NEBULA SCIENCE FICTION

BI-MONTHLY

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NUMBER 16

STORIES BY SYDNEY J. BOUNDS, E. C. TUBB, ETC.

TOP IN 1955

THE Editor of Nebula Science-Fiction is pleased to announce that, as a result of the Reader Opinion Polls on the stories published in the magazine during 1955, E. C. TUBB has been chosen the most popular Nebula author of that year.

We would like to congratulate Mr. Tubb on the remarkable achievement of securing this top position for the third consecutive year and take pleasure in printing hereunder his own reaction to the results:

"I am very pleased and proud to be considered the most popular author by readers of Nebula and even more pleased and proud to have been so voted for the third year in succession. Being human I am selfish enough to want to remain on this high pinnacle but also selfish enough to want to read the good stories which, I am sure, will appear by other authors who will do their best to win this coveted honour."

E. C. TUBB.

NEBULA
SCIENCE FICTION

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Look here . . .

It was my pleasure to announce on another page that NEBULA readers had placed E. C. Tubb in first place through their Ballot Papers in 1955, but what of the other writers who strove to please you during the same year? Kenneth Bulmer came second—a remarkable achievement considering that he appeared with us only once and for the very first time in 1955—while F. G. Rayer and David S. Gardner tied for third place in our "honours list." Mr Gardner was also the most highly thought of among my own discoveries, while Robert A. Heinlein was favourite American author.

This result is the direct consequence of the story preference votes of NEBULA readers and is the yardstick against which all our authors measure their standing in your esteem. A similar award will be presented at the end of 1956 and, if you wish your preferences to be taken into consideration—with the obvious result that you will exert considerable influence in the kind of stories printed every two months in this magazine—be sure to complete the Ballot Form in this and all future issues.

E. C. Tubb appears for the fourteenth time in this edition of NEBULA with "Dying to Live," a story which is in complete constrast to his thirteen previous appearances, and which may be something of a new experience for many regular readers. However, as you might expect, it is a first-rate science fiction story for all that.

The short stories include a chilling little fantasy by Robert Silverberg who, as you may remember, had his very first story accepted for NEBULA No. 7 two years ago. It will interest you to know that he has since made a very big name for himself in science fiction writing with appearances in many of the better known American magazines, and I like to feel that this is yet another instance of a new and talented author put on the road to fame by a first appearance in NEBULA.

In these days when college diplomas are regretably becoming more important than real solid experience in the field of industry I think you will agree it is refreshing to read in E. R. James' "Hot Water" that in the future when this trend will very probably have continued, there still exists another kind of learning of far greater real value.

Bob Shaw writes our longest "short" this time with another of the truly original and off-trail yarns with which he is building himself a formidable reputation as one of our top authors. Unfortunately, Bob is emigrating to Canada in the near future, but he has promised me that he will be sending on more of his fine stories just as soon as he gets a chance to settle down over there.

Concluded on page 112

E. C. TUBB

Dying To Live

Now that he was dying to live, living itself scarcely seemed worthwhile

Illustrated by Harry Turner

The pistol was a glittering instrument of potential destruction and Malchin held it as if torn between fear and fascination of its metallic beauty.

"So this is the end," he said thickly. "You are determined to ruin my life and that of my son."

"Ruin?" May shrugged and moved towards the lounge where her suitcase rested on the cushions. "You are too dramatic, John. Edward and I love each other. We want to be with one another. Is that so unnatural?"

"But you are my wife!"

"Your second wife, John," she reminded. She looked at him. "I was young when you married me. Foolish, blinded by the wealth you had to offer, the life of ease and luxury you made possible. I didn't guess then that a woman needs more than that." She picked up the suitcase and stepped towards him. "A woman needs affection, John. She needs love and understanding and sympathy. She needs . . ."

"Youth," he said bitterly. "But my own son!"

"It was fate, John. Some things are bigger than we are and to fight against them is useless. I love Edward and, in this world, a woman must seek her happiness where she can." She hesitated and held out her hand. "Goodbye, John."

He stared at her, ignoring the proffered hand, and, in his, the pistol twitched as though it were a thing alive.

"So you mean it," he said, and there was pain in his voice. "You are going to leave me."

"Yes, John."

"I should kill you," he said. "I should kill him for ruining my life, but can a man kill his own flesh and blood?" He bowed his head and the pistol pointed towards the floor. "I love you," he whispered. "Is bitterness always the fruit of love?"

"Love is bitter-sweet," she said softly, and for a moment it seemed as if she would drop the case and throw her arms around him. Then, from the distance, the horn of a car was heard and she stiffened. "Goodbye, John. We shall never see each other again."

She hesitated a moment, her hand still outstretched, then, as he made no move to respond to her gesture, she sighed and, turning on her heel, walked towards the door.

He lifted his head as she moved away and the pistol in his hand levelled at her slim, straight back. Tension gripped him and his hand trembled. Once it seemed as though he would call her back then, as the door closed behind her, he sobbed and sank listlessly into a chair.

He held the pose for a long five seconds, milking the scene for all it was worth then, haggardly, he went into the final soliloquy.

He cut it as short as he could but even then he knew it was too long. He lifted the pistol and, glancing at it, sighed, and slowly aimed it at his temple. He stared before him, a man broken by the conflicting surge of emotions and who had seen his world and happiness crumple around him. Then he pressed the trigger and, as the report echoed around him, stiffened then slumped in the chair.

And that, he thought bitterly, was the perfectly apt ending to a perfectly crummy play.

May had the start of him and had almost finished cleaning her face by the time he got to their dressing-room. He waited until she had put on her street cosmetics then sat tiredly before the big mirror.

"Poor crowd tonight," said May, as she struggled into her dress. "Susan gave me the figures. Twenty-seven paid seats and the rest free-entry. Ferenstien must be laughing."

"What else can he expect?" Malchin wiped his face with tissue and stared at his reflection. "Putting on rubbish like that is a waste of time. My guess is that he was backed by the author."

"Oh, I don't know," said May. "It has its moments."

"Had, you mean," corrected Malchin. "You don't imagine it's going to run a fifth night, do you?" He turned from the mirror as a knock came at the door. "What is it?"

"Mr Ferenstien wants to see you in his office," said a voice.

"Important."

"What did I tell you?" Malchin scowled as he brushed a few flecks of powder from the shoulders of his one good suit. The play had been in modern dress so he'd had to use his own clothes. "Four nights and we get a week's pay and a so-sorry-goodbye."

He was right.

Ferenstien wasn't alone when they entered his office. The author of the plan, a thin, weedy, studious type, was with him. Of the two the author looked the more miserable. Ferenstien came straight to the point.

"We had twenty-five paid seats tonight," he said. "Last night we had thirty-two and fifteen the night before that. On opening night we had fifty-three, a record. We're closing down."

"Twenty-seven," said May. Ferenstien looked at her.

"Twenty-seven what?"

"Twenty-seven paid seats tonight. You said that we had twenty-five but it was twenty-seven."

"So it was twenty-seven, does that make me solvent?" He spread his hands. "I'm sorry, people, but you can see how it is. If people won't pay to see live shows then I can't pay you. That's sense, isn't it?"

"It would be better sense to have a decent play," said Malchin. "I spent two weeks learning that part. Why don't you find some decent authors?"

"There's nothing wrong with the play," said the author quickly. "I've been trying to persuade Mr. Ferenstien to remain open. Once the word-of-mouth advertising gets around people will be queueing up for tickets." He appealed to Malchin. "Tell him what you think, Mr. Malchin. After all, you're an experienced actor and you know how these things are."

Malchin sighed. Self-preservation dictated that he should agree with the author. If he could talk Ferenstien into staying open it would mean an extra week's pay for May and himself. But against that was the fact that the play was basically bad. Reluctantly he shook his head.

"The play," he said gently, "stinks. It will never do anything else but stink. Only a moron would pay to be bored for two hours and we haven't enough of that type of moron."

"But when you first read it you said that it was a good play!" The little man almost seemed to be on the verge of tears. He looked accusingly at Ferenstien. "You said so too."

"So we made a mistake," Ferenstien shrugged. "It happens all

the time. Next time, maybe, you'll have a smash hit. Come and see me then." He looked expressively towards the door.

"But my money!" The author looked more miserable than ever. "You said that I would get rich."

"You took a gamble," said Ferenstien shortly. "I hired you my theatre and attended to everything. You could have made a lot of money and, maybe next time you will." He looked towards the door again and this time the little man took the hint. Ferenstien sighed as he closed the door after him.

"These authors!"

"Poor man," said May. "Did you have to be so hard on him?"

"Why don't you buy decent plays," said Malchin. "That way you could make an honest profit."

"Buy them from where?" Ferenstien spread his hands. "What the mannikin theatre doesn't use the TV will. What they don't want ain't no good anyway. Can I afford to pay more than the MT for a good play? Be your age, Malchin, you know I can't."

He spoke nothing but the truth and Malchin knew it. No good play had to go abegging nowadays. If an author could write what the producers wanted he was on easy street. The mere fact that no one had bought his play should have warned the little man that he had a stinker. Instead of taking the warning he'd backed his play with his own money and, inevitably, he'd lost it.

Ferenstien passed over a cheque. Malchin took it, studied the amount, then nodded and slipped it into his pocket.

"You'll let us know when anything else comes up?"

"I'll remember you," promised the theatre owner. "But I won't be able to fix you up here any more."

"Why not?" Malchin knew the answer before he heard it. "You're switching to MT relay!"

"Sure. I'm putting in a big screen and converting the wings and dressing rooms. I'm employing a few girls to sell soft drinks and snacks and I'll fill the house every day." Ferenstien looked at May. "I might be able to fit you in if you're interested."

"No thanks," said May firmly. "I'm an actress and that's what I'm going to stay."

"Then you'd better act in MT," said Ferenstien. "As far as I know, this is the only legitimate theatre left in the country, and the supply of suckers is pretty well exhausted. An Angel is rarer than a Dodo." He looked at Malchin. "What are you going to do? Sign

on at the studios?"

"Not me." Malchin looked at May for encouragement. Ferenstien shrugged.

"Well, it's your business, but to me there's only one way out." He rose and held out his hand. "Good luck, anyway. Maybe I'll be seeing you."

He didn't sound too enthusiastic.

On the way home Malchin thought about it. Ferenstien was right, of course, at least he was right when it came to financial details. The live theatre was finished. Movies had helped to kill it and TV had put it in its coffin. The mannikin theatre had finally screwed down the lid. Now actors worked for the MT or they didn't work at all or, like Malchin and May, worked for some sleazy gyp artist more interested in easy money than legitimate art.

He sighed and May stared up at him.

"Worried, John?"

"We'll get by." He forced a smile. "We've managed so far and I'll find something for us to do."

"Work?" She frowned. "I suppose that you could get a job loading supplies or watching the dials at an automation factory. Is that what you meant?"

He hadn't and didn't bother to explain that he had less chance of getting a job in industry than of playing Hamlet in a full-scale live production. Automation had brought its own problems. The mechanisation of the factories, while increasing production and lowering costs, had created a vast unemployment problem. It had been solved by a strict adherence to union policy. No overtime. No non-union workers. Four, six-hour shifts a day and a four-day week. It had worked and, at the same time, created a tremendous demand for entertainment.

The movies had tried to fill it until the artistes' union had finally managed to ban any but live shows. No movies, no recordings, no records for public playing. The mannikin theatre had come along offering better spectacle than movies and better presentation than TV. Now almost every home had its MT tube and the old movie houses and theatres had all been converted to the new medium. Like industry, the world of entertainment had saved itself at the expense of efficiency, but many, like Malchin, thought that the new medium was worse than the old.

Young men could make the change and accept the loss of the live

theatre. But Malchin was no longer young. He remembered the old days on tour, the thrill of a first night, the packed houses and autograph hunters. He didn't want to lose all that and, altogether with it, the fine old tradition of the theatre. To him there was something sacred in the smell of grease-paint, the heat of the footlights, the presence of a watchful, critical audience. To him nothing else was real theatre.

He sighed again then looked up as the European Stratrocket sent a thin trail of fire across the heavens. For a moment he felt regret that the planets were still out of reach. It would have been fun to tour the colonies with a company. He jerked back to reality at the sound of his name.

"John!" A fat, chubby man came smiling towards them. "And May! It's good to see you again."

"Hello, Marks." May returned the smile as she held out her hand. "How's the world treating you?"

"Not bad." Marks steered them towards the flashing gilt and neon of a bar. "Not bad at all. And you?"

"Fine."

They didn't resume the conversation until they were seated and Marks had ordered drinks all round. A big TV screen against one wall showed a succession of commercials but Malchin was pleased to see they had no MT tube. Mostly the mannikin theatre was unsuitable for public bars and refreshment rooms. The plays were too long and the effect too hypnotic for it to pay. He sipped at his Martini and stared at the crowd around him.

Even though it was well past midnight the place was busy. It would stay busy all the twenty-four hours it was open each day. The six-hour four-shift work-system had broken down the last barrier between day and night and, in order to consume the mounting production of the factories, life remained at a high tempo.

"I nearly starved before I got wise," said Marks. He beamed at them across the table. "It became impossible to book dates for the show so I had to disband the company."

"You paid off the road-show!" May made expressions of sympathy. "After all that time, too!"

"Best company on the road," admitted Marks, "but they had to go. I've placed most of them since though and we still keep in touch."

"How?" Malchin fished for his cherry. "How did you place them, I mean?"

"I'm an agent," said Marks. "Doing all right too."

"An agent!" Malchin swallowed the cherry whole. Marks nodded.

"That's right. Look me up when you are free." He produced a couple of cards. "I've got an in with the studios and they'll take almost anyone I send. They like experienced actors, of course, but what the devil? Anyone who's been on the boards can take an MT part with his eyes shut."

"You're an MT agent?" Malchin looked disgusted. "You!"

"Why not?" Marks signalled for more drinks. "There's plenty of work at the studios. They run some of those plays for weeks and they aren't short ones either. Five, even ten hours at a stretch. They can use a cast of thousands. I tell you, John, it's the big thing now."

"Maybe," said Malchin sourly. "But it isn't real theatre."

"It pays," said Marks pointedly. He glanced at his wrist. "Look, I'm in a hurry right now but I'd like to see you both again. Look me up tomorrow, or whenever you can. Right?"

Malchin nodded and May smiled. They were thoughtful all the rest of the way home.

The man at the desk stared at the card then looked up. "Experienced?"

"Thirty years in all parts," said Malchin indignantly. "Would you call that experienced?"

"Not as far as we're concerned. I mean have you worked MT before?"

"No," admitted Malchin. "Does it matter?"

"Wastes time." The man stamped the card, handed it to Malchin, and jerked his thumb towards a door. "Indoctrination through there. Next?"

Indoctrination was a small room fitted with tiered seats and a low stage. Malchin found a vacant seat, squeezed into it, and looked at the bored man on the platform. He waited patiently until the seats were full and then pressed a button.

"Right. Now that we won't be interrupted we can get on with it. All of you are actors so I won't bother giving you the usual stage procedure. As this is your first time with us, however, there are certain things you must know." He paused and lit a cigarette.

"First, and most important of all, you must bear in mind that you are never really on-stage at all. No matter what happens to you it can't affect you physically. It's up to you not to let it affect you mentally either. All the actors you see on MT tubes are mannikins. They

are about two inches high and each has a Thoren-type positronic brain. Those details needn't concern or worry you. The point is this. You, your mental awareness that is, will be transmitted to the mannikin. For the time being it will be you, your body and mind. In brief it will be just as though you've been converted into a mannikin. You will live on stage and most probably die there. Don't let that worry you. At the instant of death, or when your role is finished, you will be recalled back to your own body. Any questions?"

A young man in the back row stuck up his hand. "Can we speak our parts?"

"The actual mannikins cannot make a sound," explained the instructor. "Speaking, when necessary, is done by you in your cubicles. Microphones pick up the sound and we blend it at control." The instructor drew at his cigarette. "Let me put it another way. Consider the mannikin as a part of you, such as a hand or a foot. You control it, but it cannot speak. You can speak but the sounds will come out of your mouth, not that of the mannikin. If you move, however, it will be the mannikin which moves, not you." He smiled at them. "Forget the science and stop worrying about how it's done. It works, that's all you need worry about."

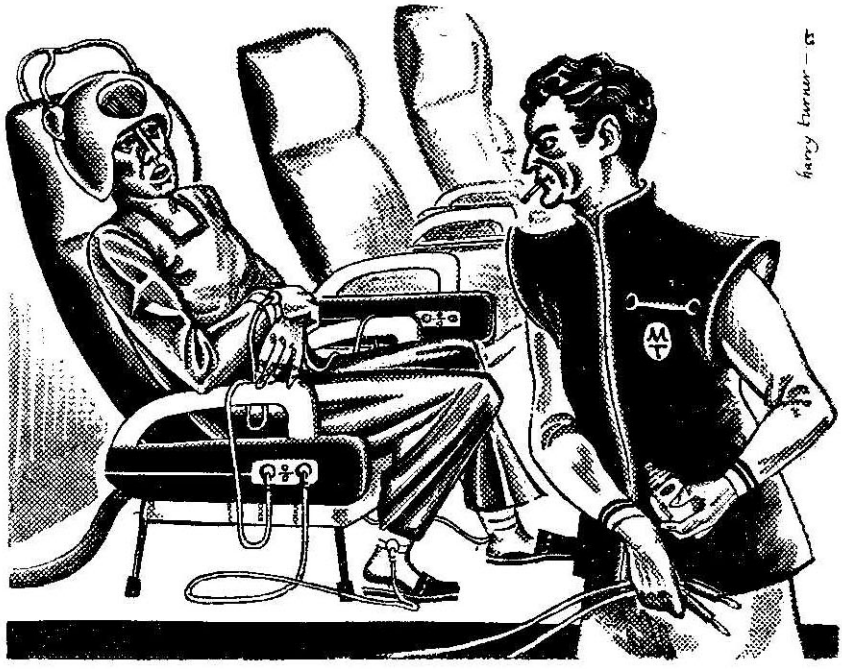
"How about learning our parts?" It was the young man again and Malchin began to suspect that he was planted just to ask relevant questions.

"Most of the cast have no speaking parts to learn," said the instructor. "When you become star players you'll have to be rehearsed just the same as for movies or the regular stage. You'll get a schedule telling you what you're supposed to do and how to do it. If you flop we cross you off our list. If you forget to remember that no matter what happens on stage it can't hurt you, you'll turn psycho and we cross you off just the same." He crushed out the cigarette. "Right. Go through the door and get to work." He pressed the button again and sat down with a patient expression. Malchin wondered just how many times a day he had to stand there and go through the same routine. A recorder would have done the same job just as well but recorders were banned. He sighed and followed the rest of the crowd through the door.

It led to the casting room and selectors handed out sheets of paper to those they had cast. Malchin stared at his then looked at the man.

"A slave?"

"Yes. No speaking part. You get killed. Next?"



"Killed!"

"Why not?" The man was impatient. "Get into the ready-room. Hurry, we're running late as it is."

The ready-room was a barber's shop where they shaved his head until it was as naked as an egg.

Malchin tried to protest, then kept quiet when told that it was that or back on to the street for him. He had already gathered that the studios had a black-list and he didn't want to get on it. Still, looking down at his carefully tended locks as they fell around him he wondered whether it was all worth it. He wondered still more when they sent him into a room divided into small cubicles each containing elaborate chairs surrounded by electronic equipment. Then he found out why his head had had to be shaved.

"The helmet fits, so." The technician stepped back and smiled at him. "Comfortable?"

"Does it matter?" Malchin was bitter. Never before in his life had he known of an actor treated as a bit of machinery and he didn't like it.

"We like you to be comfortable," explained the technician. He moistened Malchin's wrists and ankles and clipped on more electrodes "There. Now don't worry about a thing. When I throw the switch you'll be motivating the mannikin and from then on it's up to you." He glanced at a wall clock. "You've got three minutes. Better check your script so that you won't be making any mistakes."

"What script?" Malchin gestured with the paper. "This? All it says is that I'm cast as a slave and will die in the arena. Call that a script?"

"It's enough. You'll find yourself in the waiting room and someone will help you at the right time." The technician smiled again. "Just don't worry. Act natural. As an actor you should be able to do this with your eyes shut." He glanced at the wall-clock again. "Ready?"

Malchin nodded.

It was the first time he had died and he didn't like it a bit. He said so long and loudly until the technician, who must have heard the identical complaint at least a thousand times before, lost patience.

"What's the matter with you?" he snapped. "You get paid, don't you?"

"That's not the point," said Malchin stiffly. His freshly-shaven head ached and he had a sour taste in his mouth. He glowered at the electrodes on wrists and ankles. "A man's still got some rights. They should have told me what to expect."

"Why should they?" The technician shrugged as he checked a row of dials. "What difference would it have made?"

"I would never have accepted the part had I known. I'm not one to complain, but there are limits. Wait until the union hears about this."

"The union?" The technician shrugged. "What can they do about it? It would be a lot easier for us not to have to use you actors at all. We could do a lot better with edited recordings." He produced a package of cigarettes, lit one and offered the package to Malchin. "Smoke?"

"Thanks." Malchin puffed it into life and relaxed in the chair. "Can I go now?"

"Not yet. It takes a little while for you to get readjusted. Later, when you're used to it, you can get straight up and out." The technician glanced at the dials again. "I'll tell you when."

Malchin nodded and sat quietly smoking. His initial shakes had

gone and, though he was still upset by the whole thing, he felt the warm glow of an actor who has played a difficult part well. He looked at a blank screen against the wall.

"Did you catch the show?"

"No."

"You missed something. It was a costume piece, early Roman, I think, with lots of blood and fighting." He frowned as he thought about it. "I was a slave. A bit part. You'd have thought that they would have given an experienced actor a better part than that."

"Experienced?" The technician smiled through the smoke of his cigarette.

"Experienced," said Malchin firmly. "Real theatre, I mean. You can't call this real."

"No?"

"No," repeated Malchin. "I'm talking about real flesh and blood actors. I . . ." He broke off at the other's smile. "You know what I mean," he finished weakly. Then, as the technician kept smiling. "All right, so you people think you're smart. But I haven't forgotten what you did to me and I'm going to do something about it. You'll see."

"All right," said the technician. "So you're going to do something about it. So what?" He dropped his cigarette and trod on it. He glanced at the dials and unsnapped the electrodes from Malchin's ankles and wrists. "You can go now." He stamped and signed the card Malchin had received at the front desk. "Give them this on the way out."

"What is it?"

"Your resistance index and approved work. You've got a strong psyche and quick recovery. You'll be good for all the work you want. It also authorises you to collect your pay."

He smiled as Malchin almost ran out of the door.

Acutely conscious of his shaven head Malchin left the studios and caught a moving way towards the centre of town. The shame of his bald scalp was offset by the welcome feel of the money in his pockets but, as he paid his fare, he saw that the conductor was grinning at him. He scowled after the man as he walked down the strip collecting fares.

Some people didn't know when they were well off.

He dropped off for a quick snack and, over his coffee, he decided what next to do. May would be waiting for him at the apartment, but

he didn't feel like going home just yet. He doubted whether the money he had earned would justify himself in her eyes for breaking faith. Anyway, he was still burning with injured pride and the memory of what had been done to him and wanted to do something about it.

The usual crowd of actors hung around outside the offices of the union. All of them were "resting" and they eyed his shaven head with mingled expressions of envy and contempt. He brushed past them into the reception office where a girl, blonde, bored and over-painted, waved him to a chair while she operated the intercom.

"Mr. Langtree?"

The box squawked.

"Mr. Malchin to see you, sir. Official business."

The box squawked and the receptionist gestured towards the inner door. "Mr. Langtree will see you now."

Langtree was tall, thin, hollow-cheeked and as full of fight as an over-fed cockerel. He nodded to Malchin and pointed to a chair. His other hand held a telephone and he barked into it between pauses of listening. He didn't pause long.

"No. No. Not a chance. No. Live shows only, Pernod, and if you want to stay in business you'd better remember that. If I catch you so much as playing a record over that public address system of yours I'll have the unions clamp down on you. All of them. No. No. That's better. No. Okay."

He slammed down the receiver and wiped his face with a handkerchief.

"Well, Malchin? What can I do for you?"

"I'm making a complaint," said Malchin. He flushed as Langtree stared at his naked head. "All right, go ahead and laugh. That's all everyone seems to do if they don't spit. Make up your mind which you want to do and get it over with. If this lousy union would remember what it's supposed to do instead of holding out its hand for dues all the time I wouldn't have to walk around like this."

"Get a wig," suggested Langtree. "Most of the boys and girls wear them now. No one need know."

"Get a wig," echoed Malchin bitterly. "What the hell? I thought that you were supposed to be helping us."

"I am." Langtree mopped his face again and Malchin remembered that the thin man had been instrumental in the banning of movies. "What's the complaint?"

"I died today," said Malchin, and shuddered. "They didn't tell me what I was letting myself in for. They cast me as a slave and threw me to the lions." He shuddered again at the memory. "I thought there was a law against things like that."

"Like what?"

"Killing people. Cruelty. That sort of thing."

"You weren't hurt, were you?" Langtree seemed eager. Malchin shrugged.

"That depends on what you mean by 'hurt'?"

"No pain, I mean. Was there?"

"No," said Malchin reluctantly. "I can't say there was actual pain, but it sure played hell with my nerves."

"A pity," said Langtree regretfully. "I'd heard a rumour that they were letting pain-sensation through a little. Wanted to make the shows more realistic. Seems that some of the actors they employed grew used to it and started to laugh at the wrong time. If I could prove they were letting pain through I could slam down on them." He looked sharply at Malchin. "Sure they didn't bribe you to forget?"

"I'm sure. It wasn't nice but there was no pain that I remember."

"Good." Langtree relaxed in his chair. "We can't allow them to do as they like with us, not if they don't pay for it." He seemed to remember something. "Well? What did you want to see me about?"

"I told you. They killed me today."

"So what? You got extra pay for it, didn't you?"

"That isn't the point," said Malchin. "They didn't even tell me what to expect. They just connected me up and threw the switch. Before I knew what it was all about I was kicked into an arena and a huge lion was coming for me." He shuddered. "Have you ever been eaten by a lion?"

"Not that I can remember," said Langtree drily. "Was it bad?"

"It was hell! First it knocked me down and slavered all over me. I guessed they'd have a close-up of the scene so I acted plenty scared. Not," he corrected himself, "that I had to act. It was too real for that. Then it bit my legs off, slowly, as if it were enjoying it. It clawed me and, just when I was getting the willies, it bit off my head." Malchin looked ill as he thought about it. "I was never so relieved in all my life as I was when I came to in the chair."

"Bad," sympathised Langtree. "Still, they pay double rates for maiming and death. Treble for death by torture. What more do you want?"

