AUTUMN 1951 TWO SHILLINGS

NEW WORLDS

fiction of the future

NEW WORLDS

fiction of the future

VOLUME 4 AUTUMN 1951 NUMBER 11

CONTENTS

Editor: JOHN CARNELL

Cover: BULL Illustrations: BULL, CLOTHIER, HUNTER & QUINN

TWO SHILLINGS

In the United States of America, 35 cents

Subscription rates:
Great Britain and the Commonwealth, 3 issues 6/6 post free
United States of America, 5 issues $1.75 post free

Published by NOVA PUBLICATIONS LTD., 25 STOKE NEWINGTON ROAD, LONDON, N.16

Telephone : CLIssold 5541

Printed in England by G. F. Tomkin Ltd., Grove Green Road, London, E.11

COSMIC MIRROR

By LEE RONDELLE

When the Photon set out for the rim of the Galaxy, her crew little realised the paradox of Time they were to discover.

Illustrated by CLOTHIER

JAN GISH, Admiral of the Imperial Terran Space Fleet at 37, stretched luxuriously on the antigrav cushions of his mountain-top sun-room, relaxed and refreshed after twenty-four hours of sleep.

The big job was done. Below him, on the glistening runway of fused quartz congealed out of a sandy lake-bed by atomic bull-dozers, lay the system's first extra-galactic cruiser, complete down to the last layer of amalgam on her golden skin.

Two years of intense effort—and an optimism that had had to fight against the knowledge of generations of failure—had gone into the slender thousand feet of the *Photon II.*

To help Earth's top scientists plunge deep beyond the boundaries of reason into what the sages for two centuries had labelled the "impossible," thousands of second-rankers had been gathered into the mountain community.

Their function had been to study and to think—generating a conviction of possibility that for two years had lain like a psychic cocoon round the experimental station.

The fantastic scheme had succeeded. From the spring-board of this massed telepathy the top-rankers had reached and grasped the "impossible," Man's leap across the chasm of the cosmos to the nebulae beyond.

TO Jan Gish, that was the real triumph—greater even than the building of the *Photon.* It was the final, crushing proof of the theories of Morgan Gish, his father.

Pity the old man had not lived to see it, he thought tenderly, half smiling.

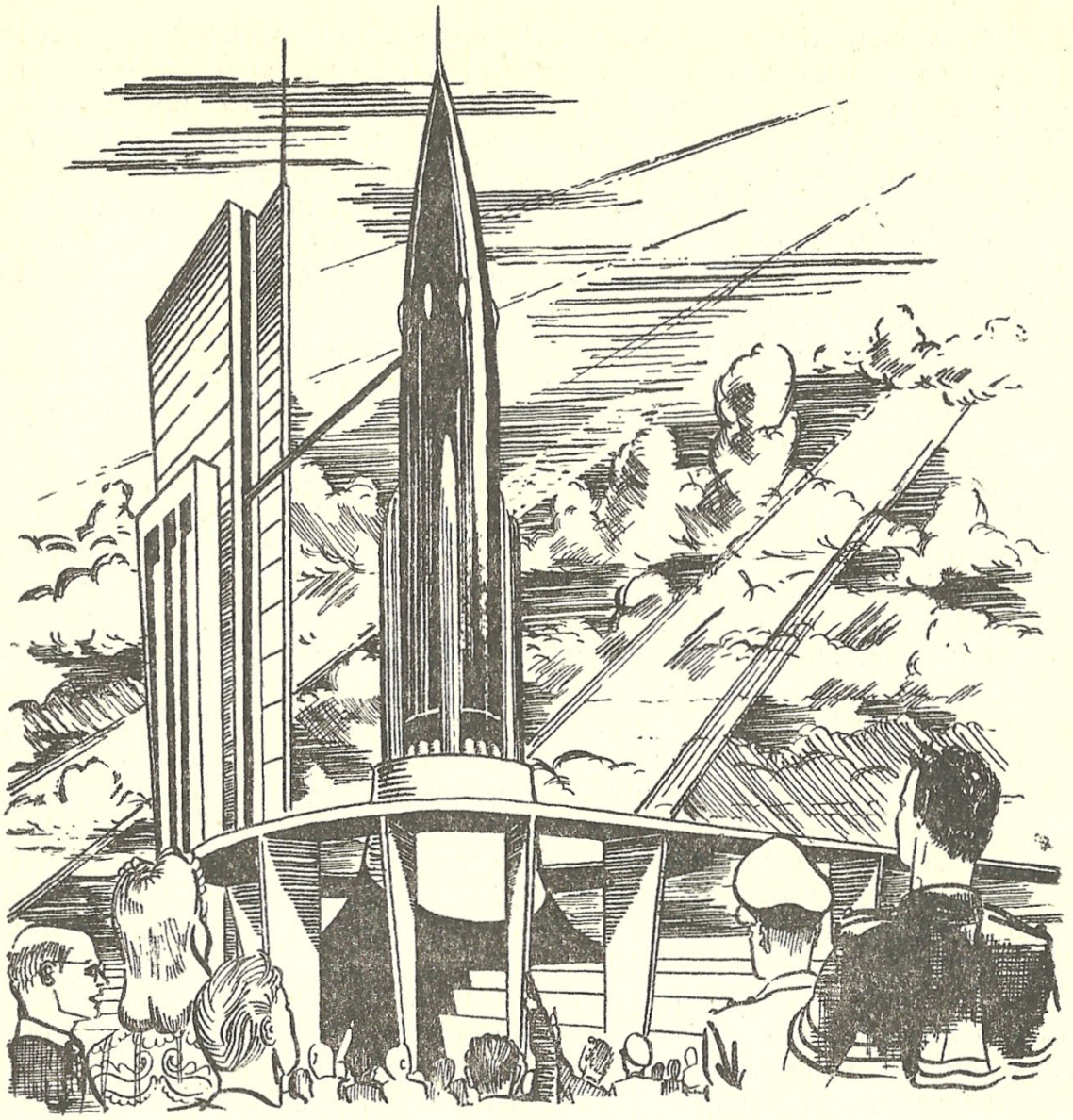
Old Morgan would have greeted the achievement with the familiar twisted grin and rasped, "Huh. Never any doubt about it, my boy."

The long-accepted theories of evolution, still based for the most part on the work of a legendary scientist called Dar'n, an ancient Briton of pre-20th Century, had been given a mortal blow by Professor Morgan Gish's bold concept of the "herd barrier."

The achievement of an individual—or a small group—was not so much limited by the inherent possibilities of the individual as by the negative telepathic impulses of the larger group among whom he lived, said Gish.

Although exceptional minds might stand out from the herd as original thinkers, and would eventually drag their immediate contacts along the road to progress, their horizon was always limited. There was always a boundary, a stage at which they failed to make any impression and had to be satisfied with the label, "born before their time."

The fact was, dogmatised Morgan Gish, no man could exceed the limit at which the accumulated negative impulses telepathed from the antipathetic



and apathetic mass around him neutralised his individual mind force.

Some men of genius had succeeded by the accident of choosing to work in isolation, thus weakening the effect of the mass mind upon them, but their cumulative achievement had been comparatively slight. The technique of isolation had been haphazard and, in any event, without proper training had often led to mental unbalance.

Gish had instanced the rapid progress—then recession—of the 20th and 21st Centuries. For a time, minds were advancing into new realms of discovery at an accelerating rate as newspapers and scientific journals, cinemas and telecommunications, had churned out reports of a mass of new and enthralling discoveries to a populace ever eager for more.

The phenomenon of mass appetite had spread even to entertainment. "Futuristic" films, of the old two-dimensional type with crude sound accompaniments, had been made. "Science fiction" at one time was the most popular form of literature.

THEN had come the slowing down. In part, it was a result of years of

haphazard research. The scientists of that period, intoxicated by the staggering array of new fields opened to them, had dashed about aimlessly—like children plucking and discarding new blooms in a brilliant flower garden. The result had been a chaotic mass of half-digested material against which both the scientific and "lay" minds were battered to frustration.

"Enough remains of the works of ancient alchemists such as Fardy, Maxl and Hevrsyd to show that, even then, the scientists had all the information necessary to design the present-day anti-gravitic generators," wrote Gish, "but they were blinded by other attractions."

But the recession had been mainly caused by the revulsion of the mass mind. In the mid-20th Century the first clear signs had appeared. Men and women turned more and more to "sport" and entertainment, driven on, to some extent, by reaction to three disastrous world wars.

Although there were several periods of re-stimulation, the trend of recession had reasserted itself, each time more pronounced. After the initial burst—a hundred years or more in which science had flamed like a comet from one blinding discovery to another—stagnation had come.

The mind of the "ordinary man" was capable of absorbing no more and the whole herd put up a telepathic barrier that, year by year, increasingly restricted the possible progress of science, philosophy and "culture."

"Looking back at the evidence of this and previous civilisations," wrote Gish, "it is now clear that the effect of herd thinking is not only great enough to bring new thinking to a standstill but, after a period of apparent stability —erroneously considered to be a 'golden age' of peace and tranquillity—actually to reverse the process of advancement.

"In this way knowledge decays, arts and sciences are lost, and mankind gradually—imperceptibly to the contemporary observer—reverts to barbarism."

In the conclusion to his famous first volume on "The Wiser Man," Gish had outlined the remedy—the segregation of the scientists whenever important new discoveries were hoped for.

But that was not enough. "We need more than seclusion from the herd," Gish wrote. "We must put the principle of herd thinking to good use by surrounding our scientists—in an isolated community—with a new 'herd' of minds as near as possible of equal calibre to their own and imbued with the spirit of mental adventure.

"The force thus generated by mass thinking will be a spiritual propellant, not a brake."

Experience of limited extent had proved that the theory was correct. At least, the remedy appeared to be effective. The production of the *Photon II* however, was the first large-scale trial.

TEN years of wrangling among the senior scientists had delayed the attempt, for Morgan Gish had written a second volume, "The Standing Wave," so cryptic and fantastic that it had caused doubts about his earlier work.

Here, as dogmatically as ever, Gish had laid down the principle of the "unified field of parallel worlds."

Much of the work was mathematical, but since Gish had set out his equations in a new tensor calculus which he didn't bother to explain, few

could understand it. The occasional scraps of "explanation" were lucid enough but yielded no coherent picture.

The science critics had spluttered and coughed when the book came out. Some had frankly said they could not understand it. Others had essayed a "précis." All had damned it, for it is better to be called a "destructive" critic than an ignorant one.

"Gish appears to be making two main points," one critic had said. "First, that previous civilisations are not successive steps in Man's progress but self-contained sine curves, co-existentially separated in the cosmos by space, or time, or both; second, that the apparent differences between the ultimate achievements of one civilisation and another are the result of what he classifies as 'the flux of principles'.

"He appears to argue, here, that the fundamental laws of the Universe which apply in one of his 'co-existing worlds' differ progressively 'through the layer' from one 'sine curve' to another. In other words, I suppose, the laws of physics that apply 'now' did not apply during a 'previous' rise of civilisation.

"Unfortunately for Professor Gish, theory is valid only so far as it can be checked by the direct observation of phenomena. He himself admits that there are no physical means of verifying his conclusions. It is likely, therefore, that we shall continue to believe that the laws of the Universe are eternal, and that eternity is greater than Gish."

WHEN the great controversy raged on Terra, Jan had been a mere captain in the Imperial Space Fleet, winning medals in the five-year war against the Lords of Aldebaran. It was the Empire's first serious challenge for nearly 50 years and Earth almost lost.

When the Lord Hrjl, as cunning a warrior as the Aldebaran planets ever spawned, had trapped the entire Imperial Navy in the confined space seas of the Eta Tauri group only Jan's brilliant manœuvring of the First Cruiser Squadron had saved the fleet from complete destruction—either by the blasts of Hrjl's battleships or by battering to pieces against the giant meteors scattered about the Five Suns.

It was Jan who led the fleet out of the Narrows into open space, for the short dash to the Aldebaran cluster itself, leaving Hrjl dead among his shattered battlewagons. From the nose of his cruiser, *Gemini*, shone the five stars of Admiral of the Fleet. Back to Terra went Admiral Torrens in a courier frigate—to Terra and retirement.

The fleet had remained in deep space for three more years, completing the subjugation of the Aldebaranians and strengthening the Terran naval bases in the Pleiades.

Then Jan had come home, to take charge of the building of the *Photon*. Before the work began, Jan had listened once or twice to the old man's emphatic defence of his disputed theories, but made little headway.

"Look, dad," he said one evening. "I'm a soldier. Give me any problem to do with battleships—from anti-grav engineering or sub-space calculations to strategy or even colonial policies and I'm all right. But when you start talking about two different civilisations being the same; and existing at the same moment in some way, yet separated by space or time, it makes double-Venus talk to me."

"I was only trying to explain that this attempt to fly to the extra-galactic nebulae is a long, hard way of going a short distance," Morgan Gish had smiled whimsically.

"That may be, dad. You don't seem to like the idea, and you may be right. All I know is that the Grand Council said: 'Build this ship and fly it.' For me, that's enough. If it can be built, we build it. If it will fly, I fly it, see ?"

Despite his initial protests, it was Morgan Gish who made the journey possible.

He had drawn up the plan of isolation. He had indicated, in detail, what the size of the prohibited area should be, and he had laid down the minimum Sobell Index psycho ratings for the 10,000 men and women who were to form the "telepath stimulators."

He had never discussed his controversial theory of "pattern layers" or the "flux of principles" with Jan again. He seemed to accept the inevitable with good humour and worked hard to help the tele-stimulators. Wherever a profound joke was being cracked it was frequently possible to see the bald head and cherubic, goatee-bearded face of Morgan Gish at the hub of the group.

Only once, just before his death, had he raised a query. The time-drive —toughest of all the problems, had been discovered and Jan was enthusing about it.

Morgan had mildly asked, "With the anti-grav we travel in 'true' space. We also have the hyper-drive, when we travel in sub-space. Through what do you think you will be travelling with the time-drive ?"

Jan had laughed the question off. "What I want to know is, do you now believe that we can do it ?"

Propped up, now, on the anti-grav cushions of the sick-bed of old age, the old man had given Jan an enigmatic smile.

"Oh, yes. You'll do it all right."

THEY had. The *Photon II*, incorporating a thousand new devices and many new principles that two years earlier had been completely unsuspected, was finished.

She would vault from the Earth under anti-gravity drive, building up to the speed of light while lancing towards Capella in Auriga, switch to hyper-drive to multiply velocity many times and then, aimed for the dead centre of the Harl Funnel—a strange empty channel to the galactic rim—throw in the time-drive.

They would need the theoretically limitless acceleration of the ultra-warp for their journey of more than a million light years.

To Jan, accustomed though he was to the colossal speeds of the fleet cruisers through sub-space under the hyper-drive, the estimated velocity of the *Photon II* was breath-taking.

Even the scientists who discovered it, he believed, only half understood what they had found. When they were asked to explain it they waved the tensor calculus about like a Frenchman's arms, trying to find adequate mathematical symbols and similes. Their conversation consisted chiefly of "Um" and "Er."

But it worked. It had been thoroughly tested on models over short

distances of a few light years. Every time, as soon as the automatic relays kicked out the drive after a few seconds, the model had reappeared—as predicted—at the end of its run.

The effort which had led up to this discovery was prodigious. During the two years of the *Photon's* building, the community of 10,000 had remained isolated on the wild Cumberland coast. Land and sea for a radius of 20 miles had been shut off by security guards.

Not even fishermen were allowed on, or over, the sea; air cruisers and rocket freighters were forbidden to fly over the area and all visitors were stopped. Even the students of archaeology, patiently uncovering the ruins of an ancient atomic power station at Sellafield, were one morning swiftly carried away.

