just a shade too bright for the tint to be natural. He didn't look up. His voice was carefully casual, "Are you a fool, Levere?"

Levere studied the long finger nails and switched his gaze to the neuric gun strapped low on Schofield's hip. The trigger guard had been removed to accommodate the exceptional nail growth, and he realised that Schofield was more dangerous than he looked at first glance. The dark eyes were fiercely a man's, and a true Effeminist would have scorned the nose that peaked between them like a parrot's beak. He was, Levere decided, a Transisionalist—tired of one Cult and yet not too willing to forsake it entirely and adopt another. A man of moods.

"Any man who wants to die is a fool," Schofield observed. He pressed a button on the desk top. "Albert, bring me a glass of wine."

A moment passed whilst Schofield hummed to himself. A door at the far side of the chamber opened and Albert appeared, the glass held carefully between two stubbed arms. His body was bared to the waist, and all of him that was visible above that mark was pink-white scar tissue, puckered and ugly.

Levere's eyes closed in protest; Schofield's were bleakly disregarding, his voice harsh. "I'm at my desk, man. Count the steps. Ten forward. To the left. Now thirteen . . . stop!" Set it down carefully, Albert. The lash if you spill it!" A pause whilst Albert gingerly settled the glass on the desk and waited with empty eye sockets fixed firmly above Schofield's head. "That's all, you may leave now."

His voice took on a dreamy quality as he watched the twisted creature stumble away. "You would hardly think he was once a handsome man, would you, Levere? He was. He was also a foolish man, he tried to commit suicide because he was tired of living. The State is a jealous being, Mark. He may never die now. That's his punishment—everlasting life and deformity. Don't you think he was a fool?"

Levere gagged.

Schofield picked up the glass and sipped the wine. He dabbed his lips with a lace handkerchief. "He has left, you may open your eyes again. Now, to details. Just how old are you, Mark?"

"Three hundred."

"A child almost. But old enough to have experienced life. How many lovers have you taken?"

"Four."

"They bored you perhaps?"

Levere lifted his head. "No," he said coldly. "It was the other way about. They left me."

"I see. You have been a member of how many different Cults?"

"None!" This time he shouted the answer.

Schofield rose and walked round to Levere. He placed his hand on Mark's shoulder. His voice when he spoke was warm and friendly. "Try to understand, Mark, that my purpose here is to see you live—not help you to die. Correct me if I'm wrong, you want to die because you are immortal. Does that make sense, even to you?"

"And if I don't care to discuss it?"

The State Minister reached across and played back the tape. "You will. I shall be here a long time, Mark, and I assure you I will never allow another hearing, tomorrow or in ten thousand years. But if you choose to be stubborn remember Albert and suicide."

Levere shrugged. "All right, here's your answer. I'm tired of living. I don't want immortality. I never asked for it, and I've never sought it. Your precious State gave me no choice in the matter. It did what it liked with me and I'm the one who suffers."

"Take care, Levere! You're speaking treason!" Schofield stroked his jowls and smiled. The hooked nose came nearer to Levere as he said, "But I forgot; The State excuses madness."

"Tell me, Mark, how many others have you met who wished to die? It isn't hard to answer. I can tell you: None! You are merely maladjusted to events. If everyone but you is content and finds happiness in immortality, then the State must be right and you must be wrong. It is outlook that counts. The minority have to fall in with the majority. There must be oneness, always! That's the way of life. The objector is removed or absorbed, and the State absorbs—integrates—the recalcitrant matter into its oneness."

Levere's voice, a cracking whiplash, stopped his movement towards the buzzer. "Happiness! Contentment! Are you blind, Schofield? The human race is dying. Yes, crazy as it sounds. Instead of the greatness that should have come from immortality we've been given decadence—not mere stagnation but decay! A thousand years before I was born man had landed rockets on Luna and set up his Bases there. And what has happened since? Medical research, space flight, technology, sociology—the very foundations of progress and initiative—are all abandoned subjects. The laboratories gather dust, the Luna



domes are empty shells. Immortality could have given man the stars, a future to be proud of. Instead it gave him the Cults. Earthbound cults founded on fads and phases because State servo-mechs do man's work and leave him with time on his hands—infinite time! Effeminists, Hunters, Main Liners, Sadists, Exhibitionists, Masochists; and God knows how many others —”

“There is no God,” Schofield said sharply. “There is only the State!”

“— and God knows how many others make a mockery of the word sanity. Look at yourself, Schofield, you with your paint and powder and pretty fingernails, and then say which of us is mad!”

The Minister's pale face tightened and his fingers inched towards the neuric gun. He laughed sharply, and his hand dropped away. “You'd do well as a Masochist. What is this? Do you want me to hurt you? Do you want your nerves to be tied up in knots until you can't even open your mouth to shriek?” His hand clamped down on Levere's shoulder and twisted him round. The fingers curled deep. “Is this some stupid hoax, some new thrill-seeking search?”

Levere flung off the heavy hand. “Damn you, Schofield! Damn

you! You don't know what you're saying, don't you realise I'm sincere about the Life Release? Can't you get it into your head that for twenty years I've lived in a hell world—a limbo—that offers me nothing?"

Schofield's head moved slowly from side to side. "No, Levere, I can't. You left it too late for it to be convincing. Not even a Masochist would put up with twenty years of torment. You're a liar, Levere. A poor liar."

Mark fought to check the anger that raged inside him. At least a State servo-mech was capable of limited free-thought, but Schofield, a State Minister and one of the few people who worked, exhibited nothing but a blind obedience to the doctrine that what the State willed was right. And that meant Cultism and the decadence which accompanied it was right, and that no possible objector could exist.

He made another attempt at trying to persuade Schofield.

He told the Minister of how he had wasted his time and his words from the moment he'd realised civilisation was rotting. Of how he would occasionally find someone who showed a trace of interest in his plea for a return to sanity. But the interest stemmed not from the will to believe, but from the everlasting search for something new to revive a jaded palate as a Transisationalist looked about for another cult to kill the years ahead. There was nothing there to hold an insincere man, there was no thrill to be found in defying the State, and the floater soon drifted into a sensory satisfying Cult.

Schofield rose to his feet, and his eyes narrowed thoughtfully as he paced the floor. "In three hundred years less than fifty people have entered this room asking for death. Most of them were turned aside because they were Transisationalists who needed only a small push to resettle them in society. A few have refused to take my advice, and I gave them a Release. Still fewer have met death, many of those who walked out of here knowing they were going to die lost their nerve and rejected the Release before it was too late." There was eagerness in his voice now, excitement. "But you, Levere, with strange ideas promise me amusement. You can have your Release. But you will suffer for it. Within three days you will be dead. You will not know when it will come to you, or how it will come. But it will. And, Levere, if you believed you'd lived in a hell world these past twenty years, just see how much worse these last few hours can be. Anywhere. Anytime. When you step outside this room you might be drawing breath for the last time. Think on that. You want to die, but there must be many things you want to do or see for the last time. How many of them will be possible?"

"So the State is built on the Cults and lives on sadism," Levere sneered. "Decadence, Schofield. Think on that!"

"But you accept the State's terms?"

Leveré nodded. "I accept."

Schofield said nothing further. He touched Levere's arm and brought him out of the chair. Together they walked out of the main chamber into an ante-room where the walls were spaced with viewing screens. He activated them and waited a moment before speaking to the Hunters Levere could neither see nor hear. The words were few and to the point. The scanning was long and tiring.

There would be no mistake in recognition, Levere thought wryly. No mistake at all.

Leveré paused for an instant on the sidewalk outside State Building. A man followed him out and saw him standing there. He made no attempt to disguise his purpose as he eyed Levere up and down. On the Park sidewalk two men stood talking; they, also, watched him closely.

Schofield's Hunters were eager, and his seventy-two hours—or less—had already started ticking to a close.

Never before had Levere felt so vibrantly alive, and he was ashamed of the feeling. He felt a thrill tighten his spine as he crossed the highway and walked past the two men. He hesitated again, outside the Pleasure Park gates with their two figures of bronze that were pipe-playing satyr and naked nymph. Pleasure. Excitement. Pain!

The three men closed in on him and Levere found himself in the Park. He had never expected to be stimulated by the thought of dying. Somehow it was unclear, it made him no better than the Cultists he derided. Everything was for pleasure, if a man found pleasure in suffering pain, he suffered. If he found it in inflicting pain on others, pleasure could still be his. It was a way of life, you took it or you left it, whatever you did was of your own choosing. Only death was hard to come by, as Levere had learnt.

For the first time in his life he found himself openly smiling at the Exhibitionalists who displayed what they fondly considered their best features. And it wasn't a decrying smile, he really meant it. A woman waved to him and he nodded back. Her bosom was bared and startlingly tanned against the swathing whiteness that hid the rest of her body. Another woman went by with a jaunty step and close-cropped hair, and the woman who had waved to him spat at her and called her a pervert.

It was amusing. He felt as if he wanted to run back and spit, too. Just for the fun of it. Suddenly his legs started to tremble and he found the grass cool against his face as he pressed close to the earth. A few moments later the dizzy spell had vanished and he sat up feeling disgusted with himself. His nerves quietened down as he sat and watched the two men on the footpath; the third man was sitting a scant five yards from him, sucking a blade of grass.

The woman called to him again and Levere turned his head away. Out of the corner of his eye he saw her start towards him, and he scrambled to his feet. As he slowed down to a walk again he heard her laugh come to him from the other side of the bushes. It was a shrill laugh, and it grated harshly on his ears. He had lost his madness.

The woman didn't follow him, but the three men did. They herded him almost; not letting him stop after that first occasion. His legs began to feel like limbs of lead, and the grass, which had been cool against his face, tugged at his feet and ensnared him. It whipped against his bare legs, and sweat ran down his back and from under his arms, staining the grey tunic a damp black where it clung to his body.

He spotted a water spigot and he ran towards it, his chest heaving. As his lips touched the metal nozzle a blast of heat caught his face and sent him staggering back. The porcelain basin cracked, and as he turned slowly on his heel the leading Hunter motioned him on again with the black orifice of the gun pointed at his belly.

It was pointed at his belly and yet the Hunter made no attempt to burn him down. What had Schofield said? Something about if he believed he'd lived in hell he'd find the last few hours even worse than the previous twenty years.

He was supposed to go quietly and completely mad, expecting to die at any moment. But he wasn't going to die in a hurry. He had three whole days to live through, with the suspense mounting with each passing moment.

To prove his point he advanced on the three Hunters and pushed the gun aside. He walked between them and nothing happened.

It was a strange dream he was dreaming. The time was two thousand years in the past, and Fogg and Hird, the Great Fogg who had the statue in the centre of Time Square raised in his honour, were busily smashing all the clocks and watches they could lay their hands upon. Springs and cogs littered the floor, clock fingers spun crazily behind cracked glass, and a million alarms were shrilling.

Hird, his assistant, was urging him on, shouting, "Break 'em up! Break 'em up!"

It was two thousand years in the past and Fogg had just unlocked the secret of immortality. Clocks, what use were they now? There was no need to keep an accurate check on the passage of fleeting minutes and hours—or even years, now when men had all the time in eternity at their beck and call. That was when time went mad and the world started to keep it company.

"Wake up. Mark, wake up!"

His eyes were sandpits, and the soft glow from the night light made them springe.

"Please, please wake up!"

It wasn't a very loud voice, even though it did sound urgent.

A woman was leaning over him, shaking his shoulder, her mouth close to his ear. He sat up and the next instant her hand was clamped tightly over his mouth. She shook her head quickly.

"Quiet. We don't have much time to spare. Hurry up and get dressed. We've got to be away before the Hunters come for you."

Now that his eyes were wide open she took her hand away from his mouth. "What . . . Who are you? Who let you in?"

"Later, Mark. Later. For God's sake hurry."

She turned her back on him and hurried over to the window. He watched her as he dressed; heard a small gasp escape her lips as she saw something outside which frightened her, felt her hand on his arm as she darted away from the window and pulled him towards the bedroom door. He was still too bemused to offer any protest as she led him out of a side door and into the coolness of the night. It was raining slightly and he shivered as water spattered from the roof and trickled down the back of his neck. Her hand tightened warningly on his and he heard soft voices and muffled footsteps from the front of the apartment.

He knew when the door was opened, the hall light went on automatically and the high wall bordering the street flung back the reflection.

Levere grunted. He'd been wrong about Schofield allowing him three days. But why was he running away? They'd come to kill him, and that was what he wanted. Didn't he, he asked himself.

He was allowed no time to think about it, the woman tugged his arm again and he was running after her down the path and past the open door to the street. There was a man silhouetted in the doorway and he spun round on his heels as he heard them. There was a sudden flash of light and the open gate sighed wearily and collapsed into dust.

The stone pillar which had supported it crumbled away as the Hunter started down the steps after them, shouting to the others who were searching the house.

"This way," she hissed as they ran; and he found himself running after her up a side street. A moment later a darkened mobiwheel loomed into sight and she hustled him inside, pulling away from the kerb with an ease born of practice. The 'wheel spun on the wet road as she whipped it round, and he heard the broad tread shriek as it gained balance again just in time for her to avoid piling them up against a wall. The small motor hummed and an instant later they were out of the side street and back on the main highway that ran past his apartment.

He strained his eyes into the darkness and made a sudden movement towards her that was too late by half a second. The Hunters' mobiwheel was side-swiped by the circular bumper, and it toppled slowly to rest against the wall.

Again that blinding flash of light, and this time it was the road ahead of them that took the searing bolt of energy. The woman's hands flashed pale against the dark panel and the fast-spinning 'wheel lurched into the sidewalk.

"I don't think they'll catch us now, Mark," she ventured. "By the time they get their 'wheel righted again we'll be well clear." She switched on the cabin light and he saw her lips part in a smile. She was one of the most normal people he had seen. Her tunic was a light grey like his own, and it covered all that it was supposed to. Her face was pleasant, not over painted, and a crown of copper-tinted curls started at the tips of her ears and smoothed out into a reflected sea of golden copper waves at the nape of her neck. "Hello," she said gravely. "I'm Gail Ghelsart and I'm taking you home with me."

"Oh," Levere said. Just like that. He knew it was inadequate but somehow he couldn't think of anything else that would make more sense.

Her eyes mocked him. "Well, is that all you've got to say? Aren't you going to ask me any questions, or are you used to being rescued from death?"

"I'd like to know what you're doing, and why you're doing it," he said carefully. That again seemed inadequate, but it seemed to be all that she expected to hear. The light went off inside the mobiwheel, and for a moment there was silence, he was only conscious of her presence by the slight pressure of her leg against his and the touch of her shoulder as she relaxed and slowed down the wheel's revolutions.

"You called at the Ministry of Death this morning and saw a man named Schofield. Perhaps you also remember a man called Albert?"

He nodded in the darkness. "Go on."

"Albert contacted me and said you'd asked Schofield for a Life Release, presumably because you are what the ancients called a round peg in a square hole. In other words you couldn't fit yourself in with this way of life, and you preferred death rather than corrective treatment. That made you our business, and I've been trying to find you ever since you left the Ministry. You see, Mark, you aren't the only one who believes the State has set back progress a million years or more. And there's no hope of the State ever righting it of its own accord, because the men who *are* the State don't want to lose the sense of power they've accumulated over the past centuries. And anyway, most people are content with things as they are and that gives the State good reason not to wish any sociological change. It's only the few like ourselves who haven't shirked all sense of responsibility that aren't satisfied. We aren't able to do much about it at the moment, except search for others who feel like we do. But maybe one day in the not too distant future the Movement will grow sufficiently powerful to make the State clean up."

"The Movement?" Levere struggled with a wild thought. "Then there are more than just the three of us? More than Albert and us two?"

"Yes," she said quietly. "Nearly five hundred of us spread across the world. It's a thin coverage, but it's a start."

So at no time had he been entirely alone. Here at last he had found companionship in a society that was totally opposed and unacceptable to him. A centre core that breathed and spoke sanity in an insane world. He turned his head away as his eyes grew misty.

"You'll join us of course, Mark," Gail said.

Dumbly Levere nodded.

"Won't you?" she repeated, and he remembered they were driving in darkness.

"Yes, if you'll have me."

She found his hand in the darkness and lightly touched the backs of his fingers. They drove the rest of the way in silence, and Levere found her closeness strangely comforting.

Schofield sat at his desk in State Building and listened intently to the incoming report. When the agent had finished, Schofield lifted the transmitter screen to his lips.

"That seems satisfactory. Evidently Levere suspects nothing and I don't see any further difficulties now that he's accepted her. Maintain the watch on the Ghelsarts' apartment and route all reports through to me. When Ralf gives the signal we'll go ahead with the Emergency Call and see what effect that has on our runaway friend. That's all. Out."

He sat back in the chair and stared at the sprawling letters that filled the rear wall. "Well, Levere," he murmured. "It's now your Hell on earth really starts."

They had spent most of the remaining night hours talking until Levere put an end to the conversation by falling into an exhausted slumber in one of the foam chairs. Gail turned on the room heater and watched him for a moment. Her eyes were troubled as she curled up beside him. His head fell on her shoulder and he murmured something in his sleep. "Poor Mark," she whispered.

Levere wasn't allowed a long sleep, at dawn Gail's brother arrived, and his coming signified trouble.

Ghelsart brusquely nodded Gail into the adjacent bedroom. In his haste he barely touched the door as he brushed past, and it failed to enter the magnetic field which should have snapped the catch. From the chair, Levere was able to see them both as Ralf berated her for offering him refuge from the Hunters.

He listened for a few moments, seeing the colour rise to her cheeks as the argument waxed hot and furious. She was giving her brother as good as she got, but it didn't take Levere long to realise that she'd acted too hastily for safety. All his hopes of the previous night crashed. He'd thought he was going to walk right into the Movement and they'd welcome him with open arms. But he wasn't and they wouldn't. He'd forgotten one important fact, he was a hunted man, a man who'd sought a Life Release. And it wasn't the habit of the State to let a person like himself slip away from the Hunters and then give up the chase..

"Your brother's right," he stated flatly, from the open doorway. "If I stay here I'm only going to cause trouble, and I'm not that stupid. They'll be scouring the city before long. I'll make my way back towards the Pleasure Park." He hesitated a moment. "And you don't have to worry about them tracing me back here. I know how to keep my mouth shut."

Ghelsart eyed him for a moment. "Thank the gods you're not as stupid as I thought you'd be. It's a mile to the Park. Go out the

back way and through the plaza, it should be crowded at this hour. As soon as you reach the far side of the plaza, get caught up in the crowds heading for the Park. And for God's sake behave as if you're a Cultist ; at least until you're well clear of the estate. If you are recognised start running. They won't take you in for questioning if they think you might break free again. Run like mad ! Understand ?"

Mark nodded and moved towards the open door.

Gail was there ahead of him. She flung herself in his path and slammed the door in his face. She wouldn't move. Her body was pressed close against the panelling and she was looking past him, staring over his shoulder at her brother. "What's the matter with you, Ralf ? Are you out of your mind ? We can't let Mark throw his life away, not when he's one of us ! There must be some way we can protect him. We've got to !"

Ghelsart shook his head angrily. "You're wasting valuable minutes. The longer Levere stays, the better chance they have of tracing him." He crossed to the window in two easy strides and scanned the street. "The way's clear now. Don't be a fool, Gail."

"I think I have it," she said slowly. "It all depends on Granger." She glanced at Mark. "Granger's a plastic surgeon and one of us. He's good, too, the Narcisstics swear by him. We'll get him to build you a new face. But somebody's still got to die to throw the Hunters off your trail. That's the tricky part. We'll have to snatch a man of your build from the Park and have Granger work on him so he looks like you. He can be hypnoed into believing he's Mark Levere and then we'll let the Hunters at him." She shuddered slightly. "I never thought I'd be a party to murder, but a dead Cultist suits me better than a dead you."

"Well ?" she demanded.

Mark wanted to tell her yes. Instead he said, "It's up to your brother, not me. I'm biassed."

Ghelsart shook his head. "Forget it. It's too chancey, and it implicates Granger, too. That makes four of us sharing the risk of one. I still say Levere should do the sensible thing and let himself be killed."

"Then it's decided," Mark said slowly. He looked at Gail. "Your brother's right. There's too few of us already to risk your lives for mine."

"That's what I mean !" she shouted. "There are so few of us that each one is too vitally important to the others to be sacrificed." She swung round to face Ralf. "If you make Mark leave, then I'm leaving with him." She said it coldly, and Mark knew that she meant it.

"You could be sorry if I had to go, Ralf. Don't forget they must have seen him leaving his apartment with a woman. If they find me with him they'll accuse me of helping him. They have ways of making people talk, so I've heard. And I can't stand pain."

"Are you threatening me?"

"It looks that way. I'd think it over if I were you."

She took hold of Levere's hand and walked with him into the leisure room. Ghelsart swore disgustedly as they left, but as soon as he was alone he smiled and walked across to the window. He nodded.

On the other side of the street a man raised his hand and moved back into a doorway.

Ralf Ghelsart turned away and followed his sister and Levere into the other room. "All right," he conceded gruffly. "If that's the way it's going to be Levere had best stay until Granger gets there. But I still don't like it!"

Levere wasn't sure whether he liked it either. For over four hundred years he had been a free party—as free as the State would permit—and now he was indebted to this woman and her brother. And he'd also caused an ugly split between them. Before he'd met them he had been prepared to die, he would have welcomed death as a man with an incurable growth might welcome a slip of the surgeon's knife. Now, however, he wanted to cling to life and join the others who were like himself. And yet to do that he could only endanger them.

He buried his head in his hands.

Schofield nodded into the screen. "Ready," he acknowledged. "Closed circuit. Sound and view." He placed his hands flat on the desk and leaned forward until his face was practically touching the sensitive screen.

Levere's Hell had started. And so it would grow, until . . .

The long silence was broken by a loud buzz, and the red State Emergency Call light flashed on and off from the centre of the wall.

Gail studied Levere, who was watching the winking light with an almost childlike helplessness. She felt almost sorry she was a part of this, but Schofield had ordered it. And what he said, was done. No questions asked.

Ralf reached out a hand to activate the screen.

"Don't," she ordered sharply. Schofield had told her to disagree with whatever her brother said and did.

Levere stirred himself. "It's probably to do with me. You'd . . . you'd better put it on."

The switch clicked and Schofield's face filled the wall screen. For a slow count of fifty he made no sign, and then his lips parted and his voice filled the room.

"Yesterday a man by the name of Mark Levere was granted a Life Release to become effective within three days. Last night he escaped the Hunters who had been assigned to kill him. It is known that one and possibly two accomplices aided him.

"At this very moment a search is being conducted throughout the city area. Transport lines in and out of the city have been closed. There can be no escape. Levere's accomplices will also die unless they report his whereabouts to State Building within the next hour.

"I repeat: The State will have no mercy on either Levere or those who aided him unless they communicate with this department."

There followed something about therapeutic conditioning, and then a blow-up of Levere's face filled the screen. Ghelsart banished it with a flick of the switch.

"Bluff," Gail said. She knew Levere did not believe her. "He's hoping to panic you into surrendering. Don't pay any attention to what he said."

"He wasn't bluffing," Ralf snapped. "You'd better get over Granger and bring him here. Tell him it's a rush job."

She nodded quickly and passed in front of Levere on her way to the door. He caught hold of her arm. "How long will it take?"

"A few minutes. Don't worry, Mark. Even if there is a search he'll be through long before they reach here."

She tugged her arm free and was out of the room. Ralf Ghelsart's face was close to Levere's as the door slammed. "I wish to God we'd never seen you," he breathed. "If anything should happen to Gail I'll . . ." His hands touched Mark's throat, and it was with a visible effort that he pulled them away again.

As Ghelsart turned his back on him in disgust, Levere rose and crossed to the window.

What to do? What to do?

If only Ghelsart would tell him that it was all right, that he wanted him with them. But he didn't. Pressure was being brought to bear on him from all points: Gail pulled one way and Ghelsart tugged the other, and between them Levere found it hard to think clearly. He felt mentally exhausted by the conflict that had flared up around him, and Schofield's threats had topped it off.

He could see Gail hurrying along the street. She walked quickly, back straight, bare legs flashing brown in the morning sun. Her short, auburn hair was a glowing halo about her head, bobbing, glinting.

And all this might die !

Levere closed his eyes. Shook his head. The street was almost empty—almost, but not quite. There was a mobiwheel rolling off the centre strip into an apartment drive-in, beneath the window. A woman stepped out, an Exhibitionalist. He let his tightened shoulders relax and his body slump a little.

Now, however, it seemed unusually quiet and deserted outside. It was only a feeling he had, but it persisted and nagged him. There was an element of menace in it, even the street seemed to be brooding—just waiting for something to happen.

Suddenly it did.

Out of a doorway on the other side of the street sauntered a man. He looked carefully about him and started following Gail. Levere recognised him ! Recognised him as one of the three Hunters who had followed him into the Pleasure Park.

The shock jarred his mental block. It whipped out the obvious solution without further thought. And it spun him round from the window.

Ghelsart wasn't expecting what happened. He had no chance to duck the elbow that swung towards his chin. His eyes glazed and his legs collapsed. Levere stepped over him.

He had no idea how they had found the apartment, but they had. So far there had been no attempt to enter the place, which meant they were waiting to catch as many as they could. The obvious thing was to get out before Gail returned with Granger. To get out and attempt to draw the watchers after him so that the others stood a chance of escaping.

But he had no intention of dying. Not now. Schofield's broadcast had reminded him of an 'out' which had always been open. Therapeutic conditioning. It would mean he'd lose his individualist thoughts in the process. But sooner or later the Movement would find him again and release him from the Cults.

Levere walked down the drive and into the street. There was no one to whom he could surrender. No one at all. He started walking in the direction Gail had taken. He saw no sign of her, but other people walked past him and paid no attention to him. Not even the man who directed him to State Building recognised him as the one who had forced Schofield to videocast.

There was no one to stop him at the door, and he hurried into the maze of corridors that led to the Ministry of Death.

There was little warning, little time for him to dart into a side corridor as he heard the voices. He waited until they had passed, cowering out of sight with beads of sweat pricking his scalp. Schofield, Gail, and the State Hunter. Schofield with his hand on Gail's shoulder. All three laughing.

Levere spent a long time finding his way out into the street. He moved like a dead man, unseeing, deaf. Leaden feet followed a twisting path his eyes could not see. Once, he fell in the middle of the highway, and a passing mobiwheel driver cursed him and swerved wildly into another lane.

It was all so very clear now. And yet he should have expected it from the very beginning. Schofield had good reason to laugh—he'd made him live through the Hell he had promised. A Hell of hope, indecision, and then final realisation that it had been nothing but a play in which Gail and Ralf and the Movement were actors and he was nothing but an uncued stooge who handed them the laugh lines. They had wrung him dry, toyed with him. Edged him first one way and then the other. And all the time they'd been laughing at him, cracking the whip and making him jump like a well-trained beast over the hoop and through the hoop. Over and through, up and down and roundabout.

Even Gail.

He didn't do anything but walk, and even so it took them a long time to find him. The sun was low in the sky before they picked him up and bundled him into a mobiwheel.

They drove him to the Ghelsarts' apartment without a word.

Schofield was the only one standing. Gail and Ralf Ghelsart and another man he didn't recognise nodded to him. Levere tried not to see them. Especially he tried not to see Gail.

"Mark," Schofield acknowledged gravely.

Levere swore at him. "I should have known you'd have to be the showman. I hope the audience enjoys it."

"Enjoys what?"

"You killing me." He was pleased to find his voice was steady.

Schofield laughed, took the gun out of its holster and threw it into the far corner.



She—he didn't want to think of her by name—said: "Hurry and tell him, Peter!"

Schofield put his hand on Levere's shoulder and forced him into a chair. He sat on the arm beside him. "To the point, Mark. First, you aren't about to die. Second, there is a group of people who don't like the way things have worked out. Third, I've done most of the work in organising them.

"I'm sorry about the test, but it was the only way I could learn if you are man enough for the task I have in mind. I think you are. You see, from the moment you left me you were in contact with the Movement. It started off with your supposed killers and continued with the Ghelsarts'. And if you hadn't gone willingly with Gail, we'd have found some way to make you."

