

# NEBULA

BI-MONTHLY

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## SCIENCE FICTION

NUMBER 15



VOTED BRITAIN'S TOP SCIENCE-FICTION MAGAZINE

# SORRY...



## ... It's past your bedtime !!

The Atomic Mutation from the film "The Day The World Ended" pleads with the star of the picture, Lori Nelson, and the beast's tamer, Forrest J. Ackerman, for a look at NEBULA.

Inside the monster suit, constructed at a reported cost of several thousand dollars, is science-fiction artist, Paul Blaisdell, whom Ackerman manages. We note he also manages to get next to some good-looking girls—and, of course, Britain's top science-fiction magazine!

# NEBULA

## SCIENCE FICTION

Edited by PETER HAMILTON

Issue Number Fifteen

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# Look here . . .

The first story in this issue is something of a landmark, both in the career of its author, Bob Shaw, and of NEBULA itself. Back in August, 1954, we printed a story called "Aspect" by a then unknown author who has since made a very big name for himself in British science fiction writing. This story created such a stir among NEBULA readers at the time that, at their suggestion, I asked Bob to write a sequel to "Aspect," keeping the new story complete in itself and here is the result—"Sounds in the Dawn," another really off-trail yarn. How about *another* sequel, Bob?

Among the shorter stories I think I have given you just about something of everything—"In Loving Memory," another fine "human interest" story by ever-popular James White; "The Green Hills of Earth," one of science fiction's all-time classics by that top American writer, Robert A. Heinlein, which story contravenes my "no reprints" policy, but I am sure you will agree that it is well worth while for all that; "The Artifact," another first story by a new NEBULA discovery—perhaps not science fiction at its orthodox best—but lots of fun and a refreshing contrast to the usual serious type of yarn; and lastly among the short stories, "Birthday Star," another vivid atmosphere piece by David Irish, contrasting the brute force of future humanity (with which we are all too used in this military age of ours) with the beauty and innocence of their mutant enemies.

Finally, we have a long story with a novel conception of society as it may evolve on a planet in the process of being colonised and opened up. This, for me, is science fiction at its best—convincing human characters etched against a credible future background—and written in a masterly fashion by that most prolific of good science fiction authors, E. C. Tubb. I understand that Mr. Tubb is to assume the post of Editor with a rival science fiction magazine and, while congratulating him upon his appointment, I trust that we can go forward together with the "British and proud of it" policy which I myself have supported virtually alone for so long.

The next edition of NEBULA will contain the results of the 1955 NEBULA Author's Award which was announced in our Twelfth issue in April and I would like to thank all those readers who have completed and sent their Ballot Forms to me each time, and, by so doing, have made the presentation of this award assume significance.

# Sounds In The Dawn

*When told to act spontaneously it is sometimes very difficult to comply. Occasionally, however, it becomes surprisingly easy*

*Illustrated by Harry Turner*

Jennings felt cold.

He awoke, shivering and covered with goose flesh, lying on his back on the metal floor several feet away from the *Panther's* forward vision screen. He had jagged memory fragments of seeing something green and bright expanding in the screen, turning towards it, and then . . . this chilled awakening.

When he sat up he saw that the other two of the *Panther's* crew, Keene and Davies, were sprawled out beside him. Keene was snoring unpleasantly.

Without trying to waken them he stood up and he knew that, at last, their trouble had come, for the ship was no longer in flight and the screens and all other mechanisms had been deactivated while he was unconscious. He stared for a moment at the black, lifeless screen feeling a strange sort of relief, almost an elation that the running was over.

It had been his own idea to run for home but he had hated it just the same. Jennings rubbed his shoulders feeling the icy draught that circled the control room, spun on his heel and went into the antelock. The airlock door was wide open.

Jennings had not been cold for years, and his body stirred deliciously, remembering other times when he *had* been cold. He felt another attack of his nostalgia coming on.

The *Panther* was lying on the pitted floor of a hangar that must have been built to house a ship a thousand times larger. The rusted floor stretched off into the distance to meet massive stanchions, backed by steel plate walls, that climbed into a misty webwork of trusses and bracing far above.

At the end of the hangar beyond the *Panther's* needle pointed prow was a double leaf door so high that the engines which opened and closed it were only vaguely seen in the frosty light that filtered down through the roof lights. Through countless chinks and unfilled rivet holes in the structure came the same cold whiteness that made Jennings remember silent frosty dawns back on the Earth of his boyhood. It was impossible to see out of the hangar but Jennings filled in a landscape from his memory—it would serve until he found out what *was* out there.

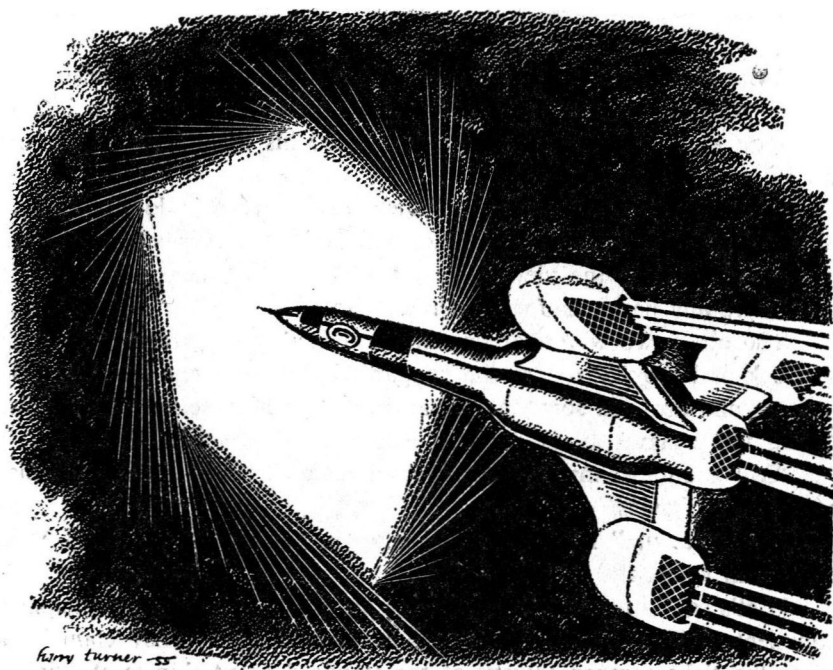
There were sounds in the hangar. From all around came the thousand furtive noises of a huge building that is in use. Jennings jumped a little as a sudden roar that could have been an animal cry or the crash of distant machinery boomed around the distant perimeters, the original sound lost in the echoing variations sounded on a thousand metal surfaces. The sound was repeated several times while Jennings stood there.

At last he got too cold to stand any longer and he went back into the control room. Davies and Keene were staring at him as he entered and he realised that, having wakened and found that he was gone, they had not been sure what was coming along the corridor. He grinned at the idea.

Keene seemed to brighten up when he saw the smile. "What is . . . ah . . . I see you brought the ship down all right. Was it . . .?" He left it there, obviously waiting to be told that he was a silly clot for letting a bad dream frighten him and that it was time for breakfast.

Davies said nothing. He stood uneasily, looking pale and worried.

Jennings shook his head and the lights in Keene's eyes dimmed. "As you both know, although the subject is not considered polite conversation round here, in order to take off from the last planet we surveyed we were forced to blow up a mountain which we later deduced to be pretty important to members of another civilization. In fact, they had built a place near there just so that they could watch the sun rise behind the mountain. We ran away, and when we had been running for



a few weeks we began to recover our confidence and it all seemed very silly. We even got so that we never mentioned the thing—if our reports weren't on file in the ship's log we would have kept quiet when we reached home again.

"Well, we were right the first time! They have us, and don't ask me what comes next." Jennings began to feel selfconscious, aware of the uncharacteristic role he had taken upon himself. He groped for a cigarette.

Keene's eyes dulled even further and his jaw dropped as he seemed to withdraw into himself. Davies stooped and gathered a lock of his hair from the floor where it had fallen when Keene was trimming it for him. "The green light we saw," he said, "that must have been some form of matter-transmitting device. . ."

Jennings had forgotten the green light. "You're probably right," he replied. "They must have been able to form the green thing in front of the ship, we passed through it and were instantaneously transmitted to some place that they had prepared for us. As well as that they

knocked us out . . . and who knows? I think they must have been in here."

Davies glanced all around him and grinned, showing his crossed-over teeth. "Good job my hair was finished. First impressions are important, you know." He frowned as he noticed his breath hanging in the gelid air of the control room.

"The lock's open," explained Jennings. "Have a look outside." Keene and Davies went out to the lock and there was a long silence while they took in the view. Jennings went after them wondering if there were any heavy uniforms in the lockers.

The other two were standing in the dismal light streaming through the lock and looking out at the hangar. Davies put one hand outside the ship and dropped some of his hair on to the floor several feet below. "I claim this planet in the name of Earth," he said sourly.

"My goodness, my *goodness!*" commented Keene, looking his disapproval at Davies.

"Ah, shut up," Davies said, "I suppose you think we should have read them a passage from . . ."

"Let's eat," interrupted Jennings in an effort to prevent the incipient argument. "It's too cold to stand around here." They clambered along the tight companionways of the standard scout ship to the living space and Davies opened the larder.

A flood of red light washed over his face, with a frightening suddenness, coming from something inside the larder and Davies leapt back, his mouth contorted with shock. Jennings was unable to see what had caused the crimson effulgence but he stepped back, feeling his heart lash out against his ribs.

Davies got control of himself almost at once and Jennings, noticing that, moved over beside him to see into the big cupboard. The shelves had been stripped of all the food they had contained and, sitting on the centre shelf, was a foot square sheet of metal which sat upright on small brackets. The surface of it was shining with the red light that had startled Davies so much.

"What is it?" Davies asked, repairing his composure. Keene put his hand forward to touch the object, thought better of it and drew back.

"Better not touch," agreed Jennings, trying to think of an explanation for its presence in their larder. He abandoned that train of thought as things began to happen to the shining plate. The light flickered once or twice and then words in white letters appeared on the surface. They were in English:—

## YOU ARE TO UNDERGO A TEST.

The words were visible for about half a second then they vanished. Jennings was just beginning to comprehend when fresh words appeared:

## THE FOLLOWING IS AN INDICATION OF THE NATURE OF THE TEST.

These words also flicked out of existence as soon as they had appeared and Jennings felt a surge of panic as he realised that he was getting behind with his comprehension. *Concentrate*, he told himself and, immediately a flood of extraneous thoughts swept into his mind. What was Denise doing back home at this exact instant? How far was home? How long would . . . ?

## YOU ARE HERE, NOT BECAUSE OF THE DAMAGE YOU DID, BUT BECAUSE YOU WERE AFRAID AFTERWARDS.

Again the words were gone before their sense had begun to reach Jennings. What does that mean? a voice shouted inside his head. What sort of an indication is that? He felt sweat breaking out on his forehead.

## THE FOLLOWING ARE THE TEST INSTRUCTIONS.

Get this and get it good, Jennings told himself.

## REACT.

There was just the one word, and then the light faded from the square. It became an ordinary piece of polished sheet metal.

At last Jennings' mind threw off its paralysis and he began to think coherently. He took Davies and Keene by the elbows, guided them over to the table shelf at the other side of the living space and lifted pencils and paper from below the spring clips that held them in place in case the ship went into null-gravity at short notice. Jennings tore off sheets from the block and handed some to the others.

"Write down the sentences you just saw. Don't look at anybody else's sheets. Just put down what *you* remember." They stared at him for a second then got the idea and went to work.

When the sheets were compared they all said the same thing except that on the third one Keene had printed "harm" instead of "damage."

The conference was about to begin.

The unusually large number of cigarettes that he had smoked on an empty stomach was beginning to make Jennings feel slightly sick. Keene was sitting at the blank screens, he rose and took his box of cinnamon stalks from a drawer. The fragrant blue smoke dispersed itself

through the control room, riding on the icy draughts from the open airlock which Jennings had been unable to close. The aliens had evidently fixed it that way.

Light, quick footsteps in the corridor outside announced that Davies was returning. "The food's all gone," he said, entering the room restlessly flipping and catching his flashlight. "I checked all the lockers and the refrigerated hull compartments—there isn't a bean or a capsule or a coffee cube in the ship. They've cleaned us out." He slapped the light down on a shelf, sat down tiredly and began to worry a wart on his left hand.

"That's to shove us into the test," Jennings remarked. "We won't be able to stall too long without food, drink or heat."

"Test?" snorted Davies. "What chance would you have at school if you were sitting an exam and you were handed a question paper which just said, 'What is the answer?' on it? That's what has happened to us." Davies' face brightened suddenly. "Maybe that is the test," he said excitedly. "Maybe we are expected to realise that the test can't be done and refuse to do anything."

Keene raised his head from the notes of the alien message and stared reproachfully at Davies. "My goodness, Grenville," he said, "there's a *time* for jokes."

"Things aren't just as bad as you suggested," Jennings said. "We have *some* information about the test. I know that it is apparently useless but we should be able to figure something out. If the people that we are dealing with are so far ahead of us probably they are equally far advanced in their use of language."

Davies glanced around for his copy of the notes, failed to see them and snatched the ones that Keene was scrutinising. Ignoring Keene's startled grunt he turned to the last sheet and glanced at it. "Look at that," he said, pointing with one crooked finger. "What good is it? 'React.' What else would you do? I think we've been captured by a bunch of morons that escaped from the rest of the alien civilization."

"But supposing," Jennings said seriously, speaking mainly to Keene, "that their ethics and moral codes were so far developed that a whole page of conditions and injunctions that we would consider to be necessary would, by them, be considered superfluous. One word might imply to them what we would take a thousand to say."

Keene frowned. "I don't know if the spiritual development of a race would . . . ah . . . be so accurately reflected by . . . ah . . . mere grammar."

"I didn't say anything about spiritual development," Jennings replied impatiently. "I'm talking about this civilization's mores. I mean that in the twentieth century public gardens they used to have notices telling people to stay off the grass and not to steal or destroy the flowers. We don't need things like that now. The fact that the flowers and lawns are put there for the public benefit contains, inherent and implied in itself, the injunctions to treat them properly.

"These aliens might be a lot nearer to the ideal of Plato's *Republic* than we are."

"The hell with this," interrupted Davies rising to his feet. "I'm going to have another look at the hangar." He went out, moving lightly and silently. Jennings considered asking him to stay and then thought better of it. Davies never talked properly about anything but his astrogating and warp plotting.

"What I mean is that the use of language is not always a sign of spiritual advancement," continued Keene obstinately, from the point where he had left off. "Just look at the Bible . . . ah . . . most of us still prefer to use the old version. The old tongue is more reverent, so . . . ah . . . I don't agree with you in what you said."

Jennings fought the despair that suddenly gripped him. "That's nothing to do with the thing I'm talking about. I mean that when they say 'react,' they mean us to think our way out, to be intelligent and honest and brave. To do what they would do in the same position."

Keene gave one of his laboured laughs. "The aliens aren't *men*!"

An eruption of anger cramped Jennings' hands into fists and he stood up feeling the familiar cold sickness in his stomach. "What put men into your head," he demanded, "when I mentioned intelligence and honesty and bravery? And, anyway, what has . . .?"

"Come out to see this," rapped Davies in an urgent whisper from the door. Jennings had not heard him returning along the corridor and the sudden sound made him jump.

"What is it?" he asked.

Davies' voice was thick and loaded with his native Martian accent when he answered. "There's some of the aliens outside looking at the ship!"

Surely this isn't right, Jennings thought, as he followed Davies along the corridor to the antelock. If they are giving us a test they shouldn't show themselves because that would be sure to influence the result in

some way. Or had that been taken into consideration? The idea faded from Jennings' mind as he stepped into the antelock, crossed to the actual lock door and looked out into the hangar.

The quality of the light hadn't changed, he noted, in the two hours since they had awakened. It was still misty, frosty dawn outside the distant steel walls, and the harsh light that streamed down from the roof lay like a coating of rime on the upper contours of the creatures who silently watched the *Panther*.

They made Jennings feel afraid.

Each was about five feet high and shaped roughly like a five-pointed star. They stood upright on two of the points, two were approximately in the same position as human arms and the fifth appeared to be the head. They were too far away for Jennings to discern whether there were eyes or other organs in the head, for the whole of the aliens' bodies were covered with sleek black fur. Their bodies were flat, looked to be incredibly strong and each one seemed to be criss-crossed with coloured braids.

Jennings counted six of them standing about a hundred feet from the ship and then he noticed that, just in front of the aliens was a faintly luminous line on the brown scarred floor of the hangar. It described an arc which, from what could be seen of it, seemed to extend away to the right and left to form a complete circle around the ship.

Jennings noted that none of the aliens had tried to cross the dimly glowing circle, that all were outside.

Davies, who could not have stopped for a proper look when he first discovered the aliens, began to whisper swear words. For once Keene did not seem to notice. His big, deeply lined face was stiff and pale with cold. The cold and something like fear. Jennings wondered briefly if the fear was for his personal safety or for his beliefs.

For a time they watched the aliens who moved silently and restlessly, leaving the narrow field of view and then reappearing again. Jennings was unable to tell whether those of the creatures that were coming into sight were the same ones over and over again, or whether there was a ring of them all round the *Panther*.

He watched them moving with their curious swaying gait trying to learn something from them, anything at all. There was no question of leaving the shelter of the ship—that would come later, Jennings told himself.

One of the unidentifiable multiple sounds roared out, fading away reluctantly in the vastness of the hangar. It caused a slight stir among

the aliens.

"Do you think they've seen us yet?" asked Davies in a low voice.

"Could be," replied Jennings. "But I don't think that we'll be able to tell anything about what they are thinking from their actions. They will be alien. We won't be . . ."

"Look at that one!"

One of the black-furred stars, apparently motivated by the booming echoes, had wandered back from the line of the others. It seemed to notice the *Panther* quite suddenly, although it had been looking fixedly at the ship for the previous ten minutes, and came swaying back at a fair speed. On reaching the others it stopped grotesquely and seemed to fold in on itself, backing away from the line again. The alien then seemed to lose interest in the whole proceedings and wobbled away out of the field of view.

The others remained facing the ship, silent and essentially strange. So many black pentagrams limned on their upper edges with frosty light, against a flat misty backdrop of rusted columns and shallow, sloping metal stairs. So many ciphers. Black fists raised against Man's advance among the stars . . . ?

"Let's go inside," Jennings suggested, feeling the need to withdraw into the safe metallic cocoon of the ship.

The view screens had been deactivated at the seeing panels themselves, at the main junctions in the control room and at the hyper-electric generators in the rear of the ship. As he turned the screens back on after the longish job of repowering them, Jennings wondered how long it had taken the aliens to figure out the principle of the ship's wiring.

When the picture appeared and automatically focussed itself he sat down beside Davies and Keene. They looked for a minute at the towering sliding doors that were visible in the vicarious window of the forward screen. Jennings scanned the view then leaned forward and pointed at two vertical lines rising from the floor at the left of the doors.

"There they are," he said. He read off the coordinates of the lines from the markings on the screen and tapped them out on the keys of the selector at the bottom. When he twisted the magnification control the picture ballooned and flowed off the edges of the screen. The visual pickups in the hull, obeying the dictates of the selector, kept the vertical lines in the centre of the field of view, until, when the increase had ceased, they filled the panel.

"Okay," said Davies, "that must be the levers that operate the doors. We see that. Go ahead from there."

"All right then. This test now. The instruction was to 'react.' I think that that means us to size up the situation and react to it in the way most natural and honest to us. We have to open the doors and take off for home."

"What else could we do?" asked Keene frowning.

"We could get to work and try to start the engines to slide up to the doors—we *might* be able to do it. Or we could break out the semi-portable and scatter those aliens, then run for the doors. Or blow out the doors themselves from here."

"But I think we should just walk out—without fear—and open the doors."

"Is *that* all?" Davies queried.

"That's enough," Jennings replied, suddenly aware how flimsy it all seemed, "you know there are some who find it hard enough to walk into a crowd of strange *people*. Or maybe you wouldn't know."

"That's right," replied Davies comfortably. "I'm not afraid of people. But these starfish out there are a different proposition. How do you know that they won't jump you as soon as you go near them?"

"They've been in the ship while we were lying here. They could have killed us a hundred times over during the time we were out."

"Mmmm," Davies said reflectively. "Then in that case I'll go out and open the doors."

Jennings almost gaped. He began to object and then changed his mind, realising that he had no idea what to say. He had only a vague idea that he should have been the one to try it out—not vain, brash, *human* Davies. Also there was the third part of the aliens' message—you *are here, not because of the damage you did, but because you were afraid afterwards*. If the aliens were half the semanticists he thought they were that had a real and very great significance. The trouble was that he seemed unable to force his mind to work.

The brain can receive and assimilate a certain amount of data in a given period of time and Jennings had reached saturation point. He realised that he had all the information at hand but actually using it was one of those tantalisingly impossible tasks like extending all the fingers of the hand slowly one after each other.

The view screen, which was still focussed on the levers controlling the hangar doors, darkened suddenly as something much nearer to the ship crossed the field of view. Davies reached out and returned the

screen to its usual setting. The levers receded and more of the background crowded into the picture, and they had a glimpse of one of the aliens swaying away to the left.

"Thought that's what it was," Davies said, rising to his feet. "Well, I might as well get out there."

Jennings began to speak then stopped as two more aliens came on to the screen. He caught a glimpse of a single eye glinting in the centre of each neckless head as they watched the ship. One of them, apparently not seeing the other, walked into him and was gently shoved back. The one that had been pushed rubbed for a moment at the place on its glossy black fur where the other's tapering limb had rested. Two of the brilliantly coloured braids that criss-crossed the flat central body snapped and fell to the floor. They lay unnoticed as the aliens moved out of the picture.

When Jennings glanced around after the little scene was over Davies had left the control room and was on his way along the short corridor to the airlock.

"Pardon me," Keene said, "but . . . ah . . . you don't seem too certain that your theory is correct."

"Can anybody be certain of anything?" Jennings replied.

"Yes!" Keene's eyes grew larger and the muscles around his mouth were stiff and immobile with utter conviction as he spoke. "I have my faith."

Jennings thought for a second. "When you are certain of a thing faith doesn't come into it—you accept it. It is *real*. Faith only appears when there is doubt. How could I be certain about those things out there?"

"I think that faith appears . . . ah . . . spontaneously," argued Keene. He launched into a halting, prolonged exposition from which Jennings' mind retreated so that the sense was unable to reach him while the words drummed unrecognized on his ears.

What is Davies going into? Jennings thought in a trembling thrill of panic, racing his brain to try and grip the problem. *React*, had been the word—well, they were reacting. They had thought and they had made a decision and they were acting on it. With honesty and due deliberation and sincerity.

*Cross your heart and hope to die?*

Think! Think! THINK! It was the voice of urgency roaring in his ears while the jumbled, discordant cacophony that was the undertow of fear surged and spurted inside his head. Jennings closed his eyes and

rested his forehead in his hands. The cold seemed to be a live thing that was determined to eat its way into his flesh.

"There's Granville out in front now," said Keene. Jennings raised his eyes to the screen and watched.

Davies had his back to the screen and was walking away from the ship towards the edge of the luminous circle and the doors beyond. Jennings noted, with the same rush of affection that he had felt before, that Davies was carrying his shoulders more squarely than usual—aware that he was being watched from the ship.

On passing the glowing line Davies stooped to pick something up. It was the coloured braids that had fallen from the body of one of the aliens. Davies examined the gleaming strips, turned to bring them back to the ship and threw them down. His face was ugly with pain and the cry he had given was faint and strange as it reached Jennings circuitously by way of the open airlock. Jennings frowned as a sudden idea began to flicker somewhere in the vast hinterland beyond the port of his awareness.

Keene caught his arm and pointed at the screen.

Davies had forgotten the braids and was staring at something that was too far to the left to be seen from the ship. He glanced quickly towards the screen and they caught a glimpse of his teeth as he grinned. An unnatural grin, Jennings thought, then he was staring in cold fascination as two of the aliens appeared. They were obviously heading straight for Davies, swaying grotesquely as they walked, and for the first time, turning their narrow profiles to the ship.

Jennings tried to picture what was happening inside Davies' head and drew a blank. He felt his throat go dry.

Davies stood unmoving until the aliens had almost reached him, then he waved his hand to them in a gesture of awareness and set out towards the doors. The black pentagrams altered course slightly so as to intercept him but Davies kept his eyes to the front. Jennings began to feel horribly afraid.

When the aliens reached Davies one of them moved in fast, without any warning hint, and swung its two upper limbs in a flurry of sharp, vicious blows that cut Davies down as though every tendon in his body had been severed. The other alien circled around and folded bonelessly to a kneeling position beside Davies and began to rake at him with the single claws that had appeared on the tips of its upper limbs.

Incredibly, Davies was able to make a quick recovery. He rolled away from the tearing claws of the one on his right and tangled with the

legs of the other, knocking it off balance. The kneeling alien flopped flat on to the floor as it went after him and Jennings caught a flash of Davies' booted feet lashing into the dark body.

Davies had begun to fight like a wildcat and Jennings, frozen in his seat, suddenly remembered and believed the tales of his hard, tough childhood in the Port of Mars that Davies sometimes told. With a surge of wiry strength Davies half rose and shouldered the alien he had rolled into down on to the floor and lurched away from both of them.

Jennings only realised how badly hurt Davies was when he saw him forced to look blindly around for the ship before stumbling towards it. At that instant he realised that the struggle had not been a thing apart in another universe but something with which he was immediately concerned. He ran to the lock, cursing his own tardiness, and leapt down on to the pitted metal of the hangar. Somehow Davies had almost reached the lock on the outside and Jennings was just in time to catch him as he crumpled up.

Jennings lifted Davies' limp, bloody body and set it on the floor of the lock, looking around for the aliens as he did so. They had both risen to their feet and were staring motionlessly at the ship. They had not crossed the glowing line.

Jennings rubbed his numb, cold-stiffened fingers to bring the blood back into them and began to pack the equipment back into the medical supply box. It had taken them thirty minutes of hard, rapid work to drug Davies down to a safe level, stitch all the slashes and coat them with tissue medium.

He put the box away and turned round to see Keene staring at him with tears in his eyes. There was something else there too. Jennings decided that it was an accusation or reproach, or both. He jerked his head in enquiry, not sure of what to say.

"This should answer all the things you said about those brutes being superior to us," whispered Keene, pointing down at Davies lying in his bunk. "I know why we have been sent here now. These savages are lost in the darkest of darknesses and we should have approached them bearing light and the Word!