"Choice of parts," snapped Malchin. "From what I hear they don't give a damn about the cast. Aside from the stars they just take anyone they fancy. Lions, slaves, soldiers, anything on the bill. You either take it or they do without you."

"True," admitted Langtree. "Still, as an old trouper you should know that that is nothing new. How many parts did you play in your early days? And glad to get them I'll bet."

"That was different," said Malchin. "I was learning my trade."

"You're still learning," said Langtree. "Personally I can't see what you've got to complain about."

"I do. And I haven't paid dues for the past thirty years to get the brush-off when you need help."

"You'll get it," said Langtree, "when you need it. But what do you want me to do?"

"File an injunction against the MT studios and make them give choice of parts. Better still, file an injunction and force them to close down."

"That's impossible. On what grounds? Would it increase employment if they offered choice of parts?"

"No, but it wouldn't be so bad if you selected your part."

"It would slow down production. Did the movies ever give a bit player a choice. Of course they didn't and the same principle applies. As for shutting them down, I daren't do it. Do you realise that they employ more artists, not counting the kindred trades allied to the theatre. than could ever be employed by regular theatres? If I tried it I'd be thrown out of office and rightly so. Agreed?"

"I suppose you're right," said Malchin reluctantly. Unemployment had been the spectre of the theatre ever since the first actor had put on grease-paint. Too many eager young hopefuls and too few openings for them. Radio and movies had supplied a large audience and had cut down employment even more. Television had increased the audience and thrown still more actors out of work as one theatre and variety house after the other had shut down or been converted. The mannikin theatre with its low production costs and world-wide audiences, its casts of thousands and its continual change of plays, had saved the profession. That, and the long and bitter struggle to ban any but live shows.

"You're an intelligent man," said Langtree. "We've done what we could but there's a limit. With the set-up they've got any bum off skid row could fill a part. We're lucky still to be in business at all." He rose and held out his hand. "Sorry, Malchin. I know how you feel

but we've got to face it. The legit theatre is dead and it's going to stay that way. Bring me a genuine complaint, something like them using non-union labour, cut-rates, violation of ethics, anything like that and I'll act fast enough. But you can't expect me to cut my own throat."

He looked significantly towards the door.

Outside the office Malchin wasted some breath and energy cursing the union, the MT theatre, the modern craze for gore and the universe in general. He was recovering his breath when a man stopped and sneered at him.

He was tall, thin, with a mane of long, black hair sweeping back from a high forehead and curling neatly over his collar. His clothes were a rusty black, stained and spotted with age and wear. His nose was a beak, his eyes heavily lidded, his thin mouth contemptuous. He looked like a caricature of a Shakespearian actor, which he was. He also looked like the popular version of a theatrical genius, which he wasn't. He stared down his long nose at Malchin, curled his lips and, in sonorous tones, addressed the street in general.

"Oh, see ye this bald-pated traitor! See his naked scalp, the pale witness of his shame! See this craven who has sold his birthright for a mess of pottage! Oh . . ."

"Oh, go to hell," snapped Malchin. And walked quickly away. The sooner he took Langtree's advice the better, he was getting tired of sneers and laughter.

The costumer, a short, fat Levantine, took one look at Malchin's bald head and reached silently for a box of wigs.

"Plenty of customers, eh?" Malchin sorted through the box, picked out a wig the colour of his late hair, and tried it on. Good, but it wouldn't delude May. He tried again. Better, but the shade was a little off. He tried a third time and frowned at the shaggy effect.

"The barber down the street will trim it for you," suggested the costumer. "Wife?"

"Yes."

"Tell her you're letting your hair grow long." The Levantine rubbed his hands together. "Business," he said, answering Malchin's earlier question, "is terrible. Wigs, yes. Lots of wigs. Costumes, no. No one wants full-size costumes any more. No one that is aside from the people going to fancy-dress parties."

"Too bad." Malchin squinted at himself in the mirror. "I'll take this one. Will it wash?"

"Better than your own hair." The costumer sighed as if in admiration of the wig. "You know, if I was but ten years younger I'd apply to be an actor. The money is good, the work simple. No more study, learning of parts, deportments, the tricks of stage-craft. Realism. Everything for realism. It makes it all very simple."

"That's what you think," snapped Malchin. "Let me tell you it takes skill and courage to be eaten by a lion."

"So?" The fat man raised his eybrows. "Was that you?"

"You saw the show?" It was one of Malchin's grievances that he was unable to see himself in a part. "Was it good?"

"I think so," admitted the Levantine. "It's running all day and I'm catching up on it in parts. I tuned in to the arena scene. Were you the one who was ripped open and flung, still living, into the fire?"

"No. I was the one who had my head bitten off by a lion."

"Oh."

"You mean to tell me that they didn't even give me a close-up?"

"There were so many," soothed the costumer. "At least twenty slaves and ten lions all on-stage at once." He dropped his eyes at Malchin's expression. "But it was wonderful background. Wonderful!"

"I bet that it was," said the actor bitterly. "All that and not even a close-up! Why, back in movies they would have made a three-minute scene of that episode. I put everything I had into it."

"Maybe next time," suggested the fat man. "It takes practice to be able to die good."

"Not that it makes any difference," said Malchin. "They don't even give us our own faces. You can't recognise anyone but the stars and there's talk of them having to toe the line. They'll have to take what's given them soon, the same as the bit players. Imagine having a star who doesn't look like what you expect!"

"It won't be the same," admitted the fat man. "But it's realistic, you've got to admit that."

"What," said Malchin bitterly, "has entertainment got to do with realism? How much for the wig?"

May wasn't home when Malchin arrived back at the apartment and secretly he was glad of it. May was a nice girl, they had been married for a long time now, but she had strong ideas of tradition and the degenerating influence of the mannikin theatre. Until today Malchin had agreed with her but the mounting pile of unpaid bills had worn away his resolve never to prostitute his art.

His death had gone a long way to restore his previous convictions but, looking at the pile of groceries he had collected, he began to admit that there were worse ways of earning money. A man, even an actor, has to eat. Even if he has to die to do it.

Putting away the food he glanced into a mirror to reassure himself that his wig resembled his own lost hair. It did, the barber had been skilled at his trade, and Malchin began to think up a story to account for the replenished refrigerator. He was still trying to think of one when she came in.

"May!" He looked at the pile of paper bags she was carrying and helped her to carry them into the kitchen. "All this food! Where did you get it?"

"From the store, of course. Where did you think?"

"I meant where did you get the money to pay for it?"

"I did some modelling," she explained. "A friend of mine, a girl I used to know years ago, fell sick and asked me to fill in for her."

"Modelling?" He looked at her. Ten years ago maybe, but she'd worn a little since then. Still, though he said it himself, she had the sort of figure which looked good behind footlights and it was barely

possible that she spoke the truth. Barely.

"Yes, modelling," she said defiantly. "Why?"

"No reason." He stepped towards her before she could open the refrigerator. "You look simply wonderful, darling. Give me a kiss."

"Mind my hair," she warned, and allowed him to peck her cheek. "Anything good on the MT tube?"

"You know that I can't stand to watch that distortion," he said loyally. "Why?"

"Turn it on while I get supper," she ordered and pushed him out of the kitchen. "They should be reaching the end of *Decline and Fall* about now and I'd like to see how they're doing."

Reluctantly he switched on the tube and, sitting down, let the false realism of the mannikin theatre engulf him. Even though he tried to maintain a professional detachment he had to admit its effectiveness. The characters looked and acted as if alive. They fought and spoke, struggled and died as if they were men and women instead of two-inch high mannikins of synthetic flesh and blood, activated by electricity and animated by the consciousness of real people.

He watched them, noting the way the scanners swung to pick out the high spots, the way red fluid, just like blood, spurted from gaping wounds. That was the worst of the mannikin theatre. The modern craze was all for blood, blood, and still more blood. Psychologists explained it by saying that it was the natural result of sublimating the natural desire for combat, that viewers were rested and relaxed by the vicarious pleasure of seeing the violence of the MT tube. Whatever the reason violence was popular and, as the mannikins were cheap and an entire city could be built on a table-top, the producers had really let themselves go.

Malchin was morbidly watching the writhings of an impaled slave when May sat beside him.

"They tell me," she said casually, "that an actor like that gets treble time."

"He's welcome to it," said Malchin briefly. He stared at a warrior bristling with arrows until he resembled a feathered pin-cushion. "Say what you like about the mannikin theatre, but you could never get that effect on a regular stage."

"But it isn't the same, is it?" she said. He hesitated.

"Well, in a way I suppose it is," he mused. "They do use real actors, you know, and they get effects impossible any other way." He stared at the big, full-coloured screen. "You could call it a combination

of movies and theatre with a bit of radio thrown in. Those mannikins are alive in a way. They can't feel, of course, but it isn't as if they were just robots."

"They get good money, too," said May wistfully. "Especially if they get torn apart or anything like that."

"Yes." Malchin cleared his throat. "May."

"Yes, John?"

"May, I . . ."

The buzzing of the videophone saved him. Irritably he turned off the MT tube and switched on the videophone. Marks grinned at them from the screen.

"John!" His eyes shifted a little. "And May! Glad to have caught you in. I thought you might have been out celebrating."

"What is it, Marks?" Malchin wished that the agent had chosen some other time to call.

"Work, my boy. Work for the pair of you, as much as you can use." He stared down at something on his desk, invisible on the screen. "I've your reports back from the studios and you're both triple A. Peerless are planning something really big and they can use you. It's one of these science fiction things. They want five hundred monsters and they've a new gimmick which pays double rates. They've fixed up a bomb arrangement in the middle of these things, they're five inches tall, so they've got plenty of room, and when the hero's ray hits them they explode." He chuckled. "The twist is that they don't die, see? They just crawl around on their tendrils trailing their broken bodies. I tell you that it's the biggest thing yet! Naturally I've booked you both. Report at the studios at ten tomorrow. 'Bye."

Malchin was very thoughtful as he returned to his chair.

"May."

"Yes, dear?"

"I didn't know that you'd seen Marks."

"I didn't like to tell you," she confessed. "Anyway, you saw him too."

"I was saving it for a surprise," he said weakly. "I only went to ask him for a loan and he talked me into it."

"Me too," she said, and squeezed his hand.

"It isn't as if they were just robots," he defended. "It takes quite a lot to manage a mannikin."

"Yes, dear."

"And we needed the money."

"Yes, dear."

"So you do understand, don't you?"

"Of course I understand." She squeezed his hand again. "I think that you were very brave taking a job like that. Which part did they give you?"

"A slave," he said, not without pride. "The sort of part they would never give to a woman. They had a lion bite off my legs, maul me, and then tear off my head." He scowled as he thought about it. "I don't know where they get some of their actors. The one who took the part of the lion must have been a sadistic pervert. He positively enjoyed doing it." He looked at May. "And you?"

"Just a bit part," she said hastily. "Nothing important."

"A crowd scene." He nodded. "Never mind, May. Everyone has to start somewhere. It won't be long before you're back with top billing." He stretched and unashamedly turned on the MT tube. "Supper ready yet?"

May nodded and went out into the kitchen. She was glad that he hadn't been too curious. It may have been coincidence or perhaps the casting director worked on a pet theory of his own, but she couldn't confess that *she* had taken the part of the lion.

John would never forgive her.

E. C. TUBB

ROBERT SILVERBERG

Always

She would never leave him for as long as his life would last

Illustrated by Arthur Thomson

"I hope you have your set tuned in today, Mr George Marks," the T.V. announcer said. "Because this is your lucky day."

George Marks glanced up from his reverie in surprise when he heard his name mentioned. Ever since his mother had died he had only half-watched the television set, keeping a perfunctory eye on the moving images while letting his mind dwell constantly on the great lonely gulf that had suddenly opened before him: the dull prospect of living out the forty or fifty years remaining to him all alone, without his mother.

"Yes, Mr Marks," the announcer continued, looking earnestly at the camera as if for all the world he were talking directly to George, "the winner of the Grand Lottery is none other than—yourself!"

Marks gasped. Every year he had taken a Lottery ticket, just as a matter of course; everyone bought one. In '83 he had won a ten thousandth prize, and he and his mother had taken a week's vacation on Sidella. In '89 he had been successful again, this time taking twelve-thousandth prize, and they had given him a free Solar System tour. But all the other years he had regularly put down his three credits and just as regularly failed to place.

"This year's Grand Prize—hold your hat, Mr Marks, if you're tuned in—is—holding your hat?—a small, uninhabited, lovely little Earth-type planet in the Procyon system! Did you hear that, Mr Marks? A planet all your own!"

A planet all my own! If only my mother could—George began, and cut the thought off. *I have to learn to stop thinking about her.* He tried to concentrate on what the announcer was saying.

"Here's some background on our lucky winner, ladies and gentlemen. George Marks is 36, unmarried, lives with his mother in Appalachia North. He's employed as a clerk in the Appalachia North General Consumer's Bank, and has previously won in the Lottery in 2183 and 2189, so he's no stranger to good fortune! Mr Marks, if you'll stop in at the nearest Lottery Office first thing tomorrow, all arrangements for visiting your private planet will be made.

"And now on to the second prize winner. Hang on to your stubs, because——"

Marks snapped off the set and leaned back, contemplating the swinging pendulum of the antique Swiss clock on the wall. The clock read 8.03; automatically he translated from the old-fashioned system and saw that it was now exactly 20.03, Appalachia Standard Time.

King George. He liked the sound of that. A small, uninhabited planet in the Procyon system, eh? Probably overflowing with fertility. For the first time since his mother's death, George felt strong and independent. He decided to become a farmer; he'd move to his new planet (unlike most of the first prize winners, who sold their winnings immediately) and live there, majestically, alone. Certainly, George thought, it would be better to live alone as a king than alone as a bank clerk!

He'd be a pioneer; he'd build a house, plow his land, swim and fish, make his own schedules. Life suddenly had some meaning again.

It meant, of course, that he'd no longer be able to visit his mother's grave. But she would understand, George thought. He briefly considered the idea of taking her along, reburying her on his new planet, but he dismissed the thought as both impractical and a little grotesque.

The phone rang. Doubtless someone from the bank, or maybe one of his mother's old friends, calling up to congratulate. He let it ring. He didn't need any congratulations.

He began to write down a list of the things he'd take with him. Household effects, books, things necessary to build a new life on the new planet. (It would need a name, too, George thought. Procyon VI is a bit cold and empty as a name. His mother's name? No, George thought. A planet named Frieda just doesn't sound right).

The list grew and grew, until finally the little old clock signalled 11.00, which George translated out to 23.00; time for bed. He slept uneasily, dreaming of the new life ahead.

There was some trouble getting the spaceline to transport everything George wanted to take, but the Lottery people were very accommodating

about paying the extra costs. George made a last trip to his mother's grave, where a nasty scene developed when some press photographers tried to get shots of him paying his last farewell, and headed straight for the spaceport.

No one was on hand to see him off.

The air was fresh and clean on Procyon VI—George had tried fruitlessly to find a name for it. It was, indeed, an Earth-type planet, smaller than Earth but with greater density so that the gravity was still approximately 1G; the oxygen-nitrogen ratio was a good one, and the land was fertile and heavily vegetated. It would have made a fine little planet for colonizing, if the Lottery forces hadn't gotten to it first. And because the Lottery was just about the most powerful force on Earth—over a billion people bought a three-credit ticket or two every year—once the Lottery had picked the little planet for its prize there wasn't much anyone could do about it.

The men from the spaceship helped George set up his prefabricated home in a couple of hours (he had given up the idea of building one) and then took off, after making sure that George's radio was working; there was a colony on Procyon II, in case he got lonely. He assured them that he had no possible desire for company—he had been telling them this since the voyage began, to their increasing displeasure—and, with some relief, they blasted off, leaving George sitting amid a heap of packing cases outside his house, staring out at his planet.

He had put the house down in a natural clearing by the side of a small but swift stream, a hundred yards or so from a thickly vegetated jungle. The survey people had assured him that the planet was inhabited only by a few species of small animals and some fish. He was planning to live off his hunting and farming, once his supply of synthetics ran out.

George opened one of the packing cases, found the little folding bed he had brought along, and installed it in one corner of the little house. As he went back outside, he was startled to hear a pleasant voice call to him, breaking the silence.

"George? Come here, George," the voice said, half-purring. Slowly, only partly believing, he turned, and saw what seemed to be a lovely female figure stretched out in the soft grass about twenty yards away. She was beckoning to him.

Hallucination, he thought, as he approached, nibbling his lips nervously. She was blonde, and young, and well-built; she looked almost like Miss Robbins from the bank, but her hair was blonder, her bosom

was bosomier, and her teeth were straight and even, unlike Miss Robbins'.

"I'm so glad you're here, George," the figure said, wriggling voluptuously. "I've been waiting *so* long for you."

George stared. She beckoned with her arms; he drew so close he could detect her gentle perfume, could see the colour of her lovely eyes——

One was blue, one was brown.

The instant he noticed the discrepancy, the brown eye immediately turned blue.

He noticed she was not breathing. At once, her breast began to rise and fall visibly.

There was a fairly strong breeze blowing, but her hair remained as motionless as if it were made of copper wire. As George observed this, her hair began to move with the wind.

"Come here, George," she said, and the appeal was hard to resist.

But he moved a few feet back instead. There were legends of this sort of thing—sirens, space loreleis. Strange extra-terrestrial monsters that cast telepathic projections to lure unsuspecting Earthmen to their dooms. None of these legends had ever been documented; they were only tales told by grizzled space-hands. He felt a hot burst of anger that this should happen to him, on his planet, the planet he had been told was uninhabited, the planet that was his kingdom, his private world.

"George?" The figure stretched, leaned back, almost writhed with impatience.

"You're a monster!" he said. A vivid picture leaped into his mind of some grey reptilian thing, oozing out of the ground, with a horde of squid-like tentacles and great bulging eyes, with the stale coffin-smell of an incredibly ancient being.

The girl suddenly melted and the monster he had pictured took shape before his eyes. His reaction was instantaneous and instinctive. "Mother!" he yelled, closing his eyes and throwing his arm in front of his face. "Mother!"

When he looked up the figure was still there, smiling sweetly, wearing the old lavender dress his mother had worn just before her death. Her hair was slightly disarranged, as usual, and altogether it was a perfect likeness of the old woman. George stared, feeling a mixture of terror and rage, and then broke and ran for his house.

"George, dear! Why are you running away from me?"

George dashed through the open doorframe of the house—he hadn't attached the door yet—and fumbled through the opened packing-case till

he came across the Webley blaster he had stowed there. He widened it to lethal range and came to the door. The image of his mother was standing there.

"Let me come in, George," it said. "I'll help you unpack." She smiled again. *It was her voice,* George thought. *Her voice exactly.* He shivered and shook at the sight of his mother come to life again.

"Get away or I'll shoot," he said coldly. "Back up or I'll blast you whatever you are." He gestured with the Webley, and drew his finger tighter on the stud. He wondered for a moment if the figure might actually be his mother; she had said to him, on her deathbed. "I'll always be with you, George, darling. Always. Wherever you go, your old mother will protect you." But then he remembered the lovely girl with the mismatched eyes, and the monster, and jolted back to reality.

"Get back into your own form or I'll cook you," he called out. He pulled the trigger back tighter, tighter, wondering what would happen when the beam of the Webley shot out and blasted the old lavender dress and the crinkly lace around her throat, and then wondering if he would be able to shoot the figure at all, even though he knew it was not his mother but only a blasphemous copy picked from his brain. He broke into a sweat and started to draw back the trigger. At the last second, the form of his mother swirled and changed.

"You win," said a tiny, wizened, rubbery, gnome-like figure. It was roughly humanoid in shape, with a pair of thick, long, powerful-looking arms and a subsidiary pair much thinner, culminating in delicate, tapering fingers. "You'd never have shot at the mother-image anyway, but I thought I'd save you the trouble of trying. This is my real form. Can I come in now?"

"No," George said. "You stay where you are and tell me what you want. How do I know if this is your true form?"

"You'll just have to take my word, I suppose. But look: I drew the other three forms right out of your mind, didn't I? What was the first thing on your mind? Admit it? That girl from the bank. You didn't picture her too clearly, though, which is why I botched the eye-colors. Then you thought of that monster, clear and vivid, and I produced that image. And finally you called on your mother, and I turned into her. But this is a new form; you didn't have it on your mind at all, did you?"

"No," George admitted. "But what do you want?"

The little old creature sat down on the edge of a packing case. "Why don't you put your gun away first? I don't mean to harm you, George. Quite the opposite, really. Believe me. I only want your love. That's why I took the first shape. The monster was an accident.

I want you to love me, and I want to love you. Please believe me, George."

George licked his lips. "This is fantastic," he said, stepping cautiously out of the doorframe. "Explain yourself. Who are you, where do you come from, what do you want. Quickly and concisely, or I'll blast you."

"You know you don't mean that, George. I see it in your mind; you're just saying it to be brave. But I'll tell you who I am. I've been living on this little planet for centuries, or maybe millenia. My race discovered the secret of immortality ages ago, and I was stranded here more years ago than I can remember, unable to reach a rescue party. We're telepathic, as you see, but only over short distances. I've lost all hopes of ever being found. My people come from far off, too far off for you to know what star I mean. It's been very lonely here, and I've had a lonely life. My people voluntarily gave up childbearing when our planet began to get overpopulated—immortality and children don't go together on a small world—and I've never known what it is to love, or to be loved. And I'm an old woman, George, old and terribly lonely."

"You're a woman?" He stared at the small, gnarled, green-skinned body. "A woman?"

"Yes," the alien said. "A functional female. But an old one, George. And when you landed I saw how lonely you were, and I wanted to help you. We need each other, George. Can't you see how badly we need each other?"

She wavered, flickered, and turned back into the image of his mother for a moment, and reached out a wrinkled hand to him.

"Accept me this way, George. Pretend that I'm your mother come back to life again. After a while the pretence will become reality. We can live together the way we did in the old days, with the little old clock on the wall and the bridge game after dinner and——"

"Keep out of my mind!" He drew the blaster again. "The answer is no!" A wave of fear went through him. The alien was surely dangerous, whatever its—her—story. He had heard the old tales of the incubi of space which lure men into yielding up their minds to them. He fired a blaster shot suddenly at the little alien, but she leaped nimbly to one side.

"You won't be able to hit me," she said, taking once again his mother's shape. "I can always see one step ahead of you. But why do you fear me, George? Let me be your mother. I'll always be with you, George, darling. Wherever you go, your old mother will protect you.

Always. I still mean that."

"No!" he screamed. He fired again, and a third time, but missed.

"I'll leave you now, then," she said. "But I'll be back, when you need me. I'll always be with you, George, darling. Always."

George watched the figure of his mother stride off into the jungle, walking with all the old jauntiness, and, as soon as she was gone, let himself sink limply down on a packing case. After a while, he got the radio going, and tuned in to the Procyon II operator.

He explained who he was, and his predicament.

"What's that? Mindreading extraterrestrial?" the operator said. "No such thing."

"Look," George said, "I didn't ask for your opinion. I just want you to send a ship and get me off this planet before something happens to me. There's a dangerous alien roaming around near here, and I'm in a serious position."

"All right," came the voice of the operator. "I'll have a rescue ship sent out as soon as possible. We're a little short-handed just now ourselves. It may take a little while. Over and out."

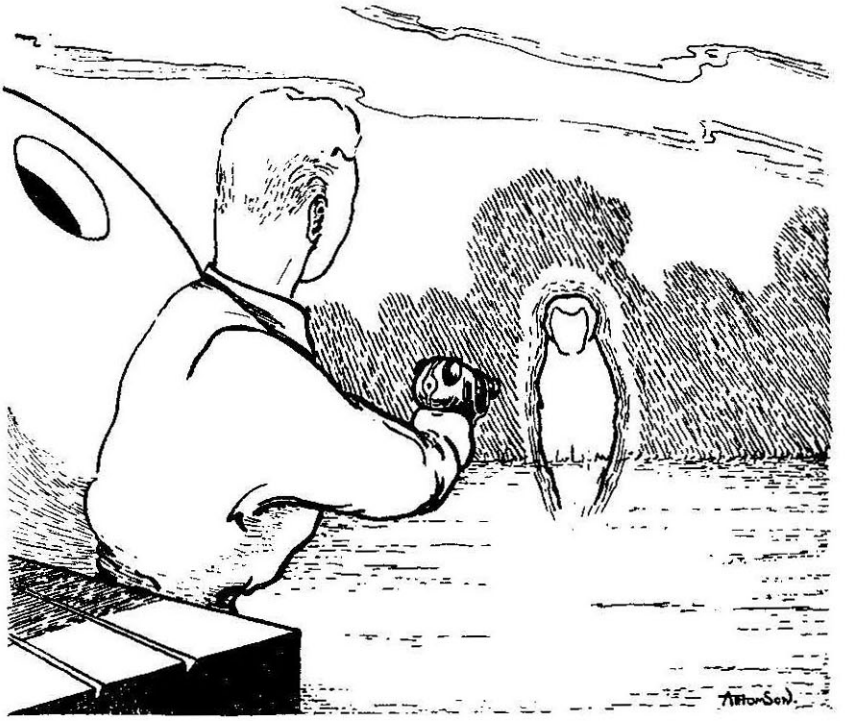
The contact broke, and George held the dead transmitter for a moment, then replaced it. There was no point in unpacking, he decided, staring glumly at the packing cases. He'd return to Earth, sell the planet —he would have been happier if he'd done that in the first place, he realized—and retire on the money he'd get. He would forget all thoughts of leaving Earth. Let someone else come out here and play with this maternal monster.

In the meantime, it might be a day or two before the Procyon II people got the ship out. He set to work putting up defences against the alien.

He dug a pit and started to conceal it with leaves and branches, hoping the alien was not listening to his mind as he worked. And then he realised the futility of trying to decoy a telepathic alien into the pit, and stopped working.

There was no way of setting up an electrified fence, which seemed to him the most efficient way of keeping the alien away. He put the packing cases in a ring around his door as a next best resort, and sat behind them, holding the Webley. The only thing he could think of was to sit tight without sleeping until the rescue ship arrived.

Once during the next day George saw the figure of his mother looking at him sadly from the edge of the clearing; she said something, as if in reproach, but he was unable to hear it. He unleashed a bolt from the



blaster, aiming low so it would pass, not through the tall illusory body of his mother but through the real short body of the alien. He narrowly missed; he thought he might just have singed her, but he wasn't sure. She turned into her true form before disappearing into the forest.

He sat there resignedly as night started to fall—the days on this planet were long, George noted, feeling a touch of sadness at the way his plans for a kingdom had been ruined. He could have enjoyed life here, he thought ruefully, really enjoyed it.

Suddenly, as if from nowhere, the ship from Procyon II dropped from the sky and came to rest in the clearing. He noted happily that it was a large ship, almost identical to the one that had brought him; that meant he'd be able to take all his possessions off the planet at once. A man clambered down the catwalk of the ship and looked around.