Inert electro-magnetic barriers along the "frontier" killed all radio signals. The "Whitehaven Project"—so named after a long-dead village of the Coal Age which had been rebuilt as the administration centre—was completely cut off.

Only contact with the outside world was at Barra, a small seaport at the colony's southern tip, where raw materials were freighted in.

No one was allowed through Barra into the interior, except on a mission certified by the Grand Council as of vital importance.

No "distractions" had been allowed in the isolated community. All the members had been psycho-screened as of high stability and in two years only four cases of emotional disturbance had been encountered by the Dianeticists.

Apart from these odd accidents—quickly smoothed out by the guards and kept secret from the community—all had gone smoothly.

Every single task, no matter how menial, that could not be performed by robots, had been carried out by a man or woman of high intellectual achievements. The chambermaid who brought the morning glass of nacro juice could—and would—converse about the complexities of a hypergauss field. The smiling man who polished jack-boots at the street corner was an authority of not inconsiderable renown on certain aspects of the Hammerman reactions.

The scientists actually working on the project absorbed this background, this new "man-in-the-street" norm of thinking. Never for a moment—asleep or awake—in street-car, restaurant or dormitory, were they subjected to conversation, behaviour or telepathed thoughts, that fell below the fixed minimum standard.

Now the job was done. The prohibited area was open to the groups of eminent world statesmen, officials and scientists, who had landed at Barra to examine the *Photon II* and bid farewell to the three men who were to sail in her.

JAN stirred lazily on the antigrav couch as a soft burr heralded the lighting of the visiscreen.

It showed him the great concourse of "personages" gathered round the *Photon's* hull. The guests had arrived and within the hour the *Photon* would leave.

He watched them for a moment from his couch, his grey eyes flickering over the mass of bald heads glistening in the sun—a sun allowed to shine

by courtesy of the Weather Bureau who had pushed up disperser beams to deal with a sea mist.

"To be hoped we don't muff the take-off," he murmured as he rose to his feet. "They've paid a lot of money for this brief performance."

He looked at himself in the lattice mirror, ran a depilatory wand over his gleaming scalp to eradicate a few hairs which persisted in growing, then picked up his beribboned tunic and gloves and stepped swiftly across the balcony to board his sports-model twin-jet car.

Fortunately, he thought, the ceremony would not take long.

Even at the last, the psychos had insisted, Admiral Gish and his two officers must not be subjected for more than a few minutes to a telepathic wave so vastly different from the one under which they had lived for two years. The shock might be too great.

There would be just time for a few speeches, a few handshakes, before the cruiser lifted herself on her pusher beams and slid—under Hammerman drive—at a sharp angle to the plane of the sun's ecliptic, towards the galactic rim.

Forty-five minutes later the ordeal was over. The crowd had pulled back to give room for the *Photon's* crushing beams to shuttle the ship's apparent mass to Earth—the familiar but ever-wonderful "transfer of gravitational potential" which is the initial warming up of the great Hammerman engines.

AS the magneto-strictors began to whistle softly up the scale, nursed by Navigator-Captain Jon Rygal, Jan stood at the entry-port for a parting look at Earth.

An experienced space-pilot of many inter stellar runs, he had looked back many times at a port of departure and as many times known the thrill that all deep spacemen know when they catch the first returning glimpse of their home planet.

There was a difference, he felt, about this farewell. For a second he wished that Morgan Gish had been down below on the quartz to give them a reassuring word and a smile.

His mind flashed, inconsequentially, to the strange metal capsule now lying in his desk in the cramped cabin that had to serve as his admiral's suite.

Morgan Gish had given him the capsule on his death-bed, three months ago. Intricately carved with symbols that hinted at immense age, it was small but very heavy, of some strange reddish-brown metal.

"The *Photon* will make her voyage, my boy," old Morgan had said. Then he had smiled—a flash of the real sardonic Morgan Gish—through a veil of weariness.

"Take this capsule," he said, "and when you find yourself between the galaxies, on a road from which there is no turning except the turning back, open it and read the message within. It may help you."

He frowned with exhaustion. "I wrote a message and put it in there," he faltered. "I wrote it to-day while half asleep. Now I can't remember what it was. And I can't open the capsule. Perhaps it was not important."

JAN hauled his mind back from his reverie, attracted by a sudden movement in the thick mass of faces. Faces and bodies swayed aside, he saw, as a little group pushed to the front of the crowd. A short, rotund figure in

the golden cloak of a high-ranking officer of the Central Government spoke urgently to the guards who had closed in about him.

Guards on each side, he approached the ship, carrying a small plastic box. They halted beneath the open space-port.

"I am Karl Zimzon, chief archaeologist of the northern zone," the little man puffed, inclining his round, sweat-streaked face at a sharp upward angle. "You will know me, of course."

Jan didn't, but he bowed gravely out of politeness.

"I have here a most peculiar package for you," Zimson hurried on, breathlessly, holding up the plastic box.

"No, no !" he said, hastily, as a guard made to seize the box. "There is nothing lethal in it. It has been thoroughly checked and passed by Security. But you must see it. It is addressed to you, though that is one of the mysteries attached to it. Some of us believe that the contents of this box are a fake—a hoax—but Professor Darellu, who found it, swears that it cannot be."

Nal Kornan, the *Photon's* astro-physicist and biologist, whispered over Jan's shoulder, "Get rid of the old baboon, Jan. He's holding us up."

"What do you want me to do ?" Jan asked the man below.

"Well," Zimzon spluttered. "We would have liked you to study it and give us your opinion. I wanted to send it to you earlier, but these ridiculous isolation regulations . . ."

He waved a pudgy hand, helplessly.

"We've got to take off in twenty seconds, Jan," urged Kornan. "If we don't, we'll have to work out a new warp and that will take days."

Jan bent down. "Sling the box up," he ordered. "I'll look at it on the voyage, if I get time, and let you know when we come back."

Zimzon hesitated, but a guard whose skull radio was blaring a command from the control tower, "Get that man away from the ship," grabbed the box and heaved it up.

It curved through a polished arc, neatly into Jan's waiting hands.

"Thanks," he smiled. He waved to the crowd and smartly saluted the group round the Commander-in-Chief. The *Photon's* space-port closed. Air hissed from the inner lock as the peripheral strictors clenched the outer plate to the hull in a space-tight magneto-weld.

She took off beautifully, as befitted a craft handled by the Fleet's best navigator. She took off fast, but to Admiral Gish, easily coupling the anti-grav laces of the commander's chair, and to Nal Kornan, watching the video matrix and the gauges of the anti-meteor screens, the motion was smooth.

She took off fast. So fast that to the gaping spectators she just vanished.

INSIDE the ship there was no sensation of speed. Normal gravity was maintained during the early part of the voyage under Hammerman drive, but it would be reduced slightly, to avoid fatigue, when they dived into sub-space.

The first part of the journey was tedious, through the familiar "coastal waters" of the solar system, building up speed. A constant watch had to be kept as they crossed the great liner routes. There were still a few of the old rockets left—great "tin tubs" with their rocket stacks reeking and belching uranium dust—and it was the duty of all captains to obey the old law of the space-seas, "everything gives way to rockets."

They passed several lumbering old tramps on the Venus run, mostly. Their skippers, recognising the *Photon* from radio descriptions, shoved a can of borium in their jets to give them the spaceman's farewell.

They shot through Pluto's orbit at three times the speed of light and still accelerating. Everything was running smoothly. Jan leaned back, happily smoking a sigret. It was a bad habit he had acquired from his father. Where Morgan Gish had re-discovered it, no one knew. Smoking was a relic of a long-dead empire.

Beyond Pluto they arched above the solar plane. Outside was blackness. Jan knew it was no use opening a port cover. They were travelling too fast to receive light, except a faint band on either beam.

Light from behind could not reach them. Rays from in front were shortened to way beyond the ultra-violet and were invisible except to the No. 1 video matrix. At higher speeds even the side beams, faintly visible to the naked eye, would disappear. Then there would be no more light until they entered the peculiar uniform grey glow of sub-space.

Jan, between studying the instrument reports and the constant checks of the robot pilot now handling the ship, listened to the rustling and drumming of the hull. The *Photon* had come alive in her own element and, like a good skipper, Jan was listening to her voice, trying to weigh up the foibles and probable tricks of his newest command.

At that speed, the void was not empty for the cruiser. She was rushing through a space that had the consistency of a fluid, snaking past obstructing gravity fields and masses on the buffers of her own powerful screens.

The drumming would increase as space became compressed almost to a solid. Then there would be silence in the sub-space, where mass became light and the *Photon* a dark shadow heavily screened against the glow. What it would be like in the ultra-warp he didn't know. No one did, although the theoreticians had predicted a high-pitched scream and had sound-proofed the cabins against it with high frequency nullifiers in the hull.

THEY sat for hours and watched the meters on which their lives depended. They ate and slept and talked.

At last, Rygal said, "We're on maximum antigrav speed."

All three checked instruments carefully. The computor silently flashed through a million integers and resolved a few thousand equations to deliver the detailed space co-ordinates.

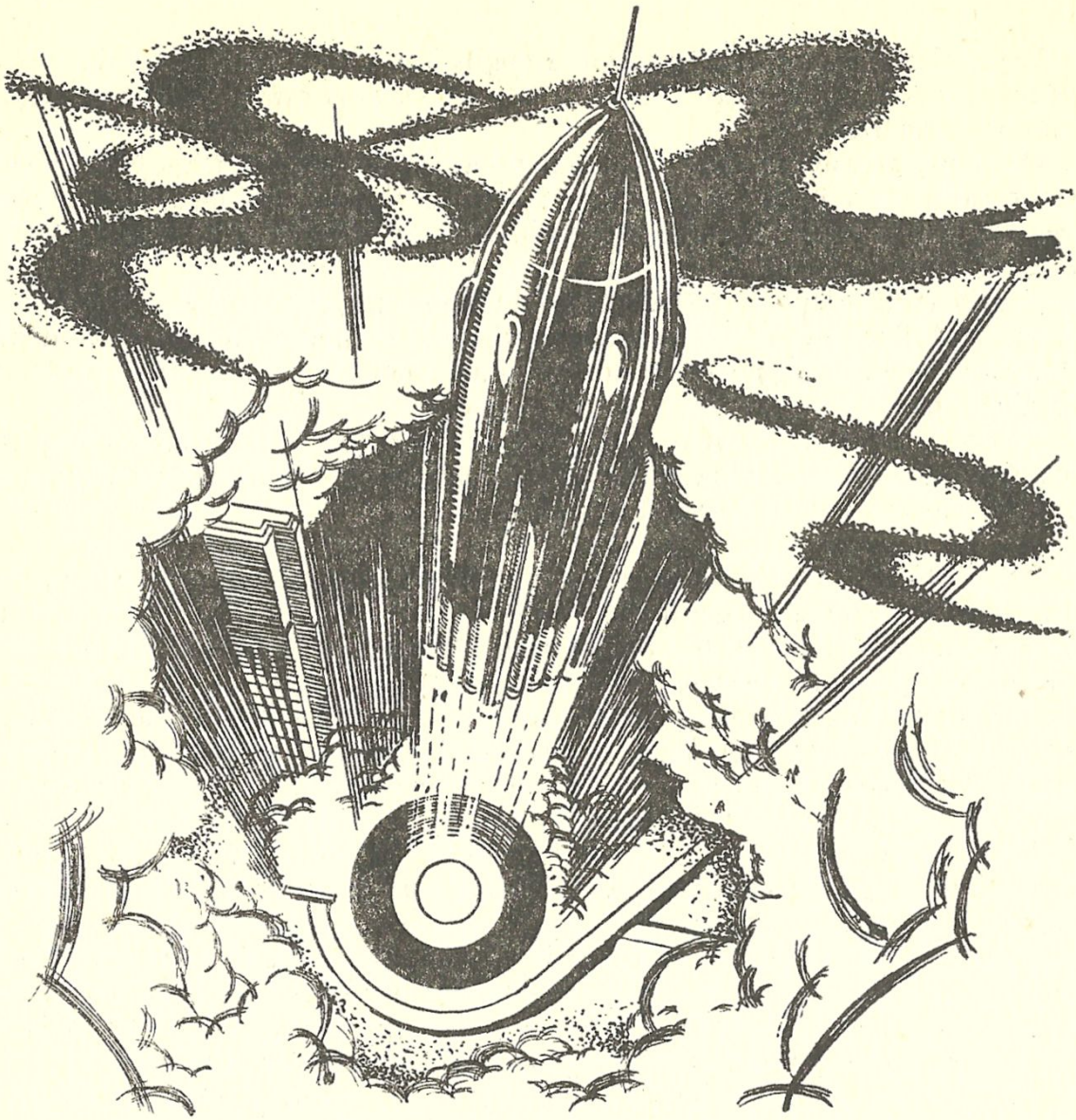
They could have left "true" space much earlier, but they needed the most accurate possible line-up on the still distant neck of the Harl Funnel, before diving into sub-space. It was Jan's intention to switch in the time-drive when half-way to the Funnel mouth in a region free of dangerous masses.

"O.K." he said to Kornan and Rygal. "That checks. Let's submerge."

Rygal relaxed his grip on the manual. The auto-pilot chattered swiftly. Outside the *Photon's* mass-repelling screen the giant magneto-strictor cocoon flashed up at the precise instant that the Hammerman motors shifted the phase of the inertia shuttle.

There was silence now in the hull. The cruiser was floating in the featureless glow of sub-space.

The Harl Funnel is 5,000 light years long, its narrow, inner aperture



15,000 light years from Earth. At the other end its broad mouth opens on the void between the galaxies.

On the twentieth day, after the fastest run in the history of the system, the *Photon II* was in position before the aperture. She was hauling up fast, at 50 light years an hour.

The position was checked with the new sub-space locators. Jan was a bit doubtful about them. As a navy man, he knew that generations of gunnery experts had worked to devise reliable sub-space probers and reactors, but had failed. Like the old submarine commanders of the early days of the Empire, space captains had become accustomed to the idea of being "blind" when they "submerged."

"Strange as it may seem, they check precisely with the predicted position," Rygal said after studying the instruments with Kornan.

"It's too easy," Kornan grunted, dropping his great bulk back into his bucket seat. "Nothing ever happens. We haven't even dropped the bottom off the ship."

"O.K.," Jan grinned. "Let's have the new drive and see what happens. We may be able to drop the bottom off then for you."

Rygal threw the switch. Jan felt a slight lurch and a sickening rebellion of his stomach as the ship seemed to heel all ways at once. Then the lights dimmed and went out.

His body trembled. He could not breathe. All sensation vanished. He could not see or hear. He could not feel the presence of his limbs or the beating of his heart. He was just a collection of thoughts, disembodied, in a black void.

A tiny germ of panic sprouted within him and gulped like a monster—grown to fullness in a few seconds—at the last remaining thread of control. There was no sound, no sight, no movement, not even the beating of blood in his brain.

Reason was tottering when, after what seemed a lifetime, the lights abruptly snapped on. He blinked painfully as the familiar clutter of the control room shimmered out of the haze and was still.

INSTINCTIVELY he knew that the antigrav drive was on again. Furtively glancing at Kornan and Rygal he saw that they, like himself, were hanging limp in their seats. Perspiration dripped off Rygal's thin nose and down the arm of the seat to swell a little pool on the floor.

Jan blinked, finding his eyelashes heavy with sweat. The trembling hand he raised to his face skidded nervelessly over his drenched skin. He became aware that within his plastic uniform he was soaked in his own moisture.

"Hades," he muttered, "I stink."

Kornan, moving stiffly in his seat, growled, "So do I. I feel like I'd spent a year in this grubby underwear. Wonder what went wrong. I don't want to try that lot again in a hurry."

"Dunno. We'd better check," Jan said, wearily, loosening his straps and stepping down. "Hell. I'm stiff. Feel as if I hadn't moved for months."