"You swayed me with cold, sterile reason and I was foolish enough to listen to you—but that is over. I am guarded against your sophistry now. I admit it, and I'm ashamed of it, that my faith was beginning to fail, but it is stronger than ever now."

Keene paused for breath and his eyes were shining with fervour. "I will approach these poor savages with the greatest gift of all! I will show them the way." He spun on his heel, strode to his personal locker and took his Original Bible from it and went to the door.

Jennings, who had been seeing in his mind's eye the bright braids falling from the body of the alien who had rubbed at himself, and the same strips falling from Davies' hand, caught Keene as he passed. "Don't be a fool," he said urgently. "Hold on. They'll only get you, too. "Wait, I think I'm getting . . ."

"Stay out of my way!" Keene shouted. He turned on Jennings and pushed him with all his strength. Jennings was not ready, thinking of several minor occurrences that had suddenly assumed significance, and he felt himself going down hard. The edge of a bunk drove into the small of his back and he slid sideways on to the floor, gasping noisily with pain. It was a full minute before the agony lancing up through him from the base of his spine died down enough to let him move.

He rose to his feet and ran after Keene. When he reached the lock and looked out Keene was sprawled in an awkward heap just inside the luminous ring. At least six of the aliens stood outside it staring at the limp body.

Jennings felt the slow draining of blood from his face. He caught the edges of the airlock, leaned out as far as he could reach and screamed a single swear word at the top of his voice. It echoed into the dark, frosty recesses of the hangar, causing some of the aliens to stir uneasily.

Jennings turned and ran into the interior of the ship, aware that he was taking the air into his lungs with noisy sobs but unable to prevent himself. He fumbled the lock of the armoury open and clawed one of the oil-gleaming, oil-smelling automatics from its holster nested in a coiled belt. The part of his mind that had been engulfed in his fury burst into brighter flame and he began a rhythmic repetitious swearing as his fingers checked the supply of slugs in the weapon.

Very clever, the untouched part of his brain thought, it was all there just waiting for us to work it out. Perhaps if we had been sitting in armchairs at home and had taken the problem out of a book we would have seen it sooner—but we humans get scared when we're in a jam. Our minds are inclined to run around in circles and some of us can't think at all. Some of us have the ability to think originally almost bred out of us . . .

But I get the answer now. I got an inkling when I saw the way those black brutes outside the ship seemed unable to focus their attention

on anything for very long. I put that constant loss of interest down to the natural incongruity of our frames of reference. I decided that I was reading the signs wrong through not having any previous data to go on.

I even put the careless way one of them snapped the braids around his body and let them fall without noticing down to the same thing. When Davies lifted the braids and threw them down again as he went to bring them back I would have got it if these two hadn't jumped him then. It has just occurred to me that *you* are probably telepathic—so much the better.

Get this and get it good. The braids that they are wearing out there are gadgets that prevent anything that is touching them from crossing that luminous line. If it is necessary to use force to prevent those things from coming near our ship it is obvious that they, the black furry starfish that mauled Davies and Keene, cannot be the same aliens that wandered around here while we were unconscious without harming us.

*In other words, I let Davies and Keene walk straight out and be cut to bits by a pack of savage, vicious animals that you brought from some stinking jungle!*

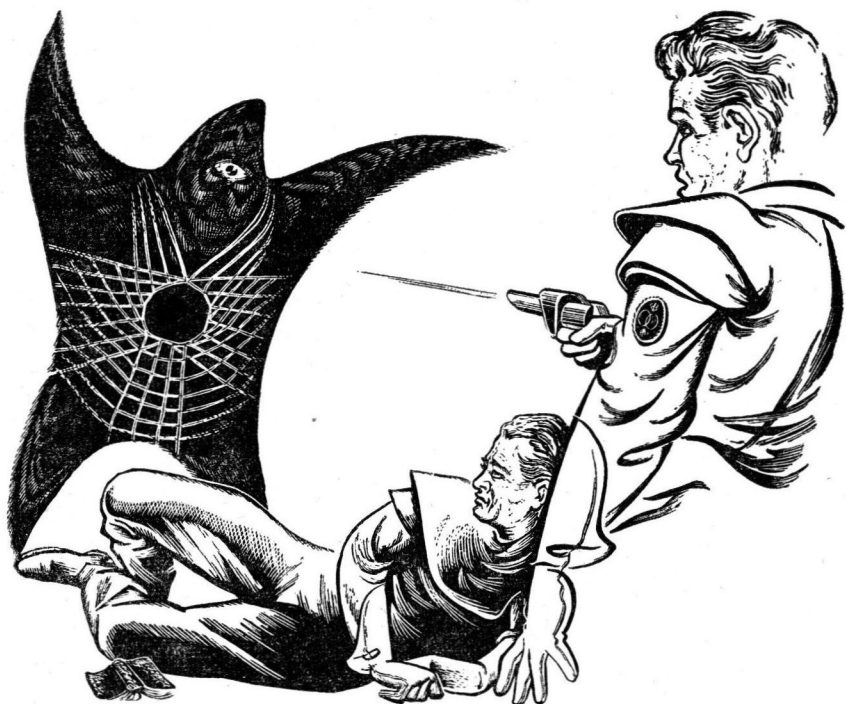
The thought lifted Jennings and threw him from the control room, loud footed and stumbling, shoulders glancing painfully from door frames, shouting curses, out to the airlock. He jumped from the rim of the lock, landing heavily with his legs apart and the automatic held ready for use.

He was on the rusted floor and striding forward before he saw that Keene was on his feet again. Keene had managed to rise in spite of the steady pulsing flow of blood from a gash on his neck. He was in the act of stepping across the glowing line, the Original Bible still in his hand, and the aliens, one of them smeared with redness, were moving in on him.

One of them suddenly bent forward in preparation for a dive at Keene, who was staggering and obviously about to go down of his own accord. Jennings straddled the automatic and started the trigger moving.

Two of the three slugs that he aimed for the alien went right through it and Jennings heard them howling away, up off the floor into the dark tangle of girders above. The alien was slammed back several yards, flapping and twisting like a fish on the hook. It skidded several feet and lay still.

Jennings ran forward throwing slugs into the group of aliens who were making the first sounds he had heard from them—a thick, slimy



gurgling from some orifice in their heads. Two of them were knocked down and one that was nicked went lumbering off across the hangar. Jennings grabbed Keene's arms and pulled him back towards the ship.

"What are you doing to them?" Keene demanded, trying to twist out of Jennings' grip. His big face was pale and almost empty of expression. Jennings kept his mouth shut and forced Keene up into the lock of the ship. Once inside Keene seemed to forget his need to speak to the aliens and became a man badly hurt. He sagged on to the floor of the lock and lay staring at the metal plating above him.

Jennings turned and ran from the *Panther* straight across the circle and towards the big doors. Twice on the way to them black pentagrams seemed to emerge from the gelid air and twice he cut them down with the automatic. He reached the levers that they had guessed to operate the doors and pulled hard on the nearest one.

The metal was so cold that he could feel his skin stick to it. The

lever refused to move until he had thrown everything he had into it and, to make it worse, his feet were unable to get a grip on the frost-covered floor. He had to leave the automatic down in order to throw the second lever. When he had done it a motor whined into life above him and the doors began to move. Somehow Jennings had lost interest in finding out what it was like beyond the doors, and he turned to run back to the ship.

It was only after several paces that he remembered having left the weapon lying on the floor at the lever. There did not seem to be any of the aliens about, although there was probably more of them in the smaller open doorways that could be seen along the perimeter of the hangar. It was almost certain that he could reach the safety of the circle before any of the aliens could reach him, but it might be better to get the automatic anyway.

Jennings turned to go back. The doors were almost fully open now and he realised, too late, that he had made a mistake.

The aliens, the *real* aliens, the ones that were conducting the test, had been out there and they were coming in towards him.

Jennings did not even get time to feel afraid, for a ball of green light flicked out at him, swallowed him and a night-black flower of unconsciousness blossomed in his brain.

The coffee was hot and strong and bitter. Jennings sipped at it slowly, letting the liquid warmth seep down into his stomach which seemed to have been cold for a thousand years. He looked for a moment at the field of red stars visible in the forward screen of the *Panther* and then at Davies.

Davies was sitting feeling the hairless patches on his arms and chest that were all that remained of the gashes he had received from the animals in the hangar. The aliens knew a lot about medicine. "I can see part of it," he said frowning, "but I don't see why they let us go after the way you went out and shot up their pet starfish. If I was putting something through a test and it came out and showed itself to be mean and dangerous I wouldn't be long stepping on it good and hard."

Jennings hesitated to speak, but when he glanced across the room to where Keene was writing in his diary he saw him give a slightly embarrassed grin, he knew then it was all right.

"You remember this," Jennings said, lifting a sheet of paper and reversing it so that Davies could see what it said. It was the third part

of the original message from the aliens. "‘You are here, not because of the damage you did, but because you were afraid afterwards’," Jennings repeated from memory.

"You see, after we had blown up that mountain we got scared and ran. The reason for that was that our visualisation of the owners of the mountain was merely a reflection of ourselves. We projected our own characters on to the blank space in our picture which was the aliens, and gave ourselves a good scare.

"To the aliens this was as good as sign on our ship saying, ‘Beware of the animals inside.’ They *knew* what we were when they took us. We still know nothing about them or why they wanted to test us. It is an odds on shot that we can never touch them as we move on out into space, but there must be some stiff opposition waiting for us from other quarters. Our bad tempers and aggressiveness are probably going to be assets—they would know all about that."

"Then it was an intelligence test," Davies put in.

"No," Jennings said seriously. "They took it for granted that we would see through the gimmick with the animals."

"What the hell?" Davies said squeezing coffee up to the lip of his drinking bulb and letting it subside again.

"I was near it when I said that the aliens must be far ahead of us in the development of their social senses. They put us in a nasty spot—no heat and no food and drink—and sat back to see how we would get out of it. It was a test of honesty, which is probably the quality they hold in highest regard."

"You mean they knew what we would do when we realised that those brutes were stopping us from opening the doors of the hangar, and they wanted to see whether we would come out and do it *knowing that they were watching?*"

"That's near enough," Jennings said.

"Did you think it out like that when you went trigger happy?" Davies grinned in anticipatory disbelief.

"No," replied Jennings grinning back. "But that means that I acted with the ultimate in honesty. Doesn't it?"

"That's right," Davies said, bringing the drinking bulb to his lips. "If you had thought it out in advance we might not have passed." He took a long drink of coffee.

Jennings stood up and stepped over to the big screen. "We know nothing at all about the aliens—absolutely nothing. We don't even know for sure that the aliens that took us are the same ones that built

the glass house and sat watching that mountain." He trailed his fingers across the cold surface of the screen. "They gave us back our food and drink while we were unconscious, but we're not home yet. *How do you know we passed?*"

Davies grinned easily. "Never worry," he said. "We're bound to have passed—why else would they be letting us go home?"

"That's right," Jennings said, looking at the massed stars ahead of the ship. "Why else?"

In the interior of the computer banks something whirred quietly and a gong sounded, announcing that the *Panther* was just about to achieve her maximum acceleration for the long journey home.

BOB SHAW

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# In Loving Memory

*It had all happened a long time ago, yet every day  
he walked to the spot where she had ceased to be*

*Illustrated by Martin Frew*

Every day Rolston went for a walk. Today, as he'd done daily since the beginning of Kallec's twenty-four-month summer, he left the cool silence of the Dome through one of the small ground-level seals and went outside. He walked under the swollen baleful thing that was the Summer sun of Kallec, carefully picking his steps around places where the surface had become near plastic with heat, following a path that never changed. His thoughts and memories, spilling through channels etched deep by the acid of self guilt, were also much the same every day, and his mouth had forgotten how to smile.

His feet seemed to find their own way as he walked, for Rolston's eyes were not on his surroundings, but were staring instead into a distance of time and space. The things he was seeing were reflected in them; the awful yearning, the bitter confusion, and the raging fire of impatience that burned in his soul. There were many times when Rolston's eyes shone with a light that was not quite sane.

A mile from the dome a cracked and blackened hill arose, burned free of every trace of vegetation. Awkward in the stiff confines of his heavy heat-suit, Rolston climbed it until he came to the shiny white stone at its summit. It resembled a giant, lumpy egg. He stood over it, looking down at the smooth whiteness with tormented, angry eyes.

"You fool," he whispered. "You little fool . . ."

Abruptly he flung himself on the burning ground beside where Naleen lay, and let the pain of memory wash through him again.

Why had she refused to take the Shots? That was the question Rolston kept asking himself. The Medic on their Team had pronounced her fit, and their psychologist had given her a high rating in adaptability and intelligence, adding that few if any of the usual courses of re-educ-

tion would be necessary to fit her for life in any civilised society. There were neither mental nor physical barriers to stop her, yet she had refused.

It wasn't that she hadn't trusted him. The way that Naleen and he felt about each other left no doubt about that. But what made her refusal so baffling was the fact that she was the last Kallecian *not* to submit to the shots, the only one on the whole God-forsaken planet . . .

Kallec was a crazy, murderous planet. It was a small, dense world, with a shallow elliptical orbit about its primary that gave it ten years of temperate Autumn-Winter-Spring and two years of a Summer the heat of which made the planetary surface molten in places. The Captain of the survey ship which had found it took one look, and named the planet "Phoenix." It was the only name that such a world *could* have, especially when he discovered that it contained intelligent, extra-Human life, and found out how the natives adapted to their hellish environment.

The survey ship had established a limited form of communication. With some reluctance its Captain had to erase his pet name of "Phoenix" from the ship's log and substituted the natives' name for their world, which was "Kallec." But he made another discovery shortly afterwards that overshadowed everything else. "Phoenix-Kallec" was under sentence of death. The ship's Astronomy section reported that the planet's orbit was no longer an ellipse, but had become a diminishing spiral that would eventually plunge Kallec into its own sun. The end would not be for thirty or so years, but the planet would be rendered uninhabitable—for *any* form of life—long before then.

The Captain reported the finding of an inhabited system and his Astronomer's predictions at once, and told of the pitifully few natives who even then managed to survive the planet's Summer. He urged that the Bureau of extra-Human Education give the planet top priority. This was done, and a team of Educators were on Kallec just two years later.

This was to be a rush job, Rolston's team had been told, to be completed before the onset of the Kallecian Summer. Otherwise the native population would have shrunk still further. When they landed it was mid-Spring and Summer was less than two Earth-standard years away.

The survey ship had already knocked a fair-sized crack in the barrier of language. Rolston, as the Team's linguist, had to widen that crack until the barrier itself collapsed and he could not only communicate, but exchange philosophical concepts without the slightest trace of ambiguity distorting his meaning. Only then could the others begin their work; the psychologist, gradually and with incredible subtlety, to change the Kallecian mind, until the natives themselves practically demanded that the

team Medic change their bodies as well.

When that occurred their work of re-education on Kallec would be complete, and not a single native would have been forced into doing anything he hadn't wanted to do. It would be smooth. Rolston knew it was for the natives' own good, but sometimes the basic ethics of it all worried him.

How could Earth humans be certain what was best for those who were . . . Different? But doubts like that troubled him seldom. He liked his work.

The Dome—a great, air-conditioned hemisphere capable of sheltering the entire native population, and feeding them, too—had been built. To impress the natives with the Earthmen's contempt for the Summer heat to come, it had been placed on the planet's equator. Then the construction men, after making sure it would function properly, packed their robots and departed, leaving the Team alone to do the real work.

The great Dome was thrown open to the Kellecians, and with natural curiosity, more and more of them had come to marvel at it, and enjoy the coolness, eventually even to taste the various synthetic foods. After that the going was much easier, because the Kallecians were very human indeed.

The volumes of unwritten laws regarding Educators who formed emotional attachments for their charges would have filled a fair-sized bookshelf, and all of them began by warning against it. Rolston had taken those warnings to heart, determined that nothing like that was ever going to happen to *him*.

Then he met Naleen.

His psychologist Jennings, tried to make him realise the purely objective nature of the phenomena, pointing out that what Rolston called "love" was merely a complicated but easily understood interaction on the glandular level brought about by sight, sound, and tactile stimuli—a fact which he should know quite well himself. But the Team psychologist's scorn was tempered more than slightly by deference—Rolston was, after all, his chief—so his warnings had no effect at all, and he was forced by honesty to admit that Naleen was, as far as he knew, a mature, mentally healthy person. The Medic, Munsen, who was over twice Rolston's age and who deferred to nobody, adopted the bluff, fatherly approach. When he saw it was getting him nowhere, he reminded Rolston sharply that one wrong move on the part of a Team member could very easily turn the natives against them, thus ruining the project completely. He still wasn't getting through. The Medic lost his temper then, telling Rolston that obviously he meant to do as he liked no matter what or

whose advice he asked for. Stiffly, Munsen gave his professional opinion that the native in question was physically healthy, female, and completely human except for the *grel* gland system and the skin markings associated with it. He'd added grumpily that successful inter-breeding was highly probable, providing, of course, that she submitted to Standardisation Treatment.

But Naleen didn't submit to the Shots. Rolston tried very hard to make her do so even before the realisation came that he was in love with her, and when it did come, he tried much harder. During the language instruction sessions he always guided the conversation on to the subject of the other planets and peoples in the Galaxy, telling her how different most of them were, yet how basically similar, and stressing the fact to her that there could only be universal peace and happiness when there were no differences left at all.

Sometimes he didn't get his meaning across properly. He stammered, his mouth dried up, and he felt like a tightly-wound spring when she was near him. He couldn't take his eyes off her.

She wore the short, white tunic that was customary on Kallec. Her perfectly formed face and limbs were tanned a deep, intense brown, and every square inch of skin was covered by the delicate gold tracery of the *grel* network—like a second capillary system laid outside the skin. This, and the mass of pure white hair that was another protection against Kallec's blazing Summer heat, was the only visual difference between her and an Earth girl. But mostly it was her eyes that he watched, eyes that shone with enthusiasm and excitement when he talked of those far places and strange people. Re-orientation of the natives was really the psychologist's job, but Jennings was very busy with about a score of Kallecians who were all on the point of asking for Standardisation, and doing the other's job for him was, in this case, very much a pleasure.

It was so pleasant that gradually her instruction began to make inroads into his leisure. He didn't mind that at all. The happiest time of his day was when they walked together at sunset, just before the night rains came. Spring was far advanced, and all about them the balloon seeds were almost pulling their parent plants out of the ground. Occasionally groups of them would break free with soft, tearing sounds and climb towards the surface of their atmospheric ocean like clusters of brightly-coloured bubbles. He would explain or argue some point of logic or ethics with her, or sometimes just talk about nothing at all. Gradually as the days passed and the now seedless vegetation began to shrivel and die in the fiery advance of Summer, what had started as a pleasure became instead a necessity. He found suddenly that he couldn't

do without seeing her, not even for a single day.

Unfortunately the heat of their arguments kept pace with the rapidly increasing temperature, until one day they'd boiled over.

That day they stood on the hillside which overlooked the Dome and verbally tore each other to shreds. He called her stupid, narrow-minded, barbaric. She was a witless savage who could not now, and who probably never would be able to understand an abstraction like altruism, or get it through her thick skull that the Earthmen were here only to help her. Only a moron, or a suicidal maniac would want to stay on this roasting-spit of a world . . .

"You want to help me selfish," Naleen cut in. Her face was tight with anger, and her *grel* lines stood out on it in sharp relief. "You not alt . . . altru . . ." She stumbled at the unfamiliar word.

"Yes. I want you for myself," Rolston admitted angrily. "But that's a different thing. That's . . ." He tried to explain, but he was hot and sticky and terribly impatient with these senseless little arguments. Suddenly he wanted away from it all—the planet, the Team, everything. His explanation was delivered in a tone of such scorn that it became nothing more or less than a deadly insult.

But Naleen wasn't completely defenceless. She'd grown very close to him over the past months, far closer than he'd realised. Naleen knew his weaknesses, and she said things which hurt him as badly as he was hurting her. The quarrel raged until they were shouting at each other in their native tongues, their faces only inches apart. Then abruptly his arms were around her and her tears were hot on his neck, and he was telling her that he was rotten and contemptible and that he hadn't meant the things he'd said, and that he loved her and wanted to be with her as long as he lived.

Through her tears she told him much the same things, and it was a long time before they tore themselves apart.

They didn't argue after that for three whole days.

It should have been easy, Rolston knew. All he had to do was make Naleen realise subconsciously as well as consciously that she lived on only one world among millions, and that it was possible to live on almost any one of the others after she left Kallec. He also knew that if she would only submit to the standardisation treatment, the remaining Kallecians who hadn't taken the Shots would have followed her example, because they held her in very great respect. Kallec would then be evacuated on schedule and everybody would be happy.

Again and again Rolston expanded on the work of the Educators to her, and about the event in the incredibly distant past which made that

work necessary.

So long ago that not even a mythology of it remained, a Human race had begun an interstellar colonisation programme. But that expansion had been premature. Instead of first developing a fast means of interstellar travel—such as the warp drive of the Earthmen—they used ships that were nothing but giant, reaction-driven shells—relying on their tremendous knowledge of the biological sciences to see them through. By travelling for centuries in suspended animation they arrived at the planets of other suns. These planets were rarely if ever suitable for them, but because they must have lacked the technology to either look for more suitable ones or to alter the existing ones to suit themselves, they were forced into the only alternative to living forever aboard their ships.

*They adapted to the planets.*

And on hundreds of worlds throughout the Galaxy, they thrived.

On the frigid world of Wimarr Nine, the animated balls of fur that greeted the first Earthmen explorers were not at first recognisable as being human, but they were. And under the reeking, corrosive atmosphere of Toscammerlang Four there was a thriving civilisation, also human. The ocean world of Resslerone held a race of human amphibians, and so on.

Not all the differences were visually detectable, but they were there. The ability to breathe water, to adapt to mind-staggering variations of heat and cold, and even limited forms of physical metamorphosis in some cases. Nowhere did the Earthmen find sub or super-human entities, instead there were intelligent human beings who—because of the addition of certain specialised organs—were perfectly suited to their environment. *Extra-Humans.*

And the extra-Human population of the Galaxy meant to the Earthmen just one thing. War.

That was the part which was hard to get across to Naleen. All those planets, each with a culture and an ethical and moral code shockingly different from each other, and in most cases, mutually repugnant to each other. Luckily none of these races had reattained interstellar flight. But when they did . . .

The Earthmen had had enough of war, and they were selfish enough not to want to become involved in some future interstellar conflict. They were altruistic enough, however, to set about trying to make such a war impossible.

Standardisation, the elimination of physical and mental differences, seemed to be the answer. If every civilisation held similar ethical standards, war should be impossible. At least, so they hoped. They there-

fore set about making—by means of weather control installations, ecological engineering, and the specialist teams of Educators—every inhabited planet they found into another Earth.

Kallec was a different matter, just a simple Shots and Shift job. Standardise and Evacuate, in official language. The Kallecians should be glad to leave such a murderous environment. Rolston couldn't understand why Naleen seemed so fanatically attached to the place. But she was.

Even when he told her for the hundredth time that he wanted to marry her and take her with him wherever he went, she still held back. He pleaded with her. He told of the worlds she could see with him, planets where Summer was no hotter than the inside of the Dome and where plants grew all the year round—and flowers, too, which were plants so beautiful that she'd have to see them for herself. And the civilisations, and cities. He told her of the gorgeous way in which the female inhabitants—both Human and extra-Human—dressed. Naleen listened to all these things with wondering, wistful eyes, but she still refused to take the Shots. She loved him, but . . .

Awkwardly, Rolston asked the help of the Team psychologist.

"You've been trying too hard," the psychologist told him bluntly, "over-selling your product. And you've further messed things up by telling her too much—*far* too much—about the purpose of the Educators and the extra-Human problem we're trying to solve. In selling, one dwells on the quality of the goods, not on the margin of the profit, if any, that they bring.

"Naleen would have been standardised long ago," he added angrily, "if I'd taken her. But no. You wanted to help out. You had to get emotionally involved with the girl and mess everything up so much that I can't do a thing—"

Rolston used some rugged language to the psychologist, to which the other listened with clinical interest. Then he apologised and left to find Naleen again.

Finally he got her to agree to *talk* about the Shots to Dr. Munsen.

That was a bad mistake.

The Medic was understandably impatient at the continued indecisiveness of the last Unstandardised person remaining on the planet—the person who'd already delayed the completion of the job by over two months because of the fact that none of the other natives would leave without her. The Team's home office was also growing restive about the delay—the Team was always needed elsewhere, urgently. And anyway, Munsen objected fiercely to spending his time just waiting for

somebody to make up their mind. Perhaps that impatience hadn't been masked very well, or he too had pressed his arguments too hard.

Naleen was under intense strain, being practically split in two by the opposing forces of environmental conditioning and her emotional feeling for Rolston—both of them almost irresistible. She'd been very quiet when she'd met Rolston afterwards, and thoughtful.

Rolston, believing that she was on the point of giving in, determined to finish the business for good. His pleas and arguments were forceful, undoubtedly. But a bludgeon would have had more finesse.

Naleen blew up.

She began by telling him that she was a freak, and that he only wanted to drag her around as a sort of pet animal. Dr Munsen had told her that the skin markings would never quite disappear in her, or the *grel* gland system connected with them though the Shots would neutralise it. He was abnormal for wanting to marry a freak like her. People would laugh at her wherever she went with him, and he'd be laughing at her, too. He was a sadist, she accused, an ego-maniac. She hated him, his Team, and all the Earthmen there ever were—but mostly him. She didn't have enough of his words to tell him how much she hated him, but she was going to try . . .

Rolston replied harshly that she didn't know what she was talking about, and she'd no business trying to analyse him with the few scraps of elementary psychology that the Educators had taught her. Dr Munsen had been angry because she was the cause of his having to stay here, and this must have made him tactless and caused some misunderstanding.

But his replies didn't satisfy Naleen. Her accusations became wilder and more hysterical, and his answers to them grew angrier and more contemptuous.

The whole thing was merely a last outburst—a final release of mental pressure—before her final surrender. He should have realised that and let her blow off steam. But instead he went on making scathingly logical answers to accusations that Naleen knew herself to be silly. He should have held on, but he was every bit as impatient as Dr Munsen to get away from Kallec, and the heat and sheer frustration made his nerves like taut wires. He needed the momentary luxury of losing his temper just a little bit, his tightly-knotted nervous system demanded it.

But when he lost his temper, he lost it all.

