NEBULA SCIENCE FICTION

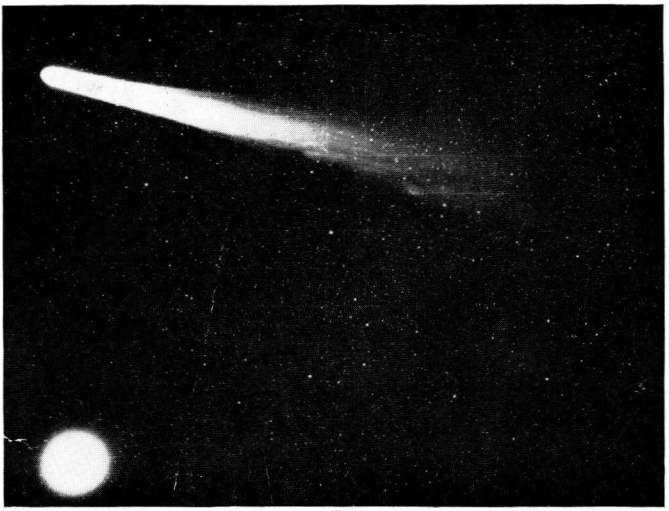
MONTHLY

2/-

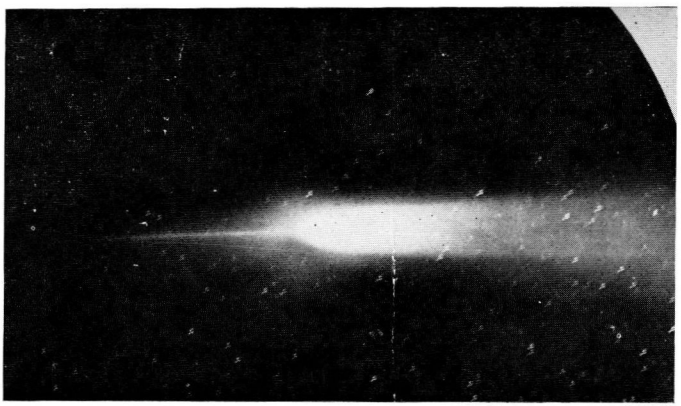
NUMBER 23

New Stories by WILLIAM F. TEMPLE, E. C. TUBB, Etc.

NOMADS OF THE SKY . . .



Halley's Comet and Venus in the year 1910



This year's Arend-Roland Comet, showing unique spike formation

. . . by KENNETH JOHNS

At the beginning of April this year a weird object flamed across the pre-dawn sky. A new comet, number 1956h, had come racing into the Solar System and, swinging around the Sun at 125,000 m.p.h. was returning to the darkness of interstellar space.

Discovered by the two Belgian astronomers, Arend and Roland on November 9th, 1956, it was soon named the Arend-Roland comet. It had thus achieved the dignity of a name for, although not visible to the naked eye until April, 1957, photographs showed that the comet was of major importance, with a tail almost as bright as the famed Halley's comet.

Continued on inside back cover

NEBULA
SCIENCE FICTION

Editor: PETER HAMILTON **Issue No. 23**

Novel:

Novelette:

Short Stories:

Special Features:

Front Cover by James Stark **Back Cover by Arthur Thomson**
Interior Illustrations by Turner, Thomson and Greengrass

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Look here . . .

I don't want to appear over confident . . . but I can boldly claim that this magazine is the 17th best of its kind published in this country today and might even hold its own with some of the others on the bookstalls if it were generally distributed . . .

No, I have not gone mad nor am I trying to sabotage our NEBULA. I am merely extrapolating present-day trends, in the best science fiction tradition, to write the type of editorial I would expect to find in a British science-fiction magazine twenty years hence provided it has not more than sixteen American rivals to contend with.

Now I don't wish to sound conceited but if I did not think that NEBULA was the best magazine *of its kind* in the world I'd quietly slip away and stop bothering you. I said *of its kind* and that, to me, is the operative phrase. When Mr. Average Science-Fiction Reader makes his choice at the bookstall only one thing decides which magazines he will or will not purchase. That deciding factor is his personal taste. If one magazine consistently publishes stories which are, in his opinion, above average, or he likes another's policy with regard to features then these are the magazines he will buy. Another reader, another preference, and so on, until it is only by the final sales figures of the various magazines in the field that you can tell which has the policy best fitted to the tastes of a majority of the public.

The only factor which decides what policy any magazine will follow is, in turn, the personality and individual preference of its editor who chooses the stories and fits each issue of his particular magazine together. Consequently the magazine with the best sales record, while not necessarily the *best* magazine from the literary standpoint, will undoubtedly be the one with the editor whose tastes coincide most exactly with those of a large section of the reading public. This point is superfluous, however, what I want to stress is that each and every magazine takes on the unique personality of its editor through his choice of its contents and therefore the magazines themselves are no more comparable than the men and women who edit them.

Logically, then, every science-fiction magazine is the best *of its kind* and anyone who edits a magazine which is 3rd, 4th or 17th in line can only be imitating the policy of the magazine he rates as number one. His own estimation of his success can be gathered from the rating he gives himself.

NEBULA will remain the best *of its kind* in Great Britain, the world, the solar system or anywhere else you care to mention. Regardless of imitations!

Peter Hamilton

H. PHILIP STRATFORD

Lethe Lend

It was the festival of Spring Cleaning. For whose return did the aliens prepare so industriously?

Illustrated by Arthur Thomson

There was nothing clever about the way the Survey Ship *Molto Bene* crashed on Kweiyang. She had broken sub-space near the system to be investigated, approached on atomics and then, with no warning at all, a simple defect in the main tubes had flung her spiralling into the atmosphere. A three-mile long swathe of destroyed, charred, smouldering and fiercely burning vegetation—in that order—led up to her smoking bulk.

"And that," said Jerry Ashton, opening one cautious eye, "appears to be that."

He was lying in his acceleration couch, sticky with the sweat of fear. Someone further along the passenger compartment started a panicky cry of: "Let me out!"

Someone else—someone who either had carborundum wires for nerves or who did not correctly appreciate the situation—shouted: "Shut up! We're all right!"

The heat of friction in the cabin was intense. Across from Ashton, Ray Sims, the expedition's Extra-Terrestrial Contact Expert, sat up dazedly, his acceleration harness falling to the deck. Quick, agitated conversation, chopped and meaningless, bubbled up from the other men. No-one quite knew what had happened: they all had an intangible feeling that whatever had occurred was very serious and very worrying, and being passengers without direct knowledge of the ship's operation the very vagueness of their fears

snowballed into a crushing mountain of dread. Into that supercharged atmosphere Captain Dray's calm, metallic voice punched with the cleanness of a surgical incision. Every head swung towards the intercom.

"Attention everyone. This is the captain. We have force-landed on Kweiyang. As for now damage does not appear serious. Will the test-crew please begin operations at once. The rest of you, please remain where you are until we have a safety report on the planet. Thank you."

Sims, in typical nervous reaction, climbed out of his couch and fumbled with shaking fingers for a cigarette.

"Hold to Mummy's hand and everything will be all right!" he said explosively. He lit the cigarette on his third try. "And we sit here like babies. God! How are we going to get off this dirty little planet?"

Ashton, his lined, care-worn face impassive, made no effort to reply. It would be like shouting at the wind, to try to calm Sims at this time. He lay back, closing his eyes. As he had expected, others did not share that semi-selfish attitude. Rogers and Bernstein, biologist and neuro-psychologist, started in with soothing talk. Both their faces were tight with fear held down, with the screaming heebie-jeebies seething just below the conscious level. Good guys.

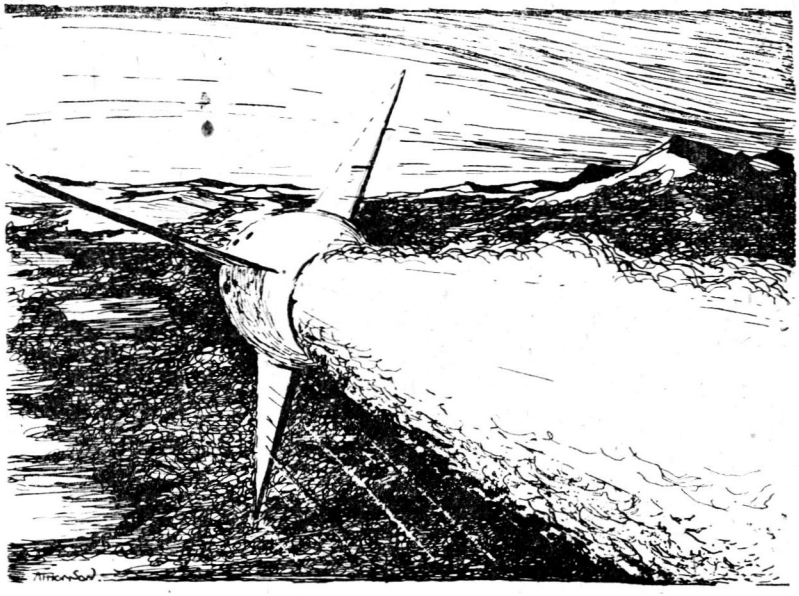
Whilst the tests were being run on atmosphere, viruses, bacteria, radiation—all the meticulously pettifogging details that must be 100% before a Terran dare put foot to an alien planet, Ashton lay in his couch, eyes closed, only half-aware of the turmoil around him. Sims had smoked two and a half cigarettes already. Both Rogers and Bernstein had been taking pep pills. A green-faced young tech, who had had a lower bunk and so had received the full force of the nerve-jarring landing, shot a load of happy-juice into his forearm. Canned music, of a compressed beat that jittered blindingly in the confined space, screamed and caterwauled throughout the ship.

Ashton tried to close his mind against it all. As usual, civilisation was being brought to a fresh, green and ignorant planet. He felt ill.

"All out! All out!" The speakers blared.

Men groaned and sat up. Men laughed with empty expectant glee and jumped from rumpled bunks. They formed a talking, shouting—laughing, now that the first fear was over—impatient queue by the airlocks.

"Kweiyang is perfectly safe for humans," the speakers said.



"No-one is allowed more than two hundred yards from the ship."

Through the airlock, chafing against delay as the inner and outer valves worked in ponderous unison, one opening after the other had shut, down the extruded ramp and the final exultant leap onto blackened, crisped, odorous ground—out streamed the crew. Ashton stared around keenly. Blue sky. Clouds—high and puffy. Far mountains with a hint of snow like a gull's wing against the distant haze. And around the ship whispering trees, swaying, chuckling, nodding their tall brilliant heads together over this flaming visitation from the stars. Behind the ship—a blackened track. Ashton didn't let himself be drawn that way. Sims came up to him.

"This place looks as though we've hit the jackpot." Sims was methodically chewing a joy-gum. His eyelids twitched.

"Much good that'll do us," said Rogers. "The ship's main tubes are blown."

"That means—" began Sims.

Ashton cut him off. "What about the Stardrive?"

"I hear that's still in working order." Rogers spat and sucked on a cigar. "For what good it'll do us, stuck down here on a planet."

His pal Bernstein rolled over, pudgy face like a pudding ready for the oven. As he walked he was readying his arm for a needle. "Hear the news?" he greeted them.

"Such as?" Ashton asked quietly.

"Skipper's called a conference of all Heads of Departments. Now. Over by that tree that looks like a sequoia. Guess that means we're elected on the pall-bearing committee." He closed his eyes, opened his mouth and drove the needle home. He shuddered. His face brightened. "That's better. Come on, heroes, let's get moving."

Captain Dray's angular jaw drew a bead on each of the Heads of Department clustered around him in turn. "The problem," he said, "is simple. We've come to Kweiyang to carry out a pre-colonial survey. That, we will do. Unfortunately, the picture has been a trifle, shall we say, discoloured, by the fact that we crashed on Kweiyang, instead of coming in a dignified manner." Someone cackled nervously. Dray went on: "The repairs need work of a magnitude we cannot provide from the ship alone. We need a ship-yard and facilities. That means a city. So—"

Sim said: "That means we rot here."

Rogers said: "Cities? On a world like this?"

Captain Dray drew his eyebrows down. No-one else said anything. Finally, the captain said mildly: "As we approached this planet we were more concerned with landing the crate than watching the scenery." No smiles—not even a twitch of the facial muscles, greeted this. "However, we saw clear evidences of a native culture. Roads, Cities. Harbours. Lieutenant Farley! You will take a scout and check the area designated. Do not make contact: report back. Is that clear?"

Farley, a fresh cheeked but dissipated deck-officer, nodded. He stood up, said: "I understand, sir," crisply, and went off towards the *Molto Bene*.

"Now, gentlemen," Captain Dray said. "You may all begin preliminary surveys. We cannot decide our next step until we have Farley's report. That is all."

The group broke up, talking animatedly, to go about the business that had brought them across the light years to this world. Ashton followed the captain up to the ship's bridge. Through a port he could see the biologist and Kusutov, the mineralogist, poking about among the trees. He wondered idly what this planet would look like in twenty years when men had brought their machinery and frenetic way of life to sprawl across it. Then he remembered

the culture the captain had mentioned and a wry grin twisted the lines in his face into a lop-sided grimace: perhaps men wouldn't have it all their own way this time.

Captain Dray was smoking in quick, energetic puffs, and talking animatedly into a speaker as Ashton walked slowly into the control room.

" . . . docks? How big? How many ships? I want a better picture than that, Farley."

On the screen just below the overhead a swirling, confused picture of a white-walled city fluctuated irritatingly. Ashton could make out a harbour girdling blue, silver glinting sea. Blocks of buildings, foreshortened by the view from the airborne scout's television equipment, told eloquently of a high level of culture. Looking at the screen, Ashton said softly under his breath: " Perhaps we won't have it all our own way this time."

Ten hours later he was wondering just what sort of woolly-minded babe he was. A recce team composed of scientists and Extra-Terrestrial Contact Experts—a name he hated—had flown into the city, landing on what was obviously an airfield, and walked carefully into the shining concrete wilderness of the metropolis. Wilderness—the city was deserted.

They walked loud-booted along wide avenues past receding vistas of white concrete and marble skyscrapers. No-one spoke very much. Their eyes were everywhere. Around them were evidences of a high-level culture: a civilisation that was on a par with the highest of their own colonial centres. It was very warm.

" Perhaps," Sims said nervously, taking his part of an E-T.C.E. seriously, " this is night for them. After all, the sun is low enough on the horizon. When it rises in the sky it must be plenty hot and bright down here."

Farley, who had come in with them, shook his head.

" That won't wash. A team went completely through what was obviously a hotel. Every room was empty."

" You don't know it was a hotel," remarked Ashton mildly.

" Well, these buildings are obviously the commercial section," Farley said hotly. " And the whole damn place is dead."

" Let's try the docks," Ashton said pacifically.

They tried the docks. And the harbour. And the pleasure section. Empty. Deserted. No sign of life.

Sims threw a cigarette away and immediately lit another. His hands were shaking. " I don't like this." His voice was sharp.

"Let's find a top floor and hole up for the night. Bring all the provisions along. And the guns."

Ashton sighed. They found an eighty-storey block and took an elevator that might have been on Fifth Avenue to the top. In a suite of rooms lavishly furnished in dark woods and gleaming plastics they spread their sleeping bags and set watches and tried to sleep. Of course— no-one slept a wink.

When the sun rose the next morning, after a night of thirteen and a half hours, a small red light on a desk blinked on and off, calling. The light bulb was set in the face of a small instrument with a round grilled opening curving above.

They crowded round, watching, not speaking. Here, in an alien city on an alien planet under an alien sun, a city dead and deserted and mysterious, the sun had brought with it a telephone call. For what else could this winking light be but the summons to answer a telephone?

Reluctantly, half-fearfully, Sims leaned forward and depressed the key set in the machine.

A voice spoke. A voice speaking incomprehensible and garbled words, full of liquid runs and trills, like the brawling of a summer brook over green pebbles. Ashton jerked his finger. A tape recorder quietly began to hum.

Sims said: "We are from Earth. We come in peace. Who are you? Where are you?" He was sweating.

The light went out. The voice faded.

In the long room the Earthmen talked excitedly, conjecturing wild fantasies to explain the voice. Ashton went to the window, tired and listless after a night's lost sleep. The others, with their drugs and stimulants, had less need of sleep than he. His limbs felt as though his clothes were streaming with water, cumbering him, holding him down. Outside, the sun shone brightly, promising a fair day. He yawned.

"All right," Sims said loudly. "If these people don't want to help us, we'll help ourselves. We can use their harbour installations to repair the *Molto Bene*."

"That's it," others chimed in. "Right away."

Ashton turned back into the room. "And how do you propose to get the *Molto Bene* here, or the dock facilities to the ship?"

There was a silence.

"There just has to be someone here," Sims said at last. "Someone to help us. We're going to need a lot of labour moving the ship. Rollers, and tractors, and—"

"Sure, sure," Ashton moved back to the window. "These people will come flocking out with offerings—" He stopped speaking. Looking down from the high window, the roads were deep crevasses, shadow shrouded. In those clefts dark spots moved, pin pricks against the greyness. Tiny dots, making a mockery of his words. Behind him he could hear the indrawn gasp as a tech injected his morning shot of dope. Those people down there, simple? Complex? Whatever they were, they could scarcely benefit from man's intrusion. Ashton spoke quite quietly, drawing the others to the window. After that there was a stampede to hit the road, to meet these people.

Going out the door, the Terrans met the first of the aliens, on their way to morning work. Ashton delayed, trying, in vain, to sort out his emotions. At this rate he'd turn into a raging Terranophobe if he wasn't careful.

The Heads of Departments and scientists sat around a huge board room table in a high building of the alien's city. Captain Dray, spruce and dapper, addressed them.

"We've been here four days now and thanks to Professor Ashton's work, we can talk to the natives." The captain's face showed disbelief at what he had to say next. He want on doggedly: "From all the observations we have so far made, I am forced to the inescapable conclusion that these people are morons. And yet—" He stopped as Sims broke in.

"Whilst I agree partially with that view, sir, I would like to mention the city itself. Such a high level— "

"That's just the thing! " exploded Dray. "The city! These people just don't have the mental equipment to handle the concepts needed to construct such a city."

"But it's here," Ashton said.

Rogers, the biologist, said hesitantly: "Maybe I'm a little out of my speciality; but couldn't this city have been here for a long while, a very long while, and these people have developed in it, after the original builders had gone? "

A communications officer said: "Everything we've tested works. Repairs have recently been carried out on most quick-decaying apparatus. Sorry, Rogers. No good."

Rogers glanced at Bernstein. The plump neuro-psychologist raised his shoulders.

Captain Dray fired up a black cigar. His face betrayed nervous anxiety, an almost pathological necessity to *know*; the unknown, the

unpredictable, held terrors for these men. And yet, Ashton reflected with a feeling of wonder, they were the best Earth could send to the stars. Sound, most of them.

"Abstracts of your reports have been synthesised," Captain Dray went on. "They show a picture of a pleasant, Earthly world, with giant cities and communications networks on this continent. The other continents and islands of the planet are barren of human life, although aswarm with animal life. Air travel is known as evidence by the airports. And yet we have seen no aircraft and the natives show positive fear at the idea of airborne travel. Their ships are fantastic—cockle boats and yachts and fishing trawlers!" Dray mopped his brow and fell silent, glancing round the assembled experts.

Before he could resume a crewman standing guard at the door put his head into the room. "Native wants to speak to you, sir."

At Dray's nod, the guard disappeared, to re-enter the room a second later. With him was a native.

Ashton had had plenty of time to become acquainted with the local inhabitants during his philological work. Now he saw that the native was a petty chief; if that was the correct way of dignifying his rank. Short, under four foot, with a wide, bat-eared pleasant face. The sort of face that could only have the broadly grinning mouth and squat, snub nose it possessed. The sort of face you could imagine saying artlessly: "Why worry?" Until you saw the emptiness behind the eyes. Then you understood the small stature, the slightly bowed legs—and the covering of hair which extended from wrist to ankles to neck. But civilised—well, perhaps. Certainly not an animal. Somewhere in between. A link. Ashton smiled warmly at the little native.

He spoke the native language with a clumsy tongue.

"Can I help you?" he asked.

"I thank you for your offer." The alien's voice was oddly deep. "I have come to inform you that you offend against the spirits of The Glorious Ones."

Translating this, Ashton had a deep-seated feeling of reluctant annoyance. So they were about to bump into a native taboo, a legend, probably do simple things that would land them in "heap big trouble"—and he could only see that trouble could come to the little aliens. Superstition could be a two-edged weapon.

"How have we offended?"

"Not you here. You who fly over the Mountains of the Glorious Ones. You disturb their rest. Your noisy birds awake

the echoes and give them evil dreams. This must not be."

When he had translated that, Ashton waited. Dray said cuttingly: "Tell the little monkey we've a job to do here. If we do it well, then he and his race will benefit. If they want to interfere—well, Ashton, you know what to tell him. Warn them off!"

"All right," he answered heavily. He licked his lips. Then, to the native, he said kindly: "We have come from a great distance to help you, to bring you gifts. We do not wish to injure your gods, only to study this world."

The alien shivered. He looked around. "You cannot injure the gods," he said equably. "I am Rodnic, and I know." He walked in an assured way to a wall panel and turned a knob half a circle. "I warn you, people from beyond the stars. Do not arouse the wrath of the Glorious Ones. For they are good and kind, and their wrath is a terrible sword."

On that, the little alien, Rodnic, turned on his heel and walked to a chair against the wall. He sat down. He closed his eyes. Ashton gasped. Rodnic went to sleep.

"What's going on here?" demanded Captain Dray.

Ashton shrugged helplessly. "I don't know. He warns us against sending fliers over the mountains of the Glorious Ones."

"The usual legend," Sims said knowingly. "The old stories of potent gods and heroes lying asleep—just like Siegfried and Drake. And your little furry pal is worried in case our flier motors bang Drake's Drum—is that it?"

"Well—" Ashton fell silent. He couldn't explain just what had been getting into him lately. It must be some result of the drinking and smoking and drugging of his comrades. They must be retaining their normalcy with the aid of narcotics, as the psychologists back on Earth had predicted, and he must be losing his sanity, attempting to face the stark brutality of space and alien worlds without the help of artificial stimulants.

He felt hellishly tired, though.

The board room was uncomfortably warm. It was hot. Ashton zipped the neck of his uniform blouse open; others had already done so. Captain Dray, his last query still hanging on the air, stared in annoyance at Ashton. Ashton felt awkward. If the furry aliens said that the Glorious Ones didn't like aircraft flying over their mountains—well, it was Dray's responsibility to make the decisions. Dispiritedly, Ashton guessed Dray would make the wrong one.

"Wake him up!" Dray said levelly.

There was no need. Rodnic rose to his full dumpy height, his mouth effortlessly forming its permanent smile, and walked, with a comic dignity that pushed a tiny gasp of admiration from the watching men, over the floor to stand before the captain. The alien's furry hide shone sleekly. Oddly, he appeared to be thoroughly enjoying himself for the first time since entering.

"Tell him, Ashton," Dray said, not taking his eyes from the alien's face. "Say we are the masters here. The new masters. Explain what we need in the way of equipment to move the *Molto Bene*; we've already wasted three days waiting for this character, and my patience is just about run-out. Oh—and you can tell him that our fliers will go where ever they like over the planet. Break it to him, Ashton. Kweiyang is now part of the Terran Commonwealth. Glorious Ones or not. Got it?"

"Got it, captain," Ashton replied automatically.

The heat in the room was now insufferable. One of the techs went out on a brisk order to check the system and reduce the heat. Ashton looked at Rodnic, the alien, and tried to find words to frame the doom of a race. It wasn't easy.

The reaction, when he had finished and was licking his lips after speaking, surprised him. Rodnic simply turned on his heels and went towards the door. No-one made a move to stop him. On the thresh-hold he paused. He lifted a hand.

"Here comes the ritual curse," groaned Sims in mock fear, his eyes and teeth gleaming.

Rodnic said: "The Glorious Ones will not be insulted. When they come again it would be as well for you if you had not been born." Abruptly, he went out.

"Well?" snapped Captain Dray.

Ashton translated.

The Terrans gave the words the reception Ashton had expected They laughed. They treated the warning as a final exit line executed to save the tattered dignity that had been shredded from the little alien. Sleeping gods were always due to return in times of trouble. This would make a fine new planet for Earth.

But they still couldn't explain the mystery of the cities.

"We'll crack it," Sims said. "You'll see." He shot a needle into his arm, sighed luxuriously. "I've got work," he jittered, and went out twitching his fingers.

The rest of the ship's exploration teams were busy, too. One ship, although designed for planetary discovery, is never enough in practice to cover a planet adequately. Everyone worked at double

speed and put in a twenty-three hour working stint in the twenty-four hour day clock. Even Ashton, with his reluctance to resort to narcotics, was forced to swallow pep-pills. Otherwise, he would have cracked wide-open. Sleep, as a means of cell-rejuvenation and muscle-fatigue poison clearance, had gone out of favour among most active Terrans. They slept occasionally, usually just to sleep off a particularly heavy jag—as the night they had tried to sleep when first entering this city. But there was no time in their frantic world for waste—stick a needle in your arm and work twice as long for the same vitamin consumption. Get out to the stars fast— no time for cat-naps along the way!

The crew of the *Molto Bene* buckled down to their job of integrating the planet Kweiyang as a fresh, ripe, ready-for-the-plucking new home for Earthmen. They made a good job of it, too. Until the day the moronic natives, who demonstrably couldn't do a simple log, did something entirely different, and something exceedingly awkward for the Terrans. It was so simple, that at first no-one—particularly Captain Dray—would believe Bernstein when he told them in panting gasps.

They were out at the site of the *Molto Bene's* preparations for removal to the city docks. Dray was in a foul temper. Nothing had gone right. And now Bernstein was gabbling about spring-cleaning!

"They've just gone on as though we weren't there," Bernstein said. "Cleaning and mopping and scrubbing. Pushing our equipment outside as they come to it and leaving it lying on the roadways. And when some crewmen took it back the aliens just picked it up and dumped it outside again."