"Here I am," George shouted. "Over here." He stood up and waved, but the man from the ship failed to notice him. George leaped agilely over the barrier of packing cases and ran towards the ship. The spaceman still didn't seem to hear his calls, and George began to sense that something was wrong. He drew close to the other, almost close enough to touch him, and still he peered out in the other direction, and

then abruptly the ground opened under George, ship and spaceman vanished, and George, with the sudden chilling feeling that he had been tricked, dropped heavily into his own pit, landing crumpled on his left leg. He felt the bone bend, and, almost coolly and detachedly, heard the loud cracking noise which followed, before sinking into unconsciousness.

Strong hands lifted him out of the pit, but he barely felt them. Powerful arms dragged him inside the house, stretched him on the bed, soothed his fever-hot forehead, set and bound the broken leg. Days and nights passed, dragged on slowly and George was conscious only of a silent, sweet-smelling figure that went quietly back and forth, ministering to his needs. The pain in his leg was a steady red beat of agony, except when the silent figure took his head in her lap and rocked back and forth, crooning a soft, wordless tune.

He slept for a long while, a long grey succession of days and nights, while the leg slowly healed. Finally, one day he woke up and looked around. All of his packing cases had been opened; the antique Swiss clock ticked away on one wall, the little bookcase was filled with books, everything was arranged just the way it had been on Earth, so long ago. Sitting quietly in one corner, knitting, was the lavender-clad figure of his mother.

"How do you feel, dear?" she asked. "Has the fever gone down any?" She crossed over and gently felt his forehead. Her hand was cool and soothing.

"My leg . . ."

"Just about set," she said. "I think we can take the splint off today. It's too bad there's no doctor, but I guess we can manage just by ourselves, can't we?"

He rolled over and looked at her. "You're dead," he said. "Roselawn Cemetry. I bring flowers to you every Thursday."

"Poor boy," she said. "Still delirious. Rest now, George; we can talk some other time."

"No," he said, sitting half up in the bed. Suddenly he realised where he was, what had happened. "You tricked me!" he said accusingly. "You led me right into my own pit with the illusion of that ship."

"It was for your own good, dear," she said.

"What happened to the real ship from Procyon II? Have they landed yet?"

"They were here a long time ago," she said, "but I sent them away. I told them everything was all right."

George slumped back in bed. "And I suppose you broke the radio, too, for my own good."

"That was an accident, George. You know the way I always am with machinery of any sort."

He closed his eyes. "That means I'm stuck here, doesn't it?" The throbbing in his leg grew stronger. "Stranded for good."

"Why do you say that? We have each other, don't we? We can play bridge, and read, and talk, and when I have my strong days I can help you with the farm. I've always wanted to work on a farm; it seems like such fun! Back on Earth you only had the bank, but here we'll be out of doors all the time, in the fresh air. And fresh air was always what you needed so badly, dear."

His leg was pounding furiously. "After you tricked me into falling into the pit——"

"Must we talk about that, George?"

"After you tricked me," he repeated, "you nursed me back to health, didn't you? You saved my life."

"It was the least I could do, George. But why talk about that? Once you're well we can get started with our farm, and fix up the house ——we can make it just like the one we had on Earth, and it'll be just as it was in the old days together. Won't it, George?"

"Yes," he said dully. "Just as it was in the old days." He started to rise from the bed; then he realised than any action would be futile, and sank back, deadly calm. His leg throbbed fiercely. Suddenly he saw before him the great empty sea of miles that stretched out between here and Earth, and the other great sea of years before him on Procyon VI. *Well, why not,* he thought, thinking of the sturdy, beloved old woman, *why not?* "I'm sure we'll be very happy together, very happy—*mother,*" he said, quietly, through the red haze of pain. "Just as it was in the old days."

"It's wonderful to hear you say that," she said. She bent down and kissed him on the forehead, and her lips were cool, and it seemed to George that a teardrop fell from her eye and trickled down to his cheek. "I'll always be with you, George, darling. Always. And you'll always love your old mother, won't you—*son?*"

Feeling like a figure trapped in a nightmare, he reached out and squeezed her hand. She allowed her shape to waver a little in her joy, but she quickly regained control and fondly grasped George's hand, and at last, after millenia of lonely emptiness, she began to feed.

ROBERT SILVERBERG

E. R. JAMES

Hot Water

There is a special kind of training men need before they should assume great responsibilities

Illustrated by John J. Greengrass

On August 19th, 1986 A.D., Slade Barrimore—Barry to his friends paused on the steps of the Administration Block of the Cawdhaw Atomic Power Station to allow someone to come out.

Seeing it was one of the Heat Exchanger Engineers with whom he had played snooker in the canteen, he grinned. "Hello, Steve——"

"Uh?" The H.E. engineer looked up with a start. His fresh young face seemed about to crease in an answering smile. Then the eyes blazed, the lips came together with a snap and the face turned deliberately away.

Barry stared after him in horror.

Would there be much of this sort of thing to face? He dreaded going on in.

Several seconds went by before he realised his shoulders were sagging. He straightened them with a jerk, put his head high and went out of the sunshine.

The hall echoed his footfalls. It seemed he would never reach the door at the end marked *Manager* before someone else came out to snub him, but he pushed it open at last.

A golden blonde coiffeur tilted back and a tanned face gave him the impression that Jean Helier had been dreading his arrival all night. Her blue eyes stared at him just that much too long and her orange rouged lips fumbled whatever she had been planning to say.

"Sit down. No, not here. In Mr Stone's anteroom. He'll . . . ring when he wants you to go in."

He nodded. He had tried to date her twice and had thought he would be lucky the third time. Without looking at her he went past her desk and sat on one of the three standard issue chairs, with the glass topped door distorting her image with its corrugations, as it swung shut behind him.

It was a small room with imitation panelling on the walls and a plastic framed picture of a view of the Station with its moorland background on the one facing him. He felt trapped, shut in; yet he was glad to be there for a while, as though it were a refuge.

Sounds of rustling papers behind the other door marked FREDERICK STONE fetched him around. A shadow passed over the glass around the legend. It seemed a towering, hungry shadow.

He moistened his lips, then set his jaw. If they thought he was going to make excuses for what he had done, they were mistaken. Yes, he had broken the rules, but——

Zzz. The bell. That was for him to go in.

He passed a hand over his wavy brown hair, set his rather heavy jaw and stood up. His shirt was wet with perspiration down his back and under his armpits.

His hand went up to knock—— But that was silly since the bell had gone. He opened his fist and pushed.

Frederick Stone sat behind a dark oak desk, watching him as he walked forward with firm steps.

"Sit down." The words were sharp but no different from "Old Rocky's" usual dry brevities.

Barry seated himself.

"You know why you're here," said Old Rocky. His gray eyes held no expression as they continued to watch. "Have you anything to say?"

"No, sir. It was all said at the inquiry."

"Then you accept full responsibility?"

"I do."

"I see." Old Rocky leaned back in his chair. "Now let me just go over it once again. When the van came from the hospital, you discovered that someone—who hasn't owned to it, by the way—had not passed on the message to the head of your department. It was lunch hour and you were in charge because Mr Lever was away and there was no one else there. The hospital's requisition was in order and urgent, so you decided to handle it yourself. Is that correct?"

"It is."

"Yet you were quite aware that, strictly speaking, you lacked the necessary authority?"

"Quite aware."

"H'm. You ran from the loading bay of Requisitions to the By-Products Store. You realise you ought to have sent the van around to your own loading bay—although that would have meant waiting for Mr Lever to return with the key?"

"I do."

"Yet you took it on yourself to break the rules." Old Rocky's face was as expressionless and his voice as dry as ever. "Moreover, you went on breaking them. You manhandled the PZ6 isotope container on to an ordinary trolley instead of using the tackle provided. Oh, I know that both the special deep trolleys were already loaded with shipments—— Then you wheeled the trolley the shortest way—although that was through the No. 3 Development Laboratory. Shelley, the lunch duty man, very properly challenged you, but accepted the brief explanation you gave him. He helped you and, since you had not told him of the lethal contents of the container, was not alarmed when it overbalanced. You dragged him clear, suffering some slight burning yourself, but he died in hospital."

"That's——" Barry had difficulty in answering through the choking contriction in his throat. "——what happened, sir."

"I see," continued Old Rocky, "that after reporting the accident to casualties you went on to make the proper arrangements for the issue to the hospital. Do you realise now how much better it would have been if you had done that in the first place?"

Barry nodded, not trusting himself to speak. Old Rocky had rubbed his guilt home; the axe would fall at any moment now. He waited . . .

He waited. His ears sang. The palms of his hands felt clammy with a breeze coming from somewhere . . .

Across the desk, Old Rocky's face was a mask that seemed to gloat over his agony.

On July 17th, 1876 A.D., just over ten years before, Frederick Stone —no one called him "Old Rocky" at that time—stood beside a wide pool at the foot of a craggy slope in another part of the country.

He paused in his vigorous towelling to look to the left. The newly risen sun was making moving lines of light through the mist coming up from the stream purling down over the rocks. He felt fit to return to work after his holiday and knew how good it was to be alive.

His eyes switched up to the Banpeak Atomic Power Station on the skyline above the pool. As Safety Officer up there, his salary was more than enough to satisfy Laura—and to send their Leslie to the best of schools——

"Leslie!" he called.

His son, eight years old, disappeared beneath the surface and came up like a seal, lifting his arms and bringing them down with a mighty splash. "Coming, Dad!"

He swam as he did everything else, with a vast expenditure of energy that Fred had more than once envied, trying to reach too far forward with each stroke of an arm and wriggling his entire body from side to side as he threshed his legs.

In front of him, on the slightly frothy water, the sunlight was making a strange sort of gleam. It passed through Fred's mind that there was something baleful about this shine. Then it disappeared as Leslie's sturdy right arm flailed into it.

Leslie touched the jumble of limestone rocks at the bottom, bobbed up like a jack-in-the-box and ran up, wobbling on the uneven bottom, with a great flurry of water.

Fred handed him the towel.

There was just time to drive back to the house, snatch breakfast, kiss Laura and slap Leslie on the back. "See you this evening!" He liked his job, hated to be late, even though the Station was running only on half power with the No. 2 Pile stripped down—and even though the Manager was on holiday somewhere on the continent, and the Assistant Manager was not due in until mid-day from a conference at Blackpool.

He had just settled behind his desk with the correspondence when the 'phone rang.

"Radiation leak near Hot box 6, No. 2 Pile," reported the voice in his ear. "Clumber here."

Fred stood up. The voice was calm, but it had used the slang term for the primary disposal tanks used for treating the active waste of fission and that suggested urgency to some degree. "Clumber, have you just come on duty?"

"Yes, sir." This time the owner of the voice had remembered that Fred was senior officer in the absence of Manager Revell and Assistant Lawrence. "Early shift."

"Night man report anything?"

"No, sir." There was a slight pause. "Said he'd been sick."

"Call his hostel. Make them check him over while I'm coming down." He banged the telephone on its rest and ran.

He ran automatically. The No. 6 Hot box—he noted he was using the slang himself—contained B. Baltus. B. Baltus was a bacteria which had the peculiar and valuable property of absorbing and thriving on a diet of radioactivity—that is, of using radio-active atoms to form its microscopic parts. B. Baltus, in itself, produced a fever in man, thirty per cent lethal at optimum dose.

He stopped at a 'phone on the desk of the control room beside the dismantled pile. "Can you get me Professor B. N. Baltus at Oxford?"

They would try. The duty man on the working deck of the primary separation plant looked up from reading a library book and started to his feet. "Get on the 'phone," Fred told him between pants as he hurried by, "and tell the switchboard to put through my call to Baltus to me in No. 2 Waste Disposal."

"Baltus, sir?"

"Yes," Fred waved an impatient arm. "Professor Baltus."

Clumber, in a plastic coverall straightened from behind the No. 6 H.A.W.—highly active waste—tank. He tilted back his mask as he came towards Fred, and his homely, heavily moustached face was set. "They're monitoring Sid—I mean Mr Bulcher now. But he's got a touch of gastric flu, so the hostel matron said."

"What's on his report sheet, Clumber?" asked Fred as he climbed into a plastic coverall snatched from the wall.

Clumber shifted from one foot to the other. "He—— It looks as though he made his last check at 3 a.m."

Six hours, fifteen minutes ago Fred's wrist watch told him. Bulcher had omitted his routine on the one night when it had mattered. Coincidences were always bad!

Fred slapped the headshield over his face with unnecessary force and snatched the Geiger tube from Clumber's grip. They went forward together. The tell tale needle climbed. But it wasn't so bad. Evidently the source of radiation was behind the concrete wall . . . Since the pipes that had fed in the waste liquid came through the concrete, perhaps one of them had burst within the wall——

"Clumber!"

"Yessir?"

"Have you checked the tank pressure?"

"No, sir."

"Do it then, man. Now!"

Clumber retreated. "It's off the guage, sir!" he gasped. "100 pounds per square inch plus——"

"My God. You're sure?" B. Baltus multiplied most quickly in gentle heat and at 5 lbs. per sq. in. over atmospheric pressure. If there was a leak, pressure should be down, not up. Fred found himself looking at the needle jammed as far around the meter's dial as it could go, and did not recollect walking around to it.

100 lbs. per sq. inch plus—— What was going on in that tank? He sprang to the 'phone.

"Have you got me Baltus, yet?"

"No sir. We've got his number, though. His home——"

"All right. Let me speak to the supervisor at the G.P.O. exchange. And you stay listening."

He used his official rating as Acting Manager and the mature voice on the 'phone sounded almost frightened as he hinted at urgency. Person to person call. He would have priority. They would call him back.

He spoke to Emergency while he waited. They would send the full squad.

He went back to the blank concrete wall out of which the pipes came. "Go around and check the valve the other side," he told Clumber.

Waiting for the man's report, he scanned the entire concrete face. Between it and the one behind it were honeycomb partitions for strength. They would confine the burst—if that is what it was. There was no other radiation apart from the varying background usual to such places.

The great concrete-encased, metal tank at his side made him sweat. It had received its deadly contents five weeks ago. He remembered being present as the moderate waste was drawn off the pile. It would have been innoculated with B. Baltus within a day or two. He had been away on holiday and had had no time to check progress.

He found himself sweating. B. Baltus did not reduce the radio-activity one iota. It merely absorbed the elements that caused it, so that when it was filtered out of the liquid about 92% of the radio-activity went with it and could be buried with it in concentrated form for its dangerous lifetime.

The 'phone pulled him to it. "Got me Baltus?"

They hadn't. Baltus was lecturing, had been traced and was being brought to the telephone. He was an elderly man, Fred remembered.

"All right. Put me on to whoever innoculated No. 6 Hot box—I mean No. 6 H.A.W. tank—of No. 2 Pile. You can find out from records. No—— Get him down on to the working deck of the separation plant here. Hurry him." Fred felt he ought to have thought of that before.

If there was only someone here to whom he could pass the responsibility of this crisis. But Revell was out of the country and Lawrence in a train or car on the way and not likely to arrive for hours . . .

He went back to the wall. The radiation seemed to make a channel down to the floor from a point quite close to the pipe. He checked the valve against the tank. The regulating wheel spun loose. The valve was broken inside! He ought to have checked that before. But there was so much to think about . . .

The pressure went right into that wall. The radioactivity had marked a trail downwards. It must be seeping through the honeycomb. The honeycomb must be cracked.

Clumber ran in, puffing. "Valve O.K., sir."

Another man followed him. "What's wrong, Mr Stone?"

"What are you doing here, Springfields?" snapped Fred. Springfields was an outsider, a man given a laboratory here for some biological research. A doctor of biology or something similar. "Oh, all right. Stay. Perhaps—— Hey, do you know anything about B. Baltus?"

"No. Why?"

"Stay with me." Fred picked up the 'phone. It was an instrument of the devil, keeping him waiting. They had nothing further on Baltus.

"I'm going on to the working deck of primary separation next door," he told them. "Get me——" He ticked off names he thought might have useful knowledge or abilities. "And get on to records again. I want three things. The Surveyor's report on the rock when this Station was built. The last three reports of the Buildings Inspector. And—— and . . ."

Everything around him seemed to stop still, like a film that has stopped running as a shocking thought came up from his subconscious.

His son had been bathing in that pool at the bottom of the limestone slope, and he was just beginning a check on radioactive substances that might possibly have escaped from the Power Station Area.

"Leslie!" he gasped.

All else forgotten, he blundered towards the door. Someone was in his way. "Get to hell——" It was Springfields—the doctor of something or other—shaking him.

Springfields was speaking to him. "What about your son?"

"He was in that pool . . ."

"At the bottom of the twenty waterfalls?"

"He was swimming, and I saw a gleam on the water—— Get out of my way!"

"You can't leave here, man. You think he's been in water that's been contaminated by a leak? I know where you live. Leave it to me."

Three more men were coming through the doorway. "Get out of here!" roared Fred and they backed in confusion. "All right!" he told Springfields. "You go. You will . . ."

"He'll be in the hospital in ten minutes, I promise you."

Fred watched him go at the double. After he had passed through the open doorway, Fred could have screamed. He sucked in air through clenched teeth, closed his eyes and fiercely shook off a sudden thought that he had never particularly liked Springfields.

Ringing of the telephone beyond the open door pulled Fred out of a well of despair and drew him towards the working deck. Men moved

apart to allow him to pass. Others were coming in.

Orders came from him. His voice sounded harsh—a dry croak that he hardly recognised. The Chief Analyst and a Monitoring assistant ran off to get kit for a check on the pool. "Signal back," he told them. "You," he told another man, "watch for them and ring me here. You're looking for traces of B. Baltus and anything radioactive."

"For you, sir." A man held out the 'phone to him.

He took it absently.

"What is it? Who's there?" said an impatient voice in his ear.

He performed a mental somersault. "Professor Baltus?"

"Yes? Who's that?"

"Hold the line." There was an irritable tut and Fred added: "If you dare to hang up, you'll have made your last lecture."

He turned to the ring of waiting faces. "Emergency Squad?" A man lifted an arm. "Ah, Cook. Get in there. There's a pipe from No. 6 Hot box leaking into the double wall between here and the dismantled pile. I want that pipe strengthened, the wall taken down and the leak stopped and made doubly secure. Treat the pipe as though it will explode any moment. For all I know it may. Wear everything protective you've got. Understand?"

"Yessir."

"And Cook!" The man looked back over his shoulder. "Don't forget the valve at the other end of the pipe, in the pile chamber. The pressure's blown the valve against the Hot box and may blow the second valve—especially when you've plugged that gap."

"You——" The man hesitated.

Fred fumed with impatience. "Well?"

"You did say "pressure" didn't you, sir?"

"Yes. Pressure. P-R-E-S- Oh, get on with it."

Fred put the 'phone back to his ear. "Baltus?"

"Yes. What's all this about pressure in a Hot box? What do you want me for?"

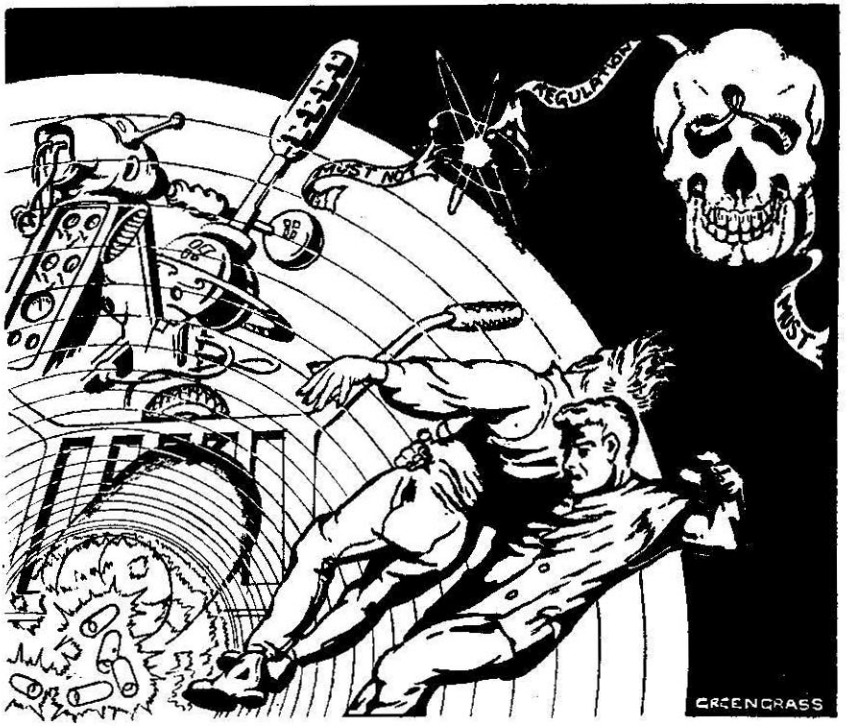
Fred outlined the situation. "Now," he ended, "I want you to tell me what's going on inside that tank. I don't know what I'm handling at the moment. Your bacteria's never acted like this before."

"It can't be——" The professors voice sounded strangled.

Fred's eyes roving over the assembled men picked out a biochemist. "You. I've forgotten your name."

"Cambley, sir. You sent for me. I'm the man who put the culture into No. 6."

"You're the man I want." Fred held out the 'phone. "Tell Professor



Baltus what you did—exactly what you did."

Cambley was definite. He was a small, thin man with thin lips. He did not care if he was speaking to a famous man. He said his piece and stuck to it. Fred warmed to him and nodded approval as he took back the 'phone.

"Well, professor?"

I don't know. I really don't know. Unless . . . But that's impossible——"

"What's impossible?"

Baltus did not answer. Fred's roving eye caught sight of a man from records with a book and papers under his arm, and beckoned.

"This bacteria," said Baltus suddenly, "has never mutated before."

"Always a first time for everything—— Mutated? You mean——" Fred gripped the 'phone very hard. "You mean the radiations have changed your bacteria into something else?"

"It is theoretically possible. I'll come up there——"

"You do that," said Fred. He had what he wanted. Even though it seemed now that the truth was probably far worse than he had feared.

They knew how to deal with B. Baltus; but with something *new*——

"If you come by air," he added sarcastically into the 'phone, "you may be in time to witness the blow up or see the first victim." Bacteria already caused some of the scourges of mankind: tuberculosis, and typhoid and——

He put down the 'phone. His watch said 9.55. It had seemed an age, but only 55 minutes has passed since he had arrived at the station. He picked up the 'phone. "Get me the police," he said.

He needed outside help—a lot of it. People had to be warned. He could hear the trickle of water . . . deadly water.

At 11 o'clock he heard that only one hill farm might logically be affected since they drew from a well known to connect with the stream from the pool. The farmer had worked late and slept late. He had been taken to hospital, apparently all right. But his wife who had breakfasted at their usual hour of eight had pains in her stomach.

At 11.5 Springfields came in and Fred's heart same into his mouth and he could not speak.

"I couldn't get you on the 'phone," said Springfields. His face was white and he looked frightened of what Fred might do. "Leslie's still alive. They don't know yet."

"Oh." Fred got the sound out.

He turned his back on them all for a moment and did not look at Springfields when he faced them again. They had to be there. He had to stay to tell them what to do.

At 11.17 the police told him that all villages and towns in the area of water flow were being warned by loudspeaker vans as a supplement to the earlier broadcast warnings. There were no other cases. Fred replaced the receiver. It was too early for that, yet, anyway.

At mid-day Lawrence entered the Station area, having been given a police escort the last few miles. But Fred knew too much of what was going on to be allowed to leave. Lawrence could do no more than back him up.

He sat with the others.

Reports of six suspected cases of fever from mutated B. Baltus came in before 3 p.m. By 6 p.m. there were hundreds.

At 7 the hospital told him that Leslie's fever had gone; the radiation poisoning, however, remained. Other cases had missed that. It had got into Leslie's blood stream. Baltus, who had arrived during the early afternoon, explained to someone within Fred's earshot that the bacteria multiplied by division. Having no sex, it just grew larger until at a certain size, it split into two complete cells, each a duplicate of the

first. This division would naturally keep halving radioactivity picked up.

By 8 p.m., the strengthening of the tank and the pipe was complete. A sample of the mutated bacteria was obtained and study on it began.

Lawrence came up shortly afterwards to say that he had been studying the plans and records that Fred had sent for. There had been fissures in the limestone below the power station, but they had all been plugged with twenty feet of concrete treated to make it non-porous. But there was undoubtedly a leak downwards that had been missed—or which had developed since.

The Divisional Health Office called to report the progress. There seemed to be no epidemic. Number of cases now stood at 285. The peak had been at 4 p.m. and fifteen minutes had passed with nothing to add to that figure.

At 8.55 p.m. Lawrence ordered Fred home. He went out of the station like a man in a dream. The night sister let him see Leslie. Very pale, like death. In a coma.

Laura was in the waiting room. She watched him sit down. "It's the time factor," he said. "If they could have cleared that stuff out of his stomach before he digested it . . ."

She did not say anything.

He buried his face in his hands. "I'm sorry." Her hand touched his cheek before any sound of movement reached him. His arms went around her and he buried his face against her gratefully. There were no tears in him, only emptiness.

At 4 a.m. Leslie died without wakening and they went home to a house that seemed unnaturally silent.

During the morning, Lawrence and Baltus called to offer sympathy. Baltus said they had the mutated strain licked. The fermentation in the H.A.W. tank had been stopped. The farmer's wife had been the only fatal casualty. The farmer would be going home within a day or two and all other cases were responding to treatment. He evidently did not consider Leslie to be his responsibility; as far as he was concerned the boy had died of radio-active poisoning—although there was no doubt he would have lived much longer if he had not been so weakened by the mutated B. Baltus fever.

Days passed, and, from being thankful for being left alone, Fred began to wonder why he was not sent for. Laura and he still had to go on living.

Word came at last in the form of a summons to attend the inevitable

inquiry. He went into the Conference Room wondering why he had not been consulted on his part. It was not a large room and, only when he looked around, did he realise that the Inquiry was being held in secret.

He barely heard the preliminaries. A long succession of witnesses painted in the picture and then an outside consultant took the stand. As he spoke, Fred began to understand why everyone had left him alone. The man coldly explained that a new fissure had appeared in the limestone beneath the wall dividing the Hot boxes from the pile. This fissure, though a mere crack, had strained the double walls and the pipes that went through them. Tiny leaks had been sprung in three of the 8 pipes and a tiny amount of radio-active matter had escaped from the leaks each time the pipes were used. This was the preliminary to the disastrous escape which the court was called to consider.

The Chairman, another outsider, a Sir Somebody, called upon Fred to explain why he had not discovered the menace hidden in the wall.

Fred stood up. He was not going to make excuses. "It was entirely my responsibility," he said. "I have no excuses."