Hazily, he knew that he had sunk his fingers into her shoulders, and shaken her until her teeth clicked together and her glorious white hair fell all over her face. He had heard his own voice shouting that he was going to shake some sense into her, but there was an unreal, dreamlike



quality to it. It *couldn't* have been his voice, he couldn't bring himself to hurt Naleen in any way. Not *Naleen*. But the passion-thickened voice and the vice-like fingers were his all right, and he was suddenly shocked back into reality when Naleen twisted free and ran away crying.

Desperately Rolston began running after her, for he knew what she might do.

He caught her, almost, at the exit port—the seal nearly closed on his fingers. Then she was through, and a viewer over the port showed her running madly over the burning ground away from the Dome.

With desperate haste Rolston struggled into a heat-suit, keeping his eyes on the wavering, heat-distorted image of Naleen that grew steadily smaller in the view-screen. It was early Summer; unprotected he wouldn't last two minutes in the hell outside the Dome. When he got out at last she was a hundred yards away. In an agony of guilt and sorrow he called her back. She kept on going. He tried to follow her, but the cumbersome suit held him back. She drew steadily away, and he saw her climb the hillside that they'd come to know so well, the pitiless glare of that blast-furnace sun making her hair and tunic a blob of

brilliant light against the blackened ground surface. Near the summit he saw her slow, stagger, and collapse.

When he reached her ten minutes later she was lying curled up in a foetal position, and the things the heat was doing to her made him gag. He couldn't bear to lift her, or touch her even. She was slowly . . . bubbling, and changing colour. Great globules of sticky white stuff were forming on her skin, bursting, and spreading—faster and faster. He tried to shade her with his body, but he knew it was hopeless from the start. He forced his eyes to look at the thing that had been Naleen, and slowly, monotonously, he cursed the sun.

He was still crouching over her when the Team psychologist and two Kalleccians came out to take him back. The natives were also in heat-suits—the Standardisation Shots having neutralised their *grel* function, they needed them now as much as the Earthmen—and were being sympathetic and philosophical about Rolston's loss in voices that were too highly amplified. Naleen, they told him solemnly, was great, highly-respected, and unusual . . . or words to that effect. Her parents also had been great and had lived through many Summers, very many Summers. The natives kept talking about how great and unusual Naleen and her parents were until Rolston felt like smashing their kindly, reassuring skulls together.

An hour after they returned to the Dome, a native spokesman informed the Team that, because of what had happened to Naleen, nobody was going to leave Kallec until the end of the present Summer.

All that had been twenty months ago. Rolston thought as he gave the shiny white rock on the scorched hillside a final look before he began retracing his steps to the Dome, and the pain and anxiety, the sheer frustration and the awful, maddening uncertainty was as bad today as it had been then. Worse even. The natives hadn't blamed him, he knew, they understood and left him alone. Dr Munsen, though he still must have felt a burning impatience at being forced to remain on Kallec with nothing much to do, neither talked about it nor showed it in any way; he, too, understood. But the Team psychologist on the other hand, showed deep professional concern over Rolston's condition, and had hinted several times that he'd like to do something about it. But while he had drugs and techniques at his disposal that could wipe the whole Naleen incident from Rolston's memory and make him normally well-adjusted again, the same code of ethics that forbade the Medic administering the Shots to Naleen against the girl's will kept him from using his wonderfully efficient curative methods until he was requested to do so.

Rolston therefore, continued his daily walks. Slowly as Kallec climbed towards aphelion along its eccentric, near-cometary orbit, Summer merged into Autumn. The Night Rain which converted the outside of the Dome into a world of boiling mud and super-heated steam began to collect in cracks and gullies, and remain as a liquid for longer periods each morning. The naked, cruel rocks were covered and softened by layers of dried mud that increased in thickness each day, and the balloon seeds which had been riding out the Summer in the relative coolness of the upper atmosphere, fell shrunken and heavy to begin their cycle of life all over again.

Rolston discarded the heat-suit for shorts and a light cloak. Daily he walked and sat beside the shiny white rock on a hillside that was now green with new life. Sometimes he lay and talked to it, going over conversations they'd had, or saying intimate, loving things. On other days he was sullen and silent and barely looked at it. One day he lost control and beat on it with his bare fists until the white perfection was smudged red. Sanity returned to him only when he felt a hand on his shoulder, and he heard the Team psychologist's voice saying gently; "Take it easy, Prince Charming. You'll never get your Sleeping Beauty that way. Now will you . . .?"

His daily walks continued—until the day he saw a crack in that flawless white rock.

The sight hit him like a physical blow. He felt sick and weak. All the frustration and anxiety that had been building up in his mind over the past two years of Summer came boiling up, seeking release. He paced backwards and forwards beside it, wringing his bandaged hands together and talking wildly to himself, and the look in his eyes was wild. As he saw the single crack, caused by the steady drop in Kallec's temperature, widen and become many, he wept a little. But not for long. When the rock began to fall apart like a cracked egg, he gave a shout of pure exultation and started tearing the loose pieces away.

Naleen rose, the last few fragments of her heat-resistant *grel* crysalis falling to the ground. She was more than half asleep, and the golden network of lines that had exuded the crysalis were still crusted by powderings of that rock-hard, organic insulator. Rolston brushed it gently off her face while she breathed deep, shuddering breaths—the first she'd taken since going into Summer hibernation two Earth years ago. Then abruptly Rolston was trying to squeeze the recently regained breath out of her.

They held each other tightly for a very long time, until Naleen got her mouth free long enough to speak with it:

"I want to see Doctor Munsen again . . ."

JAMES WHITE

# The Green Hills Of Earth

*He was Rhysling, blind singer of the  
spaceways and immortal legend of Earth*

*Illustrated by John J. Greengrass*

This is a story of Rhysling, the Blind Singer of the Spaceways—but not the official version. You sang his words in school:

*I pray for one last landing  
On the globe that gave me birth;  
Let me rest my eyes on the fleecy skies  
And the cool, green hills of earth.*

Or perhaps you sang in French or German. Or it might have been Esperanto, while Terra's rainbow banner rippled over your head.

The language does not matter—it was certainly an Earth tongue. No one has ever translated Green Hills into the lisping Venerean speech; no Martian ever croaked and whispered it in the dry corridors. This is ours. We of Earth have exported everything from Hollywood crawlies to synthetic radioactives, but this belongs solely to Terra, and to her sons and daughters wherever they may be.

We have all heard stories of Rhysling. You may even be one of the many who have sought degrees by scholarly evaluations of his published works—Songs of the Spaceways; The Grand Canal and Other Poems; High and Far; and Up Ship!

Nevertheless, although you have sung his songs and read his verses, in school and out, your whole life, it is at least an even-money bet—unless you are a spaceman yourself—that you have never even heard of most of Rhysling's unpublished songs, even items as Since the Pusher Met My Cousin; That Red-Headed Venusberg Gal; Keep Your Pants On, Skipper; or A Space Suit Built for Two. Nor can we quote them in a family magazine.

Rhysling's reputation was protected by a careful literary executor

and by the happy chance that he was never interviewed. Songs of the Spaceways appeared the week he died; when it became a best seller, the publicity stories about him were pieced together from what people remembered about him plus the highly coloured handouts from his publishers. The resulting traditional picture of Rhysling is about as authentic as George Washington's hatchet or King Alfred's cakes.

In truth, you would not have wanted him in your parlour; he was not socially acceptable. He had a permanent case of sun itch, which he scratched continually, adding nothing to his negligible beauty.

Van der Voort's portrait of him for the Harriman Centennial edition of his works shows a figure of high tragedy, a solemn mouth, sightless eyes concealed by a black silk bandage. He was never solemn. His mouth was always open, singing, grinning, drinking or eating. The bandage was any rag, usually dirty. After he lost his sight he became less and less neat about his person.

"Noisy" Rhysling was a jetman, second class, with eyes as good as yours, when he signed on for a loop trip to the Jovian asteroids in the *R.S. Goshawk*. The crew signed releases for everything in those days; a Lloyd's associate would have laughed in your face at the notion of insuring a spaceman. The Space Precautionary Act had never been heard of, and the company was responsible only for wages, if and when. Half the ships that went farther than Luna City never came back. Spacemen did not care: by preference they signed for shares, any one of them would have bet you that he could jump from the two hundredth floor of Harriman Tower and ground safely, if you offered him three to two and allowed him rubber heels for the landing.

Jetmen were the most carefree of the lot and the meanest. Compared with them, the masters, the radarman, and the astrogators (there were no supers or stewards in those days) were gentle vegetarians. Jetmen knew too much. The others trusted the skill of the captain to get them down safely; jetmen knew that skill was useless against the blind and fitful devils chained inside their rocket motors.

The *Goshawk* was the first of Harriman's ships to be converted from chemical fuel to atomic power piles—or rather the first that did not blow up. Rhysling knew her well; she was an old tub that had plied the Luna City run, Supra-New York space station to Leyport and back, before she was converted for deep space. He had worked the Luna run in her and had been along on the first deep-space trip, to Drywater, on Mars—and back, to everyone's surprise.

He should have been made chief engineer by the time he signed for

the Jovian loop trip, but, after the Drywater pioneer trip he had been fired, blacklisted, and grounded at Luna City for having spent his time writing a chorus and several verses at a time when he should have been watching his gauges. The song was the infamous *The Skipper is a Father to His Crew*, with the uproariously unprintable final couplet.

The black list did not bother him. He won an accordion from a Chinese barman in Luna City by cheating at one-thumb and thereafter kept going by singing to miners for drinks and tips until the rapid attribution in spacemen caused the company agent there to give him another chance. He kept his nose clean on the Luna run for a year or two, got back into deep space, helped give Venusberg its original ripe reputation, strolled the banks of the Grand Canal when a second colony was established at the ancient Martian capital, and froze his toes and ears on the second trip to Titan.

Things moved fast in those days. Once the power-pile drive was accepted, the number of ships that put out from the Luna-Terra system was limited only by the availability of crews. Jetmen were scarce; the shielding was cut to a minimum to save weight, and few married men cared to risk possible exposure to radioactivity. Rhysling did not want to be a father, so jobs were always open to him during the golden days of the claiming boom. He crossed and recrossed the system, singing the doggerel that boiled up in his head and chording it out on his accordion.

The master of the *Goshawk* knew him: Captain Hicks had been astrogator on Rhysling's first trip in her. "Welcome home, Noisy," Hicks had greeted him. "Are you sober, or shall I sign the book for you?"

"You can't get drunk on the bugjuice they sell here, skipper." He signed and went below, lugging his accordion.

Ten minutes later he was back. "Captain," he stated darkly, "that Number Two jet ain't fit. The cadmium dampers are warped."

"Why tell me? Tell the chief."

"I did, but he says they will do. He's wrong."

The captain gestured at the book. "Scratch your name out and scram. We raise ship in thirty minutes."

Rhysling looked at him, shrugged, and went below again.

It is a long climb to the Jovian planetoids; a Hawk-class clunker had to blast for three watches before going into free flight. Rhysling had the second watch. Damping was done by hand then, with a multiplying vernier and a danger gauge. When the gauge showed red, he tried to correct it—no luck.

Jetmen don't wait; that's why they are jetmen. He slapped the emergency discover and fished at the hot stuff with the tongs. The lights went out, he went right ahead. A Jetman has to know his power room the way your tongue knows the inside of your mouth.

He sneaked a quick look over the top of the lead baffle when the lights went out. The blue radioactive glow did not help him any; he jerked his head back and went on fishing by touch.

When he was done he called over the tube, "Number Two jet out. And for gosh sake get me some light down here!"

There was light—the emergency circuit—but not for him. The blue radioactive glow was the last thing his Optic nerve ever responded to.

*As Time and Space come bending back  
to shape this star-speckled scene,  
The tranquil tears of tragic joy still  
spread their silver sheen:*

*Along the Grand Canal still soar the  
fragile Towers of Truth;  
Their fairy grace defends this place of  
Beauty, calm and couth.*

*Bone-tired the race that raised the  
Towers, forgotten are their lores;  
Long gone the gods who shed the tears  
that lap these crystal shores.  
Slow beats the time-worn heart of Mars  
beneath this icy sky;  
The thin air whispers voicelessly that all  
who live must die—*

*Yet still the lacy Spires of Truth sing  
Beauty's madrigal  
And she herself will ever dwell along the  
Grand Canal!*

*(from the Grand Canal, premission of  
Lux Transcriptions, Ltd., London and  
Luna City).*

On the swing back they set Rhysling down on Mars at Drywater; the boys passed the hat and the skipper kicked in a half month's pay. That was all—finis—just another space bum who had not had the good fortune to finish it off when his luck ran out. He holed up with the prospectors and archaeologists at How-Far? for a month or so, and could probably have stayed forever in exchange for his songs and his accordion playing. But spacemen die if they stay in one place; he hooked a crawler over to Drywater again and thence to Marsopolis.

The capital was well into its boom; the processing plants lined the Grand Canal on both sides and soiled the ancient waters with the filth of the run-off. This was before the Tri-Planet Treaty forbade disturbing cultural relics for commerce; half the slender, fairy-like towers had been torn down, and others were disfigured to adapt them as pressurized buildings for earthmen.

Now Rhysling had never seen any of these changes and no one described them to him; when he "saw" Marsopolis again, he visualised it as it had been before it was rationalised for trade. His memory was good. He stood on the riparian esplanade where the ancient great of Mars had taken their ease, and saw its beauty spreading out before his blinded eyes—ice-blue plain of water unmoved by tide, untouched by breeze, and reflecting serenely the sharp, bright stars of the Martian sky, and beyond the water the lacy buttresses and flying towers of an architecture too delicate for our rumbling, heavy planet. The result was Grand Canal.

The subtle change in his orientation which enabled him to see beauty at Marsopolis when beauty was not, now began to affect his whole life. All women became beautiful to him. He knew them by their voices and fitted their appearances to the sounds. It is a mean spirit indeed who will speak to a blind man other than in gentle friendliness; scolds who have given their husbands no peace sweetened their voices to Rhysling.

It populated his world with beautiful women and gracious men. Dark Star Passing, Berenice's Hair, Death Song of a Wood's Colt, and his other love songs of the wanderers, the womenless men of space, were the direct result of the fact that his conceptions were unsullied by tawdry truths. It mellowed his approach, changed his doggerel to verse, and sometimes even to poetry.

He had plenty of time to think now, time to get all the lovely words just so, and to worry a verse until it sang true in his head. The monotonous beat of Jet Song—

*When the field is clear, the reports all  
seen,  
When the lock sighs shut, when the  
lights wink green,  
When the check-off's done, when it's time  
to pray,  
When the captain nods, when she  
blasts away—  
Hear the jets!  
Hear them snarl at your back  
When you're stretched on the rack;  
Feel your ribs clamp your chest  
Feel your neck grind its rest.  
Feel the pain in your ship,  
Feel her strain in their grip.  
Feel her rise! Feel her drive!  
Straining steel, come alive,  
On her jets!*

—came to him not while he himself was a jetman, but later while he was hitchhiking from Mars to Venus and sitting out a watch with an old shipmate.

At Venusberg he sang his new songs and some of the old, in the bars. Someone would start a hat around for him; it would come back with a minstrel's usual take doubled or tripled in recognition of the gallant spirit behind the bandaged eyes.

It was an easy life. Any space port was his home and any ship his private carriage. No skipper cared to refuse to lift the extra mass of blind Rhysling and his squeeze box; he shuttled from Venusberg to Leyport to Drywater to New Shanghai, or back again, as the whim took him.

He never went closer to Earth than Supra-New York Space Station. Even when signing the contract for Songs of the Spaceways he made his mark in a cabin-class liner somewhere between Luna City and Ganymede. Horowitz, the original publisher, was aboard for a second honeymoon and heard Rhysling sing at a ship's party. Horowitz knew a good thing for the publishing trade when he heard it; the entire contents of Songs were sung directly into the tape in the communications room of that ship before he let Rhysling out of his sight. The next three volumes were squeezed out of Rhysling at Venusberg, where



Horowitz had sent an agent to keep him liquored up until he had sung all he could remember.

Up Ship! is not certainly authentic Rhysling throughout. Much of it is Rhysling's, no doubt, and Jet Song unquestionably his, but most of the verses were collected after his death, from people who had known him during his wanderings.

The Green Hills of Earth grew through twenty years. The earliest form we know about was composed before Rhysling was blinded, during a drinking bout with some of the indentured men on Venus. The verses were concerned mostly with the things the labour clients intended to do back on Earth if and when they ever managed to pay their bounties and thereby be allowed to go home. Some of the stanzas were vulgar, some were not, but the chorus was recognizably that of Green Hills.

We know exactly where the final form of Green Hills came from and when.

There was a ship in at Venus Ellis Isle which was scheduled for the direct jump from there to Great Lakes, Illinois. She was the Old

Falcon, youngest of the Hawk class and the first ship to apply the Harriman Trust's new policy of extra-fare express service between Earth cities and any colony with scheduled stops.

Rhysling decided to ride her back to Earth. Perhaps his own song had got under his skin—or perhaps he just hankered to be near his native Ozarks one more time.

The company no longer permitted deadheads. Rhysling knew this, but it never occurred to him that the ruling might apply to him. He was getting old, for a spaceman, and just a little matter-of-fact about his privileges. Not senile—he simply knew that he was one of the landmarks in space, along with Halley's Comet, the Rings, and Brewster's Ridge. He walked in the crew's port, went below, and made himself at home in the first empty acceleration couch.

The captain found him there while making a last-minute tour of his ship. "What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"Dragging it back to Earth, captain." Rhysling needed no eyes to see a skipper's four stripes.

"You can't drag in this ship: You know the rules. Shake a leg and get out of here. We raise ship at once." The captain was young; he had come up after Rhysling's active time, but Rhysling knew the type—five years at Harriman Hall with only cadet practice trips instead of solid, deep-space experience. The two men did not touch in background or spirit; space was changing.

"Now, captain, you wouldn't begrudge an old man a trip home."

The officer hesitated—several of the crew had stopped to listen. "I can't do it. 'Space Precautionary Act, Clause Six: No one shall enter space save as a licensed member of a crew of a chartered vessel, or as a paying passenger of such a vessel under such regulations as may be issued pursuant to this act.' Up you get and out you go."

Rhysling lolled back, his hands under his head. "If I've to go, I'm damned if I'll walk. Carry me."

The captain bit his lip and said, "Master-at-Arms! Have this man removed."

The ship's policeman fixed his eyes on the overhead struts. "Can't rightly do it, captain. I've sprained my shoulder." The other crew members, present a moment before, had faded into the bulkhead paint.

"Well, get a working party!"

"Aye, aye, sir." He, too, went away.

Rhysling spoke again. "Now look, skipper—let's not have any hard feelings about this. You've got an out to carry me if you want

to—the 'distressed spaceman' clause."

"Distressed spaceman, my eye! You're no distressed spaceman; you're a space lawyer. I know who you are; you've been bumming around the space for fifteen years. Well, you won't do it in my ship. That clause was intended to succour men who had missed their ships, not to let a man drag free all over space."

"Well, now, captain, can you properly say I haven't missed my ship? I've never been back home since my last trip as a signed-on-crew member. The law says I can have a trip back."

"But that was years ago. You've used up your chance."

"Have I, now? The clause doesn't say a word about how soon a man has to take his trip back; it just says he's got it coming to him. Go look it up, skipper. If I'm wrong, I'll not only walk out on my two legs, I'll beg your humble pardon in front of your crew. Go on—look it up. Be a sport."

Rhysling could feel the man's glare, but he turned and stumped out of the compartment. Rhysling knew that he had used his blindness to place the captain in an impossible position, but this did not embarrass Rhysling—he rather enjoyed it.

Ten minutes later the siren sounded, he heard the orders on the bull horn for Up-Stations. When the soft sighing of the locks and the slight pressure change in his ears let him know take-off was imminent, he got up and wanted to be near the jets when they blasted off. He needed no one to guide him in any ship of the Hawk class.

Trouble started during the first watch. Rhysling had been lounging in the inspector's chair, fiddling with the keys of his accordion, and trying out a new version of Green Hills.

*Let me breathe unrationed air again  
When there's no lack nor dearth.*

And something, something, something Earth. It would not come out right. He tried again.

*Let the sweet fresh breezes heal me  
As they rove around the girth  
Of our lovely mother planet  
Of the cool, green hills of Earth.*

That was better, he thought. "How do you like that, Archie?" he asked over the muted roar.

"Pretty good. Give out the whole thing." Archie Macdougall, chief jetman, was an old friend, both spaceside and in bars; he had been an apprentice under Rhysling many years and millions of miles back.

Rhysling obliged, then said, "You youngsters have got it soft. Everything automatic. When I was twisting her tail you had to stay awake."

"You still have to stay awake."

They fell to talking shop, and Macdougall showed him the new direct response damping rig which had replaced the manual vernier control which Rhysling had used. Rhysling felt out the controls and asked questions until he was familiar with the new installations. It was his conceit that he was still a jetman and that his present occupation as a troubadour was simply an expedient during one of the fusses with the company that any man could get into.

"I see you still have the old hand-damping plates installed," he remarked, his agile fingers flitting over the equipment.

"All except the links. I unshipped them because they obscure the dials."

"You ought to have them shipped. You might need them."

"Oh, I don't know. I think——"

Rhysling never did find out what Macdougall thought, for it was at that moment the trouble tore loose. Macdougall caught it square, a blast of radioactivity that burned him down where she stood.

Rhysling sensed what had happened. Automatic reflexes of old habit came out. He slapped the discover and rang the alarm to the control room simultaneously. Then he remembered the unshipped links. He had to grope until he found them, while trying to keep as low as he could to get the maximum benefit from the baffles. Nothing but the links bothered him as to location. The place was as light to him as any place could be; he knew every spot, every control, the way he knew the keys of his accordion.

"Power room! Power room. What's the alarm?"

"Stay out!" Rhysling shouted. "The place is hot." He could feel it on his face and in his bones, like desert sunshine.

The links he got into place, after cursing someone, anyone, for having failed to rack the wrench he needed. Then he commenced trying to reduce the trouble by hand. It was a long job and ticklish. Presently he decided that the jet would have to be spilled, pile and all.

First he reported. "Control!"

"Control aye aye!"

"Spilling Jet Three—emergency."

"Is this Macdougall?"

"Macdougall is dead. This is Rhysling, on watch. Stand by to record."

There was no answer; dumbfounded the skipper may have been, but he could not interfere in a power-room emergency. He had the ship to consider, and the passengers and the crew. The doors had to stay closed.

The captain must have been still more surprised at what Rhysling sent for record. It was:

*We rot in the molds of Venus,  
We retch at her tainted breath.  
Foul are her flooded jungles,  
Crawling with unclean death.*

Rhysling went on cataloguing the Solar System as he worked, "harsh bright soil of Luna," "Saturn's rainbow rings," "the frozen night of Titan," all the while opening and spilling the jet and fishing it clean. He finished with an alternate chorus:

*We've tried each spinning space mote  
And reckoned its true worth:  
Take us back again to the homes of men  
On the cool, green hills of Earth.*

Then, almost absent-mindedly, he remembered to tack on his revised first verse:

*The arching sky is calling  
Spacemen back to their trade.  
All hands! Stand by! Free falling!  
And the lights below us fade.  
Out ride the sons of Terra,  
Far drives the thundering jet,  
Up leaps the race of Earthmen  
Out, far, and onward yet—*

The ship was safe now and ready to limp home, shy one jet. As for himself, Rhysling was not so sure. That "sunburn" seemed pretty

sharp, he thought. He as unable to see the bright, rosy fog in which he worked, but he knew it was there. He went on with the business of flushing the air out through the outer valve, repeating it several times to permit the level of radioaction to drop to something a man might stand under suitable armour. While he did this, he sent one more chorus, the last bit of authentic Rhysling that ever could be:

*We pray for one last landing  
On the globe that gave us birth;  
Let us rest our eyes on the fleecy skies  
And the cool, green hills of Earth.*

ROBERT A. HEINLEIN

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## THE NEXT ISSUE ! ! !

From his farthest outpost on Titan, Mankind is on the verge of venturing out amongst the stars for the first time, when a spaceship is sighted—coming in!

It is around this central idea that popular SYDNEY J. BOUNDS weaves a thrilling yet human science-fiction story to appear for the first time in NEBULA No. 16, out in March.

Also in this issue are varied and enjoyable shorter stories by E. C. TUBB, ARTHUR SELLINGS, E. R. JAMES and many others to make it one of our most interesting numbers to date.

Order your copy from your newsagent now, as demand for this issue promises to be very heavy.

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# The Artifact

*He was the strangest patient the doctor had ever  
seen and he had by far the strangest disease!*

*Illustrated by Arthur Thomson*

When his nurse-receptionist entered Doctor Forster didn't look up from the card he was filling in. Instead, he sighed and underlined his signature viciously.

"It's become intolerable," he muttered, still not looking up. "We doctors are nothing but glorified clerks now."

The nurse, a tall, fleshy brunette, tip-toed over to the desk, one finger laid against her lips ready to warn Forster to keep silent if he should look up before she was near enough to whisper.

"Doctor, Doctor, *Forster!*"

"Forms, Miss Lacey, nothing but forms from morning to night."

She moved nearer, holding her breath.

"Doctor Forster," she all but screamed. "There's a madman outside wants to see you!"

Forster nodded abstractedly, scrawled his signature on another card, took a third from the pile and set it on the desk in front of him.

"Five minutes, Miss Lacey, tell him he can see me in five minutes. I *have* to get these filled in today to send off to the Department."

The nurse shook him by the shoulder, shook him angrily.

"He's a madman, Doctor, and he wants to come in. What shall I do?"

Forster threw his pen down on the desk and glared at her.

"Are you mad, Miss Lacey, shaking me like that? I said tell him I'll see him in five minutes. For heaven's sake let me finish these cards in peace."

Miss Lacey screamed.

"I'm not mad, but *he* is," she shouted.

Doctor Forster stood up, moved back to the window and stared at his nurse.

"Who's mad? What is the matter with you this morning?" he asked.

The nurse took a deep breath before answering.

"Please listen to me," she begged. "There's a man outside who says he must see you. I think he's mad, I think he's awfully mad, Doctor. Shall I phone the police?"

Forster, a small, tubby man came round the desk and stood beside her, taking her hands and squeezing them tightly.

"A madman out there?" he asked. "And he wants to see *me*?"

He glanced at the door.

"Is he one of my patients, Miss Lacey? Have we seen him before?"

The nurse shook her head.

"Never," she said emphatically. "I'd never have forgotten him if we had. What shall I do—get the police? Run across the corridor for help or something? What shall I *do*, Doctor Forster?"