"Is this still a part of my Hell?"

"No! I had to be certain that you wanted to die because of what's happened on Earth. All this was an act, and you had a getout prepared for you if you wanted to surrender and go on living. Frankly, that wouldn't have suited me. Oh, you wouldn't have been conditioned, but you wouldn't have done for what I want you. We had to raise your hopes and dash them down again. And then, believing in the Movement as you had to by then, offer you the opportunity of sacrificing yourself to save the others."

Levere said nothing. He was looking at Gail and she was nodding. He began to believe, mainly because he wanted to.

"I'm the third man known as Schofield who's been the Minister of Death. And I've been that for so long I've almost forgotten my real name. The original Schofield—the only one—left a thousand years ago.

"When I first saw you, you said space conquest could have been one of the main factors in preserving the human race from the madness which has overtaken it. It is. People like you and me, Ralf and Gail, and Granger here, get our chance once in every three hundred years. One thousand years ago the first star ship was built by a group of sane people—thinkers and workers—and a colony was set up on a world where there is no Cultism, no State. Only sanity. Every three hundred years a ship returns to Earth to take others to the colony. And in between the departure of one ship and the arrival of the next, the core of the Movement left behind strive to gather together people like themselves for the next voyage. Each cycle garners perhaps a hundred to five hundred passengers.

"For over four hundred years I've dreamed of my turn coming up, and I've known all the time that I had to have someone to take my

place before I could go. You see, most of our recruits come the same way as you did, and the supply lane has to stay open.

"I'd selected Granger as the most suitable amongst those I could call on, but even then I didn't think he could hold out for another cycle. He's not hard enough. To be cruel to him; not stable enough to take the enormous strain that's imposed. I knew in my heart that he'd have to go whilst I stayed again. Until you came to see me! You were fanatical in your desire to be granted a Life Release, but only because you had nothing to live for. If it could be turned into another channel, such as seeking death to save those who think as you do, then that hatred for the State and all it stands for would last you another three hundred years or more. And, ironically enough, as a State Minister."

Levere slowly raised his eyes to the man's face. "And if I'd chosen to give myself up rather than die?" he asked carefully. He had to know because that had been his intention.

At the thought of it Schofield's face harshened. "I'd have been wrong, and you know what that would have meant to me."

"But to me?"

"You'd have stayed behind with me and for three hundred years and I would have run you off your feet paying you back for failing me!"

If he hadn't seen Gail with Schofield and suspected her of being a part of Schofield's State Hell, he would have given himself up. It was on the tip of his tongue to admit he was a failure, but he looked up at the man on the arm of the chair and saw the cold, hard eyes that told him Schofield meant what he had said. There would have been nothing but a three hundred year Hell for him under the other's command. He preferred to keep quiet and lose him.

"When do you leave?"

"The ship is due in seven days. There's a lot you have to learn before then—about the original Schofield. Granger will see to your features, and I've memory tapes to help with the rest. It won't be easy, Mark. It'll be a long wait until you get your reward, maybe longer than one cycle. It all depends on how lucky you are, or who you find to replace you—or don't."

Levere nodded. "I understand." He hesitated for a moment, looking at Gail. "Are all of you leaving?"

Schofield answered for them. "Yes. You'll be put in touch with the others who stay with you. Don't worry, you won't be alone."

He sat at his desk in State Building and ran his fingers over his face. He had opened the window earlier on, and from where he sat he

could see the dark, night sky and winking stars. Any time now the ship would be leaving Earth behind as it crossed the void between suns, to a world of sanity. He didn't like to think about the ship too much, nor the people aboard it.

The ship left at midnight. He picked the watch off his desk and counted off the few remaining seconds. He closed his eyes as all the fingers met on twelve. One Schofield gone and yet another in his place, but the one who remained felt and thought like Mark Levere. He was still here but he was with all of them, especially with one person.

One cycle from now, maybe even two, what would she be like then? Not in appearance, that wouldn't change—but in manner? How many others would cross his path before he saw her again?

He shook his head. He was being stupid. Except for the period of the test she'd hardly acknowledged his existence. And he had only been in the way when he had seen her.

He got up from behind the desk and closed the window. Next, he turned off the blazing letters that cast a red glow over the room, and picked up his cape from the corner of the desk. His fingernails gleamed silver and gold and he wondered idly how long they would take to reach a length of three inches. The gun on his hip banged against the corner of the desk and he knew that was yet another thing he would need to accustom himself to.

Outside in the corridor a figure paused in the gloom and raised a hand to rap on the door.

He frowned. After midnight, too! "Come in," he called.

The door opened. "This is the Ministry of Death, isn't it?"

"It is."

"And you are Schofield, aren't you?"

"I am."

"I want you."

It was a woman and she made no attempt to enter. He couldn't see her face. Her voice sounded familiar, but she hadn't said enough for him to be sure. Could it have been that although the ship left at midnight it left one passenger short?

There was only one way he could find out.

The State Minister of Death walked quickly towards the door.

Rebellion On The Moon

Johnny Dahlquist was just another junior space-officer but like all mankind he had a duty to earth.

Illustrated by John J. Greengrass

It happened on the Moon in the spring of 1999. The beginning of it all as far as Johnny Dahlquist was concerned, was right after breakfast when the Executive Office sent for him—

“Lieutenant Dahlquist, reporting to the Executive Officer.”

Colonel Towers looked up. “Ah, John Ezra. Sit down, Johnny.”

Johnny sat down, mystified but flattered. He admired Colonel Towers, for his brilliance for his ability to dominate, and for his battle record; he had been commissioned on completing his doctor's degree in nuclear physics and was now junior bomb officer of Moon Base.

The Colonel wanted to talk politics; Johnny was puzzled. Finally Towers had come to the point; it was not safe (so he said) to leave control of the world in political hands; power must be held by a scientifically selected group. In short—the Patrol.

Johnny was startled rather than shocked. As an abstract idea, Towers' notion sounded plausible. The League of Nations had folded up, so had the United Nations; what would keep the Federation from breaking up, too, and thus lead to World War IV? “And you know how bad such a war would be, Johnny.”

Johnny agreed. Towers said he was glad that Johnny got the point. The senior bomb officer could handle the work, but it was better to have both specialists.

Johnny sat up with a jerk. "You are going to *do* something about about it?" He had thought the Exec. was just talking.

Towers smiled. "We're not politicians; we don't just talk."

Johnny whistled. "When does this start?"

Towers flipped a switch. Johnny was startled to hear his own voice, then spotted the recorded conversation as having taken place in the junior officers' messroom. A political argument he remembered, which he had walked out on . . . But being spied on annoyed him.

Towers switched it off. "We've started," he said. "We know who is safe and who isn't. Take Kelly—" He waved at the loud-speaker. "Kelly is politically unreliable. You noticed he wasn't at breakfast?"

"Huh? I thought he was on watch."

"Kelly's watch-standing days are over. Oh, relax; he isn't hurt."

Johnny thought this over. "Which list am I on?" he asked. "Safe or unsafe?"

"Your name has a question mark after it. But I have said *all* along that you could be depended on," He grinned engagingly. "You won't make a liar of me, Johnny?"

Dahlquist didn't answer; Towers said sharply, "Come now—what do you think of it? Speak up."

"Well, if you ask me, you've bitten off more than you can chew. While it's true that Moon Base controls the Earth, Moon Base itself is a sitting duck for a ship. One bomb—*blooie!*"

Towers picked up a message form and handed it over; it read: I HAVE YOUR CLEAN LAUNDRY—ZACK. "That means *every* bomb in the *Trygve Lie* has been put out of commission. I have reports from every ship we need worry about." He stood up. "Think it over and see me after lunch. Major Morgan needs your help right away to change control frequencies on the bombs."

"The control frequencies?"

"Naturally. We don't want the bombs jammed before they reach their targets."

"What! You said the idea was to *prevent* war."

Towers brushed it aside. "There won't be a war—just a psychological demonstration, an unimportant town or two. A little blood-letting to save an all-out war. Simple arithmetic."

He put a hand on Johnny's shoulder. "You aren't squeamish, or you wouldn't be a bomb officer. Think of it as a surgical operation. And think of your family."

Johnny Dahlquist had been thinking of his family. "If you please, sir, I want to see the Commanding Officer."

Towers frowned. "The Commodore is not available. As you know, I speak for him. See me again—after lunch."

The Commodore was decidedly not available; the Commodore was dead. But Johnny did not know that.

Dahlquist walked back to the mess-room, bought some cigarettes, sat down and had a smoke. He got up, crushed out the butt, and headed for the Base's west airlock. There he got into his space suit and went to the lockmaster. "Open her up, Smitty."

The marine looked surprised. "Can't let anyone out on the surface without a word from Colonel Towers, Sir. Hadn't you heard?"

"Oh, yes! Give me your order book." Dahlquist took it, wrote a pass for himself, and signed it 'by direction of Colonel Towers.' He added, "Better call the Executive Officer and check it."

The lockmaster read it and stuck the book in his pocket "Oh, no, Lieutenant. Your word is good."

"Hate to disturb the Executive Officer, eh? Don't blame you." He stepped in, closed the inner door, and waited while the air was sucked out.

Out on the Moon's surface he blinked at the light and hurried to the track-rocket's terminus; a car was waiting. He squeezed in, pulled down the hood, and punched the starting button. The rocket car flung itself at the hills, dived through and came out on a plain studded with projectile rockets, like candles on a cake. Quickly it dived into a second tunnel through more hills. There was a stomach-wrenching deceleration—the car stopped at the underground atom-bomb armory.

As Dahlquist climbed out he switched on his walkie-talkie. The space-suited guard at the entrance came to port-arms. Dahlquist said, "Morning, Lopez," and walked by him to the airlock. He pulled it wide open.

The guard motioned him back. "Hey! Nobody goes in without the Executive Officer's permission." He shifted his gun, fumbled in his pouch and got out a paper. "Read it, Lieutenant."

Dahlquist waved it away. "I drafted that order myself. You read it; you've misinterpreted it."

"I don't see how, Lieutenant."

Dahlquist snatched at the paper, glanced at it, then pointed to a line. "See? —except persons specifically designated by the Executive Officer. That's the bomb officers, Major Morgan and me."

The guard looked worried. Dahlquist said, "Damn it, look up 'specifically designated—under 'Bomb Room, Security, Procedure for,' in your standing orders. Don't tell me you've forgotten them again!"

"Oh, no, sir! I've got 'em." The guard reached into his pouch. Dahlquist gave him back the sheet; the guard took it, hesitated, then leaned his weapon against his hip, shifted the paper to his left hand, and dug into his pouch with his right.

Dahlquist grabbed the gun, shoved it between the guard's legs, and jerked. He threw the weapon away and ducked into the airlock. As he slammed the door he saw the guard struggling to his feet and reaching for his gun. He shut the outer door and felt a tingle in his fingers as a slug struck the door.

He flung himself at the inner door, jerked the spill lever, rushed back to the outer door and hung himself on the handle. At once he could feel it stir. The guard was lifting up; the lieutenant was pulling down, with only his low Moon weight to anchor him. Slowly the handle raised before his eyes.

Air from the bomb room reached into the lock through the spill valve. Dahlquist felt his space suit settle on his body as the air pressure in the lock began to equal the pressure in the suit. He quit straining and let the guard raise the handle. It did not matter; thirteen tons of air pressure now held the outer door closed.

He latched open the inner door of the lock. As long as it remained open, the lock could not operate; no one could enter.

Before him in the room, one for each projectile rocket, were the atom bombs, spaced apart to defeat any faint possibility of spontaneous chain reaction. They were the deadliest things in the known universe, but they were his babies. He had placed himself between them and anyone who would misuse them.

But, now that he was here, he had no plan to use his temporary advantage.

The speaker on the wall spluttered at him. "Hey! Lieutenant! What goes on here? You gone crazy?" Dahlquist did not answer. Let Lopez stay confused—it would take him that much longer to make up his mind what to do. And Johnny Dahlquist needed as many minutes as he could squeeze. Lopez went on protesting. Finally he shut up.

Johnny had followed his blind urge not to let the bombs—*his* bombs—be used for "demonstrations on unimportant towns." But what to do next? Well, Towers couldn't get through the lock, Johnny would sit tight till hell froze over.

Don't kid yourself, John Ezra! Towers could get in. Some high explosive against the outer-door—then the air would whoosh out, our boy Johnny would drown in blood from his burst lungs—and the

bombs would be sitting there, unhurt. They were built to stand the jump from Moon to Earth ; vacuum hurt them not at all

He decided to stay in his space suit ; explosive decompression didn't appeal to him. Come to think about it, death from old age was his choice.

Or they could drill a hole, let out the air, and open the door without wrecking the lock. Or Towers might even have a new airlock built outside the old. Not likely, Johnny thought. A *coup d'etat* depended on speed. Towers was almost sure to take the quickest way—blasting. And Lopez was probably calling the Base right now. Fifteen minutes for Towers to suit up and get here, then the party is over.

Fifteen minutes—

In fifteen minutes the bombs might fall back into the hands of the conspirators ; in fifteen minutes he must make the bombs unusable.

An atom bomb is just two or more pieces of fissionable metal, such as plutonium. Separated, they are no more explosive than a pound of butter ; slapped together, they explode. The complications lie in the gadgets and circuits and gun used to slap them together in the exact way and at the exact time and place required.

The circuits, the bomb's "brain," are easily destroyed—but the bomb itself is hard to destroy because of its very simplicity. Johnny decided to smash the "brains"—and quickly !

The only tools at hand were simple ones used in handling the bombs. Aside from a Geiger circuit, the speaker on the walkie-talkie circuit, a television rig to the base, and the bombs themselves, the room was bare. A bomb to be worked on was taken elsewhere—not through fear of explosion, but to reduce radiation exposure to personnel. The radio-active material in a bomb is buried in a "tamper"—in these bombs, gold. Gold stops alpha, beta, and much of the deadly gamma radiation—but not neutrons.

The slippery, poisonous neutrons which plutonium gives off had to escape, or a chain reaction—explosion !—would result. The room was bathed in an invisible, almost undetectable rain of neutrons. The place was unhealthy ; regulations called for staying in it as short a time as possible.

The Geiger counter clicked off the "background" radiation, cosmic rays, the trace of radio-activity in the Moon's crust, and secondary radio-activity set up all through the room by neutrons. Free neutrons have the nasty trait of infecting what they strike, whether it be concrete wall or human body. In time the room would have to be abandoned.

Dahlquist twisted a knob on the Geiger counter; the instrument stopped clicking. He had used a suppressor circuit to cut out noise of "background" radiation at the level then present. It reminded him uncomfortably of the danger of staying there. He took out the radiation exposure film all radiation personnel carry; it was a direct-response type and had been fresh when he arrived. The most sensitive end was faintly darkened already. Halfway down the film a red line crossed. Theoretically, if the wearer exposed himself enough in a week to darken the film to there, he was, as Johnny put it, a "dead duck."

Off came the cumbersome space suit; what he needed was speed. Get it done and surrender—can't hang around in a place as "hot" as this. He grabbed a ball hammer from the tool rack, paused to switch off the television pick up, and got busy. The first bomb bothered him. He started to smash the cover plate of the "brain," then stopped, filled with reluctance. All his life he had prized fine apparatus.

He nerved himself and swung; glass tinkled, metal creaked. His mood changed. He began to feel a shameful pleasure in destruction. He laid into it, swinging, smashing, destroying!

So intent he became that he did not at first hear his name called. "Dahlquist! Answer me! Are you there?"

He wiped sweat and looked at the TV screen. Towers' worried features stared out.

Johnny was shocked to find that he had only wrecked six bombs. Was he going to be caught before he could finish? Oh, no! He *had* to finish. Stall, son, stall! "Yes, Colonel? You called me?"

"I certainly did! What's the meaning of this?"

"I'm sorry, Colonel."

Towers' expression relaxed a little. "Turn on your pick-up, Johnny, I can't see you. What was that noise?"

"The pick-up is on," Johnny lied. "It must be out of order. That noise—uh, to tell the truth, Colonel, I was fixing things so that nobody could get in here."

Towers hesitated, then said firmly. "I'm going to assume you are sick and send you to the medical officer. But I want you to come out of there, right away. That's an order, Johnny."

Johnny answered slowly, "Uh, I can't just yet, Colonel. I came here to make up my mind and I haven't quite made it up yet. You said I was to see you after lunch."

"I meant you to stay in your quarters."

"Yes, sir. But I thought I ought to stand watch on the bombs, in case I decided you were wrong."

"It's not for you to decide, Johnny. I'm your superior officer."

"Yes, sir." This was wasting time; the old fox might have a squad on the way now. "But I swore to keep the peace, too. Could you come here and talk it over with me? I don't want to do the whole thing."

Towers smiled. "A good idea, Johnny. You wait there. I'm sure you'll see the light." He switched off.

Johnny started to use the few minutes gained. He stopped almost at once. It dawned on him that wrecking the "brains" was not enough. There were no spare "brains," but there was a well-stocked electronics shop. Morgan could jury-rig control circuits for bombs. Why, he could himself—not a neat job, but one that would work. Damnation! He would have to wreck the bombs themselves—and in the next ten minutes.

But a bomb was solid chunks of metal, encased in a heavy tamper, all tied in with a big steel gun. It couldn't be done—not in ten minutes. Damn!

Of course there was one way. He knew the control circuits; he also knew how to beat them. Take this bomb: if he took out the safety bar, unhooked the proximity circuit, shorted the delay circuit, and cut in the arming circuit, by hand—then unscrewed *that* and reached in *there*, he could, with just a long, stiff wire, set the bomb off. Blowing the other bombs and the valley itself to Kingdom Come.

Also Johnny Dahlquist. That was the rub.

All this time he was doing what he had thought out, up to the step of actually setting off the bomb. Ready to go, the bomb seemed to threaten, as if crouching to spring. He stood up, sweating.

He wondered if he had the courage. He did not want to funk—and hoped that he would. He dug into his jacket and took out a picture of Edith and the baby. "Honeychild," he said, "if I get out of this, I'll never even try to beat a red light." He kissed the picture and put it back. There was nothing to do but wait.

What was keeping Towers? Johnny wanted to make sure that Towers was in blast range. What a joke. Me—sitting here, ready to throw the switch on him. The idea tickled him; it led to a better: why blow himself up—alive?

There was another way to rig it—a "dead man" control. Jigger up some way so that the last step, the one that set off the bomb, would not happen so long as he kept his hand on a switch or a lever of something. Then, if they blew open the door, or shot him—up goes the balloon?

Better still, if he could hold them off with the threat of it, sooner or later help would come—Johnny was sure that most of the Patrol was

not in this conspiracy—and then : Johnny comes marching home ! What a reunion ! He'd resign and get a teaching job ; he'd stood his watch.

All the while, he was working. Electrical ? No, too little time. It's a simple mechanical linkage. He had worked it out but had barely begun to build it when the loudspeaker called him. " Johnny ? "

" That you, Colonel ? " His hands kept busy.

" Let me in. "

" Well, now, Colonel, that wasn't in the agreement. " Where the blazes was something to use as a long lever ?

" I'll come in alone, Johnny. I give you my word. We'll talk face to face. "

His word ! " We can talk over the speaker, Colonel. " Hey, that was what he wanted—a yardstick, hanging on the tool rack.

" Johnny, I'm warning you. Let me in, or I'll blow the door off. "

A wire—he needed a wire, fairly long and stiff. He tore the antenna from his suit. " You wouldn't do that, Colonel. It would ruin the bombs. "

" Vacuum won't hurt the bombs. Quit stalling. "

" Better check with Major Morgan. Vacuum won't hurt them ; explosive de-compression will wreck every circuit. " The Colonel was not a bomb specialist ; he shut up for several minutes. Johnny went on working.

" Dahlquist, " Towers resumed, " that was a clumsy lie. I checked with Morgan. You have sixty seconds to get into your suit, if you aren't already. I'm going to blast the door. "

" No, you won't, " said Johnny. " Ever hear of a ' dead man switch ? ' Now for a counterweight—and a sling. He'd use his belt.

" Is ? What do you mean ? "

" I've rigged number seventeen to set off by hand. But it won't blow while I hang on to a strap I've got in my hand. But if anything happens to me—*up she goes*? You are about fifty feet from the blast centre. Think it over. "

There was a short silence. " I don't believe you. "

" No ? Ask Morgan. He can inspect it over the TV pick-up. " Johnny lashed the belt of his space suit to the end of the yardstick.

" You said the pick-up was out of order. "

" So I lied. This time I'll prove it. Have Morgan call me. "

Presently Major Morgan's face appeared. " Lieutenant Dahlquist ? "

" Wait a sec. " With great care Dahlquist made one last connection while holding down the end of the yardstick. Still careful, he shifted his grip to the belt, sat down on the floor, reached out and switched on the TV pick-up. " Can you see me, Stinky ? "

REBELLION ON TH



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Johnny got mad. "You k

"Think of them, man."

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whole shebang might just explode in your

NEBULA

start. He had dozed. His hand hadn't let go makes when he thought about it.

arm he bomb and depend on their not daring
owers' neck was already in hock for treason ;
he did and the bombs were disarmed, Johnny
would have the bombs. No, he had gone
baby girl grow up in a dictatorship just to

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the bombs beyond repair, and get out
arker.

He thought about ways, then got busy. He hung a weight on the sling, tied a line to it. If Towers blasted the door, he hoped to jerk the rig loose before he died.

There was a simple, though arduous, way to wreck the bombs beyond any capacity of Moon Base to repair them. The heart of each was two hemispheres of plutonium, their flat surfaces polished smooth to permit perfect contact when slapped together. Anything less would prevent the chain reaction on which atomic explosion depended.

Johnny started taking apart one of the bombs.

He had to bash off four lugs, then break the glass envelope around the inner assembly. Aside from that the bomb came apart easily. At last he had in front of him two gleaming, mirror-perfect half globes.

A blow with the hammer—and one was no longer perfect. Another blow and the second crackled like glass: he had tapped its crystalline structure just right.

Hours later, dead tired, he went back to the armed bomb. Forcing himself to steady down, with extreme care he disarmed it. Shortly its silvery hemispheres too were useless. There was no longer a useable bomb in the room—but huge fortunes in the most valuable, most poisonous, and most deadly metal in the known world were spread around the floor.

Johnny looked at the deadly stuff. "Into your suit and out of here, son," he said aloud. "I wonder what Towers will say?"

He walked toward the rack, intending to hang up the hammer. As he passed, the Geiger counter chattered wildly.

Plutonium hardly affects a Geiger counter: secondary infection from plutonium does. Johnny looked at the hammer, then held it closer to the Geiger counter. The counter screamed.

Johnny tossed it hastily away and started back toward his suit.

As he passed the counter it chattered again. He stopped short.

He pushed one hand close to the counter. Its clicking picked up to a steady roar. Without moving he reached into his pocket and took out his exposure film.

It was dead black from end to end.

Plutonium taken into the body moves quickly to the bone marrow. Nothing can be done—the victim is finished. Neutrons from it smash through the body, ionizing tissue, transmuting atoms into radioactive isotopes, destroying and killing. The fatal dose is less than a tenth the size of a grain of table salt—an amount small enough to enter through the tiniest scratch. During the historic "Manhattan Project" immediately high amputation was the only first-aid measure.

Johnny knew all this but it no longer disturbed him. He sat on the floor, smoking a hoarded cigarette, and thinking. The events of his long watch were running through his mind.

He blew smoke at the Geiger counter and smiled without humour to hear it chatter more loudly. By now even his breath was "hot"—carbon 14, he supposed, exhaled from his blood stream as carbon dioxide. It did not matter.

There was no longer any point in surrendering, nor would he give Towers the satisfaction—he would finish out this watch right here. Besides, by keeping the bluff that one bomb was ready to blow, he could stop them from capturing the raw material from which bombs were made. That might be important in the long run.

He accepted, without surprise, the fact that he was not unhappy. There was a sweetness about having no further worries of any sort. He did not hurt, he was not uncomfortable, he was no longer even hungry. Physically he still felt fine and his mind was at peace. He was dead—he knew that he was dead; yet for a time he was able to walk and breathe and see and feel.

He was not even lonesome. He was not alone; there were comrades with him—the boy with his finger in the dike, Colonel Bowie, too ill to move but insisting that he be carried across the line, the dying Captain of the *Chesapeake* still with deathless challenge on his lips, Rodger Young peering into the gloom. They gathered about him in the dusky bomb room.

And of course there was Edith. She was the only one he was aware of. Johnny wished that he could see her face more clearly. Was she angry? Or proud and happy.

Proud though unhappy.—he could feel her hand. He held very still.

Presently his cigarette burned down to his fingers. He took a final puff, blew it at the Geiger counter, and put it out. It was his last. He gathered several butts and made a roll-your-own with a bit of paper found in a pocket. He lit it carefully and settled back to wait for Edith to show up again. He was very happy.

He was still propped against the bomb case, the last of his salvaged cigarettes out again. "Johnny? Hey, Johnny! Can you hear me? This is Kelly. It's all over. The *Lafayette* landed and Towers blew his brains out. Johnny? Answer me."

When they opened the outer door, the first man in carried a Geiger counter in front of him on the end of a long pole. He stopped at the threshold and backed out hastily. "Hey, chief!" he called. "Better get some handling equipment—uh, and a lead coffin, too."

The Journey Alone

Given awoke into a world of madness and crazy contradictions. He had a private problem too. . .

Illustrated by John J. Greengrass

Given dreamed, once again, that he could see the bright gout of mercury leaping from half a dozen shattered gauges and scuttling across a crazily slanted floor. And the dream was worse than the reality because in it he had forgotten how to unfasten safety webbing. . . Here it comes, he had thought in a kind of wondering incredulity, I've run from this and hidden from it all my life, and now—I'll soon be dead. The prospect of black, total extinction that can come to the agnostic seemed to freeze his thoughts into a bleak, timeless greyness.

It was the fleeing beads of mercury that had saved his life by breaking the chilled stasis and suggesting *trying* to run, even though it seemed so very important just to sit and let his body recover. . .

Quite suddenly, he returned to consciousness and found himself staring up at a smooth curving ceiling and breathing the disquieting odour of antiseptics. A hospital, he thought, well, that was to be expected after what had happened. He was lucky the pervading odour was not one of flowers.

So the scythe missed me that time. Given mused. I can return to being a miser with a little hoard of precious tomorrows.

The bed in which he lay was vibrating faintly and to Given came the shocking realisation that he was in space. ...*This* was altogether unexpected. He jerked upwards and became aware that he was strapped down and that his sudden motion had activated a shining gadget of super-chrome and red plastic that stood at his bedside. At a leisurely pace, and accompanied by a low whine of magnetic motors the machine swung down a bright jointed arm which terminated in a hypodermic needle. In spite of Given's frantic efforts to scramble away the needle burst its antiseptic bubble and slipped into his thigh.

Without getting smaller the room dwindled into distance and darkness. . .

The second time Given awoke, everything was as before. He strained his eyes in the direction of his feet and saw that the anaesthetic dispensing robot was still at its post. Am I hurt so badly, he wondered, that they don't even want me to move? Keeping a quick welling of panic in check he cautiously tensed every muscle he knew how to control. He felt all right.

This was crazy, he decided. He distinctly remembered activating the insulation network in his flying suit after the crash and using the emergency charges in the flier's hull to get clear. Only too well was he able to recall the nightmare scramble up the side of the valley his flier had made in the sand, and the slow motion tumble down the other side. The ship's drive had blown then.

The memory of the ensuing minutes in which he had threshed about in the sand as agony played over his body in random patterns, like summer breezes on ripe wheat, was less clear, but he was sure of one thing. Apart from some bruises and second degree L-drive burns he was unhurt.

Why then was he on a spaceship? With first degree burns the medical staff at First Landing might have found it necessary to ship him to Aldebaran IV, but it was very unlikely. Anyway, the suit insulation had saved him from more than a mild toasting. Given began to get uneasy.