Clumber, apparently having asked to add to his previous evidence, again took the stand, and to Fred's astonishment, obviously attempted to take some of the blame on to his own shoulders. But, equally obviously, the court did not listen to him with any seriousness.

The Chairman's summing up left no doubt as to where the blame actually rested, suggested that if more attention to detail had been made by the Safety Officer the leak would have been confined to the Power Station area, but finally judged to the effect that the whole affair was an Act of God.

The next morning Fred had met Springfields coming out of the Manager's office as he was going in. They had stopped, and looked at each other awkwardly.

"Sorry for being so rude to you," said Fred with difficulty.

Springfields made some attempt to smile and held out his hand. "I did do my best. It's been a rotten business."

Fred went on in to the interview with Manager Revell that he expected to be his last visit to the Banpeak Atomic Power Station. What was said to him would decide his entire future. He knew that and suffered an agony of apprehension, and yet—even though he had Laura to consider as well as himself—he had his principles and would not stoop to excusing himself. The date had been August 19th, 1976 A.D.

Exactly 10 years later, almost to the very hour, he found himself

with the positions of that painful interview reversed, so to speak. Revell had seemed to him, then, to have kept him in suspense unnecessarily long. And now, here he was doing just the same thing to this sweating young man whose eyes were so full of horror. He was accustomed to concealing his thoughts and, although he found it necessary to move somewhat uneasily in his Managerial Chair, he felt confident that his face had not betrayed what had been said to him years before, and what he was going to say now.

"Barry," he said, "I think you have the courage necessary to carry this thing through to the end I would like to see reached. You will take your summer holiday beginning as from today, but then you must return and continue with the work you have been doing. The way people feel about you will make that difficult, you realise that?"

The young man did not seem to believe his ears. Well, that was how he, Frederick Stone—whom people now surreptitiously called "Old Rocky"—had once felt himself.

"I——I——" Barry found his voice. "Anything you say, sir."

"Good. I am not without influence. I see from your records that you have qualifications far beyond those required for your present post." These days there were more atomic engineers than could be absorbed by the industry. "I will see what I can do towards getting you a transfer."

"Why—thank you sir!"

"You will not forget what you have learnt about the importance of the rules, will you?"

"Oh no sir." The horror came back into Barry's eyes dimming their brightness.

Old Rocky nodded. "And meanwhile, just carry on as though nothing had happened or was going to happen. If a hint of this transfer gets out, you may find it won't materialise."

Six minutes later, after sitting silently for a while, Frederick Stone reached for the telephone that gave him a direct outlet to the G.P.O. exchange. Soon after that, he was speaking to another power station Manager.

"I've got a young man here who has just shown that he is not afraid to act on his own responsibility. I warn you, Joe, things did not turn out as they should have done and his records don't look as they might. But he has got the guts needed to take the blame for his own mistakes. And he's learnt his lesson. He has all the qualifications you could wish for and, within a couple of years, could be ready to take over as your assistant manager when Barclay goes on to his pension."

E. R. JAMES

BOB SHAW

Barrier To Yesterday

The catastrophe had destroyed the past for ever. Could it also create a new future?

Illustrated by Arthur Thomson

The Philosophy Sled, running with ponderous speed before the freshening wind, crunched shudderingly into a patch of rough ice. Chandrill jerked into wakefulness as he felt the sled slew to one side.

"Spill it!" he shouted, pointing up at the gluttonous bellies of the sails which were drawing creaks from the masts as the incident direction of the wind changed. In seconds the sails were flapping noisily from their top booms and Chandrill felt the drag as the rudder bit ice, getting the sled under control.

When they had slowed down, Chandrill leapt over the side and saw what he had expected but feared to see. The lugs at the rear of the starboard runner had twisted off along the lines of old cracks in the metal.

Two others climbed down onto the ice beside him and Chandrill recognised the heavy breathing Ildo Fearthell, the Philosopher, before he looked up at him. Fearthell's lips were drawn tautly over his broken teeth and there was a gleam in saliva on his chin—it was obvious that he had had a scare. The other person was Sinoon.

"I thought it would be those," Ildo Fearthell said. "I thought it would be the lugs."

"It was a chance we took," Chandrill said defensively, rising to his feet. "If we hadn't hit the rough patch or if we had had our new set of runners . . ."

"I don't like that," interrupted Fearthell. "I don't like that a bit. You are implying that I wasn't firm enough with Minnatose when the last casting was done on the Metallurgy Sled. Remember it was *you* who said the runner would see us through the Pass. I definitely don't like that, Chandrill."

"What made the ice so rough, anyway?" asked Sinoon. Chandrill glanced across the ice, feeling the old discomfort that was only the natural reaction to cessation of motion.

"At least six of the earlier sleds stopped here for some reason," he replied. "You can see the brake and rudder tracks criss-crossing back there."

Looking at her as she strained her myopic blue eyes to pick out the tracks in the twilight he wondered hopefully if she was beginning to reconcile herself to the Philosophy Sled.

"Then if we had been at the head of the lines, if the tribe hadn't been held back this wouldn't have happened?"

There was the faintest note of triumph in Sinoon's voice as she spoke. She drew her cap closer around her, narrowing her wide pale lips against the wind.

"That's right," Chandrill replied, making his voice as dead as was possible. The six other Lesser Philosophers, all of them nearly as old as Fearthell himself, and the two Novices who looked after the running of the sled were down on the ice by this time. Chandrill could feel the throbbing silence that comes not because there is nothing to say but because there is too much.

"The thing is," Ildo Fearthell said, "the thing is—can the iron be fixed or can we not move until a new one is cast?"

Chandrill glanced around the group and then up ahead, towards Day, to where the other sleds of the tribe had either halted or were in the process of stripping their masts. "There are still parts of the broken lugs projecting," he said. "We could make a housing for it on the timber former. A box shape that would keep it from moving about too much. We might be able to limp along until the new runner is supplied."

"All right then," Fearthell said, "We'll do that." He told young Mondaquee to bring tools and wood. Chandrill put Sinoon out of his thinking and went to work on the lugs.

He had the outside box completed and was about to get in below the sled when he heard the crackling whisper of blades on ice. He looked Daywards and saw that Minnatose had come back alone from the Royal Trio to see what was wrong. Chandrill climbed inside the framework of the sled and began shaping wood with the small axe.

He heard Minnatose stop at the front of the sled and then a period of near silence broken only by Fearthell's whistling sibilants. After some minutes had gone by he realised that Fearthell had stopped talking and he felt vaguely ill at ease. He looked around to see if he could find where Minnatose had gone to, then he jumped violently and dropped the axe.

Minnatose had slipped quietly up to where Chandrill was working, knelt down and had been peering in at him from close up for some time. He was grinning at Chandrill's reaction.

Chandrill cursed himself furiously and picked up the axe to go on working, relapsing into his protective sullenness. Minnatose crouched outside the sled for another few minutes before he spoke. "Hard at work, cousin," he said, still smiling.

"Yes."

"You need a new runner for that job."

"That's right."

"Know how to get one?"

"Yes."

"Well how about it then?" Minnatose slapped his hand against the heavy framework of the sled. "I want this sled for a *useful* job. I could have it filled with coal at the next deposit and we could run the furnace practically all the time. You could come back to the front of the tribe and no harm will come to the Philosophers. I'll disperse them over the rest of the sleds."

"I told you before that I wasn't going to agree to abolish this sled," Chandrill said doggedly. "If you need the consent of every member of the royal family before you can tear up its charter you just have to wait until I'm out of the way."

Minnatose renewed his grin, stood up and walked away, his skates clinking on the ice. Chandrill worked on until he had finished then he climbed out from under, staggering a little as his legs gave way, cramped from the long crouch.

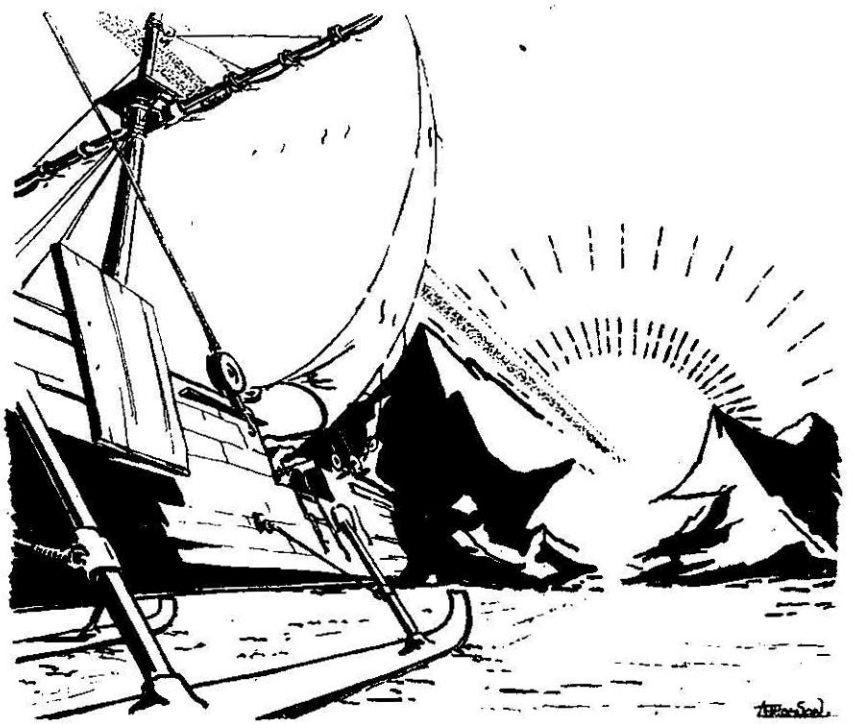
When he walked round to the front of the sled Minnatose was ready to go and there was something wrong. Something in the air. Chandrill glanced round curiously at the two or three Lesser Philosophers who were fixedly watching something in the hills to the north. He walked past Minnatose, who was looking amused, and found Sinoon climbing down from the sled with all her spare clothing in a bundle on her back.

Chandrill sucked in air. "Where to?" he asked her as she reached his level.

She was trembling slightly but her voice sounded casual. "We don't get on well here, Chan. There's no other women on this sled and since we fell back in the lines I can't get across to the other sleds in the same way. There isn't enough room here either and . . . well, I'm going back to the Royal Trio."

"You're leaving—just like that?" Chandrill asked quietly.

"Yes."



"You're not. Go back up onto the sled. I'm going to talk to Minnatose about this."

Sinoon laughed. "You can't stop me, Chan. And don't annoy Minnatose—he might lose his temper." She stepped quickly past him and moved out of sight around the front of the sled.

Go ahead, Chandrill thought, it has happened at last. They've gone too far, so let them see the *real* Chandrill, the smart dangerous invincible Chandrill who has always remained hidden for want of a situation or opponent big enough to test his mettle. That's what you have always told yourself. Now act!

Somehow he just felt sick and heavy with grief that the split with Sinoon had finally come. He set the tool pouch down and walked forward after Sinoon. He found that he had been standing for longer than he had realised for Minnatose and Sinoon were nearly a quarter of a mile from the sled and moving away fast.

He stared at them until they were only specks. To the north were the ever present foothills of the polar mountains and in the south an uninterrupted waste of ice out to the horizon. Behind the sled the sky

tinged down into the darkness of the eternal Night and in the opposite direction grew brighter with the light of the elusive sun just below the horizon.

Chandrill turned back to the sled and noted that, although the sled was not a very big structure, there was nobody in sight. They all knew what had been happening. He raised cupped hands to shout to one of the Novices to come down for the tools, moving and thinking mechanically, when the unbelievable happened.

Behind the sled, towards Night, a point of brilliant light appeared. It was a little above the horizon and, as Chandrill watched, it dipped down into the darker background of the far ice then lifted back into the sky again. Suddenly he realised that the thing was moving at tremendous speed for it had swollen into a ball as it began to ascend. It was much closer.

Paralysed with fear, Chandrill tilted his head back as the hurtling light sped by several miles up. It went straight down the sky and several seconds before it reached the horizon the light seemed to split into two, shedding a much smaller part. Immediately the larger object passed below the horizon there was a bright flare of light that lit up the whole region of sky around the point of disappearance.

Slowly, and of their own accord, Chandrill's knees buckled and he found himself kneeling on the ice, unable to move due to the pounding elation racing in his chest. He knelt there for a time taking his air in noisy gasps, grinning fiercely and blinking tears out of his eyes. Complete and pure happiness was throwing his nervous system into chaos, then the spasms passed and he stood up.

He turned and ran back to the sled, moving with the delicate high-stepping run of somebody that has lived all his life on hard ice.

The Philosophy Sled, like all the others, was the framework for a box mounted on runners. The interior of the box was divided into smaller compartments by the struts and ties that braced the masts, and pieces of thick fabric nailed to these members made the compartments into semi-private cubicles. At the front and rear of the sled were small bridges from which it was possible to see down into the cubicles but the people of the tribes were incurious by nature and found sled life tolerable.

Underneath the bridges were the supplies of bread cane which grew thickly on the lowermost slopes of the polar mountains. Chandrill let his thoughts return to the group on the bridge and realised that Fearthell was still talking.

"I don't understand you, Chandrill," he was saying in his usual tauto-

logical style, "I really don't. At a time when this sled is in need of every man you tell me you want to leave the sled! Not only that, but you want others to go with you. And for what?

"Nothing but a meteor! Just a piece of rock from the sky. Nothing at all, you might say."

"That wasn't a meteor," Chandrill stated flatly.

"What was it then?"

"I wouldn't like to guess," replied Chandrill, "but I know it wasn't a meteor." He kept on speaking, ignoring the amused smile that Fearthell slid around the other men. "And don't worry about your runner. Minnatose won't let this sled be left behind. He said he could use it for something useful and it's not hard to see his point of view.

"When I was a boy on the Royal Sleds I heard old Ardinetter, who was the Philosopher at that time, talk about the past and the future. The world was a challenge to him. He seemed to think it was a privilege to live on a world whose spin had almost stopped, stretching the days and nights into years so that it was useless even to go underground. Ardinetter believed that we wouldn't always have to follow the sun around the world.

"But that's all we have done. It is our miserable little history."

"I think I am safe in saying that all of us here are familiar with our own history, Chandrill," remarked Fearthell, nodding to the others.

"I'm trying to show you Minnatose's point of view about the sled," Chandrill said curtly. "In the times when the trek was just beginning they realised that if they could only reach the poles there would be no need to keep moving. The south pole was out because the winds were wrong below this lattitude, and the north pole is a thousand miles over the mountains. Night would have us before we reached the first peaks.

"We travel along the southernmost skirt of those mountains, round the world and round the world, never getting anywhere. And the only way we'll ever break the cycle is by being smart. By using our brains to get out. *That* is why this sled was built. It was to be a place where the best brains could work on the problem of escape.

"If you continue to sit there arguing over the possibility of the Absolute or the reality of the perceived universe Minnatose will have the sled out from under you—and he'll deserve it."

"I had no idea there was so much empathy between Minnatose and you," remarked one-eyed Tronpat. He smiled slightly.

"There's a logical refutation," Chandrill said sarcastically.

"All right then," Fearthell put in, "keeping everything on a strictly logical basis. Would you explain just how the meteor will carry the

tribes to the poles? Can you make it fly again after it has buried itself in the ice?"

"No, I can't, but it is something *new*," Chandrill said. "It's new data. New material to work with, so I say we can't afford to neglect it. I'm going to take my own yacht and go out after it. Anybody else?" He looked around the group in their loose dark trousers and broad belted jerkins. None of them spoke.

"Party coming back from the rest of the tribe," shouted Novice Mondaquee from the rear bridge. Chandrill went down and dragged out the body of his little yacht from its makeshift brackets between the timbers at the rear. He had it ready to sail when the party reached the sled.

It was Minnatose again and behind him were four men in the dark blue of Ironwórkers who were trailing two heavy runners. Minnatose glanced up at the bridge as he came up, moving fast, and scraped to a halt beside Chandrill. "Throw that thing back in there," he snapped, pointing at the yacht, "and get one of these runners onto the sled." His face was white and stiff with barely controlled rage and Chandrill felt the old nervousness stir in his stomach.

You took my wife, he thought in an effort to whip up a reckless temper. Aloud he said, "One of the boys can do it. It's important to me to go."

Minnatose caught Chandrill's jerkin and twisted it tight across his chest. "You know the Pass, don't you? You know the Pass?"

"Yes," Chandrill said, shocked at his cousin's sudden descent to violence. In the long trip round the world there were several places from which the mountains could be seen on the southern horizon. The Pass was the only point at which they approached the great polar ranges of the north; it was actually a narrow strait of ice between two continents. All the sleds of all the tribes converged there to get through to the other side.

"You know the Pass. It's gone! The meteor hit the nórthern edge of it and . . . damn you, Chan! *We can't get through!*"

The main sense of Minnatose's words were too much for Chandrill. "Damn *me!*" he said stupidly, trying to get back from the other man. "Why damn me?"

"You were the one that stopped us from getting this sled long ago. But for that this tribe would have been in the lead—the advance tribes were through the Pass when the meteor struck."

"You mean," Chandrill demanded, "that because you crippled this sled and slowed the tribe by trying to blackmail us with refusing our sail cloth and runners, it is *my* fault?"

"Shut up, Chan," Minnatose snarled. "It was you blocked me."

"What is it? What about the Pass?" It was Fearthell from the bridge. Minnatose released Chandrill and strode forward, a taut-mouthed giant in the royal white, to beneath Fearthell. He turned back to Chandrill and pointed at him.

"Get that runner on now and get this sled moving," he ordered. "I'll need every man at the Pass to get some of the stuff through if it can be done. And do it now."

Chandrill dropped one hand to the haft of the whipstick slung on his belt. He stood like that for a few seconds, only then beginning to realise that for the first time there was no way ahead for the tribes to take. He straightened his jerkin and ran to help the men manoeuvre the runners.

When Chandrill came up out of his cubicle the Philosophy Sled, the last one of all, had neared the Pass. It was darker than usual due to the smoke and dust that was riding high above the Pass, and to the north were the lines of the sleds belonging to the other tribes. Most of them seemed to be deserted. The lines converged a mile ahead and disappeared behind an outshoot of the northern cliff of the Pass.

When they swung round the curve of the cliff, Chandrill found that there was nothing to see ahead but wrecked sleds that had piled headlong into each other. There was a ragged wall of them blocking the way. Chandrill saw the smoky red smudges of flames to the north, then the wind backed suddenly bringing with it the smoke and dust and the sickening sense of disaster. He felt the brakes go on and the sled slowed rapidly but not soon enough. The wind smashed back harder and the sails twisted their booms round to the rear of the masts. Blinded with the flying ash Chandrill heard the masts and rigging crunch down into the rear of the sled and then a lurch threw him to the deck. He rolled into one of the handrail standards, caught it and managed to get his feet onto the diagonal bracing in the side and slide down to the level of the runners.

The wind turned again and drove the smoke back into the Pass sufficiently for Chandrill to see several yards. He ran across the ice away from the sled which was using up its kinetic energy in a slow spin, dragging a train of rigging and spars. When he was well clear he took his skates from his belt and clamped them to his boots, then the darkness raged over everything again. Chandrill bent forward into the wind and thrust off moving with short quick strokes.

An indefinite time went by during which he passed two deserted sleds, wondering all the time where he was trying to go and why. It took

him some time to realise that he was looking for Sinoon.

The dark curtain lifted just in time to prevent him running straight into the main mass of the wreckage. He turned to the right and headed towards the southern end of the Pass faintly visible through the twilight. By reckless leaping of scattered timbers he managed to reach the first slopes before the smoke closed down. There were runner tracks along the edge of the ice here and Chandrill followed them.

The sled marks were heavy and he realised that all the sleds at the rear of the lines had come this way, probably being poled along most of the way, in the hope of finding a way through to the other side. Something ahead was flaming intermittently with a fierce white light, and as he came nearer the light source Chandrill found that it was getting warmer. The way ahead became too crowded with close packed sleds and he moved up on to the slope feeling as though he was moving helplessly through a hazy flickering dream.

He climbed until he had crossed over a shoulder of the hill and had a view of the Pass below him. A mile ahead, at the narrowest point, something that could hardly be seen for the swirling clouds of dust and soot was flaming and glaring, shooting weird beams of light in all directions when the movements of the smoke let them through. The floor of the Pass leading up to the light was obscured but Chandrill glimpsed men moving and he heard their shouts on the wind.

Far up in the mass of sleds he caught a flash of the near white timbers and sails of the Royal Sled of his own tribe. He took off his skates and began to run down the slope.

He fought his way through a stream of men and women who wanted to get away from the unknown thing ahead. When he reached the sled, a mass of motionless darkness against swirling greyness, he found Sinoon curled on the ground close to the bottom of the forward ladder. There was no sign of any of the others about. She was motionless except for a slight trembling. The furs she wore had been transformed by mud and water into a mass of sticky spikes.

Chandrill did not try to find out what had happened to her. He lifted her in his arms and looked into the white face with its myopic seeking eyes. "You want me to take you out of this?" he asked. Sinoon nodded and let her head fall against his shoulder. Chandrill turned and climbed back up the hill, sliding in the mud. At the top of the shoulder he could go no further. He set Sinoon on the ground in the lee of a rock and dropped down beside her.

For a moment he felt good that he had brought her up out of the smoke and chaos to where they could rest then he remembered that it

made no difference. They were dead anyway.

Alone he *might* have had a chance to cross to the other side of the mountains, but not with Sinoon. There was nothing to do now but sit and wait until it got dark. Until they were dead. Down below them in the Pass the sounds were dying out but Chandrill no longer cared. For most of the tribes the trek was over and perhaps they were luckier than those who had got through the Pass. For *them* there was nothing but another circuit of the world ahead with nothing to do but think about how, when they again reached the Pass, there would be no way through . . .

"Sinoon! Sinoon!" The shout, faint as it was coming up the slope, startled Chandrill. He had forgotten Minnatose.

He shot a glance at Sinoon, who rested with her eyes closed and did not seem to have heard it, then got to his feet and looked down the slope. Minnatose was weaving up the hill following the tracks in the snow and, all at once, there was nothing else in the world save Chandrill and his cousin and the wavering line of footprints joining them together.

"Don't come any further," he shouted causing Minnatose to raise his head and see him. Minnatose stared up the hill at him for long seconds and then he shouted something.

Just one word, "*You*," and he started up the hill again, and Chandrill knew what it was for. The way in which Minnatose stared up the slope, stumbling unseeingly over rocks and brush, made it obvious.

He felt for the whipstick and got it out of its sling. It was a length of springy steel an eighth of an inch in diameter which had a handle at one end. Keeping his eyes fixed on Minnatose he groped in his pouch and brought out a needle-pointed piece of steel about six inches long which he fitted over the end of the rod.

"I've warned you," he shouted, drawing his arm back, but the words had no visible effect. Chandrill had not expected them to, he had just felt it necessary to give the other man every chance. Minnatose came on up the hill, his eyes blank.

Ignoring the sick feeling in his stomach Chandrill brought his arm down hard. He heard the steel head go whistling down the slope and Minnatose went down sideways with it buried in the bulge of his thigh. Chandrill automatically groped for another head, the finisher, then checked his hand—he would not be able to make another throw. Not at a man anyway.

Minnatose began to get some control over the noises he was making and sat up holding his leg with both hands. He had on his face the hurt, indignant look of the bully who has been hit and is now convinced

that he must bully harder than ever to teach the offender a much needed lesson. Chandrill turned and pulled Sinoon to her feet.

"Come on, Sin," he whispered. "we'll have to keep moving," He reckoned that it would take Minnatose at the most twenty minutes to recover and stop his leg bleeding and then he would be coming after him. With a sudden flash of insight Chandrill realised that there was nothing else in life for Minnatose but to kill the one that had been, as he saw it, the cause of the end of his world. It was logical. One man had stripped him of everything; of the past and the future—even life, but a fine piece of irony was there. By virtue of having deprived him of so much that man had provided him with one remaining, shining, all-important goal. Revenge.

Chandrill knew that better than he knew anything and he was running because, although he had the normal man's disbelieving indifference to the idea of simply dying, he was horribly afraid of the intimate reality of being killed. He wanted to die in his own way.

South of the Pass, along the bottom slopes of the mountain continent, things had not changed at all because nobody had ever travelled that far away from the tribal route. The wind blew from the north having carried the sleds round the world, tried to squeeze its massive invisible self through the Pass and swung along the line of the hills. Since the instant in which the Pass had been destroyed the only evidence that there was still time was in the green sky which had grown several shades darker as the long night slid ponderously across the ice sea from the east.

Chandrill's foot went blindly over the edge of a crevice and he threw himself back, bearing down on Sinoon for support. Her knees buckled under his weight and they fell awkwardly onto the stiff coating of snow that had fallen ages ago before the last water had become permanently frozen.

From where he lay, too tired to get up now that he was down, Chandrill stared dully at the fresh clean greyness of newly split rocks and, underneath them, the snow-scattered brownness of upthrown soil. It took the facts a long time to penetrate, then he sat up and looked down into the crevice.

The first thing he knew was that this was not a natural formation at all. It was a long shallow gouge in the surface of the hill. One end of it pointed out across the silent horizon of ice and the other on up the slope. The top of it was not visible because a few hundred yards above him the hill he was on reached its highest point then fell away again on

the other side. Miles beyond the low ridge thus formed the actual mountains rose distantly.

Sinoon had gone to sleep lying against him, in the position in which she had fallen, with the ease of a tired child. She *was* a child, Chandrill thought not for the first time. He got to his feet and pulled Sinoon up beside him.

"Come on, Sin," he whispered. "Up this way." She walked with him blindly, dragging her feet and leaning on him.

At the top of the slope the green-white lumpy ground dropped away from them in a long gentle fall into some rough land covered with stunted trees and briar clumps. Almost at his feet the furrow started in the hard snow, narrow at first then broadening out as it went down the hill until at the bottom it was thirty feet wide. Near the broad end the gouge was kinked round a sled-sized rock and, lying outside the trail of violence altogether, was the thing that had caused it.

It was a shining silver egg that had been split open almost vertically from the end nearest Chandrill practically the whole way through to the other end. Inside the egg was a tangled mass of crumpled metalwork and massed interlacing wires.

Chandrill knew with an instinctive judgement, that held good even for things as far outside his sphere of knowledge as this, that he was looking at the ultimate development of the sled. A machine that moved through the sky—like a meteor.

The picture of a mother ship roaming between the stars came to him suddenly. He could almost see the great machine approaching his own tiny sun, the unforeseen accident which sent it winging down, too fast for a landing on his own world, the panic aboard as the mountains appeared ahead right across the horizon, the futile efforts to bring the ship round to go through the one gap in the barrier and the spectacular failure which had snuffed out his race. Chandrill felt his mind reel with the very *bigness* of the concept

This glittering shattered thing must have been the flier's equivalent of his own ice yacht. Chandrill knew then why he had been so uplifted when he had seen the light in the sky. Something, some half-memory inherited, had whispered that here was the way out for the tribes.