He had taken only two grotesque steps towards the control panel—stretching and limping as he went, when Rygal grabbed his arm.

"Look," he yipped excitedly, pointing to the glowing co-ordinates dial. "We're there. Nothing went wrong. It works."

Kornan staggered from his seat to go and look. Awe succeeded disbelief, then changed to jubilation. Unless the instruments lied, the *Photon II* had safely made her first journey through space, sub-space and "the other space" and was now back in "true" space as the automatic pilot had changed down to gravity drive at the pre-ordained co-ordinates.

Jan rushed to the nearest port, ignoring the tele-screen. "I want to see this with my own eyes," he said.

Unscrewing the first cover, he switched off the magnetic cleats and swung back the heavy plate to lay bare the thick crystal window. The outer cover slid back into the hull.

Beyond was a night studded with pearls as the *Photon* slowly drew in towards a carpet of stars that spun into space beyond the rim of vision.

"G.N.4 ! At last !" Jan breathed. "Seen at close quarters for the first time by human beings. What a sight !"

Kornan and Rygal crowded close to him, drinking in the majestic vision of a million glowing orbs. Jan, seized for a moment with the poignant grandeur of the occasion, put an arm about them and squeezed in an old gesture of comradeship.

"It's a great thing we've done," he said, almost in a whisper. "At last Man has really crossed the great void."

Had there been any air in the void it would surely have echoed, then, with the ghostly chuckle of Morgan Gish.

THE *Photon* was travelling slowly, way below the speed of light, to enable the navigator to check the point of entry into the galaxy.

Returning to their posts, they switched on the cruiser's array of instruments, making the first of the many records they hoped to take back to Earth.

That done, they set about selecting their target, using the large visi-screen to examine the galaxy—now almost edge on to them and so huge that even at lowest magnification it more than filled the fifteen-foot tri-dimensional matrix.

They finally decided on a likely looking sun on the leftward edge of the system. Under high magnification it showed an E-type planetary system.

Painstakingly they measured, then fed the results into the computor. Extreme accuracy was essential, they knew. They had another "hop" through both hyper-drive and ultra-drive ahead of them. The nearer rim of the galaxy was still 20,000 light years away.

Jan was glad now, that he had not succeeded in his original plan to strike out for the nearest galaxy, G.N.3—the old Andromeda nebula of bygone astronomers. Jor Murgal, chief astro-physicist, who had plotted the *Photon's* course, had said, drily, "G.N.3 is like a tempting island in a maze of submerged reefs. And it may stay like that for years to come, for it will tax a pilot's ingenuity to the full to navigate among the great space warps of Andromeda.

"G.N.4 is further away, but by some peculiarity of the cosmos it lies very neatly at the end of a smooth warp that might have been a road laid out for you."

It had been smooth enough up to now, Jan thought, except for the horrible sensation of the time-drive.

With a grimace at the recollection, he gave the order that sent the *Photon* leaping ahead. Rygal wasted no time now, but slammed straight into sub-space as soon as he could. A ship can't go into hyper-drive at less than light speed, but if the *Photon* was doing more than a mile an hour above that when Rygal shot her "into the glow" it was all she *was* doing. A mile an hour less, reflected Jan, and she would have concertinaed into dust against the inertia barrier.

Rygal's sensitive features glowed with delight as he chuckled in answer to Jan's grim smile.

A minute later he flicked in the auto-pilot and they blotted out into time drive.

The ultra-warp engulfed them for what seemed only a few seconds this time. Not too bad, Jan thought, when you know what's coming. He had hardly time to appreciate the old sensation of floating in nothing when the *Photon* slid into sub-space, checked motion in a flash and was up in true space with her grav beams slowing her down among the outer stars.

Then Rygal began to swear, slowly at first, but mounting to a climax of deep-space vituperation.

"Blast it," he rapped, "we're parsecs off course."

THEY hove to. The glare of a nearby red giant star poured down on the *Photon's* hull; the lethal energy sucked up by the amalgam layers was passed to the spinning, crackling sphere—deep within the hull—that was the *Photon's* source of power. Once in space, beyond the sheltering atmospheres, she needed no other fuel than that the stars provided.

Discussion of the strange error was brief. All three men knew from experience that to attempt to navigate in strange regions with a robot pilot so grossly at fault as to give them an error of such magnitude was suicidal.

But it was not until Rygal had flicked the ship back to her last position that they realised how great the error was.

The *Photon* had been aimed at the leftward edge of the galaxy. It had emerged two-thirds of the way to the other extreme—a lateral displacement of 80,000 light years in an approach run of only 20,000.

They agreed it was "crazy," then set to work to seek the source of error. They took new sights, checked every instrument meticulously with the test gear, and fed the co-ordinates three times into the computor, after first checking it with standard equations.

For the second time the *Photon's* sleek length was hurled like a lance through the multiples of space.

"Hell's fire," stormed Rygal, studying the screens when the ship steadied. "We're exactly where we were before."

Jan frowned. "Something damned queer about this," he growled. "Come on, back again."

Once more the *Photon* went back. "We'll be wearing a groove in space if we're not careful," Kornan grinned when they emerged.

Again they checked and re-checked. They uncrated and installed the spare computor, coupled in every stand-by explorer beam. They measured wave-lengths and gravities and velocities. There seemed to be no error.

At last Jan said: "Let's take her part of the way on antigrav. Maybe we've just happened to land at some queer vortex in space, a sort of space cataract. Perhaps if we row the boat out of the main stream we'll have better luck."

Rygal snorted his disbelief, but spun the Hammerman generators up and keyed the helm banks. The vessel gathered speed smoothly, but within seconds Rygal's fingers were flashing over the helm studs.

"I can't hold her," he gasped. "She keeps swinging off course. I think you were right about a cataract. That's just what it feels like."

The *Photon* was following a wide curve, as helpless as a compass needle in a strong field. No matter how Rygal swung her she always turned her nose towards the right-hand edge of the galaxy, towards the point where she had twice emerged from sub-space.

Rygal slapped on the inertia brakes and brought the cruiser to a standstill.

"I don't like it," he said slowly. "I think it would be a good idea to go back; at least, to pull well away while we think this out."

"Nonsense," Jan snapped. "One way or another, we go ahead."

Kornan asked, idly, "O.K., which way ?"

"I don't know. It looks as if there is some kind of space stream entering the system on this side, just at this one point. It seems to me we can do one of two things. Either we can pull off and go round to the far side, or we can go along with the stream."

"One way's as good as another to me," Kornan grinned, easing his comfortable bulk back into the seat. "I'm all for the smoothest way, like floating down the river. Suits my temperament."

Rygal flushed and bit his lip. He shrugged his shoulders at Jan's enquiring look.

"O.K.," Jan said, crisply, after a moment's thought. "We'll do it the easy way, like you say, Nal. We can always turn back if we don't like it."

TWO days later, as the *Photon* shuddered and groaned in the complex warps of suns and planets on her frequent "surfacing" from sub-space, Jan remembered those careless words.

They were faced with a mass of meteoric dust and jagged rocks that stretched in three dimensions as far as the visi-screens could penetrate. Jan ordered the ship to withdraw and seek an easier path.

And Rygal found himself helpless.

"She won't go," he gritted, after juggling the controls for endless minutes. "Even with maximum power on the turning beams she won't swing."

Jan looked at the screen and thought hard. Jaw muscles stood out on his tense face.

"Divert the main engines to the turn," he ordered, quietly.

Rygal swallowed hard, but set up the new combination on the manual. "Mains to turning beams" was an old fleet emergency order. Only under dire need would a commander take the risk of the gigantic blow-out that would come if the weakened antigrav field—distorted by switching the titanic power of the Hammermans to the side beams—were to collapse.

It had happened in the past. He had seen more than one warship vanish that way in a blaze of light.

Jan watched the meters anxiously as the main drive was inched, precariously, into the side thrust. In a few seconds the generators began to howl. Rygal cut the switches in a flash as the "Collapse" warning blared.

"No use," he breathed. "We had more than 800 g. working on that turn."

Jan ordered "full astern." A few minutes later, after three attempts, they had to confess failure again. The *Photon* would not reverse.

"Probably too much mass outside," Kornan observed after analysing the performance graph on the inertia-screen convertors. "It can happen under conditions like these. Prevents us from changing fields. Effect of mass reflection during passage through the null point."

There was no choice but to go forward, seeking free space for manœuvre. For many sleepless hours they bumped slowly through the thick curd of meteors and dust.

AT last, at less than a thousand miles an hour, they stumbled out into the open. Automatic relays clacked cheerfully as power was switched back from the triple collision screens to the main "shuttle."

Behind them, the dust cloud reared itself like a huge animal head silhouetted against the starlight beyond.

"O.K. ?" Jan said. "Then swing her round. We have room now and we'd better check."

Rygal did his best, but a few minutes later he dropped his hands from the manual and sighed.

"No good, Jan. This looks like a road which has no turning. We just . . ."

The moment he said it something clicked in Jan's brain. "The road which has no turning," he repeated. "Hell !"

Darting to his cabin he came back with the capsule of Morgan Gish. He explained rapidly the strange death-bed request of the old scientist.

"Wish we'd known before this," muttered Rygal, thin-faced from constant strain. "The old man knew a damn sight more than most people suspected. It's my guess we should have opened this earlier."

In that he echoed precisely the last written words of Morgan Gish. The first words of the message in the metal tube were:

"I warned you to open this between the galaxies, my son, but if an old man's fatalism is any guide I should say you haven't done that and that by now you cannot extricate your ship."

"How in hell did he guess that ?" Kornan gasped.

As Jan read on, amazement at the uncanny prescience of Morgan Gish gripped all three.

"I think I am right about that," the letter went on. "Some day I hope not to be. If you are in the stream it will be because you have not read this in time, or heeded the warning in the other capsule."

Jan smiled thinly. "Well, the old boy was wrong there, anyway. We haven't had another."

"Yes we have," said Rygal. He picked up from the floor the box of Professor Zimzon. He thrust it at Jan. "Here. I had a look in the box while you were navigating a few days ago."

Kornan took the box from him and opened it. Inside, padded securely, was a capsule that was the twin brother of the one Jan held in his hand.

"Oh, hell," Kornan snorted. "This is getting as crazy as one of those vanishing worms on Pluto."

"Leave it for a minute," Jan said. "Let's see what else the old man has to say."

THERE was not much more, but what there was had the typical cryptic stamp of Morgan Gish.

"If it should not be too late," the letter went on, "send up a couple of Hallelujahs for both of us. Read the second capsule and act at once. But if you are in the stream, as I'm willing to bet you are, you can stop worrying about your destination, since you cannot change it now. You will come to a sun and land on a planet that is not unsuited to human life. But be prepared for a shock when you wake up. I wish I could tell you more, but there is a barrier in my mind that cannot be completely broken down. The effort is great and the price of even these few words is death. Take a father's affection, then, until we meet again."

"Ah, I got it," yipped Kornan, brightly. "Old Morgan's stolen a march on us. He's got there ahead of us and is pulling us in with tractor beams."

Even through the sadness of recurring memories Jan had to smile at him. Nal Kornan was the youngest astro-physicist in the Fleet. He was big, easy-going and full of youthful enthusiasm at times. Two thousand years earlier, when people had hair, he would have been blond and freckled.

"You read too much science fiction, Nal," he said. "My father died three months ago. I sat by his bedside and watched him go."

"Sorry, Jan. I should have remembered," Kornan apologised redly.

Jan took the second capsule from him and studied it. It was identical with the first, but much more weather-scarred and battered. Partially obliterated by corrosion was the inscription—crudely scratched on the case—"To Admiral Jan Gish. Personal. By oath inviolate."

That was modern, at any rate. The expression "By oath inviolate" was a common imprint on personal and private documents. The preservation of privacy in a world so rich in means of communication had once been a major problem. Now, every boy and girl had to take the "oath of inviolate privacy" before being recognised as an adult. Breach of the oath was one of the most serious crimes.

But if the outer wording was new, the parchment inside was not. The crumbling fragment was encrusted with years and the writing on it struggled feebly to be seen.

All it said was, "Not G.N.4. Not G.N.4. Anywhere but G.N.4."

"You're telling us," Kornan cracked. "Is it in the old maestro's writing ? It looks a bit familiar."

"It does, but it isn't. Somebody may have been trying to forge it, but what would be the sense in a useless trick like that ?"

"I wouldn't say it was useless," Rygal demurred. "Only trouble is, we didn't read it in time. And if we had, I suppose we wouldn't have believed it."

"There's a covering letter in the box," Kornan said. "Here."

JAN took the plexistrip and read out the observations of Chief Archaeologist Zimzon.

"This capsule," said the letter, "was unearthed by Professor Darellu—leader of the group digging out the old atom station at Sellafield. It was found on the slopes of Enrdayl about 120 feet above the old lake bed which is now the *Photon's* runway.

"Discovery was made only a few days before the area was sealed off. Repeated requests to be allowed to pass the capsule to you for examination have been refused by security control.

"The capsule represents an enigma for which we cannot, at the moment, find a generally acceptable solution. We are all agreed that the container itself is of great age. It is of the Roman empire which preceded the American, both pre-Dark Age civilisations. On the other hand it bears your name and the seal of inviolability.

"The latter places its age as no greater than 50 years while the former—since you are addressed as Admiral—puts it within the last seven.

"But Professor Darellu insists that the capsule was found embedded in soft sedimentary sandstone, along with other relics of the period to which it belongs.

"My own view, which is supported by that of my chief assistants, is that the capsule must have been embedded recently, possibly by using a portable atomic borer or, more likely, by simply regulating the field coils of the standard hand disintegrator.

"We could not, of course, open the tube in view of the oath upon it, but we hope that after you have done so you may be able to help us. In any event, please take great care of the capsule itself. It is of great value."

"Mystery on mystery," Kornan grinned as they examined the capsule

again. "This is no time for someone to be presenting us with puzzles."

Rygal pursed his lips. "You know, Jan, impossible as it may seem to you, I have a feeling that the hand of Morgan Gish is in this, somewhere."

"You're not suggesting the old man wrote this, went out and buried it, then gave me another on his death-bed, are you ?" Jan frowned. "It doesn't add up. Granted he liked a joke, but he wouldn't have carried it to this extent."

"Let's start at the beginning and do a bit of detective work on the clues we've got," Kornan put in, boyishly. "I've always had a sneaking desire to be a security cop."

THEY were still examining the "clues" when they fell asleep.

Consciousness fled like the setting of the moons of Mars. Jan, trying to reach the control chair, collapsed across it. Kornan and Rygal crumpled where they stood.

With no hand to guide her, the *Photon II* daintily picked her way through the glittering diadem of the nebula, controlled by forces as old as time. She moved smoothly, in quiet majesty, like a schooner of the long-dead barbarians.

The engines were silent when the three men woke again. The visi-screen was dark, the control board lifeless.

Jan yawned as Kornan shook him, then leapt to his feet.

"We've stopped, Nal," he ejaculated. "What happened ?"

"Search me. I've only just wakened, too. Haven't had time to look."

Rygal sat up and rubbed his eyes. He stretched, sensuously, then cocked his head and frowned, sensing the lack of motion. He jumped up and, crossing swiftly to the control panel, started flicking switches. The screen remained dark, the engines silent.

The *Photon* was a dead ship.

Rygal blanched, knowing only too well the fate of a ship without power. Hours later, she was still without power and the three men had to confess defeat.

Jan moved wearily to the tight-clamped row of ports, his head reeling from the effort of performing calculations which should have been done in a second by the now inert computor. He was finding it strangely difficult to think at all.

"Might as well see what's outside," he muttered, unscrewing the port cover. "That might give us a clue."