Forster dropped her hands, tip-toed over to the door, bent and listened for a moment. When he straightened up again his face was red and angry.

"There's nobody out there," he snapped. "Go back to your desk and continue with your work."

Miss Lacey refused to move.

"Miss Lacey, did you hear what I said? Go back to your desk!"

Still she refused to move, staring round-eyed at the door.

"He'll hear you," she whispered, her hands at her throat. "Oh, Doctor Forster, he'll hear you!"

The doctor drew himself erect, gripped the door-knob and pulled the door open. The nurse hissed fearfully and followed a few feet behind him as he went into the outer room. Forster, convinced that there would be nobody in the reception-room, pulled up short and stood staring. His mouth opened.

"Good morning," he managed to stammer. "I'm Doctor Forster. You wanted to see me, I believe?"

He was the tiniest madman Forster had ever seen. He was not much more than four feet tall, and incredibly thin, and sat almost buried in one of the arm-chairs reserved for waiting patients. There was a look of intense concentration on his small face.

"Good morning," he replied to the other's greeting. "Certainly I wish to see you, and right away. I have a very difficult problem and I

need your help."

He began to rise, very slowly, trying to look at his feet and hands at the same time.

"Er, just *one* moment, please," Forster stopped him hurriedly. "There's, er, one or two things I have to speak to my nurse about. If you'll sit down and wait, I won't keep you more than a . . ."

With the same intense concentration the madman sat down again. He made a frantic grasp at his left knee, gripping it tightly. Then he lifted his leg up and crossed it over his other leg.

"You see," he said, impatiently, "it's very annoying—I nearly lost it again. Please hurry up—I need your help quite desperately."

Forster gave him a ghastly smile and hurried his nurse back into the other room, closing the door behind him.

"I told you he was mad," the nurse said. "What shall I do—send for the police?"

Forster shook his head.

"I'll see him," he whispered. "But not just yet, not now. Let him wait for a while until I'm . . . Miss Lacey go outside as though nothing had happened—pretend you don't find anything strange and I'll ring for you to send him in."

The nurse stared at him.

"Did you see that leg?" she asked unemotionally. "Doctor, that leg *moved*, I tell you."

Forster, who had hoped he was mistaken, tried to shake his head.

"Nonsense," he said. "Really, Miss Lacey, I'm surprised."

"Be what you like," she snapped back at him, "but that leg moved. I saw it myself, and I thought it was going to slide down the leg of his trousers and fall on the floor, especially when he lifted——"

Forster looked scandalized. He opened the door, motioning the nurse to leave, then said with false geniality to the waiting madman:

"Will you come in now, Mr er . . . Mr . . ."

"Xrnth," the other said, "Anfd Xrnth."

Very gingerly he rose from the chair, moving his tiny body limb by limb, all the time grimly concentrating on his hands and legs. When he had himself standing he moved towards Forster and the nurse screamed. Forster whirled round to face her and she pointed soundlessly to a spot near the armchair Anfd Xrnth had been sitting in. Forster followed her pointing finger with his eyes and blanched. Beside the chair there was a neat little patent-leather shoe, with Anfd Xrnth's foot still in it.

Impatiently Xrnth looked from Forster to the nurse, then back to Forster again, while the doctor had the overpowering urge to ask:

"Is this your foot?" and run screaming from the room. Instead he pointed wordlessly at the chair, then hurried into his room, not daring to look behind him to see what the other was doing. He heard him say something, then began to tremble when the door shut and Xrnth's voice said:

"That's what I came to see you about, Doctor. This keeps happening, and it's most inconvenient."

Forster turned from the window, walked shakily to his desk and sat down, automatically taking up a blank card and holding his pen poised above it.

"Your name, please?" he asked in a whisper.

"Anfd Xrnth," the other answered. "I've told you once already."

Forster tried to pronounce it mentally, but couldn't. Without looking up he said:

"Won't you sit down?"

Xrnth snorted impatiently.

"I *am* sitting down," he said irritably. "I *have* to sit down, all the time, because this personal artifact keeps losing parts and . . ."

Doctor Forster shuddered.

"Please," he said. "Oh, please."

He took a tight grip on his pen.

"Would you spell that name, please?"

"X-r-n-t-h," Xrnth said, slowly, "A-n-f-d—X-r . . ."

"That will be sufficient," Forster interrupted him. Carefully he filled in the card.

"Your age, Mr er . . .?"

He looked at his visitor. Xrnth had his head cocked to one side, considering.

"I should think it was thirty-three, wouldn't you?" he asked.

Forster stared blankly.

"How should I know?" he asked feebly.

Xrnth stared angrily at him.

"You're a doctor, aren't you? Then what age *would* you say this artifact was?"

Forster made terrible efforts to stop himself screaming. He had the horrible suspicion that it was his *body* the other meant when he said artifact.

"You *could* say it was three *weeks* old, of course," Xrnth continued. "That's how long it took to make, three weeks. Well, three weeks less one day, but I think you could put down three weeks. No, when you asked its age I wanted to supply a figure consistent with its general

appearance—it looks about thirty-three, I think. I'm a little confused—I've never been asked its age before."

He said this almost accusingly, and Forster bridled, then decided to let it pass.

"Thirty-three, then," he whispered. "Home address, please?"

"Say . . . extra-terrestrial, Doctor. That should be sufficient." He leaned forward confidentially in his chair.

"You see," he continued, "I was on a routine flight when my Saucer crashed, landing me in a place I afterwards discovered was called Hampshire. I've been living in a barn there for the last six weeks, only coming out at night. I *have* to stay near the wreckage, you understand, because that's the only way I can hope to be rescued, but I managed to pass the time by building this personal artifact."

He sat back watching the dazed Forster wistfully.

"I passed through my basic instruction with honours," he said proudly.

He looked disconsolately through the window.

"But I wasn't very good at the Build An Emergency Artifact test, not very good at all. I'm afraid I cheated at the examination. Rhva built *two* artifacts and I pretended one was mine. Rhva's my friend—I wouldn't have passed without him."

He turned his gaze on Forster again.

"But I never thought *I'd* crash, never for one minute. You never do, do you?"

Not knowing what else to do the horrified Forster shook his head in agreement.

"And all the flights I made, too, without incident. Well, with only one, on Pluto. However, they took me off in a matter of hours. I can't understand why it's taking them so long now."

Forster told himself he musn't listen to any more, not to another word, but it was no good, he *had* to listen.

"You can be sure I regret not having paid more attention to the Build An Emergency Artifact Course, especially when you see what a farce I've made of things. Bits keep dropping off and that makes me suspect I've left something out somewhere. It shouldn't happen. The handbook says quite definitely that, where unable to live in a planet's atmosphere, a personal artifact, in the shape of the inhabitants, must be built as quickly as possible. The maximum time seems to be twenty-four hours, but I'm afraid this took me almost three weeks. Still, I've suffered no ill-effects, none at all."

Forster looked uneasily down at the card he had filled in.



"I want you to help me," the alien continued. "As a doctor you'll be able to tell what I've left out, then we can put things right so that bits don't keep dropping off all the time."

"Please don't say that again," Forster said seriously. "I can't bear it when you talk about *bits* dropping off."

He prayed the nurse would come in, but somehow he had no hope that she would.

"But that's what happens," Xrnth told him earnestly. "You saw for yourself out there, in the waiting-room. I left my right foot behind. If your nurse hadn't drawn my attention to it I might have walked off without it."

Despite himself, Forster asked:

"But how *could* you walk with only one . . .?"

"Configurationally, of course, the foot would still have been there. Oh, I can get about all right. but I must consider your fellow natives—when I walk down a street, for instance, I want to be quite sure that this artifact is actually, as well as configurationally, complete. My difficulty is this—I can't let my concentration wander for an instant, otherwise I

lose parts, sometimes quite essential ones."

Cunningly, Forster asked:

"Your, er, *wreckage* is somewhere in Hampshire, you say, and you must stay close to it so that your friends can find you?"

Xrnth nodded carefully, concentrating on his head.

"Then shouldn't you go *back*?" Forster continued, shutting his eyes tightly. "Supposing they come and you're not there, what would happen then?"

"I'd know immediately, of course—I've already attuned myself."

Forster made himself continue, knowing anything was better than having to sit helplessly listening.

"But supposing a rescue party comes now? London is a good many miles from Hampshire and the party could have gone by the time you got back. Then what would you do?"

Patiently Xrnth continued to explain.

"If a party came down near my wreckage say in five minutes time, well, I'd reach it immediately. But I think I've told you enough now—will you examine this artifact and see what it was I left out? Obviously I left *something* out. I'm tired of concentrating on each individual section, a thing that interferes with my attunation. Possibly, in my present state, if a party did land I wouldn't know about it until too late, and I do want to get back home."

Forster had a terrible vision of Xrnth coming to him year after year because, through his not having been able to give all his attention to the rescue-party, it had come and gone, leaving him behind. If only he could get rid of his visitor . . .

He stood up and moved cautiously over to Xrnth.

"Please lie down on the couch," he whispered, shuddering at what he knew he must do.

Quickly he shut his eyes, but not before he saw Xrnth rise from the chair and move over to the couch leaving a complete arm behind.

"A bit has dropped . . ."

Hurriedly he corrected himself.

"You've left one of its members behind!"

Xrnth muttered irritably and Forster heard him return, grunt, then set off in the direction of the low couch again. He opened his eyes, sighing with relief when he saw the artifact was intact.

"For a doctor," Xrnth observed critically, "you're very sensitive. Or is there anything the matter with your eyes?"

Forster refused to answer. With shrinking fingers he bent and began to probe the artifact.

"You tell me you *built* this body, er, *artifact*?" he asked incredulously.

He was mad, of course, quite mad, but later would be time enough to worry about that.

"After much difficulty," Xrnth answered. "I was desperate when I found how awkward pure protoplasm was to handle, especially when I was forced to use the atomic-motor from my Saucer. Back at the Institute they have real machines, of course, and turn out better jobs, but even so, I should have done much better than this, even using the Saucer's power."

Still without opening his eyes Forster sounded the artifact's chest.

"I was so desperate I considered requisitioning one of the native's artifacts, although they're very strict about that back home. It's quite illegal to do that, you know—they would have grounded me for it."

When the full force of this penetrated, Forster stepped back with revulsion.

"You mean you would have taken over a human *body*?" he whispered.

"Oh, on a co-tenancy basis, of course," Xrnth assured him. "There would have been no question of doing otherwise. Even that's illegal. But I didn't—that would have made them suspect I hadn't been honest at the Build An Emergency Artifact Examination."

Forster proceeded with his inspection in silence and when he was finished stepped back, shaking his head.

"Everything's there," he said feebly. "Everything."

As Xrnth made a movement to sit up:

"Please concentrate," he added hurriedly. "Bring it all up at once!"

Irritably Xrnth obeyed and sat up.

"But there must be something," he said. "There *must* be."

He thought for a little.

"Perhaps the protoplasm they supplied was sub-standard," he continued. "Or did I keep it too long under the energy-beam, I wonder?"

He got gently down from the couch.

"But the protoplasm took so long to form, Doctor—I *had* to keep it under the beam.

He began to fumble in his jacket pocket.

"I'll never live this down. When they find out what kind of a job I made they'll laugh at me. Oh well, the worst they can do is send me back to the Build An Emergency Artifact Class. They can't ground me for a little thing like this."

He fumbled more irritably in his pocket.

"Can't find my money," he said with annoyance. "How much have I to pay anyway?"

"Nothing, nothing whatever," Forster told him hurriedly, afraid he'd include an arm or hand with the payment.

"It's been a . . . pleasure."

Tightly he shut his eyes and groped his way back to his desk while Xrnth walked carefully to the door.

"Well, thank you for your time, Doctor Forster."

Forster, with his face to the wall, muttered brokenly that he wasn't to mention it.

"Are you sure there's nothing to pay?"

"Please go, *please*," Forster said, then controlling himself: "No, nothing at all. Now, I have a patient coming in . . ."

"Goodbye, then, and thank you," Xrnth said. "You've been very kind."

Forster held his breath until he heard the door close. Some seconds later, when he was sure Xrnth wasn't coming back there came an agonized scream and then Miss Lacey burst into the room.

"Oh Doctor," she babbled. "*Doctor!*"

Forster turned from the wall and stared bitterly at her.

"What happened?" he asked.

She stood clutching her throat, unable to answer until he asked the question again.

"His head," she said in horror. "Doctor it fell off as he was standing in the corridor!"

Forster knew he was ruined, at least in this building. When the word got around that such a thing had happened to one of his patients . . .

"And then he said something about it must have been the protoplasm they gave him!"

Doctor Forster closed his eyes wearily.

CHRISTOPHER LYSTER



# Birthday Star

*It was just a little girl's birthday party—  
but strange guests were destined to attend*

*Illustrated by Martin Frew*

"Oooooo look! A shooting-star!"

Loriana turned, looked at her sister, then up at the sky.

"Silly! That's not a shooting-star."

"It is, it is—and it's beautiful," chanted Myfwr, dancing with excitement, "Be quiet while I make a wish!"

"You can wish if you like," retorted Loriana, feeling haughty with the weight of her eleven years, "but stars can't come out till it's dark, not even shooting-stars."

"Then can, they can," insisted Myfwr. "Look, there it is! P'raps it's forgot the time, come early, special."

"So you can make a wish?"

"Well, it's my Birthday!"

Loriana's exasperation with her sister dissolved as she watched her jumping about with delight. She smiled and looked at the sky again. But the cloud, whatever it was which had been catching the rays of the setting sun, had gone.

"I've made my wish and I'm not going to tell you what it was," announced Myfwr, looking upwards as though she hoped the chance of another wish might glow across the heavens for her.

"Good," said Loriana indulgently. "You mustn't tell me. You mustn't tell anybody; it wouldn't come true if you did . . . It's time to go home now. Everybody will be ready for the Door-Opening. Waiting for you so's the party can begin."

"Yes, yes; let's run . . ." Myfwr skipped a dozen steps or so, then

stopped suddenly. "Wonder if Uncle Nylor's come?"

"I should think so."

"Goody! But tell me, tell me, please—then I'll run as fast as fast, all the way home."

"I'll see if Mummy'll let me."

Loriana stood silent, trennoring.

*What is it Loriana?* asked her Mother, alarm forming in her thoughts.

*No, nothing wrong. Myfwr's all right,* Loriana sent back quickly, before her Mother had time to put the question into trennor-sense. *She want's to know if everybody's ready for us—'specially if Uncle Nylor's come.*

*I've told you before about . . .*

*It's her Birthday, Mummy—*

*All right. Just a peep, mind you.*

And Loriana saw the twins, Elva and Caylor, playing by the fireplace with a woolly toy, Uncle Rayti and Aunt Rosea sitting laughing by the window—with one eye apiece on the twins, and, standing by the doorway, staring at the ceiling with his usual smile, little round Uncle Nylor. Loriana tried to trennor into his mind—but her Mother caught the intention and made her close down.

But, not before she felt Uncle Nylor say: *Hello, Loriana!*

"Yes, he's there," she told Myfwr.

"Oh—oh—race you home!" shouted Myfwr over her shoulder, while she made a few, excited, floundering steps through the grass.

Loriana allowed her the customary, count-up-to-fifty start. Then she set off in long-legged bounds, letting excitement rise with her racing heartbeats. Soon she had passed her sister, scrambled over the fence and ran up the path towards the house. She was tempted to trennor again—a quick anticipatory peek at the party—but suddenly remembered Myfwr panting along somewhere behind, and stopped running.

She sent her mind back and trennored Myfwr's panting wail as she came over the fence.

*Wait for me, Lori.*

For a moment Loriana imagined she had caught the message a fraction of a second before making trennor-contact with her sister, as though Myfwr had trennored the thought for herself. That was impossible, though. Myfwr wasn't like her Mother and herself and Uncle Rayti. She was trennor-dumb, like Uncle Nylor.

As her sister trotted up, face flushed, corn-coloured hair curling

over one eye, Loriana thought how unfair it was that all the nicest people were trennor-dumb. She was a little resentful at not being truly able to share her mind with those she liked best—except Mummy, of course, who was always making her keep trennor-silence so as to teach her to think for herself, as she said, and avoid bothering others with her ceaseless mental chatter.

And, poor Myfwr, what would she be when she grew up? Loriana couldn't imagine—unless she became a healer, like Daddy had been.

Sighing a little, she put her sister's hair straight, retied the red ribbon, flicked a trace of dust from the new dress, a dusting of pollen from the shoes, and walked her moderately sedately but with excitement the rest of the way home.

"You go first, then," she suggested. "They're waiting for the Door-Opening."

Just before Myfwr's hand touched the door everybody inside started singing The Birthday Song. The door flung itself open—and they were in, the party had begun.

Myfwr looked a bit overwhelmed by the people, the cake with seven long, coloured candles, the little table heaped with glittering parcels.

"Now go and get washed quickly both of you, then we can start properly," said their Mother. "Where have you been all this time?"

"It was such a long time to wait," whispered Loriana uncomfortably.

"Where have you been?"

"In the Daisy-field," Loriana answered, wishing she could trennor the reply instead of talking. But Mummy said that was very bad manners in company; so she daren't.

Her Mother looked quickly at Myfwr, saying nothing. Loriana knew without a word being said, a thought trennored, that sometime later she would be scolded for letting Myfwr go into the field in her new party dress.

*Sorry Mummy, she trennored.*

*Sh!* replied her Mother.

Uncle Rayti smiled.

They couldn't get downstairs again quickly enough. To start the party off Uncle Nylor made a square of glittering yellow paper come flying through the door to meet them, like a strange, *squiggly* sort of coloured bird.

"Oh, we're going to have fun," thought Loriana, while Myfwr

screached in delight and clutched at the paper as it flapped above her head. Teasingly it kept just beyond her reach, until she grew a little too excited—and a slight frown from her Mother brought the game to an end and the temporary bird to roost on the gift-table, where it turned back to an ordinary piece of pretty paper.

“Take us for a ride, Uncle Nylor, please,” sang Myfwr, clapping her hands and jumping up and down like a little, beribboned rabbit.

“But we’re waiting to start your tea-party, Dear,” said her Mother.

Loriana noticed her Mother was wearing the specially indulgent smile she kept for Myfwr and birthday parties. She realised that, because Myfwr had developed no sign of trennor-skill, she had to be shown little expressions of kindness which were unnecessary between those who could share their minds. But sometimes she wished for just that sort of a smile——

Loriana had long since learned to laugh at herself, had picked up from grown-ups’ minds the ability to count her blessings, and when Myfwr glanced at the cake, then, impatiently, at the table heaped with presents, she hoped the little one would get her own way—then they could both have fun.

“But it’ll be too dark after tea, Mummy. Please Mummy! Please Uncle Nylor!” persisted Myfwr.

The two grown-ups looked at each other, shrugged and smiled. Loriana clapped her hands as Uncle Nylor walked towards the door. The door opened by itself. Myfwr laughed.

“P’raps I’ll see another shooting-star and get another wish,” shouted Myfwr as she ran outside into the evening.

While Loriana followed Uncle Nylor through the door she felt a trennor-glow of anxiety as she passed Aunt Rosea. She wondered what was going to go wrong, and felt a faint, sympathetic twinge of fear—just like when Uncle Nylor got them whizzing giddily around the tree tops and made her feel she was going to fall and fall and fall for ever. But you couldn’t feel frightened for long with Uncle Nylor looking up and smiling with his round pink face—and there he was now, waiting to lift them up for a ride.

So Loriana dismissed her Aunt’s premonition, deciding quickly that it must be over something unimportant—like somebody breaking a saucer or swallowing a cherry-stone. Aunt Rosea was always fussing over things no one else bothered about, and, with a lot of people in a small room Loriana couldn’t help picking up a little of the thoughts around her; no matter how tight she kept her trennor-hearing shut down.



She ran over to Myfwr and Uncle Nylor standing waiting for her.

"Not very high, not very far this time," said Uncle Nylor, "it's getting too dark."

"Ooooooh——" sighed Myfwr disappointedly.

Her Mother looked as though she was going to object, but Lorian quickly suggested:

"I'll trennor-see with you, Uncle Nylor—then we can have a proper ride and be all right."

He glanced at her Mother, who, reluctantly it seemed to Lorian, nodded.

"All right then," he replied, and sounded pleased, lifting Myfwr and Lorian off the ground together while Lorian trennored into his mind.

"Keep them together, Nylor!" shouted their Mother. And Lorian heard Uncle Nylor's mind laugh happily.

*Take her hand, he said; and keep your eyes open. Hold tight——*

Then up they went, over the roof-top. Wind rushed past Lorian's ears like the sound of the sea. She could hear Myfwr's excited, ecstatic—

cally-scared little squeals as her new birthday party dress ballooned out, flapped in the air, looking like a giant, frilly, airborne flower. A few crows were sauntering home towards the wood, behind which a big red sun was going down.

"See, birds!" shouted Lorian, "we can fly better than you—see!"

*Watch where you're going!* warned Uncle Nylor's mind.

She looked up in time to see how close they were to a long branch of one of the beech-trees beside the house; they swerved round and over it.

"Ooooooh, look!" yelled Myfwr, "there's my shooting-star again!"

Lorian glanced up briefly and, as she expected, saw nothing remarkable. There was only a rather peculiar, long white cloud across the sky. But she let Myfwr use whatever she thought she'd seen, as excuse for making another wish.

*Look at it again,* ordered Uncle Nylor. Lorian had a vague impression of alarm—but it was so difficult to tell with Uncle Nylor; he could only send a trennor-thought when she or her Mother had made a link with him, and then he could never really send anything but the words he was thinking—just like talking.

Lorian looked up again as Myfwr shouted: "There it is! My Birthday shooting-star!"

And at the end of the long, white cloud Lorian saw something like a bright, tiny light wink once or twice.

*Hold tightly, look down for me, you're coming down,* cut in Uncle Nylor abruptly.

Everyone was outside when they landed—even their little cousins, Elva and Caylor, each clinging tightly to one of Aunt Rosea's hands.

One of the first things Lorian noticed was that Aunt Rosea wasn't worried any more. That, meant that whatever she had been foreseeing had already happened; but nobody seemed any the worse.

All the same there was a feeling of worry about all the grown-ups.

"You're quite sure, Nylor?" Lorian's Mother asked.

"Lorian saw it, you'd better check," he answered. "Maybe I misinterpreted," he went on, as though hopefully.

"Let me see your memory, Lorian," said her Mother.

*Go back to the cloud you saw just now.*

And Lorian felt her Mother's mind quickly unmesh from her's as she found the memory.

"No, you were right, Nylor."

"Let's get down to the field where we can see," suggested Uncle

Rayti briskly. "The children will have to come, too—and, anyway, we might need them," he got in quickly as Aunt Rosea opened her mouth to speak.

In the field Loriana stood and gazed at the peculiar, long, thin cloud. She couldn't see the bright whatever-it-was glittering at the end of it any more but, standing still in the grass, she noticed the cloud was moving, very slowly, growing longer.

In the minds of the grown-ups she could sense an increasing fear. "After all this time!" whispered her Mother.

"Perhaps they're grown up by now," suggested Uncle Nylor.

"I'll try to see," Loriana heard her Mother say in a strange voice.

There was a silence, and in that silence came a powerful trennor-call.

*Welcome Home*, it said. And Loriana had never known her Mother use her mind so strongly since Daddy died.

Eventually the thought faded out.

"Nothing!" said her Mother.

Uncle Nylor's face fell.

"Let's try together," suggested Uncle Rayti.

They sent out a trennor-call that Loriana felt powerful enough to reach right round the world.

But their consternation merely ended in a dual mental shrug.

"We always knew they'd come back," said Uncle Nylor.

"And," said Aunt Rosea, "they would never bother unless their minds were still driven by hate."

There was a silence which bewildered Loriana even more than the conversation had.

"I'll make the *Link-Call*," broke in Uncle Rayti eventually. "Perhaps meanwhile you could try contact through Loriana."

Her Mother hesitated, then: *Come with me, Loriana*, she sent.

As she threw her mind wide open to her Mother's guidance, Loriana heard the call Uncle Rayti was sending out. Mr. Vlasin on the other side of the wood answered first, just before Mrs. Rollis up the road, then a number of people she knew a little followed by a flood of minds she'd never met before. But her Mother interrupted her growing surprise, wonder:

*Up there is a ship. A sky ship. In the ship, men. We must find their minds. . . . Don't be afraid, dear. . . . We need you. You've never been told, but you are the finest Trennor in the world . . .*

*But, Mummy, that's what you are . . .*

*No, darling . . . I was until you were born. . . . But I'll be with you now, helping you. . . . This way . . .*

Loriana felt her mind trennoring towards the white trail in the darkening sky. First her Mother was directing her thoughts. Then Loriana leaped ahead, her Mother following her lead.

And suddenly their minds were inside the ship.

There, Loriana met minds full of strange thoughts, lonely thoughts, blind thoughts. She felt the fearful black grandeur of Space, the wonder of distant worlds and the pride in the hearts of those who hurled across the empty darkness to conquer them.

And for the first time she understood why she had been taught those old nursery legends about the Star Devils. The same old frightening fascination came upon her as when she had perched listening, faintly comprehending, on her Mother's knee, nearly half her short lifetime ago.

*Back to claim our own!* She felt someone think.

*Filthy Mutants!* snarled another, holding a shiny metal tube in his hands.

*Long live the Emperor!* someone else with a mind like the inside of a black iron ball repeated over and over again.

*The Emperor will be pleased with us,* another thought. And this seemed someone important. Loriana traced the thought to its owner.

She trennored into his mind and, through his eyes, looked down to where, far below, her own body stood, gazing up to the thin white cloud and the silvery speck that glittered at its end from time to time.

The man raised his head. "No sign of any cities yet, Mr. Lort," he said. Loriana felt the thought and heard the words together.

Facing him was a young man like no one Loriana had ever seen before. His hair was cropped short in a peculiar, naked-looking style, and he was encased in clothes gaudy yet stiff, composed of too many hard lines and unnecessary elaboration.

"No, Sir, nor sign of opposition." He spoke stiffly as he dressed.

"Somehow, Mr. Lort, I don't think we're going to need the bombs."

"No, Sir."

"No. I don't think there'll be anything down there. I think they died out as suddenly as they came—The freaks!"

In the back of his mind Loriana noticed a stirring of regret.

"Well, Mr. Lort," he went on, "the old stories always said there isn't another world like this in the galaxy. Perhaps it's that huge moon makes it more fertile, healthy, more full of the changes and contrasts which are essential to a vigorous life."

"Yes, Sir. We'll soon know, Sir."