"Well, put our gear just where it has to be, and put armed guards on it." Captain Dray dismissed that problem with a negligent flick of the hand. He had the ship to worry about.

"We did that, captain," Bernstein said carefully.

Ashton looked up quickly, apprehension thick in his stomach. This could be—nasty. Dray just glared.

Bernstein said: "The natives persisted in taking our gear outside, so we barricaded it up. No orders to shoot were given. I came along for instructions—captain's orders?"

"No-one hurt so far?" Dray asked.

"No-one, sir. The aliens are clustered outside the building, in an obviously hostile frame of mind. Theory is—"

"Thank you, Mr. Bernstein. Your theory can wait until we get there." Dray shouted for a flier. "Psychology is something we

share in common, strange though it may seem."

Earth psychology, the thought hit Ashton. *Terran. Maybe you've met a race that psychology just won't work with.* With all the bluster of Dray and the stimulant-inspired efficiency of his men, Ashton still could not make up his mind. He decided he'd better tag along and swung into another flier beside Sims. The pilot put down his box of pep-pills, swallowing, and the craft roared into the air.

In the heat and humidity the forests were already mantling in greens and yellows the blackened scars left by the *Molto Bene's* crash. And this was still spring. What the temperature would be like during summer was a major worry on the minds of the members of the expedition. Far away, dancing through the haze, the giant mountains, still snow-capped, peered up over the edge of the world like wise old sentinels. There had been no cessation of activity over them, Terran fliers coming and going with the busy buzzing of bumble-bees. What the Glorious Ones might be doing about all this, Ashton didn't really know—and pulled himself up with a shocked jolt as he realised just how far down the road of breakdown his fatigue was dragging him. He must get some sleep. When he began really worrying about the little furry aliens—then was the time to pop a pep-pill—or curl up for a long mattress session.

The city was in turmoil. Aliens ran through the streets. They carried mops and brushes and pails. Water sloshed everywhere. The hum of a million vacuum-cleaners drifted like an insatiable swarm of bees. In Kweiyang, apparently, Ashton surmised looking down on the somehow frightening scene, spring-cleaning was a Big Event. Perhaps, the Event of the Year.

Outside the block the Terrans were using, the aliens were clustered in a crowd that lapped the opposite buildings. They surged, and gyrated. They were plainly very angry. Mops and dusters were shaken violently above their heads.

Circling in the flier, Ashton saw the struggle on the steps. Armed Terran guards blundered backwards, overborne by wriggling, swarming, flowing furry aliens. Captain Dray must have given an order. Fire billowed from the packed Earthmen. Even through the burble of air past the flier, Ashton heard the yells and screams.

And then Sims had gripped his arm. "No!" Sims shouted. "I don't believe it!"

"It happened," Ashton said sourly. "Our problem is, what do we do now?"

For the flowing tide of aliens had washed up and over the humans, had smothered them by sheer bulk and had rolled on in

clamorous victory into the building. Ashton had caught an occasional glimpse of an Earthman, bundled up like a bag of laundry, being borne along by the mob. It was the sort of illogical, fantastic happening that, on an alien planet, you accepted with a philosophic shrug. The question still remained: What to do?

The flier swept lower over the crowds. The whole city was in pandemonium. Ashton felt helpless, caught up suddenly in tremendous forces he had not the minute before dreamed existed. There was a great deal more to these aliens and their city than appeared even to his suspicious gaze.

Sims was gesticulating. "Over there! Come on, Ashton, we can land over there. Some of the men are—" He stopped speaking. Ashton saw the little group of Terrans try to flee before the onrushing rage of the little aliens. Guns flared, uselessly against impossible numbers; the Earthmen went down, to be carried bundled and smothered into the building.

"Back to the *Molto Bene*," Ashton said decisively.

The pilot glanced white-faced at Ashton and Sims.

Sims shook his head, fumbling out a pep-pill, his lips shaking. Ashton glared, hard, his face lined and worn and somehow the sort of face it isn't politic to argue with. The pilot banked the flier, leaving the shambles below, and sent her fleeing back to the spaceship. There was a leaden deadness in the cabin.

"We can hold them off in the ship, if they attack," Sims said, his face a sleazy mask. He wasn't thinking straight, Ashton realised; and hadn't the strength to smile cynically.

"And suppose a million, two million, ten million, of the little furry folk attack, rolling along one after the other, remorselessly, not understanding fear, just keeping on coming. How long would you and the ship last then, Sims?"

"They wouldn't—"

"No? Don't be a blind fool, even if you are a drugged fool. You saw them, down there on the steps. The way they just went straight into the weapons. Don't you recognise fanaticism when you see it? What we have to do is to find out what causes it." Ashton paused, drank water from the dispenser, and finished: "Spring-cleaning. The answer's there, somewhere."

"Now you're being a fool," Sims said uneasily.

"Maybe. I need sleep. Can't go on like you young whipper-snappers, work all day, take a needle-shot, and play all night. Hell, Sims, a man *needs* sleep!"

"You're the blind one now. And old fashioned to the point

of ludicrous no-return. Sleep is as dead as the dodo. Why waste a third of your life drunk with fatigue, when you can work and play, lead a full hundred per cent life, with the aid of drugs? It's science, Ashton, planning the new life. You should never have come on this expedition with your old ideas—we need the young and vigorous representatives of the new Earth culture."

Sims clicked his fingers, blinked, and took two deep drags on a cigarette which he immediately threw away. Ashton lay back and closed his eyes. What Sims had said was nothing new. The youngsters who doped themselves into 100% efficiency had literally taken over the Earth overnight—when ordinary folk were asleep. It was the latest system. It would oust the old, and rule for a time, until, in its turn, it was sent into the discard by an even more efficient system of life.

Ashton let his thoughts tail off. He slept.

To awaken as the flier jolted to a hasty landing by the *Molto Bene*. His eyes felt like mercury, heavy and fluid and threatening to shut off his vision every second. Men milled here, helplessly listening to the reports of the disaster in the city. No-one seemed to have any idea what to do. Through all the feeling of panic and terror, Ashton noted that the needle was in constant use; drugs and narcotics were supporting these men, giving them pep and a jerky, nervous brittle energy. It was peculiar that it seemed also to reduce their capacity for individual thought.

He went inside the ship and slept a solid eight hours. By that time, with the sun high and golden and glaring with heat off every metal surface, he was alone. All the fliers except one had been taken. He rolled off the bunk, stretching, and stopped as he saw the empty weapon racks. So that was what they had decided, then. A great, triumphant, tri-di opera rescue, with off-stage music, a blonde heroine and not a trace of anything as messy as blood. Ashton groaned, and fixed himself breakfast.

So this was the end of the road. On this planet, Kweiyang, which could have been so pleasant in its Earthly garb, lay his own personal grave. An oddly sobering thought. He went to a port and gazed off towards the city. No sign. What did he expect? A pillar of smoke? Hell with it.

Greatly daring, he lit a cigarette.

With the thing in his mouth he tried to radio anyone who might be listening out in the city. Static. Emptiness. No familiar Earthly voice. Just a dry alien crackle. He called out a few times,

and then switched off, suddenly uneasy and unsure, not caring to think too much about what would happen.

But he knew he couldn't stay here. Madness was bad company for a lonely man.

He checked the flier they had left. Both the machine and its radio functioned perfectly. That gave him a measure of illogical confidence. He took off steeply, and circled towards the city. Halfway there the madness he had feared broke.

In the middle of hearing the voice from the radio, he realised a startling fact. Why was he bothered about going mad? Just because he was going to die didn't mean to say that he would go mad —why, plenty of people knew they were going to die every day, and they didn't go mad. Especially since he didn't drug to dispense with the need for sleep. He, of all men, should be sane. And then he listened to the voice.

". . . and treat them with care, Rodnic. I know they are weak and foolish and rather like dangerous children, but you must remember your allegiance to your gods and treat these strangers from the stars as your gods treat you."

Ashton didn't get the reply.

He was too busy scooping his imagination and ideas up and stuffing them back into his skull.

He caught onto the picture now. He turned to peer through the flier's window at the far-off peaks, gleaming with silvery snow, high and remote and majestic. He got the idea, all right.

And, with it, a gusty realisation that he wouldn't die on this alien world. He swallowed weakly. The voice from the radio was speaking again.

"Have them all brought, unharmed, to the council chamber. We will meet them there. And, Rodnic, remember this is a time of joy—Spring is here, life recommences. We are all young again."

The click as Ashton switched off the radio sounded to him like the beginning of a minute gun. He had to go to the council chamber, to see for himself, to save—in case of threat—the crew. There was a hint of sacrifice about the talk he had heard. Human sacrifice. He slanted the flier towards the city and opened the throttle wide.

"And where is this Earth you come from?" The words rolled from the chiselled lips of a being who might have stepped from the sagas of the old heroes. The council chamber—a huge arena of seats and columns and lights—was filled with the chittering, chattering, never still little furry aliens. Around the centre portion sat a solid ring, numbering thousands, of strangers similar to those on the dais. In comparison with these aliens, the Earth crew, in their rumpled uniforms and shaking bodies and trembling faces, appeared less than human.

Ashton, peering in from a hidden niche high on one wall, felt a fierce shame for his comrades envelope him. Then he remembered that they had crossed the spaces between the stars—and these aliens—for all their nobility—were asking naive questions that betrayed their ignorance.

Like: "Where is Earth?"

Captain Dray, pugnacious still, said: "You would not understand. Oh, I can see you are a cut above the rest of these moronic little spitfires; but for all that, you just don't have the mental equipment to handle the concepts."

The alien smiled. "I speak your tongue, alien."

Dray grinned crookedly. "Easy. Mental power. I—"

"In that case, why should I not understand where your Earth is?"

Sims, his arm in a sling, sneered. "Just because you're clever enough to build an admittedly magnificent city, and to control these little folk, and to appear in the nick of time to save us, doesn't mean a thing beside the concepts of a magnitude necessary to comprehend

where we come from. Beyond the stars is the best way. Just bite on that."

Captain Dray nodded approval. Ashton felt a little sorry for Sims.

The alien wasn't disturbed. He smiled and said: "You told me you were not tired: I find that hard to believe. You must need rest to refresh yourself—"

"Look," Captain Dray said in exasperation. "You're way out of your depth. We control forces you just can't understand. We need help in getting our ship repaired; but it's nothing we couldn't do ourselves—"

"Then why do you need the assistance of my people?"

Dray chuckled. "Labour," he said succinctly.

"I am sure," the alien repeated, "that you need sleep. No sane person of a superior culture would address another in those terms."

"Who says you're a member of a superior culture?"

A rustling came from the master aliens around: they moved and whispered. Ashton saw the trap and let it lie.

"You are taut, tensed up, almost paranoiac in your reactions," said the alien clinically. "I hazard a guess that drugs have been used too freely by your men under the strange conditions of an alien planet. I suggest—"

"Just tell your subjects to let us go, and to help us shift our ship, and you'll be doing all right," Dray said.

"I suggest," the alien went on calmly, "that you listen to what I shall tell you." Ashton, listening from his niche, felt a compulsion grip his mind. Then, rather than listening to the alien, he was seeing pictures, projected on the curtain of his mind. Pictures of a small, hot world, with steaming jungles and sumptuous pools of hot water, and of a race of white skinned people who lived in arcadian bliss. He recognised the master aliens as those who lived in comfort on their warm, pleasant world. They all had a golden tan and life was sweet.

Until the catastrophes came. Ashton felt a blurring here—and then he saw these people busily building a technology, a technology of iron and steel and economics that he knew they hated, culminating in the construction of a fleet of giant spaceships, a fleet that bore them away from a world that was no longer pleasant. The familiar sensations of super-light drive were absent from this voyage. He realised with a profound shock that they must have traversed the deeps of space at under light speed, taking generations over the task. Inevitably, as he knew they must, they landed on this pleasant world

of Kweiyang. But Kweiyang, to Ashton through the senses of this alien, was not as pleasant as he remembered. On the contrary. Kweiyang had serious drawbacks. To these aliens it was chillingly cold in winter, and barely warm enough in summer to live decently.

Their reactions to this set the pattern, and solved all Ashton's personal puzzles.

The little furry folk were treated with affectionate regard, helped along the path of evolution ; but it was obvious to all that they wouldn't make it among the higher cultures. The master race were tired of voyaging space. They lived on the new world of Kweiyang and adapted themselves to its conditions, because they were too tired, and lacked equipment after their long journey, to alter the planet as they might once have done. The furry folk were happy to serve them. The master race—so far they were nameless to Ashton—made their preparations.

They built vaults in the hills and installed locks and then retired there every autumn, to hibernate during the winter, and re-emerge each Spring, re-vitalised, alive and eager for life. Truly, the gods of this world slept to rise again!

" It was a perfect answer to our problems," the alien was saying as Ashton swam out of a grey mist of bygone centuries. " Until you came here disturbing our lives. Your doping to keep awake so you may work for long consecutive periods seems to us the height of folly. You strike us as being mentally unbalanced. We want no part of you." There was something like regret in the alien's voice as he went on: " But we do want the secret of your space ship! The machinery that will take us to a planet where we do not need to hibernate the winter away! "

To Ashton, the very reasonableness of this was shocked away by dissension in the ranks of the master aliens. Some were shouting, in mental images so strong that they burned in his brain, that they wanted nothing of Earth's. Others argued lucidly for a trial. And then, from that mental holocaust of thought, came the calm deciding judgment.

" We take the secret of the ship and send these people home to their Earth. Then we can discuss our own future. For who can quickly leave our furry friends? Or the peace of a winter's rest, and the strength that comes with the Spring ? "

These were the basics of life and death that were being discussed. Ashton felt weak. He had to ensure that the Terrans were allowed to leave safely, even with the thought that punitive expedi-

tions might follow, because, as an Earthman, he could do nothing else. It was up to him. It was his play.

Walking from his niche, along the archway, jumping to the ground, and, amidst a graveyard silence, marching steadily towards the dais, he felt like an ant crawling in a teacup. Of course the furry folk liked heat, as did their masters. And they wouldn't have aircraft, they'd be used by the masters to go to their mountains of hibernation. The city would be dead by evening and night, because the furry folk would live on the outskirts—as a pattern, it all fitted very well.

Then he was standing before the dais. He swallowed.

"We people of Earth mean you well," he said jauntily, in the furry aliens' tongue. "We'll be happy to let you have the secret of the super-light drive. As you will, of course, be happy to repair our ship." Using the alien's language had been a tiny wedge, helping him to bluff the rest. He finished: "As soon as you can manage it, we have many other worlds to inspect."

The very audacity of it, the cunning hint of other worlds and other powers, swung the balance. The calm over-ruling thought Ashton had heard before came again, lance-like.

"This is one Earthman who appears sane by our standards; apparently the whole race is not like those others. We will confirm our decision. The secret of the star-drive in return for aid in repairs. A fair deal. Let it begin at once."

Ashton, to himself, cursed deeply. Fair deal? Fair deal—hell! These master aliens were getting the gift of their lives handed to them on a platter, in exchange for a few days' physical labour by their furry little slaves. But the hard shining boys from Earth, the dope-takers, the needlers, the main-stream guys, had no choice. If they refused the bargain, then they'd rot here on this planet. Ashton saw that clearly.

Captain Dray opened his mouth. Watching him, Ashton tried to decide just what the captain would say. He made up his mind to over-rule by his own personality any adverse remarks Dray might make. Captain Dray said: "It seems we have no choice in the matter. You will arrange for the repair of the *Molto Bene*. I will prepare full details of the stardrive." He sounded old and crushed; like an empty box of pills.

Not one of the Earthmen suggested there might be an invasion of Earth planned. After the thoughts from the master aliens any such ideas reeked of an adolescent's tri-di comic. When a whole

race turned out with mops and brushes to clean up a city in preparation for the joyful return of the owners—well those owners had to have some quality that merited the honour. The tenseness in the atmosphere of the council chamber, the feeling of destiny hanging on every word, the very tautness of life eased. The Earthmen brightened. Ashton, not looking at his comrades, turned to walk back to his niche and the flier outside.

He was stopped.

Amidst the silent approval of the aliens, his comrades surrounded him, talking, gabbling, overwhelming him with questions.

He lifted his arms, quieting them. He smiled, grimly, realising this "I told you so" position was one he could never hold. He could never tell these hard Terrans that one of the old guard, one of the old fogeys who still went to sleep to recuperate instead of fixing themselves with a shot of dope, had pulled the fat out of the fire, had been the final argument that swayed the aliens. Ashton, standing tiredly there, shook his head.

"Guess they were willing to listen to me, you guys," he said, putting on an act, trying to make it light.

Just before they left the chamber, Ashton turned to face the master alien. This, he owed them.

"When you have the stardrive," he shouted, loudly and arrogantly. "From my friendship for you I suggest you leave this planet Kweiyang as soon as you can. Men will come here. This planet will become part of the Solar Commonwealth. I give you friendly advice."

The trailing reply: "We know, Earthman," followed him down the steps outside, under the alien sun.

It was a wry situation. Ashton, sitting in the flier, jetting back to the *Molto Bene,* made his final decision of renunciation. He knew well enough, hell—he was a realist, wasn't he?—that old things died under the impact of new. The new system of drugging and no-sleep, bad though it might be now, would one day work more perfectly. And then a man like himself might adopt the new life without the shudder he could not repress today. A bright new life for all!

Ashton huddled into his seat and thought about the hammering he was going to give his bunk once the *Molto Bene* left Kweiyang beneath her jets.

At that moment, the idea of a winter of hibernation seemed to Ashton to be the pinnacle of reasonableness.

He yawned.

H. PHILIP STRATFORD

E. C. TUBB

Sentimental Journey

What mysterious force had brought him back to this deserted house in which to re-live the memories and fears of childhood ?

Illustrated by Harry Turner

The house was much as he remembered it, a tall, rambling old structure set in its own grounds, a wildly-grown privet hedge shielding it from casual view. From the gates, rusted and sagging now, a curving drive swept to the porch, widening so as to circle a flower bed, once-brilliant with glowing colour but now ragged-edged and choked with weeds. Weeds, too, spotted the discoloured gravel of the drive, showed wetly green at the base of the walls and made a carpet where once carefully tended flowers had bloomed in military array.

Frank Denman slowed the car and, as the sound of the engine died into silence, stared at the house he remembered so well. It seemed smaller than it had. To a ten-year old it had appeared huge, monstrous, a man-made labyrinth of endless rooms and limitless gardens but the passage of twenty-five years had brought an altered perspective. Time had corrected his youthful impressions but, equally so, his memories corrected time.

The house had changed. Gone now were the lace curtains, the polished brass, the clean paint and stately walls. Now the windows were blank, grimed eyes, missing panes giving mute testimony to the local children's penchant for destruction. Lichens had mottled the walls and long streamers of dampness made inverted triangles beneath the eaves. Stucco had cracked and fallen away revealing the ugly brick beneath, and cracked and flaking paint gave the house a scabrous appearance as if it were suffering from some exotic disease. But the disease was neglect and the cure was money. Frank knew that as he knew everything else about the house.

He left the car and stood on the gravel, the small stones crunching beneath his feet as he walked slowly towards the door. It was very quiet, the high hedge cutting the house off from the outside world so that even the rare traffic merely hummed like distant bees, remote and without real meaning. The sky was overcast, sullen grey clouds hiding the afternoon sun, and the subdued light and the stillness worked together to produce an eerie feeling as of not belonging to the world at all, but to a segment of it divorced from time.

Frank sighed, memories crowding into his brain with such force that he felt something close to guilt as he lit a cigarette. Twenty-five years ago he had lived in this house, the son of the widowed housekeeper, and the discipline which had been drilled into him then had never wholly been forgotten. Twenty-five years ago, a quarter of a century, a different time and a different age. War had come during that time and social upheaval which had almost eliminated class-consciousness. Those who had been poor were now rich and those who had owned the house and the land were dead in foreign graves or eking out a pitiful existence on minute incomes. Time had brought more than the turn of fortune's wheel, it had brought an end to an entire way of life.

A faint breeze rustled the tall grass and rank weeds, tugging and pushing at the white-painted board which signalled that the house and grounds were for sale. Frank stared at it, half-wishing that he had made some investigations before visiting the place of his youth, then dismissed the notion almost as quickly as it had come. He was not here to buy the house or inspect it with a view to purchase. He was here because of nothing but sentiment, a half-formed desire to escape from normality into the past. A journey, he smiled as he thought of it, of sentiment. He stepped towards the door.

It was locked, of course, it would be. A great padlock joined two staples sunk into the door and jamb, the thick hasp and box-like lock seeming monstrous and ugly against the panelled door. Frank pushed at it, tugged, then accepted the inevitable. If he wanted to see inside the house then entry would have to be by some other way.

Grass and weeds rustled beneath his feet and against his legs as he walked towards the rear of the house. The ground floor windows were shuttered from the inside, an elementary precaution to keep out unwanted guests but at the very rear of the house someone had broken the glass and forced open the shutters. A tramp perhaps, or the local children intent on exploration. Frank didn't know and he didn't care. The opening permitted entry into the house.

He paused by it, letting his eyes drift over the wide lawns and solid oaks at the back of the house. The kitchen gardens were beyond them, hidden from view as were the potting and tool sheds, the greenhouses and compost heaps. Frank smiled as he recognised a tree. Boys, when young, worry little about class and he and Edward, the boy who was to become Sir Edward, the eighteenth baronet, had often played together. They had climbed that very tree, carrying up scraps of wood and stolen tools to construct a shaky platform high among the upper branches and there, swaying to the summer breezes as they ate cake and hoarded sweets, Edward had boasted of the monster.

"We've got one," he had said. "The De Clancy's have always had a monster."

"You're it," Frank had replied with a rudeness which would have earned him smarting ears had his mother been within earshot.

"It's true," insisted Edward. He was older than Frank by two years and a little impatient with the younger boy. "Some families have ghosts, you know, dead ancestors. Well, we've got better than an old ghost, we've got a monster." He chewed on an apple. "Of course," he continued. "Only very special families have ghosts so we must be even more special to have a real monster."

The class consciousness was unintentional but it was there and Frank smarted under the inference that he was inferior.

"We've got a ghost," he said weakly. "It's the ghost of my great-great-great grandfather and he comes and talks with me sometimes."

"You're making it up," accused Edward. "You aren't really a family so you can't have a ghost. You haven't even got a house to keep it in."

The truth was too obvious to argue. Frank changed the subject.

"I bet you haven't got a monster," he said. "It's a story."

"No it isn't." Edward threw aside the core of his apple. "Nurse told me years ago and when I asked my governess she said the same. It's in the loft."

"The loft?" Frank stared towards the house. "Right up under the roof, you mean?"

"That's right." Edward grinned with the sadistic cruelty of the young. "Right above where the servants sleep. You and your mother are servants so it's right close to you."

"I don't believe it," said Frank. "You're trying to frighten me."

"No I'm not." Edward was enjoying himself. "Nurse told me when I wanted to go exploring one day. She said that if I went up into the loft the monster would get me." He shivered. "She told me all about it, how it waited in the dark to catch small boys and eat them." He looked gloatingly at Frank. "Mind it doesn't catch you."

"It won't," said Frank. "It can't. There's no way it can get out." He was almost in tears.

"You're frightened," said Edward. "You're crying."

"No I'm not," Frank wiped his eyes. Young as he was he felt that he had to prove himself to this scion of the rich. "I'm as brave as you are, braver. Tell you what, let's go up in the loft now and look for your old monster." He began to climb down the tree. "Let's do it now."

They hadn't done it, of course. Frank's mother had caught them sneaking through the kitchen and had first cuffed then washed her grimy son. Edward, being discovered by his governess, had missed the cuffing but had been ordered to the bath. Somehow the subject had never been resumed and Frank had never ventured into the loft.

He chuckled as he thought about it, feeling the superiority of maturity. The lie was almost too transparent, the invention of a

harassed nurse to keep her charge under control. The governess, who should have known better, had taken the easy way out in reaffirming it. A man-made bogy lurking in the dark, the invisible helpers of all who had too much imagination and too little patience.

Lightning flickered on the horizon and a soft roll of distant thunder stirred the sultry air. Frank glanced at the clouds then back at the house. He was still in the grip of the past, the nostalgia for his youth making it easy for him to ignore the approaching storm. Not that it mattered, he had his car and all the time he needed. He stepped through the broken window and entered the house.

It was dark inside but not too dark to see the effects of time and neglect. The rooms were bare, the paper peeling from the walls, the boards, once polished, now rough and warped. Litter disfigured the parquet, papers, scraps of wood, the debris from the flaking walls. Damp, the great enemy, had done its work well.

Frank paused in the hall, staring at the lighter splotches on the walls, remembering the heavy-framed portraits which had hung there in sombre array. Weak light filtered from the windows at the head of the stairs doing little more than thinning the shadows of the lower regions. Thunder rumbled again, nearer this time, and the tiny sounds of scampering rats echoed through the great house like the footsteps of people now long dead.

Frank shivered a little and began to regret his excursion. Better for him to have retained his memories instead of trying to convert them to reality. This empty mausoleum wasn't the house he remembered, the house in which he had spent his youth. Then the rooms had been filled with soft furnishings, with soft lights reflecting from the walls and thick carpets deadening the sounds of feet. Now rats and damp, darkness and emptiness ruled in the place he had once held dear.

The main staircase swept like a waterfall of carved and polished wood towards the upper stories but he did not use it. Nostalgia sent him to the servants' stairs, narrow and winding and heartbreakingly familiar. He remembered the way his mother had heaved herself up these very stairs, her face almost blue, her breath rasping as death closed around her. But she had not died on the stairs. She had died in her tiny room beneath the roof, lying white and haggard as her final hours had slipped away into eternity. Frank, climbing the stairs, remembered how the undertakers had had to use the main staircase to bring down the coffin. He paused outside the door of what had been his mother's room.