He opened his mouth to shout for somebody to come and explain it all away, then remembered that beside the robot's visual pick-up there had been a microphone grill so that it could nail him if he made any noise. Given started to resent the robot.

There was only one other way that might work. He sucked in as much air as his lungs would hold, bunched his pectoral muscles and slowly strained upwards. There came a moment of shuddering strain then the plastic strap parted with a loud snap. The sudden jerk registered

inside the waiting machine and it whined into action. It extended another arm similar to the first, from a row of five, and a fresh needle nosed towards Given's thigh. With his arms free Given was able to handle the machine. He caught the spindly metal arm with his left hand and with the other jerked the extensible power lead. The end of it broke free of the robot's cylindrical body and the several telltales on top went out as it stopped moving. Given unhooked the other straps that pinioned the lower half of his body.

He stood up stiffly and looked around the room. It was small and bare, a ten foot cube. There was the bed, which was no more than a oblong block of soft plastic as the heat radiant walls made pyjamas and sheets unnecessary, the now immobile robot, the door to a built-in cupboard and the door out.

Inside the cupboard he found his grey duracord shorts and shirt which somebody had cleaned and pressed for him. He put them on, noticing as he did so that the cupboard door bore a small plate that said, S.C. STARFINDER — Locker 31. Sick Bay.

That was a coincidence. Given had been on the *Starfinder* when he had shipped out as a war correspondent during the '77 Rebellion. He recalled that the *Starfinder* was so closely crammed with machinery as to be reminiscent of a twentieth century submarine but forgot all about that as his head seemed to split open while he was stooping to adjust his walking pads. Strangely, the pulsating pain in his eyes and temples made him feel better—it seemed less likely now that he was the victim of some plot to prevent him finishing his unimportant series of articles on Thor, or the "duplicate of Mars" as the popular tabloids called it. Carefully avoiding the impotent robot Given went to the door and opened it just enough to let him see into the corridor outside. As he was edging it open the thought came that it was stupid to act like a furtive criminal, but he squinted out anyway.

It was pitch black in the corridor. On a spaceship power is scarce and corridor lights only go on when someone walks into that particular section or when a door opens. The fact that it was dark merely meant that nobody was about. Given wasn't sure whether he was pleased or not.

He was about to open the door wide, thus switching on the corridor lights, and step out, when he realised that he could see stars. The non-slip ribbing on the corridor floor was clearly visible for a few inches in the light seeping out of the room he was in, then it seemed to grow misty and fade away, and beyond that—he could see stars.

They glowed through the night outside the door with the fierce steady brilliance that only a spaceman can know. Given could make

out the familiar constellations, slightly distorted from Earth norm and felt a strong impulse to slam the door on this stark impossibility. What prevented him was the thought of being locked *inside* knowing what was waiting *outside*, and of having to turn the handle and open the door again.

Given took a deep breath, acutely aware of his racing heart. The room with its bed that dangled straps and the motionless cylindrical robot looked very cosy and safe now. The star-studded darkness in the corridor seemed correspondingly more appalling, even without the knowledge that the *Starfinder's* sick bay was near the centre of the ship and therefore, it was impossible to see into space from it.

However, there was something that had to be done.

He took another even deeper breath and flung the door wide open. There was a faint click, the corridor lights came on and the stars were gone. Given stepped gingerly out onto the floor that, a minute ago, had appeared not to exist, and looked left and right at the slightly curved walkway with its row of flesh pink wall lights. Normality. The essence of the ordinary.

And yet when the lights weren't shining, stars were. Given began to draw up a list of questions to ask the first person he met. One: why had he been taken onto a spaceship when the only after effects of his crash were some bruises and a sore head? Two: why did distant suns shine in what should be pitch darkness? He got an uneasy feeling that he wouldn't get any answer to the second question, or if he did he wouldn't like it.

He hesitated for a moment, realising that he had not permitted himself actually to *think* about what had happened, that he had subconsciously decided that it was safer, mentally, merely to accept. For example, the logical thing to do now was to step back into the room and close the door over, turning out the corridor lights, and observe the phenomenon all over again. But Given knew he was going to walk on down the walk-way in search of people. He did so.

Eighty feet further on and out of sight round the ship's curve from where he had been standing Given found that the corridor terminated in a blank metal door. It opened at his approach and Given walked into a room containing a desk, some chairs and several filing cabinets.

The white coated man with the close cropped grey hair and prominent teeth leapt to his feet when he saw Given. His eyes were wide with surprise when he spoke. "What the . . .?" he began, then stopped, floundering. "Damn it all, man, you're sick. You . . . you can't get up and walk about like this. You *couldn't* have. . . I mean, how did you do it anyway?"

"If it's all the same to you," replied Given, "I'll ask the questions—I think I'm entitled to. I want to know why I am on this ship and where it is going."

With some effort the grey haired man drew his quivering upper lip over his teeth and returned his eyes to normal. "My name is Alexander," he said, "and I'm the doctor in charge of the medical section of this ship. You were found near your flier in the desert near First Landing, on Thor, of course. As your flier's drive had blown and your suit insulation web was inactive it was obvious that you were suffering from first degree L-drive burning, so..."

"Wrong," interrupted Given. "My insulation was on when the drive blew. I *like* being alive," he added with, he realised, not very subtle sarcasm.

"Your insulation was off," insisted the other, nervously tapping the desk, "when your drive...but, of course, it couldn't have been. Could it?"

"No," said Given.

"Well. What happened then?" asked Alexander.

"I remember threshing about in the sand before I lost consciousness. The switch *could* have got knocked off."

"Damn it all, man, said Alexander loudly, and Given realised that he spoke rather like the old characterizations of retired English colonels, "that makes a difference to your status aboard this ship. This is a military ship and you would never have been allowed aboard if you hadn't been near to death. Now it turns out that you weren't too bad at all..."

"Why could the medical staff at First Landing not have handled my case?" queried Given, struggling to get a grip on the conversation.

"Because of the general holiday," replied Alexander, passing one hand over his close-fitting cap of hair. "Every ship that was at First Landing is jammed to its maximum for the journey home!"

Given tried hard to find another meaning in the previous two sentences apart from the obvious, surface one. He failed, then tried to envisage the whole population of a newly colonised planet packing up and flying three hundred light years to Earth for some mysterious "general holiday". His mind baulked at the concept.

"What do you mean?" he demanded irritably, but Alexander was already moving away from him through a door opposite to the one by which Given had entered.

"I think you had better come this way," he called back over his shoulder. Given went after the other man and his breath began to come harder and his headache got worse as he strained to overtake. He

realised that the crash had really got to him after all and that, for all his scrawny build and nervous, uncoordinated movements, Alexander was probably in much better shape than he was. The thought was not comforting.

The corridor made a sharp turn and when Given reached it he found that Alexander had already passed through the door that was about five paces away in the new direction. Resignedly Given went after him only to find that Alexander had crossed the room it led into and gone out through yet another door. This one bore a small plaque that said, CAPTAIN D. R. VINE. Given knew Desmond Vine fairly well and his spirits rose slightly at the hope of getting a coherent explanation of all that had happened from someone he had previously known.

"I'm sorry, sir, but you can't go in there," a voice warned as he walked towards the latest door. Given looked back quickly, realising that in his hurry he had crossed the room without looking around it. The speaker was a tall youngster in lieutenant's uniform, who had thick, heavily oiled black hair that he combed in a gleaming sweep over each ear. Given suppressed his quick surge of anger when he saw that the young lieutenant was grinning in an unexpectedly friendly manner.

"Doctor Alexander told me to follow him," he pointed out, "and as well as that, I want to see the Captain."

"All the same, you're not allowed to walk in there without being requested to do so. Orders," the lieutenant added significantly.

"I'll sit over here then." Given grunted tiredly, deciding to let things take their course. He tried to think of something else to say but there seemed to be no appropriate remarks available. In awkward silence he sat down uncomfortably aware of how rubbery his legs felt. Perhaps it was better anyway that he could have a short pause to try and sort out his thoughts.

The first and most important thing was to keep his head. No matter how bizarre, no matter how unnatural anything that happened might seem there was certain to be, underlying the apparent craziness of the situation, a logical explanation to the whole thing. This core of sanity and normality was bound to be revealed to him sometime, so, in the meantime, the thing to do was to accept.

He had made a pretty good start in that direction already, Given realised, as just for one brief instant, he let his mind consider the matter of the stars in the corridor. For an even briefer period of time Given entertained the idea that he might be mad, but that was one explanation that was out. In spite of the fact that an insane man may wrongly believe himself sane, the sane man is sure, beyond any shadow of doubt, of his reason.

Therefore, he summed up, *accept*. Just as everybody else in the world is able to do with the certainty of approaching death. He realised with some surprise, that he had managed to forget about death for a good twenty minutes or more.

Why, Given asked himself, do I have this thing riding me? What have the others got that enables them to live out their lives with a serene disregard of the dark shadow waiting at the end of their lifespan? For most others there was religion, especially since the rise of new Spiritualism, but even the atheists that Given knew weren't haunted as he was. For them there was no sudden awakening in the night to escape from a horrible dream, only to find that the nightmare was there too, on both sides of the threshold of sleep.

He was not certain that personal extinction was waiting for him, but it seemed more than likely that it was, and therefore, Given was afraid.

The argument was an old one to him and the outcome the same as always. He decided he wanted to talk to somebody. The lieutenant looked up in surprise as Given approached. The wall facing the desk at which he sat bore six curved-surface view screens giving a complete though discrete picture of the sky surrounding the *Starfinder*.

"These are monitors of the main screens in there," explained the lieutenant nodding towards a door with a plaque marked CONTROL "They are fitted with relative-to-starfield motion directors too. Actually they should be in Control Room but this tub has a slight reputation for shortage of space."

"I know," said Given. "I travelled on her twice before but that was before you could walk, probably."

The younger man wrinkled his forehead in polite surprise, and Given noticed that his eyebrows were thick and black, forming a continuous bar, undiminished even at the bridge of his nose.

"Yes," continued Given. "That was when I was sent out to cover the trouble on Mythia. The planets around Procyon were a lot more exciting eighteen years ago than they are now."

Instead of being impressed as most people were when he mentioned his Mythian assignment the lieutenant's look of surprise turned from a polite imitation into the real thing. "But Procyon is a *star*," he blurted out.

Given felt a coldness, a sinking feeling in his stomach. "That's right," he replied keeping his voice carefully level.

"Then what do you mean by 'planets around Procyon'?"

Given took a deep breath. "What are those?" he asked, waving his hand at the banked, starry segments of space on the screens.

"Stars," replied the lieutenant promptly.

"Go on," said Given gently. "Tell me more about them."

The other looked even more puzzled for a second, then his brow smoothed itself out and he grinned rather sheepishly. "No, I'm not trying to put over some sort of a gag," said Given under his breath. He kept quiet, waiting for the answer, but when it came it was even worse than he could have imagined it would be.

"Stars are lights on the tunnel walls, of course," replied the lieutenant. "What else would they be?"

The floor of the room, the ship it was in, the stars and the whole universe seemed to shrink and flow away from Given leaving him in a tiny bubble of loneliness, separate from the rest of creation. "What else indeed?" he forced himself to say, and even managed a smile. It was the bright query in the lieutenant's eyes that returned Given to reality and, feeling rather embarrassed, he returned to his seat.

The young man had not been joking. He believed what he had said and Given knew that he had heard right. He supposed, now, that he had even known in advance that there was something really bad coming to him. There was a sense of not being *right* in the atmosphere. Something seemed to have shifted in the old reality of hurriedly written articles, frosty starred nights under many skies and brief, treasured returns to Earth and home. Given felt lost.

There were two courses open to him now, neither of them at all pleasant. One was to assume that the lieutenant was mad, and the other was to keep on accepting and not thinking. . .

The door facing him opened and Doctor Alexander put his head into the room. "Would you please come in here, Mr Given?" he said in his jerky, overloud tones. Wordlessly Given rose to his feet and walked towards the Captain's room. He could feel reluctance and dread building in him at every step, for he was counting on Desmond Vine. He had known Vine when they were both at school and it seemed now that Vine was his last chance to establish contact with that reality that seemed to have slipped away. Given felt that it was now altogether possible that Vine would not know him, or he would find that the Vine the crew of the *Starfinder* knew was a multiple headed monster or a neon-eyed robot.

"Hello Jarvis," greeted Desmond Vine, rising to his feet. "So you're the one that has been causing all the fuss. You're an awful man, you know." He smiled his big genial, cultivated smile. Given felt a warming surge of relief. The same old Vine. Plump, pink, wearing the twentieth century style rimless glasses that he affected, and still exuding his aura of synthetic cheerfulness.

"Hello Desy," replied Given taking the proffered hand. "Yes, I'm the one. I'm a bit mixed up, I guess. Since I woke up after the crash

I've been swept off my feet. I suppose it's alright to call you Desy or should it be Captain Vine now?"

"No need to worry about that," Vine said airily, the light shining off his glasses. "There's no necessity for discipline among friends."

"Of course not," agreed Given. Vine's friends were all those he knew who were in a position to do him a good turn when called upon.

"And about the way things happened. Of course you're mixed up—I would be too if it happened to me. We'll get all that fixed up at dinner this evening. In the meantime why not go back to bed? You look pretty done in. You're an awful man you know."

"Wait a minute," countered Given desperately. He was glad that Vine hadn't changed any but the effect of his overwhelming friendliness was almost too much to handle. "There's some things I'd like to know now."

"What do you think of him?" Vine said to Alexander who had been standing quietly by. "Isn't he a terrible man? He gets himself nearly killed in a flier crash and he won't even rest a minute after it."

"Mr Given *should* be in bed, of course," agreed Alexander. "Lieutenant Scholes and I could walk back to the room with him."

Given felt his last shred of control desert him. "I'm not going anywhere until I get satisfaction," he snapped feeling his legs beginning to buckle again. Especially with Lieutenant Scholes. Do you realise that that boy has some crazy notion about stars being lights on the walls of a tunnel?" Given's voice sounded plaintive and ineffectual in his own ears, but he felt better now that he had succeeded in dragging something out into the open. "Have him in here and ask him yourself," he added.

Vine's face lost some of its pinkness and his soft feminine lips thinned a little. He glanced at Alexander before speaking. "Sit down and relax, Jarvis," he said gently. "The tunnels are long and dark and if there were no stars on the walls we wouldn't be able to find our way at all. You must be delirious with exhaustion. You'd better get to bed."

Given felt stinging tears begin to well into his eyes. "To hell with you, Vine," he whispered. "You're as bad as..." Given broke off as the implications of Vine's words came through and the room began to swing and dip around him. He was dimly aware of Alexander moving swiftly behind him and pinning his arms, then the lights seemed to die jerkily into darkness. Given knew that he was about to faint but there was a moment, just before he went over the edge of the precipice, in which he was aware of yet another facet of the horror that had taken the place of life.

All about him, superimposed on the fading, receding faces of Vine and Alexander, and filling the darkening recesses of the room, were the familiar groupings of a million distant suns. Bright and real and ghastly they swarmed across his vision in their old, slightly twisted constellations. Orion, Casseopia and Canis Major and all the others.

Given could see the stars.

They decided to hold the seance immediately after dinner.

Given surprised himself by being so hungry that he had been able to empty every dish served to him. It was three periods since his outburst in front of Captain Vine and Doctor Alexander, and he had spent most of that time in drugged sleep. He felt a bit stronger and was even beginning to adapt to the idea of travelling with a spaceship crew who didn't know what space and stars and planets were.

With ponderous tact and manufactured friendliness Vine had told him that "it was alright" and that he was to forget all about it even though he *was* a terrible man. Alexander and he made it clear to Given that they weren't going to hold anything against him because of his strange behaviour over the matter of Lieutenant Scholes and the stars. Nobody knew better than they, they said, the effects that shock and exhaustion could have on the mind.

By listening to the ebb and flow of dinner table talk Given had pieced together a fairly complete coherent picture of the universe as the crew and passengers of the *Starfinder* saw it.

The stars were indeed lights on the walls of a complex network of vast tunnels. The points at which the tunnels emerged into the sunlit world above were called planets. The air in the tunnels was cold and full of toxic gases, hence it was necessary for the ships to be airtight. As well as that, the ships were slow moving which explained the apparent lack of parallax in the stars groups as they moved to their destinations.

It was all very carefully put together and completely insane.

Taking a sort of morbid interest in the new concepts presented to him Given had discovered that there were inconsistencies even inside the crew's fantastic framework of ideas. For instance, everybody aboard was returning to Earth for a general holiday but nobody seemed quite sure just *why*. Given longed for the chance to pinpoint something by close questioning but that would have caused comment. He had determined to play along. To accept.

As the table was cleared Given reviewed the three explanations that he had dreamed up in the hope that something else would occur to him. Firstly, that everybody, aboard, excepting himself, had been infected with

some strange unknown virus that had caused an insanity distinguished by the fact that it inspired the same delusions in all cases. The drawback to this theory, apart from its sheer improbability, was that it didn't account for the presence of several of Thor's key men on the ship. Seated farther along the table from Given were Commander Bleriot, the man in supreme control of all traffic at First Landing, and one or two others who would never, in the normal course of events, leave Thor.

Given's second theory that this was all part of some gigantic test that he was required to pass was so improbable that it wasn't worth considering. Besides, the secret and nearly omnipotent Machiavelli in charge would never have been able to fake the near fatal crash which had started the whole thing.

His third guess was the most unlikely of all yet, in away, the most possible. The idea of people slipping, by means of some flaw in the space-time continuum, into another parallel universe was not exactly a new one. In the infinity of universes that some scientists postulated there *might* be such a one as this, wherein the people he knew lived out their lives in this fantastic version of reality. The idea wasn't new but it was just too hard to believe.

The table was now completely cleared in preparation for the seance. Vine was still radiating good will but Given sensed that he was ill at ease. Vine was one of those who had not been convinced by the open and highly scientific attitude that Spiritualism had adopted when it became New Spiritualism, and he was in the company of a number of important believers as well as several of the same views as himself. Given could see that he was finding it hard to steer the middle course.

The medium was a small dark haired man who seemed very impatient to get started. At length everybody was ready and paying sufficient attention to please the medium whom Given had heard Vine calling a very respectful Mr Noble. Given concluded that Noble was somebody big who used his talent as a medium to impress his friends. A sort of super parlour trick.

As Noble settled back in his chair with his eyes shut and his face turned up to the brightly lit ceiling close above Given felt an urge to get to his feet and run. Even in normal circumstances New Spiritualist seances usually upset him. The air of authenticity supplied by the bright lighting and the scientific disregard for mystical mumbo-jumbo of any sort was inclined to make Given doubt himself. The firmly established fact that any good medium could tell a man things about himself that it was impossible for him, the medium, to have known previously was sufficient evidence for most people that there was something in New Spiritualism.

It would have been enough for Given to pin some hope on had it not been for telepathy. Given had a deeply rooted suspicion that the talent exhibited by those who claimed psychic powers was merely a form of extra-sensory perception. The medium in his trance, casting about for a message for an inquirer could be tuning into that person's mind and extracting sufficient information to enable him to deliver his "message."

A faint groan from Noble interrupted Given's thoughts. Noble stiffened abruptly for a second then slumped into his chair. He lay like that for a full minute then screamed at the top of his voice. Given felt the hair on the nape of his neck stir slightly and two of the men at the table leapt to their feet.

"Good God!" whispered someone in a stricken voice and Given had to struggle to suppress a giggle. This was something nobody had expected.

After his one scream Noble returned to lying quietly in the chair his face working violently and his body twitching slightly. Just as everybody was beginning to relax he screamed again and burst into tears. Then he recovered consciousness.

Desy Vine bounced to his feet and pounded round to Noble's seat. "What's wrong, man?" he said urgently shaking Noble's sleeve.

"Nothing. Nothing at all," replied Noble fishing a handkerchief out of his pouch. He looked around the table and said, "I must apologise for anything that has happened, I'm afraid I'll have to call the meeting off. I—I've just had a pretty horrible nightmare. I suppose that's what you would call it. This never happened before."

"What was it, Mark?" asked an elderly man beside him.

"It's stupid, really," answered Noble, dabbing his mouth. "I seemed to be outside the ship, in the tunnel. Only it wasn't a tunnel. There were no walls or floors, just emptiness extending on for uncountable billions of miles. And, stranger still, although there were no walls the stars were there just the same, and they were different too."

"Ugh! Horrible!" said Commander Bleriot. "Go on, though."

"Well," said Noble becoming embarrassed at the incongruity of the situation. "the stars seemed to be, or rather, I *knew* somehow that they were huge spheres of flaming gases and the planets were smaller spheres *swinging round them*."

Given sat up, feeling the blood begin to pound in his temples and an illogical elation rippling through him. Here was something that tied in with home; the word home had come to mean the universe he lived in before the flier crash; no matter how fantastic the manner of that connection.

Given was suddenly aware of somebody watching him and glanced to his right to find the young man he had encountered outside Vine's room. Lieutenant Scholes, staring at him, his dark eyes wide with startled surmise. When he saw Given returning his gaze he jerked his eyes away and watched Doctor Alexander escort the medium out of the cramped officers' mess.

Given felt a glow of malicious pleasure. This would give Scholes and Vine and Alexander something to think about when they tied in his remarks to the Lieutenant with what Noble had just blurted out. It was pleasant to think of somebody else undergoing even a fraction of his own mental turmoil.

From the corner of his eye he saw Scholes hurry out of the room.

Suddenly Given was sick of the whole set up. All at once it came flooding back to him, the things he had been trying to incarcerate in a dark corner of his mind. The impossibility, the insanity, the sheer unmitigated horror of the thing that had happened to him. Why me, he asked himself, what did *I* do? Given stared round the crowded noise filled room and felt lonelier than he had ever done in his life.

He rose from the table and walked down the corridor feeling the artificial gravity drag at his feet as though he was walking in an invisible layer of syrup.

Back in the tiny room in which he had first awakened he sat on the edge of the bed and stared at the wall for a long time. In spite of what had happened during the seance Given realised that he had had enough. If there was only some final, irrefutable move that he could make he was now ready to make it. Anything at all would do just so long as he was acting.

There was something.

Ever since the episode of the stars in the corridor he had studiously avoided darkness. If he was man enough he could put out his room light and see what happened, this time trying to learn from experience.

Given felt very cold and his palms began to sweat. This was one of those cases where you had to act before really thinking about what was going to happen, because if you thought about it you wouldn't do it. And Given had already begun to think.

Slowly he stood up and put his hand on the light switch. He looked round the bare room, muttered, "What the hell?" and doused the light.

The stars were waiting for him.

Seconds crawled by in which Given fought with himself, trying not to move the switch that he could still feel under his fingers. He finally won the battle with his instinctive reactions and began to observe. The constellation of Casseopia was in front of him and he could see the

several double stars that he remembered. He could even see the misty radiance of the Dumbell Nebula. Whatever is doing this, he thought, is doing it right. The next thing to do was to see how complete the view was, so, still keeping his fingers on the switch, Given turned round to face the opposite way.

The stars moved with him. Intrigued in spite of his fear Given tried turning in in as many different directions as possible and even looking up and down. Always the one star group remained in the centre of his field of vision.

He stood still for a moment wondering what to do next. He was about to turn on the light for a breather in normality when the stars began to wheel past him in the way they should have done when he turned round.

Suddenly, close to him and dreadfully imminent, he could see a *thing*. It possessed huge motionless eyes surrounded by a slowly pulsating mass of transparently green folds of floating flesh. Gigantic and pale and luminous it undulated before him causing the light of the stars that could be seen through its appalling, silently waving fronds, to brighten and waver into darkness.

Given had time for several long, harsh, throat-tearing screams before he escaped into unconsciousness.

Morning sunlight, bright and warm and reminiscent of childhood hunts for chestnuts on fresh October mornings streamed into the office of the Controller of Ainsworth Field, Iceland.

Given took the untrimmed photographs the Controller had handed across his desk and glanced at them, only faintly curious as to what he would see. He had just recovered consciousness in the Field hospital and the memory of the final horror aboard the *Starfinder* was still vivid in his mind. Of what use were photographs to a man who had lost his sanity?

Captured on film the pulsating, placid-eyed obscenity that had paralysed Given with fear when he had seen it in his room aboard ship seemed less fearsome. The lack of any scale of reference reduced it to something like an odd jelly-fish, but it was the *thing* all right. As he stared at the foggy grey and black print Given felt a weight lift from his mind. Photographs. . . science. . . *fact*, his subconscious reasoned.

"You talked quite a lot when you were out, Mr Given." Controller Wright said before Given was able to decide which question to ask first. "I have a vague idea of what you must have been through, and if you'll be patient I'll try to give you an explanation. All right?"



Given nodded, not trusting himself to speak.

"These repulsive looking specimens," the controller began, tapping his own copies of the prints, "are the most recent addition to our catalogues of extra-terrestrial life forms. So recent that only about a dozen people know of their existence. We call them Gorgans because they were first discovered near the sun of that name.

"The Gorgans are the nearest approach to the multi-talented monsters that our thriller writers used to dream up, in that they are telepathic and that they have the ability to drain, somehow, the life energies from living organisms." The controller smiled apologetically. "They sound pretty fantastic I know, but as you are already aware they *do* exist. Another thing about them is that they are able to move themselves at very high speeds.

"Anyway, a colony of Gorgans, about ten thousand, drifted away from Gorgan in an apparently random movement and the Board ships who had been observing them at long range moved in to see the effect their presence had had on the animal life of Gorgan's one planet. To put it briefly, there was no animal life—any more.

"This is all background, of course," said the Controller pausing for breath. "I'm coming to the part that is immediately important to you.

"Here on Earth we have never had any experience of genuine telepathy, but thanks to radio messages from stray lost ships we know a lot more about it now. One unexpected effect is that the received direct-to-brain impulses tend to obliterate the receiver's own neural circuits. This would only be noticeable if the receiver was in a dark room or in absolute quiet as the case may be. So that, Mr Given, is the explanation for the illusions you had. I'm glad it didn't happen to me."

"You mean I was seeing through the Gorvan's eyes," said Given "I was in mental contact with one of them all the time? "I get that alright. But there's something else..." Given stopped unsure of what to say next.

"The insanity of the whole crew," announced the Controller triumphantly, pleased at being able to startle Given. "As I have said, the colony drifted aimlessly away from Gorvan probably looking for a fresh world to murder. We had to destroy them before that happened, and, as I'm told, it was quite easy to solve the problem. As these things go, that is. Something about a tight beam of clashing frequencies that set up vibrations sufficiently strong to disrupt the rather flimsy structure of the Gorvan's bodies. Technical details are outside my sphere," the Controller interpolated with the easy frankness of one who is confident that his own sphere is much more important.

"However," he continued, "the Gorgans moved into a part of space transversed by a line drawn from Arthea, Thor's parent sun. It was necessary for a ship to fly along this line to act as a pilot for the disrupter beam. The beam was to be transmitted from Pluto and be condensed and reformed by robot machinery on Thor, and there was just time to evacuate Thor and set up the necessary equipment.

"The ship would have to pass well within range of the Gorgans' telepathic powers which meant that, although their sense is non-directional, and the Gorgans wouldn't be able to locate the ship, they could learn the position of Earth from the minds of any crew members who possessed that data. Also they could learn the reason for the ship's flight and move into a safe volume of space.

"To solve those problems it was necessary to erase all conscious knowledge of the Gorgans and their impending destruction from the minds of all aboard. That was easy enough, but the matter of blanking out the position of Sol from the minds of men whose lives were based on an intimate knowledge of that sector of the galaxy was rather a different matter. In the end they had temporarily to erase even the most basic data about stars because, to the experienced spaceman, the very concept

of suns and planets is inextricably bound up with relative distances and directions.

"The solution arrived at, in the time available, was to replace the factual framework upon which stellar knowledge is built by a completely different and imaginary structure. Hence the business of the tunnels and the lights on their walls. The authorities were certain that the very *bizzarrie* of the concept would baffle the Gorvans.

"As events showed, they must have been correct because the colony maintained its predicted course after the *Starfinder* had passed by. So, three days ago they were wiped out of existence."