"Yes. You'd better check that the first landing-party are all ready. We can't take anything for granted—although it *does* look as though this, of all places, is going to be one world we get without a fight."

Once more Loriana felt regret in his mind as he spoke.

The young man raised his right hand stiffly to his forehead; then turned sharply on his heel and went away.

The man whose thoughts Loriana was sharing glanced at a glass-covered instrument. *No radioactivity, anyway*—the thought was coloured by surprise.

*Take his mind*, came her Mother's thought.

Loriana traced his thinking down through his memories of childhood, infancy, to the time when he had learned to use those parts of his brain which controlled the movements of his body. She sent an impulse through his unconscious thoughts, ordering him to touch a finger-tip to his nose, just to get the feel of his muscle-control.

There was no compliant movement.

She willed him to stop walking.

He continued slowly pacing.

*Come back, Loriana*, ordered her Mother, afraid . . .

And suddenly she was back on the ground, looking up through her own eyes at the thin white trail across the sky. Wondering.

No one spoke. There was an acute trennor-silence. Even Myfwr, who couldn't be expected to understand it all, was quiet, looking almost thoughtfully at the sky. Loriana wondered why she hadn't already turned to tears because her Birthday party was being spoiled.

Then, rising from faint beginnings to a great crescendo, Loriana felt a great trennor-pulse sweep through her mind like the cry of a tremendous voice, the surging of a mighty sea. It was *The Link*, the enjoined strength of every trennor-able person in the world. She let her own mind flow into this ocean, joining the cry which swelled upwards to the tiny, glittering ship in the sky.

**GO BACK.**

Then, easily following the trail of her previous trennor-journey, she again looked through the alien eyes of the man in command of the ship.

She felt an excitement jump into his mind. His gaze focussed on a red light, which glowed in the wall in front of him, and below that light a needle vibrated across the bright red figures on a dial. He spoke into the grill of a box set in the wall.

"Alert! Open bomb ports, crews at the ready for imminent action.

Landing parties prepare for battle-order dropping." His thoughts were shot with exultation as he spoke. Anticipation moved through his mind like a song.

"Gentlemen," he said, "they're trying to get into our minds. The meter shows a powerful mental force concentrated on this ship. There's a lot of them down there. Let's get in and take over. . . . All Officers immediately report to me over close-circuit for final briefing. . . . Long live the Emperor!"

*A trick only works once against a human, went on his thoughts. If we can't get over an obstacle we go through it—if we can't fight mentally we make our minds impregnable. . . . Nothing in the Universe can hold us for long—Muties, you've had your fling, now it's our turn.*

With horror Loriania followed his thoughts, and with bewilderment, while around her, through her, ran the united thought of every trennor-active in the world:

**GO BACK.**

And all Loriania felt was something hard, unyielding, in the mind of the man she was watching. It was as though a physical shield had been hammered across his brain—warding off any attempt to direct his thoughts by trennor-control.

The linked ocean of minds surged against this shield, hurled like an irresistible shaft. The whole force of this assault was turned against one man, and the spearhead was Loriania—with a bridgehead in his mind.

Through his eyes she saw the needle whirl viciously round the red-figured dial. Her own mind quaked with the laughter that shook his.

Great forces poured through her, against an immovable barrier. The whole Universe seemed one avalanche of fierce light, pressing down upon her.

Loriania screamed in her thoughts.

Then, like an overloaded fuse, her mind went out.

When consciousness returned she was in her mother's arms. Someone was stroking her hair. She saw a deepening blue sky above her and, across the blueness, a thin white trail, now tinged with the red final rays of the almost-set sun. Everyone stood silent—even Myfwr, whose face was turned to the sky and whose eyes were shut.

Suddenly Loriania felt a million ages older than her eleven years. She was as old as mankind—and older, right back to the days the first speck of jelly quivered into life when the sun was young. And at the

head of that long line of successful experience was a knowledge, understanding, ability—just a little more than human.

*"We must stop them,"* said her mind and voice together. "Come with me and throw that ship back to the stars it came from, Uncle Nylor."

She smiled at the thought of him being her Uncle; now he was the right arm of a whole race—just as her Mother was a cell of consciousness in a mighty united Mind—and she, herself, for the moment, was the focus, the centre of awareness of this Mind.

She pictured the ship lost in the darkness in between the stars, searching, searching eternally for a home lost forever. Pity was in her, pity and, deep in the memory which was her racial heritage, a pride. For, although the men up there in the sky would never admit it, she too was human. Human—and a fighter too: the same stock.

Mind against metal. Wisdom against ingenuity. Strength against force. A mutual determination which never really knew how to give in.

So she directed the strong right arm—which a moment before had been her Uncle—to aim the blow which would hurl the ship from the skies above Earth into the empty darkness whence it came.

*NOW!* she ordered, as a view of the ship came sharp to her. She saw its long, slim lines, the trail of vapour behind, the shining spread of swept-back wings standing against the sky for an instant——

Then for a second——

A minute——

*It's no good,* came the despairing thought from the Being who had suddenly become her Uncle again.

*Wait! Wait!* she urged, and slid back into the dark mind of the Commander of the ship.

She searched his memory until she learned everything he knew about the weapons the ship carried.

The she focussed her trennor-vision until the mechanism of one of the nuclear bombs came clear to her.

*You see?* she called her Uncle, without wavering her attention.

*Yes . . . ?*

*Bring these four pieces of metal together at exactly the same instant —Quickly! I'm getting tired.*

But before he could use his unique talent to make the bomb prematurely perform the function it had been designed for, there came into

their minds an impression like a voice. A strong, clear, sweet voice:—

*Why did you spoil my Party? Why did you make such a pretty shooting-star in the sky and then come down nearer and fright ever'body? Why are you frightened of us?—you mustn't be frightened. We're only people: Mummy and Lori and Elva 'n Caylor, and Auntie Rosey and Uncle Rayti, and Uncle Nylor and me.*

And the voice went on, yet no more words were in it. It was like the air to an immaculate, simple song. It was a ray of light in their minds, too—as quiet yet merciless as the slow, unfeigning gaze of a very young child.

Loriana was suddenly ashamed at the thought of how near she had been to destroying life, to killing sentient creatures because she had been afraid.

She felt Uncle Nylor steal out of her mind. Quietly.

She went back to the mind of the captain of the ship.

The hard shield which had been across his thoughts was gone. And with it had gone a host of other walls which had grown up when his mind grew up. Loriana could feel the new life moving in the spaces where these barriers had been.

Then, all at once, she felt very, very young again—an eleven-year-old girl.

Shyly she spoke into his mind: *Welcome Home.*

And when he repeated it a million minds joined in the thought:—  
*WELCOME HOME.*

Loriana let her mind come back to herself, standing quietly in the evening on a green field of Earth.

Aunt Rosea began speaking. Like most seers she very rarely had anything to say. But now:

“... a Healer ... like her father. A Healer such as we've never known before. And she has inherited all her Mother's trennorhood as well. ... A talent second only to Loriana's.

“What brought it out to-day?” whispered Uncle Nylor, sounding still very subdued.

“The excitement of the party, the force of our concentrated minds,” suggested Uncle Rayti.

Mvfwr laughed out loud.

“Silly!” she said. “I saw a star and I wished. I wished I could see things far away—like Lori can. Then I saw it again, and wished and wished and wished. Then ever'body got all frightened and I wished

they wasn't frightened, could get happy again. So I wished harder than I've ever wished before. . . . And now ever'body's happy and we can have some fun again."

"But not tonight, dear," said her Mother, whispering. "Everyone's too tired. We'll have to put off the party till tomorrow."

Early the next morning, after everyone had been to sleep and woken up again, the ship came to rest on the flat top of the low hill in front of the wood. Everyone went out to meet it.

The Captain and his First Officer—Lort—came out first. The bright buttons had been torn from their uniforms. The Whirling-Galaxy, symbol of the Imperial Interstellar Navy, was missing from their epaulettes. They trod the green grass of Earth softly, with wonder, as though they didn't want to disturb a dream.

Loriana and Myfwr went hand in hand to meet them. Myfwr was jumping about with excitement as usual. Loriana felt she was greeting old friends.

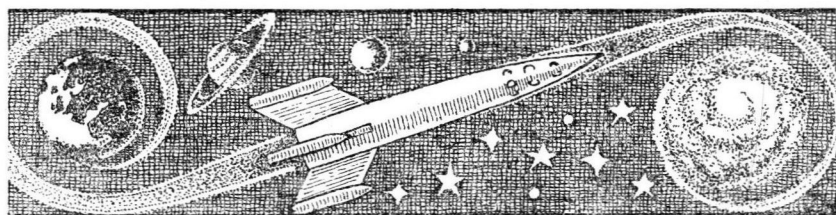
"Welcome Home," the sisters said with voice and mind.

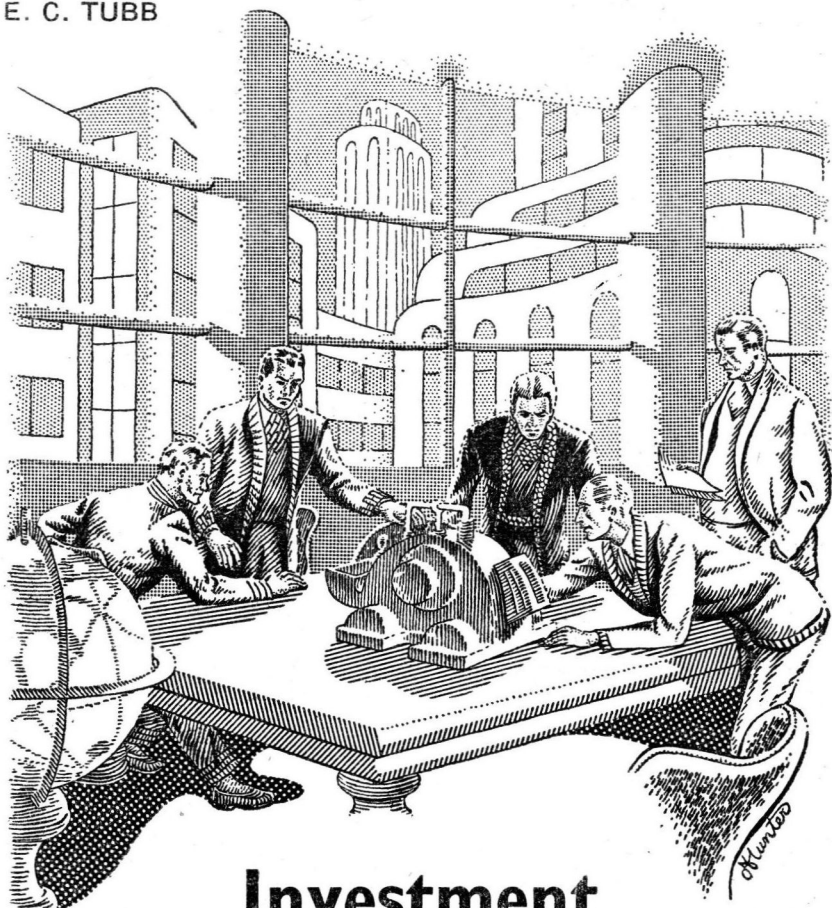
And the two men stood in the early morning sunlight—

And smiled, nodded their heads, when Myfwr asked:

"Would you like to come to my Birthday Party?"

DAVID IRISH





## Investment

*Water was the most precious commodity on Mars, yet there was something else which the natives learned to value even more*

*Illustrated by Alan Hunter*

In a soundproofed room high in a soaring block of glass and plastic offices, five men sat around a table and stared at a machine. The men were all of a pattern, smooth, cultured, expensively dressed and softly spoken. None of them was young. Two of them had the scarred hands of men who, at one time, had been accustomed to toil. Each of them controlled more real power than any obsolete king.

The machine was a model, smooth, glinting, humped and resting in the centre of the long table like a black-coated beetle.

Conroy looked at it, then at the others, then looked back at the machine again.

"Well, gentlemen," he said quietly. "This is it."

"Is it?" Le Blanc, old wizened, with little shrewd eyes and thin, withered hands, pursed his lips and shrugged. "You called us here, Conroy, and we came. As yet none of us knows just why you called us. Therefore your remark verges on the stupid."

"Conroy isn't stupid," said Hendricks, and nodded towards Delmar. "Ask John here."

Delmar flushed at the memory of a too-recent set-back and glanced at Witherson. Witherson, who had also come near to ruin when he had attempted to best Conroy, smiled and lit a cigarette with elaborate care.

"I think most of you know that I am far from being stupid," said Conroy drily. He leaned forward and rested his hand on the model. "The patents of this machine are mine. I have full control of the De Mare generator with all rights, privileges, markets, etc., and I have assembled you gentlemen here today to discuss its future." He leaned back, his eyes alert as he watched their changing expressions.

"I needn't give you a resumé of market conditions here. All of you have a finger in more than one industrial pie and all of you must be aware that, owing to recent legislation, the profitable monopolies and cartels which have built our fortunes are coming to an end."

"Are they?" Le Blanc waved irritably at a coiling wreath of cigarette smoke. "I seem to have heard similar prophecies before."

"And they meant nothing." Conroy nodded. "I agree. But we have now reached a period where competition has become so intense for the consumer market that large profits and easy speculation are a thing of the past. Now, as never before, the monopolies and cartels are beginning to tread on each other's toes. Geared as we are to large-scale production fresh markets must be found or we, as individuals, will be absorbed into the Co-operative enterprises." He looked at Witherson. "I believe that you have already experienced what must come?"

"I have." Witherson dragged at his cigarette. "I was interested in detergents, both for household and industrial use. Naturally I was a member of a price ring and had my guaranteed share of total profits. I..."

"Cut it short," interrupted Delmar acidly. "You are not giving a lecture on economics."

"Perhaps not." Witherson glared his dislike at the magnate. "To

be brief then. Trans-World Chemicals decided to enter into competition. They had the plant, the raw materials, the packaging and distribution facilities. Up to that decision they had supplied me with the basic materials but after that I had no supplies. The result . . ." He crushed out his cigarette.

"You let yourself be beaten so easily?" Hendricks shrugged.

"I saw the red light and sold out while I could." Witherson looked at Conroy. "I knew that, if I persisted in competition, I would be ruined. First, Trans-World Chemicals did not intend to join the price ring and so would have offered their product for sale at a cut-throat figure. Second, to continue in operation was to literally cut my financial throat. Overheads are high, too high, and any of us can only continue with a large turnover. Block one part of the processing and the cost rises to an incredible extent. I could have held out, I suppose, ruined the shareholders and gone down with colours flying, but I preferred to save what I could. I sold out to Trans-World Chemicals. My product is still for sale at the old price but now Trans-world owns the entire detergent business."

"And they will continue to do so." Conroy smiled at Witherson. "It would take billions for any new company to set up in competition. No new company will be formed for such a purpose. Why should it? The consumer market is flooded as it is and every new customer for a new company must be won from the old." He relaxed as he stared at the four men.

"What Witherson has experienced is what is coming to each of us. You, like myself, have remained individual operators. We have built our companies, floated our own loans, made our own agreements. We are a dying race, the last of the Tycoons, and after us there will be nothing but the big, Co-operative companies which, because they are so big and must expand to remain solvent, will inevitably squeeze us out."

"I remember '98," said Le Blanc slowly. "We managed to survive then and can do so again."

"'98 was no different than any other stock market crash," said Conroy impatiently. "Paper fortunes were lost and made but that is all they were—paper. I'm talking about factories, plant, equipment, everything we depend on to remain as we are. You can think of us, any company if you like, as a tree. It either grows or it dies. The big companies cannot do other than grow, and, like the forest giants, they are killing off the saplings. We are the saplings. To survive at all we must be as big as they are—bigger." He rested his hand on the model again. "And that is where the De Mare generator comes in."

"What does it do?" Le Blanc stared interestedly at the smooth finish of the model. "A new source of power?"

"No."

"A method of processing edible food from rubbish?" Delmar tried to be sarcastic and failed.

"Where would you sell such a product if you could make it?" Conroy didn't raise his voice but Delmar flushed beneath his contempt. "To repeat anything at present on the market would be a waste of time. A new power source would be nice, but Universal Atomics Inc. would soon take steps to safeguard their own interests. By the time they had finished with us we wouldn't be able to give our power away, let alone sell it."

"What is it, then?" Henricks reached out to touch the model. "You wouldn't have bought it unless it was of value, Conroy. What does it do?"

"It makes water," said Conroy swiftly, and smiled at their sudden silence.

At first sight it seemed ridiculous but all of them respected Conroy's intelligence so they didn't laugh or jeer. Witherson frowned at the model then looked at Conroy.

"What does it make it from?"

"Sand."

"Sand? Which kind of sand? Sea-shore sand? Quarry sand? Sand from the Sahara?"

"It will make water from any sort of sand which has a high oxygen content." Conroy leaned forward and touched the machine. "I needn't tell you how I obtained this invention. It wasn't easy. De Mare himself worked on it with but one object in mind and, if it had not been for his unfortunate death and the resultant calling in of certain monies I had advanced to him, his heirs would have carried out his original intention. As it is I own it. All of it."

"And a lot of good it will do you, Conroy," snapped Delmar pettishly. "What on Earth's the good of a machine for making water from sand?"

"None—on Earth," said Conroy quietly. He smiled at the expression on Le Blanc's wizened old face. "You begin to understand?"

"Sand," whispered the old man. "Sand with a high oxygen content." He looked at Conroy. "Mars!"

"Yes, Mars. A planet covered with sand. Sand containing approximately sixteen tons of oxygen to every hundred and forty-three tons of ferrous oxide. The one place where we don't have to worry about the basic equation of selling. We don't have to create a demand in order to

supply it. The demand is already there. Mars is stifled for want of water and, with the De Mare generator, we can sell them all they need."

He smiled at them, relaxed, his big, scarred hands resting on the polished surface before him. Calmly he waited for the storm.

Delmar started it. He was still smarting from Conroy's contempt and was determined to be obstructive. Conroy knew it, knew too that the others had a poor opinion of the financier, and mentally congratulated himself on choosing the right man to irritate.

"Rubbish! Ridiculous nonsense!" Delmar didn't trouble to disguise his feelings. "You talk as though Mars is next door. It isn't. It's millions of miles away and, for one thing, the freight charges will be excessive."

"What freight charges?" Conroy smiled at the others. "Surely you don't think that we intend shipping water direct? That would be nonsense, I agree, but we have only to worry about shipping the generators. On Mars is all we need. Water from the sand, iron from the residue for pipes and tankers, and, best of all, a market which is clamouring for what we have to sell."

"What's on your mind, Conroy?" Le Blance silenced Delmar with a gesture. "Let's get down to the bones of the matter."

"Right." Conroy leaned forward, his face serious. "My statisticians inform me that, within ten years, we shall all be out of business. This is true unless we can find and develop a new market. Such a market does not exist on Earth. No matter what we try the big combines will move in, take over, and force us out. Even a patented device needs manufacturing facilities and, without their aid, it cannot be marketed. The days of small, private enterprises are over. Within the stated period the stock markets will be so regulated by the combines that speculation will be profitless. Either we accept that or we stand to be ruined. I for one have no intention of being ruined."

"Good for you, Conroy," said Hendricks. "Count me in whatever your plan."

"What I suggest is this," continued Conroy, he didn't seem to have heard the interruption. "We form a new company, Interplanet Enterprises, and we sell water to Mars."

"A bold idea." Le Blance nodded and traced a design on the polish before him with the tip of one thin finger. "How much will it cost?"

"All we have between us—and as much again." Conroy stared at their emotionless expressions. "It's no good doing this unless we do it properly. For one thing we need our own space ships, two of them at least. We shall need an entire factory and workshop for the manufacture

of pipes and tankers. We need our own source of power and atomic piles aren't cheap. We need . . ."

"Why power?" Witherson looked sharply at Conroy. "Don't Universal Atomics supply Mars?"

"They do, and that is why we must have our own power supply. Look!" Conroy held out his hand, the fingers curved, and he slowly clenched his fist. "On Earth we are being squeezed out. I don't want that to happen on Mars. Instead of that we shall do the squeezing. Unless we have our own sources of power we shall be dependent on Universal Atomics. Unless we have our own space ships we shall be dependent on Solar Transportation. There are other companies but you know as I do that they are really one. No, we must be big enough to be beyond opposition."

"I follow that," said Le Blanc, "but there is a point you have overlooked. There is little wealth on Mars. The settlements are sprawling and relatively poor. They have only one export of value." He shrugged. "How do you hope to get a return from the proposed investment?"

"You have answered your own question, Le Blanc. Their one export."

"Marsweed?" The old man nodded. "It fetches a high price but . . ."

"With more water they can grow more crops. We freight those crops back to Earth and so pay for the operating costs of the space ships. Then . . ."

"Once they have grown to depend on our water we raise the price and squeeze them dry!" The old man chuckled. "Conroy! You're a genius!"

"Thank you." Conroy wasn't flattered. "Basically the plan is so simple that it cannot fail. We have precedent to work on and a market which is ripe for what we have to offer. I own the De Mare generator and that will eliminate all competition. It will be a simple matter to arrange that the new company, in return for developing the planet, be granted sovereign powers in order to protect our investment. Then . . ."

His voice droned on, smoothing out difficulties, explaining away objections, bringing up fresh points for consideration and, as the others began to realise the possibilities, they became fired with his own enthusiasm.

The whole thing seemed so delightfully simple.

John Westerly, elected co-ordinator and supreme power on Mars, leaned across his desk and studied the maps his secretary spread before him. Still young, he was Mars-born and had the subtle elongation of

limbs and skull which, together with the unusual chest development, stamped the native Martian from new arrivals.

"I've filled in the newly developed areas," said Mary. "Agriculture is spreading south along the line of the pipe line. The new foundry will be in operation as soon as we can arrange for a power pile and then we can concentrate on the irrigation tanks and sprayers."

"Good. Have you contacted Universal Atomics?"

"I did that yesterday. Their representative will be here on the next ship to arrange for delivery and payment."

John nodded, staring at the coloured sections on the map which showed the density and location of the half-million population of Mars.

"We'll have to put new arrivals down here at the southern extremity. If they don't like the location explain to them that there is alternative work in the foundries, the polar station or the other utilities. We've just about reached the limit of our water supply and any new farms will have to go without."

"They won't like that," said Mary. Like John she was Mars-born and had little sympathy with the new arrivals from Earth whose only idea was to get rich quick by growing and selling the valuable marsweed.

"No one asked them to come here and, if they don't like it, they can always go back to Earth again. If they'd only take the trouble to read our explanatory literature before taking passage they wouldn't arrive here with so many wrong notions. Mars is a communal state and, in order to live at all, everyone must donate time and labour to the utilities." He looked up as a clerk opened the door. "Yes?"

"Two men to see you, John." The clerk spoke with the easy familiarity normal on Mars. "Just arrived from Earth. You busy?"

"Show them in." John gathered up the maps and handed them to Mary. "Fill in the rest of the detail and we'll have a conference later about East-West expansion." He smiled after her as she left the office then rose as two men entered the room.

They were strange in more ways than one. Both were obviously fresh from Earth. Both wore clothes which, if they had been bought locally, would have cost more than any normal family could have afforded. Both had a stilted politeness which sounded foreign to unaccustomed ears.

"Mr Westerly?" One of the men, a thin-faced, hard mouthed individual thrust out his hand. "Glad to know you sir. I understand that, in effect, you are the big boss around here."

"I am the Co-ordinator." John gestured towards chairs. "Sit down and relax."

"We represent Interplanet Enterprises, Mr Westerly," said the man who had spoken before. "My name is Denver and this is Mr Gerard. Sam and Joe." He sat down and, producing cigarettes, offered one to John. "No? Mind if I do?"

"Smoke all you want," said John. "It's your money that you're burning away." He looked interestedly at the two men. "I've heard of your company. They asked me for information a few months ago and have been in touch with the Earth office. Glad to see you."

"I'll get to the point, Mr Westerly," smiled Denver. "My company has authorised us to purchase several sections of land in the vicinity. Can you arrange the transfer?"

"Why buy land? There's plenty for the taking."

"We wish to buy it from the constituted authority." Denver leaned forward, his thin face intent. "I'll be open with you, sir. The company intends to set up expensive and elaborate equipment together with warehouses, administration buildings and workshops. There must be no possibility of question as to title at a later date. If we purchase the land from the elected government such a problem will never arise."

"It would never arise anyway," said John. He rose and rested his hand on a map hanging against a wall. "Land is no problem on Mars. We have an entire planet at our disposal though some areas are slightly more favourable than others. For instance, the settlement is at the lower junction of several canals. The air is thicker here and the ground a little easier to farm." He looked at the two men. "I suppose you know how we operate."

"Certainly. Your staple export is marsweed. There are dormant seeds in the sand which, when irrigated, spring to life and bear a crop of high medicinal value. Water for irrigation is usually piped from the pole though a little is obtained by artesian wells and a little more by chemical separation."

"Very little," said John drily. "Our main problem is, of course, water. On Earth a man can be fed and clothed from the produce of two and a half acres. On Mars we can only get a much lower standard of living from twenty. Fortunately we don't depend on the crops for food. Communal yeast plants provide the staples and the profit from the crop allows a few imported luxuries."

"But with ample water would your crops improve?"

"By a factor of at least ten. Marsweed needs very little water, we spray-irrigate mostly, too much would cause a rot and decay. If we had plenty of water we could increase the harvest and, at the same time, spare more men for other work."

"You speak as though you had conscription," protested Gerard. "Surely you can't force men to work as directed?"

"What?" John stared at the speaker, then laughed. "You misunderstand me. We are individuals, but we must all work together for the common good. For example, I am a paid servant with my salary guaranteed by the government. Our doctors, lawyers, schoolteachers and other professional people are the same. The only way to pay us is for each farmer to give a percentage of his crop into a common pool. We sell it to the Earth and the money compensates the workers on the utilities. In a way it's a form of taxation but, as each benefits, none argues about it."

"And if they did?"

"A man has no right to water unless he pays something towards the wages of the man helping to supply it. The same with the yeast, the professional services, the light and powers utilities." John shrugged. "There are one or two families who refuse to join in. It is their right to do so and they make out by selling their crop direct and paying in cash for what they need."

"And you let them do that?" Denver stared at John. "Aren't you afraid that, if their example spreads, they will ruin your economy?"

"The quicker it's ruined, the better. No one here likes being dependent on anyone for anything. Personally I'd be a lot better off farming my section and that applies to every other paid employee." John smiled at Denver's expression. "You should have read your Martian History," he said quietly. "Then perhaps you'll realise what I'm getting at."