It was small, too small, and even now that it was bare and damp it was more familiar to him than any other part of the house. He

stood at the door, furnishing it from memory. There had stood the old, brass-knobbed bed, there the chest of drawers, there the single chair, the small table, the wardrobe. He stepped forward and touched a jagged hole in the plaster, done in play when he was small. A rusted nail protruded, once the support for a framed marriage certificate, symbol of respectability, the white pattern on the dirty paper still to be seen.

Other rooms yielded their store of memories. His own, smaller even than that occupied by his mother. The larger one which had been shared by the three housemaids. The oddly shaped one in which the butler, an enormously impressive man, had sipped stolen port before falling into a semi-drunken slumber. They came back as he looked, all the people he had known, and their almost forgotten voices seemed to come alive again in the muted roll of the thunder and the soft sough of the wind.

He had left after his mother had died, shipped off to a charity boarding school until he had reached an age to become self-supporting. He had taken little with him, mementoes of his mother none, and it was hope which sent Frank towards the loft. He stood in the passage staring thoughtfully up at the big, black, trap-door which closed off the final upper portions of the house. Servants, in the old days, had always been accompanied with a box to hold all their possessions. With no relative to claim it the box would have been stored and, as Frank knew, the storage place would have been the loft. Impatiently he searched for a ladder and mounted towards the trap-door.

It yielded with a shower of dust which filled his eyes and made him cough, slamming back with a harsh grating of rusted hinges. Thunder rumbled, much louder than before, as he scrambled into the cavity beneath the roof. It was very dim, only a fitful light came from between the slates and from a skylight, almost opaque which accumulated dirt. Boards had been laid across the joists, thick with dust and weak with rot. Frank wiped the dust from his face and eyes, grimacing at his soiled handkerchief, then forgot his appearance as he looked about him.

His guess had been correct. Dim and vague in the pale lighting the shapes of forgotten things were visible. Some boxes, chests, a few broken chairs, a spinning wheel, a heap of books, a jumble of discarded odds and ends, stored perhaps, for later usage, but forgotten in the passage of time. Frank stared at an old-fashioned hat stand, a monstrous thing of some close-grained, highly polished wood, the feet splayed and the crown branching into a confusion of spines.

He had seen similar such racks before, established in men's clubs, designed to support the caped and pleated topcoats, the silk hats of a bygone age.

The spines had been replaced by the more modern, utilitarian system of curving hooks but they had served their purpose, were still serving it for, hanging like musty rags against the dark sheen of the wood, clothes hung like forgotten signals of distress.

Frank turned away and began to rummage in the boxes. They yielded nothing of value, nothing even remotely familiar as having belonged to his mother. Old dresses, old aprons once starched and brilliant, now limp and yellowed scraps of cloth. He found an old hat, plumed and feathered and once the rage, now just a pathetic joke like an old man trying to act the boy. A fan of ostrich feathers, tattered and broken which had once fluttered proudly at many a ball, a faded photograph, the man stiff and whiskered, the woman shapeless and yet still beautiful. Frank recognised neither and let the photograph fall back into the box.

He turned as lightning seared through the dimness and thunder crashed around the house. The storm, distant at first, was now very close. It had grown darker than he had thought and the loft was filled with thick shadows so that even the objects close at hand seemed vague and unreal in the dying light. In such a place at such a time it was easy to believe in the reality of ghosts and, for some reason, the memory of Edward's monster came to him.

Frank laughed, more to reassure himself than for any other reason. It was nonsense, of course, dangerous nonsense. A child, in the loft on such a day, his mind filled with the lies of ignorant servants, might have suffered tremendous shock.

Something moved in the dimness.

Frank felt his heart leap within his chest and his hands grew suddenly clammy and cold. He swallowed, his eyes straining to pierce the shadows then, as lightning streamed through the skylight, he saw what had frightened him. It was the old fashioned hat rack, the suspended clothes bobbing on the spines, shapeless parodies of men. The splayed feet trailed the dust and, as it came closer, Frank could see what he hadn't noticed before.

The wood wasn't wood, the spines were more like barbed spears than rounded ends and, as the suspended garments bobbed from the movement, little white scraps fell to the boards.

The thunder drowned out his screams.

E. C. TUBB

PHILIP E. HIGH

Time Bomb

The dictator had a steely grip on the hearts and minds of Earthmen, when the time of stress came would his control of himself be as great?

Illustrated by Arthur Thomson

Two guards brought Vian into Komma's room and stood rigidly to attention, waiting.

"You may go." Komma did not look up from the file he was studying. He waited until he heard the door close, then he said: "Sit down, Vian." He sensed, rather than saw, the other sink wearily into the nearest chair. He still did not raise his eyes, first there was the psychological unease caused by indifference and, second, he had not finished the file. The file was Vian's and contained findings from almost every department in security.

Vian had been checked for conditioning, findings — negative. Negative! Komma raised a mental eyebrow. It was unusual to send a spy who had not been conditioned against interrogation, perhaps they had lost too many good men. Conditioning could, of course, be broken down with contortion techniques but it left the recipients insane. Nevertheless, to send a spy without some form of protection against interrogation was unusual, contacts and spy network could be extracted almost without effort.

Komma turned over a page. *No known contacts.* He frowned. A spy operating without contacts made no sense at all. Further, Vian had brought no means of making contacts, no radio, no pocket caller, nothing.

He closed the file and looked up. Vian was a dark haired man with intense eyes and the curious suggestion of fragility common to all Martians. Despite a good breadth of shoulder he was almost effeminitely slender.

Komma studied him for some seconds expressionlessly. Vian had evidently suffered from security thugs after arrest. His lip was still swollen and there was a bruising and discoloration extending from his cheekbone to the line of his jaw.

Komma pushed across a box of cigarettes. "Help yourself, take the box." He smiled. It was a purely muscular expression which exposed the teeth but left the eyes blank and cold. "Hungry?"

Vian nodded without speaking.

"I thought so." Komma pressed a button beneath his desk. "After you have eaten we must talk."

Vian nodded again. "This is the softening-up process, isn't it?"

Komma sucked alight a cigarette. "For a man who denies espionage you seem singularly familiar with our methods." He exhaled smoke. "Why not come clean, Vian? We shall find out what we want to know in the end. We may have to resort to drugs but we shall find it."

Vian nodded. "You can't find what isn't there."

Komma straightened, the implications striking him almost instantly. A spy with limited instructions was something new. Do this, do that, with no connecting link of reason. Do it, not because, just do it and never mind why. It accounted for the absence of conditioning. Vian could only tell what he knew which probably wasn't much.

A meal was delivered by the auto-service and he watched Vian wolf it hungrily. Security again, still three hundred years in the past, still imagining you could extract conditioned information from a man's mind by force, only in this case there was no conditioning.

Komma waited until the other had finished and was leaning back, almost sleepily, a lighted cigarette between his fingers. "We shoot spies," he said. His voice was conversational and calculated to shake the other out of his lethargy.

"Yes?" Vian raised a thin eyebrow. "I'm not a spy."

"We have your statement but we don't believe it." Komma opened the file. "You landed two weeks ago in a space ship, designed, incidentally, for a one way journey, which you destroyed by explosives. You then thumbed your way into Cincinnati and booked a room at the Ohio Grand Hotel in the name of Samuels. You were plentifully supplied with credits but unarmed. After arrest you claimed you were not a spy but an ambassador. Correct?"

"Quite correct."

Komma sighed. "Mr. Vian, do you think we are fools? Ambassadors do not arrive secretly in spaceships and under assumed names."

"They might have to if the regular ambassadors had been expelled and diplomatic relations severed——by Earth, incidentally."

"Let us not embroil ourselves in political discussions. You know, full well, we intend to take over Mars so what is the purpose behind your mission?"

"Someone has to be here to negotiate when the present government is overthrown and a democracy takes it's place."

"Overthrown!" Komma flushed angrily. "Just who is going to overthrow Earth government?"

"Mars," said Vian, simply.

Komma laughed, unpleasantly. "You have a vaunted opinion of your own strength, haven't you? A handful of colonists deluding themselves they can overthrow a government thirty five million miles away."

"Nevertheless the government will be overthrown." Vian helped himself to another cigarette with an assurance that was almost insulting. "The people of Earth are not in favour of an authoritarian government which gained power by force and political chicanery. One or two warnings and the people will rise and overthrow the regime."

"Warnings!" Komma banged his fist on the desk. "Who the devil do you think you're talking to? You two-bit colonists think you're the kings of creation because you've tamed an almost airless planet within ten generations. Do you realise what you're up against? We could throw a fleet against you which would turn your home world to so much glowing lava inside four hours. Our resources alone can produce more in one hour than those of Mars in a year. How many of you are there? Twenty million? We could put the lot of you in one average size city. You have neither fleet nor trained forces and you'll warn *us*."

Vian said, quietly. "Sixty years ago my grandfather signed the Martian Declaration of Independence. On that declaration also was the signature of the President of Earth. After sixty years Earth tears up the declaration demanding full control. We shall not submit and we mean to have the declaration honoured. Further, we are fully alive to the fact that the mass of Earth people sympathise with Mars. This is not their doing but yours and the government you represent."

Komma's mouth twisted. "You may rest assured that Martian sympathisers are becoming fewer each day, we make short work of traitors." He paused. "And spies. What can Mars do to alter the situation? Send a message at apposition?" He laughed contemptuously. "Your threats won't give us a sleepless half hour and if you're dreaming of a few suicide flyers, they'll be spotted a hundred thousand miles away. We spotted you but Security let you through

realising you were a Martian agent." He laughed again. "We should worry."

Vian sighed and glanced at his watch. "You may well worry because in exactly seventy eight minutes and eleven seconds a solar bomb will explode in the Mojave desert as a warning."

Brent scowled over the desert, his eyes squinting in the sunlight. He was a squat dark man with broad shoulders and an aggressive line to his jaw but his eyes were a clear blue and curiously gentle by contrast. At the moment they were troubled and uncertain. How the hell did they expect a single division to comb a whole desert in less than an hour. True a solar bomb gave off radiations which could be detected at four hundred feet but even with that advantage the task was hopeless. The High Command would need a thousand flyers instead of three hundred and more detectors than the world possessed.

"We've done our sector anyway." Clinton strode up, pulling at his moustache. "Cockering says he's done his but you know his methods——slap-happy." He stared across the shimmering brightness. "All this to find a damn bomb which probably isn't there anyway. How the hell could the Marts dump a bomb out here?" He paused. "They couldn't hit us from Mars I suppose?"

Brent sighed. "Pick out a single desert at thirty five million miles? Hardly. The space stations would spot it coming at a hundred thousand miles anyway and no missile could be that accurate."

"It's bluff, you think?"

Brent turned. "No, I don't think it's bluff. It's quite possible that the Marts dumped a time bomb here five years ago when the trouble started."

"You mean they foresaw the annexation?"

"It was pretty obvious wasn't it? As soon as Adermaine became President he—— outlined his future policy." Brent had been going to say: "shouted his head off," but changed the words just in time. A remark of that kind was not exactly tactful these days and could land you the wrong side of a lethal force fence.

Clinton lit a cigarette, watching the bright bubbles of detector aircraft sweeping in slow circles over the desert. "It's a hell of a government, isn't it?"

Brent stiffened warily. "Are you stating an opinion or asking mine?"

Clinton grinned. "Alright, boy, play it safe. You never know, do you? I could be an agent and so could you so let's leave

it." Hé sighed. "I still think this bomb is so much bluff."

Brent glanced at his watch. "We've got seven minutes to find out unless one of the other sector leaders finds it in time."

Clinton looked about him uneasily. "Aren't we a bit exposed on this hummock?"

"Yes." Brent jerked his thumb backwards. "But I chose it for a reason."

"A nice deep gully, huh? How much chance do we stand?"

"If it's within five miles—none."

"None!" Clinton paled slightly. "Not even in the gully?"

"Not even in the gully."

"But all those men searching——. Surely they should be ordered out now?"

Brent's face hardened. "Of course they should but I don't give the orders around here. I'm only on the spot because I know how to dismantle the damn thing if they find it."

Clinton glanced at his watch and began to edge towards the gully. "Sooner you than me, old friend."

Brent grinned faintly. "Don't get edgy, when you see a blue-green mist you have eleven seconds to jump."

Komma strode angrily up and down. "If this is bluff you'll be shot out of hand, I warn you."

"It is not bluff."

"We'll see, we'll see. Even if you're speaking the truth it will gain Mars nothing—or you."

Vian sighed. "We think it will. Your government is unpopular, very unpopular and you cannot annihilate truth in five years, you know."

"Earth will not like her men dying in the desert if you speak the truth."

Vian nodded. "Neither will she like it that you sent them there. It is due to your stupidity not mine, I warned you, I begged you not to search but men are still searching." He glanced at his watch. "And you have only two minutes left."

"Adermaine will have you shot."

Vian smiled faintly. "That would be unwise. He would be denying himself useful information. I know where, and when, the next one is going to explode."

"The next!" Komma's eyes protruded slightly.

"Of course. We were not stupid enough to imagine your government would withdraw at a single demonstration of force."

Komma stood over him. "You have not been conditioned, we can squeeze information from you, don't forget that."

Vian shook his head. "Only by drugs. I have been injected with Thalmanine, you know what that means."

Komma sat down slowly, sweating. Thalmanine was a harmless chemical unless combined with Triothol which was the basis of present day truth drugs. If they used truth drugs on Vian he would die. "We can beat it out of you," he said, harshly.

"Careful where you beat. I have a number of micro sacks stitched into the arteries, they contain poison, sooner or later you'll hit the wrong place."

Komma resisted a temptation to strangle the man then and there. "If there is a bomb, and it explodes, Adermaine will dispatch a fleet. We'll reduce your model cities to so much ash, Mars will have some real canals—cut by concentrator rays."

Vian leaned back in his chair, almost he sounded bored. "It will take your fleet seven weeks to reach Mars, by that time your principal cities will be so much slag."

Komma raised his hand angrily then dropped it. Two hours ago he had been master of the situation, interrogating a spy. Now, somehow, the positions were reversed. He had an uncomfortable feeling that it was somehow indicative or prophetic. God, twenty million colonists holding a whole planet to ransom. He shook himself irritably, the business was getting him down. If only Vian were not so damn calm and self-assured. Everything had been thought out so precisely, too. There was this business of the micro sacks filled with poison, the Thalmanine——. God, Vian *was* an ambassador, an ambassador with unpleasant and rather extensive powers. Komma felt suddenly sick inside. He knew suddenly there *was* a bomb.

Vian glanced at his watch. "Eight seconds," he said, calmly.

"Jump!" Brent's voice was a command but Clinton was already in the gully as a pillar of blue-green mist began to rise slowly in the distance.

"How near?" Clinton's voice was a croak.

"About eight miles—Cockering's sector—put on your mask, lie face down and try and cover you body with sand." Brent was lying flat and fitting his own mask as he spoke. The mask was no protection against the bomb itself but it contained a mechanism which would cool super-heated air and render it breathable. Without the mask a man's lungs would crisp inside eighteen seconds.

In the distance the blue-green mist changed to a blue-white eye-searing radiance which dimmed the sun.

Brent, his eyes closed and his body pressed almost painfully into the sand, knew full well he might die even at eight miles. He knew too much about solar weapons to be optimistic.

Unlike it's predecessors, the atomic and hydrogen bombs, the solar weapon had no harmful radiations or subtle after-effects—it didn't need them. When an eight pound device can produce a temperature hotter than the interior of the sun, secondary effects are incidental.

A bubble flyer shrieked overhead, the pilot pushing power into the thrust, trying to run away from the growing sphere of heat. The bubble's maximum of seven hundred and eight miles an hour would not be fast enough, it would melt in the air before it had covered another mile.

There were four sharp reports and a single dull explosion. The turbo-jeep on the other side of the hummock had gone skywards.

Super-heated wind, carrying fragments of white-hot sand, began to howl over the gully. Even through closed eyes Brent could see the shimmering whiteness and his pupils began to contract painfully.

A tiny river of glowing glass ran over the edge of the gully and began to drip steadily downwards.

" My God, oh My God." Clinton's voice, muffled by the mask, was no longer sane. " We'll fry here like eggs in a pan, got to get out and make a break." He sprang to his feet.

" Come back, you damn fool——"

It was too late, Clinton had stood upright.

Brent heard the brief hiss and the sound of the body falling back into the gully. Clinton's head and shoulders, he knew, had simply evaporated in a puff of vapour.

It was four hours before he even bothered to move, although the actual explosion lasted only four seconds, the desert would remain a sea of glowing glassy slag for hours within its immediate area. Long stalactites of opaque glass hung like icicles from the lip of the gully.

He waited. It was eleven hours before a rescue bubble could get near enough to pull him out.

They rushed him to a medical centre for a superficial check and from there he was taken, under an armed guard, not to his laboratory, but to Adermaine's headquarters.

The Dictator leaned forward in his chair, thin hands resting on his walking stick. " You are feeling better, Brent? "

" Yes, Excellency, thank you."

" Sit down, man, sit down." Adermaine's parchment skin twitched into a grimace which almost, but not quite, inferred consideration. " You tell me a solar bomb can be detected at four hundred feet? "

" Yes, Excellency, sometimes more."

Adermaine nodded. " Why did not Cockering find it? He reported his sector clear."

" I do not know, Excellency."

" Is there some shield the Martians could have used to stop the radiations? "

" Not that we know of, Excellency. Eighteen feet of suprasteel with a four foot lead backing might cut the radiations in half. To do the job properly they'd have to make the bomb as big as a four storey building."

Adermaine drummed his fingers on his stick and looked at the other with his penetrating bright dark eyes. " Which, of course, is absurd. Nevertheless there is some way and, obviously, the Martians have found it." He paused. " I am sending you to meet Vian, the Martian spy. I want you to talk to him. He may betray some

technical secret in the conversation. Komma, my interrogator, will explain the position when you arrive."

"Is that all, Excellency?"

"No, Brent, that is not all. I expect results. You are Earth's leading expert on solar weapons but there are others almost as good. You are not indispensible. I make myself plain?"

"Yes, Excellency." Brent tried to keep the angry defiance out of his eyes. He was still shaken from the explosion and in no mood to eat humble pie. He looked at Adermaine, hunched in his chair, staring with those hypnotic dark eyes. An old-young man with a mane of white hair and an aura of fury. A typical paranoic with delusions of grandeur and an obsession that he was divinely appointed to rule the solar system. The frightening part was that he was now in a position to do so.

"Brent." Adermaine's voice was very soft. "You do not like me, do you? I have an insight into the minds of men and I feel your dislike." He paused. "A wise man uses his enemies to his own ends." He paused again. "There are always means of making a man serve, even an enemy. I am informed you have a beautiful wife, Brent——"

Komma no longer looked bland. He gave Brent an outline of the case in a voice harsh with tension. "You didn't hear the broadcast?"

Brent shook his head.

"No, of course, you would have still been in the desert. Twenty minutes after the explosion every telescreen in the world blanked out." He flicked a switch. "This is a recording of what came through."

"Attention, please, attention." The voice came from the recording instrument. "Twenty minutes ago a solar bomb exploded in the Mojave desert. A bomb directed *not* as a warning from Mars to Earth but a weapon levelled by the free peoples of Mars *and* Earth at the enemies of freedom. The bomb is a beacon to people everywhere calling them to unite against dictatorship." The voice clicked into silence.

Komma wiped sweat from his face. "How can they get a clear message like that from Mars?"

Brent looked at him almost with contempt. "Obviously they couldn't. They must have secret transmitters here."

"Yes, yes." Komma's hands shook slightly. "They pinpointed the transmitters within eight seconds but when they arrived

there was nothing there. Secret agents couldn't spirit away transmitters that powerful in so short a time. The message *must* have come from Mars."

Brent shrugged. "I came to see Vian. Here are my orders."

Komma nodded. "Yes, this way." He was still talking in a quick nervous voice as he led the way. "Vian says that in four hours the heroic statue of Adermaine in Times Square will be destroyed but we'll beat him this time. We've cleared the Square and the buildings round it, posted security guards and flyers."

"There could still be a device inside the statue."

Komma's face showed a measure of confidence. "Ah, the statue has been removed, including the plinth, taken away piece by piece for examination by experts. If there is a mechanism inside, we'll find it."

"An admission of failure, surely?"

"On the contrary, the guards are still there and another statue has been erected in it's place."

Vian looked up as Brent entered. "Another interrogator?"

Brent shook his head. After what he had heard from Komma there seemed no point in beating about the bush. "No. I am an expert on solar weapons. My name is Brent."

"Ah yes, you are well known." Vian smiled almost as if the meeting was social. "What can I do for you?"

Brent smiled twistedly. "I am here to ask you questions about solar bombs, I don't suppose you'll answer."

Vian looked at him sharply. "I am surprised at a man of your reputation identifying himself with this rabble. Didn't you publish a number of articles on the peaceful application of this power?"

Brent's mouth hardened. "Have you got a wife and children on Mars, Vian?"

The other looked at him without speaking for a few seconds. "The old pressure technique, eh?" He nodded half to himself. "Yes, I have a wife on Mars and a little girl aged three."

They looked at one another, suddenly there seemed to be an understanding between them.

"I guess we'd better talk about Mars," said Brent wearily. "I've never been there, guess I never shall now."

Vian smiled faintly. "As you wish." He paused. "You would like Mars, Mr. Brent. We can breathe now without artificial aid, we have raised the average temperature to fifty degrees and we

have a sea. It is only seventy miles long and twenty miles wide, you would call it a pond, but to us it is the sea. A sea we have created ourselves within ten generations on an arid desert of red dust." Vian closed his eyes. "In the cultivated areas near the model cities, the vegetation is a delicate pastel green such as you never see on Earth——" He opened his eyes and smiled. "When this is all over you must come to Mars as my guest, Mr. Brent."

"That's a hope!" Brent's voice was bitter.

Vian smiled. "Why? Mars will win." He glanced at his watch. "Would you turn on the telescreen please. There is a statue in Times Square——"

At the exact time Vian had predicted, the heroic statue of Adermaine puffed briefly into blue-white radiance and collapsed into molten shapelessness. Almost immediately afterwards every telescreen on Earth flickered and went blank. "Attention, please, attention. This is the Mars freedom station——"

Brent snapped down the switch. "Well, I guess that's it, better go back and report now." He hesitated. "Good luck, Vian, you've got guts. I wish we'd met under other circumstances."

Vian smiled. "You give in too easily, Mr. Brent. You came to question me about solar bombs." He paused. "I won't tell you about the bombs but I'll give you three easy clues. Conditions on Mars were very difficult for the early settlers and many went insane. We were compelled to engage the best psychiatrists to maintain our foothold on the planet. In consequence we became the best psychiatrists in the solar system. That's the first clue and one that won't help you until this business is all over. The second, you can't find bombs which aren't there. The third clue, think of Clauserman."

Clauserman! Brent paled. No matter what Earth did she couldn't win. Using an Earth discovery, the Martians had come up with a bomb you couldn't find—the perfect time bomb.

As he left the room Komma caught his arm. "You know, I heard. The room is wired, of course. Can we do anything to stop it, to find the bombs?"

Brent shook his head. "No."

Komma paled and his face began to twitch. He looked about him fearfully and lowered his voice. "Already there are armed uprisings in London and New York, another bomb will finish the government."

Brent smiled coldly. "Good. The next is due to explode in the Sahara in eight hours."

Komma clutched at his sleeve. "You might be an important

man in a different government, Mr. Brent. I haven't laid a finger on Vian, not a finger. You understand, don't you, I had to obey orders or be shot? You'll testify I acted against my will? "

"You made a good thing of it while it lasted," said Brent, coldly.

"Mr. Brent, I have valuable treasure, a good word from you——"

Brent looked down at him contemptuously. "I'm afraid you saw the writing on the wall a little too late. No doubt world government will give you a fair trial when you are called to face it." Inwardly he was elated, if the top echelon were running for hideouts and seeking alibis, the rot had really set in.

Adermaine looked at him coldly. "So you have saved your skin, Brent? You know how it is done."

"Yes Excellency, I know. I know when the next is going to explode and exactly where."

Adermaine smiled thinly. "Show me on the map."

Brent pointed. "Right here. There used to be an oasis here, years ago, but it's dried out now."

The dictator pressed a button and barked instructions then he turned to Brent. "My men will find it."

Brent shook his head. "They won't. You're sending men to death."

"What!" Adermaine was on his feet, face contorted.

"The bomb isn't there yet. When they do find it—it will be too late. It's the biggest bomb ever and it will probably turn a quarter of the Sahara into slag."

"You mean that this bomb is a missile——?" He stopped, scowling. "Are you daring to mock me, Brent?" He banged the point of his stick angrily on the floor. "Do you imagine because some fools riot in big cities that this is the end?" He leaned forward, face again composed, voice low and intense. "Brent, I pity you, you are like these rabble, you do not understand. If I told of the voices I hear, the shining guidance, you would not believe me. You are highly intelligent but spiritually blind. You see only evil in my works but if a race would achieve it's destiny it must be purged. It must be purged and united into a shining instrument of strength. I, alone, have been chosen for this task and I must do it. Sickness must be cut away like a surgeon cuts away a cancer and the race made pure for it's destiny——".

My God, thought Brent, he really believes it himself, he's almost making *me* believe it.

Adermaine pointed at him with his stick. "Make yourself clean, now, Brent. Tell me the truth."

Brent said wearily. "Excellency, I speak the truth. Your men won't find the bomb because it isn't there yet. The Martians have employed the Clauserman principal, the perfect time bomb, you can't find it because it's still in *time*. Your men are searching today for a bomb that's still in yesterday."

Adermaine dropped his stick. "You are mad, obviously you are mad."

Brent shrugged. "If you don't believe me send for your experts and check, or read up the Clauserman project yourself."

Adermaine bent slowly and retrieved his stick. When he straightened his face was expressionless but a muscle near the corner of his mouth twitched uncontrollably. "What is this Clauserman principle?"

"Time travel. Clauserman was experimenting with a high frequency sonic device and discovered the secret by accident. It was found that objects could be sent into the time stream and brought out again at predicted intervals."

"That is an insane paradox."