It was several seconds before Given was able to take in all that had been said. "You mean," he said finally, "that, due to me being unconscious I was the only one aboard that hadn't been given the hypno treatment?"

"Yes. Actually you would have been sent on another ship but for the shortage of time and space."

Given looked out of the floor to ceiling windows at the blue sweep of the distant ocean. The Gorvans were gone and his nightmare was over. So, that's what it's like to be telepathed, he thought, feeling something strangely like happiness beginning to grow inside him. Nobody could ever do it on you without your knowledge. Suddenly it felt good to be alive—better than it had ever been. The new data he had just received on telepathy meant that he would have to re-evaluate his previous information about New Spiritualism. Perhaps there was hope. . .

"I'm afraid there are days of interrogation and interviews facing you, and you haven't recovered from the flier crash yet. Do you feel up to it?" said the Controller.

Given had been staring at and beyond the gleaming silver of the Atlantic for some time before he realised that he had been asked a question. "Surely," he said, mildly surprised. "Why not?"

BOB SHAW



An Apple For The Teacher

Jason College seemed to stand between him and all the excitement and adventure he craved, outward appearances are not always accurate however.

Illustrated by Martin Frew

Every time it was the same. At the end of every term I'd swear not to come back. This was no existence for a man who was still young, still not sunk into an academic doze. There must be better ways of earning a living: there was a whole universe out there waiting, offering a thousand jobs that were a challenge to any real live man.

And here was I stuck in this provincial backwater on Venus, lecturing to teen-agers who would all leave me behind — slick, smart young things who'd go out into the wide cosmos and experience a wider and fuller life than I should ever know.

It couldn't go on. One fine day I'd up and leave.

But every time I came back. Vacation would end, and I'd be in my seat on the ship, thrusting away from Earth and back across the dark dazzling heavens to Venus.

That spring of 2032, I remember, I'd vowed I was going to get myself into the Interstellar Education Service as travelling lecturer. Or

I'd talk myself into something with the Saturnian Development Corporation—a rough life, but one with some meaning in it.

And here I was, watching the rich green Venusian landscape tilting up once more. The ship jarred and shuddered, the spaceport was obscured for a second by a smoky cloud, and then we were down.

Back again.

Then there was the journey by helicar out from the city, out to the seclusion of Jason College.

"Hello, Professor. Been painting Earth red?"

"Why, Professor, you sure got sunburnt."

There they were all again: the slouching Uranians, so heavy that their every action seemed deliberately slow and insolent; lean rangy-looking Martians, twirling along on their three legs and chattering in their sibilant grasshopper voices; and our own people, casual and yet full of pride of the race that had pioneered interplanetary exploration and drawn the beings of the universe into a colossal federation.

"A pleasant time, Professor Walsh?"

It was the quiet, demure voice of Miss Cardew. She walked across the campus with me, and I found it hard to believe that I had ever been away. Miss Cardew was a trim, young little woman—pretty, even. But she was doomed as I was doomed. She would go lecturing, organising tutorials, passing the years in the warm tranquillity of this clouded planet until she was pinched, middle-aged and fussy.

I said: "Back to the penal colony."

"Oh, it's not as bad as that."

We passed a group of Saturnian girls, murmuring to one another in their husky seductive voices. What a contrast! I liked Miss Cardew and admired her patient disposition, but I couldn't help setting her alongside these other beings.

The original Saturnians had been the only race in the solar system that resembled our own. There had been two small colonies of them, living on two of the Saturnian moons, Titan and Japetus. In the early days there had been some disastrous interbreeding that had produced some hideous mutants which fortunately did not survive. But then came the creatures that did survive—beautiful, somehow alien creatures, the men erratic but often brilliant, the women . . . Well you need to see the women for yourself: intense and impetuous in everything they do, alluring as sleek green mermaids—but with unreasonably attractive legs instead of a tail.

"Exquisite creatures, aren't they?" said Miss Cardew. She sounded genuinely appreciative and not at all envious. But then, Miss Cardew had such a nice disposition.

I sighed. I was full of a longing for adventure and change. But here I was back at Jason.

We went in.

Jason College was a sort of dumping-ground for students from all over the solar system. The natives of the different planets usually attended universities and institutions on their own worlds, or at any rate on the worlds where they happened to be stationed. The students we got were as a rule, children of parents who worked in remote and often dangerous parts of the universe, or who had to be continually on the move. High-ranking officers in the Communications and Development Services sent their offsprings to Jason. Spacemen in the lonelier outposts might have to choose between a completely alien university and Jason.

The majority of the students were children of Earth. Saturnians, Martians and Uranians took most of their classes separately, as the different planetary races think and work at a different tempo. You need a different mood to deal with each of them, and taking the few mixed classes that we did have was always a nightmare. As Professor of Solar-speak, the universal language, I dealt mainly with Earthlings, and with the Saturnians whose mingling with us had brought them close to our own people in general intellectual outlook. I took ancient languages—English and classical Martian—with some of the other races, but they each had their own Solarspeak tutors.

Considering the mixture we got, I was often surprised we didn't have more trouble of one sort and another.

If only I'd known it, there was trouble waiting for me on the very first morning of that new term.

We had spent two hours talking about nothing in particular. Routine matters had been cleared up and I had briefly outlined the programme for the term. Nobody was in a mood for getting down to any intensive work. We were all glad when the mellow chord of intermission vibrated through the building.

The room emptied. Except for Ameldia.

All the Saturnians were clever—when they tried. Often they couldn't be bothered. Of all of them, Ameldia was the brightest I had ever had.

She was beautiful, too. The backs of my ears tingled when she came up to my desk and put her lovely well-groomed head on one side, smiling at me.

She said: "I've brought a present for you, Professor."

Then she put a large blue apple on my desk.

"That's very nice of you." I said doubtfully. It might be a joke: the Saturnians had a weird sense of humour.

"It is not a fruit," she said in a grave tone. "It is a flower. A rare flower. It flowers at night, in darkness."

"How interesting," I said.

"It is rare," she emphasised. "I hope you will take care of it. It will surprise you. Keep it in your room. Keep it by the side of your bed."

I said again that it was very nice of her, and that I appreciated it very much.

"I hope you will find it interesting," she said huskily, and then went out of the room with a lingering backward glance.

I had a good look at the thing, but I couldn't see how it would ever put forth a bloom of any kind. The surface was completely smooth. The blue colour made it look a bit odd: the only place you could imagine it would be appropriate was on a Christmas tree.

I took the thing away and put it on a shelf in my bathroom.

If it flowered in the darkness, I didn't see it. It was certainly quite spherical and quite uninteresting in the morning.

During the Solaspeak lesson that morning, Amelida looked at me speculatively. I hoped she wasn't going to ask me what I thought of her present. She didn't.

That evening, Johnson of the Vido Scriptwriting Course came in to see me.

This was unusual. I wasn't one of his particular cronies. He started to talk about the Principal's new idea regarding the use that was to be made of a recent foundation grant, and I still couldn't make out why he had come to see me. It was none of my business. It was the sort of thing we might have chatted about in Refectory, but it was odd that he should have brought it up like this.

In the middle of the conversation I went into the bathroom for a moment. The automatic light failed to come on—one of the cleaners had probably blown dust into the relay during the vacation — and I didn't bother to reach for the wall switch. I knew my way about well enough. I just went in and reached for the glass that was on the shelf, so that I could offer Johnson a drink and find out what he was talking about.

There was a faint odour like honeysuckle in the room. It wasn't until I had turned back towards the door that I realised it must come from Amelida's blue apple.

And as I hesitated, Johnson spoke. He spoke right by my ear: it even seemed that he was talking inside my head.

He said: "It'll need a good bunch of us to get rid of Beales."

I put out my arm because I was sure we must be nearly bumping into one another.

There was nobody there.

I went back into the other room. Johnson was still sitting where I had left him.

I said: "Why do you want to get rid of Beales?"

He went quite white.

"Who said . . . I mean, how do you know I want to get rid of . . . to do anything about Beales?"

"You just said so."

"I didn't say a word."

We got pretty irritable about it. I told him what he had said, and he denied it. We argued.

In the end he did get down to business. This was what he had really come for. It was all connected with one of those hysterical feuds that cropped up from time to time within the college—a jockeying for position, a persistent lobbying and marshalling of allies. The whole thing was all too familiar, though it didn't usually start until later in the term.

When he had gone, I went into the bathroom and switched on the light. The plant was in flower all right: it had sent out tendrils in a graceful pattern, looping and intersecting. The flowers were small and crimson, giving off the heady scent I had already noticed.

Even as I watched, the thing contracted. The flowers closed and the tendrils were withdrawn. The shell closed in again, and there was the seamless blue apple once more.

If I had any vague suspicions about the plant being connected with the incident of Johnson's voice, they remained vague. I am on the Arts side, and have precious little scientific curiosity. But on impulse I carried the small sphere back into the other room, then took it with me into the bedroom and set it on the table beside my bed.

I put out the light, and after a while the faint odour filled the room.

I lay there drowsing, not asleep nor yet awake.

And suddenly everything went crazy. I had been thinking idly about Johnson, and then about Beales, who was Professor of Modern Music; and suddenly I found myself sitting on a horse that was galloping between Sirius and Aldebaran, whistling the latest Saturnian dance tune as it did so.

I came wide awake. But there was still something wrong. I saw my room in shadow, but at the same time I saw the stars all about me, and the music went on and on inside my head. Then Johnson, sitting on an asteroid, stuck out his tongue at me, and I was falling towards him.

It was a nightmare. But I had my eyes open, and I knew it wasn't my own nightmare. I could move. I could sit up.

I pushed myself upright, ducking to avoid a meteor with the face of the Principal, and was reaching for the light when the phenomena began to fade. I sat quite still, watching them haze over.

Then I heard a voice. I recognised it as that of Beales.

"Arr," he said. "Mmm. OOOof." He cursed. He made a noise that might have been a strangled yawn. Then, quite clearly, he thought two unpleasant thoughts about Johnson.

He thought . . .

I realised that it was not his actual voice I was hearing. In some way I was in touch with his thoughts. I had just come in on the tail-end of a nightmare he had been having, and now I was listening to the aftermath.

Tentatively I murmured: "Beales—can you hear me?"

There was no response. He went on muttering to himself for a minute, then things blurred a bit, and something like a Uranian sloth began to heave about in the darkness. Beales was plodding on into another nightmare.

I left him to it. Just like that. Instinctively I withdrew my attention: I made the effort, and found that I could force myself to ignore him, and at once the room was normal again.

This time I sat up and put the light on.

I looked at the plant on the table. It was pulling in its flowers smoothly, the green sheaths closing about the crimson blossom like eyelids blinking in the sunlight.

Even an unscientific pedant like myself couldn't help but be curious by now. Had I become abruptly telepathic? Was there something about this plant that somehow gave me new powers?

The only way to find out was to experiment.

Out went the light again. Deliberately I reached out with my mind to make contact with others.

I met Johnson. He was having a dream. It was just the sort of distorted, egocentric dream I'd have expected Johnson to have. Then I found myself listening to the thoughts of the Venusian Patrol officer who was circling the building on a routine check-up.

And inevitably, thinking about the weird properties of the plant on my beside table. I thought of the Saturnian girl who had given it to me. I thought of Ameldia—and there she was, in my mind, wide awake.

She had been waiting for me. There was no doubt about that. As soon as I had made contact, her lazy voice purred inside my head.

"I wondered how long it would be," she said. "I thought you were never going to come."

She was the only person who had been conscious of my mental probing. She was not only aware of my presence: she was at once replying.

I said: "You've got one of these plants right by you."

"I have indeed."

"You'd better explain all this."

"Do I have to explain?" She was silky, languorous. "There are better things to talk about."

"At this time of night," I said, "nothing's worth talking about. I need some sleep. Now that I know the properties of this infernal plant . . ."

"Well? Now that you know, what are you going to do?"

Well: what was I going to do? I didn't know. I simply said: "In future I'll make sure it's not in this room with me. Then maybe I'll get some rest. I can't imagine why you gave it to me."

"Can't you?"

And suddenly, insinuated into my mind, was the full consciousness of Ameldia's beauty. In one second I seemed to be aware of all her smooth, intoxicating desirability. She laughed invitingly, and I felt her body tingling with that laugh.

I said: "Now wait a minute—"

"Don't you like me?"

"You have no right to behave like this."

"How am I behaving?" she mocked. "I'm lying here quite still, just thinking. Just thinking."

"It's the things you're thinking that won't do."

"For a professor of the universal language," she said, "you express yourself in a very confused way."

It was as though she were caressing me with her thoughts. She conjured up for me an alluring vision of herself. It was no good my shutting my eyes and trying to drive her away. She had fastened on me.

I felt that I could reach out and take her in my arms: she was so close that I could draw her to me if only I made the effort.

She said: "I wish you could. That's what I'm longing for."

I said: "You have no right to trespass on my thoughts. You've no right to indulge in this nonsense at all."

"I have at least a right to my own thoughts," she said softly. "I can't help it if I'm in love with you."

"Nonsense," I snapped. "Adolescent infatuation—nothing more."

"You're so wrong. So very, very wrong."

"Goodnight," I said, trying to get away.

But she was not going to let me escape. Eagerly, as though willing to do anything to keep conversation going, she said: "Don't you want to know about the plant I've given you? You asked me to explain a little while ago. Aren't you interested any more?"

I tried to banish all thoughts of her physical beauty from my mind. I said as coldly and precisely as possible: "I shall be extremely interested to know the technical details."

"I don't know about technical details," she said. "I only know the facts."

She told me about the lower grade mammals of Titan, of which I had heard before. As soon as she began to speak I remembered things I had heard from time to time about the animals like dogs that showed such high social intelligence when living in their own jungle environment, but were so stupid when taken away from it. Settlers had tried to domesticate the animals, but found them clumsy, unintelligent and intractable.

Ameldia mentioned that experiments had been made with groups of these wild dogs: it had been thought that their stupidity had perhaps been due to being separated from the pack, their social organism, and so a whole colony had been taken into captivity and studied. But once away from their natural environment, the small patchy jungles of Titan, they lapsed into imbecility.

Why should animals who lived a quiet well-organised community existence in one setting lose all their co-operative faculties when taken away, even if only for a few miles?

Ameldia claimed to have discovered the answer.

"In the jungle, where there is twilight even during the day, these plants flower in various places—far apart and often invisible, but always present where there is a colony of the dogs. It is these plants which make the animals telepathic. In some way they act on the brain in such a fashion as to stimulate those parts that usually lie dormant. Even on the low level of the dogs, the effect is to produce a sense of community and an ability to work and live together."



I asked her how she had stumbled across this secret. In telling me, she unconsciously gave me a lot of information about herself—her loneliness at home, her nocturnal wanderings, her frustrations and yearnings.

Hers was not an unhappy household, but her father was busy and her mother was an invalid. Ameldia was thrown very much on her own resources. She was restless. At night she would go out quietly and walk for miles. It was on such an expedition that she stumbled across the secret of the blue apple—for we knew no name for it, and both of us thought of it vaguely as the blue apple.

She had been strolling aimlessly around the perimeter of the thickly wooded hill near her home when she had sensed the presence of a dog colony. She had neither seen nor heard them: she merely knew, instinctively, that they were there. She received the warning messages that they were interchanging at the approach of a stranger. The force of their animal emotions jarred in her mind.

And ten minutes later she noticed the honeysuckle smell that was so characteristic of the plant. She did not immediately connect the plant with the strange sensation she had just experienced, but as soon as she got it home the truth became clear: she made contacts with the thoughts of

her mother, asleep in the next room, and with the drowsy, irritable thoughts of her father, who had awoken in the middle of the night and could not get off to sleep again.

"And now," she concluded, "because I wanted to let you know how I felt about you, I have brought one of the apples back for you. Before, I had only one—they are difficult to find—and although I could hear your thoughts, I had no way of transmitting my own."

"You mean you've had one of these things for some time?"

"All last term," she admitted. She gave a sly chuckle. "That is why I am your most brilliant pupil. I used to listen in to your mind at the end of a day's work, and know exactly what your next lecture would be and what questions you were likely to set in any examination. I was always a jump ahead of you."

"This is preposterous," I said. "And... haven't you reported the discovery to anyone on Titan?"

"No."

"A scientific discovery of such importance, and you keep it to yourself!"

"It would be no fun if everybody could have one. It's nicer, isn't it, with just the two of us?"

"Tomorrow," I said, "this whole matter has got to be reported to the Science Wing. Professor Lewin is the obvious man to approach."

"But I'm not in love with Professor Lewin," she said plaintively. "You're the one I want. Even if we can't be together—not yet, anyway—we can share one another's mind at night, like this, can't we? And later..."

There was only one thing to do. I got up and took the plant into the bathroom. Her cry of protest resounded in my head.

"Don't be so shy," she wailed. "Be honest—don't be afraid of your emotions. Don't..."

I shut the door and went back to bed. She was silent.

It then occurred to me that although I had silenced her voice, she could still keep in touch with my thoughts from her end.

I tried to make those thoughts as severe as possible. Tomorrow I would have a good straightforward talk with her. This deplorable business must cease. A man of my standing could not indulge in an amorous intrigue with a student, however attractive that student might be, even if he wanted to. And I didn't want to.

I wanted nothing to do with such things, I firmly assured myself and the listening Ameldia.

I don't know whether I had a nightmare when I went to sleep. Next morning I remembered nothing, but I may have had some pretty involved dreams. If so, and if Amelida was in touch with them, I could only hope that they gave her the fright she deserved.

In class the next day I found that I could not look at her. It was all very well to make stern resolves. After all, you couldn't very well take up a conversation such as we had had mentally, and bring it out in forthright speech. There she sat, looking up at me with her magnificent deep eyes—and the mental liason of the night before seemed quite fantastic.

It was no good. I couldn't see how I was going to approach the question. I let her get away without saying a word to her. There was—I was certain of this—an exasperating glimmer of triumph and anticipation in her eyes.

Of course I had determined to have nothing more to do with her via the medium of the plant. Some time in the near future I would see Lewin about that.

Yet there was something dishonest away down in my subconscious? I could have seen Lewin that very day, but I had not done so. The thing was still there on the shelf that evening. And when I glanced at it, I knew that I would have to put it on my bedside table again. There was a good reason: I must make it clear to Amelida that she must get over her romantic emotions and that I had no intention of returning them. She must stop trying to insinuate enticing suggestions into my mind. And the only way I could talk to her freely was when we were apart: I could not speak to her in class, in the reality; our first fantastic conversation had been a mental one, and our last conversation must be the same.

It was definitely going to be the last.

Let me confess that I went to bed early. I tried to read for a while, and then put out the light and lay back.

Would she be waiting for me? Was I too early?

The faint but rich scent permeated the room. Out of a whispering uncertainty, a sort of mental haze, came the knowledge that Ameldia was there.

She said: "Darling, you've come back."

"I do not wish to be addressed as darling," I said, "and I've come back only to make one or two things quite clear to you, and put an end to this monstrous affair."

Her beautiful presence seemed to be in the room with me.

"Why don't you forget your inhibitions?" she murmured. "Let there be just the two of us in the universe. Nothing else matters."

I said harshly: "A lot of things matter. I have a position to maintain, and fortunately I also have a sense of responsibility. I have not the slightest interest in you . . ."

She would not let me finish. My words were a challenge to her. She flaunted herself at me, coaxed and cajoled, let her mind run riot until my own mind was dazed. But stubbornly I managed to say:

"It's no use. You're very beautiful, but you're very young and silly. I do not love you. Is that clear?"

I drove her away. This time I did not flee from her by getting rid of the plant. I thrust her out mentally, denying her by sheer willpower until the force of her desires weakened, and wretchedly she slackened her grasp on my mind.

When I was quite sure that I had convinced her, I gasped out loud and did not move for two or three minutes. The temptations exercised by that alluring creature had been almost too much for me.

Was I a fool not to have accepted the challenge she offered? I had thought I wanted adventure, and yet when something like this happened . . .

But this was not adventure. This would have led only to petty intrigue. There could have been nothing more than a physical passion that would not have lasted. She was little more than a child—a greedy, impulsive young animal. I was sorry for her, particularly in view of what she herself had let me understand about her home background; but that didn't mean I was going to make a complete fool of myself because of her. I wanted something better than that.

I could not go to sleep. My fretful imagination wandered. I heard snatches of thought and conversation from all over the college. Preternaturally alert, I was like an invisible wanderer through the building, hearing faint bursts from innumerable visiscreen speakers all relaying different programmes.

I was brought up sharply by the mention of my own name. It was clear enough to make me reply: I almost said "Yes?" out aloud.

Someone was thinking about me. Very flattering thoughts. I received an immediate impression of genuine sweetness of character: I seemed to be in tune with a person of the most beautiful disposition. Someone, too, who admired me in a way I would never have suspected. I could not believe it. This steady, loyal devotion was something that I could surely not have woken in anyone? It was firm and mature affection, with nothing mawkish and nothing unbalanced about it. A

more complete contrast to Ameldia's adolescent emotionalism it would have been hard to imagine.

I felt ashamed of prying into such thoughts. I knew it was my duty to turn away. But before doing so, I had to find out whose thoughts I had stumbled on in this way. I delayed a moment longer, and then knew.

They were the thoughts of Miss Cardew.

I have never told my wife of the way in which my interest in her was first aroused. I wouldn't want her to think that I only started to concentrate on her because I was flattered by her admiration. There was a lot more to it than that, but I doubt if I could ever explain it. I shall never forget the sense of nobility and the strength of character that I received, as it were, from behind her conscious thoughts. I knew then that she was a woman in a million; and everything that has happened since then has confirmed this judgement.

I wonder if I would have remained blind to her charm if I had not had that jolt? It's an idea that sometimes makes me uneasy.

Anyway, even before things between us became beautifully serious, there was one or two steps I took. In the first place I gave Lewin my plant without telling him how it had come into my possession, and by now its properties are of course well-known. In the second place I fixed a robot cleaner to go and steal Ameldia's plant—and then spent several hours tampering with the instruction tape mechanism of the robot to make sure that no-one would ever know that I had indulged in such dubious practices.

Ameldia must have guessed where the plant had gone. She was extremely insolent to me the next day, but I managed to cope with her without having to run the risk of any uncomfortable intervention from higher authority.

Later in the term, when the engagement of Miss Cardew and myself was announced, Ameldia looked bleak and reproachful. I think she was on the way to recovery from her infatuation by then, however, and she was reasonably polite at the end of the term when she came to tell me that she was leaving.

I was glad to hear that news. I had hopes of getting a new job during the vacation—a man's job, that would make my wife proud of me—but I did not dismiss the possibility that I might come back to Jason. And somehow I didn't fancy living at Jason with my wife and knowing that Ameldia was within range and that she had almost certainly brought back from Titan another of those accursed plants. I didn't want Ameldia snooping on the thoughts of the two of us.

Titan Apples are well-known now. They are expensive, but private individuals can obtain them, and I have heard that some married couples buy them. I don't think I should care for one in my house. My wife's thoughts are her own, and my thoughts are my own, and that's the way it ought to be. I'm not sure that I'd want to know what somebody else was thinking about me all the time. We're still very much in love, and I hope we'll stay that way. But maybe her affectionate laughter will turn to something else in later years. I'm a modest guy, really, and I'm honest enough to admit that there are bound to be times when she looks at me and wonders why she married me.

Well, if she wants to ask questions like that, let her ask them outright or else keep them to herself. I'm not going to creep up on her and listen in.

And come to think of it, I hope she doesn't buy herself a Titan and start rooting about in my mind. Would I know if she'd got one: would she give herself away?

The only way of finding out is by buying one myself. Or borrowing one, so that I could just make contact for long enough to find out whether *she* has got one. And then there would be the temptation to go on using it, to explore just a little bit further, a little bit longer.

No. I won't do it. No good could ever come of it.

All the same, you can't help wondering . . .

JONATHAN BURKE

THE NEXT ISSUE ! ! !

Eight manned rockets leave earth and each returns with its pilot a screaming lunatic. The elusive cause of this tragic failure to attain space-flight is gradually unravelled in "Planetbound" by E. C. TUBB, a brilliant new novelette which appears in NEBULA No. 13.

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The Great Time Hiccup

When time went mad and sanity began to crumble, only a desperate plan—carried out in time—could hope to succeed

Illustrated by Martin Frew

Some twenty-two thousand miles above the troubled plains of earth, George Garstang crawled on his belly along a corridor two foot six high. He wore the standard snug-suit but nevertheless he sweated. On the other side of the thin metal sheet above his head beat the sun, softened by no atmosphere. Between the outer and middle skins of a space station there is little room. Usually it is occupied only by vacuum; now, in this emergency, it was air-filled, and the elaborate machinery of Operation Breakdown was being moved in.

George fitted the virus capsule nozzle deftly into its prepared socket, and rolling onto one side clamped the other end of the tube into the feed on the inner wall. Before moving on to the next, he flicked up the manual scanner-eyelid in the outer skin—bless the man that had thought of that unnecessary detail!—and peered out. Only space. Earth was round the other side of course, this being Tuesday morning early shift. He muttered to himself, collected up the slack of his welder and crawled to the next nozzle. Sliding a hand round to the holder on his back, he pulled out another capsule tube. He fitted it deftly into its prepared socket.

Then, of a sudden, he was back in the tiny station bar, arguing with Colbey. Back in the middle of a drink, in the middle of a sentence.

"... even if it is ruining the station, it is the only way of saving mankind's sanity. The virus capsules will be shot down into the atmosphere and spread slowly and evenly over all the earth. . . ." (They had only been jerked back about eleven hours this time, he estimated : this scene was taking place on Monday evening).

"Yes, yes," interrupted Colbey impatiently. "But these psychologists don't know for sure when the effects of the virus will wear off. Supposing they don't wear off and for the rest of his days man has to live with a slowed metabolism? Supposing that?" He smacked his hand triumphantly on the table top. George recalled the gesture all too well.

"And if they don't try something soon, civilisation will crack anyway. This virus is a sort of last gamble," George said—George's lips said, while something on the fringe of his mind wept at the fourth repetition of this scene. Thinking with that fringe was like looking at an object on which the eye is not focussed : a poor substitute for direct scrutiny. He wrestled with despair while he argued and Colbey argued back.

George was a little runt of a man, a third grade electric engineer with trouble at home. He did not like symphonies, or authorities, or opinions which differed from his own. But he had enough sense, after four play-backs, to know he was about to make a fool of himself. Each time, that fringe area grew more ashamed. He could hardly sit it through again : yet he had no option.

"These psycho-biol boys are forced to make this gamble, I tell you," he heard himself say angrily.

A tall man with a long rectangular face detached himself from the bar and made towards their table. By the uneasy way he managed the quarter G he had not been in twenty-four orbit long. He was one of the Breakdown organisation and George disliked him on sight.

The tall man lowered himself into a chair and said, "I couldn't help hearing what you two fellows were saying—you kept getting louder all the time. No offence, but you're both a little off the tracks."

George ran a hand up the stubble that reached to the crown of his head and asked, deliberately roughing his voice (why did he have to use that trick?): "Like how do you mean, bud?"

"The distribution of this virus is in no way a gamble," the other said. His name was Anderson Gray and he had a quiet, pedantic way of talking that at once irritated George, ever on the watch for signs of

superiority in others. "The virus itself was developed in low-grav labs several years ago. Its label is perikaryon naphridia IIy 244 —"

"No need to pull the Latin on us—we just fix fuses," Colbey growled.

"It has a complex inner structure," the Breakdowner continued, as if reciting, "And on contact with the human system it heads for the neurons, where it proceeds to dry out and govern the moisture in the perikaryon or cell-body. The only objective physical effect is an illusion of thirst, but at the same time the transfer of impulses across the synapses of the nerve-cells is greatly slowed. In short, the virus lowers the metabolism rate—and only by living at a much lower pitch can we survive the present storm without mass neurosis."

"Thanks for the speech. You ought to stand for Parliament," George said rudely. "But why do you say 'storm'? You mean the Great Time Hiccup."

The tall man gave him a level, tolerant stare.

"I prefer the more correct term," he explained.