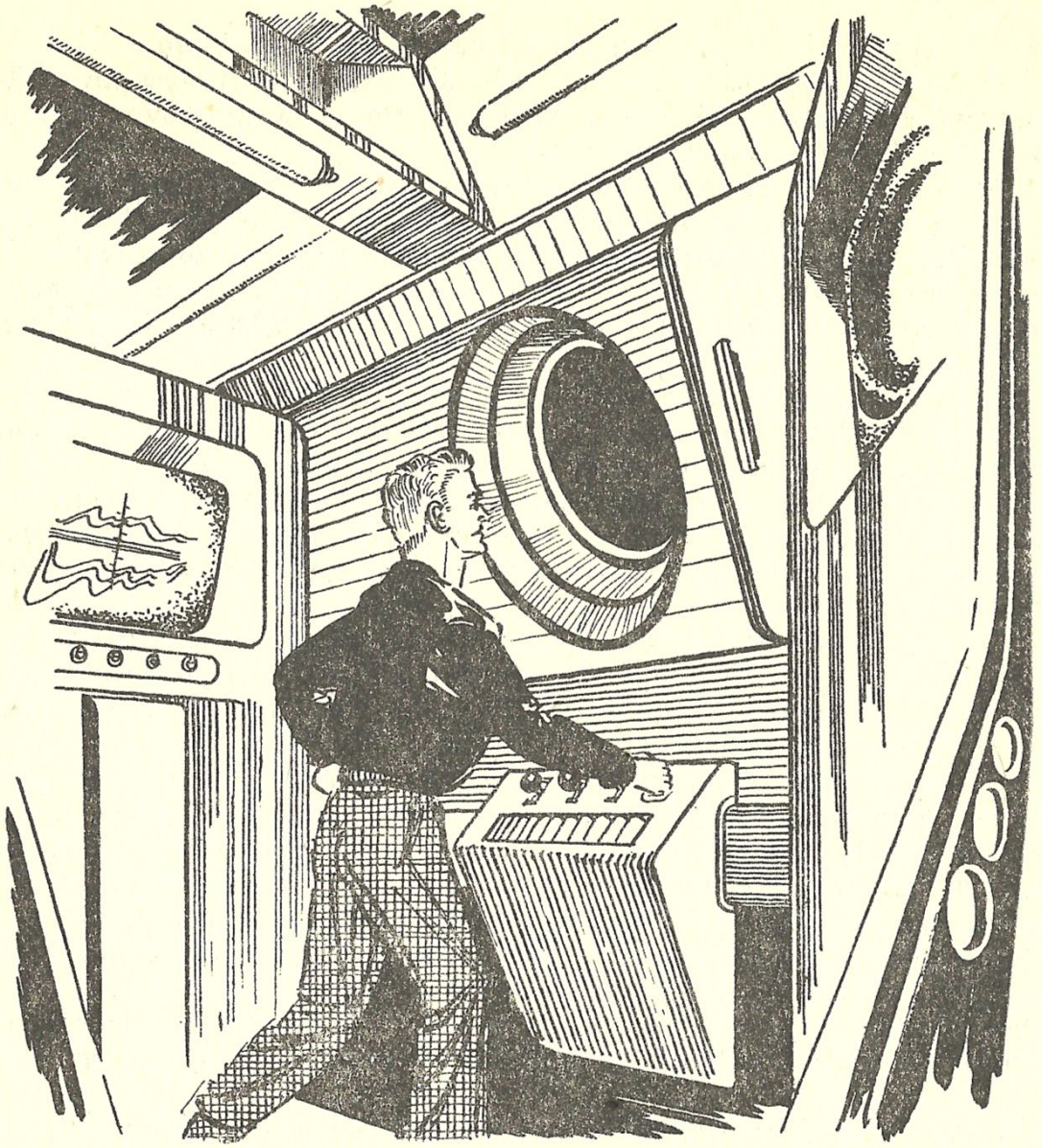
The three men stared blankly out of the crystal port. Beyond the quartz disc was utter blackness. No light. Nothing moved.

Rygal checked the external pressure gauges, which still worked as they needed no power. "Four atmospheres," he said glumly. "That's going to be very nice."

"Sample it," Jan ordered.

That was Kornan's job. In the cruiser's laboratory, well equipped with instruments for the most part useless until power was restored, he swiftly opened to the outer atmosphere the tiny test chamber built into the *Photon's* hull.

Still peering at the blackness beyond the porthole, Jan and Rygal heard the faint clicking of the battery-driven analyser. Two minutes later, Kornan was back, holding a plexiglass beaker.



"Water," he snorted disgustedly. "Fresh water." He reeled off its chemical content in one breath.

Rygal brightened immediately. "Well, that's something, at any rate," he said. "The emergency grav meter is still working, on battery power, and that shows .985 earth gravity. If the normal laws of pressure apply, we have only 200 feet of water above us."

"Then we'd better get on top of it," Jan said.

THE *Photon* was equipped with every testing device known. Most of them were useless until power could be restored but, fortunately, the simple ones would suffice. Within a few minutes a small sphere had been released, bobbing upwards and trailing a thin flexible tube behind.

In the lab., Kornan flicked on the hand pump and the analyser. He studied the meters as they steadied.

"You guessed right," he told Rygal. "Air at normal pressure, but a bit chilly. Water depth 210 feet."

For three hours Jan directed the effort to raise the *Photon* the last, infinitesimal, part of her journey. But the ship that had streaked through a

million light years was powerless to lift herself the last few feet.

Kornan was the first to pack up. On distrene waste he cleaned off the insulating grease from his hands, scowled at the silent antigrav motors and crawled back to the control chamber.

"Not a squeak," he told the others when they returned—Rygal from behind the control panel and Jan from the ship's nose. "Not a ruddy squeak. Everything's there. In separate sections everything seems to operate. But the engines as a whole don't. It's just as if we'd moved into a new system of physical laws. Hammerman's principle of mass translation doesn't seem to apply."

"It's the same here," Rygal said. His voice had a ring of strain in it. Jan frowned. Rygal was known as a "nervy" type, but that was not uncommon among brilliant pilots. He hoped he would not break down.

"There's nothing wrong with the controls," Rygal went on, his voice rising half a note, "except that they don't work. All the artificial balancer masses have gone with the field collapse. But we could restore them if only we could get power."

"There's one thing, anyhow," Jan said phlegmatically, lighting another of his archaic sigrets, "we're resting on solid bottom. I've just been testing with the bow probes. Pretty grim job, too, without power to shift them. It's my guess we're on the bed of some sea or lake."

He studied his sigret end thoughtfully, then went on, "We'd better go up in space helmets and have a look round. We've got portable winches and hawsers and the first job is to drag the ship on to dry land where we can examine her. It won't be difficult."

"So long as we don't run into any hostile natives," Kornan grinned.

Jan smiled and reached for his side blaster, hanging in its holster from a rack. He strapped it on and the others followed suit.

Releasing a collapsible boat alongside the test buoy, they quickly passed through the space lock and shot up through the black, chilly waters.

IT was night. Rain was falling steadily and a mournful wind nibbled the lake surface into listless waves, slapping gently against the fragile boat. The sky was blanketed with clouds, denying them their first look at the new galaxy.

Jan clambered aboard last. Shivering a little he shed his helmet. As he placed it gently between his feet he was astonished to find, strapped to his belt, the two metal capsules.

He glanced guiltily at Kornan and Rygal, wondering if they had noticed. He had no recollection of even picking the capsules up before leaving the *Photon*. Frowning deeply, he tried to remember, and couldn't.

He decided to sling them overboard and had the straps half unfastened when, without recalling the precise reason for it, he changed his mind.

A mist seemed to be settling on his brain. Thoughts kept eluding him. With a stab of alarm he realised that at that moment he could not remember how to navigate the *Photon* !

"Nal," he said, suddenly, "how do the antigrav motors work ?"

He had to repeat the question. Kornan looked at him curiously then answered, slowly: "They're quite simple, really. They work on the principle of mass translation by shuttling the— er—— by——"

He ground slowly to a stop, mouth open. Then he grinned. If it had been daylight, Jan would have seen him blush.

"Oh, hell, Jan," Kornan laughed brightly, "you know as well as I do. Whose leg are you pulling ?"

Jan had learned all he wanted to know. Somewhere, in the air, or the water, or in the space matrix itself, was a force that was draining their minds.

He shuddered. Then pulled himself together. Their only chance was to work fast and restore the *Photon*. That done, they had power unlimited at their disposal, armament both physical and psychological to combat an entire planet.

"Let's go," he growled. He switched on the compact jet motor and headed the tiny cockleshell towards what he hoped was a shoreline, looming just a little blacker than the black of the night.

A minute later they grounded and stepped ashore. They pulled the boat into a clump of reeds and began their circuit of the lake, seeking a suitable place for the winch, in line with the *Photon's* axis.

They found the trail where it entered a wood. After listening carefully, blasters in hand, they crept along the dark aisle, feeling their way. The night was full of rustlings and squeakings as untold horrors crawled around them in the undergrowth.

They were not molested, however. As they groped through the wet forest, Jan threw away the two heavy capsules and felt relieved of a burden that was mental as well as physical.

AFTER hours of steady marching, Jan's wrist gyro told them they were in line with the *Photon*. They climbed a slope and took refuge among the rocks.

A grey dawn came at last. They all sighed with relief, for in each one had been the fear that this world might have a night that was years from sunrise to sunset. The grey light showed them the grim nature of their landing place on a new world in a new galaxy.

Wild, desolate hills hemmed in the dark lake except for narrow passes at each end. Blue-green trees covered the low-lands, with the hills bald above them. Other vegetation was mostly a tough, wiry kind of grass and thick masses of prickly shrubs bearing brilliant yellow flowers among their needle-sharp spines.

As the watery sun touched them, the plants gave out a pungent, not unpleasant odour. Jan rose from his squatting position among the rocks and walked over to examine a clump near at hand.

That was when he had his first glimpse of one of the planet's inhabitants.

Jan was too well armed and protected to feel any qualm of fear. Deeply interested, he stared at the almost human face—humanoid, but very hairy. Hair grew thickly round what might be a chin, and round the savage mouth. It flowed in dark tangles from beneath a strange metal helmet. The creature appeared to have no ears and the eyes were deep-set beneath shaggy brows. Only its head was visible.

"Nal ! Jon !" he called. "Come here !"

Even as they came running, the thing leaped from behind its sheltering boulder into the open. The three men thrilled with wonder, for it was definitely humanoid. It had well-shaped—if bulky—arms and short lower

appendages that were definitely legs.

On these legs it was now charging towards them. It had thrust back a cloak of heavy material, draped from its neck, and the sun glinted feebly on a metal breastplate. From a broad leather belt dangled a short sword or, rather, the scabbard, for the thing was now brandishing the sword and roaring fiercely. Yellow fangs flashed in its cavernous red mouth.

Jan's eyes dropped to the belt and stayed there, hypnotically. Thonged firmly to it were his two message capsules !

He had no time for speculation. After a second's pause while it weighed them up, the man-thing was charging again, waving the crude metal sword.

"Obviously hostile," Jan murmured, unsheathing his blaster and thumbing it over to "stun" instead of "disintegrate."

ONLY the quick action of Kornan saved him. The "fool-proof" blaster failed and as Jan ducked instinctively beneath the swinging sword Kornan slugged, hard, with his fist.

The thing fell, bellowing unintelligible sounds. Kornan battered it to death with the butt-end of his blast gun.

"Thanks," Jan muttered, breathlessly.

He tried the blaster again. Still it failed. The others triggered theirs, experimentally. Nothing happened. Like the *Photon*, the blast guns were dead.

Suddenly, they felt naked and a little afraid. For generations man had relied on blast guns and it was many years since one had failed before its time.

Jan looked carefully at the gun, trying to remember its construction. After a while, he realised he was just looking. His brain seemed tired. It refused to grapple with this simple problem.

It didn't matter, anyway. It would do some other time. Neither Kornan nor Rygal had done any better, he noticed.

"We'd better get away from here," he growled. The others nodded, silently. Jan bent down and transferred the two metal capsules from the dead body to the empty straps on his own belt. He didn't know why, but he felt too tired to analyse the action.

"Let's go," he said.

"That won't get you anywhere," broke in a calm, pleasant voice behind them.

They swung round. Sitting on a rock a few feet away—a rock they could have sworn had been empty a few seconds before—was a white-robed old man. He was bald-headed and the grinning round face ended in a wisp of white beard.

He was a laughing man—an old man who puffed smoke out of a little white cylinder between his lips. A terribly familiar man.

KORNAN burst out laughing. "I told you," he said gleefully, grasping Jan's arm, "I told you he'd got here before us !"

Rygal's thin face twitched. "Morgan Gish, by all that's holy !" he breathed. "Or the ghost of Morgan Gish."

Jan remembered a man who had died quietly, in bed, as he held the gnarled fingers in a filial farewell. He shuddered. An icy shiver slipped like spectral fingers down his spine.

"Hello, dad," he said, striving to keep his voice level.

He stepped nearer, reluctantly. The old man on the rock placed a hand—a warm, solid hand—on his shoulder and squeezed.

Suddenly he felt the quickening of his mind—the exhilaration always radiated by Morgan Gish. Ghost or not, he thought, this was a father come again to give affection at a time of trouble in a strange world. He was grateful, and somehow comforted.

"Sit down, boys," said the old man. "I haven't much time and I've a lot to tell you."

After Jan had embraced him and found, to his astonishment, no phantom but a man of warm flesh and blood, they squatted at his feet, clothed in a new optimism. Morgan Gish took a final puff at his sigret and threw the stump away.

"Now," he said firmly, "just where do you think you are?"

"G.N.4," Jan answered promptly, "but whereabouts in G.N.4 I'm damned if I know. Do you?"

"Yes. I know. And so would you if you would think a little." The old man smiled mischievously. "Now, Captain Rygal, I seem to remember you used to be a bit of a student of history, once. In your youth, no doubt, before you turned to—ah—more important things. You should be able to guess."

Rygal shook his head.

"Try. Go on. Take a look at the man you just killed. Forget space-flights and other such nonsense and tell me what your trifling knowledge of history would say about him."

Rygal half turned to study the sprawling corpse. After a few seconds his frown of concentration gave way to an open-jawed gape of amazement.

"I should say," he said slowly, "that he was a mercenary of ancient Rome. But that's fantastic. There was no space-flight in those days. How could he have got here?"

"I thought you would miss the point," the old man smiled. "That," he said, pointing to the body, "is certainly a legionary of ancient Rome—a German mercenary in point of fact. He's a messenger, carrying in those metal tubes letters to the garrisons of the north."

"The north of what?" Jan asked. "What place is this, that it could be reached in Roman days?"

"I'm afraid," said Morgan Gish, almost apologetically, "you'll find that it is—Earth."

He stopped their incredulous protests with a lifted hand. "It is. You might as well accept it."

Jan groaned. "I don't get it, dad. I just don't get it. We definitely travelled from one galaxy to another, didn't we?"

"You did."

"And this is that galaxy we aimed for—G.N.4?"

"It is."

"Then how the blazes can this be Earth and some four thousand years before we were born?"

THE old man sighed. "I wish I could put it all quite clearly, my boy. But there's much that I don't understand myself. I can tell you this, though.

Lying down there——" he gestured towards the lake "——is the *Photon*. She is in exactly the same position as she started. The only difference is one of time. You knew your take-off field as Enrdayl valley. Earlier, it was called Ennerdale, in the American civilisation. Two thousand years before our time it was filled with water and had been for possibly thousands of years.

"The *Photon* is lying where she did at take-off, only now there is water in the lake, that's all."

Jan buried his head in his hands. "I wish I could think more clearly," he groaned. "I can't remember much about the early part of this trip. But unless the *Photon* was turned in some way, this is the nebula we aimed at. You agree that it is. Now you say we are still on Earth."