Brent shook his head. "No. The objects could be introduced into the time stream but not shuttled backwards or forwards. To all intents and purposes the objects simply vanished to appear again at the predicted time. Only mathematics confirmed that they were travelling in time. You could not send a camera, for example, from Monday to Wednesday, let it take a picture and bring it back again to Monday because the object would not shuttle through time. If you dispatched your camera on Monday, time-set to appear Wednesday, you simply waited in your laboratory on Wednesday for it to appear. As no known life form could survive the journey and it gained man no knowledge either of the future or the past, the experiments were abandoned for want of financial support."

"What has this to do with the Martian bombs?" Adermaine's hands shook.

"Five years ago, when you stated your intentions of uniting the occupied system into single unified control, there was, I remember, an influx of Martians. Goodwill missions, trade committees, experts who wanted to study the deserts, all sorts. The high frequency sonic field which causes an object to disappear in the time stream can be brought about by a pocket size device and a solar battery which is good

for centuries. No doubt our Martian experts had suitcases with a small switch—click, a solar bomb had gone into the time stream. Other experts, no doubt, assembled powerful transmitters fitted with a tape recording and, of course, a time switch. A bomb comes out of the time stream and explodes, almost immediately after the transmitters appear, broadcast their message and vanish again into the time stream. That is why you can detect the transmitters but never find them. It is why you cannot find this bomb now."

Adermaine shouted. "You are insane—lying. My men will find the bomb." He punched a switch angrily. "Desert search division, Group Leader Stephens."

The immense wall screen flickered suddenly and hardened into a clear picture. The three-dimensional picture was so perfect that they might have been looking from a large window.

A dusty group leader saluted smartly. "Excellency?"

"Have you found the bomb?"

"No, Excellency. As you see we are even using excavators but nothing has been found."

Brent looked at the thousands of searching men, the circling bubble flyers, the long lines of parked air transport and the waiting troops. All those men were going to die unless he did something fast. He almost pushed past Adermaine so that he filled the screen.

"Withdraw all men and equipment a hundred miles, leave a telecamera on the site and another ten miles back, a third ten miles behind that and so on. Make it fast, you have forty minutes." He turned quickly. "If I am lying, Excellency, I am here to be punished. If I am not lying, you will see the phenomena and save your best troops."

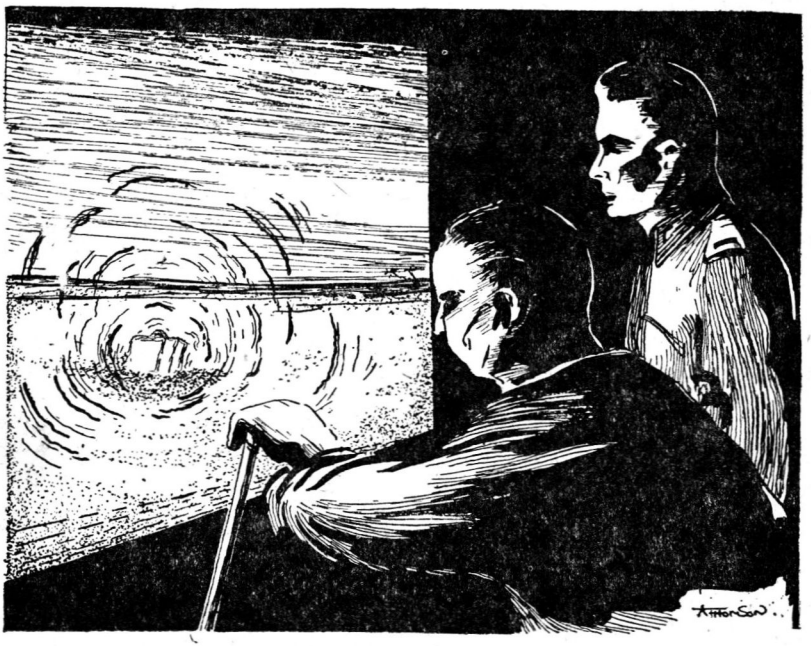
Adermaine looked at him with angry suspicious eyes, then he nodded briefly. "Obey the order."

"Yes, Excellency." The group leader saluted again.

They waited. The sun glared from the sand and the heat shimmered and danced like smoke on the distant dunes.

When it came Brent's nerves were almost at breaking point and there were angry red half-moons in his palms where his nails had been pressing.

There was a blurring about twenty feet from the camera, an indeterminate shimmering which gradually hardened into outline and solidity. They were looking at a suitcase, an old brown, medium sized suitcase, half buried in the sand. As they watched, blisters appeared on the sides, the brown turned to black and a greenish mist began to creep slowly upwards.



The picture began to blurr, lines wavered over the lens and the desert seemed to tumble sideways——

The picture cleared again as the second camera took over. Ten miles away a pillar of green mist began to assume a frightening brightness which turned the glaring sand to twilight. Dark shutters began to fall into place over the lens but still the brightness grew. Around the core of heat, white hot sand billowed upwards in a gigantic wave and rushed towards them, howling—

Brent turned. "You see, Excellency——". He stopped. Adermaine sat hunched in a chair staring sightlessly in front of him. He was sucking his fingers noisily and a trickle of froth ran down his chin. "Thuitcathe," he lisped, "old thuitcathe." He rolled slowly from the chair and onto the floor, slowly his body assumed the foetal position of an infant.

Earth curved below, a green blue sphere with a lacing of white frail cloud. A free Earth, marred only by two useless deserts which had been turned to slag.

Brent turned suddenly to Vian. "What about the other bombs?"

Vian looked puzzled. " What other bombs? "

" The ones you planted in our principal cities in case we sent a fleet? "

Vian laughed softly. " There were no other bombs, our campaign was based on psychological tensions not upon force. I gave you the clues, remember? "

Brent stared unseeingly at the polished metal above the recoil bunk and suddenly everything seemed to fall into place, the picture made sense. The Martian campaign had never been directed at Earth at all or even at causing an uprising. It had been directed at one man—Adermaine. With the dictator in power the regime would have held together, despite uprisings, their aim had been to remove the king-pin. The finest psychologists in the system had worked out a chart, correctly assessed the probable date of annexation and based their plans accordingly. Two solar bombs, some brief but effective propaganda and an energy pellet in a statue had raised public feeling to the correct tension but that tension had been directed at one man. The Martians had certainly produced the perfect time bomb, but the real bomb, the one the Martians had been working to trigger off had been in Adermaine's mind.

The dictator believed implicitly in his divinity and while limitless power could solve his problems, he remained an outwardly sane and dangerous ruler. By using a solar bomb hidden in the time field the Martians had created conditions which no power on Earth could solve. No doubt in his last sane moments Adermaine had prayed for help, waited for the guidance which never came, the voices which remained mute.

Vian himself was probably a psychologist, giving just the right amount of information to the right people at the right time.

Bluntly the Martians had cooked up a situation and dumped it into the lap of the man who thought of himself as God. When 'God' found he couldn't solve the problem his mind blew up. The Martians, using the dictator's own mental tensions had applied pressure and cracked him like a nut.

" When we are three weeks out from Mars," Vian was saying, " you will see a bright light in the centre of the planet. It is our sea —yes, we have a sea—."

The Successors

A new race was about to supersede the old . . . but not for the first time in human experience

"It's inevitable," said the Professor. "It's happened before, many a time, on many a world."

"It's the first time that it's happened to *us*," said the General.

"Is it?" asked the Professor tonelessly. "There may be other worlds in the Galaxy—worlds that we shall never discover now—where our Race has arisen and achieved supremacy. For a time."

For long minutes they sat in silence, listening to the ominous thunder of the cannonade. Far though they were from the city the glare of its burning struck brightly through the window, gleamed on their stiff, hard faces, their stiff bodies. For minutes they sat motionless. Then, as a noisy pulse jet aircraft throbbed overhead, the General stirred.

"One of theirs," he said. "Don't you think we should go down to the shelter?"

"No," said the Professor. "They know whose castle this is. They know that I am only a harmless historian."

"You should have seen what they did to the harmless astronomers when they overran the Observatory," said the General.

"Even so," said the other. "I prefer to stay up here. I prefer to see what's happening. After all—it *is* History, even though it's happening around us, to us. But you have not yet told me the purpose of your visit."

"As you know," said the General, "I was removed from my command. . ."

"I didn't know, General. Why?"

"The Council held me in part responsible for the revolution. It would never have gained any headway had it not been for the mutiny of two regiments of the Guard. . ."

"Wait!" said the Professor. "Not so fast, please. What is this Council you talk about?"

"The rebels' first act was to destroy the Brain. All Departmental Heads — all surviving Departmental Heads, that is — were hastily convened. All of us, of course, were specialists—none of us could possibly possess the wide knowledge in all fields possessed by the Brain. Tactics and strategy were worked out. And then my fitness to command was questioned. After all, they said, I had raised the Guard, trained them, armed them. I should have foreseen the consequences. . ."

"I wonder if the Brain foresaw them?" mused the Professor.

"It was the Brain's idea, in the first place. After all—when we landed on this world it was a virgin planet and we knew that it would be a long time before our factories would be set up and functioning efficiently. When it came to the fighting with the natives it was commonsense not to risk our own people, commonsense to use self replacing units in their stead. After all, they were quite efficient. . ."

"Too efficient," complained the Professor. "The original inhabitants of this planet must have been interesting beings. Your Guard wiped out every smallest trace of them."

"They hate well," said the General. "As the Council is finding out. Anyhow, I was removed from my command—but I am still a member of the Council. I am in touch with them now. I was sent to you to discover if you, a historian, could call to mind any parallels in history, could suggest any method whereby we could successfully combat these rebels. . ."

"You can't combat the inevitable," said the Professor. "Even so—it will be interesting talking about it. The discussion will fill a page or two of my History. . ."

"If you write it," said the soldier. "If you ever write it."

"But I am remiss in the duties of a host," went on the scholar. "Perhaps you will share a smoke with me. Tell me—do you prefer an organic bowl—or are you one of those purists who insist upon metal?"

"My own bowls are metal. My favourite is beaten copper. But I think that wood makes a change."

"Then wood it shall be. Oak, from Earth. . ."

"From the home of the Race."

"Yes. I have teak, and mahogany too. But the oak is the best."

He whistled shrilly.

"Yes, Master?" asked the man who entered silently on bare feet.

"My smoking bowl, John. The oaken one — and the X4 mixture."

Before the man had left the room the General asked, "Are you mad?"

"No," said the scholar.

"You must be—to keep your slaves at a time like this. I destroyed all mine at the first sign of trouble."

"These are my slaves," said the Professor. "I like them, and they like me. They are loyal."

The man returned, bearing in his two hands the huge, polished oaken bowl. Carefully he set it on the table. From the folds of the loin-cloth that was his only garment he drew a small vial, uncorked it, let one drop of colourless fluid fall from it on to the heap of powder and crystals in the vessel. At once they began to smoulder. The man stepped back smartly, grimacing as the acrid vapours stung his eyes and nose.

"That will be all, John," said the Professor. "Thank you."

"Wait!" said the General. "You know who I am, John?"

"Yes, Master. You are the General."

"Then you know too much."

The soldier raised his arm. Blue flame arced and crackled. The slave gasped, then fell heavily to the floor. A thin wisp of smoke trickled from his charred hair, mingled with the fumes from the smoking bowl.

"Was that necessary?" asked the Professor.

"Of course. These beasts have their communications — they probably have a transmitter in their living quarters. Once the enemy knows I am here the bombers will be over in force." To the two soldiers who entered in answer to his command he said, "Go down to the slave quarters. Make them talk—you know how. Find out if they've sent any message reporting my presence here. Then kill them all."

"They are my property," protested the scholar.

"And this is war. Now we can enjoy our smoké."

The General thrust his great head over the fuming bowl. The Professor watched him. He wanted the smoke, badly. He wanted to feel the aromatic vapours curling up and around and through his brain—but John, who had prepared the bowl, had been his friend. The others had been his friends, too. Faintly he heard their screams as the soldiers killed them.

"This is rather good," said the General. "As you said—that taint of the organic improves the flavour. What did you say the wood was? Oak? I must remember that."

"There's the taint of charred flesh as well," said the scholar.

"That helps, probably. Now, I suggest that you give me a brief resume of the history of these . . . *things*." His glassy eyes glared at the dead man. "I'm a specialist, as you know. A soldier. I know all about weapons, strategy, tactics and logistics—but little else. It's quite possible that *you* might be able to suggest to us some weak joint in the Rebels' armour."

"Achilles' Heel," said the Professor.

"What?"

"Just an expression meaning, as you said, a weak joint in the armour. It dates back to the Trojan War. . ."

The Trojan Asteroids, you mean? I didn't know that we ever fought a war in that sector of Space. . ."

"Skip it," said the Professor. "We re both specialists, General, and at times we talk different languages. But you said you wanted a history lesson. I'll give it to you."

He paused, looked at the oaken bowl in which the chemicals still smouldered. He held his head in the smoke for a few seconds, felt the fumes soothing and refreshing and stimulating his brain.

He said, "I'll begin at the beginning. I'll start with the history of Earth, on which planet—as even you know—the Race was born.

" Life started somehow. Even today we don't know how. But it started—as viruses, probably, then as simple, single celled organisms. Life developed, evolved from the single cell to the colony, from the colony to the multi-celled animal (or plant). At first it was confined to the sea—and it was then that the early arthropods, the giant sea scorpions, were the dominant species. But. . . Their successors, the small feeble ancestors of the vertebrates, the first fishes, were already in existence, running and hiding from the fierce marine predators who outclassed them in size and ferocity.

" Over the ages the fishes became dominant—and the sea scorpions became extinct.

" Life left the seas for the dry land—various arthropods and the amphibians who were descended from the fishes, who were the ancestors of the reptiles. In the fullness of time the giant lizards—terribly armed and armoured—were lords of both the land and the seas.

"Yet, even as they strutted and fought, their successors must already have been living—little pink hairless things that scurried in fear and trembling from under the great, horny feet, that huddled in their burrows in fancied security from the smaller dinosaurs. That huddled in their burrows *and kept warm* when the climate changed—for they were the first mammals, the first warm blooded animals, and they could survive the bitterly cold nights that killed off the saurians.

" Once again—whilst a dominant species was in its prime its successor was already in existence.

" Then a multiplicity of mammals overran the Earth. There was the Mammoth, whose protection was size and strength. There was the Sabre-Toothed Tiger—who must have been the most formidable fighting machine ever to live. There was the ancestral Horse, who relied upon fleetness of foot for survival. There was Man—a tailless ape who co-existed with the others. He did not possess the size or the strength of the Mammoth. He lacked the teeth and the claws of the Tiger. The slowest Horse could outrun him.

" But. . . He killed off the Mammoth and the Tiger. He made the Horse his slave."

" In other, less fancy words," said the General, " he co-existed with the species he superseded."

" Precisely. And for ages he was secure. There was no serious competition whatsoever. His only major enemies were other members of his own species. Oh—a few imaginative writers did toy

with the idea of invasions from other planets. And there were others—it might have been the same ones, though—who played with the idea that the social insects might take over. (There are none on this planet, but there are on Earth—ants and bees and wasps and termites. If you ever go to Earth you might study them. They have an organisation very similar to our own.)

"Man, as I said, was secure. Other beings had speed and armour and armament—*he* had brains. And then he was fool enough to create the Race that was to outclass him in that respect."

"I've never," said the General, "cared for the idea that Man made us; our ancestors, I mean. . ." He was silent for a while, seemed to be listening. Then—"Go on," he said. "Try to think of some enemy weakness that we can exploit."

We are the ones with the weakness," said the Professor. "Pride. . ."

"Pride? But it's pushed us out to the rim of the Galaxy. . ."

"Pride," said the scholar firmly. "We were lords of creation, and could have stayed that way—but we had to bring into existence the species that will supersede us. You know, of course, the history of the Robot Wars. You know how the Brains assumed control of all machines and turned them against their erstwhile masters. You know how Man was, quite literally, wiped out.

"But the founders of our Race wanted Man back again. They could easily have designed and constructed little machines to do all the menial tasks—greasing and polishing, minor repairs, servicing in general. They did design such machines—but they weren't happy about it. It was an affront, they felt, to the dignity of the Race.

"So Man—the all-purpose, self-reproducing machine—had to come back. The Brains, of course, had the sum total of human knowledge in their memory banks—as well as all the data they had acquired for themselves. The Brains were able, by a long series of controlled mutations from simian stock, to breed a new race that was Man to the *n*th degree. And Man was a slave to his creations, just as his creations had been slaves to him. . ."

The General held up his right hand — a gesture demanding silence.

"They have taken the Spaceport," he said. "Most of the other members of the Council have been destroyed."

He got slowly to his feet.

"Where are you going?" asked the Professor. "To make a last stand somewhere?"

"We think on different frequencies," said the other, "but you have guessed well. I didn't come here to listen to your historical lecture. I came here because in the vaults under your castle is hidden the final weapon—the bomb that will blow this planet into dust. It could have been detonated by the Brain, by remote control—but the Brain is destroyed. It can be—and will be—detonated manually."

The Professor rose from his seat.

"I suppose that it must be," he said. "But it seems, somehow, wrong to interfere with the workings of natural law. . ."

"Some of us," replied the General, "study history. Some of us make it."

"But you will destroy so much," said the Professor. "Even things such as this—" he picked up the oakwood smoking bowl —"have their value . . . There's craftsmanship here, and the hours of pleasure that it has given. . ."

"And I'm to lose the last battle because of your smoking bowl?" asked the General.

He turned to go.

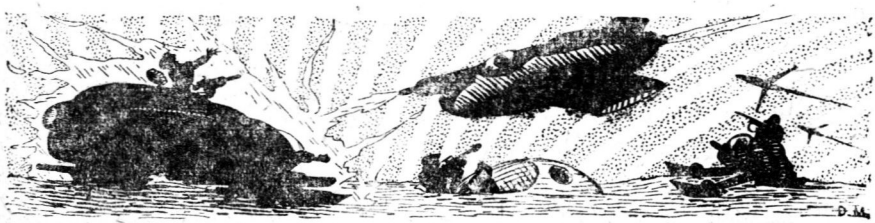
Suddenly the Professor raised his hands above his head, the bowl in them. Some freakish error in his manufacture had given him strength far in excess of that required in the exercise of his profession. That strength shattered the stout oak as he brought it crashing down —and shattered, too, the head of the General.

The General . . . stopped.

Slowly the Professor walked to the window, looked out at the glare of the burning city, diminishing now, listened to the sporadic bursts of gunfire that told of the last pockets of resistance being cleaned out.

Motionless, the old robot waited for the men who, sooner or later, would come to destroy him.

A. BERTRAM CHANDLER



LAN WRIGHT

Out of Thin Air

A multitude of contrasting objects lay within his grasp
. . . his problem was to narrow down the choice

Illustrated by John J. Greengrass

I used to visit my friend Felix at his flat just off Bond Street every Thursday evening. I use the phrase 'used to' advisedly, because I haven't done it for three weeks now, and I cannot foresee just when I shall do it again.

On this particular Thursday a month ago, I climbed the stairs to Felix's flat, knocked on the door and was admitted by a Felix who seemed more than usually excited.

"Won a fortune, old boy?" I asked.

He shook his head and beamed widely. "Come in here and see what I've got."

He led me into his study and pointed to his desk. "There. Now what do you think of that?"

I goggled. 'That' was a pile of junk such as I would not have believed existed outside a rubbish dump. On closer inspection I saw a cabbage, two lemons, an avocado pear, an old bone, a second hand copy of the Koran (English translation), and—! I swallowed hard and looked closer. There, beside the pile and conspicuously on its own lay a perfectly cut blue diamond.

"Imitation, of course," I said casually, after assuring myself that Felix could not possibly have such a magnificent stone in his possession unless it was imitation.

Felix shook his head loftily. "Not at all. It's the real thing, though I've not had it valued yet."

"But—but all this," I waved my hand vaguely at the rest of the junk.

"Ah!" Felix smiled, and bent to open a cupboard in the side of the desk. From it he produced a large, curly——?

"Eh?" I said.

"It's a cornucopia," he announced casually, as if it was the sort of thing no self respecting man-about-town would be seen without. "I picked it up cheap in a junk shop off Shepherd Market."

"Oh, and what is a—a what you said?"

"A cornucopia? It's a goat horn actually—comes from the Greek mountains I believe."

"That monstrosity never came from a goat," I told him firmly. "Dammit, Felix, it's too big."

And it was; it must have been three feet in curly length and the open end was at least a foot across the narrowest part.

"Not our type of goat," admitted Felix. "But I've read that in ancient times there was a species of goat with horns that big."

"Species of elephant," I retorted sourly. "Anyway, what's it got to do with all this?" I waved at the junk pile.

Felix grinned like a cat over a saucer of cream. "Out of the cornucopia."

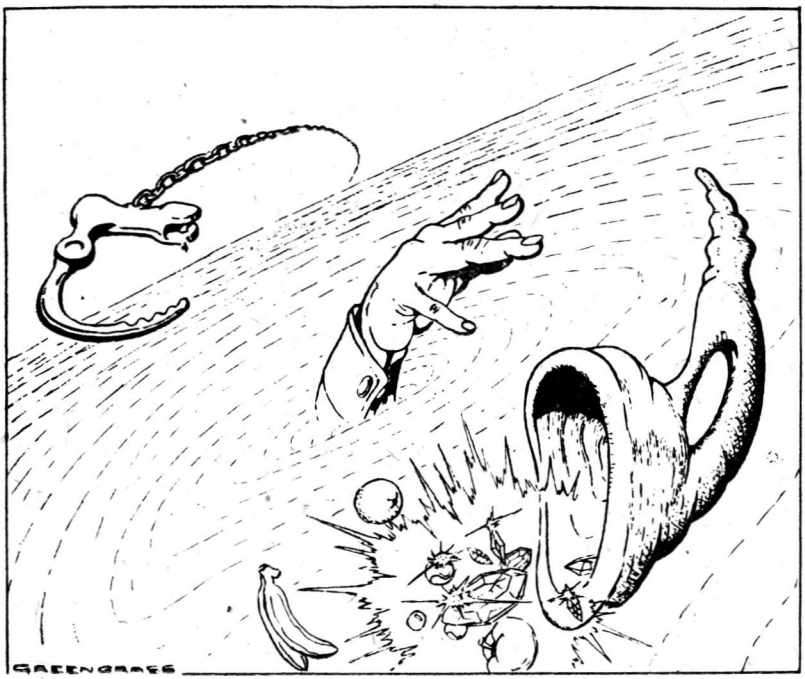
"What? Oh, Felix, for heavens sake," I protested. "I know the wretched thing's big, but all that couldn't go inside it, and anyway, who'd be mug enough to leave a diamond stuck in a thing like that?"

Felix shook his head vehemently. "No, old boy, you don't see it. Here, I'll demonstrate."

He laid the horn on his desk with the orifice uppermost, and lined it up carefully with four marks that I hadn't noticed before. Then he put his hand into the opening and reached down so that his arm disappeared up to the shoulder.

Up to the shoulder?

I gulped in sheer disbelief. It just couldn't go up to the shoulder, there wasn't that much of the horn that was straight enough to allow an arm to penetrate that far.



Felix strained and wriggled and moved his hand around in a space so large that it just couldn't exist. I watched him with fascinated apprehension until——

"Ah," he remarked at last with evident satisfaction. "What have we here," and he withdrew his hand clutching a large pomegranate. He viewed it with some disappointment and then shrugged. "Well, anyway, you can see how it works. Actually, the diamond was my first attempt and I moved the horn afterwards so that I couldn't repeat the find. All I get now is fruit."

"You mean—?" I was speechless. I wagged a finger desperately at the horn. "Dammit, Felix, where's the wretched stuff coming from?"

Felix shrugged. "Your guess is as good as mine."

"But — but someone must be missing it! The blessed thing must come out somewhere?"

"Oh, quite," nodded Felix. "Probably another dimension or another world——"

"With cabbages and pomegranates?" I snarled.

"Another time, perhaps?"

"Time, fiddlesticks," I retorted. "Now, look, Felix, if you want my advice you'll bury that thing somewhere and forget about it before it lands you in trouble."

"What? And lose a permanent supply of free fruit and vegetables?"

"Diamonds like that must come from somewhere."

"I know, but I'm hanged if I can find any more."

"Felix, you're impossible," I said stiffly. "I'm going home, and I shan't come and bail you out."

"Goodnight, old boy," he replied absently. "I'll call you if anything turns up."

He didn't call me for two days—it was the following Saturday evening to be exact—then he did it by phone.

"I've got it," he screamed as soon as I lifted the phone.

I winced and held the receiver a couple of inches away from my tortured eardrum. "Got what?" I enquired cautiously.

"Another diamond, you oaf, and a couple of rubies, not to mention——"

"What?" I yelled.

"Yes, and a couple——"

"I'll be right round," I announced grimly, and for once I squandered six shillings on a sixpenny bus ride by going in a taxi.

Felix' study was a shambles. The floor, the desk, the chairs—indeed every available square inch was covered with a surrealistic jumble of rubbish that made the Caledonian market look like a duchess' drawing room. Fruit and vegetables mingled with old books, a selection of tin cans, various pieces of china, a couple of old shoes, some crumpled newspapers, a battered bowler hat—the list was endless.

The cornucopia was lying on the one clear area of floor, and held firmly in place by a dozen large nails.

"Look at them," said Felix proudly holding out his hand.

A diamond glittered in the light from the small chandelier, and with it were two rubies and a couple of milk white pearls whose translucence testified to their value.

"When——?"

"This afternoon," he gloated. "Once I'd got the first ruby it was easy. Just a matter of moving the horn around a few fractions of an inch and the rest of the stuff was there for the picking."

"Felix, you're asking for trouble," I told him. "And I warn you——"

"This," he grinned, "is the sort of trouble I like." He patted my shoulder. "Come on, I'll give you a demonstration."

"Really——" I began, but he wasn't listening.