Denver shrugged. History, Martian or otherwise held no interest for him. He was a man of action and left the brain work to the higher executive. He got down to the object of his visit.

"About this land. Can you help us at all?"

"I think so." John stared again at the map. "You could take your pick of any land to the west or east. See? The areas coloured green are settled and unavailable but all the rest is there for the taking."

"We'd want something a little nearer to the spaceport." Denver rested a finger on the dry, crinkled surface of the map. "How much would you say this section is worth?"

"As much as the owner can get," said John frankly. He looked at the tiny lettering. "The title is secure. The owner has lived on it for five years and that makes it his to do with as he likes."

"You follow the settlement regulations then?" Denver frowned as he stared at the map. "We can buy that section but we'll need some more at the perimeter of the settlement proper. Say two sections, here

and here." His finger tapped at the map. "They aren't claimed and I'd like to buy them."

"You can't buy them," said John patiently. "If your company settles there then they can have it for free."

"But will that be constitutional?"

"Yes."

"I'd still like to buy it from you," said Denvers slowly. "Say for a token payment of a dollar an acre—with sovereign rights, of course."

"That goes without saying," said John. "Every landowner on Mars has the right to protect his own property."

"Then you agree?"

"Call it ten dollars an acre, interplanetary dollars, of course, and it's a deal." John almost laughed at the expression of relief in Denvers' eyes. I'll get Lawyer Samuels to arrange the transfer and the land is yours for perpetuity."

"Thank you." Denvers thrust out his hand. "I can see that we are going to get along well with each other." He turned towards the door. "You won't regret this, Co-ordinator."

"I'm sure that I won't," said John politely. "By the way, what is your company going to sell?"

"Water," said Gerald succinctly, and was almost out of the room before John could catch up with him.

"Water!"

"That's right." Denvers allowed himself to be drawn back into the office. "Interplanet Enterprises intend to market the De Mare water generator. We shall have two main production plants selling water direct, with semi-portable units for use in outlying districts." He stared at John. "Have you heard of the De Mare generator?"

"Not until now."

"It separates water from sand. About five tons of water for every hundred tons of sand. The residue can be used in the foundries for the extraction of iron. We..."

"Have you got them?" asked John impatiently. "Here?"

"A few pilot machines. More will be imported as soon as possible."

"I see." John looked thoughtful as he realised the possibilities. "About these semi-portable units. You'll accept deferred terms, of course?"

"No."

"No?"

"We do not intend to sell any production machine. The water from the main plants we shall sell direct and the units will be on hire."

"On hire." John sat down and nodded. "Of course. On hire only?"

"Yes," said Denvers softly and this time it was his turn to hide his amusement.

Conroy sat at his desk and smiled as he read the report in his hand. The intercom at his side hummed its attention signal and he closed the circuit.

"Yes?"

"The members of the board have arrived and are waiting for you, sir."

"I'll join them in five minutes." Conroy flipped the toggle and finished reading the report. Exactly on time he entered the board room and, after nodding to the other four men present, sat at the head of the table.

"I'll make this brief, gentlemen," he said abruptly. "We need more money."

"More?" Witherson seemed to shrink within himself. "But you told us that the original estimate would more than cover our outlay."

"I was wrong." Conroy was deliberately brutal. "Either we find more money or we lose all we've invested."

"Like hell we will!" Delmar sprang to his feet his mouth ugly. "I know you, Conroy, and I know of your financial juggling. Are you trying to take us for a pack of fools?"

"Sit down, Delmar." Le Blanc's thin voice cut through the rising noise like a knife. "Let us hear what our chairman has to say." He looked at Conroy. "Explain."

"Our overheads have been higher than we allowed for. Local labour on Mars is practically unobtainable and the men we have sent there have broken their contracts to turn farmers. With marsweed at its present price and land free for the taking, it pays them to do that. Operating two space ships with one-way pay loads, building the generators, purchasing the atomic piles and radio actives for their maintenance, and paying skilled technicians high enough to make it worth their while to work for us, has run away with our capital. We need more money."

"We haven't got any more money," snapped Delmar. "What about you? You've taken a block of stocks as your share and given the company nothing but the right to use the De Mare generator on licence. You talk of us being ruined but you've taken damn good care to see that you can't lose no matter what happens!"

"Have you finished, Delmar?" Conroy regarded the angry man with

cold dislike. "Without the generator the company couldn't exist. With it there is no limit to what we can do. Must I draw you all a blueprint on company management?"

"That will not be necessary," said Le Blanc acidly. He stared down at the tips of his fingers. "Another share issue?"

"No. We have already floated all the shares the public will stand. Another issue would undermine confidence in the company and we would be left with worthless stock." He smiled. "Now is not the time to destroy their value so as to buy them cheap. We still need credit and public confidence."

"Private loans?"

"No, for the same reason, and for an even better one still. No bank will advance us money without either strong security or a controlling interest. At all costs we must retain control."

"But we have securities," protested Witherson. "Two space ships, a factory on Mars, the generator . . ."

"The banks do not recognise installations off-planet as security. We have not yet paid for the space ships and cannot borrow on them. The generator is useless here on Earth."

"We could sell it to the Maritians," said Hendricks. "They would be willing to buy it."

"At their price—or ours?" Conroy shook his head. "We could sell it, yes, but for a fraction of what we can expect once we have passed this initial hump."

"You seem to be making out a good case for liquidation," said Le Blanc drily. "Is that what you suggest?"

"Of course not. But we must raise enough money between us so that we can continue our operations." Conroy stared at their watchful faces. "Damn you! What's the matter with you all? All of us are in too deep to back out now. A few more millions and we can sit back and wait for the profits to roll in. Are you going to throw away billions for the sake of millions?"

"You promised us an immediate return," said Delmar coldly. "Now you say that we must find more money. Which are we to believe?"

"I back Conroy," said Hendricks. "He knows what he's doing."

"Thank you." Conroy relaxed and smiled as if highly amused. "The company has been in existence for almost a year now. Mars has been buying our water for no more than three months. Before we can expect any sort of gain from our investment we must first provide the consumer with money to pay us for what he consumes. The Martians cannot pay us until they have farmed and sold their crops. Then we

will be paid in full." He leaned back in his chair. "I need hardly remind you of the present market value of marsweed."

"High," admitted Delmar. "But where does that get us? We sell water, yes, but with operating costs so high will they continue to buy it? And even if they do, what sort of a margin of profit will we have?" He looked around the table. "It seems to me that the only ones who stand to benefit are the Martians themselves."

"Naturally." Conroy nodded his agreement. "But before we can pluck a pigeon it must first grow feathers. Remember that. Remember too, that the immigration to Mars has doubled now that they know water is obtainable. Each immigrant will want to farm marsweed. To do that they need water. We supply the water. Every ship heading for Mars is now loaded with certain customers for Interplanet Enterprises."

"But where does that get us?" repeated Delmar. "I'm not in business for philanthropy. I'm in it for profit!"

"It doesn't seem possible," said Conroy wonderingly, "that any man with such a limited imagination could have made so much money. What's the matter, Delmar? Did you lose your intelligence in the last crash?"

"I lost money, and you know it, but my brain is as clear as ever." Delmar clenched his hands to disguise his anger.

"Then use it," snapped Conroy irritably. He leaned forward across the table. "Marsweed is high—why? I'll tell you why in order to save time. It is scarce, that's why. It is scarce because it needs water in order to grow. There was little or no water before we set up our business and now there is more than enough. Harvests will increase by at least ten times. More than that. Every new farm opening up increases the yield. Marsweed is rapidly becoming as common as grass. Soon its value will fall—**but the price of our water will rise!**"

"Clever," said Le Blanc. "Very clever."

"Clever?" Delmar shrugged. "He tells us that we are as good as ruined and you compliment him. Maybe I'm the one that's insane."

"I won't argue that," sneered Conroy. "Fortunately for you there are those who are able to see a little further than their nose." He ignored the man as he spoke to the others. "This first year we will be paid in cash for our water. Next year we will raise the price of both water and hire of the generators. We will agree to accept marsweed as payment, based on the lowest price offered. The lowest because that will be our interest on money loaned. We store the marsweed and sell it at our own time when the prices are right. We don't have to flood the market and can sell a little at a time. Later, we repeat the process. As the supplies of marsweed grow so will the bill owed us for water. At the same time

the price of the crop will fall. In effect we will merely take the entire crop in return for the water to grow it." He relaxed, smiling, his mind busy with the logical outcome of what he proposed.

"We corner the market," said Le Blanc. "The people want marsweed for both medicinal and cosmetrical value. They will want it even more when it is hard to get. As yet it provides the only certain cure for cancer and various unsightly diseases of the epidermis. The demand is high—and we control the supply."

"Exactly." Conroy stared at Delmar as if speaking to him alone. "But it goes even further than that. Not all of Mars will be growing marsweed. There are foundries there now, factories, industries to utilise the ores obtained from the sand. They can even get fissionable elements with sufficient power and water. Once the stranglehold of water has been broken Mars will boom into an El Dorado of potential profit and exploitation."

"But the freight rates!" protested Delmar. "How are you going to get over that?"

"Damn the freight rates," said Conroy savagely. "Can't any of you realise that we're beating our heads against a wall all the time we try to enter into competition with Earth-based industry." He calmed himself and relaxed again in his chair. "Mars is going to be our world from now on—all of it. Marsweed will provide all the capital we need and, with that capital, we'll import luxury items to sell to the colonists. That way we'll make a double profit. Within ten years there won't be a man on Mars with a soul to call his own or a dollar which isn't ear-marked for Inter planet Enterprises. We won't just have a monopoly, gentlemen. We'll have a financial empire!"

"Wonderful!" chuckled Le Blanc. "I've said it before, Conroy, and I'll say it again. You are a genius."

"I'm a business man," snapped Conroy. He stared at the others. "Well? Are you going to provide the money we need?"

He didn't need their shouted agreement. The greed in their eyes had already given him the answer.

The sand car threw coiling plumes of dust behind it as it crawled up the ridge and down into the valley. John stopped it with a jerk, slid aside the door and, zippering his thick coverall, standard wear on Mars, stepped out of the vehicle.

Around him stretched a barren desert broken only by the humped bulk of a machine and the toiling figure of a solitary man. John walked towards him, resting against the side of the warm machine as he watched

the man shovel great quantities of sand into a wide-mouthed hopper. Liquid gurgled down a pipe and into a storage vat while, from a vent at the rear of the machine, an impalpable dust, bright ochre in colour, streamed and dissipated beneath the touch of the thin wind.

"John!" The man flung down his shovel and stepped towards the co-ordinator. "I didn't hear you."

"I'm not surprised." John kicked at the bulk of the De Mare generator. "You were working like a horse."

"Got to," grunted the man. "I've trebled my acreage and the sand soaks water as fast as I can make it."

"Going in for heavy crops, aren't you Seth?" John squinted to where a fuzz of dark green, almost brown vegetation made a scanty carpet on the sand. "Getting greedy?"

"You know better than that, John. Hell, two more big crops and I'll be able to take it easy."

"Will you?"

"Sure. With the prices what they are . . ."

"I meant will you take it easy, or do you just want money?"

"Mean the same, don't they, John?"

"Not always." John caught hold of the man as he stepped towards the shovel. "Relax. You always used to have time for talk when I came around before. Want to burn yourself out and die young?"

"I've got to keep working, John. The hire of this generator is mounting every minute whether I work it or not. I need big crops to pay off at harvest time."

"Battery replacements come expensive too, don't they?"

"Sure, but I'll make out."

John nodded, watching the man sweat as he laboured to shovel hundreds of tons of dust into the hopper in return for the precious water. The sight wasn't new to him. All around the pipe-fed areas men were breaking their backs and straining their hearts to serve the machines. More water to grow more crops so that they could pay for the water to grow the crops. A vicious circle with vicious as the operative word. Deliberately he took the shovel from the man's hands and pushed him so that he sat in the sand.

"John! What the hell?"

"I want to talk with you, Seth, and I can't do it while you're working."

"Talk to me tomorrow. I'll come to the meeting."

"You didn't come to the last one, Seth, and you won't come to the next. Neither you or any like you. Now relax and listen."

"Make it short then," said Seth uneasily. "I've a schedule to meet."

"Why?"

"Why? I've got to pay the hire on the De Mare, haven't I?"

"Why?"

"Are you serious, John? If I don't pay they won't hire it to me next year and I won't be able to farm my land."

"Why not? You did before you got a De Mare, didn't you?"

"Sure, but prices were higher then. A small crop won't keep me now. Damn it all, John, you know all this already."

"I also know that the hire-rate has gone up as from two days ago," said John evenly. "Battery replacements too. Direct water from the main plants has doubled its price per gallon." Absently he stirred the dust with his booted foot. "You know, it seems silly to me, a man killing himself in a race he can't win. As silly as a man doing work without reason." He pointed towards the horizon. "There's Jeff over there, doing exactly the same as you are, and further south Sam is wearing himself out fast. It takes a full day to load the hopper and spray-irrigate the crops."

"Don't I know it? But what else can we do?"

"Cut down production. Prices are less than half of what they were two years ago and they will hit bottom when this year's harvest comes in. Most of it you owe to pay for the water it took to grow it. Some you owe to the government to pay for utilities. The rest is yours—what there is of it. It seems to me that you're no better off now than you were before the water came."

"That's right!" Seth nodded as though he had just thought about it. "I work a dam sight harder now than I ever did before but don't get as much for it. It don't seem right when you look at it that way."

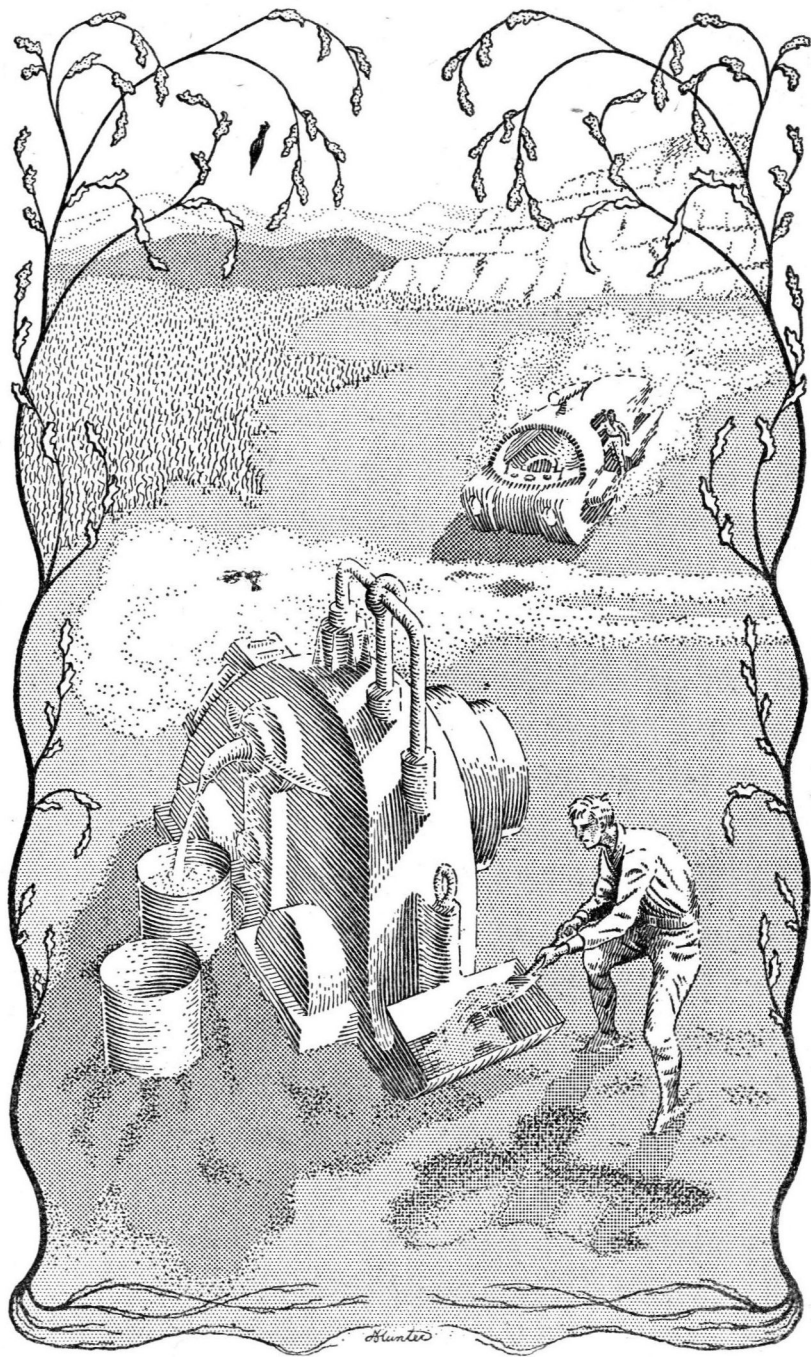
"That's what I thought," said John casually. "I'm glad you see it too." He rose and turned towards the sand car. "I'll be getting on now. See you sometime, Seth."

Dust plumed over the sitting man as he drove away.

Mary was waiting in the office when John returned. He looked tired and a three-day stubble accentuated his normal paleness so that he looked literally ill. Stiffly he slumped into his chair, wincing as his bruised flesh met the unyielding plastic.

"Two days more in that sand car and I'd have to eat standing up."

"I wondered when you'd be back," said Mary. She placed a sheaf of papers on the desk. "A lot's happened in the two weeks you've been away. Have a good trip?"



"I saw a lot of people," he said ambiguously. "Talked to most of them and talked with the rest." He stared at the papers. "What's all this?"

"Immigrant total has now reached a point where new arrivals are becoming a problem. If it wasn't for the De Mares we couldn't have fed them all and the settlement's getting too big to handle."

"Good." He smiled as he read the figures. "Most of them arriving broke eh? Better still. We can claim a six-month period to pay for their houses and food. How's the new pipe line getting on?"

"Almost finished. We can start building the new settlement almost at once. I've sent a detail over to start on a foundry."

"Generators too, I hope?"

"Naturally. The residue is perfect for smelting." Mary counted on her fingers. "Say a year at the most. We'll have prefabs erected by then all ready for occupation."

"A year?" John shook his head. "Speed it up. Cut the time by half if possible."

"I'll try." She looked at him with sudden concern. "Anything wrong, John?"

"Why should there be?" He smiled blandly into her eyes. "Seen the new shops yet?"

"I've looked at them," she admitted. "They have some wonderful things for sale. Nylon and crestone, perfumes and cosmetics, all the things a woman likes." She sighed. "When I see what they have on Earth I wish that I lived there. Fancy being able to just walk into a shop and buy anything you wanted!"

"Fancy," he said drily. He rose on sudden impulse and caught her arm. "Let's go shopping!"

"What? But how? I've no money and . . ."

"I've got money." He grinned at her expression. "Never mind where I got it, let's go and spend it. Quick now, before I change my mind!"

The shops looked as though they had been transplanted direct from Earth. Brilliantly lit, plastic fronted, the wares displayed to best advantage and designed to tempt the heart and awaken the envy of any woman ever born. Mary stared into them as though she were staring into fairyland and around them, pressing close to the plastic, women, both new arrivals and native born, reflected their longing in their eyes.

"What would you like?" John led the way from one window to another. "Perfume? Cosmetics? Take your pick."

"I'd like . . ." Mary blushed as they halted before a window filled

with filmy underwear. "Look John! It's transparent!"

John thrust his way through a crowd of women and into the shop. It was filled with sightseers and the attendants, obviously imported employees of the company, wore resigned expressions as well as their uniform grey. John gestured to one of them, a not-so-young woman with a harried expression and a trapped smile.

"Yes sir?"

"Some clothes for the young lady. Let her have her choice."

"Yes, sir!" The sales assistant reached down and produced something which would have reminded John of a cobweb if he had ever seen one. "Imported direct from Paris, Madam. Triple strength trestene guaranteed rot and wear proof." She held it to the light and Mary touched it with reverent fingers.

"How much?"

"One thousand dollars."

"What!" Mary stared hopelessly at John. "It's too dear."

Privately he agreed with her. A thousand interplanetary dollars was the latest price quoted for a litre of refined marsweed juice. On Earth the juice would fetch five times that amount while the garment had probably cost no more than ten dollars. He shrugged. "If you want it, buy it." He looked over the crowded shop. "Take your time. Look at something else and pick what you want. Buy what you choose up to five thousand dollars." He smiled at her shocked expression. "I mean it."

He turned away to avoid her blushing thanks and listened to the low tones of a couple deep in conversation.

"... if Jerry and Bill arrive as they said they would we can put them up and so avoid them having to work for the government. They'd be willing to work for you for a year. With their help you can grow more weed and I'll be able to afford something decent to wear for a change ..."

John looked sympathetically at the harassed expression on the man's face, and moved on.

"... two thousand dollars is only a couple of litres of juice. I've never had a decent dress since I came here and I can't see why you have to be so mean."

"Two litres of juice means two acres of marsweed," protested the man weakly. "I'm killing myself as it is trying to farm what I've already got."

"I'll help you. Fred is getting big now and can use a shovel and I can operate the spray. *Why* can't you buy me a dress?"

"Hello, Kerry," said John before the man could answer. "You're looking thin. You want to take care of him Mrs Kerry, you'll have a hard time finding another like him."

"Hello, John." The woman, thin, scrawny, but with the unsuspected strength of all the colonists seemed unable to take her eyes from the tempting display on the racks. "You shopping?"

"Buying a gift for Mary." John craned his head to see whether she had made her final choice.

"Engagement present?" Mrs Kerry nodded and smiled. "She's a good girl, John. You could do a lot worse."

"I know it." John waved as he saw Mary looking for him. "Be seeing you, Kerry."

He paid the cheque, thumbprinting against his signature, and steered the way out and through the gaping crowd outside. Mary walked close beside him, hugging her package, her face radiant with smiles.

"Thank you, John. It's the nicest thing anyone has ever done for me."

"You deserve it." He stared thoughtfully at her. "Clothes mean a lot to a woman, don't they Mary?"

"They mean almost everything." She pressed the package against her face. "I'm just dying to try it on."

"Why don't you?" He smiled at the conflicting emotions mirrored on her face. "You can thank me tomorrow—when you're wearing it. Go on now. Go and amuse yourself."

He stood for a moment staring after her retreating figure then, sombrely, he stared back towards the glittering shops with their avid-eyed women pressing before the windows. He sighed.

Lawyer Samuels was small, shrewd, slightly addicted to alcohol, but intelligent. He had proved his intelligence by earning over a million dollars as a company lawyer, and then had shown his imagination by running to Mars to avoid paying taxes. He thrust his way into the office, jerked his head at a man hovering behind him, and sat down before John's desk.

"We've got trouble, John. First case of this particular type I've known since I've been here." He pointed towards his companion, a pale-faced, thin-bodied man who John recognised as one of the old-timers. "All right, Penders, say your piece."

"I'm in trouble, John," said the man miserably. "I'm in debt."

"So?" John raised his eyebrows at Samuels. "I thought you said that this was the first case of its type? Debt is nothing new. The gov-

ernment will pay for him and he can work it off on the utilities. Why bother me?"

"Because there are going to be others and this is a precedent." Samuels stretched and glanced at the low ceiling. "Tell him, Pender."

"It's the company, Interplanet Enterprises," said the man. "Like everyone else I hired a De Mare and went in for large scale production of marsweed. When they upped the hire-rate I had to irrigate more acreage. They upped it again and I had to get my wife and kids to help me farm the land." He shrugged. "One of them make a mistake. They over-sprayed the crops and now they've rotted on me." He looked appealingly at John. "I owe for the hire and I've got nothing with which to pay. I can't even donate my share to the government. I'm broke, John, and now the company are pressing for payment."

"Well?" John shrugged unsympathetically. "Why come whining to me? What do you expect me to do?"

"Can't the government pay for me and I'll work off the debt later?"

"How much do you owe?"

"Twenty thousand dollars. That means twenty litres of juice at present prices and I haven't got an acre that's worth the trouble of harvesting."

"The government hasn't got that kind of money," said John. "We can handle small debts up to say a hundred dollars, but by the time we supply your family, feed you, provide housing and water, you'd have to work about a hundred years to work off a debt that size. It can't be done."

"Then what can I do?" Pender clenched his hands as he looked from the lawyer to John. "The company want me to sign papers promising that I'll work for them at their own price."

"What doing?"

"Farming."

"Your land or theirs?"

"They want me to deed them my farm. They'll pay me a wage and I turn over the crop to them for disposal." He stared miserably at his hands. "I don't know what to do, John. I thought that perhaps you could advise me."

"Why should I? Did you ask for advice when the water came? No. You grabbed at the chance of a big profit and got greedy. Now, because you've hit a little trouble, you can't think of anything else to do but whine." John pointed towards the door. "Get out of here!"

"What!"

"You heard me. Get out!"

For a moment the man hesitated, his hands trembling with rage, then, with a strangled sound, he turned and stamped out of the room. The slam of the door echoed throughout the building. Samuels looked shrewdly at John.

"Think it will work?"

"I don't know. But I do know that wet-nursing them is the worst thing we can do. Pender is like the rest, he has brains and intelligence, courage too or he wouldn't be here. It's up to him to use them, to figure it out for himself. If he can't then he deserves everything that happens to him." He sighed and stared at his hands. "Where's it going to end Samuels?"

"I don't know, but I can make a guess." The lawyer nodded as if admiring the smoothness of what was happening. "They're clever, John. Damn clever. And they've got centuries of precedent behind them and some of the best brains on Earth to advise them. We've got a planet loaded with sand and over half a million people dying for a little comfort. The way things are they simply can't lose unless . . ."

"Unless the people remember who and what they are and why they came here." John nodded. "Let Pander stew a while. Let him pass the word and get really worried. Then, when the other cases start coming in, drop a few hints to the right people." He looked sharply at the lawyer. "Don't make the mistake of talking or explaining too much. Don't give them hope and above all, don't let them think that we are looking out for them. What they do must be done from within themselves—or it won't be worth doing."

"The blow-up will come at the next harvest," said Samuels. "I've never known so much acreage bearing so heavy a crop. Some of those farmers are going to get the surprise of their lives." He chuckled. "A lot of people are going to get a surprise."

Conroy was one of them. He sat in his office and, as he stared at the report in his hand, his face darkened with anger. Irritably he flipped the switch of his intercom and snapped into the instrument.

"Assemble the board."

"Yes, sir." The voice hesitated. "There is a gentleman to see you, sir. Shall I admit him?"