Colbey said, "He can see you were born ignorant, George," and guffawed. Ruffling George was one of Colbey's favourite pastimes.

George sucked the rest of his drink out of its closed glass and said, "You go ahead with your neurosis, Joe. I may be ignorant but I'm sane." (Now he was saying it for the fourth time, he no longer believed it.)

And the tall man answered quietly, "Yes, one of the aspects of the problem that most concerns us is that if the virus fails it will be the sensitive and intelligent portion of the world who will crack first."

The cold way in which he said it—George leaned forward and hit him across the mouth with a tough fist. (He exerted the fringe of his mind to the utmost, trying to stop the blow, but his arm travelled as eagerly the fourth time as it had the first.)

"Mind if I sit this one out?" Colbey cried, delighted at the incident, as the other two flung back their stools and stood up. (How much sickness fitted close under his delight this fourth time?)

All over the planet, business as yet went on outwardly as usual. Vehicles were still moving, tradition kept the wheels turning. But as consciousness was folded back and back upon itself, more and more links broke in the chain of organisation. There were numberless examples of broken people whose behaviour could be classified 'sane' only by courtesy of the rigor mortis effect of the time throwback: when past flowed back into present the damage would show. . . .

A battered shooting brake stopped with a sigh and a straggling man climbed out onto the deserted highway to view a flat rear tyre. Instead of tackling it, he sat and waited for a lift ; the fringes of his mind screamed at a delay that he knew would mean a lost job—but irrevocably this scene must be re-enacted. Beyond the road, an old woman in a rickety bungalow sat by her husband. He lay panting on a couch. Already she had watched out his life three times ; within her, as she rigidly waited, something gibbered and wept but had no release. Everywhere . . . repetition. . . .

Anderson Gray sat up in his foam bed and stretched. A tail-end of pleasant dream vanished into a never-to-be-rediscovered pocket as he recalled the Time Hiccup. As the phrase crossed his thoughts, he put a hand up to his lip. It felt five times its normal size, and he recalled the squabble with the electrician the night before. Well, he should have looked after his own business.

It was 05.40 Tuesday—early shift. That belligerent electrician would by now be crawling between skins, rigging the virus release apparatus. Today was Breakdown Day. And, the fringe of his mind mentioned, they were almost up to where the last Time jolt-back had occurred.

He was shaving when Dick Proust came in, blithe as a berry. The thick lip drew some sarcastic banter, and then suddenly the past caught up again with the present, and they were living over unused time. Everyone on the station knew it : the sensation was unmistakable—a return to sanity, a sense of freedom, a hope, a confluence of personality.

Dick cheered and observed, "These throw-backs will make philosophers of us all ! It makes you see all too vividly the insignificance of human action when you have to repeat the slightest gesture, willy-nilly. Heigh-ho for the life of a cabbage !"

Anderson dropped his shaving kit, swore joyously and grabbed a piece of paper.

"Come here, Dick," he called. "Let's chart this latest freak of the storm while there's the chance. You'll see what I mean when I say the situation is getting worse."

He drew neat, parallel lines down the page to represent two-hourly divisions of Monday and Tuesday. Between eighteen hundred and twenty hundred hours Monday, he struck a thicker line.

"That's purely personal," he said wryly. "It represents the time I got my lip improved. It'll serve as a landmark."

Across the page he drew a horizontal line.

"That's our flow of consciousness."

Just after Oh-two on Tuesday, he stopped the line.

"That was where we ran into the first of this series of jerk-backs—hiccups if you like. From sleep we were whipped back to eleven a.m. Monday—as nasty an awakening as ever I knew."

As he talked, he drew in a second horizontal line under the first, commencing at eleven and running forward to oh-four Tuesday.

"There we were jerked back again, into mid-Monday afternoon. That session lasted till just after oh-six fifteen Tuesday. So we come to the final—we hope!—jerk-back."

He commenced a fourth bar just before his 'lip' line.

"And now we come out of it here, oh-six fifteen hours. There's your pattern."

He held it up for Dick's inspection.

"Pretty," Dick commented cautiously.

"Ugly," Anderson said. "This happens to be a tight little coil of time-folds. The last hiccup was a month ago now, if I've managed to keep my memory straight, and then there were only two throwbacks, each lasting about three weeks."

"Quite right," Dick agreed. "That one was pleasant—I got my leave played over three times."

"The first hiccup of all was a year ago, when everyone did their previous eleven months over again—in consequence of which I can boast a sister who had the same baby twice." He fell silent, thinking, too, of how during that terrible period he had believed himself insane, only to emerge at the end of it into a world where everyone held the same suspicion about themselves.

"What are you getting at with all this, Andy? It's time to feed." He patted his stomach lovingly.

"I'm demonstrating the obvious, and heaven help you if you have to hear it all over again later. The time snags are getting closer together and become more repetitive each dose. Suggest anything?"

"Yes, food," Dick said.

They moved along the narrow curving corridor with their newcomers' gait, and floated into the mess. A food smell filtered thinly through an aroma of scrubbed table.

"Anything else?" Anderson persisted, refusing to be interrupted by a dab of porridge and two half-size rashers.

"The storm's getting worse, you mean?" Dick asked, wiping his spoon fastidiously on his handkerchief.



"Yes—we're moving into it, or it's closing in on us ; whichever way round is right, the effect on us is the same"

Dick Proust pulled a wry face only partly on account of the porridge.

"What happens in the middle of the storm ?" he asked.

Anderson shrugged. "Who can say ? Maybe we'll be frozen in our time tracks. Maybe we'll become as hopelessly entangled as adhesive tape when it loops back on itself. But using the analogy of a weather storm, which is the only analogy we can work with, a space storm will have varying ridges of pressure. On this side of it, we've been jerked back in time. As yet, according to the radio-eyes, we're only on the fringes of the upset. We may yet be jerked back whole years at a time—centuries."

His friend nodded grimly. "In other words, it might be more comfortable to die now—except that even death's no refuge when you can be flicked back ten years at a breath. Man ! It's bad. . . . And on the other side of the storm ?"

"That may be even worse. You may be flung head first into your own future. Think over the possibilities of that !"

Betson entered the mess and strolled over to them smiling. Bald and cherubic in appearance, the mainspring of Operation Breakdown, he wore his burden lightly.

"What's the matter with you two ?" he enquired. "You bear that jaded look ! Feeling self-conscious with the ghosts of Gray—and Proust—future hanging over you ?"

"That is quite a feeling," Anderson admitted, and explained. Then he had to explain his lip.

Betson grinned. "Don't blame that little cable-monkey. I know him—George Garstang's his name. He's seen their end of the job through in time, and it's no fun either between skins, doing his job. That and the hiccup effect have worn his sense of proportion thin. Remember, Andy, all we have to do is keep Ily 244 warm. Everything should be ready to squirt in two hours. Then we climb into the orbital rockets, abandon station, and go down and drink the airs of Lethe."

He rubbed his hands and added, "Doesn't the prospect of five years at half-throttle appeal ?"

"Not to this boy," Dick said. "But I can't think of a better solution."

They took their used plates over to the hatch and walked with Betson to the upper deck. Here, all the usual equipment had been scrapped and every available inch housed the perikaryon cultures.

Here, it was quiet except for a boiling-kettle noise from the solar converters. Two biologists walked watchfully by the container machinery, which was already syphoning the virus into the ejection canisters. These canisters would spin down in a chain round the globe, dissolving under friction a few thousand yards from surface, spreading their vital contents over every square mile of land.

"Anything further we can do?" Anderson asked.

Betson puffed out his cheeks until he looked like an ugly, intelligent baby. "Hope two hours passes without getting a reef-knot in it," he suggested.

He walked over to the nearest viewer and flipped it on. The wide-angle lens showed a well-furnished view of space: the corona, the night-side of Earth beautiful in moonlight, the moon. It looked almost cosy, with none of the blankness of deep space in it.

The same thought came to all the three men. The storm did not show. There was no sign in these blank depths of the light-year wide disturbance that hurtled through the System at a speed of something like a hundred thousand miles every second.

"Odd thing," Anderson commented, laying a cool finger on his hot lip. "These interstellar storms have been known of in theory for a long time, long before we even got to the moon. The radarscopes have detected them moving beyond the galaxy. This one was traced all the way here, but somehow a whirlpool of nothing seemed no cause for worry."

Betson switched the view off and they turned away. Even the shallows of heaven do not bear looking at for long.

"It's never any good just knowing a thing in theory," he said. "We talked glibly about space-time, never realising exactly how integrated the two were. A storm in space is a storm in time—disrupt one, you disrupt the other."

An inspection lid above their heads slid open and a ladder whirled down. A man climbed down it and it returned smoothly into the bulkhead. The man was George Garstang, complete with red face and backache.

He unzipped his snug-suit, straightened his short figure and said respectfully to Betson, "That's the last rejection nozzles all finished in this section, sir. They should be wound up everywhere in another half hour."

Involuntarily, they all sighed with relief.

"Everything else is ready for action. We'll put zero hour sixty minutes ahead," Betson said decisively. "I'll phone Centre. We'll push it through before we are jerked back again."

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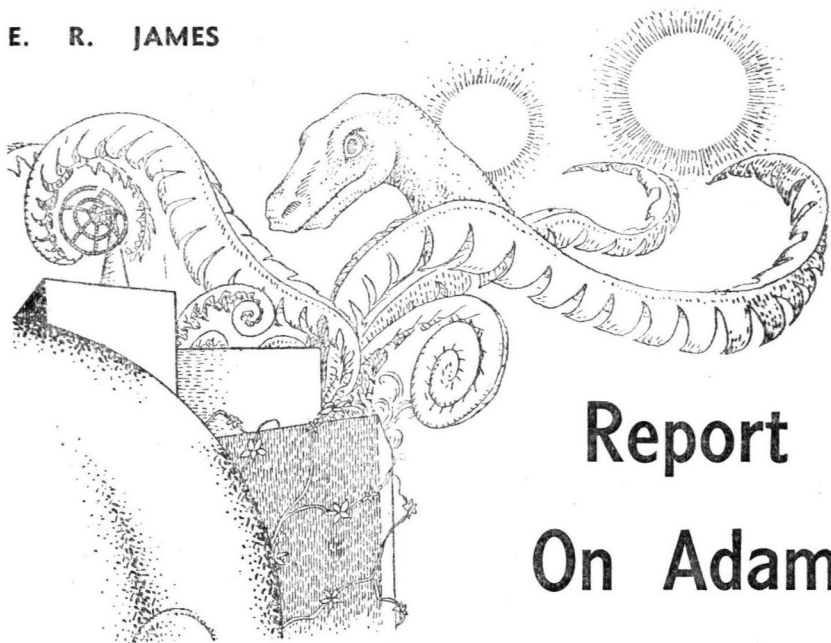
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Report On Adam

Illustrated by Alan Hunter

"Thou shalt not kill."

—Exodus XX 13.

"Adam Black, you have been found guilty of murder."

Adam, standing upright between the three warders, felt his spine prickle.

The Judge, his scarlet robe suggestive of blood and the black cap dreadful on top of his wig, seemed the only living thing in the crowded room. "The sentence of this court," he said, "is that all those civil and other rights, which you have hitherto enjoyed everywhere on Earth and across Space on Mars, Venus and all the other Solar Colonies are instantly stripped from you.

"It will be proclaimed everywhere that you have blemished the proud heritage of Homo Sapiens.

"You shall be taken from this place to a lawful prison whence, after a suitable time of waiting, you will be conveyed to a place in which your mind will be presumed legally dead and a certificate issued to that effect.

"Thereafter your physical body will be maintained in whatever manner may be directed by the SCI Sub Committee in Capital Punishment.

"And may the Lord have mercy on your soul."

"Amen!" said the Court Chaplain.

Adam glanced at him and then stared across the rows of heads at the voluptuous girl who sat behind his counsel.

He was wondering why he had killed a man on her account. Now, because of her, he was being banished from the company of all mankind. Blonde, flashy, softly plump—was she worth it?

"Take a good look," said a dry voice in his ear. "Maybe she's the last woman you'll ever see."

"Why, you—" Adam turned like a tiger in his rage.

His left hand, however, was caught and twisted so that he was brought up short, stiffly erect, and holding his breath because of the pain.

"Steady, Mr Black," urged the owner of the cruel grip. "Don't let them see you lose control. Don't let her see you."

"No." Adam choked back his fury and felt his arm released. "Thanks," he said with a nod to the warder on his right. "I'm all right, now."

He was left alone with his thoughts until the following day when a warder opened the door of his cell.

"Come on, killer." The warder stepped back warily and put a hand to the holster at his belt. "Visitors."

"Go to hell," said Adam. "And take your visitors with you. I'm—"

"You're the one most like to get to hell," interrupted the warder harshly. He drew his gun. "I don't hold with this no-killing business. Murderers should swing. Now get up before I blast you in the guts."

Adam slowly stood up.

"You aren't being kept here to see people!" snapped the warder; the lines in his face deepened, "you're on borrowed time, so that people who want can see you."

The other warder took Adam into the interview room. "Sit here, Black," he said, pointing at the nearer of two chairs facing each other at a table. "Say what you want. Your trial's over. There's no tape recorder or anything like that." He nodded encouragement.

Alex Feltman, big and shiney-faced, came in with his usual fixed smile and seated himself across the table. "Hello, Adam."

"Hello, Alex." The last time he had his strong-arm man face to face had been just before leaving for that last trip to Mars for the opening of their new Gambling Casino. "Everything going well?"

"All the Earth places raking it in. Mars place confiscated, though. Say, can they just take it over like that?"

"I don't know—" Adam hesitated. The faintest smudge of red hazed the shiny skin beneath his deputy's lips; the set expression of the smooth face was like that of a lion tamer facing the king of beasts. Adam felt cold in the stomach. "Ask our—*your* lawyer. If you want me to help you, then spring me out of here!"

"I— we— That is—."

"No," murmured Adam. "I wouldn't pay you to, would it? What a fool I was to make the business over into a limited company. You and Delia'll be running it between you. It would be a risk to try to get me clear. Oh, get out of here!"

Feltman paled under the impact of Adam's logic. He scuffled out of his chair and backed away, eyes wide and hands raised as though to defend himself although Adam did no more than smile contemptuously. Feltman was a fool: didn't he realise that he was setting a standard of treachery to the lawless men he now commanded?

As Feltman left through a door marked OUT, Adam's eyes widened as his lawyer came in. This immaculate, hitherto miracle-working man had had that effect on him all through the trial. He licked his lips. "What do you want, now?"

"I don't want anything, Mr Black. I've come here for two reasons. First: I'm sorry. I did my best. If you'd followed my advice and continued to perform disciplinary actions to your staff on Mars instead of trying the same tactics on Earth where—"

"I know! Not again. You've said it often enough. On Earth there's the law; on Mars there's order—and if a criminal's killed they pin a medal on the killer."

"H'm. Well. . . Not quite, but—"

"I was exaggerating," nodded Adam. "What's your other reason for this visit?"

"You're being double-crossed, Mr Black. Feltman and——"

"I've guessed it," said Adam. "Now just you focus your legal mind on the situation for a moment. It fixes me——sure. But I've got a feeling that before long, the two people you're thinking of are going to miss me." He smiled again. "Feltman," he added meaningly, "was here just now."

"An unprincipled man," said the lawyer primly. "I have resigned from my position with the company and have handed back the unclaimed

portion of my retainer. Criminals are my business—but I cannot deal with scoundrels.” He held out his hand.

Adam shook it and watched the immaculate black coat and pin-stripe trousers retire across the floor.

Through the IN door came a plump, bald, fussy little man, and Adam stared as memory stirred. This was an SCI man—either a member or an agent of the Scientific Council of Integration. . . the Law that nowadays waited behind the law to administer punishment or correction on such as he. Adam closed his suddenly dry mouth and held on to the edge of the table. SCI men had other functions beside administering the LAW. This one had come to him two months ago on Mars, had approached him as he had emerged from the artificial lake attached to The Old Adam Casino (“The only lake on Mars!”—a big draw worth the staggering outlay.)

The puny figure had made him all the more aware of his own powerful physique, and he had found a certain pleasure in shaking himself and splashing the little man as he’d introduced himself. Oscar. . . Oscar Lennox—that was the name.

“So you’re an SCI man!” he remembered mocking. “A fine sort of superman, aren’t you? Why you’re a dammed water-colour man—I’d have thought you’d at least have the brazen richness of oils. You look as though you were born in a glass case like all the rest. Educated in cinemas and waited on ever afterwards by a legion of machines and gadgets. . .”

But Lennox hadn’t seemed to mind this kind of talk. There was a coldness about him that was rather disturbing. Perhaps it was a singleness of purpose. He had come directly to the point. He wondered if Adam would consider taking charge of a planetary exploration team. . .

Adam blinked back to the present as Lennox seated himself. They surveyed each other. Quite suddenly Oscar Lennox sighed and rubbed his bald head, looking the while like an extremely baffled man.

“A great pity. A great pity, Mr Black. I have been observing your demeanour all through the trial. I am certain now that you would have made an admirable leader for the P.E.T. You have been wasting your talents and misapplying your energies ever since your parents died. I had to see you just once more. If only you hadn’t *killed* that holligan. . .”

He stood up, scratched his plump cheek, and nodded petulantly. “You don’t belong in a highly developed civilisation such as this.” He narrowed his eyes. “Adam Back, you’ve been like a bull in a china shop. It’s a wonder you didn’t break something before this.”

Adam grinned as the little man stamped his foot and scowled.

Lennox's expression changed to regret. "Yes. Only a born leader could grin like that in your present position."

He shook his head and Adam, realising that he had not spoken to Lennox, that the little man had neither expected nor wanted to speak, stared sombrely after his retreating back. Perhaps this was a first taste of being a laboratory specimen, instead of a human being.

He shifted his attention as the IN door opened again. He caught his breath. Delia. But all feeling of passion had gone from him. He watched her face as she approached him. Doll-like. Yet her eyes seemed to be summing him up with the coldness of a calculating machine.

A man did not notice the expression in the eyes of a woman like this, until it was too late.

He had come back from Mars a day or two early, because the new Casino had begun so well. Delia had not been expecting him; but she had had been expecting someone.

Her face betrayed her as he walked in; she wore a most flattering gown; she had the flat's sound-proofing on; and, after greeting him, had seemed to hold her breath as though wishing him to go.

He had paused in front of the visiphone, idly fingering the switches. He would kill anyone who tried to take her from him.

"I think," he said, "I'll just run over to the Club before dinner. You don't mind, do you?"

He locked the seeking mechanism of his radaircar on to the Club Copernica and the towering block of Superflats slipped away behind. Lighted streets and buildings moved below and the Club's flashing signs rushed to meet him as the aircar dropped to a landing.

In the visaphone kiosk on the roof he dialled the number of the flat.

Sound came through first. "... I tell you he knows. His eyes burn right into my brain!" said the girl's shaking voice.

Obviously she had not noticed the way he had set up the flat visiphone—

The kiosk's screen glowed. She was in the arms of one of the two men who had been running things on Earth while he had been away. Alky Pollack. . .

Adam's lips thinned; the veins on his forehead stood out; his hands clenched: no man touched what was his!

He remembered nothing until he stood in her room, looking at them. Delia screamed; but the sound-proofing was on.

Alky swivelled around, gaped and went for his gun. Adam knocked it aside and his hands closed like a steel band around Alky's throat and Alky went over backwards.

His mouth worked noiselessly. His eyes bulged. His fingers clawed into the pile of the carpet, and then flailed up at Adam.

Adam held on. . .

The screaming of the girl seemed to come closer as he became aware of her.

He let go and stood up. Alky was certainly quite dead. Delia seemed to expect a similar fate, but curiously enough he seemed to have no feeling at all for her. . .

It was not until he had reached the roof and two men closed in on him that he realised that he must have forgotten to switch off the kiosk visiphone on the roof of the club. It seemed the police had witnessed everything.

He took a deep breath. Coming out of his memories, he looked at Delia's lipstick. It was slightly smudged. So now she was charming Alex Feltman. "To think," he said, "that I did murder on your account. I can see what you are doing. I thought I was clever. But I'm only a child by comparison with you. . . I don't think I could have thought up such a chain of deceit and self-seeking. And now you've come to see if you can get what Alex Feltman couldn't. . ."

Her eyes widened.

He nodded. "You're wasting your time. You get back to him and start trying to convince him you don't intend to desert him with as few qualms as you've shown towards me and Alky. I've got an idea it'll be a full time job when things start to go wrong. . . A good strong-arm man, that's Alex. You'd have been safer with Alky."

Her eyes hated him. He could feel her hating him, and he felt certain that she would be thinking of his words a great many times after he had gone—

Gone. He did not notice her departure and only looked up with a start when the two warders came for him.

"How you're going to miss that baby," gloated the hardfaced warder.

Adam smiled.

The other warder pressed his arm. "Good man. That's the way to look at things."

The Court Chaplain came to see him later in his cell and said some more in the same vein. A few weeks before Adam felt he would have laughed the Chaplain out, but he listened now. This waiting was unbearable. When he was alone fear gnawed at his thoughts.

The night passed and stars were fading from a brightening sky as he was escorted out to a waiting aircraft.

"Where are you taking me?" he asked.

The warder in front looked around with a twisted smile. "Cattle are never told whether they're being taken to new pastures—or to a slaughter-house."

"Oh, stop picking on him," the other warder urged. "We aren't here to punish him."

"No?" came the dry answer.

Nine hours later the aircraft's doors were opened and he was urged out into a gigantic cavern, partly natural and partly man-adapted as an aircraft hangar.

Each of the warders gripped an arm and marched him to a conveyor pavement that took them up into a tunnel in the rock wall, and so to a small office where a clerk checked his papers, and waved them on. You'll have a meal and be assigned quarters afterwards."

"Blooming rush!" grumbled the sour warder. He jerked Adam's arm, thrusting him forward painfully. "Lead the way, dead man."

Adam scarcely heard him. With rapidly beating heart, he passed through into an astonishingly comfortable waiting room. Uncertain whether to sit or not, he was looking at the easy chairs when a man in a green laboratory coat came in.

"Adam Black?"

"That's right," said the friendly warder.

The man smiled at Adam and advanced with outstretched hand. "I'm Dr. Fairlie. It's my task to explain to you about lobotomy."

"Lobotomy? That's——"

"You know about it?"

"You want to take away part of my brain." Adam clenched his hands. "No. I'll kill myself first."

"That won't be necessary, I assure you," soothed the doctor. "I don't think you really understand quite what we do, though. The treatment has perhaps bad associations in your mind because it is used to relieve some kinds of mental disease, but——"

"But——nothing!" Adam took a pace backwards. "If I submit to lobotomy, I'm automatically telling the world I think I'm crazy——"

"No." The doctor was vehement as Adam. "That's quite wrong. All the treatment does is tend to make you take life easier——"

"Easier! Oh, I know better than that. You want to change my personality. You want to make me a nonentity. What d'you take me for? I'm a man—not a bullock!"

"A bullock? Now that's not a fair description. Lobotomy does not interfere with the functions of any gland." Dr. Fairlie pursed his lips and suddenly turned and walked back to the door through which he had come. "Peter!" he called.

A fresh faced young man entered and smiled inquiringly at the visitors. "Hey. I seem to know..."

"Adam Black," murmured the doctor, "let me introduce Peter. I operated on him three years ago."

"I remember." Adam nodded. "You killed a bank clerk, didn't you?"

Adam Black... Got it! You're the gambler who started building casinos everywhere?"

"You remember me then?"

"Of course. It seems a long time ago, though, now. I wonder sometimes why money seemed so important at the time. I never seemed to have enough. Queer when I think how contented I am here without a dollar in my pocket."

"Contentment..." interposed the doctor. "That's about the only effect modern lobotomy has on a human being. Think it over."

"No." Adam shuddered. "You aren't going to monkey about with me."

Back the warders took him to the conveyor, but quite soon he was entering another room, this time only furnished with bare wooden benches. A bare electric bulb flickered behind a sign: SIT DOWN—SUPERVISOR OF EXPERIMENTS IS EXPECTING YOU—WAIT.

Adam seated himself on the hard bench facing the several signs and read them without any meaning coming through his mind. There was something in the words SUPERVISOR OF EXPERIMENTS IS EXPECTING YOU that made his flesh crawl. What kind of experiments went on here?

The sign winked out at the same instant as a man with a long lean face came through the door below it. "I'm Professor Carboys, Mr Black. I'm rather busy, so I'll just ask you one question. How do you feel about the man you killed?"

"Feel about him? I don't know exactly. He got what he deserved, I suppose. What should I feel about him?"

"Some people, Mr Black," said the professor without a trace of emotion in his face, "are afflicted with a sense of having done wrong. Not many, perhaps." He raised his eyebrows. "Perhaps I might say that I wish they were more. You feel no twinge of conscience, then?"

Adam, frowning, kept silent for a moment.

The professor shrugged. "From your behaviour I had hoped to waste no time on you. However——" He pointed at the door. "There are many laboratories beyond that door. Any one of them would be glad to see you walk out after their experiments——"

"Experiments? What kind of experiments?"

The professor frowned at him. Adam felt that he had interrupted some kind of carefully prepared speech that the professor had made many times before.

"Er——" Professor Carboys cleared his throat very loudly. "We——that is the various sections of my staff are trying very hard to find cures for the various scourges that still afflict mankind. Leprosy. Arthritis. Cancer. Polio. Still there are very many enemies of——"

"What kind of experiments?" insisted Adam.

Professor Carboys scowled at him. "Well—— We want human subjects. Got to have them. Animals are all very well——"

"You mean: you want to vivisect me?"

"No. Well—— Not exactly man. A possible cure is tried out on you after it has been tested on lab. animals. You can choose your disease as things are—— Shortage of volunteers——"

"I'm not surprised."

"Don't sound so shocked, Mr Adam Black. Have you forgotten you killed a man——"

"In hot blood——"

"Twaddle, Sir! Does that excuse you? In cold blood my staff are trying desperately to lift some of the burden of suffering from mankind. Thank God that there are some people with consciences—who think they might expiate their crimes to some extent by submitting themselves to suffering so that someone else who has done no one any harm may perhaps suffer a little less."

Adam licked his lips. His eyes fell before the livid face of the professor. Every nerve in his body seemed to have a separate voice urging him to run—to get away——

"I—— I don't think I would have that kind of courage," he said slowly.

For a moment there was complete silence except for the whistle of his own rapid breathing. Then the professor sighed. "At least—— I can admire you for admitting that so frankly."

Adam found himself still trembling as he and his escort stepped on to the conveyor. The friendly warder pressed his arm encouragingly. "The next alternative'll be right up your street, you wait and see."

"Don't get soft, Joe," threatened the other, "Remember we're not supposed to influence the human cattle."

"Influence him? He's turned down the other two choices, hasn't he?" The friendly warder blew through his nose. "Maybe you should mind your own business, anyway." He leaned towards his scowling mate. "Ever since that judge found him guilty, you've forgotten we're supposed to be strictly impartial."

"That's——" began Adam in fervent agreement.

But his words died as the friendly warder pushed him roughly off the conveyor. "Prisoners under escort to SCI H.Q. will not communicate with anyone until they have made their own decision as to disposal."

Adam shrugged. Beyond the next door a man sat at a large desk. He was dressed in an ordinary civilian suit of dark blue, his tie was black against his white stiff collar and his eyes, when he looked up were bright. Adam had the curious impression that the man's hands were ready to shoot out to any one of the six telephones which flanked the open record book and blotting pad before him.

"Adam Black?"

"That's right, sir," said one of the warders, who had halted just behind Adam.

"Good. Well, Black, you've reached the end of the line." He pressed a button, one of several upon a panel beside the record book. He smiled at Adam, whose attention just then was attracted to one side by a winking light.

Upon the wall around the light was a map of the world. The light was red and it winked from the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

"It's the typhoon season," said the man at the desk. "There's one of the Second Squad somewhere in the middle of the biggest cyclone of the year. He's dropping his helicopter down towards the fishing boat that's weathered through the circling wind, but is now in no condition to weather out. There's a good chance our man'll make it out with the four survivors from that doomed little ship before it sinks and before the 'copter is torn apart by turbulence on its way out."