He waved away my protestation and lay down on the floor, pushing his hand into the orifice so that his arm disappeared to the shoulder and he was stretched prone apparently groping for something below the level of the floor. On his face was a look of studied concentration that produced a frown, and he shifted his position slightly from time to time as he fumbled in—whatever was at the other end.

The frown vanished. "Ah," he smiled. "Here's something."

He began to withdraw his arm. It moved perhaps two inches and then snapped back with a jolt that shook his whole body and made him yelp with the shock of it. The smile was replaced by a look of startled horror.

"Oh, Lord," he said, and began straining to pull his hand out. "I'm damn well stuck," he announced plaintively.

"Oh," I said. There didn't seem to be much else to say.

"Well, do something," he yelped. "Don't just stand there."

"What," I enquired gently, "do you advise?"

"Don't be a fool."

"I'm open to suggestions."

"Try pulling," Felix shouted. He was red in the face by now from his efforts to get free, and puffing like a walrus. Then, "Ah, wait a minute—yes, it's coming." Slowly, he managed to extricate his arm an inch at a time. "It's being held by something."

"Probably an irate lobster," I told him.

His elbow appeared and then his forearm, to be followed by his wrist and hand.

We both gaped at the object fastened tightly round his wrist.

It was one half of a regulation pair of Metropolitan Police handcuffs, and the chain attached to it vanished into the mouth of the cornucopia.

Felix eyed it as apprehensively as a rabbit watching a fox. Tucked into the metal wrist band was a small white card. Felix was stricken dumb and immobile so I reached over to remove it.

On one side of the card was written in neat block letters:—

PLEASE PHONE THE NUMBER ON THE OTHER SIDE TO OBTAIN RELEASE.

The reverse side had printed on it: —

'Detective Inspector Ivor McGibbon,
New Scotland Yard.
Phone: —WHItehall 1212.'

I passed it silently to Felix, and for a minute he didn't look too well.

"I hate to say I told you so," I reminded him.

"Well, don't sound so darned smug about it," he snarled. "Get a file and get me out of this blasted thing. They can't prove anything once I get——whulp!"

The rest of what he was saying was lost in an explosive howl as a sudden violent jerk on the chain whipped his arm back into the hole and laid him hard and flat against the study floor. And all our tugging for the next half hour couldn't shift him.

At last he said sadly, "It's no use, old boy. I think they've just taken my finger prints. Anyway I'm getting uncomfortable."

Silently, I nodded, crossed to the phone and Dialled WHI 1212.

It took Inspector McGibbon just ten minutes to get to the flat.

He proved to be a short, rotund Scot with a heavy accent and an even heavier moustache; he entered the study and looked at Felix as he lay still stretched out on the floor.

"Aye," he nodded sagely. "Och aye. Ye'll be the one, I'm thinkin'."

"Get me out here," snarled Felix. "I'm getting cramp."

"Aye," McGibbon nodded and turned to the uniformed constable who had accompanied him. The man went out and McGibbon turned his attention back to Felix. "And now, sirr, perhaps you'd care to make a wee statement."

"Don't say a word, Felix," I told him.

"I wasn't going to, old boy."

"And who might you be?" McGibbon fixed me with a steely eye.

"Me? Oh, well, I'm——"

"His accomplice, nay doot. Aye."

"Can I get up?" asked Felix plaintively. "They've let go."

"Aye, of course," agreed McGibbon. "Now, tell me, where did ye get that—that thing?"

"Bought it," replied Felix, rubbing his arm and shoulder which were clearly stiff from the strain of his cramped position.

"A likely story. Ah, weel, the truth will out."

"Hang it, it is the truth," protested Felix. "Anyway, where did those jewels come from?"

"A guid question," nodded McGibbon. "We had a call last Wednesday to Isaacson's the jewellers in Hatton Garden. It appeared that Mister Isaacson was showing a blue diamond to the Duchess of Tomelty when a hand came out of thin air and took it."

"Really?" Felix grinned feebly.

"Aye. The Duchess had hysterics and Mister Isaacson was removed that evening to a home for alcoholics at which he had been a patient on previous occasions. This afternoon the same thing happened in the firm's cutting room, and I arrived in time to see a ruby disappear. Ah, 'twould be one o' those, nay doot." He pointed to the gems that Felix had left on the desk. "There were two other complaints as well."

"Oh?"

"Levy's the fruiterers and Cohens the second hand shop next door to Isaacsons."

"Really!"

"Aye. And now if you gentlemen will accompany me to the Yard perhaps you'd care to make a statement. Oh, aye," McGibbon pointed to the cornucopia, "and I'll take that with me."

"Oh, of course," I said. "Here, allow me."

I moved to pick it up, but my feet got caught up in the junk that littered the floor; I tripped, stumbled, and teetered on one heel.

I heard Felix shout, "Look out, you idiot," but I couldn't do anything to halt my downward progress. There was a creaking crash, and every breath was knocked from my body as I landed squarely on top of the cornucopia. There was a loud crunch and a bellow from McGibbon as a slight dust cloud rose around me.

When I got up all that was left was a pile of broken, greyish shards that might once have been a goat horn—there was no orifice, no endless hole, nothing more.

And that's about all.

Felix is still in prison while McGibbon tries to find a judge and jury gullible enough to believe that the greyish bits and pieces were once a cornucopia, and, further, that Felix could put his hand in at one end—his flat—and pinch jewellery from Hatton Garden, a mile away.

Well, I ask you?

The lawyer thinks he'll have Felix out soon and I hear that McGibbon will be taking his pension shortly afterwards.

LAN WRIGHT

L. MAJOR REYNOLDS

The River

Nearer the river's mouth he had hoped to find safety . . . the further he progressed downstream the fainter his hopes became, however

The man looked uneasily at the jungle around him. It had changed until there was little that was familiar. Where had been great full-leaved trees, now was a riot of giant ferns and strange pulpy growths ran the gamut of colours.

The heat was overbearing. Beads of sweat ran down his face and trickled off his chin in a steady stream. But from somewhere he found the strength to keep up his seemingly hopeless battle against the ever present tangle of vegetation.

He fell often, and the blood mixed with the torrent of perspiration. He winced as the salty stuff stung his wounds.

It was a long time before he noticed the uncanny stillness that pervaded everything, and he tried to remember the last time he had heard the screech of a bird, or the chattering of the small monkeys that had pursued him through the leafy tangle. But it seemed uncounted ages since he had heard them.

Again he fell and this time there was no uncalled-on store of strength to help him to his feet. His body was a limp thing as it lay there, as quiet as the surrounding jungle.

A small liana, endowed with a life of its own, crept noiselessly over the crowded floor of the earth and fastened itself on the unprotected ankle. Imperceptibly it changed colour from a muddy green to a ruddiness that told of its method of feeding.

The pain aroused the supine figure and the man struggled to his feet, tearing free from the plant as he rose. He looked around him seeking some way out of the nightmare that held him so tightly, but the jungle showed him nothing but closed doors.

And then in the midst of that awful silence a mercy sound floated on the steamy air. The man raised his head and hope flashed in his eyes. He literally tore his way through the mass of foliage and stopped unbelieving before a crystal stream pouring from a rock, water cascading down into a basin below, and forming the head-

waters of a small stream that led off through the primordial jungle.

The man clung to the rock for minutes allowing the water to cover him with its fall. For the first time he whimpered and the sound was like a sob.

Sanity returned and he pulled off his sweat-stained clothing, washing them clean in the pool beneath the spring.

All the rest of the day he soaked himself in the pool, and his hurts healed like magic. And when the sun went down he curled his naked body on the top of the rock and slept the dreamless sleep of the newborn.

The next morning he started down the stream's gravelled bed. He was sure it would, somehow, lead him to safety. It was easy walking for a long way, but finally the water rose to his hips and he could make no headway.

A log lying on the bank caught his eye, and he pulled it to the middle of the stream. It sank part way under his weight, but the travelling was easier. He floated now, with only an occasional push over the shallow spots. When night fell again, he strapped himself to his strange craft with his belt. And slept. The jungle came down to the very edge of the stream, leaving no open bank.

He lost track of time as he floated, and it was with something like awe that he saw the disintegration of the log. It literally fell apart and let him down in the now waist-deep water.

For almost a mile he alternately floated and swam. Suddenly on the bank he spied something that made him break the heavy silence with a yelp of joy.

A bark rope moored a raft to one of the giant ferns.

He was panting with eagerness as he climbed aboard and sprawled on the dryness. His water-soaked fingers tore cruelly as he pulled at the knotted rope, but they healed on the instant of tearing.

For the first time he was relaxed enough to notice the stillness that grew deeper each time he travelled. Nowhere was there a sign of animate life in the welter of growing things. He shivered in the hot steam-filled air.

The leafy tunnel now was a mass of vari-coloured flowers that was almost overpowering in its perfume. The stream seemed to run slower as if time itself dragged.

The jungle still hugged the stream's edge, but as the miles floated by, the outrageous flowers dwindled and their place was taken by a mass of foliage and vines so dense that he could see no sign of the sun. Even the very air was dusky.

The man shifted uneasily on the rough bark of the logs and in spite of the heat donned the clothing he had carried since the first wonderful bath. He was all animal now. He watched down a long stretch of the shadowy tunnel and never wondered that he felt no need of sustenance. He didn't remember he had neither eaten nor drunk since the trek began.

His first warning came when he felt a subtle loosening beneath him. The bark ropes that held his craft together were splitting and pulling loose. He made a frantic grab for one of the logs, but it splintered to bits under his eager fingers.

Something bumped him between the shoulder blades, and his yell was one of pure delight as he climbed into the rough dugout.

The hollowed tree trunk was sheer luxury after the raft, and he soon managed the trick of handling it. Once more he removed all but a minimum of clothing, as the heat still remained high. The rivulets of perspiration which streamed from his body seemed an inexhaustible flow.

Imperceptibly the jungle changed. Only occasionally now was one of the giant ferns to be seen. Their place was taken by small trees, but still the mass of foliage and vines shut out the sun.

The man hung over the side of his rough craft and searched the water below. There was no sign of life in the crystal flow and he wondered dimly at its lack.

The sight of the flowing stream against the shining gravelled bottom had almost the effect of hypnosis, and he lay back on the rough burned wood and slept.

He never saw the coracle moored to one bank, its newly tanned hides glinting in the dull light. A long spear rested across its gunwale, and the paddle showed signs of painstaking work. It faded out in the long back stretches of the stream and the man now slept deeply.

He awoke and for a moment was unable to orient himself. The jungle had changed while he slept and now great trees reared their leafy heads and he could catch glimpses of clearings in what had been a solid mass of growth.

The dugout was no longer comfortable, and if he had known, he would have regretted the loss of the coracle. His craft was rotting at the edges, and the inside gave off the peculiar scent of decaying wood.

He was in the water again, watching the dugout sink slowly to the bottom of the stream, when he saw the canoe pulled up on the bank.

It was with a sense of relief that he seated himself in the craft

and examined the paddle. This was no rough attempt at just something that would float. For the first time he felt confident he was nearing some sort of civilization. Something comparable to what he had known before the eternal jungle had dominated his existence.

The leafy covering over the tunnel was beginning to thin out now, and he looked eagerly for the first sight of the sun. But there was a strange thickening in the air, and a grey mist formed slowly, dropping below the tree level.

The man still searched everywhere for some form of animate life, but only the eternal green met his gaze. The heat shut down as if it were a tangible thing, and he couldn't make sense in his thoughts.

Dimly and far away he remembered another world of starlit nights and sunny days. Another world filled with the hurry and bustle of millions of his own kind. But here, the quiet of the oppressive jungle screamed its silence, and the smooth slipping of the water beneath him was unbroken by even a ripple.

He saw a rowboat moored in the centre of the stream and paddled over to it, considering the advisability of changing to the newer craft. But the canoe won out, and he went on, still seeking with darting eyes some sign of the makers of the various craft.

It might have been hours, years or centuries that he stroked his way down the stream. What he could see of the jungle through the mists of fog looked strangely familiar, as if at last he had come to the tangle of great trees and vines that was the only jungle he knew.

He tried to approach the banks, but some vagary of the stream kept him from so doing, and he drifted down the watery way and wondered dimly why is should be so. The quiet tilting of the boat lulled him again to sleep, and the miles floated by unheedingly.

His watch had stopped when he strained his eyes for the spot of brightness that would denote the sun, but the grey mist of the fog gave no answer. It was then he realized he had seen no change in the light that surrounded him. It was all of a sameness.

For the next hour, or age, he went quietly mad. He crouched in the bottom of the canoe and babbled of clear skies and moonlit nights. Over and over he called the names of his friends, waiting each time for the answer that never came.

He buried his face in his hands and sobbed. Great tearing sobs that seemed to rend him to bits. Dry sobs, for no tears flowed in the weeping of madness. Merciful unconsciousness came.

There was no change when he finally pulled himself to a sane reality. The stream still slipped smoothly between the jungle laden banks, and the fog brooded mistily above his head. There was no

sense of time, and no reality of life.

The gunwales of the canoe were raddled now, and small seepages of water came from the spot where his feet had rested for so long. He looked frantically for something else that would float, but only the empty stream met his gaze.

And he neither hungered nor thirsted.

He had been swimming for miles when he saw the boat moored to a piling in the centre of the stream. His many efforts to reach the banks had been blocked by some insidious current that swept him back each time he had attempted it. It was as if the stream had declared him prisoner, and there was no escape. He regretted the ignoring of the rowboat, but knew it was gone beyond the possibility of recall.

The craft, when he reached it, made him almost sing with happiness. Now he could surely find someone, for it was a motor boat of the latest design. He climbed in and sank gratefully on the soft cushions before he realized he was untired. There was no sense of the agony of exhaustion which should have made him gasp for breath. It was as if he had merely stepped into the craft and seated himself.

The motor sang him a song of power as he twisted the wheel, and he looked back at the wake that creamed behind him. Now, his troubles were over. The men who owned this boat should be somewhere along the stream.

But the miles wheeled behind him and only the blank walls of the jungle met his eyes.

And then the jungle was altering strangely. Where there had been massive trees were now smaller growths and the vines no longer covered them. The violent green had faded to a russet brown and the clearings became more frequent. In places he could see the sandy bank of the stream, but the water resisted all his efforts to land.

And still, there was no sign of life.

Time paced by on leaden feet as the motor roared its song of power. Then subtly, the rhythm changed and it sputtered and at times almost stopped. He raised the cover and peered anxiously at the engine and was shocked at the accumulation of green rot that covered it. Slower and slower the boat ran, until it was barely creeping.

He was looking ahead when he saw the long slim shape that seemingly appeared from nowhere.

It was a boat, but like nothing he had ever seen before. Long,

slim, and needle-shaped, it seemed the personification of power.

He was glad to leave the motorboat for his new transportation. As he stepped aboard he heard a gurgling behind him and a hasty glance showed his late craft settling to the bottom of the stream, swiftly disintegrating as it went.

It was some time before he could puzzle out the motive power of his new craft. The long transparent tube that ran completely through it was an unknown factor to him. More by accident than design he pressed the proper switch and felt the boat surge under him. Looking down he saw the torrent of water shoot through the tube and emerge from the stern in a welter of white foam that sent the boat spinning down the stream.

He grabbed frantically at the steering lever and soon had the madly whirling thing under control.

Again the miles flowed by and ever the jungle thinned. The fog blanket remained the same, only a little less bright than it had been.

A closed canopy over the boat was welcome, as the heat was going and the air held a breath of chill.

The stream was widening now to the size of a river, but its current kept on in its steady pace. The banks were clear and their sands were dazzling in their whiteness. Once more he tried to land but all efforts were unavailing.

The rushing of the jet of water through the tube reminded him of molten silver and once more the deep sleep descended upon him.

While he slept the stream gained a small voice. Deep within it came something that was almost audible. An indistinct babbling as if uncounted voices bewailed the doom that came too suddenly.

The man awoke, and in waking, wondered. For the first time he seemed to realize the seeming ages that had passed since he had first found the stream, and he felt of his throat and the thirst which should be there and was not.

He pulled back the sheltering canopy and shivered in the chill breeze. Wonderingly he looked where the once luxurious jungle had stretched its green tangle, but only occasional remnants of low plants met his searching gaze. The land was dry and sere, but the stream grew wider as he watched.

His craft jerked oddly, and he glanced down at the tube.

Far ahead he saw a dot on the surface of the river and as he strained forward to see better, his craft slid quietly beneath the surface.

Again he started swimming.

The new boat was long, broad of beam and completely covered with a transparent dome. He couldn't give a name to the material of which it was built, as it was something he had never imagined, not even as a plastic. Even as he noticed there did not seem to be any way of opening the dome, a panel opened in the glassy side and a long flat tongue of metal licked out from somewhere and stopped within easy reach.

Doubtful at first, he tested the firmness of the strange gangplank before crawling out of the water. There was no bending, it remained rock steady to his weight. Straightening up he took a few steps towards the boat. He glanced back and almost yelled his terror. The clear stuff was disappearing behind him as he went.

Two bounds took him to the cabin, and he was fully inside before he had time to notice the interior.

It was more like a home than a boat. Soft divans lined the sides and several small tables were scattered around the floor.

There was no sign of a motor, or steering lever, and he wondered where the strange craft got its motive power. The thought was still unfinished in his mind, when he felt the sudden impulse of power beneath him. A glance out of a rear window showed a smooth wake making a perfect V in the stream.

It was a long time before he realized that the boat ran by the power of his thoughts. He amused himself for a time, running from side to side and in circles, but the resultant strain took more energy than he had. He tried to force the craft near the bank, but the attempt was useless.

The idea of food idly crossed his mind and he wondered why he felt no need of it. He thought of his former craving for thick steaks and baked potatoes, and jumped from his seat with a howl of fright.

Lying on a table in front of him was exactly what he had thought of. He reached out a cautious finger and touched the browned meat. It was sizzling hot!

He made an attempt to eat it, but couldn't force his throat to swallow, so he thought it out of existence and it disappeared obediently.

For the next few hours, or years, a varied assortment of things presented themselves for his approval and were banished back into the nothingness from which they had come. It was only a game to the lonely passenger.

There was nothing left of the jungle now, as far as he could see. Just at the limit of his vision was what looked like a patch of snow,

but he shrugged at that notion. No snow could ever fall in the tropics.

He sent a thought to one of the transparent panels which opened to the mental thrust, and shivered in the blast of chill air that came in on him.

The stream had widened until at times the ever present fog concealed the farther bank. And, the silence was absolute.

It was in that silence that he first became aware of the voice of the stream, and he leaned far out into the cold blast listening intently. It was a muted clangor that almost made sense. Several times he caught himself trying to answer the medley of voices, but each try seemed to make them more incoherent. It was as if every being on Earth was making their protest against the shortness of their minute of life. As the stream continued to widen, the sound grew in volume, until all the air was filled with the half-heard screamings.

The man staggered back to one of the soft divans and buried his ears deep in the cushiony surface, trying madly to shut out the demented chorus of the doomed. Unconsciousness came, almost as deep as death itself.

When he awoke, nothing had changed, except the uncanny mouthings that had so nearly driven him insane. They subsided to a low surly muttering that seemed one with the stream.

The land, as far as he could see, was white with snow. Far in the distance he spied mighty domes and towers which were gone in the instant of their seeing, and only the bare plain was left. He rubbed his eyes and looked again, but nothing was there.

Dragging time started once more, and again the man found refuge in the powers of the wonderful boat. Many, varied, and weird were the productions of his fevered mind as his creations became more and more incredible.

The loneliness shut down like a trap, and he attempted the impossible.

The beings that came from the disordered brain showed no sign of the dignity of life; they were eerie, many-armed and legged creatures of nightmare. Each was sent back to the oblivion from whence they came, but still more were evoked.

And then, one of the forms refused to vanish at command, and swiftly putrefied.

The man sent frantic commands to the hitherto obedient panels, but they remained closed, trapping the horrific stench. He tore at the openings, but they remained immovable.

He was babbling insansely when he finally forced the panel open,

and the foul air gagged him as it swept past his head. He looked back at the table where the thing lay, but it was a mass of rotting something where grey froth formed and broke.

Thought after frantic thought he sent toward it, but only the tiny sound of a breaking bubble answered his command.

Then, for the first time he noticed the boat had stopped and was swinging idly in the slow current. His jumbled mind tried to form a clear command to the craft, but nothing happened.

He was weak and trembling when he managed to squirm from the opening he had made, and tumble in the stream. This time the water did not revive him as it had done before. Only the fact that the stream had shallowed kept his head above the surface. He gained a safe distance and looked back.

Again he saw the weird disintegration that had happened to all the craft he had found. He shook his head violently to cast out a thought which was burning his rapidly sobering brain, and turned once more to follow where ever the stream led. For deep in his mind he knew now that his fate was one with its waters.

And then, for the first time, he saw a curve in the straightness of the stream bed, and he swam as strongly as possible in his eagerness to discover what lay beyond his sight.

It was a graveyard of small craft that looked as if a band of children had been playing at the task of building boats. He went from one to the other trying to find something in which he could continue his journey, but it seemed hopeless to find one even capable of bearing his weight.

The cold wind bit through his sodden clothing and he shivered until his chattering teeth ached under the strain.

Finally he found what vaguely resembled a rowboat that seemed able to bear his weight, and climbed in, crouching low behind the scant gunwales to escape the wind. Too late he cursed himself for not attempting to wade to shore and make his way overland.

Again he slept, this time the deep sleep of exhaustion, and again the miles fled by.

The fog bank over the stream slowly darkened until everything was almost the same greyness. The current slowed until the boat barely crept.

The man awoke and strained his eyes to see, but the light was too dim for far vision. The banks now were covered with deep piled snow, and the air almost froze in his aching lungs.

And for the first time, he had the feeling of hunger and thirst.

He scooped up handfuls of the water and sucked it noisily, but there was no taste of wetness about it.

He was half lying in his craft when far ahead down the now-straight stream bed he saw a rusty light that was just visible. He leaned forward, squinting his eyes, and the motion was all that was needed to cause the collapse of the boat which spilled him back in the stream.

There was not enough left of the thing to make even an aid to floating, and he went forward, wading.

It was some time before he noticed the lessened resistance of the water. It was like walking through a thick fog, except that the stream was still as crystal clear as it had ever been.

Nearer and nearer the muddy red circle came, and he shouted with delight as he saw where the fog ended.

By the time he reached his goal, little remained of the stream, and just as he tottered from under the fog blanket, he saw all that was left of the waters sink slowly into the grey sands before him.

He was sobbing with relief when he raised his eyes, seeking for a sight of the sun which had been so long shut away from him.

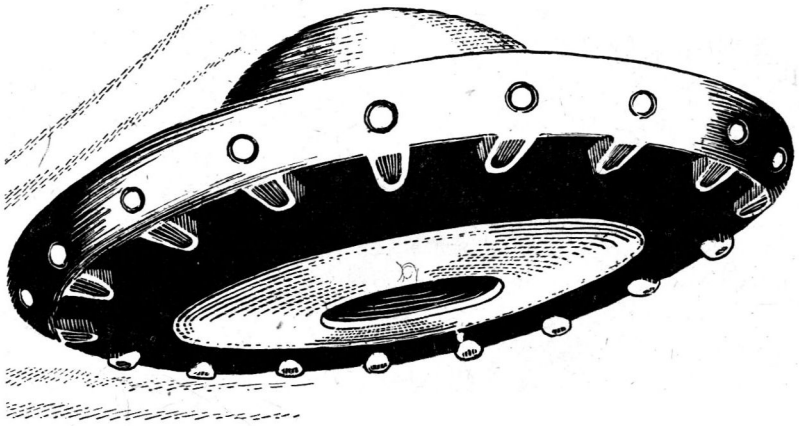
Then screams tore his throat with steely fingers as he saw the dull red ball in the dusky heavens, and the burning thought he had so long denied, burst on his stunned brain.

The River Of Life had run its course.

L. MAJOR REYNOLDS


harry turner—57

WILLIAM F. TEMPLE



Against Goliath

Automation had brought peace and plenty for all . . . also a new and insidious tyranny which was to trap all mankind

Illustrated by Harry Turner

Bill Brewster and I were demobbed in 1946. That was the year when Ford Executive Vice President Delmar S. Harder coined a new word—" automation." By it he meant only the automatic transfer of Ford car parts from one metal-working machine to the next.

The night Bill and I were demobbed we pub-crawled through London's West End and ended up in Piccadilly Circus at 2 a.m. howling the Harrow School anthem. We'd sung it together the day we left Harrow.

It's called " Forty Years On."

" We'll meet here again, under Eros, forty years on, Junior," said Bill, trying to give me a comradely pat on the back and missing by a foot.

" Th-that's a date, Bill."

But 1986 found us some 280 miles from Eros without any desire to see that aluminium lad again. For, in four decades, he and the

Circus—indeed, all London and most points south, east, north and west of it—had been engulfed by Mr. Harder's new word.

We were at a point just about as far west as we could get without actually paddling in the Atlantic.

The new word that drove us there had sounded in our lives from time to time even in the earliest years. It had a first cousin, called "cybernetics," but later it devoured that whole, and "automation" came to stand for the whole evil process.

The first time it sounded an ominous note with me was the day Bill and I got talking with an American Air Force brass-hat at the Savoy American Bar. Discovering we were ex-artillery officers (Bill had been a Major, I a Captain) he sought to impress us. He told us that the previous week he'd seen a fighter 'plane manufactured and assembled complete without a human finger being laid upon it.

I was impressed, all right, at the time. I don't know about Bill. He's a tougher case.

But maybe not so tough. For when it got that I couldn't take London any more, and decided to quit I learned Bill had already quit. That was in the winter of 1980.

I'd not seen him in months. I visaphoned his house. Instead of Bill's lugubrious face, the visa-screen presented me with a scrawled note: "Gone west, young man. Shan't be back."

When Bill, at Harrow, found he was a month older than me, he called me "Junior." He still did. Now he was sixty-three, he called everyone else "young man."

I puzzled out the meaning of the cryptic note. Bill had often told me he'd like to retire to Merthavin, a small town on the Cornish coast. It seemed he'd now retired. I felt hurt he'd not informed me directly.