He walked down the slope keeping inside the track of the egg and peered into it hoping to see and at the same time afraid of seeing the creature that might be inside. He was unable to see more than a few feet into the interior because of the masses of plates and equipment that blocked his vision and a dense grey-white gas that lingered far inside the hull. At the open end of the egg was a squat machine, heavily

flanged and moulded to one half of the hull which Chandrill took to be the floor.

He clambered along the upthrown earth and rock that formed a motionless sculptured wave around the egg to the front, the end that he would have expected to have received the most of the damage. There the smooth line of the hull was surprisingly unbroken. He worked his way right round to the rear of the egg and reached the windward side of the gash in the hull where he caught a wisp of the cloudy whiteness from inside. It reeked of ammonia and something else . . .

"Wake up, Chan! Wake up! Please. Wake up . . ." The voice in Chandrill's ears grew louder and more insistent and at last he had to relinquish sleep and return to the ice and the cold green sky. Sinoon was bending over him and the sight of the scared, tear-streaked mask that was her face brought him back to reality.

"What's the matter?" Chandrill sat up. The inside of his mouth was parched.

"He's here," she said, pulling at his arms. "It's Minnatose. He's on the other side of the hill. I'm afraid. Get up." She shook him violently, overflowing with nervous panic. Chandrill wondered what Minnatose had done to change her former admiration to this. He got to his feet unsteadily and blinked as it came to him that if he had received a larger dose of the gas he would not have come out of it at all.

They ran from the silent egg towards one of the larger clumps of briars and dropped down behind it. Lying down, Chandrill saw through the stalks that the ground was so heavily scattered with rock and earth that they had left no trail to their hiding place. Just at that moment Minnatose appeared on the skyline.

Chandrill's hope that he would not need a weapon faded out for Minnatose was carrying one of the long, heavy knives used for cutting down bread canes. He was standing stock still at the top of the hill staring down the slope at the gleaming machine. His thigh was clumsily bandaged. Minnatose started walking down the hill.

Chandrill felt Sinoon begin to tremble and a sudden flood of guilt and responsibility sent him looking around for something that he could use for fighting. There were lots of stone splinters nearby but nothing that looked nearly heavy enough, and he sent his gaze further out. About thirty yards from him he saw something rather peculiar lying in the lee of the huge rock. It was an almost perfectly round piece of metal about a foot in diameter. It looked very heavy and Chandrill wondered if he could reach it before Minnatose could stop him.

"Keep quiet and lie still," he whispered to Sinoon. He pressed his

stomach up from the ground and poised, ready to spring forward with all the strength he could muster.

It was in that moment of supreme concentration on it that the round object moved. It rolled over revealing that, on the side which had been turned away from Chandrill, it was partly made of transparent stuff through which could be seen a swirling gaseous movement reminiscent of the gas in the egg.

The shock of the event, coming just at that vulnerable instant, drove the air from his lungs and brought with it a flood of reactive weakness. He dropped back onto the ground beside Sinoon. She was staring at him, slowly getting more afraid as his own fear leaked through to her by way of his eyes.

Chandrill examined the object and realised that he had not seen it properly the first time. A trick of matching colours had prevented him from seeing that the object was not a complete, separate entity.

It was, in fact, the helmetted head of something sprawled on the ground.

Something wearing a white one piece garment that completely covered its body. The realisation in some way relieved Chandrill for the idea of an alien creature lying there in the snow was more acceptable to his mind than the one of a curious looking sphere which could move of its own accord. He watched the alien for a full minute in which it made no further move, then he decided that it must be nearly dead.

"Try and get this, Sin," he whispered. "It's difficult to grasp but try to get it anyway." He told her his theory about the egg and about the alien in white lying nearby, then snapped, "Don't move or make a noise!"

She lay very still for a long time then said, "Where is it?"

Chandrill turned round to face the alien and pointed to it. The alien was lying in the same place and in the same position except for one thing. The helmet was now lifted a few inches clear of the ground and the transparent window was facing directly towards where Chandrill and Sinoon lay.

Long cold seconds rolled over Chandrill as he realised that the alien had seen them and that he did not know what to do about it. On his left was the ruined space craft with Minnatose out of sight now on the far side of it. On his right was the silent, sentient alien in white, perhaps dying perhaps ready to spring into ferocious and deadly action. There was no way for Chandrill to tell.

The wind rolling in from the dark ice and down the line of the hills was loud and then quiet in his ears. The green sky seemed to be pressing down on everything, holding it still.

Quite suddenly over a distance of thirty yards, the alien seemed to reach out an invisible hand which passed through Chandrill's skull and took hold of his brain. The sensation paralysed him. Then the alien spoke. As Chandrill felt it, the process was not so much one of speaking as of writing the words directly onto the surface of his brain with the finger of an invisible hand.

Being, it said, *I can feel the fear in you and your companion and I can feel the blind kill-longing in the other one which is near my ship. I have an aversion for these things and will not tolerate them near me. You shall explain your circumstances to me so that I may decide what to do. Prepare your report and project it to me thus . . .*

Chandrill received a wordless description of how to gather his thoughts, poise and launch them from his mind. He was not sure that he could do it and he knew that unless the instructions were constantly reiterated in the same way he would forget them in ten minutes. As well as that he received a faint disturbing inkling of just how far the alien would go to preserve its peace of mind.

Wondering just why he felt it so important to get everything just right he began to prepare his explanation. He tried to compress the history of the tribes into one compact, cohesive mass. He thought of the dark futility of the eternal trek round the world and of the original aims of the Philosophy Sled, and its failure. He sketched in his own life, the struggles with the others to make them accept his beliefs, the struggles with himself to act on them. Chandrill thought of the recent events; the light in the sky, the destruction of the Pass and the flight from the cousin who needed to kill him . . .

He fixed his eyes on the dark window with its sluggish movement of mist inside then, praying that he could do it right, launched his message. The alien made a hoarse pain sound and clapped what might have been two arms, made shapeless with the white covering, over its helmet. From the far side of the sky-craft came the sound of a stone as though dislodged by a sudden movement.

Before Chandrill had time to wonder what had happened the words began forming inside his head. *Such strength,* they said, *I did not expect such strength. A mistake on my part. I have very little time—the being you call Minnatose, the one with the dark shadow over his mind, has seen me and is coming. Listen. Inside my ship there are*

millions of books on microfilm. I see that your knowledge of optics is sufficient for you to develop a way to read them. There are aids to deciphering also. There is yet a chance for your people because the engine of the ship is not destroyed and has manual controls. . . .

Wild hope surged up in Chandrill.

No. The ship will never fly again, so you cannot leave this world on it nor could you even reach the poles. But with the engine whole . . .

What had the alien meant?

"A chance for your people . . ." the alien had said. What chance?

Silently, and moving with incredible speed in spite of his wounded leg, Minnatose tore across the space which separated the sky craft and the alien. He had the cane knife at the ready as he tore through the briars in front of where the alien lay. Chandrill was dimly aware of Sinoon burying her face in her arms. It was impossible for him to know if Minnatose realised before he made his dive that it was not Chandrill he was tackling.

Chandrill watched his cousin crash down through the briars onto the alien and there was a sudden silent upheaval as the two bodies met. The alien seemed to enfold Minnatose and it became horribly apparent that it possessed more than four limbs, more than six, and all of them in the white garment whose purpose Chandrill was beginning faintly to understand.

The struggle was short and sharp. Chandrill saw fleetingly the cane knife raised in Minnatose's hand then there was a loud hissing explosion. A cloud of the white mist which had been inside the hull of the ship stood out around the fighters—and the contest was over. All movement ceased in the tangled mass and the cloud was ripped away by the wind bringing the stench of ammonia to Chandrill's nostrils.

He pulled Sinoon to her feet and ran with her towards the egg out of the way of the gas and brought her round to the engine end. She sat down wordlessly when he told her to. Chandrill climbed up onto the metal of the ship and looked at the engine.

What had the alien meant?

On top of the squat casing was a long graduated slot with a knob at one end of it which looked as though it was intended to be pulled along. Chandrill moved it a little and nothing happened so he moved it back to its original position. He stared hopelessly around the tangle of wreckage. What was the use of the ruined hulk if it would never fly again? The certainty of imminent death bore down on him, worse this time because it had been preceded by hope of life.

"A chance for your people . . ." the alien had said. What chance? Chandrill began to think back to all that the alien had told him about the engine. First, that it was whole . . . The concept that the alien had projected when it meant "engine" was very complex. He began to examine the fast-fading mental symbol that had been imprinted on his brain. The word "radioactive" was strongly connected with it. Chandrill had a faint understanding of what that meant for there were caves in several parts of the foothills which always shone with a faint radiance.

Suddenly he understood the engine a little. He pushed the knob far up the slot to the very end of its run and depressed two buttons above it. This time when he moved the knob only a fraction of an inch the scattered snow and ice behind the egg hissed and melted. There was a faintly luminous beam reaching out from the engine to the hill where the steam was rising. And this had happened when he had moved the knob only a hundredth of its full distance.

This tremendous energy was made available by moving the tiny knob and Chandrill knew that it would last a long, long time. This was the power which could hurl the egg to the stars but which now spent itself in heat because the converter which changed that power to lift was destroyed. But the power would always be there, and with the engine mounted on a hilltop it could spread its heat for miles. It would be a huge eternal hearth for the tribes to gather around and settle. A hearth that would be warm all through the long night.

With a stationary culture not drained of time and energy by the necessity to keep moving his people could begin to *do* something. Then the tribes would begin their real destiny—one with a future.

Chandrill jumped down onto the ground and smiled as he saw Sinoon standing near the boulder off to one side. She had had a bad time recently and it would take a lot of work to get her back to normal, but she should be all right.

"Come on, sleepy," he called out to her. "There's work to be started. By the time we get all the way back to the Pass, spread this news and get them out here with all their food and sleds for building you'll really be tired." Chandrill walked over to Sinoon. He could not help noticing as he went that the hill with its natural shelter would be a pretty good site for the first town that his world had seen in a long, long time.

BOB SHAW

JOHN SEABRIGHT

The Moron

A little knowledge is a dangerous thing—especially when it turns out to be a little too much

Illustrated by Harry Turner

It was getting late, the inspector was due, and she had a headache, all of which tended to make Miss Weston a little impatient with her history class.

"Now children," she snapped. "Once again and this time please try to get it right. From seventy-three. Ready? Go!" She sat down and closed her eyes as twenty ten-year olds lifted their voices and shrilled their mnemonics.

"Nineteen hundred seventy-three
Blake crashed on the moon did he."

"Nineteen hundred seventy-five
Church circled and returned alive."

"Nineteen hundred eighty-one
Duer landed and the job was done."

"Very good!" Miss Weston opened her eyes and started to her feet as a man walked through the open door and smiled at her. "I'm Carter, the inspector. I listened to your class from outside in the passage." He beamed down from the dais at the mixed class below him. "They certainly seem to have a grasp of essential history."

"I do my best, sir," said Miss Weston. She glanced at the calm, almost benign face of the inspector. "They are troublesome at times but I think that I have taught them what they should know."

"I'm sure that you have," he said politely. He took a book from his pocket and glanced at it. "According to the schedule this class should know essential history from nineteen hundred sixty-five until the present day. Fifty years. A total of twenty dates."

"They know them, sir," said Miss Weston. She tried hard to be calm and competent but it was hard to forget that, if Carter wanted to, he could revoke her teaching licence and throw her out of her employment. He seemed to sense what was in her mind.

"There's no need for alarm, Miss Weston," he said gravely. "We of the teaching profession realise that, no matter how hard we might try, there is always the awkward child, the backward child, the difficult child. It is our duty to find them and so bring them up to the level of the rest. No one can expect a hundred per cent perfection."

"No, sir," she said gratefully. "Thank you, sir"

"Not at all." He stared at his book again. "With your permission I'll just run through a spot-check on this class."

"Certainly, sir." Asking her permission was, as Miss Weston knew, an empty formality but it served to bolster her domination over the class. Carter nodded, cleared his throat, and pointed to a freckle-faced youngster.

"You! What's your name?"

"Johnny, sir. Johnny Thorne."

"Well, Johnny, when did we first land on Mars?"

"Uh?" The boy's face was twisted with thought then, as he remembered his teaching, it cleared. "*Nineteen hundred ninety-two. Leman landed on Mars, too true!*"

"Very good!" Carter swung his finger. "You there! What happened in nineteen hundred eighty-seven?"

"*Nineteen hundred eighty-seven. Venus found to be a lemon.*"

"And you!" The finger swung towards a red-headed boy in a blue jersey. "What's your name?"

"Tommy, sir. Tommy Prentice."

"Well, Tommy, this is a hard one. When did we first reach Mercury?"

"Nineteen ninety-eight, sir." Tommy shuffled his feet and lowered his eyes from Miss Weston's expression.

"You know that isn't true, Tommy," she said quickly. "Now, repeat after me. *Nineteen hundred ninety-nine. Mercury reached by Devine.*"

"The man asked me who was the first," said Tommy sullenly. "Devine was the second."

"But . . ."

"That will do, Miss Weston," rapped Carter. He shut his book and slipped it into his pocket. "Tommy, stand out before the class and wait for me. Miss Weston, give them something to occupy their time while you are away. We will wait for you outside."

Miss Weston bit her lips as she watched the man and boy leave the room.

The office was a large, brightly lit affair tastefully decorated and hung with charts and schedules appertaining to the school. The supervisor, a remarkably young man for the position he held, smiled as the inspector entered and held out his hand.

"Back so soon? Everything satisfactory, I hope."

"Far from it." Carter stepped aside and gestured for Miss Weston and Tommy to enter. "A blatant case of false teaching. Tommy, when did we first reach Mercury?"

"Nineteen hundred ninety-eight, sir."

"You see?" Carter looked significantly towards the supervisor. He nodded and looked grave.

"I see what you mean. Miss Weston, take the boy outside and then return. Ask my secretary for the complete file on this student." He sighed as he sat down and gestured the inspector to a chair. "I'll not attempt to minimise the importance of this discovery, Carter, but I'd like to make one thing quite clear. I have the utmost confidence in Miss Weston."

"The boy has received wrong education," said Carter. "His history is inaccurate. As Miss Weston is his teacher in that subject she can hardly be free from all blame."

"Agreed." The supervisor glanced up as Miss Weston returned with the file. "I was just telling Inspector Carter that I have the utmost confidence in you, Miss Weston," he said encouragingly. "I feel certain that you would not have taught the boy wrong facts."

"I would never do that," she said quickly. "I can't understand how he could have got his dates so confused. The mnemonic is very plain. Nineteen hundred ninety . . ."

"Yes, yes," interrupted the supervisor. "We know all that, thank you. But the fact remains that the boy has been mis-educated. As his teacher you can realise how concerned we are about it."

"I can't understand it," she repeated. She was on the verge of tears. "I try so hard and they're so slow in learning. I . . ."

"Let's get to business," snapped Carter. He had no patience with

emotion. "According to the schedule there is only one date for the landing on Mercury. Nineteen ninety-eight isn't mentioned at all. If Tommy knows that date then someone must have taught it to him. I think we can discount childhood fantasy and stubbornness?"

"Naturally." The supervisor nodded and opened the file. "Tommy has followed the scheduled pattern for his class and age. Elementary reading, essential history, basic general knowledge. Quite normal."

"How about his recreation?"

"Scheduled games and pastimes. The usual football, swimming, with some attention to Law and Crime and Red and White. His index for Law and White are as they should be; he likes to be on the winning side."

"Home life?" Carter snapped the question as if it left a bad taste in his mouth. The supervisor riffled the pages of the file.

"Both parents dead. Lives with his grandfather who . . ."

"Wait!" Carter glared at Miss Weston. "Did you know this?"

"Of course. But Tommy had always arrived at school on time and is decently dressed and fed. He seemed a nice, normal boy until this happened. I simply cannot understand why he should be so bad."

"There seems to be a great deal you fail to understand, Miss Weston," said Carter acidly. "Surely you don't need to be reminded of the importance of your position? In your charge is the next generation of men and women, potential fathers and mothers whose children will, in turn, come to you for education. How you teach them, what you teach them, will have repercussions extending much further than any of us can imagine. Personally, I find it incredible that you could allow a boy in your class to deviate so widely from the norm."

"I'm sorry, sir," she said, and this time did break into tears. Carter glared at her until she managed to control herself.

"I'm glad to see that you realise how lax you have been. Bring in the boy."

Tommy entered the room, a little scared, but mostly defiant. He looked at his teacher, then at the supervisor, finally at Carter.

"Now, Tommy," said the inspector. "You keep saying that we first reached Mercury in nineteen hundred and ninety-eight. That isn't true. You don't seem a boy who would lie for the sake of it so why do you lie at all?"

"I'm not lying," said Tommy.

"You are lying," snapped Carter. "You know your mnemonics, don't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you know that Devine reached Mercury in nineteen ninety-nine. Why do you insist that he didn't?"

"I'm not. All I said was that we first reached Mercury a year before that."

"You can say anything you wish but that doesn't make it true, does it?"

"No, sir."

"Then you admit that you're lying?"

"No, sir."

"Then you want us to believe that the history books are wrong?"

"No, sir."

"Then what do you mean?"

"I don't know, sir." Tommy screwed his face up. "All I know is what Granddad told me. He said . . ."

"Never mind what he said," shouted Carter. "He tells you nothing but lies. Lies, do you hear! The only truth is that which is taught to you in school." He calmed himself with a visible effort. "That will be all, Tommy. You may take him back to his class now, Miss Weston, but don't let him talk to the others. In fact it would be better if he

didn't go home tonight. You can find him a bed in the boarder's wing, I suppose?"

"Certainly." The supervisor nodded to the teacher. "But what about his guardian?"

"I'll attend to him," promised Carter. "I'll take the address and get onto the job right away."

He reached for the file.

Tommy lived in a lower class apartment down in a section of the city long scheduled for demolition. Carter carefully walked up seemingly endless flights of stairs, not touching the handrail or the walls and when he reached the top he was breathing hard and his face was moist with perspiration. He knocked and an old man answered the door.

"Mr. Prentice?"

"That's right." The old man looked over his visitor's shoulder and squinted down the stairs. Carter stepped into the room.

"If you're looking for Tommy, don't bother. He won't be home tonight."

"Not coming home?" The old man shut the door and looked anxious. "Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"Physically, no. Mentally, a great deal I'm afraid." Carter stared about him and sat on the edge of a chair. "You are his guardian, I understand?"

"That's right. I've taken care of him since his parents died. Why?"

"The guardian of a young person has a tremendous responsibility, Mr Prentice. As great as that of the parents themselves. I trust that you realise that?"

"Sure I do. Why?" The old man sank into a sagging chair and reached for a pipe. He loaded and lit it and blew smoke towards his visitor. "Who are you? Police?"

"Not exactly. I'm Inspector Carter of the Ministry of Education. I've come to talk to you about Tommy."

"Tommy's a good boy," said the old man firmly. "There's nothing wrong with Tommy."

"Not yet," admitted the inspector. "But if things go on as they have been there will be a great deal wrong with him before he grows up." He leaned forward on his knees. "Mr Prentice, you know, of course, that for fifty years now it has been a criminal offence to interfere with the functions of the schools?"

"I've heard of it," admitted the old man casually. "I never did see any reason for it. It seems unnatural to me."

"I'll tell you the reason," said Carter patiently. "Education is now a science. We have carefully selected and arranged all necessary facts and information so that the young mind can readily assimilate them. We work on a strict schedule and we have eliminated doubt. Our teaching is the truth. All that any child or adult needs to know is incorporated in our curriculum. We cannot tolerate unskilled interference with our duties."

He leaned back as tobacco smoke swirled towards him.

"Not that that is any hardship to the average parent, you understand. Even a hundred years ago people were only too willing to rid themselves of an unpleasant task. The schools then did more than just instill the rudiments of education with their meals, medical services and general welfare. But that is beside the point." He paused. "To put it briefly, Mr Prentice, you must stop giving Tommy false education."

"Me?"

"You."

"Now wait a minute," snapped the old man. "I've never told Tommy a lie in all his life."

"No?" Carter shrugged. "Did you tell him that we first reached Mercury in nineteen ninety-eight?"

"I did, and it's true. Boris Stazingroph reached Mercury that year. I remember it well."

"That," said Carter calmly, "is a lie." He raised his hand against the other's protest. "Let us be reasonable, Mr Prentice. If it were the truth then it would be in the history books." He reached into his pocket and drew out the teaching schedule. "See? Here is every date in essential history. No mention is made of nineteen ninety-eight. Doesn't that prove that your statement is a mischevious untruth?"

"No," snapped the old man. "It only means that you've altered history to suit yourselves."

"Not altered, Mr Prentice," said Carter quickly. "Edited. There is quite a difference."

"Not to me there isn't," snorted the old man. "When you try to tell me that things which I know happened never did, then that is alteration. As a school inspector you should be ashamed of yourself for teaching such rubbish."

Carter sighed. The old fool was going to prove stubborn. It was strange how the old still clung to the outworn things of the past. He looked at the old man. Browbeating alone would be useless.. Browbeating coupled with explanations might just possibly work. Carter fought down his instinctive anger and leaned forward in his chair.

"You have made a statement which you cannot possibly prove," he said gently. "Not unless you are a certified historian with access to the restricted documents. In such a case you would be allowed to communicate such information only to other historians. You could never prove yourself right and history books wrong."

"That doesn't make me a liar," grumbled the old man.

"It makes you the worst of liars," snapped Carter. "It makes you a fanatic who is unable to grasp the truth. Every schoolchild will deride you for being so stupid as not to know essential history."

"The history you and those like you have selected for them to learn," reminded the old man. "What was wrong with Boris Stazingroph being the first to reach Mercury? Couldn't you fit him into one of your stupid mnemonics?"

"The mnemonics are the greatest aid to learning yet discovered, said Carter. "The rhymes enable every child to absorb all revelant data."

"Poppycock!" said the old man. "We never had such things when I was at school and we learned well enough."

"Did you?" Carter felt it increasingly difficult to control his anger. "In your time a child attended elementary school for eleven years. In that time they learned to read and write, to do simple mathematics and acquire a smattering of general knowledge. None of that general knowledge was of the slightest use to them after leaving school. Even with eleven years tuition many of them left school unable to read or write. That, to me, is a clear condemnation of the teaching system then used."

"The percentage was low," protested the old man. "There will always be a few who are unable to learn."

"I disagree," snapped Carter, "and I can quote figures to prove it. But let us go on. Some children went to higher schools. Some even went to Universities. Many men and women had a total of twenty-four years of education before being ready to enter the world of business. Twenty-four years, Mr Prentice! A third of a lifetime. Do you still claim that the systems then in use were efficient?"

"They were doctors and scientists," protested the old man. "They had to learn a specialised trade."

"Perhaps, but need they have taken so long to learn it?" Carter smiled, well aware that he had made his point. One day, perhaps, when things had settled, it would be possible to look back on that terrible waste of potential without feeling anger, but it was still too recent for any intelligent man to feel anything but angry frustration at the stupidity of the past.

"You spoke of doctors," Carter said. "They had to learn Latin,

why? They had to learn a mass of irrelevant information about things which could not possibly concern them, why? It took six years to train a man to extract teeth. It took seven years to train a man to perform the most intricate operation. If a man could learn so much extra in that single year then isn't it obvious something was wrong?"

"Doctors were taught Latin so as to make them international," said the old man weakly. "Dentists had to know about heart conditions and things like that."

"Why?" said Carter. "A dentist attends to teeth, nothing more. If he works in collaboration with an expert on anaesthesia there is no need for him to know more than the essentials of his trade. Specialisation, Mr Prentice. We now train a dentist in eighteen months, a doctor in four years, an expert on anaesthesia in one."

"Perhaps," said the old man doggedly. "But the history books still lie."

"They do not lie," shouted Carter. "They contain all the essential truth a child needs to know. We have cut away the rubbish which cluttered up our educational system. All the tedious lists of Kings and Statesmen. All the wars and conquests and battles. We have eliminated old boundaries which no longer exist. The past is dead, Mr Prentice, why should we bother ourselves to learn of it?" He leaned forward and held out his teaching schedule.

"This is the truth, all of it. If a thing is not in this book then that thing does not exist. It is a lie! We want no part of it. Tommy will learn all he needs to know from this book. Later, when he has decided what he wants to be, he can acquire more education. He can spend four years in a hospital and learn to become a doctor. He can spend two years in a laboratory and learn chemistry; one year to become an elementary teacher; three years to obtain his degree in higher electronics and atomic theory. He will start his business life as a young man Mr Prentice, not one with most of his youth and a third of his life wasted before he begins."

"Standardisation," said the old man sickly. "You are turning out minds like you would turn out motor cars. They are all the same. They are taught the same things. There is no room for argument or discussion or separate viewpoints."

"Exactly." Carter smiled as he realised that the old man had grasped the underlying principle. He lifted his teaching schedule as a different man in a different age would have lifted his bible.

"Teaching stripped down, simplified, denuded of unessentials. A total of fifty-three dates in history. Twenty books which constitute the

world's classics. Five symphonies; three operas; three ballets; eight plays; four poems; one religion; three dances, one atomic theory; one political party; seven inventors." He paused for breath and, when Carter spoke again, it was in a calmer tone of voice.

"Can't you understand, Mr Prentice? We don't want Tommy to grow up a freak. How will he feel if he has no mutual topic of conversation? What will his friends think of him if he pretends to knowledge they do not and cannot have? As things are everyone is equally at home on every subject. They know all there is to know about them and there is no room for argument. It makes for friendliness and understanding."

"It makes for morons," said the old man disgustedly. "You and your education! All you've done is to write off most of history and nearly all of everything else. You haven't raised the standards of education at all. All you've done is to eliminate the things worth knowing so that the dumbest moron can call himself equal to the highest intelligence. I want something better than that for Tommy."

"Better?" Carter shrugged. "For an old man, Mr Prentice you have a short memory. "Is a freak 'better'? Is a self-styled highbrow 'better'? Do you want Tommy to grow up to be a normal, well integrated individual or a fanatical fool despised by everybody? People do not like those who think themselves above the rest, Mr Prentice. They will call Tommy a liar and he'll be held in contempt because of it. Is that what you want?"

"No."

"Then why teach him untruths?"

"They aren't untruths. I keep telling you that I know what happened. It is no lie. It's you that are lying."

"Please." Carter forced himself to remain calm. "When you talk like that you make me doubt your sanity. Are you telling me that you are right and that the rest of us are wrong?"

"I didn't say that."

"You inferred it. If everyone denies that Mercury was reached in nineteen ninety-eight, and you insist that it was, then who is right? Remember, we can prove what we say by the history books. What proof have you?"

"None. But it happened, I know it did."