One of the three doors behind the man opened and a clerk came in with a tape recorder.

The man at the desk turned to Adam. "I am Major Sharpe. It's an old title, but I hang on to it because I consider I still command soldiers. Call them what you will—Death Squads, Hero Squads, Suicide Squads——" He shrugged. "All those names have some truth

in them. All the men in my squads owe a debt to Society and try to pay it off—I like to think they're doing it for their own satisfaction—by risking their own lives to save the lives or property of other people. Not many live long enough to be released, so the 'Death Squad' is true enough; all are heroes in their various ways or we would not consider using them—every man has both bravery and cowardice in his make-up, you know; and the jobs are such that ordinary folk cannot be expected to tackle them, because they are almost certain suicide. . . . But these things won't worry a man like you—not too much anyway."

"Oh?" Adam hesitated.

Major Sharpe lifted his eyebrows. "It's this—or one of those other things, you know."

"Other things? You mean lobotomy or being a human guinea pig?"

"That's right."

"Then it looks," said Adam grimly, "as though you've got a new member."

Meeting the other squad members, Adam was reminded of a book in which he had read of the camaraderie of fighter pilots during the Second World War; but these were men of all nations, and all classes of men: a kind of SCI Foreign Legion.

That night, lying awake thinking of the strange events of the day, he felt it would be possible to have a good life here.

No sooner was breakfast over, however, when he was led off. "Medico's going to give you a check-up. Then the psychiatrist after that. What's in the wind? Didn't they give you a clean bill of health in the jails you patronised?"

The examinations were so thorough that they took up all morning, and he was late for the mid-day meal.

As soon as he had finished eating the warders were waiting for him in a small electric car that raced off into a long tunnel through the rock. Several miles must have gone under its wheels when it finally came to a halt.

"You," said the bitter warder, "are going to be present at a meeting of the Scientific Council of Integration. They want to see you. But—and get this!—they don't want to hear from you. Keep your mouth shut. Understand?"

"Take it easy, Henry," said the other warder. He nodded at Adam. "He puts it badly. But he is right. You're going in front of the highest authority on Earth—in the Solar System for that matter.

You'll only prejudice these men against you if you waste their time. They'll have all your record in the SCI dossier on your case. They just want to look at you."

Adam shrugged, but, on entering the Council Chamber, he was too intent upon the seventeen men, who had evidently ceased speaking to regard him, to have anything to say. They sat around the curved edge of a semi-circular table the flat side of which was presented to him. One man near the middle stood up the better to look Adam up and down.

Adam glared back at this man in resentment.

Seventeen men. They began to talk together in tones too low for his hearing. Seventeen scientists, each an elected representative of a major science—not of a nation. Adam looked around the table at young men, old men, one woman, dark faces, white hair, slanting eyes. . . Polyglot crew——

"——not ethical!"

"That's ridiculous. He's been given the chance of lobotomy and of being a guinea pig for Carboys. This is no different to any other assignment—not in principle."

"To the devil with principles! He's a convicted murderer. It's simply a question of money. Our budget will be strained even to use the Seibel-Houston drive just once more in this decade——"

"Gentlemen!" The Chairman was pounding his gavel.

Seventeen men. Adam licked his lips. With his feeling for the temper of men, he could sense that these were longing for the time when they would have finished their term of office on the SCI. They wanted nothing better than to get back to their own niches in science. Integration—the fitting together of the vast human jig-saw—was a chore to them. No, there was one man—he'd be a Sociologist, most likely—who was enjoying it all.

Adam scowled at this enthralled youngish man sitting impersonally above him, summing him up as though he were a laboratory animal.

"You forget he'll have Tarbaud's Bertha with him!" Adam heard another man shout. "Think also of his very name—*his name*——"

"I still think——"

The gavel was pounding for silence and getting it. "We'll have a show of hands," said the chairman. He waved his hands at the warders and Adam was urged outside.

Seconds ticked by on a nearby wall clock. After two of the longest minutes Adam had ever experienced, a messenger came out and, avoiding Adam's inquiring eyes, handed a purple form to the bitter warder.

"By special jet to the Woomera Spaceport? The *experimental* place——" The warders looked at each other.

Stars were shining from a clear black sky when the jetplane disgorged them. A closed car rushed them on over a flat surface.

At a concrete dugout he was put through the kind of examination which could leave no doubt as to his identity. While a spaceship officer stood listening, the warders were given a short lecture by two men in unfamiliar uniforms. Adam heard the last words of one of these men: "It's not that the prisoners aren't expendable, you know. Substitutions have been known. Men of his kind could pay enough to attract a desperate man. And, if we haven't the right subject the SCI say we'll be wasting a second million."

Adam looked around. The warders were still intent upon their instructors, but there were more than a dozen soldiers, all armed with pistols in open holsters, keeping their eyes, half in curiosity, upon him. Even so, for a moment he considered whether he might be successful in grabbing one of those holstered guns. But there were eyes, eyes, watching him from every direction.

And his mood changed as he realised that he was in fact like an actor before an audience. He was the important person, the central character, in this thing that was being played out. Although these people held the whip hand of him, they were no more than pawns in the game.

He stiffened both mentally and physically.

When a soldier approached him, he smiled, simulating indifference at the hypodermic syringe in the man's hands.

"Roll up your sleeve, Black."

Seeing no alternative, he obeyed calmly. A man faced with a firing squad or its modern equivalent should not lose his dignity. After all, he had nothing else left.

After the prick of the needle, he expected them to tell him what was to happen, but instead, looking around, only felt their interest had gone. A feeling of anti-climax depressed him and this impression increased. He realised that he had assumed the injection to be an anti-hysteria drug similar to that offered him at the trial; perhaps it was, indeed something to steady his nerves, for the sharpness of his impressions—the tingling clarity of his alerted mind began to fuzz: but there was no more to it than that. . . he drifted away from the disturbing reality of watching eyes, concrete dugouts and unsolved threats. . .

"You may wish," someone was saying, "that you had what they've given him. But you've got the job of looking after him between you. . . But even that voice receded into the booming echoey nowhere of unconsciousness.

He came back to awareness slowly and in some confusion, his mind full of some strange dream that escaped him as he attempted to build it into a proper memory. He opened his mouth and realised his throat was parched. He felt starved as though he had not eaten for several days. Vision came to him in a series of steps beginning at vague shapes and ending by solidifying into the face of the friendly warder.

"Hello there. How do you feel?"

"Uh?" he croaked. He held his splitting forehead. "Like hell!"

"Wash your mouth out. Take it easy now."

Presently he recovered sufficiently to take an interest in what was happening to him. He had been lying, and was now sitting on a couch resilient with sponge rubber. Straps lying unfastened across the couch suggested that he had been fastened down while unconscious. It was the kind of treatment he had suffered on the times he had left Earth in a spaceship, though then he had been conscious of the sensation of enormous weight, due to acceleration.

Come to think of it his weight felt normal. Either he was still on Earth and the experiment was still to be faced, or was it over. . . But, no. There was barely room between the couch and a metal wall for the chair on which the friendly warder sat. The head of the couch was against the short wall; its other side against the other long wall; its foot left just enough room for a metal door to swing open. The ceiling was the standard 6 feet from the floor.

He was in a space ship and the sounds filtering through the walls of his cell suggested vaguely that it was a huge ship and told him most certainly that he was in Space.

The mutter of rockets was unmistakable. Either the ship was accelerating or it was decelerating to land on. . . earth or some heavenly body—and the alteration of speed was what gave him the impression of normal weight.

"Alright, now?" queried the warder.

Adam nodded. His arm was taken and he was taken out along a corridor lined on walls, floor and ceiling with handrails and through a door marked "Messing." Odours of cooking reminded him of his hunger and soon he was eating and drinking ravenously, served by a Cockney crewman.

Replete, he began to take a keener notice of events and suddenly realised how gray with fatigue were both his companions.

"Had a rough passage?" he asked.

The warder nodded. "You've said it."

"That's why they gave me the injection, eh?"

"That's right."

"Cigar chum?" asked the crewman.

Adam took one from the full case offered to him. "Thanks." As he drew in the fragrant smoke, it occurred to him that this was not unlike a condemned man's last meal. "Any use asking what's going to happen to me?"

"None. Black," said the warder. "Carping is with the Scientist in Charge, right now, getting the dope. Carping's senior to me. You'll have to wait until he tells you."

"Scientist in Charge? Who's that?"

The crewman exhaled smoke from a cigarette. "Felix Tarbaud."

"Who's he? A rocket engineer?"

"No, mate. A biologist."

"A biologist! What's he want with me?"

"Dunno. All I do, is cook. First time there was just the scientists. Then we brought a bunch of colonists. Then we came and took them back to Earth. Now there's you, skin and bone—all alone. Wish I had hold of the tickets and was putting the fares by for me old age. Just the job at a million a time."

"A million a time," murmured Adam. "That's a lot of hard money, even for space travel. Where are we heading?"

"We're there, mate. Or nearly. Proce—"

"That'll do! No communication with the prisoner." The bitter voice of the other warder fetched them all around in surprise.

The crewman looked discomfited. That suggested secrecy. Adam could not recall anything about any new Space project.

Carping's gaze switched to him, and the warder's eyes hated him even as his sour voice addressed the others: "All right. I'll take over now. You two are to report to Command for fresh briefing."

He took the gun from his belt and pointed it at Adam. "Lead the way out, killer."

Adam, seeing no alternative, went out into the passage. It curved around as though it was just inside the tower of the hull, and ended with a vertical metal ladder leading up. "Climb!" said Carping. Adam climbed, keeping an eye on the warder, but whatever else Carping might be, he was good at his job, giving his prisoner no chance to turn the tables.

They emerged into a kind of hold, much larger than Adam's previous knowledge of spaceships had led him to believe to be likely. He thought that perhaps an entire ship section had been taken out, for there were girders, freshly severed, so that instead of supporting a floor—as he judged they had been designed to do—their padded ends cradled the bottom of what he took to be a thirty foot globe of welded metal.

"Interesting, isn't it?" said Carping with a mocking grin. "To think it was specially done for you. They did it all, in fact, between the time you came out of the SCI Chamber and our arrival here. That globe's Bertha."

"Bertha?"

Carping laughed. "Wouldn't you like to know?" He showed his teeth in a smile in a way very like a snarling dog. "Get up that ladder."

Another metal ladder led up to a circular hatchway opening outwards from the globe.

"Inside," ordered Carping.

Adam ducked through the four foot opening and stood up inside. He was in a metal room ten feet square and seven high. An acceleration couch stood in its centre and there were rows of cupboard doors all round the otherwise bare walls. Adam looked back.

Carping was crouched down in the hatchway. He kept his gun trained on Adam. "In a way," he said, "I would have liked you to make an attempt to overpower me. It would have been most satisfactory to see you squirming with the agony of a burst of lead in your vitals."

"You aren't fit to be a warder," said Adam grimly.

The warder laughed. "Not fit? I'm just the man to handle your sort. Killer. You aren't fit to go on living! I could——" For a breathless moment, Adam thought Carping would fire. Then the warder smiled. "No, I'm not going to kill you. I'm going back with the others and, while you're dying a thousand deaths, I'll be able to imagine each one."

"You're a pathological case," murmured Adam in rising horror.

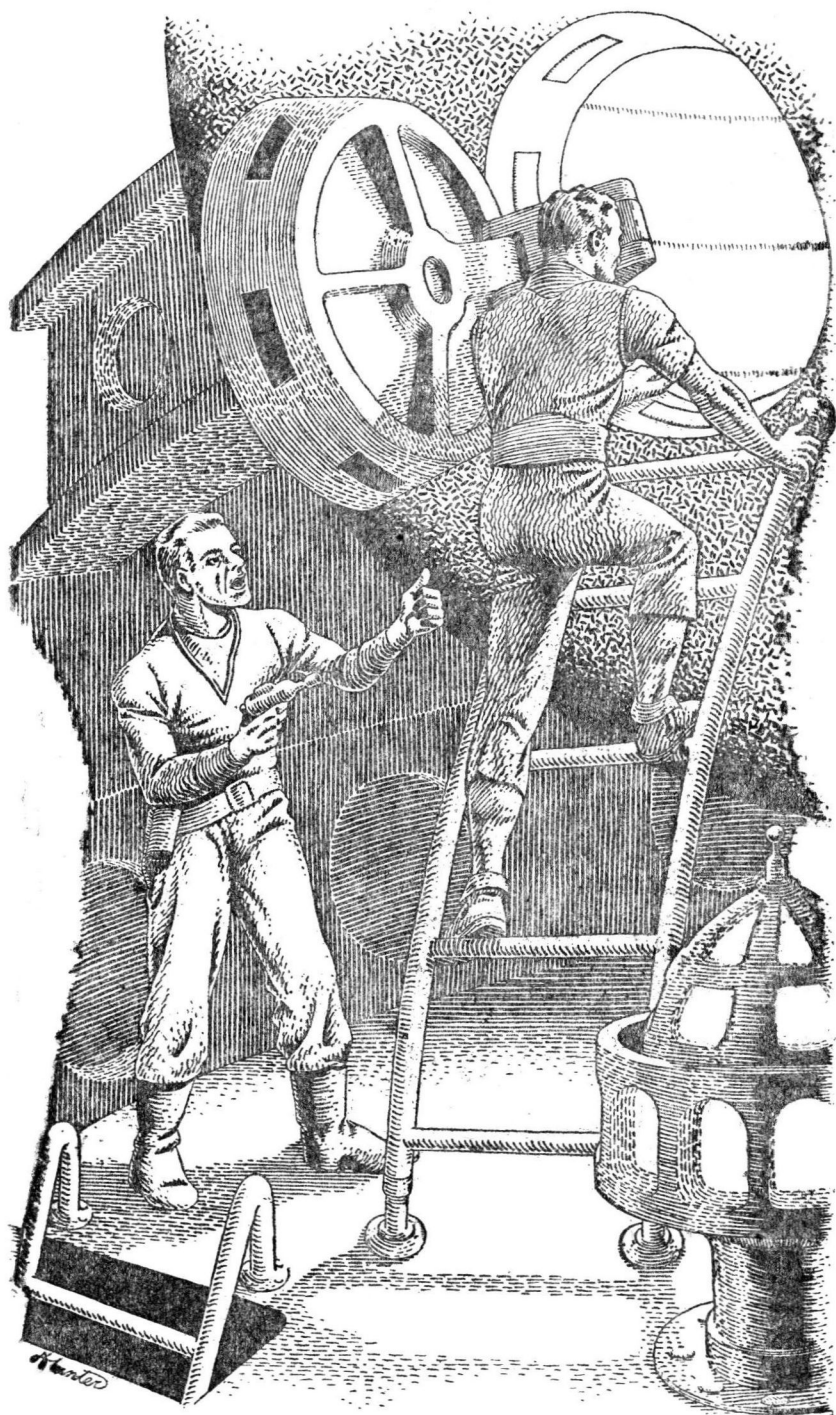
Carping laughed. "I'm a man in need of revenge," he said. The naked metal surfaces outside the globe reflected his laughter in harsh reverberations. "I am the voice of outraged society!"

"You're mad!"

Adam flung himself at the hatchway, right into the muzzle of the gun. Anything was better than the mad joke this self-appointed avenger was playing upon him.

Carping waited for him, smiling, moved suddenly and the gun barrel battered over Adam's cheek and nose. Eyes streaming, stunned, he staggered backwards, thinking only of his own bruised knuckles and whether he would get a second chance.

"No," said Carping, gasping and spluttering with the effect of Adam's blows. "No, you'll not provoke me. I've thought about it too much. Don't you realise how I planned to be with you at this



moment? I wasn't sure what they would do with you; but I couldn't have planned it better myself. How you're going to suffer!"

Adam rested on his hands and knees, gathering his strength.

Carping chuckled. "I'm supposed to be telling you what's going to happen to you. That scientist wanted to do that, but I said I was responsible for you and wasn't going to let him near you. Too dangerous. I said you were."

Adam lurched to his feet and blood trickled down his face.

"Goodbye, killer!" yelled Carping.

And the hatch slammed deafeningly.

Adam shook his bemused head. On each side a metal wall shut him in. Desperation sharpened his thoughts. He stumbled to the hatch but his fingers slipped over the smooth metal because there was no way of opening it from inside.

He set his back to it and the acceleration couch caught his attention. It was there for a purpose. Because he had been shut in here without the instructions he was supposed to have, he would have to guess what he must do.

He ran unsteadily to the couch, clambered on to its deep sponge-rubber and snapped together the quick-release straps. He waited. Nothing. His heart was beginning to pound and sickness rose in his throat. The cloth of his clothes billowed up loosely as though he were under water, or as though the ship was no longer altering her speed through Space.

The straps across him were tighter than they had seemed. The background rumble of the rockets had either ceased or did not penetrate into this metal egg.

Frightened by his weightless condition, by his loneliness and by the cumulative effect of many vague threats, there crossed his mind the notion that perhaps he would have been better hanged—

At once, however, his natural drive rebelled. Never! He was a man. Never would he allow himself even to consider such an outdated alternative. No matter what happened to him. . . No matter what—

Somewhere close by something clicked.

Expecting anything, he only felt more alarmed when nothing seemed to happen. He felt that he was falling, and caught himself in that way that occurs to many people on the verge of sleep. He was not falling, of course. He was in that weightless state known as "free fall," only to be experienced outside a gravitation field, but comparable to that of a man falling without an open parachute if one disregarded the resistance of the air about such a man.

Something clicked again alerting Adam.

A violent jolt took him by surprise. For several seconds the rubber of the couch continued to press up at him. Did the ship alter course or speed again? Or—— Yes, it was likely that the metal globe had been exploded clear of the ship and was now on its own.

All sensation of weight tapered off and this time, try as he would, he could not throw off the feeling that he was falling—although his sensations differed not at all from those before the jolt. Down— Down—

Down—

To lie upon the couch and do nothing brought sweat beading out on his prickling skin. Overstrained nerves revolted and he retched and the food he had eaten came up in a scalding stream.

Down—

It required physical effort not to leave the couch. His nails dug painfully into his palms as his fists clenched even tighter. Weightless.

Down—

When he closed his eyes, his imagination conjured up a mighty chasm into which he fell endlessly. He stared, panting hoarsely, at the metal ceiling with its sunken panels of light.

Down—

There came a time when the first panic ceased. His nerves and muscles began to ease off their tension. But every now and then he gasped, seeming to feel the first shock of crashing down on bedrock.

But he continued to fall unchecked, and he continued to force himself to lie in the safety of the couch. He even found himself adjusting to the fall and considered treating it as his new normal. He wondered whether he should release himself and eat and drink and he went so far as to lift his head, but there was nothing beyond the closed cupboards to attract his attention. None of these seemed big enough to be the entrance to any other part of this globe and, since his throat gagged at the thought of any kind of nourishment, he was content just to go on speculating.

Meanwhile, he continued to fall through Space in his metal egg. There was, of course, no sense in supposing that he was in this globe just to test his reactions to free fall. Men had been in Space long enough for such problems to have been studied in detail. He might be a guinea pig being sent on an ellipse close to the Sun's surface to test the efficiency of new equipment for man's protection. But that wasn't likely, either, for the globe was made of metal and metal tended to soak up heat and radiation.

It was, he recalled, of a round, welded construction that suggested great strength. Bathyspheres for descending to great depths were

similar. Perhaps he was being dropped on to the surface of one of the giant planets to test the globe's strength. But, no. No globe of ordinary metal would withstand such pressures as were to be found at the bottom of an atmosphere up to 16,000 miles deep.

And besides that, both the giant planets and the Sun were too far away for the spaceship to have reached either in the short while he judged it to have been off the surface of Earth, unless——

It could be a new kind of Spaceship. Some kind of new motive power was suggested by the billion that the crewman had said each of its voyages cost, and he had spoken of this voyage as though at its furthest point from Mother Earth. . .

Baffled, Adam came to terms with his sensations and was even capable of a vague surprise as he caught himself dozing.

He awoke suddenly, at once alert, but unable to place the cause of his awakening.

Something clicked.

Even as he braced himself, the couch seemed to fall away below him and the straps over his legs and chest bit painfully into his skin. Both sensations were only momentary and passed away, before he had time even to experience any new fear. Something had been exploded clear of the globe above him and his highly stimulated mind brought him a memory of a new method of landing small ships upon a planetary surface.

The ship approached Earth at a tangent so that it just touched the outer atmosphere and would have skimmed out again if a special parachute had not been released. This 'chute, automatically adjusting itself to the terrific speed of the ship and the tenuous air, opened only sufficient of its metal supporting surfaces to brake very lightly—just sufficient to keep the ship from escaping from the atmosphere.

As the ship slowed, Adam remembered, the chute gradually changed its shape, adjusting itself so that the ship had at length ended its descent in a vertical fall under the fully opened 'chute, and landed undamaged.

Comforted by the memory of what he felt must be indeed happening to him, he waited. He remembered reading that this landing method was hoped to be of great use in landing small craft from the bigger ship, because it had already been developed to an excellent degree of accuracy.

Sure enough, as time passed, he became aware of the globe swinging gently, and of an increasing feeling of weight.

He landed with a jolt suggesting soft earth below the globe and felt sufficiently confident in his theory to leave the couch. He looked up at the hatch, but it remained closed. Then he noticed open vents beside the

hatch and he approached them to make as good an examination as he could. They did not seem to be working yet. A wet finger held in front of them gave him no sensation of being in a draught.

He turned to walk back past the couch and saw that one of the cupboards had swung open. Excited, he hurried to it. Inside was a large, viewing end of a cathode tube such as was used in military work. It was dark.

Disappointed he looked around the room for any further changes.

A small table and a seat had protruded from the wall on the other side of the couch. He stared and suddenly grinned at a steaming meal of meat and vegetables, milk pudding and raw fruit salad, coffee and cheese and biscuits. Prisoner he might still be, but this was just what he needed.

When he turned around afterwards he found that the vision screen was alight with a picture of two prefab. huts behind a weed-grown patch of cultivated ground. Huge trees swayed in the near distance and, as he watched, he thought he noticed birds and animals. Then a brightly coloured bird flew between him and the huts.

It looked like paradise. . .

For three days and three nights he did nothing but eat meals automatically served to him and watch the ever changing scene outside the globe. Several times he gained the impression that something was about to happen. All the alien but attractive creatures seemed to disappear and he even thought that the globe shook as though with the tread of a gigantic animal.

On the fourth morning he noticed several things. The meals were getting later and later in relation to sunrise and sunset outside the globe. A scent, neither unpleasant nor pleasant, but more of a mixture of good and bad odours, was permeating the air he breathed. He realised that he had hitherto been too interested in the outside to consider himself.

A gentle stream of air touched his face from the ventilator beside the hatch. He judged it to be strong in oxygen and perhaps at a lower pressure than the air of Earth, for his heart tended to beat more quickly and yet his breathing was normal.

After the fifth sunrise, he waited for his breakfast until a time that seemed more suitable for lunch. He found it impossible to decide, however, whether his meals were getting later, or whether the period of night was of different length to Earth's.

He finished the meal and was trying to solve this problem of the passage of time when a flutter of wings and a twitter of bird song startled him.

Turning sharply, he saw a magnificent bird, no doubt startled by his sudden movement, fly screeching from the open hatchway.

With leaping heart, he rushed to the opening. The surface of the place to which he had been sent stretched away to the edge of the jungle of giant trees. For several minutes he could do nothing but stare, even though he was seeing nothing more than the prefab. huts, the weed-infested fields and unfamiliar creatures to which the vision screen should have accustomed him.

He clambered out cautiously. One grew used to confinement and did not really feel lonely until there were tangible signs of other human beings. It required an effort to approach the two huts at which he had looked for so long.

He moistened his dry mouth. "Hello?" he called and his voice sounded slightly different from his memory of it. "Thinner air, I suppose," he muttered to himself.

"Hello!" he yelled and suddenly giving way to impulse let go with a tremendous war-whoop. "Yha-who!"

Birds and creatures fell silent to stare at him with soft beady eyes. The silence alarmed him. He ran to the hut nearest him. A creeper had curled itself around the handle of the door. He tore it away and hurled himself inside. Panting, he glared around at the evidence of human routine hastily left. Mildewed cloth; a skeleton recognisable as that of a bird picked clean amid a ruin of feathers; a rifle, here and there tinged with rust, leaning against the arm of a chair beside a table laid for a meal. . .

He grabbed the rifle, tested the action—over-oiled by Earth standards, but perhaps not by the conditions here—and ran out with it. The other hut was empty, but recently deserted like the first.

Huts, several score of them, dotted what was evidently a cleared space—a space cleared by man's effort in this encircling jungle.

"Hello! Hello! Hello!" He ran towards the huts. He stopped and fired the rifle into the air, sending birds and animals scattering in all directions.

No voice answered him. Appalled, he slowly turned around. A man marooned by pirates of the old Spanish Main must have felt like this. He looked up at the sky—a darker blue than that of Earth. The small fierce sun touched the edge of his vision and he looked away instinctively.

So intense was the Sun, in fact, that he could see it for several seconds as a dark spot superimposed on the unfamiliar scene. When it disappeared he found himself looking at the globe, but it was now such a

bright orange-yellow that he felt started. If five days and nights here could so corrode the metal, a few years might easily oxidise it completely away.

Not that it really mattered, since the globe was of no use to him now that it had landed him, acclimatised him and released him.

Sobered, he began to walk around the globe taking stock of his plight. The recently departed immigrants had made such great efforts to clear and plant the land; yet they had gone suddenly.

His roving gaze alighted on a peculiar rock formation on one side of the clearing. It was like curved steps leading up to an irregularly shaped stage. "Lava!" he said aloud. So volcanic action had driven out his predecessors.

He turned slowly. Water was plentiful, standing still in a herring bone irrigation system. Crops and weeds grew together in luxuriance that spoke of rich soil with similar bacteria to those of Earth.

He begun to distinguish between the huts. They were all sited upon a rough circle of ground a yard or so above the level of the cultivated land, but only about half of them—some 50 of the smaller huts had the appearance of living quarters. Others looked like storehouses specially designed to withstand damp, and there were power houses, workshops, and administration buildings; three large huts equidistant from each other stood on the edge of the open space in the middle of which the globe had landed, and their situation around the globe and the aerals sited upon their roofs told him they were almost certainly radio huts that the mechanisms in the globe had used to find this place.

He glanced at the globe and, viewing it from this new side, stared with interest at a large flap which had lowered itself down until its top edge rested upon the alien turf. Upon this flap a large plastic cube shone milky white against rusting metal.

Adam hurried towards it. Letters stencilled upon its top caught his eye.

AUTO—BERTHA.

N.B. FASTEN TO FLAP THIS WAY UP.

Beneath the letters, in the centre of the side facing him was a glass panel lit from within, and into this he peered. Something roughly round, suspended in a viscous liquid, faintly orange, a darker nucleus of many—uncountably numerous parts—and with a transparent skin on which several thin hair-like things whipped and wriggled. He blinked and looked again, was baffled and stepped back to frown and scratch his chin.

Beside the glass panel was another break in the plastic, a small square above which was marked:

Relative Auto-B. Time

And in the square were the figures and letters:

001 Day.

Adam shrugged. He looked around the cube and jumped as high as he could to make sure the top was as blank as the other sides. It was.

To blazes with it.

He had had quite enough of puzzles. Earth had flung him out and marooned him in this alien place, so the sooner he forgot all things Earthly and accepted things alien, the better it would be for his peace of mind. If they thought he was going to suffer they were mistaken. His kind on Earth had to fight for what they got; they had few friends; he could get along without any help. He'd show them. He'd——

How quiet it was! The creatures that had soon returned from their scare over his firing the rifle seemed to have faded into the landscape. The ground shook. Rumbles set his nerves on edge.

They passed into the silence and the creatures started to come out of their hiding places. Volcanic activity, he supposed.

Well, he could do nothing about that either and must accept it as part of his new life.

He turned his back on the globe and felt that his action was symbolic.