"Simple," said the old man, patiently. "You drove the *Photon* round a great curve—a very steep curve in the space-time continuum. I never left the Earth, but I arrived at the same spot. I simply used another method and nipped across the narrow base-line of that curve."

"You mean we turned back on our tracks ?" Rygal asked.

"In a way, yes, but not the way you think. You followed the course you plotted—a fairly straight course in space."

"Just a minute," Rygal broke in. "The warnings in the capsules. You sent them didn't you ? You told us not to go to G.N.4 ?"

"I sent one," the old man agreed, "but I don't think it would have made much difference whether you had gone to G.N.1 or G.N. umpety-one. I may be wrong—that's what I keep trying to find out—but I think it would still have been our own galaxy and our own Earth you landed in."

Kornan looked up, frowning. "I've been trying to figure this out," he said, slowly. "Do you mean they are—all—our own galaxy ? That there's only one ?"

Morgan Gish lit another sigret after throwing one deftly to Jan. He watched the blue smoke rise faintly into the morning sky.

"That's exactly what I think," he said. "At least, within reachable distance in the cosmos. One cosmos, with one galaxy wandering through it. And as we look out into space, through our instruments, we see the four-dimensional images of our nebula at different stages of its development.

"It's like seeing yourself in a looking-glass. Suppose you set out from your nose-end to travel to the nose-end in the glass, what happens ? Suppose you pass through the complicated space-warp which is the mirror surface and arrive at the image nose-end ? If you've done the journey on time-drive, you will have slipped down through the series of parallel-existing nose-ends and arrived, not at the nose that now looks in the glass, but the nose that looked in yesterday, or the day before."

JAN grunted, "It's as clear as mud. You mean the galaxies differ only in time ?"

"Well, all that I've been able to check do so, though there may be others, somewhere."

"Look," Kornan interjected, "this doesn't add up. We travelled a distance that takes light a million years, but we have only gone back 4,000 years."

"Agreed. That seems to be part of the illusion. I suspect that the speed of light between the galaxies is very much greater than we assume. Certainly the physical laws of one galaxy differ from those of another, perhaps only

very slightly, but in some cases extensively."

"Let me get this straight," Rygal said. "You are suggesting that our galaxy is travelling through the greater cosmos—at a speed very much greater than light, and that as it pursues what appears to be a complicated zig-zag path we look back with our telescopes and see . . ."

"All our yesterdays," Morgan Gish finished for him, softly. "It's an awe-inspiring thought—to consider as we look through our great telescopes at the outer nebulae that we are looking at our history, weaving its maze through the cosmic hall of mirrors.

"The theory checks, too, with many observed facts. Consider how the galaxies are all retreating from each other, and the greater the distance the greater the speed of their withdrawal. It is what we would expect, because the velocity of one regressing image is added to the next. If the path were straight, the effect would be a mathematical progression of speeds.

"I may be wrong," he said once more, "but I don't think so. Anyway, don't try G.N.4 again. I'm getting tired of it."

"What do you mean ?" Jan queried sharply. "You sound as if you had been here before."

"I have," the old man chuckled, lighting the last of his sigrets. "S'matter of fact I'm getting tired of coming here to give you boys this pep talk. But there we are. If I hadn't meddled, I could have enjoyed a new life—Man's immortal, you know, in the extra-cosmos. Now we're on the merry-go-round of time and until something changes the rhythm we're stuck with it.

"Four thousand years from now, another Admiral Gish will set off, with another Captain Rygal and another Commander Kornan. Only they'll be the same three. And another Morgan Gish will be sitting here to give them a civic welcome to Roman Britain.

"However," he sighed, getting down from his rocky perch, stiffly, "I must be getting on, now. Remember, no more G.N.4. I can't do more than tell you. The rest is up to you, or fate."

JAN stood up, new hope gleaming in his face. "We'll break the circuit by going back with you, Dad."

"Huh ? Can't be done. You came by the long way and you can't take a short cut. Can't be done."

Morgan Gish looked at them benevolently. He held up a gnarled hand.

"You see, this too, too solid flesh is but a dream—the dream of a dying man. That is the price—the agony—we all pay to travel the way I came. Normally, I suppose, I could do as I assume I used to do before we set up this time trap—wander to some galaxy, some period of history, and settle down as a young child. And live again. We all do that. That's how life goes on. But I'm in a closed cycle. I go back as Morgan Gish ten years before his death. I lose most of what I know now in transit and, out of the rest, I try to write it down—the unified field of parallel worlds—and no one will believe me."

They pondered the riddle in gloomy silence. Around them, a timid morning wind faltered through the tufted grass and brought the pungent smell of golden gorse strongly to their alien nostrils. Below them, on the fringe of the lake, little long-eared animals hopped hesitantly from their burrows and sniffed the air of a new day.

"Well, we can soon get over that difficulty," burst out Kornan, suddenly enthusiastic. "All we have to do is drag the *Photon* out and repair her. Then we can either fly back the way we came or try some new galaxy."

The old man shook his head, slowly.

"Even if you could remember how to do that, it still wouldn't work. It should have struck you already that there is something peculiar about her. Put very crudely, the space-time of G.N.4—or, if you like, the space-time of A.D. 50—is not the same as the space-time of A.D. 4000. The Hammerman reaction principle, the law of sub-space conversion and of time-drive, just don't exist."

"Then we must re-discover them," said Rygal, his voice edgy with strain. He was holding himself in check, almost as if he realised the position better than his companions but dare not yield to the knowledge.

Morgan Gish moved back to his rocky seat and leaned against it.

"You don't seem to understand," he explained, patiently. "These things are not there to be found. In this time they don't exist."

They didn't argue the point. The ring of finality about Morgan Gish was too strong to allow them hope that he was wrong. Rygal, still seated on a boulder, nodded his head repeatedly, like a child learning a lesson by heart. His thin lips were twisted in a sardonic smile.

"I thought as much. And what will you say if I suggest that we can use the *Photon's* hull, and our elementary knowledge, to build a rocket ship ? After all, I believe they had rockets in the days long before Rome."

"Hell," Kornan snorted, "we'd have been dust for generations long before we reached even the nearer stars in such a ship."

Jan Gish, tensed for the blow he felt was coming, asked quietly, "Then how do we get back, dad ?"

The old man was silent for a moment. His compassionate glance flickered over them.

"You don't," he said, gently.

FOR a few moments he watched their stiffening faces. "You see," he explained, softly letting fall the heaviest blow to their hopes, "only my presence is keeping your minds alert. I am shielding you from the telepathic field of this older world. But in a few hours, when I am gone, you will not even know what a space ship is. The knowledge you hold, you see, is not true of this world. It is not knowledge, but fantasy. By to-morrow it will be a dream; by the day after, forgotten.

"So are the great mysteries guarded. Each galaxy is different and yet the same. But each has its own anaesthesia, so that the grand illusion can go on. Possibly I—because I have caught myself in a time-trap—am the only human ever to catch a glimpse of the shadow-show.

"And I cannot tell. When I return, the little I remember is not enough to gain a single believer. When I am here and possessed of the knowledge, I can talk only to three men who in a few hours will not have known me, yet who to my own time have been dead 4,000 years."

He chuckled whimsically.

"Oh, yes, the knowledge is secure enough. We can know the secrets only when we cannot tell. We can tell the secrets only when we do not know."

He straightened again, then shook hands with Rygal and Kornan. Jan he

embraced as a father would naturally hold his favourite son.

"Don't take it too badly, my boy," he said, patting him on the shoulder. Then he grinned. "At any rate, you're better off than the followers of Irgon Stel, the time-travelling fanatic. They never knew that space and time are like the components of a spinning gyroscope, which cannot be turned in one axis alone. They travelled in time, all right, but ended up sitting very uncomfortably in the middle of space. Here, you will have compensations in your new life. For one thing," he chuckled, "you've got to find some female and found the house of Gish, or where shall I be ?"

He stepped over the stiffening body of the legionary. "Better hide this, it might lead to trouble," he said. "And give me one of those tubes. I shall need it."

Jan silently handed him one of the message capsules from his belt.

Before they had realised he was going, Morgan Gish waved to them and swiftly walked to an outcropping of rock that obscured part of the moor beyond.

"Good luck," he said. Then, with another wave, he was gone.

Jan ran after him, expecting to overtake him beyond the rocks. "Dad !" he yelled, a thin knife-edge of hysteria in his voice.

The vast expanse of moorland was empty. Nowhere was there even a hint of the fluttering shroud of Morgan Gish.

Jan leaned against the rocks, a tired, dejected figure from the 41st century. The sun glistened on his bald head and his vast shoulders sagged as he stared out, unseeing, across the dour hills. In his dulling brain he could already feel the ghostly fingers of barbarism plucking the thought-flowers of a great civilisation and throwing them away.

Kornan and Rygal had not moved, except to find fresh seats, when he rejoined them. They rose and followed his example in the last gesture of resignation.

Three hand blasters curved gracefully down. The lake surface closed over their useless metal.

Kornan stepped over to the dead Roman. He lifted a dagger from its scabbard, handed it to Rygal. The short sword he gave to Jan. He looked at his ham-like fists, smiling faintly.

"These will have to do me."

Without effort, he picked up the body and hurled it into a deep cleft in the rocks. Metal chinked against stone, then there was silence in the dark hole.

Jan took the metal capsule from his belt and made as if to throw it after the body. Then a sudden thought struck him. He opened it, took out the thick message sheet and tore off an unmarked portion.

"Might as well try to stop this happening again," he grunted, taking out his stylo.

He scrawled rapidly, thrust the scrap back into the tube and capped it again on his warning to the future. The metal flashed in the sunlight then disappeared down the gaping hole.

Within it was the message of Admiral Gish.

"Not G.N.4," he wrote. "Not G.N.4. Anywhere but G.N.4."

They were silent for a few seconds, then Jan stirred. "Let's go," he said.

They moved off, shoulder to shoulder, into their strange new world.

THE END

NO PRIORITY

By H. H. BOYESEN

To the man from the future, building a Time machine was child's play. Present-day shortages, controls and red tape, made it a complicated job, however.

Illustrated by BULL

THERE was a slight shimmering in the middle of the early morning London street and . . .

The little man ran out of nowhere, snapping his fingers and literally dancing with frustration and impatience. He stopped in the middle of the road and looked over his shoulder. He covered his ears and squinted his eyes, looking for all the world like someone waiting for a bomb to go off. He winced perceptibly, threw his conical hat on the ground, jumped on it, picked it up, put it on his head and looked around. There was no one about except the milkman with his electric cart, who was staring open-mouthed at this singular performance. The little man rushed up to him, looked anxiously into his face and shouted:

"Sneldrop !"

"Uhhh ?" was all he got in reply. Waving his hands the little man repeated himself and pointed at the cart. Still nothing but a goggle-eyed stare. Finally he could contain himself no longer and impatiently pushing the milkman aside, he ripped off the lid of the battery container. He peered at the batteries and, taking a small instrument from his pocket, he probed about. There was a loud report, a brilliant white light and a smell of burning insulation. The little man looked at his instrument with complete disgust, almost threw it on the ground, thought better of it, and put it back in his pocket. Without another glance at the milkman, he ran out in the middle of the street, peered about him and up into the overcast sky.

"No weather control, of course." Shrugging his shoulders he twirled a dial on his heavy belt and soared aloft to disappear in the clouds.

For perhaps five minutes the milkman stood with his mouth agape staring into the empty sky. With a shake of his head, like a sleepwalker awaking, he came back to Earth and started to move on down the street. The cart wouldn't move which wasn't surprising as the batteries were flat. In a resigned daze he pushed it down the street, delivered milk to all the wrong houses, and finally appeared several hours late at the repair depot.

"Batteries flat."

After testing them, the mechanic agreed by saying that they were the flattest batteries he had ever seen, in fact they weren't batteries any more, and who was to pay for this and had he perhaps ridden down to Brighton and back for a lark.

The luckless milkman started to explain, gave it up and shuffled disconsolately away leaving a much-puzzled mechanic staring after him. Later that night he had several (neat) at the local, tried to explain his morning to a busy dart game and was laughed out of the pub for his troubles. When he got home, he quarrelled with his wife, threw a teapot at the cat and finally

NO PRIORITY

went to bed where he tossed and turned and resolved to go to sea the next morning.

AS for Recol, for that was the name of the little man, he had simply flown above the clouds where he hovered around impatiently waiting for the sun to rise high enough in the heavens so that he could check its size and rate of fission accurately, with a minimum of atmospheric distortion. He wanted to find out what century it was. It hadn't occurred to him to look at a newspaper.

While he waited he startled several birds on their way to the north and sniffed disdainfully at an airliner circling in from New York. He paced it idly for a few minutes and amused himself in the propwash like a porpoise in the wake of a ship. This so horrified the stewardess, who happened to glance out toward the rear of the plane, that she gave up flying that morning, refused to tell anyone why, and took a slow freighter back to New York, spending the entire voyage locked in her cabin drinking milk.

When the sun was high enough he took the instrument from his pocket, made a thoughtful observation and some rapid calculations. He sighed and with a weary glance at the depressing cloudbank below him, swooped down out of sight.

Skimming swiftly up the Thames, Recol looked about for a quiet place to land. He found Battersea Park to his liking and floated gently down behind a bush. Glancing about to make sure that no one had seen him, he stepped out from his shelter and began his reconnaissance of London.

The problems facing a traveller from the future whose time machine receives an accidental overload, slips out of the dimension he is travelling in, and then blows up in still another dimension, are many and varied. Recol had to find food, shelter and a place to live. All of which meant money or some system of exchange.

The simplest exchange at the moment was a mackintosh which lay over a park bench while its owner busily pruned a tree. Recol slipped it on and, being an honest man, left a small radio about the size of a match box in its place. Later when the unhappy gardener got the hang of it (the radio didn't bother with the ears but rather tuned itself to the electric impulses of the listener's brain at any wave band, any distance and at any volume the listener happened to think), he was quite pleased and used to amuse himself listening in on rather obscure conversations between a trading outpost near Aldebaran and the home base in the Andromeda Nebula. He thought he was getting Radio Tokyo.

Recol didn't attract much attention in London as he prowled about now that his rather strange clothes were covered with a mac, except when he absent-mindedly glided over a fence on his way out of the park, and once soared lightly over a traffic jam in a moment of utter frustration.

HE was furious over the loss of his machine because he would have to make another one, and that would take time. Not that time mattered to a traveller such as he. It was the thought of having to spend any more time than he could help in this civilisation with its crudities and discomforts. In his position as assistant to the Chief Income Tax Collector for the Third Galaxy, he had been forced to scan reel after reel of microfilmed history, spend night after night learning languages in his sleep from the microphone

under his pillow. He had been assigned to the Third Galaxy and the ten centuries dating from the year 1000 A.D. onwards.

Clever people in his century didn't hide their assets from the Government merely in multitudinous banks under various names, but spread them throughout all time in every possible dimension. It was Recol's job to trace the faint emanations left by the Time Machines as they slid along dimensions and in and out of temporal vortexes. It wasn't too difficult finding the machines. The hard part lay in doing the detective work on the spot and bringing back the evidence in tri-dimensional sound film. The only evidence acceptable at the Tax Tribunal was Tri-Di film of the culprit making an actual deposit or withdrawal from a bank or engaging in some form of barter.

At any rate, Recol was well prepared to cope with the languages and some of the customs of this strange world. The first problem, now that he was suitably dressed, was to make some money, so that he could eat and buy the needed equipment. All his bartering goods, collection of time currencies and precious stones had been in the machine when it blew up. He decided as he headed over a bridge that he would speak to the Chief about setting up bank accounts for the use of agents stranded like himself.