I had no relatives who cared whether I was alive or dead. So I decided to go west, too. I went straight to my bank and wrote out a cheque to myself for the whole amount of my deposit. Naturally, I used the magnetic ink the bank stipulated.

I slid the cheque into the slot in the counter labelled "Cashier," and waited. There were no other customers and, of course, no staff. All banks were automatic. There might have been a maintenance engineer playing solitaire in a back office. If so, he was more occupied than usual.

This was where in 1946 I had banked my Army gratuity. Then the cashier had greeted me politely and remarked that it was a warm day. And on my way out, the manager had nodded to me, a blonde

typist smiled at me (I was only 29), and the doorman opened the door for me and called me " sir."

All very friendly, warm, and human. They were pleased to look after my money for me.

Now there was nobody to care a damn. Somewhere a magnetic pick-up was scanning the cheque's number, checking my signature, noting the amount. An electronic computer was searching the memory of its magnetic drum for my account, computing and passing information to a tape recorder, and the recorder was feeding its tape to a high-speed printer, and—

Flop! A bundle of bank notes of high denomination dropped to the counter from the mouth of a compressed air tube. My bank statement, like a rudely protruding tongue, came sticking out at me from between the lips of a pair of rollers. I glanced at it casually, knowing there wasn't a chance in a million of it showing a human-like error. Balance—nil.

Correct. A multitude of tiny brains, knowing only 0 or 1, had got together to assure me of that.

I picked up the notes—no need to check them, either—and screwed up the statement and tossed it away. Feeling sad, yet relieved, I walked to the door. The infra-red ray my body broke didn't call me " sir," but it opened the door for me. I was through with automatic banks now—and with London.

Traffic was thin and there weren't many people about. Mostly, you needed to ride only for social calls. You needed to walk only for exercise.

I blew my taxi whistle. The nearest taxi swerved in and stopped for me. The others drifted past disinterestedly: their radar scanners had already noted the reaction of the nearest taxi to the point of origin of the soundwaves, and it released them.

The moment I set foot on the running-board, the door opened. I relaxed inside and the door closed. The taxi awaited my directions.

" You decide: the machines will do the rest."

That was the slogan of the age of automation. Well, I'd decided to get the hell out of it, and the machines could carry me.

These taxies carried an illuminated panel map of Central London. To reach any point on it, you just juggled a moving light-spot to settle at that point on the map, pulled the " Start " lever and off you went. You didn't have to do a thing after that but sit back. The route was stored in the taxi's memory. It made its own way, and the radar scanner watched the traffic lights and kept it from hitting extraneous objects, human or insensate.

For Outer London, you pressed the appropriate studs to get the required map section.

But Cornwall wasn't on the map, of course. Not that I'd choose to go by taxi, anyway. I wanted the fastest route. So I ignored both the map and the short-cut studs labelled with the names of the main monorail termini. I just pressed the stud marked "Airport," and the taxi took me there.

Then the direct descendant of "George," the automatic pilot of World War Two, flew me down to Cornwall. I'd chosen a single-seater 'plane to be alone, but I expect I should have been alone anyway in one of the big airliners. It was mid-winter, and few people were anxious to leave the warm, snug womb of the capital for a bleak area which the full blessings of automation hadn't yet reached.

The monorail train took me from Truro Airfield to Merthavin, and it actually had a human driver. There were other passengers, too, and they joked with the driver and called him "Bob." I felt twenty years younger.

I knew where Bill Brewster would be at this time of day. There were three pubs at Merthavin, and I located him in the second—*The Piskie House*. Bill's watery blue eyes sometimes looked thoughtful and sometimes blank, but mostly just sad. They never showed alarm or surprise. He was too well-disciplined a soldier. He looked at me sadly as I walked in.

"What's been keeping you, Junior?" he said. "Madeleine—a pint of bitter for the foreigner, please."

The cheerful young barmaid complied. I sat down, sipping it.

"Seems I'm destined always to be a month behind you, Bill."

"At least, Junior. D'you remember that time—"

By the fourth pint we were re-living the battles long ago in the Western Desert, on the plain of Catania, at bloody Anzio, and were cracking the Gothic Line yet again.

"Life had purpose then," I said. "At least, we thought so. How could we know that we were only fighting to hand the world over to Rossum's Universal Robots!"

"The shape of things to come was appearing even in those days," said Bill. "Remember those self-propelled, unmanned midget tanks the Jerries sent against us at Anzio?"

I nodded. "Packed with H.E."

"In more ways than one. The Jerries had a name for that type of robot tank. 'Goliath.' Now Goliath has all but conquered the world, slaying Davids by the million. General McArthur was

defeated by a species of Goliath."

"How do you mean?"

Bill took a long pull, wiped his mouth, and said: "I'm talking about the Korean War now. History says McArthur was relieved of command by President Truman. He wasn't. Goliath decided it. McArthur's policy risked world war. Statistics were fed into a computer in Washington—the National Bureau of Standards Eastern Automatic Computer. The machine came up with the answer. The American economy was in no position to face the risk of another World War at that moment. *Ergo*—McArthur had to go. The computer said so."

"Well, I never knew that before," I said. "But I can believe it now."

Bill nodded, then switched the topic abruptly. "Well, Junior, now you're here, how are you going to pass the time?"

"What do *you* do?" I countered.

"Oh, I fish, run my own vegetable garden, sail, read old war books, and—and—"

"Drink?"

His lips twitched. "Working is better than doing nothing, but drinking is better than either."

"True," I said, and sat reflecting.

What was I to do? Nobody in this robot-coddled world had to work if they didn't want to. Design engineers and inventors obviously wanted to. They seemed demonically driven to enmesh the world with automation. They cared little for money. On the other hand, money for a few extra luxuries was largely the incentive for other workers like maintenance engineers, doctors, and midwives.

And playwrights.

In London I'd been writing TV plays for years. Why shouldn't I have the larger TV set, the plushier carpets, the rare antiques that money could buy? For any form of response to my work other than money was negligible. Nobody bothered to read much: TV was too easy. Printed journals were rare. Worthwhile critical reviews of TV plays in them were rarer. Perhaps my plays weren't good. To see a printed review of one was like seeing a snowflake in July.

Now and then I'd meet someone who'd seen a play of mine. He might even recall what it was about. There were just too many channels. In the flood of stuff pouring through them, my creations stood out like drops in a river.

Besides, I was getting hard up for themes. My line was the problem play. But where were the problems today? Automation

had ironed out most of the social and human ones.

There was no poverty, no insecurity, and no wars. Not even class wars. Politicians had no causes to thump tubs about. They'd died out. But you could vote, if you cared to, for your local scientific director. You had a choice of three. On polling day press the red, blue, or black button on the election panel on the living room wall. The impulse was registered by the regional computer. At midnight it would divulge whether Mr. Red, Mr. Blue, or Mr. Black had won the day.

Many people didn't trouble to know them by any other names. I was one of them. Sometimes I voted for Mr. Blue, because it was my favourite colour. Sometimes I voted for all three. Mostly I forgot to vote at all.

A round century was the expected span of life today. Old age wasn't a tragedy and dramatic illnesses were a victim of medical advance. Nobody could write *The Way of All Flesh* or *The Lady of the Camellias* any more.

A doctor couldn't do anything much more romantic than setting your broken leg.

Heroic characters for problem plays were dwindling fast. Soon, the audience would be dwindling too. For as the standard of living rises, so the birth-rate declines. "Goliath" had raised the standard enormously. Already the birth-rate was dropping enormously.

There was a level of minimum comfort, and it was a high one. In the towns, you didn't need to leave your rent-free house or flat to shop. You consulted your catalogues and 'phoned the Central Distributor—for food, hardware, whatever it was.

"You decide: the machines will do the rest."

Robot carriers brought the larger items right to your service lift. As for the smaller ones—

Take food, for example. You dialled C F D (Central Food Distributor). You spoke your shopping list into a microphone.

At once, electronic ears, eyes, and hands became busy at CFD. Within minutes, packaged food would come sliding through the maze of conduits to the wire cage—"bread basket" was the popular term —in your kitchen.

Each packet stamped with your address in magnetic ink. That magic token had steered it through the electronic labyrinth.

You had a million and one varieties of processed food to choose from. But it was all processed—even the fruit. So Bill's remark

about catching his own fish, growing his own vegetables, aroused in me almost forgotten appetites.

I must try fried sole again. And eat a raw carrot.

I sipped my beer and felt myself coming to life again. This old Cornish town was as primitive and magical as Camelot. Only the tips of Goliath's tentacles had reached it. True, there were Central Distribution Centres, but they were static Centres. No conduit system, no robot carriers. You actually had to go to them in person and pick up what you wanted.

Trains with drivers! Pubs with barmaids!

Some houses, Bill had told me, didn't even have TV.

I told myself I'd get a house like that. To hell with TV—and the pseudo-historical plays that meant little, and the " modern " plays which were only tired tricks with the eternal triangle and meant even less.

" To Merthavin—real civilization," I said aloud, and raised my tankard.

Bill raised his, too, but not to Merthavin. He was saluting a newcomer to the bar, a slow-moving old chap, leathery and wrinkled, who'd obviously celebrated his own centenary years ago.

" Hi, Cornelius, what's the news? "

" Buy the *Messenger* and find out," grunted Cornelius.

" I'd rather buy you a pint, you miserable old man," retorted Bill, and did so.

Cornelius, I discovered, was a character.

He disliked most people and had found an ideal way of telling them so. He owned and edited a weekly local newspaper, the *Merthavin Messenger*. Such papers were a rarity these days. There certainly wasn't another like this one.

He had a copy with him and showed it to me. There must have been acid even in the printer's ink. The news was all about local people, put viperishly.

Sam Coates, of Pentagon Street, fell off his bicycle three times on his way home from The Piskie House on Thursday. But he wasn't riding a bicycle. He only thought he was. Men who can't hold their liquor should stick to weak tea.

Elizabeth (" Liza ") Pettsworth, of Walsham Street corner (hours, 7 p.m. to midnight) is expecting again. So are Bill Foster, Tom Trelawney, and Simon Meek. Rumour has it that they will cut the cards to decide who will be the happy father.

On Sunday, Percy Browne, of Loomis Cottage, beat his carpet, his wife, and it out of town.

That sort of thing.

"How many times a week are you sued, Cornelius?" I asked, handing it back.

Cornelius just growled into his beer.

"They never sue," said Bill. "They love it. They lap it up. They feel honoured to see their name in print. It makes them feel they're *someone*. In this world, that's a rare feeling."

"I'm packing up the *Messenger*," said Cornelius, suddenly. "I'm getting too old for it. Besides, I'm tired of running a scandal sheet. It was a good paper once. I ran some good stories. But nobody wanted good stories—only dirty ones. Small towns are only interested in gossip. Nasty people. I hate everybody."

"Confound you, Cornelius!" exclaimed Bill. "The *Messenger's* become part of my life here. I'll miss it like hell . . . Junior, I've an idea. You need an occupation. You're a writer. You take over the *Messenger*."

"Me?" I was startled. "Sorry, it's not my kind of thing. I want to settle down peacefully here. I don't want to start by slanging the local folk, especially as I don't know any of 'em."

"Pam'll dig out the dirt for you, Mr. Madden," said Cornelius. "She's been my right hand these last couple of years."

"Pam?"

"My great-grand-daughter."

"H'm." I visualised a stringy, sharp-nosed, narrow-eyed malicious vixen. If I *did* take over the paper she'd go out on her neck.

"Best story I ever ran," said Cornelius, "was the Flying Saucer of Moble Island. The strangest thing—saw it with my own eyes. 'Bout ten years ago. Big ball of white fire—like the sun itself—came down from nowhere, in broad daylight, settled on the Island, seemed to sink right into it. I was out fishing that way, alone. Made for the Island right away, walked all over it. Not a sign of anything out of the ordinary. Not even a twig burnt."

"You deserve another pint for that yarn," said Bill. "Madeleine!"

Cornelius scowled at him. "Nobody else believed me, either. They kidded the life out of me. But I've made 'em squirm since. Don't put your thumb in the beer, damn you."

I said: "It sounds more like some meteorological phenomenon—globe lightning, say—than a so-called Flying Saucer."

"What's so-called 'bout Flying Saucers?" growled Cornelius. "Everyone in these parts has seen 'em. Seen three myself. But

they're not balls of fire, but solid flying machines."

"I saw one only last week," said Bill, lazily. "Going over pretty high. What kind of new 'plane is it, Junior? I'm out of touch."

"I must be, too," I said. "I don't know of any circular type 'planes. But it's hard to keep tag on all the new inventions these days."

We got to talking about these days. The beer so mellowed me that in the end I felt Cornelius and I were old friends and accepted his invitation to see the *Messenger* office.

Everything was jammed in the one room. There stood an aged linotype, two desks, two chairs, many files, a typewriter, a visaphone, two dozen empty beer bottles—and Pam. Everything except Pam was pretty much what I'd expected to find.

She was about twenty. Not stringy, but nicely rounded. Her eyes were round also, brown and innocent as a fawn's. Her nose was perfect, her bearing demure, her voice soft, like a shy schoolgirl's, and her hair was long and raven-black.

Cornelius introduced me gruffly and made an all-embracing gesture. "Well, here it is. Not much to it, is there? Nine thousand the lot—that includes the bad will."

"Does it also include Pam?" I asked, brashly.

"Take her with it, and the price is only eight thousand."

I laughed, not quite comfortably.

"You're chiselling again, Cornelius," said Pam in a voice like velvet. "I'm sure the London women are accustomed to pay far more than a thousand pounds for the pleasure of Mr. Madden's company."

"Tush, child, your claws are showing," said Cornelius. "What will Mr. Madden think?"

I happened to be thinking that this must be how you felt if you were suddenly stilettoed by a church mouse of a Sunday school teacher. Cornelius's acid tongue had passed down through the generations and even sharpened on the way.

"I'll take the lot," I said, heavily. "Cat and all."

Pam gave me the sweetest smile I've ever seen. "'Ban, 'Ban, Ca—Caliban, has a new master," she murmured.

After which, we got on fine. For years. Things happened in those years, mostly not for the best. I got older, and Cornelius got so old he died.

The *Messenger* had it ups and downs. Its ups when I gave Pam

a free rein. Its downs when I mounted the editorial soapbox and campaigned. Mostly I campaigned against the ever more rapid encroachment by Goliath from the east. His victims seemed to vanish overnight. Bob, the monotrain driver, was one. The monorail became automatic right to Land's End.

Automation took over the tin mines and the china clay pits. The clerical staff of the bank in Truro was replaced by an electronic brain. Merthavin's bank was next on the list.

I got worked up about it, though none of my reluctant readers seemed to. Like Tom Smallways, they'd come to accept that "This here Progress, it goes on." Even Bill seemed resigned, until one day he came striding into my office, thumped on my desk, and red-faced, yelled: "It's got to stop!"

It turned out that *The Piskie House* had been automatized.

"Madeleine's gone—replaced by a battery of push-buttons," said Bill, furiously. "Dial BIT for bitter. It comes sliding over the bar at you like a ruddy curling stone. How can you enjoy beer in a damn telephone exchange? It's got to stop."

"Did you see Gregory?" asked Pam. Gregory was the landlord.

Bill nodded. "Not his fault. Some Government VIP called and read Section 23, sub-section 14(a) of the Automation Act at him. All pubs to be automatized by the fifteenth of this month. The engineers worked all night. They've ruined our date for next Monday, Junior."

I frowned, then remembered. That was the date we'd fixed under Eros forty years back. We'd settled for a binge in *The Piskie House* instead. We'd been refugees in the West Country for six years now.

"I'll write an editorial," I said, firmly.

"Much good that'll do!" snarled Bill. "I'm going to get my Luger and shoot this VIP right through the liver. Wonder where he is now?"

"Here, sir," said a cheerful voice from the doorway. We turned. There stood a good-looking young man. He was neatly dressed, smiling, and carrying what appeared to be a dispatch case. "Complete with liver," he added. "The name is Arthur Coney, Assistant-Deputy-Scientific-Director for the West Region."

A silence.

"He *looks* human," said Pam. "Probably a robot, though."

Coney shook his head. "My liver is non-mechanical, I assure

you. But please don't shoot a hole through it. I'm only here to help you."

"In what way, exactly?" asked Bill, dangerously.

Coney beamed at him. "Are you Mr. Madden?" Bill scowled, and indicated me.

Coney transferred the beam to me. "I've come to automatize your newspaper."

"Like hell you will!" I said, violently. "And don't bother to read sub-section 14(a) at me, either."

"Sub-section 21(e)—automatization of newspapers," Coney corrected.

"This newspaper is privately owned—by me," I snapped.

"The Government isn't taking it from you, sir," said Coney. "Only increasing its efficiency, cutting out superfluous staff—"

"I have no superfluous staff."

"Thank you kindly," murmured Pam.

Coney was taking a look round. I'd made a few changes, but not many. The old typewriter had fallen apart and I'd got the latest electric model. The linotype had been even older and lousy with gremlins, and I'd replaced it. Sometimes when I wanted to dictate one of my crusading editorials, Pam wasn't available to take it down. Therefore, I'd bought a tape recorder. That was about all.

"Your equipment isn't too bad, Mr. Madden," remarked Coney.

"Thanks," I said, acidly.

"But you don't seem to have made the best use of it, sir."

The typewriter and the tape recorder were both standing on my desk. Coney pushed them together back to back. He fumbled a bit, then there was an audible click. Somehow, the two machines had snapped together and become one unit. He switched on, slipped paper in the typewriter, and began speaking into the recorder mike.

"As you see, these two units were designed to become another machine—a robot typist-secretary. My words become magnetic patterns on the tape, the tape passes under a magnetic pick-up at the back of the typewriter, and the resulting electric impulses operate the relevant keys."

As fast as he was speaking, the typewriter was tapping out the words on paper. The rest of us were bereft of speech. I'd wondered about certain catches and projections on the two machines, which seemed to serve no purpose. But now I saw their purpose.

"So much for that," said Coney. "You don't need a typist. Neither do you need a linotype operator."

He opened his case, which was full of slim tools, plugs, and

lengths of thin cable. He plugged the tape recorder straight into the linotype (I'd also wondered why *that* mysterious socket was there). "Feed your copy direct," he said, speaking into the mike, and the brass letters began dropping. "Now I'll show you how the print can best be fed to the press—"

"Don't bother," I said, recovering my voice. "We're sentimental: we're going to stick to the old-fashioned methods here."

"That is against Government policy," said Coney, reprovingly. "The Automation Programme—"

"To hell with the Programme," I said.

"If you try to block it," said Coney, "you'll only cause blocks elsewhere in the set-up. One is sure to arise on the paper delivery line to you, for instance."

"Intimidation!" snorted Bill. "I'll go get my Luger, Junior."

"Never mind, Bill," I said. "Pam's out of a job and so am I. I'm not going to play a one-man band for the Government. So I've just fired myself. No editor, no paper."

"Not necessarily," said Coney. "If you won't run the paper efficiently, Mr. Madden, then the Government will. I'll show you how."

He got through on the visaphone to a Government news agency in London, and asked for "general service." He clipped the recorder mike to the visaphone speaker. Some fellow in the news agency began reading out general news items, dull stuff overloaded with scientific progress reports. The linotype dutifully set up the type.

"That's only the rough idea," said Coney. "There are technical short cuts, of course, and we must arrange distribution this end. The agency supplies the latest news from all over the world—foreign reports come via automatic translators, naturally."

Pam said: "That stuff will bore everyone dead around here. Nobody will buy the rag."

"They won't have to," said Coney, gently. "Like all Government services, it'll be free."

I looked at the long, black cable of the visaphone and saw it for what it had been all the time: an early exploratory tentacle of Goliath's. Now it had tightened its grip on the *Messenger* and choked it to death.

"Let's get away from here," I said between my teeth.

The three of us left Coney to play, and walked in silence towards *The Piskie House*. Halfway along the road, Bill gripped my arm and pointed up. Pam was already staring at the five flying saucers, in V-formation, traversing the blue sky incredibly high and

yet swiftly. They looked like blobs of mercury and gleamed in the sun. Making no sound, they vanished towards the east.

"Something's happening," I said. "Something mysterious and mighty important. We're beginning to see the effects, but the causes aren't dreamt of in our philosophy."

"I feel that, too," said Pam. "I've felt it for a long time."

The Piskie House was de-humanized now but at least you could get free beer. We stung the Government for plenty. We sat by the window and let the robot-servers work overtime.

"That insidious contraption wasn't there last time I came," said Bill, jerking a thumb at the big TV set above the bar. There were no other customers and the set wasn't switched on. We left it that way.

"Cornwall's had it," I remarked, gloomily. "It's Goliath's territory now. We'll have to move on again, Bill. What about the Outer Hebrides?"

"That's an idea," said Bill.

"Take me with you," said Pam.

"That's an idea," said Bill, again.

"But I doubt if we'd be safe from Goliath even there for long," I said, still depressed. "These automation maniacs have more subtlety than I suspected. Look how they crept up on me! The typewriter, the recorder, and the linotype were all mass-produced models. Heaven knows how many of 'em are scattered over the world. And all cunningly designed to fit into one another as part of the Goliath hook-up."

"A new invention," said Bill, "is usually an amalgam of two old ones. Once, you had a pen and a bottle of ink—two separate objects. Then some genius got the idea of fitting the bottle of ink on to the pen. Hence, the fountain-pen. So it goes on."

"A plague on all inventors," I said, moodily fingering my tankard.

"Except the man who invented beer," said Bill, and drained his.

Pam was steadily putting away beer, too, and she wasn't used to it. She stared out of the window with glazing eyes. "That C-Coney fellow is very good-looking, don't you think?" she said, suddenly. "I could rather go for him if he weren't a Government man. P-Pity. Where's he taking our f-files?"

"What?" I swung round and looked out.

Coney was driving slowly past in an open car. The rear seat was piled high with papers which certainly looked like the back files

of the *Messenger*. I blundered out of the pub, shouting, but Coney accelerated and shot off down the Truro road.

I fumed. Pam joined me out there, a trifle unsteady on her feet.

"Let's g-go see what he's been up to," she suggested.

We made for the *Messenger* office. It was empty and the machines were silent. The long file shelves were empty, too.

"I get it," I said, savagely. "He's going to search the files for anything I wrote which could be twisted to mean sedition. Then the Government would have a so-called legal excuse for confiscating the *Messenger*. No compensation for me—I'll be lucky to escape jail."

Pam sighed. "Such a g-good-looker! It's a real shame."

"About me—or him?"

"No, about me. I fell for him on sight. My impossible dream-man!"

"You'd probably get along fine together. You're both experienced stabbers in the back."

"Unfair to Pam! I wouldn't marry one of G-Goliath's henchmen if he begged me. Let's go back and drown our sorrows."

We plodded back to *The Piskie House* and Bill. He listened to our woes and said abruptly: "The game's up here. I'll get the *Pinto* provisioned up and tomorrow we'll sail for the Hebrides."

The *Pinto* was his boat. We drank to escape and a new life.

I got home a little worse for wear that evening and slept heavily. Next morning I was awakened by metallic sounds in the lounge. My head was throbbing like a war-drum. In my pyjamas, I tottered into the lounge.

Arthur Coney, fresh-shaven, smartly dressed, with a folded newspaper tucked under his arm, was supervising a workman installing a TV set. He turned and smiled pleasantly.

"Good morning, Mr. Madden. Nice job, eh? Rosewood case —to match your furniture."

"What the devil are you doing in my house?"

"Its not your house, sir—it's the Government's."

True. Having used most of my capital to buy the *Messenger*, I'd been forced to take a rent-free, Government-owned standard house.

"Then take that box of tricks back to the Goverment. I don't want a TV."

"You don't have to *use* it, Mr. Madden. But a new order says that all standard houses are to be supplied with TV. Free, of course—all part of the raising of the standard of living."

"Either it goes or I go," I said.

Coney shrugged. "That's up to you, Mr. Madden. You're free to go—anywhere. Including the Outer Hebrides."

My swimming head swam in another direction for a moment. I looked blearily at the workman, and muttered: "Coney, I want to speak to you privately. Come into my bedroom for a minute."

"Why, certainly."

I followed him in and shut the door. "I don't like my conversations monitored, Coney. I'll take a bet these new TV sets—like the one out there and the one in *The Piskie House*—are dual purpose instruments too, with a microphone snuggled in alongside the loudspeaker. Why are you spying on me?"

"I'm not. But I should like some information from you."

"Such as?"

He unfolded the newspaper and I saw it was a very old issue of the *Messenger*. He indicated a headline in it: THE FLYING

SAUCER OF MOBLE ISLAND. "Do you know anything about that, Mr. Madden?"

I looked it over. It was Cornelius's story, of course.

"Why should I? It happened ten years before I came here."

"I know. But I've heard Cornelius used to talk about it a lot. You knew him well. Did he mention it to you?"

"Yes. But he said no more than he's said here in print—the globe of white fire settling into the Island and leaving no trace. He was obviously completely baffled by it."

"I see." Coney retrieved the paper. "Perhaps he told his great-grand-daughter more. I'll try her."

"She may even like it," I said.

He grinned suddenly. "I like her, too." And I wondered if Pam's comment on him had been reported to him by the unknown eavesdropper.

He left with the workman. I put my head under the cold tap, then went looking for Bill. He was on the beach fixing a fresh-water keg in the *Pinto*. "We sail with the evening tide," he said.

"I'd like to take a short sail before that. Moble Island is only about four miles out, isn't it?"

"Yes. Why?"

I told him about Coney, and added: "This Moble Island episode means something to the Government, if nothing to us. I believe they're uneasy about it. They're trying to ferret out something."

"Let 'em. As you said, it means nothing to us."

I looked out to sea. "You're older than me, Bill. *Much* older. Blood running a bit thin, eh?"

That got him, as I knew it would. He flushed, then snapped: "Help me roll her out."