"Exactly, none," said Carter triumphantly. "You can't prove your statement but we can prove ours. So you are wrong, aren't you? You must be wrong."

"You are twisting my words," said the old man doggedly. "I know

what happened."

"You are an old man," said Carter brutally. "You are getting senile. In fact I think that the Courts would agree that you are too old to be a capable guardian to a young boy. Perhaps Tommy should reside at school as a boarder."

"No." The old man looked pleadingly at the inspector. "You can't take him away from me. You wouldn't do that, would you?"

"Why not? You are obviously hurting his mind with your idle fantasies. You will make him dissatisfied and discontent. He'll be quarrelsome and unhappy. In the end he will doubt the truth of the rest of his teaching. He may even believe that the World State hasn't existed since the beginning of history. Do you want to arouse nationalism and internecine strife again?"

"No," said the old man. "I wouldn't want to do that."

"Very well then." Carter looked shrewdly at the old man. "When did we first reach Mercury?"

"Nineteen hundred and . . ." The old man caught himself just in time. "I don't remember."

"Are you sure? Wasn't it in nineteen ninety-eight?"

"I don't remember."

"I see. What if Tommy should ask you again? What if he should ask you other questions?"

"I don't know." The old man stared at his hands. "Are you going to take Tommy away from me?"

"Perhaps. Answer my question."

"I'd tell him to ask his teacher."

"Does the teacher know best?"

"Always. Are you going to take him away?"

"No." Carter rose with a smile of triumph. "Not unless you forget what I told you. If I find that you have been interfering again then I won't hesitate." He stepped towards the door. "Good evening, Mr Prentice. Think over what I have said."

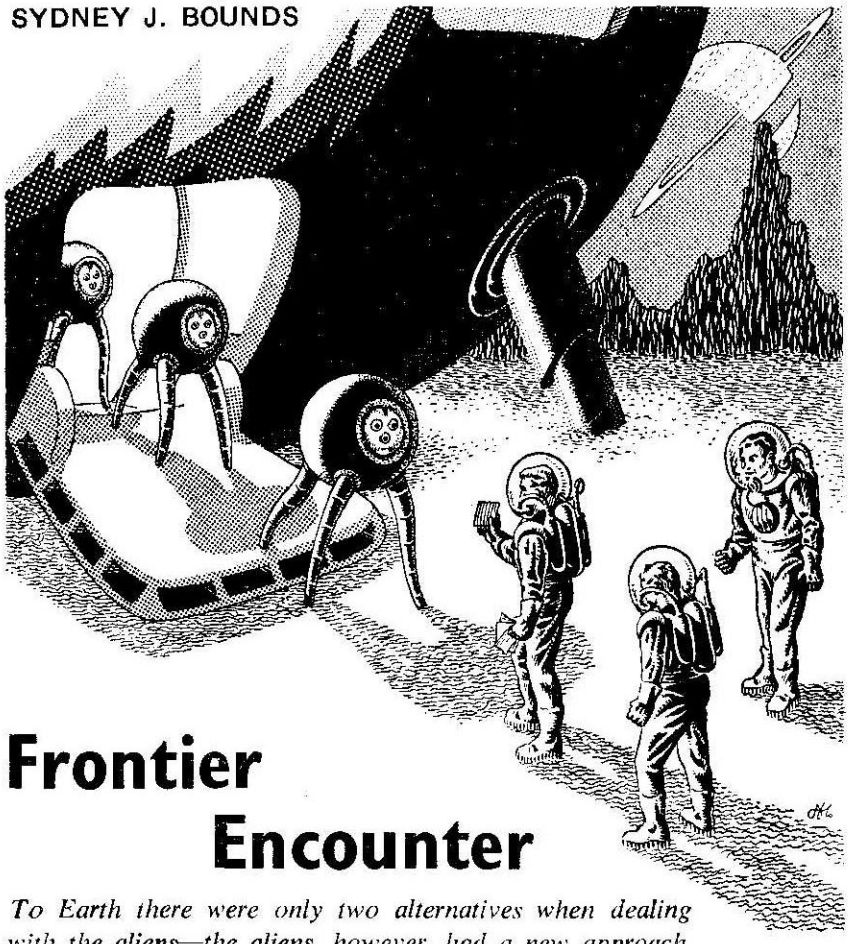
The inspector was smiling as he left the apartment and walked down the stairs. It was good to be alive in such a well ordered world. It was good to be intelligent and the equal to anyone he might meet. It was wonderful to have power and to be able to use it as it should be used—to protect the young children from the hates and fears of their elders. His smile grew broader as he thought about it.

Inspector Carter was always smiling but there was nothing strange about that. It was just that he was always happy.

A moron is a happy man.

JOHN SEABRIGHT

SYDNEY J. BOUNDS



Frontier Encounter

To Earth there were only two alternatives when dealing with the aliens—the aliens, however, had a new approach

Illustrated by Alan Hunter

The alien spaceship was sighted long before it crossed Pluto's orbit, while it was still a silver pinpoint in the black void revealed by the telescopes. It was travelling at incredible speed, swinging through a long curve that would eventually bring it well within the solar system.

The year was 1990. Man had pushed his frontiers out from Earth in tiny, manned rocketships. The lunar base was developing fast; Mars had at last revealed that the canals did not really exist; and a lonely outpost on Titan, largest of Saturn's moons, marked the furthest reach of Man's domination . . . as yet.

On Earth, the United Nations Organization had finally achieved a balance of power—not world government, but a compromise, with each nation agreeing to pool certain resources. Since the brief holocaust of atomic warfare in 1960, the governments of both east and west had realized the futility of trying to persuade other races to their way of life.

And so, when news of the alien ship was telecast, the peoples of the Earth looked to the Security Council for guidance. But in that towering structure of steel and glass on New York's waterfront, there was only fear and wonder, a frozen helplessness to grapple with the greatest problem mankind had ever faced.

From another star system, an alien science had flung a ship across the void of space—and two different civilizations were about to make contact. The big question mark was: would the aliens prove friendly, or hostile? And if friendly, what sort of communication was possible?

Endless discussions took place while the silver ship grew large in the telescopes. The military were all for destroying the alien ship before it could bring others of its kind; social scientists welcomed the opportunity to exchange knowledge with another civilization; between the two viewpoints, the Security Council swung like a pendulum . . . while time grew short and the peoples of Earth anxious.

It was decided that an attempt at communication must be made—while remote-controlled rockets with atomic warheads stood by in case of need. And, of course, contact must be made as far from Earth as possible. A direct ship-to-ship approach had insuperable difficulties; a joint landing on one of the outer planets or their satellites was indicated—the obvious choice was Titan.

Titan, that distant world of frozen rock, where a handful of Earthmen struggled to establish a colony . . .

"Johnny!" Olive Paton's voice rose to a shrill note. "You can't attend the conference looking like *that*. Comb your hair—change into something more formal—and wear a starched collar for once. This is important, maybe your big chance, and appearances *do* count."

Johnny Paton glanced in the mirror.

"Guess you're right, dear," he said easily, "but there's no time now. I'm due at Lucas's office . . . see you later."

He slipped out of the square prefab before his wife could continue her criticism of his personal appearance; not that he minded—after five years of marriage, he was well-used to her fault-finding—but he did not

like to hurt her feelings and was constitutionally unfitted to bother about his dress.

He shambled along the compressed-rock avenue of the residential section like a great shaggy bear, his uncombed hair resembling a ball of rag-wool, his tweed jacket hanging casually from stooped shoulders. His eyes, except when he concentrated on some problem of interest to him, were inclined to take on a vacant expression and he walked with an air of preoccupation.

Life, for Johnny Paton, was largely a matter of observing other people; although not essentially lazy, he was easy-going to the point of not bothering to exert himself. It was a habit which irritated his wife. who admired the quality of commercial enterprise more than any other in a man.

There were times when Johnny wondered why Olive had married him at all—certainly the atmosphere of romantic love had long since disappeared from their life.

Crossing the square before Administration, where Lucas's office was located, he looked beyond the transparent wall enclosing the colony, to the rugged terrain of Titan. A frozen ice-field stretched bleakly to the horizon, with here and there the sunlit surface of a crag of rock illuminating the dark shadows. And, hanging in the deep blue sky, Saturn majestic and breath-takingly beautiful, the knife-edge of the rings all aglitter.

No matter how long he stayed on Titan, Johnny knew he would never get used to that sight . . . but now his gaze searched for a silver light in the sky, a light that was not a star although it had come from the stars.

He found the alien ship. It was nearer, much nearer. The thought quickened his step and he entered Admin with something like eagerness showing on his face. Lucas's office door was open and the room crowded.

The Director was saying: "—— so it's up to us. Earth has dropped the baby in our lap. If we fail, the best that can happen is that we'll all lose our jobs. We don't need to think about the worst. We mustn't fail!"

There was silence. Johnny looked at the faces around him and knew that words were being marshalled, questions formulated, suggestions crystallized. This encounter with an alien civilization was a problem without precedent. There was no formula, no routine to follow. It had to be thought out from fundamentals.

"Hit 'em with atomics—then examine anything that's left."

These terse words came from Colonel Grant, military adviser to the colony. He was a tall, upright man with a neatly-brushed moustache, very fair of complexion—there was never any indecision about Grant, who had a natural tendency to act first and think afterwards.

Lucas, the Director, smiled wryly.

"Perhaps you'll get your chance later, Colonel. Orders are to try a friendly approach first—anyway, the fact that the aliens have crossed interstellar space argues a science superior to our own. Maybe atomics won't affect them."

"Language will be the difficulty," said Ted Raginsky. "It's asking too much to expect them to use a language based on Earth forms. I'd like to try communicating with pictures—a representational drawing of a spaceship should mean something to them. Or maybe abstract art will find some touchstone in their sensory equipment."

"It's possible," Lucas conceded. "After all, our own language has developed from picture-signs. You're the artist, Ted—it's up to you."

"First," said Norma Bush, the colony's mathematician, "we need to effect contact. I suggest a geometric symbol, say a triangle set within a circle. We could lay it out in neon tubes and flash a signal with a basic rhythmic pattern—periods of light in harmonic progression, for example."

"We'll try that," Lucas decided, and scribbled a note on his pad. "How about you, Johnny—any hope of hypnotizing them?"

Paton shook his head doubtfully.

"Inducing hypnosis is basically a matter of suggestion. We're up against the language barrier again."

"Pity . . . an alien under hypnosis would be useful for study purposes."

Grant laughed.

"I don't think Paton will be much use in this direction," he said. "He's all right for pulling teeth, but anything bigger and he's out of his depth!"

Which was just what Olive might have said, Johnny thought.

After the conference, Johnny Paton started aimlessly across the square. The problem of what contribution he could make in dealing with the aliens was uppermost in his mind, and he was deaf and dumb to everything going on around him.

The pressure of a hand on his arm brought him out of his reverie.

"I called and called," Norma said, "but we didn't seem to be on the same plane of existence. I want you to help me lay out the signal, Johnny. Will you?"

"Sure, Norma."

He changed direction and walked with her to the store sheds. Physical action took his mind off his own problems and lightened his mood—or maybe it was simply because he was with Norma.

"Don't let that brass-brained colonel get you down," she said. "I happen to know that Lucas is expecting you to make a major contribution to this business—you'll think of something, Johnny."

"It's not so simple. Even now, hypnotism does not have full academic status. The practical applications, for dentistry and childbirth are accepted, of course; hypnoanalysis is being used more and more in mental hospitals—and ordinary people have discovered its beneficial qualities as a method of relaxation . . ."

Johnny Paton's thoughts ran on and his words came easily. He couldn't talk to Olive like this; Norma was sympathetic to his problems and that made all the difference.

A strange girl, Norma, tall and bony—was that why she was still unmarried, he wondered?—a girl for whom mathematics was the primary language. She had a homely face and awkward gait, but her voice was soft, seeming to share in his thoughts. It was impossible not to like her.

"There are all sorts of odd phenomena connected with the hypnotic state," Johnny said, "most of them unexplored. Time distortion is just one. Our sense of time is a subjective thing and, under hypnosis, can be varied. There is the case of a girl who picked and counted, 'in her mind', 862 cotton bolls, carefully selecting each one and occasionally looking beneath the leaves to make sure she had not missed any—all in *three seconds* of actual time measured by the observer!"

"In another instance, a professional violinist used this 'special time' while in a self-induced trance, to practise and review long pieces of music. She found that her memory improved strikingly and her technical performance was better."

"It seems to be general with this type of phenomenon, that the subject experiences fully on all levels; by that, I mean you could expect to see and hear clearly, to feel the things you handle. The hallucinations are rich in detail. In one case, where a social problem was given to a subject in trance, she reported that she *interviewed* each of the persons concerned!

"It's possible," Johnny concluded, "that I might be able to use the time distortion effect somehow. Assume we eventually arrive at communication with the aliens; obviously it would be a long drawn-out affair, with each side striving to grasp the basics of the other's language and way of life—then I'll place one of our people under hypnosis and suggest that time slows down. By this means, it should be possible to review all that has gone before almost simultaneously—again, I could pose a specific problem in dealing with the aliens and get an answer in a matter of seconds."

"Sounds good," Norma said. "I'll volunteer as a subject once I've some data to work on. Math can be an awfully long process, and any technique for getting a quick result would be welcome. I think you've got something there, Johnny . . . now let's get this signal operating."

They helped each other into spacesuits and passed through the airlock to the poisonous methane-and-ammonia atmosphere of Titan.

Olive Paton said: "I hope you've prepared a plan to lay before Lucas, Johnny."

Johnny swallowed a piece of vita-bread and washed it down with black coffee. He never felt his best over breakfast.

"No, not yet," he mumbled.

"Well, really!" Olive's voice grew sharper. "It's time you had, then. I don't want to spend the rest of my life in this hole. I only came because you were keen on it, and because I saw the chance for you to better your position. You might think of me *sometimes* . . . if you can impress Lucas, you could step into a good job when we return to Earth."

"I'm working on something," Johnny said half-heartedly.

"You want to work on the Director—*he* can do you some good. The Colonel, now, he spends a lot of time in Lucas's office. He has a plan for dealing with this enemy spaceship——"

"We don't know that it's hostile," Johnny protested.

"Hostile or not, he's prepared for action! I wish you were a bit more like him—I can't imagine Colonel Grant sitting down to breakfast unshaven. He's always smartly dressed. You're too lazy for anything . . . you might at least speak to me at breakfast instead of just sitting there. I don't see much of you as it is!"

Johnny Paton sighed, finished his coffee and left the prefab. Olive was right, he supposed, but that didn't make life any easier—he just wasn't her sort of person.

During the night, the alien ship had reached Titan. It hung in the sky, half-a-mile above Norma's flashing sign, a metal sphere with no visible means of support. Five hundred yards in diameter, Johnny calculated, and no rocket tubes, no windows or ports, no external attachments. Just a plain metal sphere, bright and silvery in the sun. No sign of a crew, either.

Outside Admin, MacIver was talking to Schultz, the colony's physicist.

"Morning, Johnny," MacIver said. "We've been discussing our visitor. Schultz reckons they're studying us radiologically——"

"That is so," Schultz boomed. He was a heavy man with a guttural accent. "I say they keep themselves shut up for fear of an attack. Undoubtedly there is provision in the ship for visual observations, also for discharging energies—there will be moving panels that are now closed. So they have radiations and watch a screen in safety.

MacIver grinned.

"Quite the psychologist, isn't he, Johnny? But there's another point, too—while they stay shut up like a clam, just out of reach, we can't get at them. And they're *above* us, a superior position. If they stay that way, it could be bad for our morale."

"The Colonel, he has an atomic weapon trained on the ship," Shultz stated. "Is foolish that. If he fire, what happens to us at such short range?"

Johnny stared at the silver sphere and wondered how its inhabitants felt. Perhaps this was *their* first encounter with another race . . .

"It's moving! I could swear——"

"Ja, ja!" Shultz exclaimed excitedly. "They are going to land."

Johnny started running for the store-sheds. Lucas was just ahead of him with Ted Raginsky. All three scrambled into spacesuits and passed through the airlock.

"Wonder what they'll look like?" Raginsky said over the inter-com.

The sphere came slowly down and a tripodal landing apparatus slid smoothly from its belly. As each leg settled on the ground and took the weight of the spaceship, they sank back into the metal hull, gradually easing that vast bulk to the rock surface.

"Pneumatics," Lucas said. "We have one thing in common."

Johnny walked right round the ship and rejoined the Director and Raginsky.

"No change," he reported. "Seems they're not ready to open up yet."

Lucas turned and looked back at the group of inter-connected domes of the colony, and saw other space-suited figures coming towards the ship. He frowned slightly.

"I suppose I should forbid so many people to come outside at once, but it seems pointless. If the aliens are hostile, we can't do much to protect ourselves anyway."

They settled to wait for the aliens to show themselves.

A couple of hours passed. Shultz had rigged radiation meters to test the ship's skin; Norma set up a handlamp that flashed to an arithmetical progression; Raginsky was alternately sketching and complaining how difficult his job was in a spacesuit; someone else was taking photographs.

Then three metal panels slid silently back in the ship's hull, revealing transparent windows. The windows were high up so that the men outside could not see into the ship; no alien showed himself.

"Direct observation now," Shultz commented. "Undoubtedly they are losing their fear of us and will reveal themselves in due course."

"We can't all hang about waiting for them," Lucas decided finally. "Our air cylinders won't last indefinitely and we must have someone here when they do make a move. The only thing for it is a rota. I'll stay, with Shultz and Miss Bush—the rest of you return to the colony. I want you Johnny, with Raginsky and MacIver, to relieve us two hours from now."

Johnny Paton made for the observatory dome, stripped off his spacesuit in the air-lock and climbed the stairs. Quite a crowd had gathered there, taking it in turns to look at the alien spaceship through a small telescope. Duprez had continually to explain that it was not possible to depress the fifty-inch sufficiently to observe at ground level.

Surprisingly, Olive was there, talking with Colonel Grant. Grant was assuring those about him that there was nothing to fear.

"Everything's under control," he said loudly. "The first sign of any danger and I'll blow them clean off Titan!"

Johnny found an empty chair and sat down. He studied his watch; another ninety minutes before he went outside again.

Ted Raginsky yelled: "Something's happening. There's a hatch opening—*they're coming out!*"

Johnny swung round, startled, and saw that a metal panel had opened low down in the hull of the alien ship, revealing a brightly-lit

interior. He hastened in the direction of the ship with MacIver and Raginsky.

All three were nervous, excited. They were unarmed and about to face the unknown . . . did the aliens feel as bad, Johnny wondered? The final seconds dragged relentlessly, then, from the hatchway, came three strange figures.

Each was a metal sphere, about a yard in diameter, with an inset of transparent glass; from behind the glass, three circular eyes looked out. They moved on tripodal, jointed legs with an unsteady gait.

MacIver said: "I suppose we should have guessed they'd need spacesuits, too—after all, Titan is no more their world than it is ours. He paused, staring. "They seem to be having difficulty in adjusting to the new gravity."

It was some minutes before the aliens mastered their difficulties, then they inspected the various items of equipment Shultz had left behind. Raginsky tried to interest them in one of his drawings; and was ignored after a cursory examination of his work.

The aliens made no sound as they moved about, and showed little desire to communicate with the Earthmen. Instead, a shallow truck which moved on ball-bearings, was brought from the ship and Shultz's instruments loaded on to it—then truck and aliens disappeared into the spaceship and the hatchway closed.

"Now," said MacIver thoughtfully, "did they take that stuff because they thought it might represent a danger? Or did they remove it to study at their leisure?"

Johnny called up Shultz on the intercom and told him what had happened. The physicist sounded annoyed, then became interested.

"You think, maybe, we have discovered something in common, Johnny? A basic technology?"

"I wouldn't know," Johnny answered.

Lucas came out to discuss the situation with MacIver. The psychologist said:

"I don't like a feeling I have, that we're looking on this encounter from the wrong angle. We—and by 'we' I mean all members of the human race—have a tendency to consider ourselves the lords of creation, to regard other forms of life as below ourselves in intelligence. It's dangerous to overlook the fact that *we* have only got as far as interplanetary tarvel, while the aliens have crossed the unimaginable gulf between the stars. That could mean they are used to dealing with other races than their own, while we are not."

"In that case," Lucas said quietly, "our ultimate course of action may rest with the Colonel."

Norma had workshops build her a simple abacus, an oblong frame with wires stretched across it and beads to move along the wires. She carried this to the spaceship and waited for the aliens to come out.

Shultz and an assistant were carrying out tests on the metal hull, completely ignored by those inside.

"This is something quite new," Shultz said. "I suspect they are able to control the atomic structure of metals to obtain quite remarkable qualities. If we ever learn how they do it, the process will revolutionize industry."

Norma saw three eyes watching from a window high up in the ship. She began to move the beads on her abacus, performing simple arithmetic sums; she worked slowly, methodically repeating her calculations and, all the while, looking up at the high windows.

Presently, a single alien came through the airlock, hauling a truck behind him; on it were Shultz's instruments, and something else—something alien. Roughly spherical in shape and about a foot in diameter, it was constructed of glowing wires about a compact, central unit of metal cylinders.

The alien left the truck and moved toward the abacus. Norma stood to one side and waited. She saw an extra "arm" appear from the metal sphere, equipped with pincers. Rapidly, the alien moved the beads, copying exactly each calculation she had made. Then the alien revolved about on his tripodal legs and vanished into the ship.

Norma looked at the physicist, and sighed.

"Now, what does that mean?" she murmured. "Do they really understand the basis of our mathematics? Or was he simply imitating my actions?"

Shultz didn't answer. He stared at his instruments with a puzzled frown.

"Something odd here, and this——" He prodded cautiously at the ball of glowing wires. "What is this? I must get these things to the laboratory at once and perform tests."

He set the truck in motion and found that it moved effortlessly. Surprised, he stopped the truck and started it again, pushing it this way and that with the pressure of his fingers; it responded perfectly.

Incredible, Shultz thought—and not entirely due to the low gravity. Somehow, they had reduced friction to a minimum . . .

Lucas turned from the window as the door of his office opened.

"Sit down, Colonel," he said. "I have decided to make a demonstration of military force."

Colonel Grant looked pleased. He seated himself across the desk from the Director, stiff as a ram-rod with his hands resting precisely one on each knee.

"I'm under your orders," he answered formally.

Lucas smiled wanly, nodding.

"Quite so, Colonel—and I want it clearly understood that the action I propose is not in the nature of an attack. I simply want a demonstration of our striking force so that I can study the reaction, if any, of our visitors."

"That is understood."

The Director cut the end of a cigar and spiked it; he applied a match slowly, blowing out scented blue smoke.

"I'm in a difficult position," he remarked casually. "All of us here are concerned with this unique encounter . . . but the responsibility for failure or success is mine alone. It is too much responsibility for one man."

He paused and, when he continued, seemed to be talking more to himself than to Grant.

"My own inclination is to treat the aliens as friendly and do all in my means to further communication between our two races. Certainly, they have shown no sign of hostile intent, as yet. However, the *possibility* of war, no matter how remote, must be assumed . . ."

"We, here, are expendable. In fact, I doubt if we could make any effective defence of this colony if the aliens chose to attack us. Remember, their ship has come from the stars—and that presupposes a science in advance of our own. It comes to this, then; that we must learn as much as we can of the aliens' armament and transmit that information to Earth. You are following my argument, Colonel?"

"Yes, but I still think we ought to blast them first and——"

"——and throw away the chance of scientific advancement through contact with another race? No, Colonel, I can't agree to that. Although we are but a handful of men remote from Earth, and this ship is but one ship, the significance of this encounter is bigger than anything else that's happened in the history of Man."

Lucas drew on his cigar. He drummed on the desk with his fingers. Then he rose and paced the room.

"We must do all we can to promote a friendly relationship. Playing

a double role, we must also act as Intelligence agents for Earth. It is a sobering throught, that this one ship may be able to destroy Earth . . . it may be, we don't know. That is why there must be no possible misunderstanding of our intent. I propose, therefore, that you shoot a target ship into space and annihilate it by remote-controlled atomic weapon, at a safe distance from Titan, of course."

"I'll arrange the demonstration at once."

"Good! That's settled then—I hope I didn't take you away from anything important, Colonel?"

Grant looked the Director straight in the eyes.

"No, nothing important," he replied calmly.

Olive Paton tired of waiting for the Colonel to return and walked back to the prefab she shared with her husband. Johnny's never going to get anywhere, she thought, he's no use to me—I'm sick of him!

Her first husband had made promises he couldn't keep, had no intention of keeping. Her life had been one long series of frustrations, but she never lost her ideal. She knew what she wanted of life. She wanted to be at the top, hostess to the elite of society. When Alan had been killed in an accident, she'd looked round for another passport to the things she wanted.

Johnny Paton had seemed a good bet at the time. He was still young, and rising in his career. He was easy-going, but that was all to the good—she would supply the driving force and Johnny would climb rapidly. That's how it had seemed to her then . . . now she was forced to admit that Johnny Paton *couldn't* be driven. She had tried and failed, and was ready to discard him.

The Colonel wouldn't need driving. He had his eye on the top of the ladder and plenty of initiative. All she had to do was attach herself like a limpet and let him carry her along. But she had to be careful; society disapproved of women who openly flaunted the convention of marriage. She had to make the Colonel commit himself before she finally broke with Johnny.

She sighed; it would be good to get away from Titan! She was sick of breathing a chemical atmosphere, of living under a glass dome and looking at ice-fields. She wanted to live in a real house again, not this utility prefab with its maddening restrictions on space. She wanted bright lights and parties—and news of social events that was not months out of date.

Yes, Olive Paton decided, it was certainly time she came to an arrangement with the Colonel.

"Johnny!" Shultz sounded excited as he gripped Johnny Paton's arm. "Come to the lab and see what I've got. Everyone else is too damn busy and I must show somebody."

"Sure, I'll come," Johnny agreed amicably.

He wasn't really interested but it was too much bother to invent an excuse for not going with the physicist. Anyway, he had nothing else to do.

Shultz had a test piece rigged up on his bench. Johnny didn't know what was supposed to happen, but it was obvious that the physicist had arranged two groups of apparently similar equipment for purposes of comparison.

"These instruments were designed to measure small amounts of radiation of different types," Shultz explained breathlessly. "They are mass-produced and tested to very fine limits. It is inconceivable that there should be any detectable difference in performance. Watch closely, please."

He connected a main switch and adjusted a dial. Immediately the group of instruments on the left began to register, while those on the right did not.

"I have released the smallest amount of radiation I can control. Johnny. Ordinarily, I would not be able to measure such an amount. Ordinarily, I repeat—with the instruments on the right . . ."

He turned the dial a little more. The instruments on the left reacted promptly, while the others barely flickered to life.

"This second set of instruments, on the left, are those which were taken aboard the alien ship and then returned."