Exploration, carefully conducted to conserve all the resources left at his disposal, soon boosted his spirits. Food there was in plenty to keep him for years; machines and fuel stocks were such that he felt he might harvest, thrash and reseed the acreage worked by the departed colonists; books were not his strong point but there was a non-fiction library that would give him the dope he needed to set him on the path to self-sufficiency.

He came across three helicopter-jets, perfectly serviced, and climbed into one with his eyes gleaming. He ran it out, climbed it straight up and sent it screaming over the jungle in a wide circle. Keeping his own relatively tiny clearing in sight, he spiralled up until his ears made faint popping sounds.

The unbroken jungle reached in all directions with no rise in the general surface even worthy of the title of hill. At this height the great trees—more like gigantic ferns than Earthly trees—were like the pile of a huge carpet. Occasional mounds of lava, some trailing a wisp of smoke, seemed no more than worn patches.

Such monotony depressed him and when he sank down into the clearing with its man-made variety, it was like coming home.

He ate a hasty meal out of tins and, while the sun declined, continued his exploration. A clock still working in the administration buildings was a find, but a wrist watch beside an unmade and mouldering bed was a thing to be prized. It was not quite an ordinary watch, for the means of adjusting the speed of the movement was of the interplanetary sort, allowing the "day" of any reasonably Earth-like planet to be divided into the customary 24 "hours"—whether this period was anything from a quarter of an actual Earth hour up to two Earth hours. It occurred to him while he was strapping it on that he had no means of telling what relation an hour of this planet's time had to the hours he had previously accepted as normal. Not that such things mattered. . .

As the afternoon wore on, the temperature climbed. . . By the time he was eating another meal, he was driven out of the huts into the shade of a row of small specimens of the trees indigenous to the planet. The heat was oppressive and all the creatures seemed to have retreated into the jungle. He sweated and panted.

The sun declined steadily but there was little ease in the tropical conditions. It sank with disconcerting suddenness below the horizon and Adam at once felt the loss of heat and shivered. Light still filled the sky for a while and he saw clouds forming with unearthly speed.

A damp miasma chilled him as it settled over the cultivated ground. He folded the chair he had been using and hurried into the doorway of a hut.

Drops of rain began to splatter over the fields and roofs of the empty prefabs. He retreated inside and closed the doors and windows to keep out the vapours and watched the final coming of darkness though glass.

A fit of sneezing reminded him of his clammy skin. The first towel he picked up to dry himself fell to pieces in his hands. He finally found one that wasn't rotten, but as he took it from a damp-proof cupboard, he was shivering uncontrollably.

In the cupboard, someone had hidden a half bottle of whisky behind the linen and he picked it up. Having drunk himself warm again, he covered the daylight tubes and fell asleep.

He woke in alarm. Things were falling on to the floor and the floor itself seemed to be swaying. He nerved himself to stay where he was, for volcanic action seemed commonplace on this world, and the tremors passed.

His head ached with the whisky, but he felt disinclined to go back to sleep. Sneezing and shivering further woke him and he got up from

the mouldy-smelling chair and made himself a hot drink. Tomorrow he would find himself a prefab. that had not been left open to the damp by its previous owners.

Sunrise found him convinced that he had either caught cold or contracted a fever native to the alien place. Not feeling too bad, however, he decided to continue with his explorations and try to work it off.

Outside, the slanting rays of the sun were drawing up the last of the night mist and the temperature was rising. After a good breakfast from the cold store, he slung the rifle across his back, took an axe from the damp-proof implement store and, marking the trees as he went, followed what appeared to be an animal track into the steamy warmth of the jungle.

Several times he heard ponderous crashings away among the trees, but the surface became a bog a few feet on either side of the tracks he used, and he did not dare to trust himself to the quaking mush. Once, where a fallen tree had broken a great gap in the close foliage, he glimpsed a giant reptile creature half immersed in the mud. It had the unmistakeably long neck of a herbivore feeding on trees and he could hear it stripping the tender shoots high above.

During the days that followed he continued to ignore the spasms of fever and learnt to operate and maintain the farm machinery on which his life might depend before long.

With the fields in good enough order to satisfy his townsman's eye, he took to exploring again. There was little of interest in the vast expanse of jungle, however, and, although he got the aircraft homing gear working and covered thousands of miles in either direction, he found no break in it except for insignificant lakes and an occasional volcano erupting fire and smoke into the deep blue sky. North and south the jungle stretched, ending in a welter of new green growth to the north and a mass of frost blackened trunks to the south, and blending into melting or advancing glaciers.

There was, then, summer and winter on this planet. It was Earth-like even in that respect. From this aspect of time he began again to consider the enigma of time here relative to time on Earth, and the thought came to him that perhaps the number of days shown on the "Auto-Bertha" could be compared with the number of days he had been free.

Back in the clearing he jumped from the helicopter and ran the few paces to the milky cube to stare at the figures:

071 days

That was incredible and could not possibly have any relation to the

actual passage of time. He stared in through the glass panel and could see something pulsing.

He remembered that, many years before he had looked through a low-power microscope at a tiny pond creature known as a waterflea. In its transparent body he had seen its heart pulsing like that. But what connection could that have?

Not that it mattered. To blazes with it. And with the rest of humanity. And Earth. He had a planet to himself.

It did have its peculiarities, but on the whole it was a good planet. Where it was, what sun was in the sky—those were idle questions that came to his mind only out of curiosity.

But, all the same, as the days sped by, they were questions that worried him more and more. A strange sort of half-light made a brief appearance at both dawn and sunset. He smoked a piece of glass and watched his queer sun clear the horizon—and was about to turn away when a second orb, even more dazzling than the first, followed its mate.

A reflection? His first thought was replaced by a realisation of the truth: Twin suns. He was on a planet of a binary or double star, and this had been concealed from him so far only because one sun had been eclipsing the other at the time of his landing.

Provoked by his discovery, he invaded the administration buildings. Damp had mouldered away all exposed papers. Much had been taken away by the departed colonists, he supposed, and he found nothing of interest to him. He remembered his library and found his answer after a study of a book on general astronomy. The sun or suns gave off radiation similar enough to Sol. That narrowed down his field. They revolved about each other somewhere not too far from Sol. That was only logical. The nearer stars would be examined first.

He remembered someone—the crewman on the strange ship. . . Yes, the crewman had even begun the name: Proce—

“Procyon!” he said aloud triumphantly.

Then he gasped. Procyon, according to his book, was 60 Billion miles from Sol.

Slowly the two suns appeared to move apart and the periods of half light shortened both the burning days and the chill nights. The tempo of both plant and animal life quickened. Plants blossomed and seeded and creatures entered into their breeding season as the rhythm of the unearthly seasons produced an abundance of corps.

Adam's fever eased until he was hardly aware of it. He grew used to it and lost his secret fear of falling sick and having no one to help him.

Harvest absorbed all his energies. He did not really need to harvest, but he could not simply sit and watch while alien life blotted out the work of the men who had been here before him.

By the time the two suns stood at a 60 degree angle, he realised that his planet only revolved about one of them. The other, larger sun increased in size but, although brighter, seemed to give him less heat.

A time came when as one sun sank below the horizon the other rose. Continual bombardment by radiation made the air of the clearing difficult to breathe. Thunderstorms added to the periodic rumbling of volcanic action. He moved about very little and only by chance going near to the jungle edge did he discover how very much more bearable were conditions beneath the towering trees. It would be a priority task to move one of the huts into the shade for future "summers."

With the gradual lengthening of night his fever came back, but he scarcely noticed his occasional shivering fits, uncontrollable sneezing bouts and runs of temperature peaks, as he read up his books and planned his coming crops.

Restlessness drove him to all kinds of action that a more peace-loving man would have let slide. He searched the surrounding jungle for many miles for the sole purpose of finding out all he could about the giant reptiles such as the one he had seen. One thing struck him as being common to all his encounters. The creatures liked to be half submerged in ooze.

Perhaps that was why they had not bothered him once in the clearing. Standing, looking around the clearing, however he noticed several places where the ground had subsided. With water level and ground level so much alike, he felt he could afford to take no risks and set to work with a mechanical digger and transporter to make sure that monsters would find no suitable mud baths in the uneasy soil of his domain.

Having filled in all except the narrow irrigation trenches and a deliberately low-lying ricefield, he began his planned project of moving a pre-fab. into the shelter of the trees.

One night he mis-judged the length of sunset half-light and was caught by the sudden condensation of moisture. Fearing to aggravate his fever, he dared not go back to his usual night quarters, and remained in the hut which was almost re-erected on its new site.

Dog-tired by his efforts, lulled by the temperature moderating effect of the trees, he fell asleep in spite of a resolution to stand guard.

Crashes woke him. The floor was rocking and his first thought was of earthquake. Then the roof shattered. Pieces of it came crashing

down around him. Cold breath chilled him over so that his skin crawled, and he heard an incredible hiss like a blast of escaping steam. A giant something shouldered its way as irresistibly as a bulldozer through the remains of the pre-fab.

As soon as he moved pain stabbed into the lower ribs on his right side. Thin sections of roofing slithered off him and drops of rain splashed on his face. Holding his aching side with one hand he used the other to push away the debris across his legs.

Light touched trees above him and he saw a neck like a telegraph pole against the brightening sky. Then it was gone and he could hear the crackling and whipping of disturbed foliage.

Sunlight brightened swiftly as he fought himself clear. Swearing at himself over more than the physical agony of his hurt ribs, he fled from the jungle into the sanctuary of the clearing: for he had become over confident and forgotten that the huts had all been sited in the centre of the clearing for a good reason.

He stumbled through his ploughed fields, between his cluster of huts, right to where the globe rusted into ruin before he turned at bay.

The jungle had swallowed the monster. Only the wrecked hut under trampled trees showed where it had been. As the air cleared and warmed in the increasing sunlight, his breathing slowed and the pain in his chest eased, and he looked warily around his domain.

His breath caught in his throat so suddenly that he choked. Yet he repressed the gagging and forgot the increased discomfort this brought as he continued to stare.

The flap on which the milky cube rested had broken away from the rest of the rusting globe. The milky cube itself was rocking weirdly to and fro in the undergrowth with an increasing motion.

As Adam continued to stare a crack appeared in its milky surface. It broke into two parts, fragments of its hard substance springing off it.

And, out of its centre, behind where the glass panel had been, something dragged itself weakly.

He watched in amazement. Was it a woman—or a travesty of a woman that struggled like a new hatched chick in the soft grassy stuff in front of the broken cube?

All at once he was aware of a terrible ache within him. Not since his arrival had he dared to hope for human companionship—for the companionship of a woman in particular. . .

Holding his side, he staggered forward to kneel and look into her vacuous white face. "Are—— Are you real?"

Her brown eyes brightened at the sound of his voice and she lifted a bare arm awkwardly to touch her ear.

He caught hold of her arm. Her flaccid flesh filled him with a great excitement. "You——"

He ran to the shattered cube. In the Relative Auto-B. Time square were the figures and letters: 17 Years.

He turned and stared at her. Without embarrassment or comprehension or feeling she stared back.

He moistened his lips. What did one do when confronted with a naked woman of a relative 17 years, who had just been born?

Her face screwed itself up and she let loose a lusty wail. And he grinned. "You feed her," he said.

She took to tinned rice pudding happily.

Days had a new meaning now. There was someone to work for, to look after and to plan to educate and——

He began his first lesson with his name. He pointed to himself: "Adam." Then he stopped, and scratched his chin. The cube on the rusting flap came into his mind. "Bertha," he said experimentally. It would be a sardonic way of writing "Birther." But it was, after all, a good enough name already given. He pointed at her. "Bertha," he said.

Her strength soon came to her. She learnt as quickly as he could expect and, if she was slow on abstract conceptions, she soon found her part in the life of the Procyon Settlement.

Three Procyon years later she bore him a sturdy son and he increased the size of his cultivated ground in honour of the event, nearly doubling his acreage between growing seasons, driving back the forest.

Neither she nor the boy suffered from the fever that continued to trouble him. (Perhaps it had been brought on by Warder Carping's blow). And the years sped by and he pushed the forest back further and further as other children were born to them.

He called his first-born Jack and took a great joy in teaching the youngster all the skills necessary to use the tools and knowledge left to them by the vanished Earth colonists.

All during those years the cleared land quaked and rumbled. Even he grew used to the uneasiness of the thin solid crust and presently took it for granted as did the others who knew nothing different.

But, when Jack reached an apparent age of 10 Earth years and perhaps 20 Procyon years—Adam had lost count—there were a series of earthquakes and an unprecedented new crop of tiny volcanoes and hot

springs. The lava platform on the edge of the clearing blew to pieces and smoke and steam drifted sulphurously around the huts.

Adam, knowing at last how the original colonists had felt, took refuge in the air, only landing to refuel at intervals for three days and three nights, watching the upheavals below.

During this time, he cursed those who had put him here, but as soon as he felt reasonably sure that the worst was over, he began to plan for greater safety in future. What they needed was a second clearing to which they could flee if danger should ever threaten the first. He could not go back to a less violent world as the colonist had done.

Leaving Jack in charge, he flew a load of high explosive to a distance of about 20 miles and pounded the jungle there into a ruin of shattered fronds and stems. He was circling around with a second load to make sure that he would have a clearing large enough to keep the monster reptiles at bay, when he glimpsed something high in the bright sky.

A tall ship was coming down towards the old settlement. Instead of the glare of rocket fire that he looked for at its tail tubes, a ring of bright, pulsating light encircled its nose. It was the great ship that had brought him, the SCI ship with the interstellar drive, returning.

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His jet howled to crescendo and even that sound vanished as he raced to be home first. Why were the Earthmen coming back? What did they want?

Did they think they could come down on his world as if they owned it?

He judged the ship would land astride the grassy patch on which the remains of the globe were disappearing into the soil.

He pointed his jet at that point, crash landed it and, carrying the plunger box of a radio detonator, ran from right underneath the descending holes of the unused rocket tubes.

Jack, a tiny figure standing in front of the huts, legs apart, arms akimbo, defiant as himself, waited for him. He felt proud of his son as they stared up at the towering ship settling on its landing pods and putting out its guns to menace the surrounding jungle.

A large hatch hinged down to form a high platform and on to this stepped men to stare away over the endless trees and down at the little settlement. One saw Adam and Jack and drew the others' attention.

"Hello, there!" the hail floated down.

Adam glared up. "Hello yourself. What do you want?"

"Are you Adam Black?" came the query.

Adam grinned. "I am. Adam Black, sentenced criminal. I've paid my debt to Earth. I don't want to go back. Why don't you leave me in peace here?"

"We are coming down to see you. D'you hear that?"

"I hear. But you'd better not come down. There is half a ton of H.E. in a helicopter jet right beneath your tail tubes. In my hands is a radio detonator. If you make any move I don't like, you'll have a burst ship to repair—if not to scrap. Now, what d'you want on my planet?"

That made them hesitate and gather together to talk. They hailed him respectfully, too. . . . "Black, will you let one of us come down to speak to you?"

"All right," he agreed. "One man."

An escalator ladder unfolded down from the platform and a man descended. Although older, he seemed familiar even before he spoke with the well-remembered voice of the friendly warden: "Adam Black—So you did it."

"I remember you," Adam nodded, and he had to steel himself not to take the offered hand. "What happened to the other—Carping?"

"Henry Carping died a year after you were brought here. A disease of the nerves, I believe."

"Oh." Adam hesitated.

The warder did not say anything, but he had a sheet of paper in his hand, although he did not seem in any hurry to do anything with it.

Adam jerked his head. "What's the paper?"

"Paper?" The warder looked at it. "Sorry, but I'm still marvelling at the way you've managed here, alone, when a highly organised colony unit failed——"

"I had to!"

"Yes, I suppose you did." The warder looked at the paper and then held it out. "There's another man up there who knew you before you... came here. He thought that this might interest you."

"Oh?" Adam took the paper, stood looking at the warder suspiciously for an awkward moment and then handed the radio detonator box to Jack's ready young hands.

He spread out the paper which was slightly yellowed with age and deeply creased as though long folded.

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Subject: Colonisation of Procyon (G Type Sun) II.

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To: Field Agent Lennox. Via SCI H.Q., Secunder City, Mars.

From: President, Scientists' Committee of Integration, Earth.—Sub Committee 12548 reports disastrous failure of First Extra-Solar Colonisation Attempt.

The Returned Colonists have been subjected to Malzard's Memory-erasing treatment with complete success. For it is felt that publication of the result of the experiment would only cause public outcry. Operation of the Seibel-Houston Drive is so expensive that further efforts at Colonisation, outside the Solar System might be delayed for many decades, perhaps for many centuries. In the interest of Mankind, therefore, this information is to be treated as SECRET and RESTRICTED.—Reasons for failure have been analysed as (a) lack of sufficient determination, perhaps due to opportunity of return (b) continual onset of alien difficulties, although some of these were overcome in a highly commendable manner, and (c) mental strain caused by Biniary Summers in general and a sudden outbreak of violent volcanic action in particular.

Cross reference to Sub. Committee 7,912. . . Reasons listed above would appear to bear out the findings of this sub-committee on the Decline of Virility in the machine Age.

—You are, therefore, empowered to solicit the services of the man known as Adam Black, Test No. 934,353,852 (at 1/3/2253 Application for Interplanetary Passport.) as suggested by your personal report.

—Extraordinary projects call for extraordinary measures to bring them to a successful conclusion. Should he, as you state you expect, refuse to consider taking charge of a second expedition, you are further empowered to endeavour to have him convicted of some minor crime so that he may be offered our commission under circumstances calculated to be in our favour.

In this connection you may be able to foment trouble between him and his associates in connection with the faithlessness of the girl, Delia—

Adam looked around as he sensed someone at his side. Bertha had come out of the hut and stood at his side, looking up into his face. He put his arm around her shoulders.

And he continued to read:

—Should he be found guilty of a serious offence, his case will have to be considered by a special meeting of the SCI.

In the event of his being marooned, with only Tabaud's Bertha to provide him with company, he would—at the end of a decade, if still alive—be acknowledged by the SCI to have squatters' rights established on whatever parts of this Earth-type planet he may have used.

Adam looked at Bertha, and from her to his son and over his shoulder at the younger children still in the shadow of the huts.

To them this was a completely novel experience, both frightening and intriguing. They were waiting for him to give them leadership.

He let his gaze rove around the clearing. His huts were beginning to look weatherbeaten and his machinery all showed signs of wear, and it would be impossible to get spares or replacements without trade with Earth. His eyes glinted as he contemplated his full storehouses. Earth was always short of quality foods to satisfy her increasing population. It was up to him to drive a hard bargain on behalf of *his* world.

His gaze centred on the waiting warder. "And you? What's brought you back here?"

"Me? Oh, I've been sent to finish your case, Mr Black. . . just to make my final — report on Adam.

E. R. JAMES



Dear S-F Reader

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An opinion of some new science-fiction books

From KENNETH F. SLATER

A couple of novels, first. There is **WORLD OUT OF MIND**, by J. T. McIntosh (Museum, 9/6, 189pp.), dealing with the invasion of earth. Not, please, a crash-bang invasion, but a subtle one in which the invaders, making use of the involved intellectual caste system future mankind has evolved, insert themselves into positions of power so that when the invasion really does come the opposition will be non-existent. But something goes wrong—the invaders are not human, and in taking on human bodies they find they've taken on something extra as well! One of the delightful parts of the book, I think, is Mr. McIntosh's "caste system" of blues and greens and whites—a combination of Huxley's Alphas and Betas with van Vogt's Games Machine, and a little McIntosh special stirred in to make it really "new." Then, next new novel, from Hodder & Stoughton (10/6, 192pp.), is **TIMELINER**: Charles Eric Maine. It is an adaptation from the radio play, **THE EINSTEIN HIGHWAY**, as was Mr. Maine's previous novel an adaptation of his earlier play. Hugh Macklin is experimenting with dimensional quadrature, in the hope of developing time-travel. Paul, Macklin's senior in the laboratory, and Lydia, Macklin's wife, decide that this is a good opportunity for removing Macklin from the

path of their love. Hence, when Macklin commences the experiment Paul alters a dial, and Macklin is cast adrift in time—but immediately returns to consciousness in the body of Eddie Rayner, a man of the future who is one of the pioneers of Lunar exploration. After a few minor adventures in Rayner's body, Macklin commits suicide, to return again in the body of a man on Venus; here he enters several bodies—for reasons to be explained in the story—before taking a terrific step forward into a very distant future. Finally, Macklin returns to his own period in the time-cycle, only to find he is occupying the body of his unfaithful wife, Lydia. This story is well worth reading, and I would warn those of you who may have met the shorter version published in a British magazine some eighteen months ago, not to be put off by the immediate and obvious similarities—there is far more in this novel than in the short similar yarn. (I believe, but cannot be definite, that yet another version appeared in short form in an American magazine—I have a definite recollection of it, but cannot find it among my collection at the moment.) My only comment on this is that I wish Mr. Maine would devote his obvious talent to producing something entirely different, and not rehashing—no

matter how well—his own work. It is disappointing to the reader who can't get enough s.f.

William F. Temple, well-known to fandom, has produced a very fine story in the space-opera class in **MARTIN MAGNUS: PLANET ROVER** (Frederick Muller, 7/6, 167pp.), perhaps one of the best points about the yarn being the creation of Martin Magnus himself, a somewhat brusque but very likeable person. The story involves inhabitants of the deep sealed caves of Luna, intelligent denizens of Terra's oceans, and inhospitable horrors of Venus—and, of course, some Earthmen. Makes quite good reading, of the lighter sort.

For those readers who would like a fantasy for a change, I can offer nothing better than J. R. R. Tolkien's colossal **THE**

LORD OF THE RINGS. There are three books, **THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE KING**, **THE TWO TOWERS** and **THE RETURN OF THE KING**, the last named not yet published. They cost 21/- each, but average about 400 pages, so there is plenty of reading in them. Good reading, exciting reading and interesting reading. A long time ago, perhaps on this earth, or on some similar earth, the Lord of Evil was defeated. His power lay in the Rings, which were distributed amongst Men, Elves and Dwarves—the Master Ring remaining in the Lord's possession. After his defeat the Ring finally comes into the hands of Frodo, a Hobbit—you'll not find a Hobbit in any mythology outside this book, nor, for that matter, will you find many other of the

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many interesting and intriguing types of life elsewhere. It is with the adventures of Frodo and his aides in their efforts to destroy the ring before it falls back into the hands of the Dark Lord—now grown to power again—that the story is concerned. It would be impossible to give you any synopsis of the story, on so vast a scale as it is written, and so I must content myself with giving you my earnest warning that if you don't read it, you have missed one of the finest books of its type ever to appear.

Paul Capon's **DOWN TO EARTH** (Heinemann, 9/6) is the third in the series which started with **THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SUN**, and concludes the adventures of Professor Pollenport and his party of space adventurers who made the trip to the planet Antigeos. It is, perhaps, the weakest of the three from the point of s-f, being primarily concerned with affairs on Earth while the voyagers are returning in an Antigean constructed vessel; these affairs being mainly those of a newspaper magnate and a business man who set out to distort the reports received on their radio, in an attempt to deceive the world that the Antigean's intentions are hostile, and the ship is one of a vast invasion fleet. Luckily, their attempt is foiled, and they meet their respective sticky ends amid general rejoicing. However, Capon's **WORLD AT BAY** (Heinemann, 9/6), although classified as a juvenile, and this time dealing with a real invasion of earth, is much more in line with the usual trend of s-f, and hits some really good spots. The invaders, forced to vacate their own world, wish to

take over a part of the earth, peacefully—and their method of doing this is to blanket the earth with a sleep-inducing drug. However, one small party of scientists learn to combat the force in time and achieve an amicable settlement with the invaders.

Anthologies, this time, I give you only one. **BEST S-F**, edited and with an introduction by Edmund Crispin (Faber & Faber, 15/-, 365pp.), is the "BEST" series, and it does contain fourteen really excellent stories—apart from Mr. Crispin's own seven-page introduction, which is one of the best introductions to s-f I've read to date. The tales range from A. E. Van Vogt's **DORMANT**—the story of robot bomb, left over from aeons-old war, which woke up, to H. Nearning, Jr.'s delightful **THE CEREBRATIVE PSITTACOID**. J. T. McIntosh is represented with **FIRST LADY**—one way of colonising planets; Ray Bradbury's thoughtful **THE FIRE BALLOONS** adds the touch of consideration of things above the human level. There is Eric Frank Russell's **A PRESENT FROM JOE**, which gives an entirely different method of disposing with the Martians. John Wyndham's **DUMB MARTIAN** . . . but I think I've mentioned enough titles to give you the idea of the level of this anthology.

Kenneth F. Slater

Fandom's noted literary critic

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Nebula Science-Fiction

SCIENTI FILM PREVIEWS

News and advance Film Reviews Direct From Hollywood's

FORREST J. ACKERMAN

I cannot yet give you an eyeball report on whether the translation to the screen of Raymond F. Jones' Peace Engineer series, pieced together to form the Boardman novel, **THIS ISLAND EARTH**, suffers, suffices or surprises in the process. Considerable money seems to have been spent on its production, a reported 17,000 dollars alone having been spent on the manufacture of *The Mutant* featured in it. This rather magnificent monstrosity, the brainchild in fact of Hollywood's youngest Westmore, has already been introduced to audiences via a technicolor article in the highly glossed pages of *Collier's* magazine. There he is to be seen as a bulbous brained beauty, head approximately four times normal size, just like an author after making a first sale to **NEBULA**. Completely innocent of dermic covering on face and head, his cartilage and convolutions are unappetizingly emphasized. He has built-up shoulder muscles and arms twice normal length which terminate in ugly pincers.

As for the screen story itself: A leader on the world scene of nuclear experimentation is young Dr. Cal Meacham, whose personal project is the industrial application of atomic energy. During a personally piloted flight his jet plane goes mysteriously out of control and he is headed

for a crash and probably death when he is just as mysteriously rescued by a green beam which seems to act as a tractor ray, lowering him to a safe landing. The event remains a source of bafflement. It is followed by a second mystery.

In his private lab at the Ryberg Electronics Corp., Los Angeles, Meacham is astonished to discover a tiny condenser unlike any he has ever seen before. Next a catalogue, sans return address, arrives for him. It illustrates components and instruments completely foreign to him but all obviously for nuclear use. He decides to see what will happen when he places an order for a mechanism of unknown function called an interocitor.

Interociter and blueprints arrive, out of the blue as it were. Meacham takes a crack at assembling the parts and builds himself some sort of super TV set. Tuning in on the unknown, he conjures up a commanding figure who identifies himself as Exeter. Exeter compliments Meacham on putting the apparatus together in functioning fashion, says this has been a sort of test of his abilities and invites him to join him in a new experiment now under way. Meacham is intrigued at the prospect of learning the secrets of this unknown wizard.

Out of the fog an unpiloted plane arrives to spirit Meacham off to his date with unknown destiny. The craft is windowless and apparently powered by a radiant disc of light. When Exeter's aerotaxi lands, Meacham is genuinely surprised to find himself in the State of Georgia. He is met by Dr. Ruth Adams, an attractive brunette whom he recognises as a one-time college classmate, although she gives no sign that she remembers him. She leads him to Exeter.

Exeter reveals his mission: to put an end to war. To this end he invites Meacham's collaboration. He demonstrates a device capable of disintegrating heavy steel plates: a red ray; and with a green ray shows himself to be the master of gravity. But Meacham does not fall in with his plans.

Conniving with the girl and another lab. worker, Meacham attempts to escape from Exeter's stronghold, but the trio is detected and the assistant killed when Exeter directs his disinterayer onto the speeding station wagon. Later, attempting a second escape in a plane, Meacham and Ruth are captured by Exeter's green ray and drawn into the hold of a giant spaceship. They are headed for the planet Metaluna!

Metaluna has a traditional enemy, the planet Zahgon. The two worlds have been at war for centuries. Metaluna has had all peace offers spurned, and now defeat is in sight for it because its supply of nuclear energy is fast dwindling. Atomic power is vital for the functioning of the interocitor and the red dis-ray. How necessary the red ray is is demonstrated when, nearing

Metaluna, the spaceship is attacked by Zahgon-controlled meteors, which are disintegrated just in time.