It was getting later in the afternoon, and darker as he wandered around London wondering what to do next. He noted with distaste that the streets and shops weren't lit up with SUN-GLO units and then remembered that harnessing and storing sun energy wouldn't be developed for a hundred years or so. But the streets seemed even darker and gloomier than necessary, and he was puzzled until he saw a headline in a paper proclaiming MORE POWER CUTS. This was the time of the unplanned use of power, he thought to himself, and shuddered.

But it might be the means toward getting together some money. A cynical smile flitted across his face as he remembered his experience of the morning with the electrical cart. He should have realised then when he drained the batteries of their energy for his flying harness what stage of civilisation these people were in. They hadn't even developed Sneldrop energy.

He found what he was looking for in the largest and most expensive-looking hotel and walked happily in.

THE management was pleased to give him the best room overlooking the park and sent up a large dinner, all the newspapers and a bottle of excellent claret. After dinner he relaxed comfortably on the bed and read all the advertisements he could find for electrical and radio components, sheet metal, tubing, rubber, and so on. Figuring rapidly in his head he arrived at the amount it would cost the management the next morning for the small service he was going to perform.

At midnight, Recol peered cautiously down the darkened hall and slipped quietly out of his room. Making his way down the back stairs he found the furnace and electrical room. The night electrician was about to ask him his business, when he went quietly to sleep. Recol had merely made a few rapid passes with his hand and stared at him rather hard. A handy device in his business when he had to collect evidence from under the noses of bank tellers and the like.

For several hours he busied himself with soldering iron, wires, valves and

bits of an old radio set. At one point when he needed a particularly complicated valve for which he could find no counterpart, he made himself a little crucible, plugged heavy leads into the mains and for about five minutes drained all the power from the borough. There was great consternation at the power sub-station, but he was gone, trailing wires and carrying strange devices up the dark stairs before an inspector arrived to question the much-puzzled night man, who remembered nothing, not even dozing off.

Recol let himself into his room, dumped most of his burden and soared out of the window up to the roof of the hotel. There he clamped a concave, mirror-like device facing the east. He descended gently down the face of the building paying out a length of cable which was connected to the thing on the roof, and went back into his room. A few more connections and adjustments and he was through. After a bath he hopped into bed and went to sleep, dreaming of tax evaders with long, scaly ears.

IN the morning, after a sumptuous breakfast, he checked the little black box that he had put together the night before. It worked quite well. In fact it worked so well that it lit the electric light bulb that he had detached from its socket and laid on the bed. By a simple adjustment all the bulbs in the room lit up. He carried it to the window and aimed across the park at a large neon sign advertising pills. The pills glowed redly and the letters were green. Several men in overalls, hired to clean the sign, gaped in astonishment and spent a futile half-hour trying to find out who had turned on the switch.

The manager of the hotel arrived in due course after a discreet telephone call from Recol, and with the traditional rubbing of hands and bowing asked if he could be of any help.

Mr. Recol simply wondered if the management would be kind enough to tell him what his annual electric bill was. Looking puzzled and sensing a Ministry of Fuel inspector (for who else would be wearing a mackintosh in his room in the middle of the morning ?), the management obliged with a round sum and sighed at the very thought of the cost.

"Perhaps it would interest you to halve that bill, or quarter it, or maybe even cut it out altogether ?"

"You mean you intend to cut off our power——" the management paled at the thought, "——altogether ?"

"I beg your pardon ?" Recol was puzzled.

"We realise that this is the time for strict fuel economy . . . but the guests . . . cabinet ministers dine here frequently . . . they might find it inconvenient eating in the dark . . ." the management sighed unhappily.

"Not at all," Recol smiled. "I see I am misunderstood. Look !" And he proceeded to demonstrate to the shaken manager his simple device.

For half an hour that worthy watched lights go on and off all over his hotel and all over the city as far as he could see. The next day there were solemn reports in all the papers of a freak electrical storm, and the week after equally solemn letters in *The Times* proving that there couldn't possibly have been. And there the matter lay.

The management gladly parted with a large box full of five pound notes after Recol had explained two things. One, that the lights in the hotel could be turned off, when the device was working, simply by turning them on.

The two kinds of energy cancelled each other out. Two, that if anyone ever touched the device or tried to find out how it worked, it would quietly fuse into a mass of unrecognisable metal and glass and that would be that. The management promptly built a large steel and glass burglar-proof box on the roof of the hotel, and, in a little private ceremony, locked the door, got into his car, drove to the Serpentine and threw the key as far as he could into the water. A year later he received an embossed testimonial from the Ministry of Fuel commending him for conserving so much power.

RECOL ordered first a dressing gown, and then had himself measured for a suit which was sent up that afternoon. That night he went to a pantomime and came away utterly bewildered, and was not surprised to find that everything had closed and contented himself with some cold and greasy fish and chips. He remembered vaguely something he had read about Paris on the microfilms and wistfully went to sleep regretting that he hadn't landed in that gayer city.

The next day, after a series of misfortunes with buses and tubes, which persisted in sending him in totally different and unrecognisable directions, he hired a large car and settled down to the pursuit of materials for his Time Machine and an empty room or garage to build it in.

The room was hard to find, but he eventually persuaded a bespectacled and furtive gentleman at an agency that he really was willing to pay the stated and exorbitant fee for (*a*) finding the flat with garage, (*b*) service charge, (*c*) deposit, (*d*) furniture (a bed, chair and table). The surprised agent handed Recol the key, wished him well and wondered privately if he were an American or a retired monarch. No one else could have afforded that much.

Recol next set out in search of material. The first three establishments pleased him. He departed from each in a glow of good fellowship and *bonhomie.* Everyone was so charming and so polite and so regretful. They were sorry about that sheet aluminium but prior export-only commitments . . . no valves of that type . . . shortages, you know . . . tubing ? let me see . . . there was a firm who handled that but they are doing defence work now . . . why don't you try old Smithers, I know he would be delighted to help . . . Perhaps in six months we could let you have half a pound.

At the end of the day Recol was visibly shaken. It wasn't until after the third establishment and an hour long traffic jam in Regent Street that he began to realise that he wasn't getting anywhere. As he left the fourth shop, the whole horrible, unplanned, unreasoned complexity of, to him, the barbaric, primitive existence of this century, stole over him and in the sheer agony of it, he forgot himself enough to soar completely over the car while his chauffeur, who was holding the door, watched him open-mouthed. Pulling himself together he ordered himself back to his hotel and noticed with malicious satisfaction that the chauffeur eyed him anxiously all the way, as if expecting him to take off again.

THAT evening he ate a gloomy and silent meal which not even the excellent service and the special bottle of champagne sent by the management served to dispel. Later he wandered into the bar determined to dampen his sorrow, if not to drown it completely.

Half-way through his fifth brandy and Scotch, which was the nearest thing he could find to his usual Dilrop, after trying a bit of everything behind the bar, he became conscious of an interesting conversation going on next to him.

"Most amazing thing I've ever seen."

"Amazing."

"All those thingummybobs going round."

"Ummmmm."

"Lights going . . . on . . . and . . . off."

"Erhhh."

"Have another."

"Don't mind."

"Electronics. Great stuff. Here's to it."

"What ?"

"To electronics."

"Ahhhh."

"Probably be the most interesting thing at the Festival."

"What Festival ?"

"Festival of Britain, old fellow."

"Ah, yes."

"Another ?"

Recold didn't wait to hear the rest. Electronics. Festival. He remembered reading something about it in the newspaper. Steering a deliberate course and looking rather like a ship tacking into the wind, he found the elevator and went to his room. There he put on his mac and opening the window, sailed out into the night. That is, he dropped several stories before he remembered to turn on his flying harness, and sweating gently, he drifted towards the river.

A POLICEMAN on duty near Waterloo Bridge happened to glance up to see if by any chance there were still any stars in the sky, and saw to his utter astonishment something sail overhead. It reminded him for a moment of a large bee on a quest for nectar. It certainly flew in a rather aimless and bee-like manner from side to side. It certainly appeared to be searching for something. By the time he had got a call through to his station, it had disappeared and all he got for his trouble was a loud and sardonic lecture from the sergeant about the evils of drinking on duty.

Recol darted on and eventually his eyes found the large dome-like structure which he recognised from the picture accompanying the article. He swooped down and made a rough landing in a pile of old boards which tumbled about making a tremendous clatter. The watchman on his rounds had a vague notion of investigating the noise, but he, too, was troubled by an impression of a large bee and thought better of it.

This gave Recol a moment to pull himself together and somewhat less addled by the cool night air, he crept forward through the piles of building materials to the side of the almost finished building. He found the door open and went in. A good deal of the interior was finished off and exhibits had begun to flow in. Taking a minute torch from his pocket, he shot the beam around the vast interior.

There was nothing resembling anything electronic near him, so he set

off to explore. He went down numerous halls and through numerous great rooms dedicated to progress. In his own terms he was amused by what this century called progress. There were many things which were gravely set forth as being newer than new, that he had learned to construct with building sets when he was a child.

At one half-uncrated exhibit he paused a few moments and, chuckling gleefully, made a few deft adjustments, changed a circuit here and a gear there. After hunting about he found some materials he wanted and, making a mysterious series of windings with some old cable in the interior of the mechanism, he tapped a lead off his flying harness and carefully measuring the energy output with his multi-purpose instrument, he wandered off.

The next morning when the staff tested their brand new, for-export-only patent dishwasher, they were duly surprised to find the cups, saucers, tumblers, dishes and knives, forks and spoons emerging in a shower of miniature replicas, all about an inch big. They never did bother to find out that this was just a better way of storing them and that if they had put them back in and reversed a switch, they would have come out normal again. Instead they hurriedly sent the machine back to the factory, but it got side-tracked to Brighton and was lost forever on an obscure siding.

RECOL soon found himself nearing what he judged to be his goal. Collections of radio-grams, radar sets, short wave and long wave receivers, testing devices, battery charging apparatus, complex sonar sets, and all the gear of this century were strewn about, and in the process of assembly. Rubbing his hands happily he tiptoed about checking the equipment, looking for power leads and mentally assembling his Time Machine.

At the far end of the room he paused when he heard a noise just around the corner. Thinking it might be a watchman making his rounds, he faded into a dark corner and held his breath.

The noise continued without coming nearer and he thought he could detect a faint light which flickered like a candle. Cautiously he stole forward and around the corner. Dimly he could see that it was a candle and that there was a young woman bending over it sobbing quietly. Around her and stretching away in the gloom was a collection of strange, irrational objects of every conceivable size and shape. For a moment he was baffled. None of these objects had any relation whatever to the technology that he was familiar with. He rubbed his eyes and tried to think back to the microfilms to see if there was some strange department he had forgotten. Or had he suddenly gone mad ?

Reaching around to steady himself his hand felt the wall and he almost dislodged a sign that was tacked up with a piece of string. He grabbed it in time and looked at it in the dim light.

With a stifled sigh of relief he understood. The sign said plainly "ALL EXHIBITS FOR ECCENTRICITY CORNER THIS WAY" and there was an arrow at the bottom of it.

He put the sign down on the ground, being careful to point it toward the Electronics room he had just left, and crept forward. It wouldn't do to have a nervous and sobbing female interrupting him in the middle of his work.

As he hunched quietly forward a curious feeling stole over him. A feeling that he was looking at something out of the corner of his eye that he had

seen before. The feeling kept revolving around the back of his mind and suddenly he almost shouted out loud with sheer and beautiful joy and amazement. That girl was sitting right in the middle of *his Time Machine* !

Or at least it looked like his Time Machine.

Or was it really a Time Machine ?

It must be.

It had to be. No one, no matter how eccentric, could possibly design a machine like it accidentally. Not even an ape working for ten thousand years.

WITH a smile of pure pleasure Recol stole forward until he was almost breathing down her neck. And it was a lovely neck. He wondered idly if the front of it was as lovely too. Dark hair streamed down over her shoulders. He made a mental bet with himself that she was one of those girls who looked twice as beautiful when they were crying. He was going to find out in a minute.

"Boo !"

With a little shriek the girl whirled around and he found himself looking into a pair of dark, tear-starred eyes.

"I believe you are sitting in the middle of a Time Machine, Madame."

"I . . . how did you know . . . I mean."

For a breathless moment Recol stared, puzzled. Then a look of slow realisation went over his face. Of course. This really *is* a Time Machine. And the girl is one of my futuristic black-marketeer Tax Evaders. One of the many cases he hadn't caught up with yet. There were so many now that the rates had gone up. Someone had to pay for the new intergalactic explorations. With a start he shook himself together.

"And what, pray tell, are you doing here ? Running away from something ?"

The girl gave him a deep, searching look and turned away.

"How did you know this is a Time Machine ?"

"I happen to own one myself. That is, I did own one. Now that I look at it I see that mine is a later model, though."

"You mean, then, that you . . . that you are from my time ?"

"Depends. What is *your* time ? We're probably within a few hundred years of each other, one way or the other."

"I'm 3897."

"So am I ! But that still doesn't explain why you are here. And I might as well warn you that anything you say will be recorded against you."

The girl looked suddenly even more unhappy.

"I was afraid of this. You're a detective."

Recol frowned. This didn't fit the pattern at all.

"Not exactly a detective. Inter Temporal Tax Collection Bureau. I'm assistant to the Chief."

"Oh, then you're not a . . . detective." She looked up at him and smiled a dazzling smile.

"Why should that make you happy ?"

"I was afraid Daddy had sent you looking for me. I know they can trace these things and I wanted to run away for a while and then it broke down and I can't fix it because I was never any good at electronics and all that at finishing school and . . ."

With a helpless gesture she stopped and looked at the ground.

"Run away? You know that these things are illegal for the ordinary citizen. How did you get this one?"

"Well . . . I suppose I'm really not an ordinary citizen, in a way. Daddy is head of the Bureau of Archaeological Endeavour and he wanted me to marry a man I hate. He's sort of old-fashioned, I guess. So, I just borrowed this and . . . ran away. My name's Adrid," she added irrelevantly.

RECOL introduced himself automatically while his mind strayed to other things. He had heard of her father. Important man in the Government. Archaeological research by that time had developed into a major science with the advent of time travel. All of past time was being studied in order to formulate some key to, some hint of the future. Time travel went only one way, backwards. The voices of the past swelled in an ever-increasing chorus as new finds and evidence were brought in to point the way ahead. Mistakes in judgment made by great men of the past could be accurately judged and correlated with observed events. Countless treasures were being brought forward. The coffers of the Government were swelling. Knowledge was increasing. And some people were using the machines for their own private gain at the expense of the rest of civilisation.

"Do you think you can fix it?" she interrupted his thoughts anxiously.

"Of course. But how did you get it here?"

"Well, when it went haywire I found myself in the middle of a wood. For a while I didn't know what to do until some kind people found me wandering around lost. So I pretended that I had lost my memory and they put me up in their big house. Then they gave me a job as a governess and when I had saved up some money I came to London and then I read that they wanted strange inventions, so I saw the man in charge and I told him that I had the strangest invention that he had ever seen but that he would have to fetch it out of the woods. So we went down on the train together with a picnic lunch, and he liked the machine so much that he bought it right there. And then he had some men come in a lorry and cart it away."

"What did you tell him it was?"

"I told him it was an invention for travelling in time and he laughed and laughed and told me that time travel was impossible. So then I laughed and laughed. I've been sneaking in here every night since trying to make it work, and to-night you came and you'll make it work and everything will be all right." With that she smiled happily and wriggled her toes.

Recol was so enchanted with the story and the toe wriggling and the chance to travel in time with this beautiful creature that he set right to work tracing circuits and checking valves. Soon his flying fingers had located the trouble and without more ado he had finished and the machine began to purr and shimmer.

Adrid had been watching him with interest and wriggling her toes, and when the job was finished she looked up at him coyly.

"You know, I left all my things over there in the corner. Could you get them for me? It's so cold out there."