Again, he moved the dial, and this time both groups registered the same degree of radioactivity.

"We have now reached the normal *minimum* level at which these instruments operate," Shultz said quietly. "Do you understand what that means?"

"The aliens have changed them in some way."

"True, though an understatement. They have taken my instruments—which are an end product of advanced technology, remember—and subtly altered the mechanism so as to extend their range beyond anything Terran scientists have been able to achieve! And this with a science which must be alien to them . . ."

Johnny was silent, thinking over the implications of Schultz's discovery. His gaze wandered to the sphere of glowing wires that had come from the ship.

"How about that?" he asked. "Have you found out what it is?"

Shultz shrugged.

"It has its own source of energy. It radiates. It is, I suspect, an application of inter-atomic energies, totally different in kind from our own crude releases of nuclear power. What its *use* is. I have no idea."

"Looks like they understand our science, but we can't understand theirs," Johnny said. "And that's going to disturb the vanity of some folk back on Earth!"

"Everything's ready, Mr. Lucas."

Colonel Grant sat at the control board of the rocket firing station, his hand poised above shiny metal keys. He waited for the word of command.

The Director of the Titan colony stared through powerful binoculars at the alien spaceship and the small group of figures beside it. MacIver he recognised, and Ted Raginsky, among the spherically-suited aliens.

"Carry on, Colonel," he said.

Grant pressed down a firing key—and, from a point hidden by towering blue ice-walls, a slender rocket roared into the sky. Within seconds, it was but a tell-tale flame heading out to space.

Lucas held his breath. It was a critical moment. If the aliens misunderstood . . .

The Colonel pressed a second key and the atomic weapon was launched, following the target ship into the void. It would home on the target with radio-precision, its greater velocity shortening the gap until contact was made.

"How long?" Lucas asked.

"Eighteen minutes."

The aliens, Lucas noted, had returned to their ship. He used the intercom to call MacIver.

"Well?" he said.

"Nothing much," the psychologist answered. "They saw our two rockets go up and watched them, then went into the ship. That's all."

"All right. Return to the colony—just in case."

Lucas looked at his watch. These were going to be the longest eighteen minutes of his life. What reaction would the aliens show, he

wondered? He kept his binoculars on the spaceship; MacIver and Raginsky had disappeared and the ice-field was deserted. He began to imagine what might happen if the aliens failed to appreciate that this was simply a demonstration . . . and beads of sweat formed on his forehead and the palms of his hands.

"Colonel," he said, "no matter what the aliens do, you will not take any action against them except at my direct command."

"Very good, sir," Grant replied. There was just a hint of contempt in his voice, a soldier's natural suspicion of any non-military superior.

The minutes passed with leaden slowness; then, far out in space, a brief and intense light flared and died away.

Lucas let the air from his lungs in a noisy grunt.

"They'll have instruments to tell them what that means, I imagine."

The Colonel had his glasses focussed on the ship now.

"Something's happening out there," he said sharply.

A conical structure rose from the top of the spaceship; it revolved slowly, and sunlight flashed on a metal surface. Nothing else appeared to happen and, presently, the whole structure was retracted into the ship.

Lucas contacted Shultz over the intercom.

"What did you make of that, professor?"

"Nothing was recorded on any of my instruments," the physicist said. "I assume they broadcast energy-waves of a kind unknown to our science. Sorry I can't be more helpful."

After that, at regular intervals, the metal cone was elevated above the alien ship; it revolved and was lowered. This occurred for some hours; then Lucas received an urgent call to attend the observatory.

Duprez was seated in a swivel chair immediately below the eye-piece of his fifty-inch telescope and he was in a state of excitement.

"M'sieur Lucas, I have made a great discovery! Look, please, for yourself."

He slid from his seat to let the Director take his place. Saturn was large in the view and off-centre; Lucas saw what he took to be one of the smaller satellites—and was puzzled by its movement.

"You are watching Hidalgo, an asteroid whose orbit is a long ellipse about the sun," Duprez informed him. "It is near aphelion, which brings it close to the orbit of Saturn. You observe its movement?"

"Yes, but what significance has it?"

Duprez's eyes shone.

"You are watching such an event no man has seen before, m'sieur—

an interference with celestial mechanics! Hidalgo has left its orbit and is moving towards Titan. Some force has been applied to the asteroid, to shift it from the natural course it has pursued for countless centuries . . . and Titan is about to inherit a moon of its own!"

Lucas knew then that the aliens had reacted with a demonstration of their own, that mankind was totally outclassed by these beings from the stars.

The supply rocket from Earth arrived on schedule; and the only deviation from normal routine on account of the situation on Titan was the inclusion of two passengers.

Lucas met them in his office. Hetherington, the UN observer, had pale white hands which contrasted strangely with his ruddy cheeks; he also had the habit of keeping his eyes lowered, as if he could not bear the direct gaze of another person.

"Well, Mr. Hetherington," Lucas said, "I can't pretend this development is unexpected. I suppose you are replacing me in command here?"

"No, no!" Hetherington appeared horrified by the suggestion. "Certainly not—it is just that the Security Council feel they should have a representative on the spot. I may, perhaps, tender *advice* from time to time, but you are in no way superseded by my arrival. The United Nations have complete confidence in your ability to handle any situation that might arise. Regard me as—er— a neutral observer."

"I see." Lucas smiled faintly; it seemed that no-one was rushing to lift the burden of responsibility from his shoulders. And he thought he knew why. If anything went wrong, *he* was to be the scapegoat . . .

He turned, looking towards his second guest.

Wayland was a sharp-featured man with very bright eyes and a name that was well-known to millions of Earth's televiewers.

"You want a story, I suppose?" Lucas said.

"Yep! Folk on Earth are getting tired of official handouts. I don't imagine it's your fault, but somewhere between here and Earth, a lot of news is getting censored. I'm here on behalf of Tele-News and my reports will be broadcast driect to the public."

Wayland paused, a hint of regret in his voice.

"I can't use telecasting direct, of course—only sound radio. But I've a cine-camera and tape-recorder with me. I'll be putting over the full story when I return to Earth."

Hetherington interposed: "It may not be politic to tell the public too much——"

"The public pays your salary and are damn well entitled to know

what's going on," Wayland fired back. "I'm ready to respect Mr. Lucas's wishes if he wants a particular piece held back for a time . . . but that's as far as I'm prepared to go."

The Director cleared his throat and avoided looking at Hetherington.

"It may be as well to prepare the peoples of Earth for eventual contact with the aliens," he said. "I have no objection to your reporting the facts, Mr. Wayland—I have every objection to you presenting a distorted version of the truth for the sake of a story!"

"Hell, people aren't interested in facts and figures—they want a full-blooded story. I want an interview with the aliens. I want to know what they look like and how they behave. I want to know what they eat and how their ship works. I want——"

"You want too much," Lucas said drily. "I'm serious now, facts only. I'll check your script before you broadcast and I'll cut out every adjective . . . anyway, I think you'll find the truth sufficiently disturbing."

"Yeah?" Wayland gave the Director a sharp look. "I'd like to get busy right away. Can you spare someone to show me around?"

Lucas thought quickly.

"Difficult," he said, "we're so busy——" He paused, reviewing names in his head. "Yes, of course, there's Johnny—Johnny Paton . . ."

Grant was waiting for them when Johnny and Wayland returned from the ship. He moved in on the Tele-News man, like a hawk swooping on its quarry.

"Wayland," the Colonel said, "I want to talk to you."

"I'm listening."

Grant looked sideways at Johnny, and waited; Johnny grinned and ambled away.

"I understand you're broadcasting direct to Earth, your own story, uncensored. Is that true?"

"Within limits," Wayland answered cautiously. "Lucas——"

"Lucas," the Colonel exploded, "is a fool, and a dangerous fool at that! This alien spaceship represents a menace to Earth. You've talked to Shultz?"

"Yes."

Grant pointed up through the transparent dome of the colony.

"And you see that? Titan has a moon! Shultz reckons they have a greater control of atomic power than we have—I don't understand it completely, but it seems they are able to control the binding energies

of atomic nuclei in a way we can't. It's simpler and more efficient. The results speak for themselves; they reduce friction between moving surfaces; they create new properties in metals; they move an asteroid out of its orbit . . . and Lucas just sits and looks on!"

"What do you want me to do about it?" Wayland asked.

"Tell people back on Earth what could happen if this ship were allowed to return home. Tell them what would happen if a whole fleet of alien ships descended on Earth. Tell them our only chance for survival is to destroy this one ship, *now!*"

Wayland looked thoughtfully at the Colonel.

"Does it occur to you that the aliens might be in constant communication with their home planet?"

"That's a chance we have to take. With Lucas in command here, my hands are tied. But if the people of Earth can be roused to a sense of their danger, then perhaps I'll be allowed to strike before it's too late."

"Do you really believe you can destroy this ship, Colonel?"

Grant smiled grimly.

"I'd have a damned good try!" he said.

Wayland thought about it and shook his head.

"No," he decided, "I'm betting on Lucas. He seems to know what he's doing, and if he's right——"

"If!" Grant turned his eyes upward and his palms outward in a gesture of hopelessness. "And if he's wrong—what then?"

Wayland had no answer for that.

Johnny Paton walked slowly back towards his prefab. Neither Norma nor Ted Raginsky had offered much hope for communicating with the aliens, and until a mutual basis for understanding was effected, he could do nothing to put his scheme into operation. It looked as if he would never get his opportunity. Even MacIver was doubtful of working out a psychology for them.

"It's their three eyes," the doctor had said. "We can't comprehend what sort of visual field that opens up for them. Certainly, it will be radically different from our own—but just how different and in what way, I don't know. And we haven't seen them without their spacesuits yet—maybe they have other senses, different from anything we can imagine. Even if Schultz gets to the bottom of their physical sciences, we may be no nearer true understanding."

Johnny sighed; the situation looked like dragging on until the alien ship departed . . .

He reached the front door of his prefab and found it open. That was unusual. So, too, was the disorder of the living room.

"Olive?" he called.

He could hear her moving in their bedroom, but she did not answer. He crossed to the door and pushed it open. His wife was packing; one suitcase stood ready and she was throwing things into another.

Johnny said stupidly: "Where are you going?"

Olive Paton looked at him briefly, not ceasing her hurried packing.

"To Earth," she said; and added, seconds later, "with Colonel Grant."

Johnny was silent. He could read nothing in her face and his own feelings were too mixed to permit of coherent speech. He said, with a struggle:

"But how?"

"The supply ship returns to Earth four hours from now. We'll be on it."

She closed the lid of the case and snapped the fastenings, looped a strap about it, performing these operations with mechanical efficiency. She straightened up, facing him.

"This is good-bye, Johnny."

"Olive, wait——" There ought to be something he could say, he thought desperately, but what? "Let's sit down and talk it over."

She laughed hollowly.

"Too late, Johnny . . . I'm moving out. You're no good, a failure, and I don't want to waste my life. Maurice can give me what I want and I'm grabbing the chance while I'm still young."

She picked up her suitcases and pushed past him.

"Goodbye," she said, and was gone.

"You're going to let him leave?" Wayland asked incredulously.

"I can't very well use force to keep him here," Lucas returned.

"Why not? Till after the rocket's left, anyway. You're in command here, and the alien spaceship constitutes an emergency—Colonel Grant's action is practically mutiny!"

The Director stood looking from his office window, through the curving dome of the colony to the tiny supply ship. He liked this business even less than Wayland.

"He threatened to surrender his commission and return as a cilivian . . . and that would have placed me in an awkward position with certain VIP's back on Earth. No, it's better to let him go. Hetherington——"

"Hetherington will jump at the chance to advise UN that you be removed from command," Wayland said. "At least, allow me to make a statement—Tele-News can be a potent force for swaying public opinion in your favour."

"No!" Lucas's voice revealed gathering determination. "I won't be drawn into a political squabble. Grant and I represent differing viewpoints, and those viewpoints will be echoed on Earth. I believe he is wrong and that friendly relations with the aliens are possible, despite their obvious superiority—and that it is important not to be panicked into hostile action. I can't condemn the Colonel for his views; he is an honest man and bound to stand by his beliefs—that's why I am allowing him to return to Earth to put his case before the United Nations."

He was silent a moment, smiling at the Tele-News man.

"It will take time, anyway, for Grant to get things moving and bring a war fleet out here. I hope to prove his action unnecessary before then."

Wayland snorted.

"You're an idealist, Lucas! Grant is out for personal power and you'll be trampled in the mud. Your only chance is to stop him now. Sure, you can send in factual reports—but Grant will be on the spot, and that counts for more than the written word. He can tell any story he likes and you won't be there to defend yourself."

"I'm not worried for myself," the Director said lightly. "My job is to ensure that no harm comes to the people of Earth from this alien visitation."

Wayland said, doggedly: "You're wrong. Grant should be stopped before it's too late . . ." He switched tactics. "How about Paton?"

Up and up, the rocket soared, its tail flame dwindling to a pin-point of light in the deep blue of the sky. Norma had no eyes for the Earth-bound supply ship; she watched Johnny Paton and tried to read his feelings as he turned away.

And it was incredibly difficult to read any feelings at all in his face. His eyes were calm, there were no tears, no sign of regret or guilt; not even a hint of relief. He moved slowly, carelessly, as if it were not *his* wife who had left him for another man.

Norma wanted to say something helpful, but the only phrases that came to mind were awkward for her tongue. She smiled bleakly: it was impossible to be sympathetic in mathematical symbols, and words had

never seemed real to her.

You ought to be glad, Johnny, she thought—that woman wasn't worthy of you. Forget her! There are other women . . . there's me. I love you, Johnny, only you never seem to notice. I wish I could be brazen about it. I wish . . .

But she couldn't speak first, she realised; she wasn't that sort of person. And Johnny wasn't likely to notice her. No man had, not the way she wanted. Her conversation was limited to math, her face too homely—a double handicap.

She sighed; romance wasn't for her . . .

Johnny said: "Hi, Norma."

She smiled then.

"Our visitors are building something outside their ship—coming to look at it?"

"Sure," he said.

They walked in silence to the airlock and put on spacesuits. Johnny never said a word about his wife—and he didn't look as if he would be seeking consolation elsewhere. Johnny was too easy-going to exert himself; he was content to let life slip by, a casual observer. In time, he would forget Olive and be content in his own company.

Norma, with her unsatisfied desires, her loneliness, envied him his detachment.

They reached the ship, which was now the scene of some activity. The aliens were out in force. Norma counted, two, four, eight, fourteen of them. They were constructing a chamber—or rather a double chamber, with the two compartments separated by a transparent wall.

MacIver and Schultz were keeping an interested eye on this new development.

"What's it going to be when it's finished?" Norma asked.

Shultz shook his head. McIver said:

"I've got an idea . . . Lucas will want to know about this." He called the Director over the intercom, ending the conversation with, "——and bring an engineer with you."

Lucas came out with Fosdike, a stumpy man with thinning hair and blue eyes; he had been largely responsible for the design of the Titan colony.

"Well, MacIver?" Lucas said.

"Just watch, and you'll get the idea," the psychologist answered imperturbably. "If I'm right, they're almost finished."

Fosdike grunted, scanning the building operation with a professional eye.

"More like half-finished, if you ask me," he said.

"Exactly! *Their* half . . ."

Norma became excited. "I see what you mean, doctor. They have built the shell of a building with two halves. One section is complete—well, near enough—even to an airlock. They'll pump in an air supply and equip it the way they want—the other half is for us. A meeting place without the drawback of spacesuits!"

Lucas looked at the engineer.

"Can you finish our half, Mr Fosdike?"

"Sure, nothing easier—I'll set some men to work right away."

"Good!" The Director paused. "But don't let anyone think our problems are over. We still have to find a method of communicating——"

"It occurs to me," MacIver said quietly, "that our friends may have ideas about that, too!"

Hetherington kept his gaze on the floor as he spoke.

"You know, Mr Lucas, it could have been a serious mistake to quarrel with Colonel Grant. If the aliens turn out to be hostile——"

"I did not quarrel with the Colonel," Lucas said emphatically. "We held different opinions and went our own ways, that's all—there is a difference. And our visitors show every indication, so far, of wishing to establish peaceful relations."

"So far." Hetherington fluttered pale hands. "But with no adequate defence, no military officer . . . my report can hardly suggest that you have handled the situation with due regard for the safety of those on Earth."

"You—and your report—and your long-range, sit-on-the-fence bureaucrats—can go to hell!" Lucas said angrily, heading for the door. He stopped on his way out, turning, to add: "For your information, Mr Hetherington, it is most unlikely, in the event of hostilities, that either you or I will be called to account for our actions. This colony will almost certainly cease to exist . . ."

He slammed the door after him, and felt better immediately. Hetherington irrated him beyond measure with his pose of observer, his advice, his confidential reports to Earth. Lucas thought he would rather have been deposed altogether . . . no, he didn't mean that. The situation on Titan was developing nicely and he wanted to see it through.

Crossing to the airlock, he met Johnny Paton. One look was enough to decide that Johnny would let things slide unless he was taken in hand. The Director changed his plans on the spot.

"Johnny," he said. "I want you with me when I enter the Forum." Raginsky had coined this name for the building erected by the aliens. "Come along—Fosdike reports our section is complete."

"Sure," Johnny said, without interest.

They dressed in spacesuits and left the colony, walking across the ice towards the Forum. Fosdike was standing by, with Ted Raginsky and Norma. Three aliens were already in their half of the building.

Lucas viewed them with interest. Out of their space-suits, they looked somewhat like overgrown caterpillars, long and segmented, with six short legs and furry down. It was their colour that caught the eye, banishing any sensation of horror. Each alien form shimmered through a rainbow of colour, silver and blue and pink and breath-takingly beautiful.

Norma said: "I watched one of them come out from his suit, like a spring uncoiling. He must have been wound up in a ball inside."

"Let's go in," Raginsky said impatiently. "Those colours fascinate me—I've got to get to work with my paints."

"Next time," Lucas told him. "Sorry, Ted, but I want Johnny to come with me. Johnny and Miss Bush."

Raginsky turned away, disappointed, and Lucas went towards the airlock. Norma took Johnny's arm and pushed him forward. All three passed inside the Forum. It was warm, the air sterile; the room was small and equipped with three chairs facing the transparent wall beyond which the aliens were visible.

It was somehow embarrassing to be stared at by a non-human with three eyes.

Norma giggled. "Reckon they've never seen anything like us before. I feel practically naked without my spacesuit!"

Just then, a mechanical voice filled the chamber:

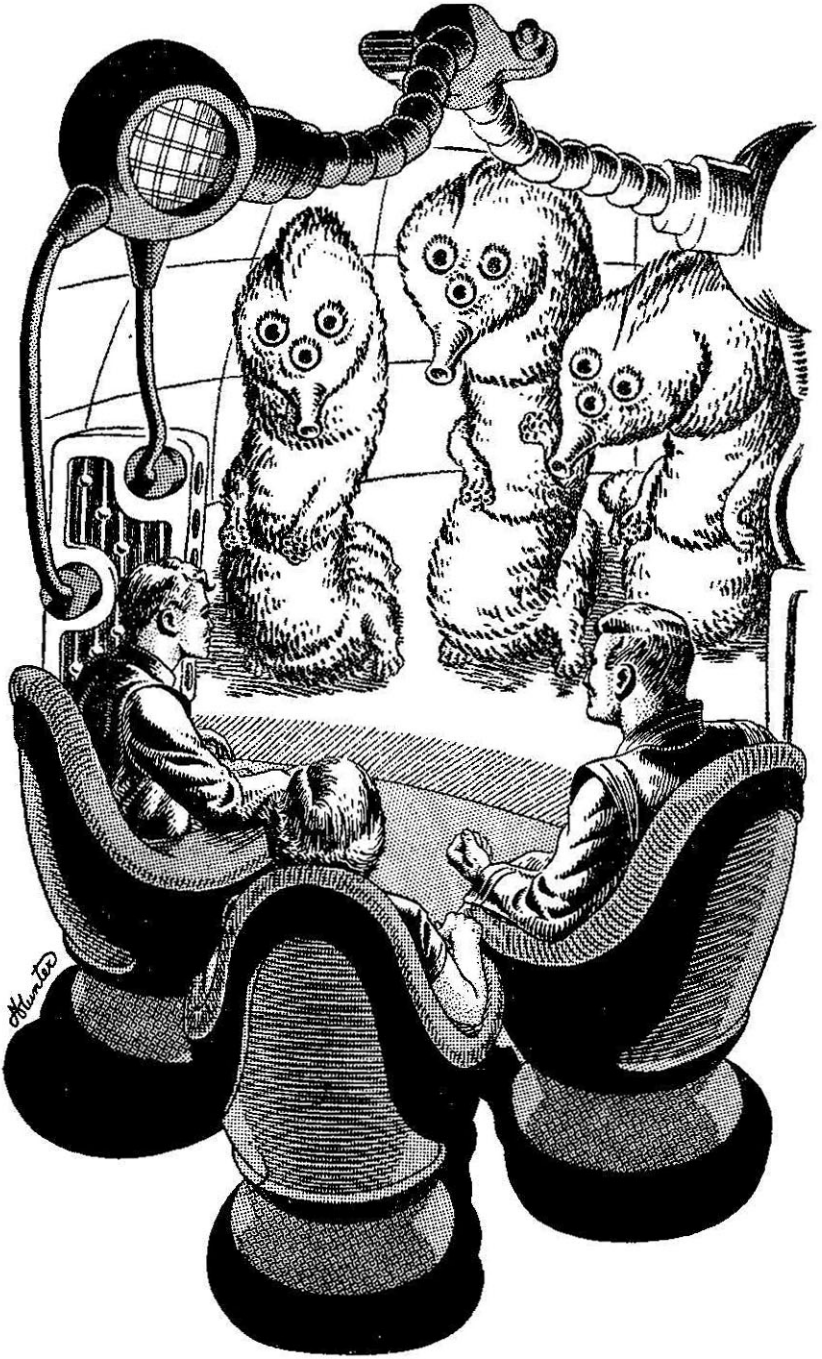
"*Welcome, Earthmen, to the Galactic Union . . .*"

Even Johnny was jolted from his lethargy.

"They can't possibly speak English!" he said, denying the evidence of his own ears.

The voice went on:

"You will wish to know many things, among them how it is possible for us to speak to you with your own language. Our people have visited many planets throughout the galaxy and this problem is always our first concern. From long experience we have evolved a system. Ever since we landed we have been studying you and recording your speech, and this which you hear now is a mechanical translation.


Hunter

"We cannot, of course, speak your tongue. But we are intelligent and have great experience in communicating with other races. The machine we use is automatic; we feed in your speech and ours to a set pattern and an adaptation is made; the broadcast is also mechanical. You know for yourself that it works . . .

"This ship is the vanguard of our expanding empire. In the years to come, other ships will visit you, bringing knowledge of scientific and artistic cultures of which you cannot dream. Have no fear for we mean you no harm; the Galactic Union has never molested another race.

"We have much to offer and, in return, seek only information of your people and way of life. Our purpose is to unite all intelligent life-forms, no matter of what kind, throughout the galaxy. Trade with other worlds will eventually come. You have everything to gain by joining the Union, nothing to lose.

"At present, you appear to be below the cultural level of most races throughout the galaxy, but that need not alarm you. It is understandable in so young a people—and we will help you to advance to a higher level. We have a simple mechanical aid for this purpose, which will be demonstrated in due course.

"In one hundred years from now, your way of life will have changed utterly. No longer will you be shut away in your tiny corner of the universe. You will have access to the ideas of races who evolved before your planet cooled, and beings whose form is totally unlike anything you may imagine, for we of the Union have only one quality in common—intelligence. We come from the central stars of the galaxy and our composite civilization is greater than that of any single race. Welcome, Earthmen, to the Galactic Union!"

Lucas's eyes glistened. He would have given much to have Colonel Grant with him just then; but the Colonel was no longer important . . . when this news broke on Earth, there could be few who would throw away the chance of joining a galactic civilization.

Norma dreamt of incredible new mathematics which would be opened up to her.

Johnny thought of Olive, and was sorry for her. The Colonel wasn't going to be a big-shot now and she wouldn't get the things she wanted. He wondered if she would come back . . .

The mechanical voice began again:

"We come now to our method of teaching. If you find your consciousness slipping away, do not resist—there is nothing to fear. Listen

carefully. You are seated comfortably, relaxed, with your hands resting lightly on your knees. One hand feels lighter than the other, so much lighter that it seems to float in the air of its own accord . . .

Johnny started violently. This was—*hypnotism!* Often he had used a similar technique to induce a trance—now he was the subject. Lucas and Norma were responding, he noted, and let himself relax again.

"I am going to count, slowly, and the higher I count, the more relaxed you will become. I am starting to count. One—two—three—four—five——"

He was sinking into sleep, floating away . . . the voice droned on, changing subtly. Now it was no longer counting. Somewhere, a metronome was ticking, ticking . .

"The metronome is slowing down—slowing down—slowing down——"

Time itself was slowing down. No longer was he conscious of an objective time. Personal, experienced time was all that counted. He had all the time in the world to learn what it was the aliens had to teach him . . .

Carefully graduated knowledge filtered into his mind. Step by step, information about the Galactic Union was presented; a background sketched in and the life of the aliens shown against it. Johnny began to comprehend the extent of the universe, the diversity of life-forms, the miracle of intelligence.

Till now, mankind had been a child playing in a nursery, unaware of the adult world outside. Adolescence passed in the trance and maturity dawned. The maturity of the species . . . Man was about to take his place in the ultimate civilization.

"You will remember everything you have learnt," the voice said. "Wake now."

Johnny and Norma were alone in the observatory. It was night on Titan and the enveloping atmosphere was a rich darkness studded with a myriad lights. The stars alone shone with a new meaning . . . Man was not alone.

The alien ship had gone, pushing out the frontiers, seeking other worlds and other races.

They watched until the ship was a point of light lost among the stars, until they could not tell it from all the glittering gems that made up the universe. Other ships would come—and Earthmen would build their own starships and a-visiting.

No longer would the stars seem cold and distant. They were lamps

burning in the windows of friendly homes throughout a vast city, lamps to show where intelligent life existed. A new era had dawned for the peoples of Earth . . .

Johnny turned away, awed by his new knowledge. On the morrow, the entire staff of the Titan colony would be returning to Earth, each with his appointed task in the new civilization. There was so much to do, so many things to be made ready for the coming of their friends.

"They've changed everything," Norma said quietly. "We *belong* now . . ."

"Yes, we belong," Johnny echoed, but his meaning was different. Leaving the observatory, he took her hand; and Norma's eyes shone as bright as any star.