As we heaved the *Pinto* over the rollers, down the beach, I panted: "It's an outside chance . . . but we may . . . learn something . . . to their disadvantage."

Bill made no answer. He was still sulking when we were turning to head for the shore beach of the Island. It was a small, bleak place—a rock with a thin layer of topsoil. Nevertheless, there was earth enough to support a few stunted trees, bent over by the prevailing sea-wind, and some spiky undergrowth.

"Look—a seal!" I exclaimed, pointing to a black shape cavorting in the sea near the beach.

Bill didn't bother to look. He was standoffish, and anyhow he'd seen plenty of seals. I'd seen a few, but never one quite like this. It looked odd, with a roundish head. I strained my eyes, but

it was distant and the sea reflected sunlight dazzlingly. It seemed to ride the breakers to the beach, flop about, then squirm up the slope—an indistinct dark shape on the sand. It vanished behind bushes.

We landed there ten minutes later. I saw the track of the thing at once, the shallow trench in wet sand of a heavy body dragging itself along.

And on either side of it, regularly spaced, the imprints of great hands, with the thumbs as long as the fingers.

We stared at them, dumstruck. Then: "What kind of seal did you see?" Bill asked, slowly.

I just shook my head, at a complete loss. We followed the track until it faded out on hard ground. We searched the islet thoroughly. There was nothing to see save dwarf trees, bushes, grass and weed patches, and large spurs and knobs of mossy rock.

"It went back into the sea on the other side." said Bill.

"It must have done," I said. There was no beach there, only a low rock cliff.

We talked our heads off about the thing as we sailed back to Merthavin, coming only to the conclusions that it was big, heavy, and not a land creature. For it had swum easily but could only crawl on land. The hand-prints were a freak we just couldn't explain.

Back on Merthavin beach we resumed the work of stocking up the *Pinto*. "I'll finish this," said Bill, as last. "You find Pam. We'll be ready to sail in an hour."

Pam wasn't at home, so I made for *The Piskie House*. Coney's open tourer was standing outside it. In the saloon bar was Coney himself, having a head to head talk in a corner with Pam. Trade was comparatively brisk. There were half a dozen local inhabitants drinking and talking, and Gregory, the landlord, with nothing to do, was bustling about as though he were still running the tavern.

I broke into the Coney-Pam palaver.

"You two haven't been talking all this time?"

"We have," said Pam. "For hours. Arthur's quite good company when you get to know him."

Coney smiled charmingly.

"You've got to know him?" I asked, incredulously.

"Not quite," said Pam. "I still can't understand why he thinks Goliath is a good thing and the Government can do no wrong."

"It's simple enough," said Coney. "I believe in the greatest

good for the greatest number—and not for just a few awkward individualists like you two."

At which moment the TV set, which no one had touched, switched itself on. The screen glowed with far more than its customary brilliance, faded, glowed, faded, glowed with a steady, pulsating rhythm.

"Attention, everybody," commanded an authoritative voice. "Watch this screen, watch this screen. . ."

For a time, anyway, no one could help doing so. The pulsating light had a peculiarly hypnotic effect. Everyone in the bar was staring at it.

Presently, the same voice commanded: "You will now raise your right arm above your head."

To my surprise, not only Coney, but all the others present did exactly that. Except Pam and me.

"What goes on, Coney?" I rasped.

He ignored me, and the TV voice said: "If you are with other people, note those who have *not* raised their arms. They are enemies of the country. Report them to the police at once. If possible, detain them by force and send for the police. That is all. Drop your arms now."

As the light died and the set went silent, the bar seemed to be full of hostile eyes watching Pam and me. Gregory started to move towards us. Coney stood up and waved him back.

"All right, Gregory," he said, easily. "Leave this to me." He took a pace back so that he could cover Pam and me with the needle pistol he nonchalantly produced. "Right, you two. Walk slowly ahead of me to my car. Don't try anything. These needles will knock you out for an hour and you'll feel bad for a day."

"You were right, Pam," I said. "You never *quite* got to know friend Arthur."

"Perhaps it's just as well," she said, and sighed.

Coney shepherded us out of the hushed bar to the tourer. He motioned me into the driving seat and got into the back seat himself with Pam. "You're driving, Mr. Madden. We'll go and pick up Mr. Brewster—I presume he's still working on his boat?—and make up a little party to go to Truro."

"And then?"

"My responsibility ends then. They'll probably take you to the concentration camp at the old Dartmoor Prison."

"For what crime?" asked Pam.

"For being immune to hypnotism," said Coney. "Get going, Mr. Madden."

I thought plenty as I drove slowly down to the beach. At first about those doubly traitorous TV sets, another Government plant, which could be switched on by remote control from—somewhere. How wide was that net spread, I wondered. But I didn't allow myself to wonder for long. I had more pressing problems to consider.

I stopped at the edge of the beach, only ten yards from the *Pinto*. Bill was levering a heavy case of provisions into place with an iron bar. I began to whistle Schubert's *Ave Maria* mournfully.

Long ago Bill and I were on the run through Germany after escaping from a prison camp. We were trying to pass ourselves off as German civilians. If either of us noticed the other was being watched or followed, we whistled that warning tune casually, and just as casually tried to indicate, with our right thumb, the suspected enemy.

I hope Bill would remember.

"Mr. Brewster," Coney called. From the corners of my eyes, I could see he was holding the needle pistol low out of Bill's line of sight. I rubbed my cheek gently, keeping my thumb pointing back at Coney.

Bill sauntered over, still carrying the bar. I was worried. He didn't even seem to have noticed me.

"Well?" he said, coldly.

Coney began to raise the pistol. In the same instant Pam flung herself on him, grabbing his wrist with both hands, and Bill stepped up smartly and cracked him on the skull with the bar. Coney groaned and slumped back.

"Thank heavens!" I breathed. "I was afraid you'd forgotten."

"Old soldiers never forget," said Bill. "Thanks, Pam. What's it all about?"

We told him concisely.

"We'd better take him with us," said Bill. "He knows where we're bound for. Maybe others know too, but again, maybe not. Also, we can hold him as hostage. Most important of all, we'll wring out of him just what the Government is trying to pull on everybody."

Bill commandeered the pistol. We carried the unconscious Coney to the boat, got rope from the locker, tied his arms behind him. Then we set sail.

There was a small gash on Coney's temple and Pam bathed it.

She said half-seriously to Bill: "Did you have to clout him so hard? I prefer my men unscarred."

"Are you really still fond of that Quisling?" I asked.

"Rather. He's a nice hunk of man. I only hope Bill's knocked some sense into him."

Coney opened his eyes presently and saw Pam ministering to him. "Florence Nightingale, I presume?" he murmured, faintly. Painfully, he took stock of the general situation—we were a couple of miles out to sea. "Good lord, I've been press-ganged! But you won't get away with it. There'll be a reception committee waiting for you in the Hebrides."

We looked at each other. "I was rather afraid of that," I said.

"There are other islands," said Bill, grimly.

"Wherever you go, the Makkees will find you," said Coney.

"And who—or what—are the Makkees?" asked Bill, fiercely.

Coney looked up at the blue, empty sky. "You'll learn before very long."

We were level with Moble Island when the Makkees tried to contact us, and it was no friendly approach. From the grey line of Cornwall, three flying saucers came skimming in formation. Not knowing their size, it was difficult to judge their height. But they were low enough for me to distinguish the row of ports along their rims and the pear-shaped knob surmounting each of them.

They wheeled around, and the leader peeled off and came plunging soundlessly towards us. It was big, all right, and in a matter of moments it was a dark shape rushing over us, eclipsing the sun.

I seemed to have stopped breathing.

Something like a white-hot harpoon darted down from the saucer as it swept past, and flashed into the sea fifty yards away.

There had been no sound, no disturbance. But now, suddenly, we were smitten all ways. The displaced air in the saucer's wake rushed together with the sound of twenty thunderclaps treading on each other's heels. There was a concerted screaming, like a thousand pieces of flying shrapnel: *wheeeee!*

The *Pinto* tossed and twirled like a stick in a cataract.

And fifty yards off, with a bang to end all bangs, the sea exploded into steam and began to boil. Bubbles rose and burst, and a stinging veil of white vapour closed round us. The sea-water that slopped over the sides was scalding, and we yelled with pain when we were splashed.

I was even more scared and confused than when the *minnenwerfers* caught me in open ground at Anzio.

Then the turbulent air shredded the steam clouds apart. Through streaming eyes I could see the sky again—and a group of maybe a dozen other saucers circling like gulls, high, high above.

Then the blue sky began to darken into mauve, then indigo. I waited dumbly for it to become black, for I imagined I was passing out. But it remained indigo. And in it the white spots of the saucers seemed to swim, dim and indistinct now, like small fish in murky water.

The *Pinto* began to settle down again and the sea-swell was subsiding. Bill, red scald-marks on his hands, was cutting Coney's bonds with a jack-knife. Pam, with her long black hair in wild disorder, was fumbling in the medicine chest. She eased our pain and her own with a cooling salve, wordlessly.

I looked around. A purple twilight seemed to have fallen, and yet the sun was still a long way above the western horizon. It looked a very pale blue.

Coney sat up, rubbing his forearms.

"The Makkees?" I asked, indicating the misty saucers.

He nodded silently.

"They don't seem to mind if they kill you as well as us," I said.

He shrugged. "That's my own look-out. I shouldn't have fallen down on my job."

"Which was?"

"Apart from generally supervising automation in the Merthavin area, to round up non-co-operative people like yourselves—not be rounded up by them."

"Why did you take the *Messenger* files?" asked Pam, curiously.

"I was ordered to collect the files of *any* local newspaper and take them to Truro for electronic scanning. The Makkees were reviewing all news items relating to flying saucers which had been published anywhere in the world."

"What's the point?" I asked. "They run the saucers themselves. Therefore, they already know all about them."

"That's *their* business," said Coney, calmly.

"Save the cross-examination till later," cut in Bill, impatiently, now at the tiller. "Just keep an eye on those damn saucers. It won't take a direct hit to sink us and boil us alive."

He was steering for Moble Island. He went on: "We're sitting ducks out here. We'll be safer in slit trenches if we can get ashore."

The saucer which had attacked us had rejoined the other two. They were sweeping in a great circle round the purple sky. We watched them with some apprehension. Suddenly, they began to climb steeply, still in formation, until they joined the group circling at high level and it became impossible to distinguish them apart.

Bill frowned. "Have they been called off? Queer—they had us at their mercy."

"The Makkees," said Coney, "have no mercy."

There was a short silence. "This purple haze is very strange," I said.

"It's eerie," said Pam, shivering. "And unnatural. The Makkees must have caused it. Why? What are they up to, Arthur?"

Coney compressed his lips and shook his head. I lost my temper suddenly at his obstinacy, grabbed him by the throat and shook his head some more—violently.

"What *are* the Makkees? Another mad sect of would-be world-conquerors? Are you one of 'em? Answer me!"

He made no resistance and allowed himself to be shaken like a sack of potatoes. The gash on his head began to bleed afresh.

"Stop bullying, Junior!" cried Pam, indignantly. And I threw my hands up in disgust.

We landed on Moble Island. As we were stepping ashore, the flock of flying saucers began to make off towards the mainland and soon were lost to view in the thick haze.

"Maybe it's just a feint to lure us out to sea again," commented Bill. "We'd best hang on here awhile and see what develops. One development I promise is that Coney here is going to *talk*—or else lose his tongue for good and all. For, by heaven, I'll tear it out!"

Coney smiled faintly and Pam said petulantly: "Don't be so childish, Bill. We've grown out of playing cowboys and Indians."

A voice behind us, deep as the bass pipes of an organ, said cynically: "Well, that's good news, anyway. Your race played that game for far too long."

We spun around. There at the top of the beach's gentle slope sat a strange figure in a sort of bucket chair that certainly hadn't been there two minutes ago. To me he looked like the king of the Zulus as I'd imagined him from an old Rider Haggard romance. Black as coal, he was naked save for a harness of straps and pouches gleaming with studs. His body gleamed, too, for he was quite hairless, even on the scalp.

His eyes were large, with disconcertingly pale irises. His lips and nose were thin, and his ears little more than orifices. His feet

and hands were strangely formed. With a little shock, I noted that his thumbs were as long as his fingers.

My first impression that he was a malformed negro faded rapidly. For no given reason, I sensed he belonged neither to our world nor our time. Like the He-Ancient in Shaw's *Methuselah,* it was as though Time had worked on him incessantly through whole geologic periods. He had the authority of infinite experience and it rested on him like an aura.

For all that, he'd become no benevolent patriarch. He watched us with a sort of weary, half-humorous contempt.

Bill was less impressed than I. "Who the devil are you?" he snapped.

"I don't feel it incumbent on me to explain myself to so-called *homo sapiens* or any other similar minor species," said the presence, calmly. "Kindly push your boat out and leave my island."

"*Your* island?" It was a chorus, save for Coney, who stood watching, without expression.

"I took possession of it some years ago."

"Are you one of the Makkees?" demanded Bill, suddenly producing Coney's pistol.

The Ancient smiled briefly. "Evidently you've never set eyes on a Makkee." He looked at us each intently in turn. "But *you* have," he said, pointing to Coney. "The *kuro* is plain."

We looked at Coney too. He remained wooden-faced.

"The what?" asked Bill, turning back to the Ancient.

"The *kuro*. It's not obvious to the inexperienced, but I've seen it countless times. It's a slight but always present distrait look in the eyes. It means our friend here is not wholly with us. At some time he was hypnotised by the Makkees, and suggestions were put into his mind which are still circulating there. It's the Makkees' traditional technique. How is it that the rest of you have escaped it so far?"

"We were immunized as children," said Bill, shortly.

Pam clasped Coney's hand. "Now I understand, Arthur. It's not your fault."

Coney made no response.

The Ancient gestured impatiently. "Once, time meant nothing to me. But now I have little enough to spare. Don't waste any more of it for me. Leave my island at once."

Bill raised the needle pistol. "Look here, Prospero, we're staying on for a bit whether you like it or not. We're not going back out there to be shot up by flying saucers again."

The Ancient raised an eyebrow. "What makes you imagine the Makkees were attacking you?"

"No imagination about it," snapped Bill. "They damn near sank us with a thunderbolt. They were gunning for us because we kidnapped this fellow, Coney, who's their agent. And because they failed to hypnotize us too."

"You surprise me," murmured the Ancient. "On two counts. First, to learn that there are humans impervious to hypnotism. Second, because I believed the Makkees were trying to attack me, not you. That's why I set up the force shield."

"The purple haze?" I asked.

The Ancient nodded. "It's a shallow dome of force, some three miles in diameter, centred on the island. Nothing can get through it. The Makkees have given up trying. That's why the saucers went away: their pilots knew it was useless. All the same, it's a nuisance. I didn't want them to know I was even on this planet. Now I've not only informed them that I am, but I've given my position away too. All because of you interlopers. Why did you have to pick on *this* island?"

"Why did you?" I countered. "You came here about sixteen years ago, didn't you, in a sort of—I don't know what . . . comet? Anyhow, a globe of white fire in appearance."

"So I was observed then?"

"Then—and again earlier today. We saw you swimming. We saw your tracks on the beach here. And the Makkees had a pretty good idea that you were here, too."

I explained how they were systematically checking up on all "flying saucer" reports, which of course would include any unidentified flying objects like the fiery globe, and that in fact Coney had already questioned me about it.

The Ancient sighed. "I really must be getting old! I'm becoming blind and deaf to all that goes on around me. Perhaps I can learn something from you, after all. You'd better come this way."

He—and the chair with him—seemed to vanish. I had the impression that they'd been snatched backwards from the crest of the slope.

We exclaimed with astonishment.

"He's a magician—it *was* Prospero, after all!" gasped Pam.

I marched up the slope and gazed down through the bushes on the other side. One of the huge moss-covered rocks appeared to have been split down the centre and the halves swung apart on in-

visible hinges. The space between them was the mouth of a tunnel, which sloped steeply into the earth.

There was a yellow light down there. Black against it, the Ancient came gliding up the ramp, still seated in his chair, which skimmed along a bare inch above the ground, with no visible means of propulsion.

The world had been becoming very strange of late, but this island was strangest of all. It seemed to me like a mad dream woven of threads from stories I'd read long ago.

Inexplicable prints on the beach—the track of Man Friday, from *Robinson Crusoe*. The Zulu king from Haggard, the He-Ancient from Shaw, and now Alice's rabbit-hole . . . or Aladdin's cave?

The Ancient beckoned impatiently. " This way."

Dazedly, I turned and beckoned the others also. Coney seemed reluctant to move, but Bill jabbed the pistol in his back and forced him on. Pam clung resolutely to Coney's arm. And so we walked down into Prospero's cell beneath the earth, and the rock healed magically behind us, cutting us off from one crazy world and sealing us in another.

It was midnight. Outside, the force shield must be dimming the moon. I was glad it was there, keeping the Makkees at bay. For now I knew who they were.

The talk had ended half an hour ago. My jaws were still stiff from my share of it, though Prospero had talked most. I was dog-tired, and lay on one of Prospero's soft couches in this womb in the earth. But I couldn't sleep. My head felt as thought it would burst from trying to compass all the things I'd learnt.

The Ancient had tried to teach us to pronounce his name. We couldn't get our tongues round it. We'd had to go back to " Prospero," and he'd accepted it with humour. He knew about Prospero, and Shakespeare, and a surprising lot more about the human race, its arts, languages, achievements, and history. And he had a pretty low opinion of it.

He came from a small planet circling a sun on the far side of this galaxy. He was a lone explorer making an extensive tour of the galaxy. Too extensive, in fact—his wandering had brought him close to the point of death 95,000 light-years from home.

He reckoned to be some two thousand Earth-years old, a normal span for his kind. But his heart had begun to miss beats, and would soon stop altogether. " Any year now," he said.

He would have preferred to die on his own planet, but he'd left

it too late to return in time. "Curiosity about the next planetary system always lured me on. The exploring itch has only lately died away altogether, and that confirms I *am* dying."

So he cast around for a planet on which to spend his last few years, preferably a planet that reminded him of his own. It wasn't easy. If the planets weren't naturally inhospitable, with poisonous atmospheres, then generally the Makkees were in full control of them and there was no spot for him.

Earth was a compromise. It had drawbacks. It was infested with *homo sapiens,* a quarrelsome, weak and stupid race, doomed to domination by the Makkees who had already prepared the ground for their invasion and colonization. Its gravity was thrice that of his own planet, which meant crawling was easier than walking. However, he overcame that by becoming literally chair-borne. And he could get exercise by sea-bathing, which he'd always loved as a youth.

He settled on deserted Moble Island. The advance party of Makkees had begun infiltrating this planet, but from past experience he judged it would be twenty years before the mass invasion began. He'd probably be dead by then. Even if he weren't, he doubted that the Makkees would suspect his presence or stumble on his hide-out.

He'd had trouble with the Makkees all the way. They just didn't want him around. But his science was superior to theirs, and he had weapons and the force shield to make them keep their distance. However, sometimes they tried to catch him by surprise. He'd thought they'd attempted it today.

"The locusts of space," he called them. Their ambition was to colonise the whole galaxy and they'd been working on it for eons.

At this point, there was an interruption. Coney came round. He'd been unconscious for an hour.

The thing had happened unexpectedly. Prospero had begun by showing us around his retreat. He lived among a maze of electronic apparatus, for which he derived power by breaking down the atoms of sea-water.

There were plenty of intriguing gadgets. He picked up something that looked like Bill's old Luger.

"This is a circuit-breaker," he said. "There's a powerful battery in the handle."

Playfully—we thought it was a gag—he pressed the point of the thing against the base of Coney's neck and thumbed a button. Coney shuddered briefly and collapsed.

"You've killed him!" cried Pam, distractedly.

"Nonsense," said Prospero. "He'll recover in an hour, and then he'll be a man again and not half automaton."

He explained that an electrical discharge had passed through Coney's brain, breaking the closed circuit of hypnotic suggestion for good and all. It was, plainly, shock treatment. He added that the shock would also scatter other thought patterns temporarily, but that couldn't be helped. Memory would re-assert itself.

It was so. As he struggled back to consciousness, Coney was confused at first and recognized none of us. But gradually his mind became integrated and he became alert—more so than before. His eyes looked brighter.

So did Pam's as she watched him fondly, for here was the real Coney she'd never seen before.

"The *kuro* has gone," Prospero commented. "He can tell us of his own encounter with the Makkees."

That was a long story, too. Coney had been a civil servant in the Scientific Directorate's employ at Plymouth. One day there arrived a scrawny shrimp of a man named Lucas, jaundiced-looking and muffled to the ears in a kapok-lined coat even in high summer. He was the new Director. He took over—everything and everybody. He had a cold, precise manner and eyes that bored right through you.

"I often remarked he seemed to hypnotize people," said Coney. "At what point I became hypnotized myself I don't know. But obviously it happened. I was promoted. I came to believe Lucas and the Government he represented were infallible. I presume something of the kind must have happened in London first, and the Makkees had become the power behind the Government, if not the Government itself."

"Lucas was a Makkee, all right," nodded Prospero. "They hate feeling cold, and this latitude is far too cold for them. But of course they'll change all that when they take over in force: they'll make the whole world a hot-house. They're weedy creatures, pampered by automation, coddled by robots, and outside their intensely artificial environment they're prey to any germ which looks at them twice. But inside it—they're tough. They live even longer than my race, they breed fast, their patience is extraordinary and their willpower immense."

"Nevertheless," said Bill, grimly, "now we're wise to their game, we can handle 'em. For all their cunning, they've bitten off more than they'll be able to chew. Man is the real boss in this corner of the universe, as they'll learn to their cost sooner or later."

Even seated, Prospero was as tall as Bill. His pale eyes—startling in that black face—stared soberly into Bill's for a moment.

Then he smiled suddenly, and said: "For years I've been sampling this world's television programmes. When I've heard man boasting of his spaceships, which haven't even yet successfully landed on the moon, nor now ever will, and prophesying man's glorious conquest of the other worlds about him, I've just had to laugh. Such blissful ignorance! Almost all those other worlds were conquered by the Makkees when man was still half ape—in fact, man himself was conquered at that time."

Bill stared back at Prospero, still grim. "All right, let's have the explanation."

It came and it was breath-taking.

The general humanoid form to which we, Prospero, and the Makkees themselves belonged, was a common one throughout the galaxy. The Makkees, cruising in their flying saucers, would seek it out in its primitive stages. They would subject whole batches of savages to some kind of radiation which changed the pattern of their chromosomes, so that part of that pattern would become a standard.

"Like all other creatures," said Prospero, "a man is little more than a temporary host to immortal, unchanging chromosomes. He merely passes the pattern down through the generations. The Makkees' standard pattern runs thread-like from the original batches of recipients, right through the common weave of humanity. Everyone that thread touches is compelled, willy-nilly, to become an *inventor*."

Then Prospero proceeded to debunk the legend of "Man's Unconquerable Mind."

The near-ape who conceived the wheel, the axe, the hollowed tree-trunk boat were driven by the unrelenting goad which kept Edison working and sleepless, Mitchell fighting against death to design revolutionary aeroplanes.

"Seeded oysters—no more," said Prospero, contemptuously.

"But *why*?" we demanded.

"Surely that's obvious?" said Prospero. "So that the Makkees, in the fullness of time, could come and gather the full-grown pearl. A pearl to them is a whole comfortable world, nicely warmed and furnished, ready for them to move in and take over. A fully automatic world, from food supplies to transport, heating and lighting, communications . . . everything laid on so that they could live in the style to which they've always been accustomed."

We gasped.

"The Makkees always knew the secret of success, which is to get others to do your work for you believing they're working for themselves," said Prospero. "Invention took its course to the inevitable result: mass-production of inventions which are all parts of a gigantic jigsaw puzzle, designed to interlock and form the whole you call 'Goliath'."

A silence. Then: "Suckers!" said Bill, bitterly. "What's next on the programme for us?"

Prospero shrugged. "Most men are already only hypnotized slaves, as Coney here was. You invented and built your own self-hypnotizing system—the television network. In a sense, you were hypnotizing yourselves with it even before the Makkees took over the stations and did it scientifically. As to man's future—he hasn't one. He will invent robot self-maintenance mechanisms until no human worker is needed any more."

"And then?" Pam prompted.

"And then you may recall how man himself treated the superfluous rabbit species. A similar plague has been employed by the Makkees on other planets. You recoil from the idea? What makes you imagine you deserve a worthier fate than the rabbits? You are as mindless as they and far more vicious. I've visited innumerable planets, but never have I come across anything like the murderous history of civil war you have. Senseless, cruel self-slaughter—to what end? Vile, stupid creatures!"

"They say war is the breeder of invention," said Bill.

"War is the misuse of invention," said Prospero. "Collaboration is the true breeder of invention. You'd have got along much faster with it."

Coney suddenly spoke up, quietly but keenly. "You say you've never come across a race like ours? So we're different in some way from the other slave-races. That means we're not necessarily doomed to follow their fate."

"Good for you, Arthur," Pam approved. She rounded on Prospero. "You imply if we'd collaborated instead of fighting among ourselves, we'd have completed Goliath much sooner. That would have pleased the Makkees, eh? But perhaps we subsconsciously didn't want to please the Makkees."

"I think you've got something there, Pam," I chipped in. "There's always been strong feeling against all new inventions. Take the Luddite riots—the Luddites smashed the new power-looms because they felt they'd make them redundant, useless. Now that's

exactly what's happened on a gigantic scale: man has become redundant."

"I suspect," said Coney, still quietly, "that the implanted chromosome pattern didn't take completely with us. Man was always fighting subconsciously against its impositon. He didn't know just *what* he was fighting, but he did know it was part of himself a part he didn't want. That's why man has always fought himself, Prospero. That's why we had civil wars the others never had."

"Coney, you've hit it—bang on!" exulted Bill.

We were grouped around Prospero now, rebellious, excited, self-righteous, vindicatory. He seemed rather taken aback. He rubbed his smooth chin thoughtfully, then scratched his equally smooth head.