"Who is he?"

"Doctor Edwards of the Mayo Clinic. He . . ."

"Show him in," said Conroy hastily. "Inform me when the board has been assembled."

"Yes, sir."

Doctor Edwards was tall, thin, stoop shouldered, and represented the purchasing power of a continent as far as medical supplies were concerned. In his way he was both a realist and an idealist. Realist enough to accept the fact that men would always try to make a profit from human misery, and idealist enough to assume that, once they had made their profit they would be satisfied. He set a small phial of golden liquid on the desk and glared at Conroy.

"Last month I authorised the purchase of one hundred litres of marsweed juice from Interplanet Enterprises Inc. This is a sample of that juice." Edwards touched the phial. "The price you demanded was high to begin with and, to me, there seems no excuse for selling an inferior product."

"Inferior?" Conroy picked up the phial and held it to the light. "It seems all right to me."

"I'll be frank with you, Conroy," said Edwards. "We purchased it in good faith. You know that the rising incidence of cancer makes it imperative that we obtain large quantities of the juice. Pure, it performs miracles. Adulterated it is worse than useless. Three patients are now doomed to an agonising death because that juice has proved ineffective."

"The juice you purchase from us was as we received it from Mars," said Conroy tightly. "We extracted it from the local harvest and, as far as we are concerned, it is pure."

"It is not pure. Analysis has shown a high water content. The pure juice has no such content. The adulteration is so high as to be fantastic. Fifty per cent of that juice is plain water." Edwards had obvious difficulty in controlling his anger. "Naturally, we are suing you for recovery of the purchase money plus substantial damages. But money alone cannot compensate for the suffering you have caused by your insane greed after swollen profits. I . . ."

"Please!" Conroy held up his hand. "I assure you that the company is in no way to blame for this. The colour density, which is the way we test for purity, showed nothing wrong."

"It wouldn't. The die has stained the water and the colouration is the same, but, as far as medicine is concerned, this juice is worse than none at all. Injections of it will only build up a tolerance in the malignant cells and so prevent later treatment. To use it would be criminal! To sell was even worse!"

"Wait!" Conroy swallowed as he stared at the phial. "Again let me assure you that this was not intentional. Why should we destroy our reputation by selling inferior products?" He looked hopefully at the doctor. "Is there no way we can make reparation? Distillation

perhaps?"

"Heat would destroy the therapeutic qualities of the juice." Edwards seemed a little mollified by the big man's sincerity. "What do you propose?"

"Replacement of the juice with pure stock and, on top of that, return of the purchase price."

"We are suing you for ten million dollars."

"It would ruin us," admitted Conroy. "Worse, it would ruin public faith in marsweed juice as a cure for cancer."

"Public faith doesn't enter into it," snapped Edwards. "The medical profession will buy and use the juice."

"If they can get it," Conroy shrugged at Edwards expression. "Interplanet Enterprises now have a monopoly on supplies of marsweed. You buy it from us or you don't buy it at all. I'm sorry, but that is the position. If you want to cut off all supplies of the juice then sue us and ruin us. If not, then accept my offer and my assurance that all future supplies will be double-analysed before sale." He reached for the intercom. "Shall I instruct the shipping department to dispatch the supplies?"

For a moment Edwards hesitated, his dislike of compromise struggling with the need for continued supplies of the drug. Love of humanity won and, reluctantly, he nodded.

"Good. I'll ensure that we send you stored supplies and that none of the later stocks will be sold until all have been checked for purity. The cheque for one million dollars will be on your desk tomorrow morning." Conroy held out his hand. "Believe me when I say how sorry I am that this has happened."

Edwards didn't shake hands.

Le Blanc, older, more wizened, and yet still the same, shrewd, calculating financier he had been four years ago at the founding of the company, stared at Conroy as he entered the board room and slumped into his chair. The others, all showing in slight degrees their prosperity, smiled and nodded to each other. Even Delmar seemed happy and without criticism. Conroy rapped the table for silence.

"The company has just lost two million dollars," he announced bitterly. "We were lucky not to have lost everything we own. As it is, our predicted profits are now non-existent."

"Trying to frighten us, Conroy?" Delmar relaxed as he smiled at the chairman. "Every time you open a meeting like that we usually wind up making more money." He chuckled. "Ever heard of the man who cried 'wolf'?"

"I'm in no mood for humour." The acid in Conroy's voice wiped the smile from their faces and caused them to pay attention. "The chemists have just informed me that almost all our stocks of juice are adulterated and worthless. The water content is too high and, aside from a possible use as a skin tonic, are valueless." He paused, waiting for their protests to die into silence. "I'm not joking and, believe me, Delmar, I'm not crying wolf. This is a crisis!"

"Sabotage," whispered Le Blanc. "Someone has tampered with the supplies of juice."

"No. We have our own processing plant on Mars and, aside from the government one, treat all the weed grown. The juice is tested for colouration and sealed. Those seals are still intact. Incredible as it seems the juice extracted from the past two harvests of marsweed have proved to be useless." He lifted a hand until they had fallen silent. "I have checked with agronomists and the cause is obvious. The farmers have been using too much water for irrigation. The native plants do not need a great deal of water. The plants grew thick and big, yes, but their juice content remained the same. All the farmers did was to bloat them out with unwanted water, water which has adulterated the juice and ruined it for medical purposes."

"We should have foreseen that." Hendricks bit nervously at the end of his cigar. "Damn it, Conroy. It was too obvious to miss."

"Was it? Can you grow marsweed, Hendricks? Or you, Delmar? Witherson? Le Blanc? Of course not. We aren't farmers. Naturally we relied on the growers knowing what they were about. Even now I don't think that it was deliberate."

"Placing the blame is unimportant," said Le Blanc quietly. "A mistake has been made, very well, forget it. Learn from experience and make certain that it isn't repeated." He looked at Conroy. "From now we will make a double test of all marsweed juice. If it does not come up to specification we will refuse to purchase. That will bring the growers to heel."

"Will it?" Conroy didn't sound too hopeful. "There's one other matter which I think you should know. Use of the De Mare generators has fallen by fifty per cent. Our bad debts have risen to the same figure. For some reason the growers aren't doing as predicted. Most of them, when finding that they owe more than they can pay, have gone bankrupt. We have taken their land and possessions, of course, but that isn't doing us much good. Labour is almost impossible to obtain on Mars and we cannot work the seized farms."

"Are you certain of those facts?" Le Blanc silenced the others with

a gesture of his hand.

"I have the report from Denvers. He is worried. The warehouses are full of unused generators and, as he says, production of marsweed has fallen." He glared at the papers before him. "I can't understand this. Human beings are predictable. Offer them the chance to make money and they will take it. Offer them luxury goods and they will buy them. The economic cycle is almost as fixed as one of the natural laws. We can't have been mistaken!"

"Recall the water generators," said Le Blanc. "Refuse to hire or supply them. Close down the main plants. Starve them of water and, before long, they will be begging to work for us." He smiled his thin smile at the shouts of protest. "Calm yourselves. As Conroy has said the economic cycle is almost immutable. Create a demand, supply it and then, if you stop supplies, the demand will still exist. On Mars they need water, they always have done, and now that they have had a taste of unlimited water, they will be unable to do without it. Our profits may shrink a little, yes, but we can still afford to operate on a long-term policy. The farmers will learn not to over-irrigate. We shall still be in control of the marsweed supply and, with the tempting things for sale in our shops, the colonists will be all too eager to hire our generators to earn the money to buy them." He relaxed, smiling at the others. "We have nothing to worry about. Merely stop their water and they will do anything we ask."

"But what about our immediate profits?" Delmar almost shouted the question.

"Supply and demand," reminded Le Blanc. "The shorter the supply the greater the demand. Next harvest the price of marsweed juice will be anything we choose to make it. Within two years we will be selecting those to whom we condescend to sell. More. Once we have taught these colonists that they cannot do without our generators, and they will soon find out that they can't, we shall be able to virtually rule Mars. Imagine it, gentlemen. Within ten years we shall have an entire planet and a million workers all striving for the benefit of the company—and we own the company!"

"It sounds nice," sneered Delmar. "And I'll believe it when I see it. In the meantime I suggest that we send someone to Mars to report on the position first-hand. We've too big an investment to rely on the reports of others."

"There's another thing," said Witherson. "Now that most of our stocks are valueless, we can't afford too long a delay. Withdrawing our equipment sounds nice, but until used it's costing us money. Have you

thought of that?"

"That has been taken into consideration," said Le Blanc. "We shall be unable to declare a dividend this year, the shareholders must wait for their profits, but still we can afford to wait."

"Until the shareholders demand that we go into liquidation?"

"As we control a majority of the shares that demand can never arise." Le Blanc rose from his seat. "I take it then that we all agree one of us should go to Mars?"

He nodded at their agreement and looked at Conroy.

"You are the obvious man to go. Fortunately one of our ships is now on Earth. You will be able to travel back with it."

Conroy didn't argue.

The journey took three weeks and, at the end of it, Conroy was half insane with impatience. Always an active man he found the endless days of free fall, the monotonous sameness of space travel, the unchanging vista of the stars through his porthole, and the bleakness of the alloy walls surrounding him almost calculated to irrate. He wanted to get to work, to pit his wits and skill against those of others, to manipulate fortunes, deal in millions, raise financial empires and juggle shares to get what he had always wanted.

Unquestioned financial despotism.

With the De Mare generator it was possible. Le Blanc and the others were essential nuisances but the real power of the company lay in the generator. And Conroy owned the machine. Cooped up in his cabin he worked out the final details of the master-plan to put him in sole command of Interplanet Enterprises and, through the company, Mars itself.

He wasted little time with Denvers after he arrived. The thin-faced man had recalled the De Mares as per radioed instructions and now sat in the huge warehouse surrounded by the humped machines. He was bitter about the labour problem.

"They won't work for us," he complained. "We get a few assistants but once they've learned of the profits to be made from marsweed, they all hire a De Mare and turn into farmers." He spat at the bulk of one of the machines. "You'd think that they had more sense."

"That's new arrivals, of course. What about the local labour?"

"Worse. All of them own land and even the government here has to force them to donate time to the utilities. It's the craziest set-up I ever saw."

Conroy nodded and went in search of John.

The co-ordinator rose as he saw his visitor and gestured towards a chair.

"Sit down. Denvers told me that you were coming. Have a nice trip?"

"Not bad." Conroy stared interestedly at the man who represented the supreme power on Mars. He wasn't impressed by what he saw. "I've come to clear up a little misunderstanding. You know, of course, that the company has decided not to hire the De Mares until the position has been clarified?"

"What position?"

"Repayment. There has been a distressing tendency for users of our machines to avoid their just debts by going bankrupt. We . . ."

"What's distressing about it?" said John. "What else did you expect them to do?"

"Work for the company and pay their debts."

"Why should they?" John shrugged at the other's expression. Bankruptcy is legal and you took their land in settlement of debt. Personally I can't see what you have to complain about."

"You're not very co-operative, are you, Mr Westerly?"

"If you mean that I'm not sympathising with you, then you are correct in what you say. As an individual the company means nothing to me."

"And as the Co-ordinator?"

"It means a hell of a lot," admitted John. "But perhaps not quite in the way you think." He smiled at his visitor. "Suppose we get to the point. Just what is troubling you?"

"The company cannot afford to hire out its generators without some guarantee of payment. For a man to hire one, farm his land with it and then, when he realises that he can't afford to pay for its hire, to go bankrupt is, to me, highly unethical."

"Is it illegal?"

"No."

"Then what the hell have ethics to do with it?"

"You don't understand," said Conroy patiently. "Unless your people decide to co-operate a little more then we shall be forced to withdraw the De Mares permanently. I needn't remind you how essential our product is to Mars."

"To Mars," agreed John softly, "but not to the people. Four years ago before you came we were managing quite nicely. We can do so again." He leaned forward, staring at the big man. "You haven't come all the way from Earth to tell me that. What did you come for?"

"To arrange with the constituted government some form of protection so that we can continue to supply you with our product."

"Meaning?"

"A guarantee that any debtor will be forced to work off his debt."

"What you really want," said John bitterly, "is a guarantee of economic slavery so that you can farm your seized lands." He shook his head. "The answer is no."

"Refusal will mean the loss of the De Mares."

"So what? Must I remind you that we managed without them once and can do so again?"

"But you need water!" Conroy was shocked by the other's indifference. "You can't do without it! You must continue to use it now!"

"Why? So that you can use the whip and the carrot?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Yes you do, Conroy." John relaxed against the back of his chair. "Some of us here have known all along what your precious company intended. Others saw a chance to earn quick money and took it. You beat them as you intended and, for a while, it almost seemed as if you were going to win. Then the reaction set in and now, as far as Mars is concerned, you can take your generators straight back to Earth." He smiled at the other's bewilderment.

"I told Denvers when he first arrived that he should have read his Martian history. It appears that you have also neglected to do so. Mars was colonised by men who sacrificed all they had known for the sake of an ideal. Others followed them, all deliberately turning their backs on so-called comfort and security. Aside from the new arrivals we have all been bred and raised in that tradition. Did you think that such a people would fall for your transparent bribes? The whip and the carrot won't work here, Conroy."

"That's twice you've said that. I still don't understand."

"You lie, and you know it. The twin spurs of starvation and luxury. The whip of hunger and the carrot of comfort. Work today so that you may eat tomorrow in order to get strength to work the next day. The beautiful, vicious simplicity of the economic rat-race. People get so that they can only see the carrot. The new car, the television set, the house, the fur coat, the expensive perfumes, the choice foods. They forget the whip, the grim, unending necessity to work and work and work until they die with never a moment free from worry or care. Illness means poverty. Marriage, babies, the right to tell an employer to go to hell, the right to work or not, all mean the same. Earth is peopled with economic slaves and the tragedy is that none of them realise it."

"That isn't true."

"Yes it is. You tried to bring that system to Mars but you can't, and do you know why? We can do without your luxuries. We don't need your water. We'd like it, yes, but the price you ask is too high for any intelligent man to pay. And they are intelligent. If they weren't then they would have returned to Earth, or stayed there, or signed away their lives for the sake of a few tawdry luxuries like perfume and nylon underwear. You can't bring Earth to Mars, Conroy. Not while the people still have the guts and the sense to say one little word. They can say 'no,' and they can keep on saying it and, while they do, there's nothing in the universe you can do to enslave them."

"You've got it all worked out, haven't you?" Conroy stared his dislike of the co-ordinator. "You're just one man, one individual. Who are you to speak for the rest?"

"I speak for no one. I have no real power. I am elected to co-ordinate the utilities, the essentials on which we all depend. Food, water, power, everything which must be a communal enterprise. No one need contribute, if they don't like the way we operate then they can get to hell out of it. There's a whole planet waiting to be developed, and, more than anything else, that is why you can never win." John leaned forward and stared intently at the big man.

"On Earth the individual has lost his land. There are too many people on too little soil. Land is money and land is security. But few own land and, in losing it, they have lost more than they know. Basically we are all peasants, Conroy. Everyone has the desire to own a bit of dirt. It need only be a window box, a garden, an allotment, a field, but everyone, at one time in their lives, wants to run soil through his fingers and call it his own. On Mars everyone can do that. You complained that men were going bankrupt but why shouldn't they? What have they to lose? There is always more land a few miles away, free land for the taking. Why should they fight to hold on to what they don't need? Why should they agree to work for you for a wage when they can share-crop with someone else? Or, if they don't want that, then they can always farm new land at the new settlement. All they need is water, Conroy, and the pipe lines can supply that."

"We can supply it better," said Conroy. He was surprised to find that he was sweating.

"Admitted, but your price is too high."

"Our investment is high too. We've got to get it back again."

"That," said John coolly, "is your worry." He smiled as the door opened and Mary walked into the office.

She hesitated as she saw Conroy, and John rose as she was about to leave them alone.

"Don't go, Mary. This is Mr Conroy from Earth."

Conroy nodded as he acknowledged the introduction and looked impatiently at John.

"Could we finish our business . . ."

"It is finished." John smiled at Mary as she sat down. "My wife, Conroy. One of your customers too. Mary, perhaps you could tell our visitor why the shops didn't sell many clothes."

"They were too dear. It just didn't seem worth all that money for so little."

"I bought her a set of underwear," explained John. "An engagement present. She loved it but wanted to send it back. I made her keep it for our wedding."

"Why did you want to send it back?" Conroy felt that now he was getting some real information. Mary smiled.

"It seems so silly to have to work for a whole year farming several acres just to wear something a little better than anyone else. The effort just wasn't worth it. It was getting so that no one had time for visiting anymore and everyone was getting irritable and nasty because they were so tired. So," she shrugged, "the women decided that they would rather have healthy men than nylon underwear."

"No competition," explained John. "On Mars most of the houses are the same, all the people share the same circumstances, no one is rich and no one is poor. There are no social crimes here. A man doesn't have to own a house or wear a nice suit or drive his own car. If he can then he never boasts about it. There are no comparisons to arouse envy and ambition. There is no competition between families as to who can own the most or display the most. There is no high-pressure advertising to tell a man that, unless he buys what he cannot afford, then he is a failure. No tempting the women to work their husbands to death so that they can wear the latest spring models. We want to keep things that way."

"There's nothing wrong with business," said Conroy. "Interplanet Enterprises could give wealth to everyone on Mars. With the water generator you could live like human beings instead of like primitive savages."

"Could we?" John didn't smile but if he had it would have been without humour. "Perhaps, but not while you insist on channelling the wealth of Mars back to Earth. Not while you regard this planet as a pigeon for the plucking. We welcome business on Mars. We welcome

anyone who brings us anything. Universal Atomics have played fair with us and we are grateful. We buy their power piles and pay them for extended terms. We will buy more, and more, and as many as we can afford as we expand. They know that, and they know too that, in time, Mars will prove to be their biggest customer." He smiled at the big man. "You know, in a way, we are grateful to you too."

"Grateful," said Conroy bitterly. "And you show it by wanting to ruin us!"

"No. Because of your product immigration to Mars has increased to an extent never before known. New men and women. New hands to develop a new world. Your water too has been valuable. We've been able to store millions of gallons in reservoirs built from the smelted iron. Yes, Conroy, we are grateful to you—but not grateful enough to let you turn us into your pet slaves."

"That concept is ridiculous! You seem to have a mania on the subject. Business relationships between producer and consumer are more like a symbiosis than anything else. Each helps the other and both grow rich. The high standard of living on Earth is directly due to that relationship."

"Agreed, but I know my history, Conroy. I remember the boom and slump cycle, the industrial revolution with its hordes of broken, starving men and women, children too. There was no prosperity then. It was only when the producers realised that they couldn't stay in business until the consumer could afford their products that sense came. Then they slowed down, demanded smaller profits, let the pigeon grow a few feathers instead of plucking it naked. But that was on Earth. What do you care what happens on Mars?"

"We have invested millions on this planet. Doesn't that answer you?"

"I need no answer, Conroy. I only know that the people here won't agree to kill themselves for the sake of your shareholders."

The shareholders! Conroy felt sick as he thought of them. Le Blanc, Delmar, Hendricks, Witherson and the unknown millions who had backed the new company with all they owned.. They had expected huge profits and, for a while, had received them. Now, unless the Martians agreed to buy water, they would be ruined. He clenched his hands as he saw his dreams of empire toppling to dust and, with the collapse of that dream, came anger.

"Damn you!" he said hoarsely. "I'll smash every generator rather than let you beat me. I refuse to crawl and whine and beg you to accept the one thing you want most of all. I . . ."

"You're talking like a fool, Conroy!" John lost his casual manner with his smile. "We want water, yes. We want it more than you can ever guess. With it we could turn Mars into a garden, farm every acre, not just with marsweed, but with real, edible crops. We could extract the ores from the dust and build our own factories. With water we could do anything. But even at that you need us more than we need you. We can afford to wait, Conroy. We can wait until your company is ruined and the patents of the generator are free for use. We can sit back and watch your capital dwindle to nothing—and there is nothing you can do about it!"

"You'll never get the generator!"

"At your price, no. But Mars is a market, Conroy, and Earth is desperate for new markets. There will be another company. Someone else will discover a way to extract water from the sand and come to trade with us. They will trade fair or they will find that they won't be able to trade at all. You see, Conroy, we on Mars have learned a lesson. It is a simple, basic lesson which seems to have been forgotten by everyone on Earth. A man can be imposed on only to the extent he permits. We don't intend to be imposed on by anyone."

It was true and Conroy knew it. The Martian character was different to that of Earth. Tradition had fallen away in the new environment, and self-determination, self-pride, a spartan simplicity and the strength of purpose stemming from their pioneer existence had given them what the teeming millions of Earth had lost. The guts to say no.

Every producer must, in the final essence, depend on the consumer for, without him, they couldn't exist. The company needed the Martians but the Martians didn't need the company. And they knew it.

And Conroy knew it too.

"What do you suggest?" he said quietly. "We've got to sell you water, you know that. If we don't we go out of business and lose our investment. Advise me."

"Sell, don't hire out your generators," said John evenly. "Set the payments low enough to be reasonable and extend the purchase term long enough to give yourself a good profit. Battery replacements and maintenance will ensure a steady income. The government will guarantee to meet lapsed payments up to a certain amount because we can always use the labour of defaulters on the community projects. We might even be willing to buy your big plants for our industries."

"Small returns," said Conroy. "The bottom will drop out of the market as soon as I take back the news."

"We'll buy the shares." John smiled. "The government I mean.

We have stocks of marsweed for emergencies and can afford to buy if the price is low enough. But you're wrong about the small returns. Every family on Mars will be a customer for a De Mare. Two hundred thousand of them and more coming all the time. You'll sell them as fast as you can make them and even then the demand will always exceed the supply." John grew thoughtful. "Maybe we'd better buy some shares at that." It's going to be a darn good investment."

"Let me handle it." Conroy smiled, his mind busy with secret ambitions. "You have juice?"

"Yes."

"Let me handle this. I'll take it back with me and sell it through private channels. I'll spread the rumour and wait until the shares hit bottom. With what I can buy for you and my own holdings we'll control the company. Hell! What a coup!" He looked anxiously at John. "Is it a deal?"

"We'll figure something out," promised John. He smiled for the first time with any real warmth of feeling. "I'm glad to have met you Conroy. Something tells me that the best investment Mars could make would be to have you in the Government as financial adviser. Are you interested?"

"If I pull off what I hope then I'll have to move to Mars. It will be the only safe place I know." He smiled at Mary. "I might even bring my family here too. I'd like my daughter to grow up as good looking as your wife."

"Do that." John moved towards the door, his wife at his side. "See you tomorrow, Conroy. We'll discuss details then."

Mary didn't speak until they had left the building and were half-way home.

"Can you trust him, John?"

"Let him do as he pleases. He can't hurt us and, maybe, he means what he says. Anyway, it doesn't matter, does it?" He pointed towards the silent warehouse containing the De Mare generators. "There's his headache. An investment that has turned sour. He'll do almost anything to recover it, he's that kind of a man." He shrugged. "What the hell? It's his money, not ours, so why worry?"

Mary didn't answer. She was staring into the dark, almost black sky in which the stars had begun to gleam with increasing brightness as the sun lowered itself beneath the horizon.

"Poor devils," she whispered. "Why did they never learn to say no?"

Far above the green fleck which was Earth seemed to twinkle in silent misery.

E. C. TUBB



*New Hard-Cover Science-Fiction Reviewed by*  
**KENNETH F. SLATER**

If you are apt to base your opinion of a story on the opening lines, then you are going to think J. T. McIntosh's latest novel to be published in this country something of a shocker. *"Marrying Toni was one of the formative experiences in the lives of young Mundans. She was one of the anythings that everyone felt he had to try once"* is how he opens **BORN LEADER** (Museum Press, 9/6, 190pp.), but don't be alarmed, please. Mr. McIntosh hasn't written a novel of sexocracy, but one in which military autocracy and an un-free-thinking democracy came into collision. Earth, ravaged and expecting utter destruction, sends out a colonising vessel to the planet Mundis; the young colonists are indoctrinated with Terra's own phobia about atomic power, given a Constitution under which to run the colony, and instructions that no children should be born during the several years of the journey. When we are introduced to the colony, a Gap exists. A gap in age-groups, and a gap in understanding; the artificial and restrictive atomic power phobia of the older group is in conflict with the inquisitive minds of the younger group. To further complicate the position, in Earth's very last days, under a strict mili-

tarist control, another colony is sent out to Clades, twin planet of Mundis. Only one prime directive exists—that Clades shall not interfere with Mundis. Naturally, when Terra turns into a bright-burning star in the sky, the military head of Clades automatically assumes full authority, and his first act is to ensure that not only Clades shall survive; Mundis, too, under the military control of Clades, must have her chance. . . . An excellent setting which Mr. McIntosh develops to the full, making a book well worth reading, and re-reading.

Martin Magnus, William F. Temple's delightful character, returns in **MARTIN MAGNUS**

## s f b c ?

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ON VENUS (Muller, 7/6, 176 pp.). Unfortunately, the personality of Magnus is less developed in this second juvenile, and the person of Cliff Page built up. Cliff is a comparatively colourless fellow, and the book seems to suffer in consequence. As suggested by the title, this story follows Martin on a trip of exploration to Venus, to clear up a number of things which remained unsolved in the first book—the question of the Venusian space-vessel which visited Earth; the reason why the Venusians refused contact with the first small expedition; and other things.

Before departing, Martin and Cliff discover traces of Venusian visits to Luna; a disused space-port and lunar base, one of the midget submarines which the Venusians had used in Earth's seas, and a lot of conflicting evidence that—midget submarines apart—the Venusians are giants! Which sets up a nice complex puzzle for Martin and Cliff to unravel when the expedition arrives. And unravel it they do, in the midst of some swift-moving adventures.

Reviewing MARTIN MAGNUS: PLANET ROVER, I said it was good reading for adults, even though primarily juvenile. This second epic is somewhat more definitely juvenile, but nevertheless an enjoyable yarn if you don't hope for too much.

Should you be hoping for a lot, I'll suggest you try THE MAN WITH ABSOLUTE MOTION by Silas Water (Rich & Cowan, 9/6, 206pp.). I cannot recall mention of the proverbial kitchen sink, but there are galaxies, universes, metagalaxies, and odd

planetary systems galore. Faster-than-light travel, the end (almost) of the human race, the extinction of which is a minor problem, too small to be worthy of attention of the metagalactic government; the metagalactic government's prime problem of power; the devious dirty work of Alphirk, a rival planetary group trying to wreck the Fourth Universe; a couple of love affairs; an android revolt; side-shows of freaks . . . even some characters out of other authors' stories! There are some brazen distortions of theory, and some excellent development of facts and theories. The whole book is a puzzle, to me at least. I'm not sure just when the author was laughing up his sleeve, but I'm positive that he did it frequently. I'm equally positive that he gave considerable thought to some sections of the work, to make certain points which show whole themes for stories bundled up in a few paragraphs.