SYDNEY J. BOUNDS

New Hard-Cover Science-Fiction Reviewed by
KENNETH F. SLATER

The third novel from Charles Eric Maine is perhaps his best yet. Which is, of course, the way it should be. However, CRISIS 2000 (Hodder & Stoughton, 10/6) will not appeal to all readers, and I'd advise those who like Galactic epics to leave it alone. The scene is confined to the site of the Festival of Earth (circa 2,000 A.D.) and is mainly concerned with the activities of a small group of characters. "Characters" is the right word, at that. There is Senator Drazin, a loud-mouthed gentleman who has invited any "living creatures anywhere else in this universe of ours" to attend and watch the Triumph of Man. Senator Drazin is one of the most shaken of the group when his offer is taken up, and a batch of beings land in the Festival grounds, erect an impassable energy wall, and start what may be an invasion! (The fact that all the beings look exactly like Drazin is just one more staggering fact . . .)

Wayne, in charge of the Festival, calls for help, which arrives in the persons of Colonel Kyle (an offensive type—he believes in shooting a long time before you see the whites of their eyes) and Jon Dexter (Dex) of the F.B.I. Dex is not certain that Kyle is right, and does considerable fence-sitting throughout. Drazin is in favour of giving the aliens a chance to prove whether their intentions are honourable or not, but when after a warning the "Dupes" advance their fire-wall, causing a lot more damage to the Festival buildings, he is forced to give in to Kyle, who calls up an attack force—which is unsuccessful in doing anything but damaging itself. The story moves along quite rapidly, with some background incidents (including a love-interest element) and does reach some quite high levels of tension. The climax of the releasing of an atomic bomb, the discovery of the truth about the aliens, the adventures of Dex and Dr. Farrow (a lady scientist) inside the fire-wall, are all excellent. However, I was not quite able to get along with the single-mindedness of the various folk. Dex was more interested in Dr. Farrow than anything else; Kyle wanted to blow 'em off the earth to the exclusion of all other ideas; Drazin was of the open-armed welcome school, and in their lesser parts everyone else was equally one-tracked. Nevertheless, very readable.

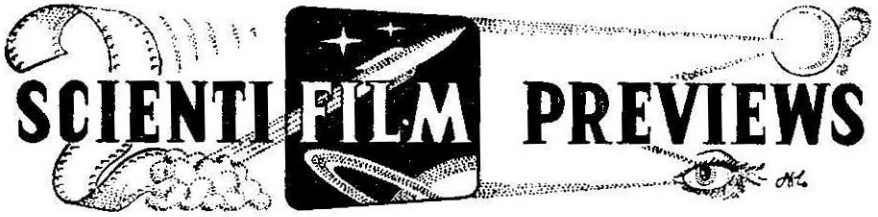
Also very readable is Chad Oliver's SHADOWS IN THE SUN (Max Reinhardt, 9/6). Paul Ellery is making a sociological survey of an American small town, Jefferson Springs, and

comes up with a list of coincidences. No one in the town had been there more than fifteen years. A Texan town, settled for 132 years—in which every family had uprooted itself and gone away, no disasters, floods or epidemics to cause. The town's culture is typical. So typical that it forms the impossible "average." Those are the two main points which worry Paul, and make him unsettled . . . and then when he sees a dark globe settle close to an outlying farm, passengers descend, and the globe takes off, well, he knows he is up against something far from "average." The reader is then taken into a complex philosophical study of the gentle art of colonisation—if your populace is too great for your lands, should you take land by force? Really civilised human races don't do that—they infiltrate gently, assuming a veneer of the barbaric culture, and carrying on their own culture underneath. The "savages" are pushed out, gently but firmly aided on the way their own culture is going—into the big-city groups! You perhaps gather from that just where Earth stands on Mr. Oliver's scale of reference and, yes, you are right. What Paul has discovered is an infiltration of civilised man into savage Earth. Just what Paul does about it, what his final decision is, I'll leave Mr. Oliver to tell you—for you really must read this one.

In BEYOND THE BARRIERS OF SPACE AND TIME (Sidgwick & Jackson, 10/6) expert anthologist Judith Merril has attempted—very successfully—to select "s-f" stories which are outside the confines of the material world. A difficult task, but one not impossible, as this work shows. "The Wall Around the World," by Theodore Cogswell, deals with the seclusion and forced development of psi-trained humans; a flavouring of witchcraft lifting the story way above the normal. "Crazy Joey" by Mark Clifton & Alex. Apostolides covers the problems of concealment for the lone telepath. Anthony Boucher's "The Ghost of Me" and others by John Collier and John Wyndham, demonstrate that humour is not lacking in the s-f field; a rather terrible revenge is taken by the redskin in "Medicine Dancer" by Wm. Brown, and horror by Bradbury comes in "The Veldt." The inclusion of Rhoda Broughton in

the list of authors indicates that Miss Merril has not overlooked the older and more "standard" weird concepts, and helps to make the book a balanced whole, sure to appeal to all readers who do not limit "s-f" to "space-fiction," a current term I deplore.

The other collection is the work of one author, Robert Sheckley, a comparative newcomer to the field, but one who has definitely made a name as a reliable author. To me, half the enjoyment in Sheckley's work is the very simple things he takes as a starting point. Food packaging, for instance, becomes the delightful story of two space-men, right out of food, who find an alien store of packed foodstuffs. The consequences are little short of hilarious, and give the title to "UNTOUCHED BY HUMAN HANDS" (Michael Joseph, 12/6). Chivalry is all very well, and so far as humanity is concerned it could be practised more frequently with excellent effects; however, in the case of "The Monsters," it was hardly the thing. Construction contractors have problems — Mr. Sheckley dreams up one confronting a not-too-efficient constructor of galaxies. But not all of the work is in a light vein—in "The Ritual" two space explorers, dying of hunger and thirst, are faced with a (literally) long song and dance before they receive aid—a case of total misunderstanding. Horror, refined, is contained in "Warm." Of all the thirteen stories in the collection, none can be picked as the best, but each is perhaps the best of its kind so far written by Mr. Sheckley.



News and advance Film Reviews Direct from Hollywood's

FORREST J. ACKERMAN

In issue No. 13 I produced my portable pulpit (it's collapsible and I carry it with me to every preview; I have only to add steam and it immediately expands upright) and climbed upon it not to praise BRIDE OF THE ATOM but to bury it. My sermon was showing that issue, and the reason I wore dark glasses was not to disguise the fact, but because I took a very dim view of the moral of the picture, namely that this was the thousandth scientist in scientifilm history (or histrionics) who had "*tampered* in God's domain." By the time my review had appeared the title of the picture, as yet generally unreleased (and for this at least we can be grateful), had been changed to BRIDE OF THE *MONSTER*. But whether she eventually appears on your marquee as the Bride of the Atom, Electron, Monster, Creature, Thing or Neutrino, beware of this mesalliance of pseudoscience and melodrama. And if by any good fortune this celluloid insult to the intelligence is co-featured with THE PHANTOM FROM 10,000 LEAGUES, run, do not walk, in the opposite direction from this eminently missable double bill.

The younger generation, consulting the dictionary for the first time for the definition of a "league," is forever leaping to the conclusion that old Jules Verne was off his or Davy Jones' locker when he wrote 20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA because it would be impossible to go that deep—you'd run out of earth. Eventually they rediscover what others of us did long ago, and Verne fans before us, that Old Jules' title was meant to describe the *nautical mileage travelled* by the *Nautilus* during its undersea adventures. However! When the producers title their picture THE PHANTOM FROM 10,000 LEAGUES, that "from" is the preposition that makes it altogether a fantastic proposition. Since a league is roughly 3 miles, the Phantom obviously has come from a distance of 30,000 miles—*really* out of this world — and after seeing the picture (just for you, Dear Reader, just for you) I immediately asked myself: "Was this trip necessary?"

The "phantom" is a kind of Greater Alligator who hangs around the shallow waters (about one-thousandth of a league) beneath the surface of the Pacific Ocean about 50 feet from the pebbly shore of Catalina Island. There's an exposed deposit of uranium out there on the ocean

floor, and a Scientist (it says in the script) has hypoed it with a dose of his discovery, called HEF, short for Hydro Energy Force. This irritated uranium now gives forth a shaft of lethal light in protest at having been tampered with. Before the picture is through a bunch of people have been killed, for no good reason that I can remember, and beast, uranium and scientist have, via a stockshot, been blown to Kingdom Come.

The morale of the foregoing, as spoken on the screen, was a variant of the Immortal Phrase above. This time it came out: "Nature has many secrets that man must not disturb. This was one of them."

Walt Willis and I, wishing to become independently wealthy over nite, are forming a company called KFH Productions (Kanu Fathom Hit), and plan a series of films including IN LEAGUE WITH THE PHANTOM, THE PHANTOM WITH 10,000 LEGS, 10,000 PHANTOMS IN THE LAGOON, and THE FATHOM OF THE OPERA.

If the insects are about to replace people, on the screen, this phenomenon may be attributed tc the phenomenal success of a "sleeper" called TARANTULA which is doing anything but putting audiences to sleep and has opened the eyes of avaricious producers anxious to cash in on a new good thing. THEM! is even being revived on the basis of the box-office of TARANTULA. Actually, THEM! was by far the superior s cientifilm — but it's TARANTULA that's getting the big patronage and paving the way for THE DEADLY MANTIS, THE ANTMAN (with American sci-fi artist turned actor, Paul Blaisdell, creating and operating the gi-ant); CREATURE FROM GREEN HELL (superwasp); and Ivan Tors' THE INSECT STORY; with Ray Harryhausen studying scripting possibilities of Curt Siodmak's *Amazing Stories* classic, THE EGGS FROM LAKE TANGANYIKA.

TARANTULA is not a bad picture, despite the money it's making. It was developed from a half-hour telefilm in the Science Fiction Theater series called "Food for Thot." The plot practically wrote itself, and there are scarcely any surprises in it for the s.f. fan, but everyone I have talked to has without exception had praise for the technical effects. The ever-growing tarantula that wreaks havoc (what else?) on the countryside is superbly effective. It was too easy to dispose of the giantarantula in the final reel by an aerial flame-bomb bath; I felt cheated. There should have been an extra reel with the scientist growing giant himself and destroying his creation, dying in mortal combat. But it still wasn't bad. And the sight of the scientist in the final stages of acromegalic dissolution, his features running like asphalt on a scorching day, have not come our way since the horrifying make-up job on Charles Laughton as the Hunchback of Notre Dame. Dandy for dieters who would like to lose weight faster by skipping a meal altogether!

And—praise be to the 9 Billion Names of God—I didn't hear anything about anybody monkeying with something they should have left alone.

WALTER WILLIS writes for you

In a recent issue of *Wireless World* a contributor bemoans the way the spaceships of science fiction still seem to be using outmoded radio techniques . . . like calling "Over" after each message as if it were still beyond human ingenuity to design a set that would transmit and receive simultaneously. He can't have read much science fiction, because he doesn't know the half of it. Most of our current spaceships are using radio equipment so far behind the times it's a wonder that when they are tuning in on the latest from Earth Control they don't get the Savoy Orpheans. The item that's always annoyed me most are those blooming rheostats. Every time an author takes you into the Mad Scientist's laboratory or a spaceship control room it's a hundred to one there'll be some character there madly twiddling a rheostat. Now a rheostat happens to be a big ignorant-looking wirewound variable resistance that was last used to control the filaments of valves when they still had directly-heated filaments and looked rather like drunken electric light bulbs.

Of course the trouble is that rheostats and big glass valves . . . or, as the Americans call them, toobs . . . were all the rage back in the 'Twenties when sf started, and most of the writers learned what they know about radio, which isn't much, from sf stories crammed in between articles describing How to Astound Your Friends by Building This Loudspeaker Radio Apparatus Guaranteed to Play. All the authors aren't like this of course—George O. Smith knows nearly as much about electronics as the characters in his stories—but most of them fall output over input when they try to be authentic. What they need is an Electronics Consultant. As an old ham from way back (I once built a piece of apparatus so like a mass of spaghetti that it might have been designed by Signor Macaroni himself) I'm willing to offer my services for a moderate fee, in the interests of scientific truth, the integrity of science fiction, and me. I could even advise the film industry on such points as that modern radio and TV sets don't leap into life the moment the heroine switches them on: even if it's Marilyn Monroe, they still need a little time to warm up. Take the B.B.C. too, and "Journey Into Space."

Now I haven't been listening to this programme much recently—I chop the firewood at a different time these days—but from what I remember a sample five minutes used to go something like this.

Our intrepid spacemen are about 50 million miles from Earth, three in one ship and one in another . . .

"Freighter No. 1 to Discovery, Freighter No. 1 to Discovery. Over."

"Discovery to Freighter No. 1. Discovery to Freighter No. 1. Over."

"Freighter No. 1 to Discovery. Are you receiving me? Over."

"Discovery to Freighter No. 1. Receiving you loud and clear, strength QSFL5. Are you receiving me? Over."

"Freighter No. 1 to Discovery. Receiving you loud and clear, strength N3F. I have an Important Message. Over."

"Discovery to Freighter No. 1. What is your Important Message? Over."

"Freighter No. 1 to Discovery. Stand by to receive Important Message. Over."

"Discovery to Freighter No. 1. Standing by to receive Important Message. Over."

"Freighter No. 1 to Discovery. Here is Important Message. Important Message begins. The Mars Invasion Fleet——— aaaaaggggghhhh!"

"Jet, I think there's something wrong."

"Discovery to Freighter No. 1. Important Message not received. Repeat Important Message. Over."

"....."

"Jet, he doesn't answer."

"Discovery to Freighter No. 1. Am not receiving you loud and clear. Are you receiving me loud and clear? What is your Important Message. Over."

"Freighter No. 1 to Discovery. Receiving you loud and clear. Here is Important Message. Orders must be obeyed without question at all times. That is all. Over and out."

"I don't care, Jet. I've still got a feeling there's something wrong."

Now visualise this situation. Here we have two Earth spaceships, the only ones in the entire Universe. Is it really necessary for them to proclaim their identity every time they open their transmitters, or indeed at all? One would think that space was packed with spaceships like sardines all the way from Mercury to Uranus, all blaring away at one another like commercial radio stations.

Of course science fiction people aren't the only ones who do this. Take the climax of the average aeroplane film . . .

"Able Baker 69 Roger Lodger calling Control. Over."

"Control to Able Baker 69 Roger Lodger. Receiving you loud and clear. What is your report? Over."

"Able Baker 69 Roger Lodger to Control. Wing has dropped off, fusilage is on fire and dashboard clock has stopped. Instructions requested. Over."

"Control to Able Baker 69 Roger Lodger. Stand by for instructions. . . . Hello, Able Baker 69 Roger Lodger. Try winding it up. Over."

"Able Baker 69 Roger Lodger calling Control. Too late. Other wing has fallen off. Tell them I died for good old BOAC and give my love to Sir Miles—" CRUNCH. Screams. Ambulance noises.

"Control to Able Baker 69 Roger Lodger. No longer receiving you loud and clear. Come in, Able Baker 69 Roger Lodger. Over."

Now if these people hadn't been so fond of the sound of their own names that brave young test pilot would have had a less untimely death, and the Important Message would have come through so we could all have switched back to the Third Programme.

Dear Mr. Hamilton: I have received a copy of NEBULA No. 14 and am very pleased with it. Most specifically with Kenneth Bulmer's powerful "Sunset." I had the pleasure of meeting the author at the Cleveland Convention some months ago and, had I known at the time that he had produced this effort, I would have treated him with cringing deference. It's a remarkably trenchant story and precisely the kind of thing we are denied over here, due to the general belief that "downbeat" stories are to be avoided.

The same holds true in Eric Frank Russell's "Down, Rover, Down." For some reason or other the average American seems to prefer stories with a build-in pat on the back: even when social aberrations are presented, there is generally a hero who is eventually able to rectify the situation with the aid of the omnipresent Underground and restore matters to rights—the said "rights" being an approximation of today's *mores.*

Consequently, I find it refreshing to read stories like these in a science fiction magazine with a broader policy, particularly when they are so well written as these two.

I just could not let NEBULA go by without going on record for my admiration of it.

ROBERT BLOCH,

Wisc., U.S.A.

* *Many thanks for your letter, Robert. I was extremely glad to hear from you. As you remark, I have always attempted to follow a broader policy when choosing the stories to appear in NEBULA than is possible for the majority of other Editors who are unfortunately tied down by a long list of narrow taboos and rules which considerably limit their choice of material regardless of its quality. If a story is well written and of good entertainment value, I am prepared to consider it, providing, of course, that any "risky" ingredient is a necessary part and not merely dragged in for vulgar effect.*

Dear Ed.: I was interested by the letter from Frances Evans and your reply in NEBULA No. 13, and I would like to point out that although your stories carry a different influence there still seems to be a lot of American idiom in them, phrases like "this was for sure," "that's for me,"

and that most horrible of circumlocutions "in back of" instead of "behind." *If Winter comes can Spring be far "in back of"?—Shelley.*

However that's a small point. I really want to take Frances Evans to task when she talks about taking science fiction into the sphere of good literature. There are several writers in this country who do serious work (a term I personally prefer) and who have ventured into the field of fantasy, George Orwell's "1984" for example or Aldous Huxley's "Ape and Essence."

The point is surely that the great writer is a man who feels intensely and who can communicate his feelings to us. If he has something of universal significance to say then his work lives and his writings become "literature," i.e. they are usually read (or ought to be read) by every fresh generation.

BOB LINDON,

Ilford, Essex.

* *It seems to me that you are inclined to be confusing the issue, Bob. Science fiction is a new and independent form of literature against which a majority of critics are biased owing to the deplorable standard of many so-called science fiction magazines. Consequently if we in NEBULA concentrate on publishing only material of the highest standard obtainable, it seems to me that we are doing a great deal to make it possible for science fiction to be universally accepted as having a definite contribution to make to the kind of "literature" to which you refer.*

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.

Dying to Live	
Always	
Hot Water	
Barrier to Yesterday	
The Moron	
Frontier Encounter	

Name and Address

Mrs. Clunie of Hamilton wins the One Guinea Prize offered in NEBULA No. 14. The final result of the Poll on the stories in that issue was:—

1. SUNSET
   By Kenneth Bulmer 35.8%
2. PUSHOVER PLANET
   By James White 24.6%
3. QUIS CUSTODIET
   By E. C. Tubb 16.8%
4. DOWN ROVER DOWN
   By Eric Frank Russell 7.6%
4. QUESTION ANSWERED
   By Mark Trent 7.6%
4. THE BEAUTIFUL MARTIAN
   By Sydney J. Bounds 7.6%

The result of the Poll on the stories in this issue will appear in NEBULA No. 18.

Dear Ed.: You probably need no more comment upon your excellent magazine from over here, but may I say a few words anyway. I have had a number of copies of science fiction magazines from a gentleman in London with whom I have been corresponding, and my pat on the back goes to NEBULA.

My letter is chiefly prompted by a letter in issue No. 12 from Mr. W. H. Cazly of Huntingdonshire. I feel sure that if Mr. Cazly will examine his feelings on the "American slant" in science fiction, or for that matter any other type of story, he will find that what he is really objecting to is the unsuccessful attempt at American language and point of view by writers who don't quite know how to do it. I wonder if you really know over there how very seldom a British author is able to create a really American character. I am quite willing to believe that our writers miss the mark by just as much when they try to build a Britisher. You know, an American hates a phoney (Americanism) as fiercely as you do over there. I assure you, a man who tries to graft an Oxford accent on to one that was "made in U.S.A." is just as much a subject of amusement here as would be a Yorkshireman who tried the same thing there. Incidentally, for Heaven's sake don't blame us for all the deformities our poor language suffers. Take a trip through the Shires and listen closely.

What I am trying to say is that, level for level, economically speaking, our language is surprisingly alike. There is an unfortunate tendency to compare the language of an educated Ameri-

can with that of an uneducated Britisher on our part, and the reverse on yours, and in that we are both wrong, of course.

FLOYD W. ZWICKY,
Illinois, U.S.A.

* *I am quite sure that no-one will doubt what you say for a moment, Mr. Zwicky. The point which Mr. Cazly was trying to make is that there seems to be a needless emulation of things American, whether of high or low standard, by British authors, publishers, film producers, and the man in the street, which seems to have little or no counterpart in the U.S.A.*

Although most of us in Great Britain have a great respect for the United States, we feel that it is an unhealthy symptom indeed when a significant proportion of our population begins to prefer stories and films couched in the jargon of American gangsters (whether written in this country or elsewhere) to material written in reasonable English regardless of its source.

Dear Mr. Hamilton: A line of appreciation. I like the single column layout of NEBULA, its clear print and lack of typographical errors, coupled with the fact that the stories printed are not space-opera nor boy-meets-girl disguised as science fiction. The cover illustrations are fine and, unlike one of your correspondents, I *like* pictures of spaceships on alien landscapes.

Mrs. E. MAYER,
London, S.E.18.

Dear Ed.: In NEBULA No. 14 James White's "Pushover Planet" takes first place although I can't understand why the Lednang creature committed suicide leaving the Terrans an opportunity of solving the problem of inter-stellar flight.

Second came "Sunset" by Kenneth Bulmer. This was an excellent story of what the future may be like.

John Newman's "Universe Times Two" was a very welcome addition. We rarely find good astronomical features in science fiction magazines.

PETER BUCKLE.
Leeds, 13.

* *Many thanks to both of you for your interesting comments on NEBULA No.* 14. *As I have said so many times before, it is letters of critical comment like these which help me to know exactly what everyone enjoys so that I may continue to print it in future issues. For those of you who cannot find the time to write a letter but who wish to help your favourite author win the* 1956 *Nebula Author's Award, there is always the Ballot Form on page* 109.

LOOK HERE—from page 2

An exceptionally talented newcomer, John Seabright, contributes "The Moron," the last of our short stories in this issue. I think you will agree that this is an outstanding first appearance and I am sure that if he can maintain this high standard Mr Seabright will be back with us again, and often!

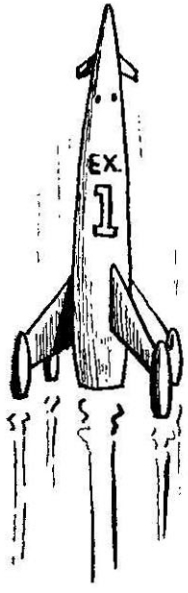
Finally, we have "Frontier Encounter," another outstanding human interest novel by Sydney J. Bounds, with just the spice of space-opera for which so many of you have been asking. Syd tells me that his latest book is shortly to be published by Fulshams Press Ltd., so I hope that all our Bounds' fans will be on the lookout for it now.

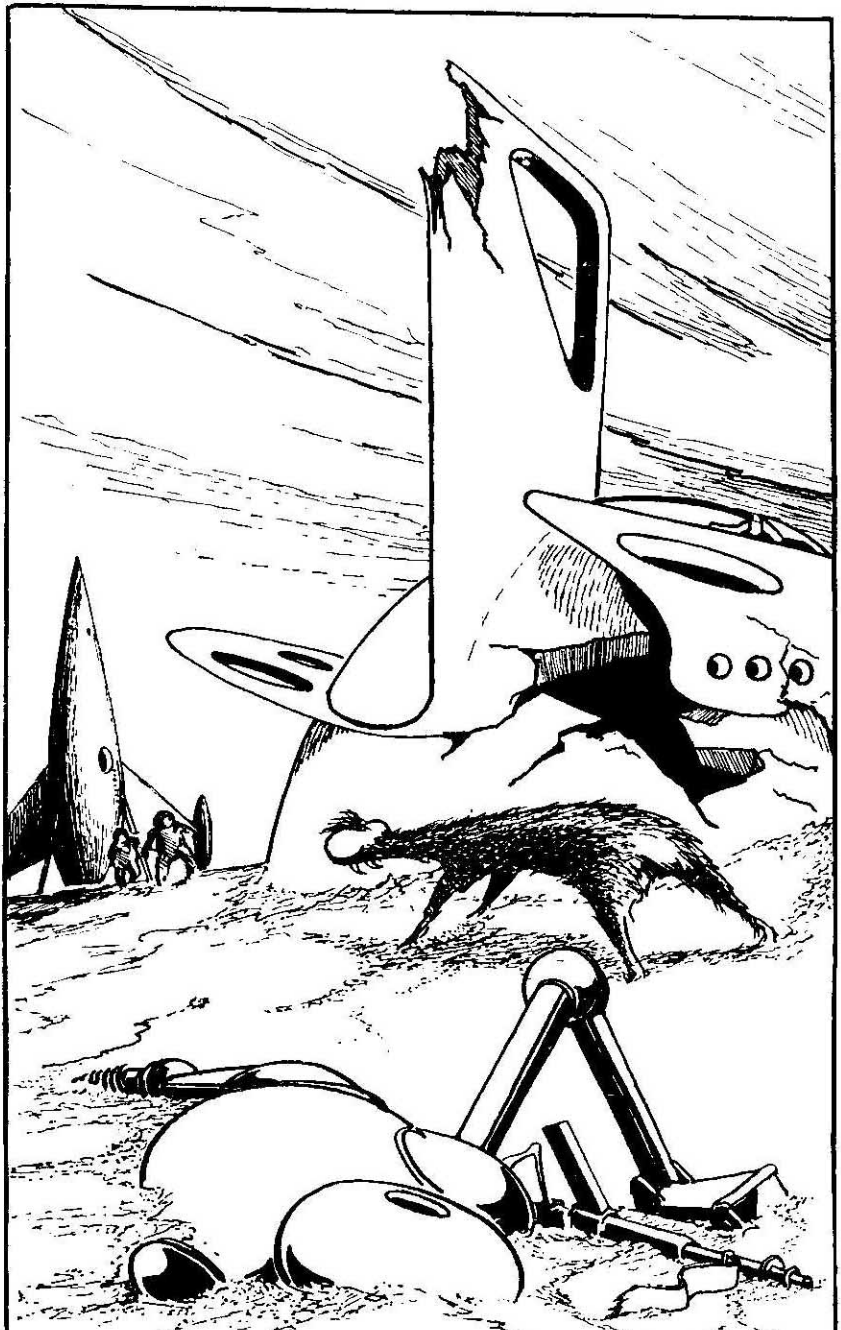
This, with all the usual features, is my offering this time, and I do hope that you enjoy it.

Before concluding I would like to mention two science fiction conventions which are to be held in the near future. The first is our own "Cytricon II"—Second Kettering Science Fiction Convention to most of us—to be held at the George Hotel, Kettering, over Easter week-end. I hope to be there myself and I very much look forward to having a chat with any NEBULA readers who manage to come along.

Unfortunately, owing to awkward geographical complications, I will not be able to make it to the Seventh Annual Midwestcon at the North Plaza Hotel, Reading Road, Cincinnatti, on May 26th and 27th, but I have been asked by Don Ford, its Chairman (and from whom further details are available at 290 Maple Ave., Slaronville, Ohio), to extend a warm invitation to all our American readers to go along and have a really enjoyable week-end.

Peter Hamilton




A.THOMSON.