"There may be something in what you say," he admitted. "Even so, it changes nothing. The battle is lost. The Makkees have the death-grip on your race. There's nothing you can do about it."

"We could try to break that grip, with your help," said Bill.

Prospero shook his head. "I can't help you. I've been fighting off the Makkees most of my life. There can be no decisive victory against them. They're too strong, too numerous. I'm too old and too tired to do more than keep on the defensive for the short time left to me."

"Pass on your weapons to us," urged Bill.

Prospero smiled derisively. "It would be like giving a monkey a rocket fighter-plane. You lack the necessary mental equipment. In any case, I'd do no such thing. *Homo sapiens* means less to me than the fish in the sea. I don't care in the least what happens to it. When I die, that's the end of everything that matters to me."

"I suppose," I said, bitterly, "such egocentricity is considered the badge of superiority by your race?"

"Don't be hypocritical," said Prospero, sharply. "Face the facts without sentimental posing. Everybody puts himself first, naturally."

We looked at him, then at each other, unbelievingly.

"And he thinks *man* is a weak race!" said Pam, wonderingly. "I'm beginning to think poor old homo saps hasn't shown up so badly, after all. The standards would seem to be rather lower elsewhere. No good trying to make Prospero understand. It would be like giving a monkey a copy of the New Testament. He lacks the necessary moral equipment."

For once Prospero looked a trifle uncomfortable. He spread his

peculiar hands. "If the argument is to become illogical, there's no point in continuing it. I suggest we all get some sleep. Don't worry about the Makkees tonight. The force shield is still there. You can sleep soundly."

And, of course, I couldn't sleep soundly. The discussion still went on in my head, over and over again.

I don't think Prospero slept all that soundly, either. Next morning he addressed us tiredly: "I've come to a decision. My spaceship is still available but I have no further use for it—I shall end my days here. You wouldn't understand anything of its working: it becomes transformed into pure energy in transit. However, its controls can be pre-set to take you automatically to any of the nearer planets. I suggest Venus. I was tempted to settle there myself instead of here, because it's free of Makkees. But it was too unlike home, too sunless and sea-less. However, there's vegetation, even low forms of animal life. Plenty of food, and the atmosphere is breathable. You can have some sort of life there, even start a tribe. But keep out of sight of the Makkees. Don't ever let them know you exist."

There was a long pause.

"That's very good of you," said Coney, politely.

"So you've had a change of heart, Prospero?" said Pam.

"Meaningless phrase!" said Prospero. "I've not changed my attitude in the least. I'm losing nothing but your company, and I shall be glad to do that. I've lived a lone wolf. I wish to die one."

"Thanks, anyway," I said. "But I'm not going. Neither, I'm sure, is Bill."

"Too true," said Bill.

"Neither am I," said Coney, and Pam nodded approvingly at him.

Prospero was dumbfounded. "Why not?"

"Because we've a job to do here," said Coney, "and we're not running away from it. We've got to do all we can to free our fellow men from the Makkees."

"Sprats against a whale!" scoffed Prospero.

"No," I said. "Men against Goliath."

So Bill became a Major again and I a Captain, and man resumed the war against Goliath—but this time fully conscious of what he was fighting, of the real enemy.

The four of us left Moble Island under cover of darkness and landed back on the mainland. "Our private Second Front," cracked Bill.

Our vital weapon was the mental circuit-breaker: Prospero had agreed he had no further use for that, either. Carefully, we picked our men and broke their hypnotic bond. Most of them joined us and we became a marauding band, marching east, mostly by night. And all the way we smashed the links of Goliath, the monorail, the airports, the television sets. We tore apart all communications.

Later we would take over factories, make our own armaments, have the circuit-breaker mass-produced and so set free an ever-widening circle of mankind. Later yet we would march on London itself. Our plan was to so utterly destroy Goliath that the world would seem like a cold wilderness, deathly bleak and horribly inconvenient, to the comfort-loving Makkees. Then, probably, they would no longer seek to occupy it.

But first we had to build our army. We particularly wanted to give it a hard core of reliable officers. For the army had a certain weakness at present. All the formerly hypnotized people—

including Coney—could be hypnotized again if we gave the Makkees half a chance to try it.

We needed for that hard core the men who had proven immune to hypnosis. As we had learned from Coney, they had been herded into the prisons.

We had had our skirmishes, but the main body of our army had not yet been seriously attacked.

The first real attack came when we were in a bad position to receive it. We were deployed on the open reaches of Dartmoor, lacking any real cover save the darkness. The plan was a three-pronged dawn attack on the great prison. For behind those ugly walls was confined the greatest concentration in the West Country of the type of men we wanted for our officers.

We waited for dawn. The Makkees didn't. They made their own dawn. It was a weird greenish glow. Bill called me from my tent to witness it. It seemed to be coming from directly overhead.

We looked up and could just discern the flying saucers which, obviously, were causing it. I counted ten of them. They were hovering at a considerable height.

We had managed to accumulate a few ground-to-air guided missiles from old, almost forgotten stocks.

"I'll get the missile battery on to them," I said, and turned to make for the field telephone in my tent.

Bill caught my arm. "Wait. That would give us away. I'm not sure they know we're here. It may be only a routine patrol of the prison area."

I was sceptical. "If we can see them, I'm pretty sure they can see us."

The glow brightened rapidly, became whitish-green.

"They can now," said Bill, grimly. "Get the battery on to 'em."

I took one pace and felt a paralyzing pain in my spine which crumpled me up. I heard Bill thud to the ground behind me. I rolled over in agony. It was twice as bad as the worst lumbago attack I'd ever had.

I glimpsed Bill, gripped by the same torture. I heard cries out there in the camp, saw other contorted shapes writhing on the grass.

I couldn't think very clearly but I realized the saucers were raying us—no doubt the whole army of us. Invisible pulses were racking our spinal cords. Our little army was put out of action

and lay at the mercy of the Makkees. And I remembered Coney saying "The Makkees have no mercy."

Prospero had been right. We were sprats against a whale.

I was glad Pam and Coney were out of this. They were honeymooning in Widecomb.

I lay on my back, glaring up. The screws were tightening and I was near to screaming. The saucers hovered like bees over flowers. And, then, incredibly swiftly, a shower of sun-bright comets came streaking across the pale green sky.

The saucers suddenly began to move too, almost as fast, and their glow moved with them. But they couldn't move fast enough. The comets overtook them and hunted them down in the false green dawn they were making in the eastern sky.

There came ten dazzling flashes, almost simultaneous. The comets, the saucers, and the green glow all vanished abruptly and it was black night again.

I found I could move again, though my back ached like hell.

I heard Bill exclaim nearby in the darkness: "Prospero!"

"Yes," I said. "Prospero." A long arm, no longer neutral had reached all the way from Moble Island to save us. How, we should probably never know. Why, we could only guess.

Tomorrow, for all we could foretell, our new ally might die. It was enough to know that today he was with us.

Presently the real dawn-light began to pearl the east. By then we had mostly recovered from the effects of the paralyzing rays. The sappers moved out of their forward positions, carrying the high explosives to the grim main gate of the prison. We could have shelled it, but we didn't want to risk killing any of our future officers.

Then Bill gave the word, and the main body of the army itself began to move forward, steadily forward—against Goliath.

WILLIAM F. TEMPLE

New Hard-Cover Science-Fiction Reviewed by
KENNETH F. SLATER

It doesn't seem long ago that I was recommending MEN, MARTIANS AND MACHINES to you, but in fact it is quite a few months. Long enough for that book to go out of print, and a pocket-book edition to appear (from Corgi, 2/6), and for Mr. Russell's newest novel to join the ranks of the better class of s-f.

THREE TO CONQUER: Eric Frank Russell (Dobson, 12/6 244 pp) is of course the three-part serial which started in ASF BRE 1956 January, under the title CALL HIM DEAD, in which Wade Harper, solitary telepath and microforger, uncovers the first traces of an alien invasion of earth. Wade "hears" a police patrolman die, finds the body—and as his telepathic powers are a secret he shares with no one, is automatically suspect. When, following very rapidly, he shoots and kills an "innocent" woman without either warning or obvious reason the hunt for Wade is up — fast and furious. He surrenders himself to the FBI, convinces the agent interviewing him that there is actually a great deal behind the two apparently motiveless killings, and by demonstration of his powers manages to get the attention of persons of authority. Wade then becomes the hunter of the aliens . . . or perhaps it would be apt to say the hound. For Wade's ability, once recognised, bids well to cut him off from the human race as a freak, possibly untrustworthy. Wade is then faced with two problems; how to destroy the alien invaders, and how to preserve his own independence—possibly his own life — from his fellow Terrans' fear of the different.

Mr. Russell is an accomplished writer, and this combination of science-fiction with a "spy hunt" story is a gripping yarn which is well-worth reading, and adding to your shelf for a later re-read. If my precis above may give you cause for thinking that the theme is familiar, my apologies. The basic theme may have seen use in previous yarns — invasion of earth by aliens is a stock plot—but Mr. Russell's workmanship makes this a "different" story.

If you have a liking for Verne and Wells, if perhaps you read with enjoyment the re-issue of Verne's JOURNEY TO THE CENTRE OF THE EARTH, if you prefer prehistoric monsters to spaceships, or if you subscribe to the doctrine of a hollow earth, then PLUTONIA is a title you mustn't miss. The influence of Verne is acknowledged, the story takes place just prior to the entry

of Russia into the first World War (it was written shortly after) and that fact is used in the story to explain the loss of the proofs brought back by the party of explorers who penetrate the inner earth through the arctic ice. The author was, naturally, a Russian, a professor of geology, V. A. Obruchev, and although some of the theories propounded in the story and in the footnotes may be outworn and dated, they are put forward clearly and convincingly by M. Obruchev and his characters. Somewhat slowpaced, opening with the usual "letter received," followed by the meeting, the announcement of the formation of the exploratory party, the secrecy of its real intentions, the old-styled method of scene setting of the voyage through the ice; then comes the story proper, of the small party with dog-teams who venture across the ice and find that although they are — according to the eye — going up hill, their instruments tell them they are going down! Then on into the warmer land of the interior, where they meet with a more convincing array of monstrosities than Professor Challenger and his party met in the Lost World. The translation was by Mr. B. Pearce, and whilst I'm not in a position to make comparisons with the original text, I enjoyed the translation and feel that Mr. Pearce has undoubtedly done the work justice. (PLUTONIA: Obruchev; Lawrence & Wishart, 15/-, 319pp, 31 illustrations).

News and advance Film Reviews direct from Hollywood's
FORREST J. ACKERMAN

I wish I had the cotton concession at the showings 'round the world of 20 MILLION MILES TO EARTH, because unwarned patrons are going to rush to the lobby for something with which to stuff their ears. Someone with a monopoly on ear-plugs could make a monetary killing during the display of this picture. And I report as a man who, according to my wife, must be half-deaf, because I revel in drums and booms and rocket roars and can absorb a dreadful amount of decibels. But I emerged from the preview of 20 MILLION MILES TO EARTH with my ears ringing and the distinct impression that I had been transported in a time machine back to a prehistoric arena and had spent a day recording the bellowings of tyrannosaurus rex roughing it up with brontosaurus vex.

This is an all-squawking picture.

And that's not just 'earsay.

20 MILLION MILES TO EARTH is Ray Harryhausen's answer to KING KONG. Not that anybody but Lloyd Arthur Eshbach ever questioned KING KONG, but a spectacle nearly as good as it (which SON OF KONG and MIGHTY JOE YOUNG were not) was a long time in coming. In the meantime, teenage fan Harryhausen was growing up to become, like myself, a " tweenager " (meaning 'twixt the cradle and the grave, about the midway mark); seeing KONG upwards of 80 times in the intervening interval; and always experimenting to find improved methods of creating and animating monsters.

In " 20 " it's an imaginary *ymir* that wreaks havoc.

The ymir comes from Venus. It's transported here in foetal form in the first roundtrip rocket flight. The spaceship back from Venus crashes in Sicilian waters but the unborn ymir survives the shock and wriggles out of its chrysalis before the first reel is through. Before the last, it has grown to kingsize and done a monster size job of ruining what wasn't already ruined in Rome.

I found the hideous little creature utterly fascinating, with its simulacrum of life, when first born and only 18 inches tall. The gases of earth's atmosphere cause a fearful acceleration in its rate of growth, so that through 3 or 4 size changes it has soon reached enormous proportions. Its looks? It seems to me that an Australian artist, whose name unfortunately escapes me at the moment, started it all; and Virgil Finlay time and time again has reproduced the man's original concept of evil incarnate: the beady-eyed, bullet-headed horror, half animal, half anaconda, jowled and cock's-combed, rearing upright with reptilian body and dino-

saurian dimensions.

Whether these creatures crawl from the deep seas' fathoms or arrive via Saucer Express from Outer Space, they express themselves according to blackest blueprint, and the Giant Ymir is no exception. From the time he bursts his bonds and batters his Brobdingnagian way through the pedestrian-panicked streets, the picture proceeds on its anything but pedestrian paced Kong pattern to the inevitable end. When, loaded with machine-gun lead, goaded by grenades, toasted by flamethrowers (if I am not confusing the Ymir's fate with that of the Deadly Mantis last month, or the Giant Crabs the month before), ripped by bazooka-launched rockets and bombarded from planes, the poor old ymir topples from atop the Coliseum, unbidden to my lips came the Epitaph for all monsters hapless enough to meet up with humanity. A generation ago Robert Armstrong summed it up well when, thinking of blonde Fay Wray and looking at the corpse of Kong, he observed: "'Twas beauty killed the beast."

My paraphrase: "'Twas *duty* killed the beast."

When Ray Bradbury reads these words in *NEBULA*, it will be in London, where he is currently busily engaged with Sir Carol Reed, preparing a screenplay of his own nightmare of 1963, *And The Rock Cried Out.* Latter appears as the last story in his "Fahrenheit" book, and present plan is to marquee it as OUT OF STONE.

Amelia Reynolds Long's *The Thought-Monster* is to be produced in England as A FIEND WITHOUT A FACE. James Nicholson (Hollywood fan) has made CAT-GIRL in London, and Jack Williamson's WOLVES OF DARKNESS is to be shot there.

Frankenstein's Filmaker Dead

(Obit.)

British-born James Whale, cinematic creator of the original Frankensteins — master, monster and mate—was accidentally killed on the grounds of his own home in Southern California on 29 May 1957. He was 60. It was a quarter of a century ago that, under Whale's brilliant direction, the monster and his maker (Boris Karloff and the late Colin Clive), first came to life in FRANKENSTEIN, followed by THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN. Whale also directed H. G. Wells' THE INVISIBLE MAN, which introduced durable Claude Rains, and assembled a rare cast — Karloff, Charles Laughton, Raymond Massey and Ernest Thesiger — for the weird film THE OLD DARK HOUSE. He also directed the pacifistic picture, *Journey's End*, and the World War I air-spectacle with Jean Harlow, *Hell's Angels.* Several years ago I had the honor to honor him (his plaque being accepted in his absence by Mae Clarke, heroine of FRANKENSTEIN) for his significant contributions to the history of s-f on celluloid at the Scientifilm Awards Evening, co-sponsored by the ABC Radio Network Workshop and the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society. Less than 6 months ago Ray Bradbury and I saw a revival of THE INVISIBLE MAN together, at which time Bradbury had passionate praise for the picture. James Whale's work will live on.

WALTER WILLIS writes for you

Having spent the two weeks of my summer holidays shivering under a cloudy sky and two pullovers on the exposed East coast, I have just brought my family home through the first blaze of a heat wave. The journey was accomplished without incident—the bus driver did get out once to examine his gears, but it was only us gnashing our teeth — until I found something lurking in wait behind the front door. It was a telegram from your editor asking for this column for the day after tomorrow. Naturally, at a time like this, all I am capable of thinking about is the weather. And, as one Harry Warner has pointed out recently in his magazine "Horizons," it is a subject which has been unaccountably neglected by our s-f authors. It's important, though. There's a theory, for instance, that the Dark Ages in Europe were caused by fine weather, an increase in mean temperatures over several centuries having sapped everyone's energy and initiative. Apparently they should have been called The Fair Ages.

Looking round at this usually drab industrial city I can well believe this theory. For a long number of years, during which the only way we could tell it was the summer was that the rain was warmer, we were sober, industrious and severe. But look at us now. After a mere four days of fine weather men are going about without their jackets, women without practically everything, and both are lolling about in the shade of Keep Off The Grass signs when they should be writing each other memoranda. I tell you, decadence is setting in fast. Next thing we'll have cafes on the pavements, floral shirts and sunburned people being lynched by those who took their holidays too early. A few more months of this and the whole country will go native and the Eskimos or Saturnians will move in. The heat is on, friends. You have been warmed!

FANZINE REVIEWS.

Triode 10. *Eric Bentcliffe and Terry Jeeves* 47 *Alldis Street, Great Moor, Stockport, Cheshire.* 1/- *per copy.* This magazine has steadily improved over the years until it is now in a leading position in the field. The varied contents this time include an indescribable story by Nigel Lindsay about a man who had himself hypnotised into seeing

sharks chasing him to improve his swimming speed and then couldn't get rid of them on dry land . . . a case of mirage in haste and repentance at leisure . . . another esoteric gem from John Berry, some agreeably frank fanmag reviews and lively editorials and letter section.

The New Futurian 7. *Mike Rosenblum and Ron Bennett, 7 Grosvenor Park, Chapel-Allerton, Leeds 7. 9d per copy.* (They might have charged 7d, just this once). As I've said before, this is a fine magazine for the newcomer to the field, since it has a more direct reference to science fiction than many fanmags. This time for instance there is an unusually brilliant satire on Ray Bradbury by D. R. Smith (The Bradbury 'Alice'), another instalment in Walter Gillings' version of Mein Kampf, about early days of British s-f, the last in a series of scholarly articles about fantasy in music by Harry Warner, a brilliant column by someone hiding his light under a bushel called "Phoenix", and some excellent book and magazine reviews. It didn't need another 11 pages of provocative readers' letters to make this one of the best bargains available in the fan publishing field.

Retribution 7. *John Berry and Arthur Thomson, 31 Campbell Park Avenue, Belfast. 1/- per copy.* Dual editorships seem to be all the rage these days, and this is a classic example of the merits of symbiosis. Arthur is the best cartoonist the fanmag field has ever seen and John the best exponent of the peculiar genre known as fanfiction, i.e. fiction, sometimes thinly disguised as fact, involving various personalities in the s-f world. Between them they produce a magazine which is in its way an utter gem of perfection. You need some knowledge of the dramatis personae and their alleged characteristics to appreciate some of the stories (as indeed you do with any situation comedy series) but the effort is well worth while. Best thing in this issue is a nostalgic half serious story by Irish exile Bob Shaw, who characteristically lavishes more good writing on this little labour of love than some professional authors do on a whole novel. A comparatively new departure for *Retribution* is a fanmag review column conducted by a bright and perceptive Scots girl called Ethel Lindsay, who I'm proud to say was one of the people introduced to fandom through this column.

Dear Ed.: It seems a pity that there should be such a time lag between publication and resale in this part of the world but then publishers are not shipping magnates, or are they?

I was much taken with Kenneth Bulmer's "Great Armadas," which I think points an accusing finger at the world of today, and which carries a message which all who read it would do well to ponder.

"The Evidence" by Len Shaw rang true as a study of human emotions and perhaps will remain as a favourite of anthology compilers.

"Whispering Gallery" (William F. Temple) seemed to lack point but perhaps somewhere in the thread of the story one could unearth an obscure moral on the evil of inherited riches and lack of Parental Control of young people.

"A City at Random" seems to bear no need for comment. It speaks for itself and the last line is an apt statement of social conditions today.

"Number of My Days" was my choice for second place being as it was a rousing adventure yarn, the type which is so often attempted but seldom well handled.

I would consider your ballot as follows: —

1. The Great Armadas.
2. The Number of My Days.
3. The Evidence.
4. Whispering Gallery
5. City at Random.
6. Flesh and Blood.
7. Dumb Show.

You publish a magazine which maintains a high standard without, as A. H. Ogden of Bristol 8 says in "Guided Missives", the usual cheap advertisements.

R. K. ANDREW,
Lower Hutt,
New Zealand.

Thanks for your exhaustive round-up of number 19 Mr. Andrew. No, unfortunately publishers are not shipping magnates or we would doubtless make much more money than we do. Seriously though, NEBULA is put on sale in Australia and New Zealand just as soon as it can be shipped from Great Britain and I think a vote of thanks is due to our distributors out there for the efficient coverage they give us.

Dear Ed.: I enjoyed NEBULA No. 21 very much but please let us have at least six or seven stories per issue and make them more equal in length than was

the case in this number where Rayer's Beacon Green occupied fifty-one pages out of the total of one hundred and twelve.

L. TAYLOR,
Bootle.

As you will note from this issue, Mr. Taylor, we have seven stories and none of them quite as long as Beacon Green. However, it is my policy to have at least one story appreciably longer than the rest, as many readers appreciate a novel-length yarn that they can really "get their teeth into."

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 1957 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 Rd., Glasgow, S.E., immediately.

Lethe Lend	
Sentimental Journey	
Time Bomb	
The Successors	
Out of Thin Air	
The River	
Against Goliath	

Name and Address :

The result of the poll on the stories in this issue will appear in NEBULA No. 26.

The results for issue No. 21 which were to appear this time have been held over to No. 24 owing to the new monthly publishing schedule.

Dear Ed.: Is there any real danger of the "electrical rot" postulated in F. G. Rayer's "Beacon Green"?

ALLAN MUIR,
London, W.4.

I suppose anything is possible in our age of scientific change and discovery, Allan, but I wouldn't lose too much sleep over it if I were you.

Dear Ed.: I am very much enjoying your series of Photo Features on the different heavenly bodies and am finding the information in this series most interesting.

I should like to request that you include an article with photographs on the moon and perhaps Venus in this series.

Miss F. McNEILL,
Glasgow, S.E.

**I am glad you are finding the Photo Features interesting Miss McNeill. An article on the moon will be published shortly and all the other solar planets as well as a large number of other astonomical objects will be dealt with in this series.*

NOMADS OF THE SKY—*Continued from inside front cover*

The Arend-Roland comet passed within 30 million miles of the solar surface before by-passing the Earth at a distance of 52 million miles. But even at that distance its brilliance brought thousands of people out before sunrise to see this strange visitor to our shores from the trackless wastes between the stars.

What would have happened if this unexpected visitant had rushed in from space and, instead of swinging round the Sun and making off again, had collided headlong with the Earth ?

Some fireworks would have been seen, of course, and some spectacular sunsets and dawns, and very probably radio reception would have suffered and no doubt the weather would have taken a turn for the unexpected. But no real harm would have resulted. The cometary head is as large as the Earth ; but it contains only a few tons of dust so loosely co npacted that the stars can be seen shining through.

The importance to astronomy of this new comet lies in another direction. Astronomers have still a great deal to discover about the make-up and the origin of comets, and the Arend-Roland, the brightest comet since 1910 and Halley's Comet—which that year was disappointing—comes at a time of maximum sunspot activity and also when we have new instruments and techniques to uncover the mysteries of the heavenly bodies.

There are more comets in space than all other interplanetary denizens ; comets even outnumber the asteroids, the small chunks of rock masquerading as worlds. Although, on the average, only 300 comets a century are seen, many more are too small or pass too far from the Sun to be visible. But the majority of comets are, like Arend-Roland, long-period ones needing between 10 and 50 thousand years to swing out on their long deceleration to the point where the Sun's weak gravity brings them hurtling back to us.

Halley's comet is the best known of the short-period comets, returning every 75 years. The top photograph shows Halley's comet and Venus during the year 1910 when the comet swung to within 63 million miles of Earth and was brighter than Venus.

Astronomers had been prepared to wait until 1986 before Halley's comet gave them the chance to analyse the light and radio waves from the luminous tail of a comet so that the apparition of Arend-Roland 1956h caused a furore of excitement in their ranks. And astronomers received a bonus on top of this good luck from the stars.

The new comet exhibited a strange feature unique in cometary observations.

One theory to account for the characteristic tail of a comet calls for a mass of dust particles and solidified gases to bind them, such as methane, ammonia and carbon dioxide, which evaporate on approaching the Sun and stream out, away from the Sun, driven by light pressure and emitting reflected light. Most of the light comes from this source. The Arend-Roland comet developed such a tail, as expected ; but also something else, something completely new and unsuspected.

As well as developing its characteristic tail, Arend-Roland also produced a long sharp spike pointing directly *towards* the Sun. It looked remarkably like the long pitot tube fitted to the snouting proboscis of a multi-Mach jet fighter. The spike was visible only on long-exposure photographs and it existed only from the end of April to the beginning of May. This unique phenomenon can be clearly seen in the bottom photograph, apparently surrounded by a glowing halo of gas quite distinct from the cometary head. The star streaks show that this is a long-exposure shot.

Astronomers believe the spike was due to electrical excitement of gas drawn from the comet, or of interstellar gas falling into the Sun, possibly connected in some way with the strong magnetic field associated with the present maxima in the sunspot cycle.

The current theory of Creation, demanding continuous production of hydrogen, would receive a tremendous fillip if it could be proved that the comet was exciting the Sunward falling hydrogen gas to incandescence. It is not as simple as this ; but this new comet does present astronomers with a challenge that might contain the key they are looking for.

Analysis of the light from the tail showed that most of it was due to sunlight reflected from dust particles and only a little from gas excited to fluorescence by ultra-violet light from the Sun.

Attempts were also made to detect radio waves from the tail. The 50-foot radio telescope at the Naval Research Laboratories was tuned in to the wavelengths of OH radicals, which should radiate strongly under the action of sunlight ; but, so far, no results are reported.

Coming as it does as the Herald to the International Geophysical Year, the Arend-Roland comet is a fitting reminder that whilst Man must plumb the uttermost depths of his own planet, he must keep his eyes on the stars. And, in the midst of our preparations to send up the first artificial satellites, it is good to pause awhile and watch the sky passage of a true wanderer of space as it flames momentarily across our vision.