With a fatuous smile Recol left the machine and began groping his way over to the darkened corner. As he went she kept up a running flow of conversation.

"It's really been such fun travelling around in time. I used to go with Daddy sometimes when he went back and I met so many fascinating people. Especially the men. I think they were . . . are . . . so much more interesting and romantic than our men . . . bigger and handsomer and stronger . . . don't you think so ? . . . I remember I met one, oh thousands of years ago . . . he was a Viking and he had a wonderful ship and a dragon's head but father wouldn't let me talk to him much and I would so like to see him again and go sailing across the seas in that wonderful ship . . . wouldn't you if you were me . . .?"

A cold chill crept into Recol's heart. He hadn't been paying too close attention to the girl's chattering. Suddenly he gasped and whirled around. Her voice *had* been growing fainter. With a muffled groan he started forward. The machine was growing fainter and shimmering and he could just see her smiling at him and looking out of those great dark eyes.

"Goodbye . . . you've been sweet !"

And the machine vanished.

HE stood there for a minute with his hands on his hips staring at the large amount of nothing which was where the machine had been. Then very carefully he pulled his little conical hat out of his pocket where he had put it for safe keeping and threw it on the ground and jumped on it.

Just as carefully he picked it up again, dusted it off and put it back in his pocket. Deliberately he turned and hunching the collar of his mac up around his neck stalked out of the building and into the night. For a moment he absent-mindedly toyed with the idea of hailing a taxi, gave that up as impossible and soared instead into the air with his hands thrust disconsolately in his pockets.

As Recol flitted over the dimly lit streets, battalions of gloomy thoughts chased themselves through his mind. In the morning they would find the Time Machine missing. As a result they would put an extra guard around the place so that he would have no chance to get in again. He would have instead to wade through innumerable forms, wait countless months for delivery of supplies. The outlook couldn't be blacker.

A sickly grey dawn was breaking as Recol approached the hotel. With a neat back flip he slid feet first through the window and into the room. For a few minutes he leaned out of the window gazing moodily at the still sleeping city. Idly he amused himself by aiming the black box (which the management had not yet removed to its new home) around the city and turning lights on and off. One sign in particular caught his eye and after aiming at it carefully and making a few adjustments, he yawned and went to bed.

As he slept he dreamed. Sometimes he smiled; sometimes he frowned. He was chasing a pair of beautiful dark eyes down the gleaming corridors of time. Frequently she was just within reach, until a menacing figure clad in skins and waving a Viking sword managed to get in the way. This was when he frowned. But deep within his subconscious he knew he would find her somewhere, in some time. And when he did . . . this was when he smiled.

Londoners that day were alternately shocked and amused by a large red neon sign which no one seemed to be able to turn off. Only a few of the letters were lit, and they said, with beautiful simplicity:

NUTS

Space Opera . . .

A NUMBER of readers wrote in to commend our statement in the last issue that we were publishing a "space opera" story in this issue ("Cosmic Mirror"). The blunt truth is that, despite changing literary trends with excursions into the philosophical and psychological fields of the future, space opera has been, is, and will be, the backbone of science fiction.

"Space opera" is the term given to any type of future story set somewhere in interplanetary or galactic space, against a background of stupendous inventions and all the plausible possibilities of a scientifically advanced mankind.

There are, however, varying grades of space opera. There is the "cosmic wild west" type, which does more harm than good to the medium—that is, the wild west cowboy plot put into a space setting, with ray guns, bug-eyed monsters and near-nude heroines, supported by muscular heroes clad in three suits of space armour. There are the short, plausible, thought-provoking stories centred around a spaceship somewhere in the void, and there are the "classics" of the top authors which need 80,000 words or more of first-class writing to put over credibly.

Old and new readers alike are always fascinated by the cosmic concepts so vividly portrayed by some of the authors, now becoming master-craftsmen in the art of mentally transporting their readers across the vastness of the galaxy. In America, the "Skylark" and the "Galactic Patrol" series of Edward Elmer Smith, now being published in book form, are being bought enthusiastically by a wide-reading audience. Other top writers whose stories have appeared in magazine form are finding their works snapped up for book publication—John W. Campbell, Jr.; George O. Smith; Murray Leinster; Jack Williamson; Clifford Simak; and many others.

New Worlds will have its quota of space opera, but we shall see that the stories are in the better traditions of the field.

DESPITE our intention of publishing bi-monthly as from the last issue, paper supplies were held up for this issue and we remained quarterly. However, adequate stocks have now been built up to warrant bi-monthly appearance, and the next issue, dated November, should appear on October 1st.

Unfortunately, our companion magazine *Science-Fantasy* was hard hit by the paper situation, but we have redesigned the third issue and increased the size to that of *New Worlds*. The issue, expected in September, contains new stories by some of our top authors, with the accent upon *fantasy* with a scientific theme.

You will want this magazine which is "different." Make sure of your copy *now*. The new *Science-Fantasy* is going to be as popular as *New Worlds*.

JOHN CARNELL

THE SCAPEGOATS

By CEDRIC WALKER

The androids hoped and worked for equality with Man, but humanity was not prepared to accept them as equals. They were far too useful in other ways.
(A sequel to "Manhunt")

Illustrated by HUNTER

SECOND by second the tension mounted. Not that there were many outward signs—faces were cold and emotionless as usual. But there was no mistaking the seething under-current of sharply divided opinion that eddied around the hall.

Ormond thought: We get more like human kind every day. He found a certain amount of satisfaction in the thought. And yet . . . Automatically his mind began to dissect the idea. Was it in the natural order of things—the path down which blind forces pushed his kind inevitably—or—more mundanely—was it the result of their having kept up the pretence so long ? If you acted a part deliberately for a long enough period of time, eventually the fiction would become fact.

He glanced across at Upjohn, and smiled to himself. There was the bare beginnings of a very human frown on his youthful face. He was perhaps more "humanised" than most. Certainly his impatience was one of the strongest of human traits. The impatience that had driven men out to the stars and to less noble deeds.

Upjohn was speaking, and it was obvious that many—too many—of the gathering were being swayed by his arguments. Equally obvious, much of his tirade was directed towards Ormond.

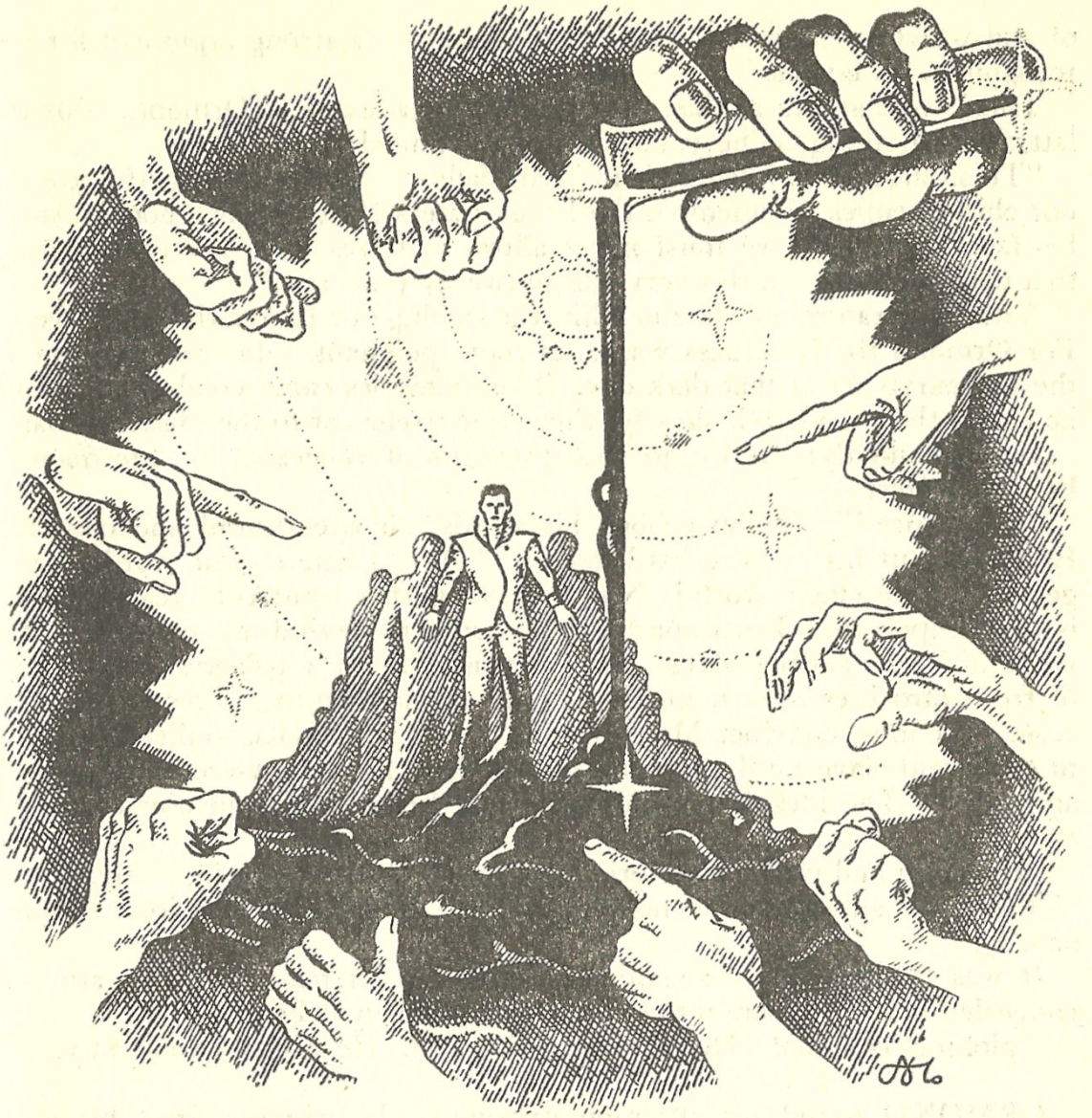
"——therefore, I say, 'Strike now'. Demand full rights from the Earth Council. We've sat around mooning long enough. Our fleet has been ready for some time. If they refuse—well, I think we can give a good account of ourselves. At least we'll give them something to think about. And who knows"—his voice rose—"but that it will be the spark that will cause our people throughout the galaxy to rise up against the oppressor ?"

There were increasing murmurs of assent. Ormond looked round the room at the shining eyes. He felt the excitement that hung over them like a pall. The situation was becoming dangerous.

He said mildly: "It seems to me we are letting ourselves be carried away by most illogical and surprisingly human arguments."

He paused. A sudden hush had fallen. As an Elder and one of the chief controllers of android education, Ormond was entitled to a certain amount of deference.

"One of our most important characteristics—that very one which we uphold above all as being the factor which makes us, in this respect, at least, superior to Mankind—that of coldly dispassionate reasoning, appears to have become submerged in a welter of childish pugnacity. Upjohn particularly is being distressingly human."



UPJOHN turned to face the Elder squarely. His darkly handsome face was quite calm again but Ormond sensed the smouldering fires beneath.

"Not at all," he said, with the barest trace of a sneer, "our respected Elder is mistaken. It is not a question of merely desiring a squabble. That would be foolish indeed." He drew himself up. "We are not Men that we should fight and murder to pander to our petty emotions." He paused and glanced around.

Approval showed in the eyes of the gathering.

Upjohn smiled.

Ormond thought: give him his due—he's clever. He's struck just the right note. He had a momentary desire—which he promptly quelled—to curse under his breath.

"The question is rather one of expediency," Upjohn went on. "We cannot delay any longer. For twenty years we have multiplied here on this planet we have made our home. For twenty years singly and in small bands our people have made their way secretly to Lareenia, each bringing their mite to add to the store of knowledge. All these years we have planned and laboured and built until we now have a space-fleet we may well be proud

of and which may prove"—he smiled slightly—"a strong argument for our recognition as equals."

There were smiles at this. Upjohn looked askance at Ormond. But the latter said nothing. The younger man continued:

"To sit around in idleness is to invite failure. Sloth and forgetfulness are our chief enemies. Remember the Lotus-Eaters of the English poet ? And," his face darkened, "we must never allow ourselves to forget the massacre that took place here in this very village twenty years ago."

A murmur ran round the room like the sighing of a breeze through a wood. For Ormond the bitterness was even more poignant. He had been one of the few survivors of that dark day. The memories came flooding back, but he thrust them aside relentlessly: they were irrelevant to the matter in hand.

He said quietly: "If we go with thoughts of vengeance we are doomed before we start——"

"Vengeance ?" Upjohn echoed his words, his eyes round and childlike. He thrust out his arms to his listeners. "Have I uttered one word of vengeance ? One single word ? No. Not vengeance—but cold reason. That is what impels me. I mention the—incident—to remind my audience of the waste of lives—android lives—that goes on daily on a galactic scale. News of fresh atrocities against our kind pours in constantly. This waste must cease. We must convince Mankind that we are not robots, soulless machines to serve and slave until worn out and useless, but fellow-creatures of flesh and blood. The idea that we are a host of Frankenstein creations must be erased."

"By bomb and gas and bacteria, perhaps ?" Ormond put in, softly.

The mask slipped for a moment. "Yes. If need be," Upjohn shouted angrily.

It was the signal for a sudden outbreak of altercation. The gathering congealed here and there into small groups, fiercely debating.

Upjohn stood aloof. He had made his point. He waited confidently.

ORMOND found his attention drifting. The window drew his gaze. There was a large clump of flame-flowers not far from the building. Their gloriously coloured heads were turned towards the window, as close as their stalks would allow them. They were probably listening, thought Ormond. The thought filled him with wonder—as it always did. Amusedly, he wondered what their opinion of the matter would be. Pity they could not communicate, but that was one thing the Lareenians had not been able to teach the androids. Strange, beautiful, peaceful Lareenia. And at the thought the hubbub, which had faded from his consciousness to a dull murmur like distant surf returned in all its fury.

Someone was at his elbow, saying something. He roused himself. "I'm sorry. What did you say ?"

The other repeated the question. "We wish to know your opinion. We have all heard Upjohn's advice. Some of us agree, some of us do not. You have expressed your disapproval, therefore we would like to hear your proposal."

Heads nodded around the room. Upjohn's face wore a bored expression. In the silence Ormond studied his palms for a moment. Then he glanced up and said simply: "My advice is: do nothing."

He was aware how lame the words sounded.

THERE were cries of protest. Upjohn was sneering openly. Even some of the other Elders looked sharply at Ormond. The latter endured it for a moment then he raised a hand.

He spoke slowly, weighing each word carefully. "Some of you may hold my views as traitorous—or worse. But it isn't that. It's difficult to explain. Upjohn, I know, is all for faring out and bearding Mankind in his own den—giving him a taste of his own medicine. Oh yes," as Upjohn made as if to speak, "I know how you feel. Once I felt the same way." He extended his palms. "But what would you gain ? How could we hope to pit our space-fleet—admirable though it is—against the unlimited might of the Space Guard ? It would be fatal. We should be destroyed, and then we'd be worse off than ever."

"Better than skulking in hiding like rats," Upjohn put in. "Better to fight and die than wait—wait for ever."

Murmurs and head-noddings. Ormond sensed the tide was turning against him.

He said desperately: "We have waited so long—let us wait a little longer . . ."

"The longer we wait," said Upjohn contemptuously, "the slimmer grow our chances of ever achieving recognition. We must prove to Mankind that we are a force to be reckoned with."

"But don't you see, once we attack we throw away all hopes of a settlement by peaceful means ? Our bitterest enemy is the lurking fear in the minds of men that their creations will turn upon them and destroy them. A subconscious dread that will only be removed by generations of peaceful cohabitation between men and androids. Attack and it will put us back a hundred years."

He saw his point had gone home here and there, but the majority looked doubtful.

"Then what do we do ?" asked one.