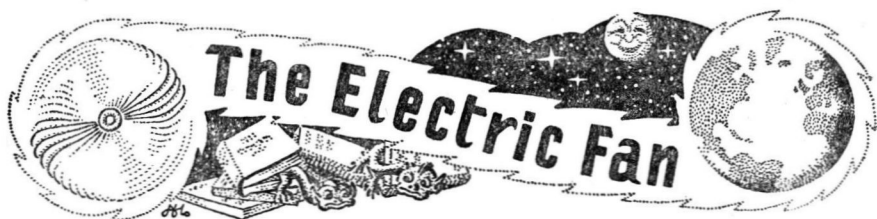
Safely on Metaluna, Exeter conducts Meacham and Ruth by tube car to the heart of the planet, the Engineer's Palace. Here the Engineer explains to the kidnapped terrestrials that it is the plan of the few remaining Metalunians to escape permanently to Earth. Meacham and the girl oppose the plan.

Meanwhile, Metaluna is under round-the-clock attack by the Zahgonian forces. The underground stronghold of the Engineer it hit, aiding Meacham and Ruth in a break for freedom. Surprisingly, Exeter defies the Engineer and joins the "earthlings." In the process he is fatally clawed by the Mutant.

Amidst a planetary battle to the death, the spaceship takes off for a return to earth. Via "stellar-scope" Exeter, Meacham and Ruth witness the end of Metaluna as meteoric bombardment by the powers of Zahgon turn it into a radioactive sun. Aboard the ship a stowaway Mutant dissolves into a pool of green fluid when unable to convert its metabolism to earth ratio.

Exeter expires enroute, Meacham and Ruth safely reaching home again.

Now that I've listened to myself tell it, it doesn't sound so good, does it? About as many holes as a bag of doughnuts. Still, due to the time and expense involved in this one, and the respected name of Raymond F. Jones, and the commission I expect to collect some day for the sale of the picture, I'll reserve judgment until after I've actually seen the completed product.



WALTER A. WILLIS

Looks at British fandom

TRIODE, No. 2. Eric Bentcliffe, Terry Jeeves and Eric Jones, 58 Sharrard Grove, Sheffield, 12. 48 pages, 9d. This has been one of the leading British fanmags since its excellent first issue, and this second one maintains the standard with a wide range of good material, including a page of photographs. Tony Thorne fancifully recounts adventures with a book club which was so over-generous as to move a subscriber to tears (it must have been Readers' Onion) and a pseudonymous author tells of early struggles so protracted that his victory was dust in his mouth. Dale Smith has some booknotes which will be of interest to collectors (if there are any left these days) and Mal Ashworth succeeds in writing three entertaining pages about not spending a night in a haunted house, a new approach of seance fiction. The best line is "On a sunny afternoon like this I'd spend a night in Bolling Castle on my own any time." There is also a promising column by Mike Wallace, reviews, editorials, cartoons, and a thing by me. However, the most interesting item is probably a symposium called "Grab Up That Torch," in which Ken Slater proffers a few helpful if impractical suggestions as to how British science fiction magazines might increase their circulation, and is promptly trampled

into the mire by two English professional editors. One of them goes so far as to say that because American magazines pay more, they "will have first call on the best stories—apart from the odd story that is sold to a British publisher out of kindness, drunkenness or sheer stupidity." Of course I know I'm only a fan, and probably a misfit to boot, but I'd thought there might be a few more reasons why some struggling native Sturgeon with a hard roe to hoe just might send his story to a British editor. Because, for instance, he has been given help and encouragement to write it, or because he can hope for an early decision and a prompt cheque, or because he likes the editor (and this is more important than one would think), or because his story is more suited to a British magazine (due to American political taboos, for instance, or stylistic conventions or reasons of locale). I have known British fan editors who offer authors no money at all but who have yet managed to get stories which are subsequently bought for hardcover anthologies. What science fiction everywhere needs is not more kindness, drunkenness or stupidity, but more editors with enough gumption to go out looking for material and enough talent to help their authors to make a good

story out of a mediocre one. As it is some of them cannot even be trusted to correct spelling.

the girls is stationed in the WRAC, which makes the nickname "Fez" very appropriate. I hope no one will try turban it.

FEMIZINE, Nos. 3 and 4. Joan Carr, Ethel Lindsay and Frances Evans, School House, Teignmouth St., Collyhurst, Manchester, 9. 62 pages (double issue), 1/6. A very gay and charming magazine produced by that most opposite of sexes, men not even being allowed to contribute. Typical is Pamela Bulmer's quarter-serious exhortation to girl fans to revolt against the domination of the men. Among the deeds to which she urges them is to chain themselves to the lamp-posts outside the Globe Tavern, where the London Circle now meet. (Is this why they moved from Fetter Lane?) Personally I think they'd have a better chance of being noticed if they were chained to the bar inside, like some of the men. Pamela also has a very entertaining column called "Wigwam," which might have been sub-titled "Watch Out For Squaws." Frances Evans contributes a nice little vignette about a misogynist and Daphne Buckmaster writes futuristic nuclear-fashion notes on the design of female space-suits. (I thought it was established that young females can endure the cold of interstellar space in a bikini, or nothing at all.) I notice that the model illustrated has very narrow lapels, which bears out the male contention that when women usurp men's place they cease to be so widely revered. Another 2054 item is Ethel Lindsay's "Dear Diary," a sort of Pepys into the future. This magazine is actually published in Egypt, where one of

SATELLITE, No. 4. Don Allen, 3 Arkle St., Gateshead, 8, Co. Durham. 56 pages, 1/6. A bright and neatly produced magazine by a very promising young editor, with material varying widely in type and quality. The most interesting are probably Jan Jansen's fascinatingly frank survey of Belgian fandom and "Vitriol's" determinedly malignant column "Fanalysis." The main defect of the latter is that the anonymous author's acquaintanceship with genuine dragons is slight, and some of his victims look more like windmills to me, but it's pungently written and with a little more evidence of a sense of humour should make a very fine column indeed. This is a special issue of Satellite (the usual price being 1/-) and incorporates the second issue of a cartoon magazine called "Dizzy," which normally sells at 9d per copy. The first issue of this magazine would have made a good thing for a bride to take to her wedding, containing as it did something old, something new, something borrowed and something blue, but the original material is more plentiful in this issue and many of the cartoons are genuinely funny. As for the blue ones, they seem to my twisted mind to be good too, but I was amused to notice "Vitriol" sounding off against similar mild indecency in other fanmags. Evidently charity begins, and ends, at home.

HYPNOTISM

A discussion by a specialist in the field
W. H. POWERS

Hypnotism is perhaps one of the most controversial subjects one may introduce as a topic of conversation among any group of average people.

Reactions are instantaneous and varied. Some believe in it, and some don't. Among those who believe in the existence of Hypnotism as an established fact, will be found those who are for it, and those who are "agin" it, and the latter usually predominate. One thing is certain: speculation will be rife. Charlatanism or Truth? Mental control or occult force? Projection of Will, or mere hocus-pocus? Has a hypnotist some special endowment of mind or eye or mental or physical Magnetism beyond that of the ordinary mortal?

Very few people indeed are qualified to answer these questions, because very few have been in intimate contact with hypnotism or hypnotists, and very few have factual knowledge of the subject. Even to the infinitesimally few persons who have had hypnotic treatment of any kind, or have been hypnotised by a stage hypnotist, the whys and wherefores are still often a complete mystery; and among any audience which has witnessed a performance of stage hypnotism will be found people who are convinced that the whole thing is a fake, and that the volunteers who have participated in the show as hypnotic subjects have merely followed the demonstrator's in-

structions, and have not really been hypnotised at all.

What of Science Fiction readers? I believe that the average reader accepts hypnotism as he accepts atomic power-drive, and hyperspace—something conducive to his enjoyment as a reader, but not really true—at least not yet. For Hypnotism has crept into Science Fiction so that today it is an integral part of many plots. It is apparent that some authors are well acquainted with the theory and *rationale* of hypnosis, and use the theme advisedly and well; some overstep the bounds of possibility as we know it today—but this is quite in order, as they write of the Future; and Hypnotism, *as a Science*, may be said to be only in its infancy.

It is true that hypnotism has been known to Mankind from the earliest days of recorded History, and presumably before that, in various guises and under various names ranging from veneration to opprobrium in meaning. Sleep of the Gods, healing of Imhoptep, Wizardry, Spell-binding, Entrancing, the Evil Eye—these are some of the terms variously applied to Hypnotism through the ages; and it is also patent that many of the legends and Fairy-tales of our youth have been inspired by the power which today is recognised by that name. Practically all the evil supernatural characters in such tales have the power of "casting spells" and immobilising their victims in a trance-like sleep. We may smile, in our

adult superiority, at the legend of the Princess falling into a trance upon pricking her finger, as foretold by the evil Fairy—but such an occurrence may quite easily be brought about by using post-hypnotic suggestion on an hypnotic subject!

In a precisely similar way, the disciples of Science smiled upon the children of Superstition who were credulous enough to believe still in the power of the spellbinders, the Mesmerists and hypnotists. Too busy proving the physical laws of the universe, and the fascinating hows and wherefores of their own bodies, as well as finding applications for their discoveries, the Scientists and Medicos dismissed the possibility of hypnotism into the same category as that of the Philosopher's Stone and many another fetish of the Necromancer, Astrologer, and Wild Medicine Man.

Some indeed did stop and wonder, and some stepped aside to explore, either from a desire to investigate a thesis so fascinating, or a determination to scotch, once and for all, an assumption so ridiculous.

Of these wayfarers, some returned to confront their unbelieving scientific brethren with what they believed to be unassailable facts of astonishing import. Their statements were greeted with derision, their veracity questioned, their sanity doubted, by the adherents of orthodoxy. Those who were persistent in their claims of the reality and benefits of hypnotism were unceremoniously booted from the brotherhood of scientific society, and left to pursue their investigations in secrecy and ignominy, if they so willed.

Fortunately, some *did* so will; and Truth, by its very nature, is a hard thing to suppress; so that today a long list of eminent and impeccable names can vouch for the authenticity of the phenomena of Hypnosis. By far their greater number is made up of Continental names, but one or two British investigators must happily be included; Braid, who invented the word Hypnotism in favour of Mesmerism; Elliottson; and Esdaile, a Scottish surgeon, among them. Even among these scientific investigators, however, opinions for many years differed sharply. Two opposing schools of thought arose upon the Continent; that of Salpêtrière, under M. Charcot, and that of Nancy, under Liebeault, who first convinced, and subsequently named among his disciples, Professor Bernheim; who had been bitterly opposed to hypnotic treatment. Like many another of his kind, Professor Bernheim attended a demonstration of hypnotism with the avowed intention of exposing a fraud, and stayed to marvel and to be converted, and to investigate still further the possibilities of this unique phenomenon.

Susceptibility to hypnotic influence is an inherent trait of Mankind. This susceptibility ranges in degree from those who are hardly affected at all, to people who are extremely susceptible and can enter the deepest stages of trance with great ease at the first induction.

No weird, occult, or magnetic power is possessed by the hypnotist. This does not by any means signify that almost anyone could become a successful hypnotist. A hypnotist must possess certain attributes which may be summed

up as, "Personality;" certain traits which command the attention, respect, and faith of the subject.

Contrary to popular belief, intelligent and strong willed people make the best subjects—providing that they can be persuaded to collaborate with the operator.

Under hypnosis, the organic functions of the subject may be controlled to a remarkable degree. The action of the heart may be advanced or retarded. The sweat glands may be caused to function at the command of the operator, and rigidity of the limbs or the whole body induced by suggestion. Analgesia is a feature of certain stages of the trance state, when the subject feels no pain; and a recent newspaper account tells of a major operation being performed by using hypnotism when the physical condition of the patient precluded anaesthetics. Incidentally, this is not by any means a new technique, as any serious student of hypnotism knows.

One of the most curious phenomena of the hypnotic technique, and perhaps one of the most important from the aspect of hypnotism as a healer, is the Post Hypnotic Effect. Very briefly, it means that suggestions made by the hypnotist may be carried over into the waking state. The effect is not apparent during the trance state of the subject, who on being awakened has no recollection of the suggestions having been given; yet when a suitable stimulus is applied—this may be almost anything, such as the hypnotist snapping his fingers, coughing, lighting a cigarette, and so on—the patient, although now

fully awake, will carry out the command given him while he was in the trance. When asked to give a reason for these actions, he will invariably try to give a rational reason for his behaviour.

One hears much of hypnotism being dangerous to the subject. Certainly, like any art, science, or vocation, it should never be practised unless the operator has a complete knowledge of his work; but in the hands of an experienced operator, fully versed in the theory and practice of his subject, such danger is absolutely non-existent. Some hypnotists have hypnotised thousands of people without a single case of adverse results; and similarly some people have been hypnotised scores of times without experiencing a single ill effect.

Now for a little known fact which eventually, I believe, will have a most profound effect upon the future of hypnotism: it is not essential that a subject should be able to enter the deeper trance states in order that beneficial suggestions become effective. Experiments have definitely proven that the lighter stages of hypnosis, wherein the patient never loses consciousness of his surroundings, and is at all times aware of what the hypnotist is saying, are nevertheless sufficient to effect a cure.

If this short article has spread some light, however feeble, among Nebula readers—who are, I believe, an intelligent and enquiring representation of Science Fiction fans, seeking the best in the field—I am gratified. . . . and if you would like more facts, a fuller exposition, of Hypnotism—write your Editor and demand them! He will be glad to co-operate!



GUIDED MISSIVES



Letters to the Editor

Dear Ed.: I noticed Wait Willis's review of Alpha in Nebula No. 11 which was very complimentary, but not wholly correct.

Walt refers to us as "two young Belgians," but I hasten to correct him that, although I have lived in Belgium practically all my life, I am not truly a Belgian. I was born in Gateshead-on-Tyne of an English mother and Belgian father. Nevertheless, apart from about seven or eight years in England, my actual home has always been in Belgium, so perhaps he's not so wrong after all.

I'm not so young either. As a matter of fact, I celebrated my 39th birthday last Sunday. However, I shall not bore you with such gruesome details, but shall try to give you my opinion on NEBULA.

"THE YUPE" was an amusing little tale and certainly an amusing gadget. I was a little disappointed, though, in seeing the old "Atomic-power-fearing-Super-Race" question cropping up again.

"THE TRESPASSERS" was good. Apparently Bob Shaw has a rather low opinion of the war-like humans, and not without reason I should say. The guy that labelled Mars "the planet of War" must have shuffled the cards a little, I think.

I have not read any of Eric Frank Russell's stories for a long time, and looked forward to reading "BOOMERANG." I wasn't disappointed, either.

"THE WORLD IN EXILE" was another flying saucer tale. It's been done before. Perhaps it would be a good idea to send some of these stories to the various would-be world rulers and military Chiefs-of-Staff.

"OPERATION MARS" was the best thing in the issue. Ted Tubb writes a very good story usually, and this was no exception. I liked the idea of the stranded colony on Mars miscalculating the time they spent waiting for the supply ship, being as they based their calculations on earth days.

The features were also very good, especially the film-reviews. On the whole, a very good issue.

DAVE VENDELMANS,
Antwerp, Belgium.

Dear Sir: I guess your proof readers slipped up on the most recent (No. 10) edition of NEBULA, and I think it spoils the mag's good reputation to have errors and slips such as there are in this issue.

Now, having got over my "beef," I'll throw an orchid or two.

I found the neat, logical conclusion to "FINAL CURTAIN" very well written. Quite frankly, I can't see any other way for it to finish.

That final excellent twist in "BY NEEDLE AND THREAD" certainly kept me guessing to the end.

Clothier's magnificent cover. Need I say more?

1. **Plausibility :** The essential quality of all fiction lies in its promotion of "suspension of disbelief" in the reader, whether it is the sloppiest of love stories or the hardest of realism. If the fantasy is too fantastic to be possible, let alone probable, whatever persuasions of the possibility are put forward, one just disbelieves it; it becomes silly. The most interesting of scientific fiction, to me, anyway, is the kind which is only a little way outside things-as-they-are or possible-here-and-now. E. C. Tubb's **OPERATION MARS** goes beyond the limits of the possible only in the assumption that the atmosphere of that planet is humanly breathable and could support human life for more than a few minutes.

The result of the Foll on the stories in this number will appear in NEBULA No. 14.

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PEN FRIENDS

THE Pen Friend Service which advertised in previous issues of Nebula, apologise to those readers who have not yet received a reply to their enquiry. The number of answers to these advertisements was so great that it was impossible to give them the prompt reply intended, but replies will be despatched to every applicant as soon as possible.

MISCELLANEOUS

HELP the younger generation to appreciate good science-fiction by sending your old s-f books to the H. G. Wells Club, 3 School St., Witton-le-Waer, Co. Durham.

HYPNOTIST, Psychological, Scientific; No hocus-pocus. All interested (Newcastle area) any way whatever write Nebula Box E.

SCIENCE-FICTION pocket books and magazines for exchange. Write for list—A. Clark, Theddlethorpe, Mablethorpe.

"THE ABYSS" by OJB, book for decade.

WHY not brighten up your party by having a film show in your own home? Moderate prices; all kinds of films. Glasgow and Lanarkshire only. Nebula Box A.

That seems to be in flat contradiction to known facts. Otherwise the story is plausible enough. Space-suits would have made it fully satisfying. A good many of the monsters and unearthly creatures imagined by writers of scientific fiction are anatomically and in almost every other way just flatly impossible, seldom more so than when they are emotionally anthropomorphised as well. For plausibility in fantasy one thinks of Wells' Selenites and the unknown deep-sea extra-terrestrial invaders in "The Kraken Wakes."

2. Characterisation: Since human beings are involved in the adventures and dangers, it is essential that the human characters should talk and behave as if they were flesh-and-blood human beings and not as if they were dummies put in as part of the scene props. And their talk and behaviour must be in keeping with the parts they play. If we are to expect and believe in the intelligence and learning of a top-notch engineer or physicist, for example, he must not talk and behave as if he were a stupid, emotional lout with a Hollywood vocabulary, and his presumably carefully selected fellows and crew must not consist of foul-mouthed oafs and dumb mechanics incapable of doing anything without military-type orders and supervision. Women are so utterly out of place in space-travel that they hardly ever make themselves more than incredible and silly when dragged in as a story element.

3. Style: It may be due to irrational prejudice on my part, but what is called, I believe, the "American slant" in wording, both narrative and dialogue, is intensely distasteful to me. Nor do I think American scientists and first-rate engineers have much special slant in their language and behaviour. It is merely a national accent. I have met a few and they talk like decent, cultured, intelligent Englishmen, and not like New York gangsters or Mid-West Babbits. To make the dialogue of English scientists and engineers sound faintly like schoolboys who have seen too many Hollywood films is, to me, as nauseating as the imitation Yank slant in the voices of Cockney dance band crooners. What I call "Yank English"—spelling "through" as "thru," and "wise-cracking" in narrative or dialogue—affects me as badly as the Communist trick of condensing titles into single hybrid words from two or three originally separate words. English composition is flexible, and the English vocabulary is rich enough for any English writer to say what he wants to say in crisp, effective, readable prose without borrowing tricks and deformities from America.

4. Scientific Content: Too many stories are very little more than hackneyed plots lifted from crime, Western and similar fiction magazines and used as the skeletons on which pseudoscience and engineering jargon constitute the flesh—the fat and flabby flesh. It isn't good enough to re-hash a stale whodunit in a space-ship setting

Forry says thanks

—for the—

kind co-operation from a reader, Charles Eric Maine, who also happens to be the playwright of a forthcoming scientifilm who writes:—

"Dear 4e: Seeing a mention from you in the current issue of NEBULA, I thought you might like the latest gen on the TIME SLIP film. The film goes on the studio floor on Jan. 31. Lead part is Gene Nelson, with Faith Domergue (of **This Island Earth**—Fja) co-star-ring. Title has been changed by the distributors to THE ISOTOPE MAN. Story is of atomic research and murder with a curious mental aberration in murder victim, who is brought back to life by an adrenalin injection, which makes him answer questions before they are asked. He is about 5 seconds ahead in time. A novel based on the same theme will be published shortly after the release of the film."

FORREST J. ACKERMAN.

and call it scientific fiction. It remains a stale whodunit!

Nor can I raise the slightest interest in a women's magazine love story just because the heroine wears the latest model in space-suits and her boy friend is alleged to be a scientist instead of a car salesman. The fiction is the vehicle in which the main freight is a scientific possibility in scientific fiction. I may be exceptional, but I should like to have the scientific factor so strong and prominent that I was informed and instructed as well as entertained. Little touches can do it! Again I cite Tubb's **OPERATION MARS**: the Martian polar ice caps were frozen salt water. I believe they are probably frozen gas with a high carbon-dioxide content. But they could be water, and if so are quite plausibly salt.

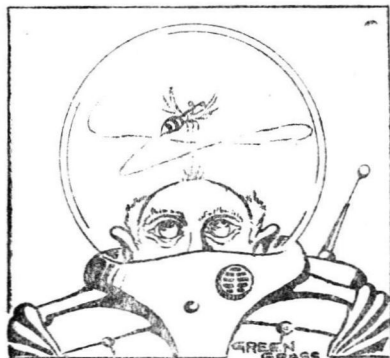
He does not mention the lichenous grey markings which appear to be seasonal.

Too long winded, am I? Oh, well . . .

W. H. CAZLY,

Huntingdonshire.

* Authors who want to win the 1955 NEBULA AWARD announced in this issue take note!



Dear Mr. Hamilton,

The statistics published following your recent Survey are very interesting, but I think that a couple of conclusions reached by Mr. Mackenzie are out of order.

For instance, the non-existent "Imagination" was the cause of several exclusions. This is hardly fair as one does not expect "catch" titles, and to the avid s.f. reader, who reads almost everything he can get, the title sounds a distinct probability.

Surely one will remember most vividly the name of a magazine one will certainly not buy again. Next come the "musts."

Also, just how does Mr. Mackenzie decide what is an impossibly large number of magazines to read in three months? I happen to be a very quick reader, and over a quiet week-end with no distractions, half-a-dozen s.f. mags. will be metaphorically devoured. For me, the problem used to be the disposal of used copies until I found a bookstall that encourages "swapping."

Again readers had to vote on all five British mags. This again I consider out of order. If you remember, the "British s.f. Magazine" was first introduced as the Vargo Statten mag. "for juveniles." With such a description, and with an editor whose novels I avoid, the magazine was one I didn't buy. Must my choice on the other four thus be ignored?

FRANK CLARE,

Bedford.

* Thanks for raising so many interesting points, Mr. Clare. Your letter has been passed to J. Stuart Mackenzie, the statistician who conducted our Survey, and we hope to publish his replies to these and ques-

tions from other readers in our next issue.

Dear Mr. Hamilton: I have just finished reading NEBULA 10 and take the opportunity to comment.

The Clothier cover was really excellent as were his covers for Nos. 7 and 9. More, please!

Turner, I thought, was most successful in the inside, but Hunter is definitely weak. How about more Greengrass, Steele, Miller and particularly Turner who is really good?

"PROJECT STARSHIP" was very good—far better than I thought Syd Bounds could do. "FINAL CURTAIN" was nicely macabre as was "BY NEEDLE AND THREAD." "THE MARRIAGE PROMPTERS" was good, but not particularly original. "CLOSING TIME" was not equal to Ted Tubb's best, but was still very good. "ANACHRONISM" didn't quite succeed, I thought, although it could have been very good.

The Departments were satisfactory but don't let them take any more space. The cartoon wasn't bad, but don't you think that in general they only lower the tone of the magazine?

If many of your readers are like me, they won't relish hacking out the ballot form and defacing an excellent magazine, so couldn't you print them separately and just have the slip of paper somewhere in the mag? You would probably get a great many more replies that way!

Don't lower the price, don't go monthly yet and don't let up a bit. There's still competition from some other s.f. magazines.

I like the policy of encouraging the new authors, but don't overdo it. Ennis and Humphrys had a freshness of style that was attractive but too great a proportion of such stuff could pall. You seem to have achieved a genuineness and friendly atmosphere that is most enjoyable.

Are you ashamed of your circulation figures? How about letting the readers share your undoubted pleasure in seeing them grow?

All the best and may NEBULA go as far in the next ten issues as it has in the first.

PETER JEFFERSON,
Sydney, Australia.

* Thanks for all your interesting comments on NEBULA, Peter. I am glad you approve of my Editorial Policy. I'm sorry I can't have a ballot form printed and inserted in the magazine like a leaflet, this would be rather expensive, but I hope everyone will use the Form printed in this issue to help their favourite author win the 1955 NEBULA Award.

I am sorry, too, that I cannot print the exact sales figures for NEBULA. By the time you read the circulation figures in any one issue, they would probably have doubled themselves again by the next, anyway!

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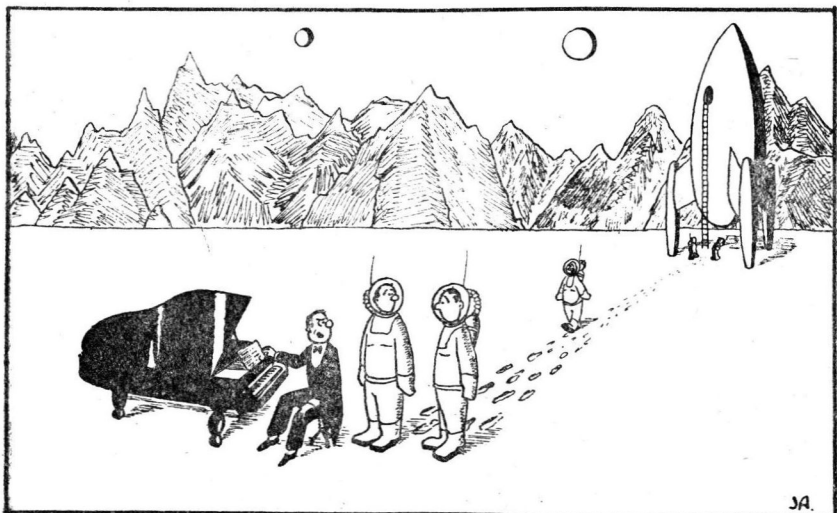
LOOK HERE—Continued from page 2.

As each author's percentage figure for an issue is merely added to the next when the author in question appears more than once in the year it is obviously to the advantage of each writer not only to send his best stories to me, but to give me a wide range to choose from.

Now, what will all this mean to the ordinary reader, who has no ambitions to become a writer himself? It means that he will have a greater say through his Preference Vote than ever before in the type of story chosen to be printed in his favourite magazine. It means that there will be an even bigger choice of first-class story material available to me when I select what is to appear in any issue and consequently that each issue is going to be even more enjoyable than before. Finally, this contest will ensure that all the British authors who count will try even harder than previously to write their best when they write for *Nebula*, because of the great boost in prestige involved in winning this "1955 *Nebula Award*." In short, this whole scheme has been devised so that YOU, the regular reader of *Nebula* will have something even better to look forward to every two months in this magazine.

This is the first time a British science-fiction magazine has made such a gesture both to its readers and the writing fraternity and I want to urge you to help to make it successful, at the same time assisting us to print the kind of stories you enjoy most, by completing the Ballot Form on page 123 now.

Peter Hamilton



"I might ask the same question!"

New Worlds to Conquer

IN THE

BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE



Editor—VARGO STATTEN

New Size • Increased Contents • Fully Illustrated

Designed for the countless thousands of readers who discovered the pleasures of Science Fiction through the novels of VARGO STATTEN, whose book sales in Britain last year were nearly 250,000 copies.

It is the aim of the Editor to offer all that is best in science fiction and to appeal to the vast public who want their stories in this category to be couched in easily understandable language and told in a truly entertaining manner. Contributors to date include E. C. Tubb, Vargo Statten, Volsted Gridban, F. Dubrez Fawcett, J. Barrington Bayley, Morley Carpenter, Frank Bussey and many new Science Fiction authors who will ultimately become household words, or so we believe!

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