This book will, I think, both annoy and intrigue the "serious" s-f reader; it will also amuse many more, and make excellent light reading for an even vaster number.

THE BIG BALL OF WAX, by Shepherd Mead (Boardman, 10/6, 222pp.) has a special introduction for the British reader—a warning! It doesn't warn you about, against or for, the book—it warns you against the subject of the book. High-pressure advertising and salesmanship. Of course, Pohl & Kornbluth's THE SPACE MERCHANTS (Gravy Planet) dealt with this subject, and so did Damon Knight's HELL'S PAVEMENT. Mr. Mead has taken a different angle on the subject, however; and while it is possible

to think of many other stories and books which are parallel in either the theme, or the "invention" he uses in developing the theme, none are truly comparable. What occurs in the book is only too terrifyingly possible; at the same time, the book is humorous, oft-times with a subtle wit that calls for a double-take before you see the point. Apart from the main theme, some of the procedure and "etiquette" in the big-business world lead one to appalling thoughts of tomorrow; as for instance in the description of a meeting where, after a preliminary subtle move to show how important correct seating is, a pledge of allegiance to the flag, the singing of a Loyalty Song, a quantity of ritual statement and answer, the actual business is disposed of in no time flat—and nothing actually concluded at that! A highly delightful—and fearful—story of the world of tomorrow, and what might happen if big-business got its hands on a machine which could make you experience anything—literally anything! Which film-star would you prefer to marry . . . ?

Other items which I would like to mention are **RETURN TO MARS**: Capt. W. E. Johns (Hodder & Stoughton, 7/6), continuing the deplorable adventures of Prof. Lucius Brane in very juvenile standard—healthy reading but sadly lacking in even a guesstimate of technical accuracy; **ANGELS AND SPACE-SHIPS**: Fredric Brown (Gollancz, 10/6), a fine collection of short yarns, eight reprinted from magazines, and nine original items serving as one page interludes. The book is almost worth

buying for these nine items alone!

Among the very latest arrivals which I will mention more fully next time are "Shadows in the Sun" by Chad Oliver (Reinhardt, 9/6), "Beyond the Barriers of Space and Time," a collection of short stories by many outstanding science-fiction authors (Sidgwick & Jackson, 10/6), "Untouched by Human Hands," more short stories, this time all by Robert Sheckley (Michael Joseph, 12/6), "Crisis 2000" by Charles Eric Maine (Hodder & Stoughton, 10/6), and lastly, "Split Image" by Reed R. de Rouen (Allan Wingate, 11/6).

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# SCIENTI FILM PREVIEWS

News and advance Film Reviews Direct from Hollywood's

FORREST J. ACKERMAN

THEY CAME FROM ANOTHER WORLD, immediately establishing the sci-fi motif, is the new title for *The Body Snatchers*, on which I recently gave you a "sneak preview" report. Since then I have, on a visit 450 miles up in Northern California, had lunch with the author, Jack Finney, and later (locally) talked with Ray Bradbury on the phone, learning that some changes have been contemplated on the version I saw before general release. Bradbury has been approached to write an introduction to the film and an epilog, which possibly would be recited by Orson Welles, strengthening the scientific aspect of it. The title change is a clue to that: producer Walter Wanger and his associates feared the general public might mistake "The Body Snatchers" as a kidnapping or grave-robbing ghoulish film. My main hope is that they don't tamper with that magnificent, dramatic, *downbeat* ending.

Speaking of endings gives me a perfect blending point for introducing remarks about THE DAY THE WORLD ENDED, an American Releasing Corp. production on which I have recently seen a Studio projection room rough cut. As I saw it, it ran about 12 minutes longer than

you'll see it. The dozen minutes they'll excise doesn't mean you'll miss anything, it'll only serve to tighten up an over-talky picture. As Paul Blaisdell, the s.f. artist who plays the monster in the picture, said to me, "It's kind of a poor man's FIVE." Except that it has eight characters—plus a burro for "comic" relief. Otherwise it might aptly have been titled "Five Meet the Thing" or "Five Against the Thing." It is an Atomigeddon story *cum* mutant menace. As it opens with stock shots of atomic explosion, the narrator's cold, impersonal voice tell us: "T.D. Day is here—Total Destruction by nuclear weapons. And from this hour forward the world as we know it no longer exists. Man has done his best to destroy himself, but there is a force more powerful than man. And in His Infinite Wisdom He has spared a few of the species *homo sapiens*." Among those sapient homos that have been chosen to be saved—altho' only for half a dozen reels—is a racketeer, a burlesque and an old prospector, the latter certainly no likely prospect as a new Adam. All are dead before the picture ends, so no special purpose was served in heaven's saving them from the hell of atomiconflagration. Even Jim Maddison, who had 10 years'

foresight in preparing a survival Shangri-La for himself and his beautiful daughter Lori Nelson (last menaced by the revengeful Creature from the Black Lagoon), is not spared to enjoy the fruits of his labor and sacrifice. But Lori and rugged Richard Dennnig make a good-looking Adam and Eve, walking hand-in-hand into the radioactive dawn at the end of the picture. I have so far not mentioned the Menace much. No one personally knowing small, sweet-and-mild Paul Blaisdell would readily be able to believe he was that towering monstrosity with the barrel chest of a Martian, the muscles of an Atlas, the horns of a pair of unicorns, rudimentary claws on his shoulders—and a third eye. (See *inside front cover*—Ed.) But (with my own third eye) I saw him at the Studio climb, sweating blood, out of that hothouse of a monster suit he built, so I know for sure that it was Blaisdell, and that his heart must be pure, because he surely needed the strength of ten to carry Lori Nelson, slight as she is, around in that suit. I would say that this BEM (Blaisdellian Evolutionary Monstrosity) stands with the best of the scare-suits.

**GUEST REVIEW** by Ed. M. Clinton, Jr. (Author Clinton, a client of the Ackerman Literary Agency, here fills in for his representative on one of the films Forry happened to miss catching at the "sneak".)

**THE ANIMAL WORLD.** Warner Bros.: This is a miserable imitation of such films as *The Living Desert* and *The Sea Around Us*, but is nevertheless of

considerable interest to fans by virtue of Ray Harryhausen's magnificent paleontological models. These creatures are the picture's real stars, and worth the price of admission. Whether they justify enduring this over-long film itself is another matter.

Somewhat along the lines of the "Rite of Spring" sequence from *Fantasia*, the great land lizards of the Mesozoic are made to epitomize the prehistoric life-forms of Earth. Harryhausen's models breathe, eat and even lay eggs (tho' somewhat grotesquely) and while no model ever made has been completely convincing, this crop of critters is a sight to behold and comes as close to the ideal as has yet been realized. Brontosaurus, tyrannosaurus, stegosaurus, pterodactyl, tricera-tops—these and their relatives parade by in a fascinating spectacle. The camera work includes a number of big close-ups which reveal Harryhausen's remarkable detail work in the face and mouth areas, and eyes that are sometimes disquietingly alive.

Unfortunately, the film makes a fetish of sadism, cruelty, killing, and bloodletting, thus nullifying much of this fine work. For, while there is no doubt that eat or be eaten is the law of the animal world, it is of questionable taste to emphasize this to the point of contrived hideousness. In one sequence, for example—notable for its realism, to say the least—a conquering tyrannosaurus greedily devours his vanquished rival. Somehow, it is not pleasant to watch bloody flesh—howevermuch it may be known to be make-believe—torn dripping hunk by dripping hunk from a still-breathing body, and ravenously devoured.



WALTER WILLIS writes for you

Last time, I had better explain for the benefit of any among you who don't cut this column out and learn it by heart, I was telling the thrilling story of how Ken and Pamela Bulmer went off to the States as representatives of British fandom under the Transatlantic Fan Fund. In case you've been lying awake nights wondering what happened to them, well they've since been in Cincinnati, Cleveland, Savannah and Washington. Ken has grown a beard, and from reports of his appearance the most charitable explanation is that he hopes to get deported and thus save his fare home. (I could say that is an example of growing fare hair, but I won't.) However, in spite of his ferocious appearance, he and Pamela have been encountering wonderful hospitality from American fans everywhere they go.

In Cleveland, of course, they were guests of the Convention Committee and one of the things they had orders from British fandom to do, apart from having a good time, was to put in a bid for London as the site of the World Convention in 1956. Well, of course, as it says in Whitaker's Almanac, orders must be obeyed at all times, but when Ken got to Cleveland he found that New

York had done everything conceivable to ensure getting the nomination themselves, short of extending the city boundaries by 12,500 miles in every direction. When New York decides to do a thing, no one else has much of a chance of beating them at it. As Robert Briggs of Washington was heard to put it once, "New York would rather be the dirtiest city in the world than the second cleanest." In the circumstances all Ken could do was withdraw as gracefully as possible and make it unanimous. So it will be just an ordinary British Convention this year, inasmuch as any British Convention can be described as ordinary, and it will be held in the George Hotel, Kettering, over the Easter weekend—same place and date as the happy affair last year.

However, there's now a very good chance that London will get the World Convention in 1957, and plans will be laid for this at Kettering, with the appointment of representative committees with regional members and everything. Not that this will mean that a few Londoners won't have to do all the work, as they usually do, but it will mean that there will be someone else to blame when things go wrong, as they usually do. Some-

times it seems to me that the only way to avoid the disasters to which Convention programmes are always succumbing is to have the entire official programme pre-recorded on tape or film. In other words, automation. It doesn't seem to be so far off, either. It's been only too noticeable in recent years that the only items which went according to plan were the tape-recorded plays and the film show. Basically, of course, the trouble is that Conventions are becoming too enjoyable. The people who should be running things are far too busy having fun to worry about schedules, and since they are the people who write the affair up afterwards, it passes into history as a highly successful Convention. But there must be newcomers attracted by the advance publicity who attend unnoticed, watch in perplexity, and leave in silence. This won't do. Science fiction fans are friendly and likeable people but it's asking too much to expect a newcomer to walk into a conversation and introduce himself. If we are going to advertise a science fiction convention to the general science fiction public we must put on a genuine programme of interest to it. It seems to me the only practical alternatives are either to hand over the official programme to the professional publishers or to prepare a packaged one which will grind remorselessly on even if everyone responsible is whooping it up on the third floor. Prefabricated programmes have the further immense advantage that they can be used again. It would be possible for a keen but introverted fan group to put on a Convention just by booking an hotel and buying a dozen reels of

guaranteed high-class programme.

One thing that occurs to me is that when all our distinguished American visitors come over in 1957, we should be able to show them something that hasn't existed for a long time—a good new British sf film. There hasn't been one since "Things to Come," that classic of the Thirties, and it was beginning to look as if every planet in the solar system was going to be overrun by third-rate bit players from Brooklyn. Now, however, we have "The Quatermass Experiment." By all accounts it sticks loyally to the original TV serial, which held all of us here enthralled for six weeks, right from the opening with the crashed spaceship to the climax where the hero has his back to the wall in Westminster Abbey, while the horrible vegetable alien rustles its fernlike tentacles all round him. (Courtesy of John Rustle Fern, no doubt.) Though I must admit that at this awe-inspiring moment one inveterate punster was heard to murmur, "Don't be afraid, Quatermass; you are among fronds." What we liked about the story, apart from the fact that it was the best piece of science fiction we'd ever seen on a screen, was that it made no feeble concessions to the science fiction ignoramus. No earnest lectures on elementary astronautics, no hackneyed quotations about Heaven and Horatio, no desperate attempts to explain why it doesn't have to have air to push against up there—just a good science fantasy. Judging from the reaction of the critics and the public it doesn't seem to have done the film a bit of harm.



Dear Ed.: Did the results of the Space Times questionnaire ever get sent to the readers who sent their 1/- postal orders for them? I certainly did not get mine. Can I have some information please. That questionnaire must have been about two years ago.

J. F. PERKINS,  
London, E.12.

*\*I am extremely sorry to hear that you have not yet received your copy of the results of the Space Times questionnaire published in NEBULA No. 7.*

*As you will be aware, the replies to this questionnaire, as well as remittances for copies of the published results, were sent direct and made payable to Mr. J. S. McKenzie, who is now at 5 Hans Place, London, S.W.1, and were never at any time received at the NEBULA office. Mr. McKenzie analysed all questionnaires received both through NEBULA and other channels, and merely supplied us with the results, which were published in NEBULA No. 11. Consequently, anyone who has not received his or her copy of these results should write immediately to the address above stating that this is the case.*

*Although NEBULA published this questionnaire, we can naturally accept no responsibility for monies sent to any address but that of the magazine.*

Dear Ed.: The production of NEBULA has now improved tremendously. As you remark—better paper and better printing. Also the artwork as a whole was your best to date. Your cover, while not original in content, was most striking in colour, and I also like your new artist, Arthur Thomson. Interior illustrations were most competent—not a really bad one among them. Finally, the stories were good and well varied in style.

My only grouse is the new size of NEBULA. This seems but a ghost of the previous bulky issue, but with costs still rising, I suppose this was inevitable.

First place among the stories went to "Planetbound." Basically, this is an idea I have upheld for some time, but E. C. Tubb went deeper into the matter and produced a minor masterpiece. I really must congratulate him on this.

"Mansion of a Love" takes second place. With customary economy William F. Temple has produced a polished little gem. But for squeezing so much solid thought into such a short story this is a record even for him.

"This Night No More" comes next. A complete change in every way from the preceding stories. F. G. Rayer handles conversation in a stilted artificial fashion, and his characters are

cardboard puppets, but his plot held the reader's interest and his descriptive passages are excellent. The settings really became most vivid, but where he excelled himself was in his description of the aliens. Far from being a masterpiece perhaps, but darned interesting reading.

Finally "Counterpoint." This was rather too drawn out for my taste. However, apart from this relatively minor point, I thought this a good interesting story.

ALAN HUNTER,

Bournemouth.

Dear Ed.: This Harry Turner seems to be a sort of British Kelly Freas and I hope he works on his styling. He seems to have possibilities for doing very good work. Of course, when you print stories by Tubb and Temple in the same issue, you have won me over anyway. Tubb seems to be occupied with people and Temple with the real *science* fiction type of story; both are good. Features are also good, but not really outstanding this time for some reason. That cover—it looks very much like a scene on a moon photograph (with some interpolation involved) which same looked monotonous to the painter and he felt he had to break it up to kill some of the monotony so he injected some very mysterious appearing pyramids. The back cover illustration looked many times better. In fact, had it been painted, it would have been one of the best—perhaps *the* best—illustration to appear in a British magazine so far.

SAMUEL JOHNSON,

Jacksonville,

Florida, U.S.A.

## ONE GUINEA PRIZE

To the reader whose Ballot Form (below) is first opened at the NEBULA publishing office.

All you have to do, both to win this attractive prize and to help your favourite author win the 1956 Author's Award, is to number the stories in this issue in the order of your preference on the Ballot Form below and post it to "Nebula," 159, Crownpoint Road, Glasgow, S.E., immediately.

Sounds In The Dawn	
In Loving Memory	
The Green Hills Of Earth	
The Artifact	
Birthday Star	
Investment	

Name and Address

Mr. James Alexander of Perth wins the One Guinea Prize offered in NEBULA No. 13. The final result of the Poll on the stories in that issue was:—

- |                       |       |
|-----------------------|-------|
| 1. PLANETBOUND        |       |
| By E. C. Tubb         | 33.3% |
| 2. THIS NIGHT NO MORE |       |
| By F. G. Rayer        | 28.0% |
| 3. COUNTERPOINT       |       |
| By Ian Wright         | 27.5% |
| 4. MANSION OF A LOVE  |       |
| By William F. Temple  | 11.2% |

The result of the Poll on the stories in this issue will appear in NEBULA No. 17.

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# NEBULA

159 CROWNPOINT RD  
GLASGOW, S.E.

Dear Ed.: I was very pleased to see NEBULA No. 13, which was on sale here on 12th October.

The front cover for me is superb. I think it is your best painted and most imaginative cover yet, and I look forward to more Rattigan covers. The painting of No. 11 was also very good and is my second favourite for NEBULA. The back cover this time was for me the best yet. Very well drawn and a wonderful subject. More of this artist, *please*.

"This Night No More" was superbly written and was, I thought, spoiled only by the repetition of phrases such as "daughter of Bate," "son of Trader," etc. However, that was a small point. The story was tops.

Second came "Counterpoint" by Lan Wright. Gregoff seemed a very real person to me, and I was able to live and feel with him. Only good authors can do this, and I think that this is Wright's best story to date—authentic and in the best NEBULA tradition. What about a few sequels?

Third was "Planetbound" and fourth "Mansion of a Love." Both well written, the former perhaps not quite up to Tubb's usual standard, while I doubt that the effect of processing would be nullified by Shakespeare in Temple's "Mansion of a Love."

On the whole your Editorial comment "wonderful selection of material" is justified. Thanks for the picture of the Kettering Convention. It was interesting to see what some of you science fiction people look like—spectacle manufacturers should be happy! NIGEL A. JACKSON,  
Melbourne, Australia.

*\*Thanks to all of you for your most interesting comments on NEBULA No. 13. I was pleased to see that a representative from each of the countries in which NEBULA is widely distributed should have enjoyed this issue so much.*

*It is letters like this from all our readers which let us know what you like (and dislike) and with this in mind we can go ahead and try to please everyone.*

*Of course, if you do not feel like going to the trouble of writing a letter, there is the Ballot Form on page 109.*

Dear Ed.: Some readers may be interested in a series of booklets I have come across recently. The "Today and Tomorrow Series" was published twenty to thirty years ago by Kegan Paul in London and E. P. Dutton in New York. It comprises at least eighty - seven titles wherein authors such as Bertrand Russell, Rebecca West, Andrew Maurois, and a host of others select some topic of importance in life and speculate, often humourously, on its near and distant future. The booklets are usually to be found in the sixpenny and shilling remainder boxes of second-hand book dealers. Each booklet has fifty to a hundred pages and the titles are selected from the appropriate characters of Greek and Roman mythology.

On the subject of prognostication, we often had tales involving a future human race with greatly developed brains and shrivelled bodies, the vogue seems to be past now, but even so I want to point out two biological reasons against such a future. Firstly, the brain has no internal bony or cartilaginous support, hence there should

be a definite limit to its size until we evolve such a support, for above a certain size the mass of a large part of the brain would crush its lower layers. I seem to remember this as the theme of a story long ago, so my idea is not new. Secondly, of all the parts of the body, the brain is volume for volume very greedy for nourishment compared with other parts, so if our mentation increases the blood would have to supply it with more oxygen and sugar, consequently we would need a larger digestive tract, lungs, and heart, at least, so our trunk would be bulkier too; if standing in queues continues to be part of the normal pattern of our lives then our legs will doubtless keep pace.

Since I came to Edinburgh some months ago I have, with little success, tried to find other s-f addicts or even an equivalent of the London Circle. Perhaps any fen, fem, or bem interested would contact me? My address is 39 George Square, Edinburgh, 8.

H. D. BAECKER,

Edinburgh.

*\*Thanks for an interesting letter, Mr. Baecker. I hope many Edinburgh enthusiasts will be getting in touch with you now.*

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## LOOK HERE—from page 2

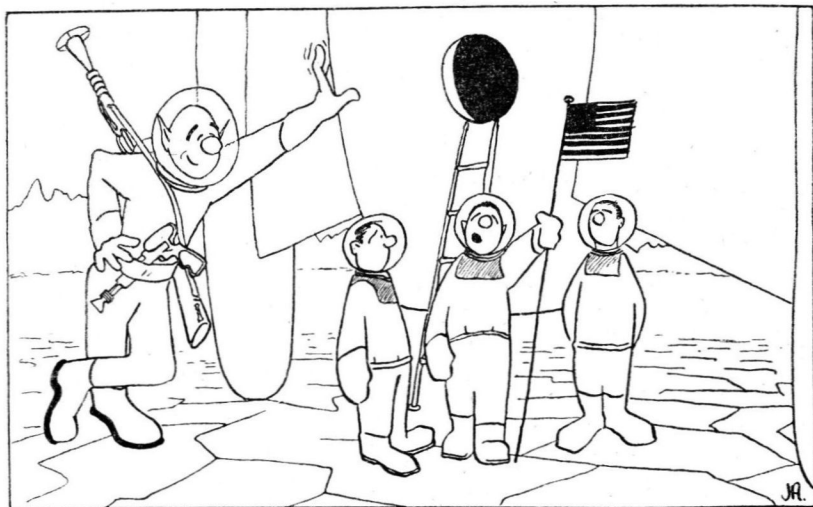
If you are one of those readers who have never sent in a Form, how about starting with this issue? The author whose stories receive most votes in the Guinea Prize Polls of the magazine in each year receives a cash prize and a Certificate to this effect—and remember, it is your vote which decides who wins!

I recently received a circular letter from Messrs. T. Werner Laurie Ltd. regarding the publication of a book entitled "There *Is* Life on Mars" by Earl Nelson, F.R.A.S., F.R.G.S., F.R.S.A., the great-great-grand-nephew of Admiral Lord Nelson.

It seems significant to me that this person, a descendant of one of our greatest national figures, is not solely preoccupied with the past, nor his great family history, but shows a lively interest in the future and all the promise of a new age of romance and expansion which it holds.

Perhaps, like wise men the world over, he realises that the past is past, and that a new beginning must be made before the war-like tradition of the human race puts an end to progress for ever.

*Peter Hamilton*



*"... and so I claim the moon for the United States ..."*

# **ALL over the world...**

*People are enjoying NEBULA. Here are a very few of the hundreds of unsolicited letters of comment received from abroad*

## **U.S. ARMY, KOREA**

There are few pleasures available here in Korea and reading your excellent magazine is one of the greatest... I feel that it is now up with the best produced on this side of the Atlantic—and Pacific, too!

*Sgt. Peter M. Evans*

## **AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND**

Congratulations, yours is the only science-fiction magazine which contains anything like a satisfactory blend of scientific accuracy and really enjoyable reading.

*Arthur Frew, B.Sc.*

## **CALIFORNIA, U.S.A.**

I congratulate you on the excellent magazine you publish, it is easily the best on the market today... I have enjoyed every story... all are above the average of today's offerings and I subscribe to twenty-two current publications.

*Harry Petzwall*

## **MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA**

I think your magazine is a magnificent publication and at present the best in the field of British Science-Fiction.

*N. A. Jackson, Jr.*

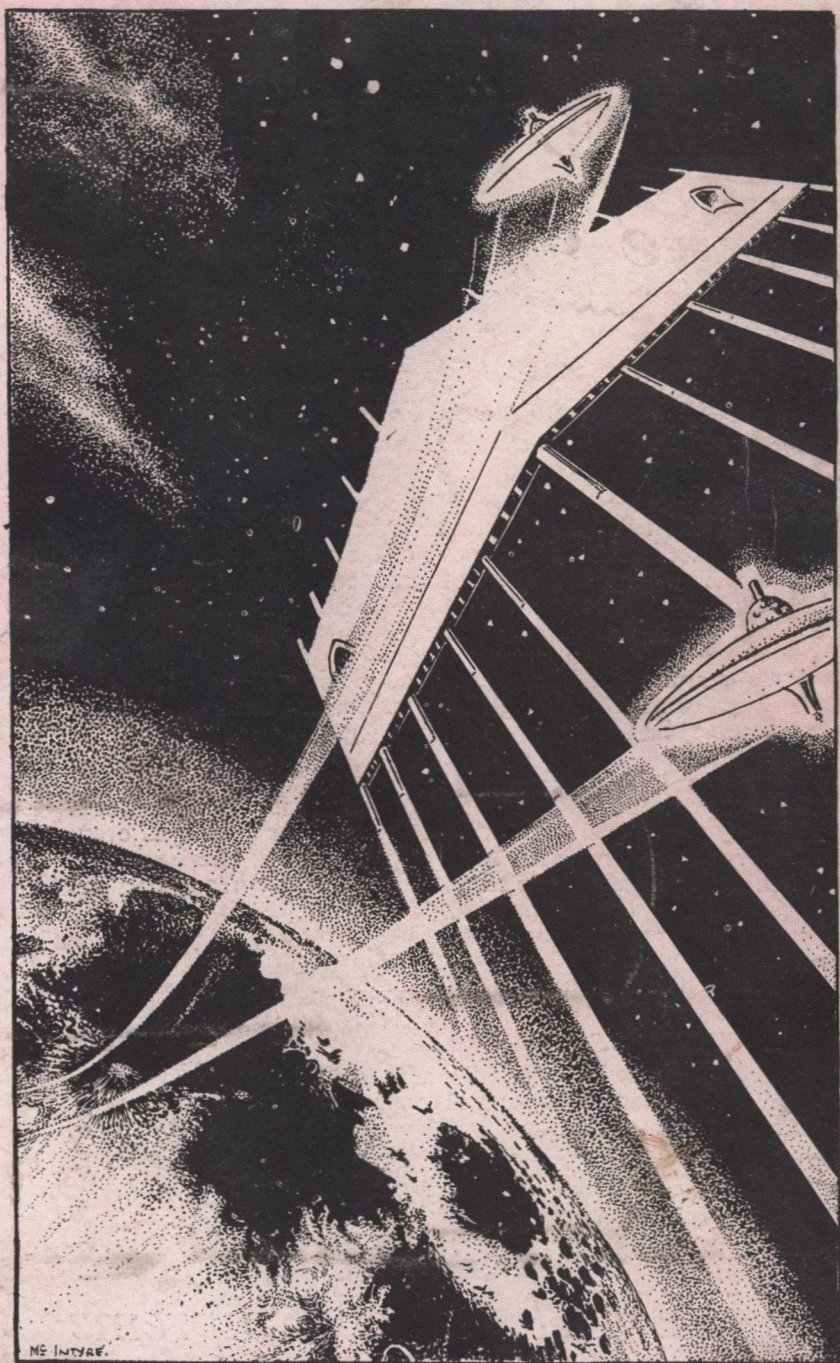
## **KENTUCKY, U.S.A.**

... Along with "Punch" and the "Manchester Guardian Weekly" your magazine adds to our admiration and enjoyment of things British.

*Rev. Richard B. Hunter*

*These are the opinions of foreign readers—it's even more popular in Britain! EVERYONE joins in saying...*

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