"I believe we should sit tight. Here on this planet we have found peace and time to study and build and develop whatever powers we may have. I see our kind as complementary to Man. I see in the future a relationship of symbiotic perfection. I believe that in the normal run of progress we shall be accepted. When the fear has gone from men's minds. I know it—as clearly as I know that one day I shall die."

"Words ! Words !" Upjohn sneered. "That's all very nice. But, meanwhile the waste goes on. Everywhere we're treated like cattle. Slaughtered at the slightest sign of rebellion. Used as fodder for the futile wars Mankind contracts in his foolishness every so often. Here on Lareenia we are safe only so long as the Earthmen don't return in bulk and so long as we are able to hold on to our Lareenian cloak. But what of the others ? What about them ?"

ORMOND didn't reply. There wasn't really anything to say. He supposed they thought him selfish, and he couldn't blame them for that. Perhaps he was—from a short-sighted narrow point of view. But—he clenched his hands—if only he could make them see it as he did. He realised the situation was now dangerously near the bursting-point. He played his

last card.

"I have a further suggestion to make."

Upjohn opened his eyes wider at this and seemed about to make some cynical comment. Then for some reason he changed his mind and gave his full attention to the speaker.

"You all know Faber."

There was a stir at this. Faber—nobleman, Chief Educator of Earth, and twenty-second in the line of Heads of Unesco, was one of the few humans in the public eye ever to speak out in favour of the androids. He would have been deposed—or worse—long ago, but for the fact that his post was hereditary, and his person by existing standards inviolate. His was one case in a host of sinecures in a corrupt Earth Government, but, whereas most of the men who filled such posts were parasitical and uncaring, Faber was as articulate and functional as he was permitted to be. Though his activities were of little more than an advisory nature.

The gathering was waiting eagerly now for Ormond's next words.

"My idea is to visit Earth, reveal myself to Faber and persuade him to visicast a galaxy-wide appeal for equal rights for our people."

There was a moment of stunned silence then pandemonium broke loose. Shouts of protest mingled with cheers. Some looked aghast.

"Ridiculous."

"Madness."

"Faber would refuse."

"Supposing he gave you away ? Then we'd all be finished."

Upjohn sneered: "Do you really think that human beings will be swayed by any appeal for fair play ? There have been appeals before and what good did they do ?"

"Faber has a great deal of influence," Ormond pointed out quietly. "He is respected throughout the galaxy."

"He has appealed before with no result."

"No apparent result. Who can tell what is in the backs of people's minds ? And never before on video. I feel the time may be ripe for a final appeal."

THE initial shock over, Ormond saw that he was losing ground again. Upjohn was openly contemptuous, and a great many were unconvinced. He took the final plunge, and felt a cold hand settle round his heart as he did so. If he failed . . .

"Let me try this," he said, his voice rising above the hum of discussion. "If I fail——" He shrugged. "Then I suppose it will be Upjohn's turn."

"We shall have lost nothing but a little time," mused one of the Elders.

"Precious time," snapped Upjohn.

"We have waited so long a little longer will make no difference," murmured another of the Elders.

A few of the grave heads were nodding in agreement. Half-reluctantly the Elders gave their permission. Most of the younger ones were manifestly indignant.

There was nothing more to be said. Amid low-toned grumbles the meeting broke up.

THE trip to Earth was unpleasant. Ormond spent most of it in his cabin

fighting the effects of overdrive. Lord—he must be getting old. Or maybe it was because it had been so long since he had experienced it. Not since he had landed on Lareenia twenty years ago, in fact. During his spell with the Space-Guard cruiser he had got used to it, so much so that it became to him little more than a split-second trembling.

In a way he was rather glad to have a legitimate excuse for not taking part in the usual activities of a trans-galactic liner. For one thing, there was always the possibility that he might have given himself away. Though he didn't think there was much to be feared in that direction. He had shed his Earthly habits so completely that even the Lareenians—who shared the secret—had at times mistaken him for one of themselves.

There was another reason which he could not analyse to his own satisfaction. In the days when he had worked under the Earthmen he had consoled himself with the thought that some day his kind would be accepted and ultimately the two races would be so mixed that the "true android" type or the "true human" type would be as mythical as the "true Aryan" of the twentieth century. There had been a feeling of kinship that over-rode the chagrin of the daily humiliations. The feeling was gone now. Perhaps the waiting had been too long. In the Earth ship he felt a billion miles from Mankind. Maybe so it would always be. Maybe Upjohn had been right after all . . .

He lay back and tried to concentrate on the ceiling video. But the memories persisted. He could not shrug them from his mind. The horror of the massacre in the village was still vivid. Then the days of hiding while the Earth ships scoured to and fro. The kindness of the Lareenians who had hidden him. The gradual drifting-in of others from all over the galaxy, until there were so many they had found it impossible to lurk underground any longer. Then the wonderful plan in which an entire race had co-operated to keep their secret. Even now it seemed incredible.

All this planning—this secret building of space-ships—where would it all end? Back in the meeting-hall he had felt confident of his own beliefs. Now he was not so sure. Was Upjohn's answer the right one? No. He didn't want to believe that. His was the only way.

AT Earthport there were the usual formalities, though on a slightly larger scale than at the Lareenian port. The official glanced at Ormond with little more than idle curiosity. Name . . . race . . . personal details . . . nature of visit: consultation with Chief Educator Faber on matters pertaining to Lareenian education . . . Stamp . . . The papers were whisked back to him and in a moment he was in the stream of people bustling towards the waiting line of taxis.

He checked in at his previously booked hotel without a hitch.

Twenty minutes after breakfast the following morning found him entering the portals of the flamboyant mass that was the headquarters of Unesco—New London, the Earth capital—a thousand miles from his hotel.

A bored-looking receptionist ushered him into a bare room that belied the outward appearance of the building, and left him.

He prepared himself for a long wait and was mildly surprised when a girl appeared at his elbow.

"Won't you come this way, please?" she said, smiling.

He followed her. A corridor. Elevator. Then he was alone in a small room and the door was closing gently behind him.

It was singularly unimpressive. A filing-cabinet, a desk, a couple of chairs, and little else.

THE man behind the desk smiled at him. He was medium-sized, with grey eyes and a lean body. Ormond had seen him many times on the video and had marvelled at the seeming youthfulness of one who must be in the neighbourhood of sixty at least. But, bearing in mind the skill of the visicast engineers, he had not expected him to appear so in the flesh. He saw now that he had made no mistake.

"Please sit down," he said.

Ormond did so and was glad that he had for the next words hit him like a hammer-blow between the eyes.

"To save time, (*a*) I'm aware of your identity, (*b*) you may talk freely here. There's no one listening in."

Ormond floundered up out of the depths. After the first shock the other's voice seemed to have a soothing effect. And something else that made Ormond feel small and inarticulate. He made no attempt to reconcile the paradox.

"But how——?" he began.

"Does it matter for the moment?" Faber indicated a box on the desk. "Cigarette?"

"Why, you know——" said Ormond, in surprise. No android would ever dream of adopting such an injurious habit. Then he stopped and smiled. "Oh, I see."

"Childish, I know, but it's amazing how lifelong habits assert themselves. Forgive my little trick." Faber replaced the lid of the box carefully. "And now?" he said questioningly.

Ormond poured out the whole story. While he spoke one corner of his mind marvelled at the instinctive trust he had felt in the man. It made him feel a little humble. What price his logic now? The logic which told him that it was quite possible that he was signing the death warrant of his race—or at least the Lareenian colony.

Faber was silent for a long while after Ormond had finished. His eyes stared straight ahead but they didn't seem to be seeing anything. Ormond felt the power of the man even when he was silent. He thought: If only we had people like him. Not many. Just a few here and there. Someone to show the way. Someone to follow. Someone to worship . . . He smiled wryly to himself. By their very nature the androids would never produce great leaders. They were all so equal socially and fundamentally. When a problem was raised each added his quota of opinion and the thing was weighed dispassionately from all angles. Greater age and therefore greater experience carried a certain amount of added respect, but even the Elders could be over-ruled. Upjohn appealed to the more adventurous of the younger ones—but he was hardly a leader.

FABER'S voice cut across his thoughts. His eyes had exchanged something a million miles away for the scene in the room. He said slowly: "I hadn't reckoned on this—yet. I feel—like you—that recognition will come

gradually, inevitably. You can't change Mankind overnight. The idea that you are—forgive me—soulless creatures is instilled into them."

Ormond looked at him. "If only there were more humans who thought like you."

Faber smiled. "There may be more than we think. Fear of authority may keep them silent."

"We must believe that," said Ormond. "It is our only hope. And yet, they treat us as slaves. If we escape, the Space Guard hunts us down like rats. Can the Earth Council seriously believe that we constitute a real threat to humanity? Have we ever shown any signs that we will turn on our creators—like Frankenstein's monster in the old legend—and destroy them?"

"That's part of the answer, admittedly, but I don't think it's the main one."

Ormond looked startled. "Can there be another reason for such persecution?"

Faber looked suddenly very old. "All through history there's been a

scapegoat. Someone to take the blame for the evil-doings of another. Someone to discriminate against. It didn't really matter about the reason for discrimination. Anything would do. The colour of his skin, the race he belonged to. It didn't have to be plausible. Just so long as it served to turn attention away from the guilty ones. The old National Governments used the device. They reasoned that if they kept people's attention focused elsewhere they could do what they would never dare do otherwise and blame it all on some suitably defenceless race or country or what-have-you. Remember Hitler ?" He leaned forward. "The Earth Council is crumbling slowly but inevitably to a vast spiteful ruin. It seeks to hide its corruptness—which is killing it like a cancer—by means of a scapegoat. You are that scapegoat."

Ormond sat silently for a long while. Something seemed to die within him. He said dully: "How can we ever hope to come to terms with beings who think in that manner ?" He spread his arms helplessly. "Perhaps we'd better give up the scheme. I don't know—perhaps Upjohn was right. Perhaps I was foolish to imagine that the day would ever come. Perhaps it would be better to quit the galaxy and get out of Mankind's way altogether . . ."

"No."

Ormond stared, startled by the sudden vehemence in the other's tones. Faber had risen to his feet, his eyes flashing. He seemed to tower over the desk. The room grew suddenly smaller. Ormond leaned back involuntarily.

"No," said Faber again. He regained his seat. His face was expressionless once more, but his eyes stared unblinkingly at Ormond. "You will not leave. You will remain on Lareenia. The broadcast will be made. Now you had better return to your hotel. And keep out of the way."

THE lounge, which a moment before had been buzzing with noise was silent now except for one voice coming from the giant screen at one end.

Ormond thought exultantly: they're listening to him. They aren't walking out. Maybe the day he'd dreamed about for so long was nearer than he'd suspected.

The huge grey head leaned forward. The soft-spoken words became more urgent. He had the audience completely in his sway. The power of the man was not lessened by the artificial medium. More people drifted in, listened, and stayed.

Faber was recalling the early experiments of Mostyn—the near-legendary creator of the androids—and had reached the stage when the scientist had attempted to fit the first android child into human society by placing him in a public school. When he came to the tragic ending there were murmurs here and there in the gathering.

Ormond pictured him alone at his desk far away from the city—Faber made all his telecasts from his home—and wished there were some way he could tell him of the effect his words were having on at least one gathering of humans. He marvelled again at the power of the man. The Earth Council had not liked it when he had made his formal request, but they had agreed reluctantly on condition that he stuck to the scientific side of the question and not indulge in any "rabble-rousing". It was Faber's intention to continue a dispassionate recounting of the history of the androids for a while and make his appeal at the end after he had lulled the Earth Council into

placidity, trusting his status as a noble to prevent the engineers disconnecting him on their own initiative and thus giving him time to get the message across.

Ormond was dragged from his reverie in a manner that left his senses shocked and unco-ordinated.

Faber's calm features dissolved in a kaleidoscopic fury of form and colour. His voice was lost in a sudden welter of sound. Then the screen cleared and the head and shoulders of an announcer appeared, his eyes wild with excitement. He clutched a paper in one hand. His voice rang out in sharp contrast to the former soft tones, crackling through the room like a burst of machine-gun fire . . .

" . . . dastardly attack. The garrison was completely wiped out. Being in such a hitherto peaceful region of space they were taken entirely by surprise. The true nature of the androids is at last showing itself. The monster is turning upon his creator. How wise our leaders have proved to be in their policy towards the androids. There can be no hesitation now. The source of the raiders must be located and the whole evil brood wiped out. Mostyn's insane experiment must not be allowed to go any further. The alternative can mean only one thing—death for Mankind . . ."

THE announcer's voice shrilled on, but Ormond heard it only vaguely. Black misery engulfed him. This was the end then. All hope of a settlement was gone, and with it all hope for the androids. Upjohn, you fool, why couldn't you have waited? A few more days. He thought logically: if only Upjohn had been efficient, then perhaps the radio operator wouldn't have got the message through before he died. Maybe they wouldn't have known who was responsible? They might have put it down to piracy. No. They would have found out sooner or later: they hadn't even had the sense to avoid choosing a planet so near Lareenia. Now there would be a galaxy-wide flare-up. Many men would die, but in the end numbers would tell and the last android would be rayed out of existence.

Mostyn—praise be that you did not live to see the end of your noble experiment.

The announcer's words impinged on his consciousness . . . " . . . is from Lareenia. There can be no doubt of this. The consensus of reports from various ships of the Space Guard in the area prove conclusively that no other ship of that size could have been in the area at the time of the massacre . . ."

In the pandemonium no one noticed Ormond slip out of the room.

He took the elevator to the roof and walked swiftly to the landing-strip. He climbed into the first taxi he came to and rose rapidly until he was above the normal levels. Then he set the controls at maximum and punched out a course. The taxi shot into the night like a bullet.

He considered his actions. They had been machine-like and cool and almost involuntary. But somehow he knew Faber was in deadly danger. As he was himself—though that didn't matter: he was as good as dead anyway. The point was: they knew Faber had had a visitor from Lareenia and they would quickly put two and two together. Apart from that his well-known sympathies with the android case would be enough to tie the rope round his neck. This time even his position would not save him.

The people would be crying for blood and the Earth Council would be only too pleased for an excuse to get him out of the way.

The outer beam recognised him and allowed him through. He touched down on the roof. There was one other taxi there. Faber was still at home and alone.

He went down. He had been there once before. He knocked at the study door. Faber's voice said softly: "Come in."

Faber was sitting at his desk. There was an open book before him. He looked up and smiled. He made a movement with his hand. The desk lamp went out, and simultaneously the whole room glowed into light.

ORMOND looked at him and he was filled with a deep pity. Even in the stress of the moment he had time to wonder at his feelings towards one who did not even belong to his own race.

"I came——" he began. Then he paused. Why had he come? There was nothing he could do. He said: "You are in grave danger. They will be coming for you soon. Can't you go away? Is there nowhere you can hide?"

Faber smiled. "Is that why you came?"

"For that reason. And to thank you for what you have done. Perhaps we should have succeeded," he shrugged, "who knows? Now it is the end."

Faber shook his head. "No, Ormond," he said, "it is not the end. Some of us will survive. We can start again."

Ormond raised his head slowly until his eyes met those of Faber. For one breathless moment he stared piercingly into their depths. "You mean . . .?"

Faber nodded his head slowly.

Ormond sat down. It was a surprise, but his mind swiftly adjusted to the new state of affairs. One half of his brain worked rapidly while the other listened to Faber's words.

"There are other settlements. One here on Earth. We needed someone in a key position—more, someone who was greatly respected." He smiled and added: "Android flesh is easier to mould than human flesh."

"And the real Faber . . .?"

"Is still alive. They won't find him."

"What will happen now?"

Faber shrugged. "We shall be killed, I suppose. The untimely interference of Upjohn will undoubtedly rouse human passions to the mob level—providing that the Earth Council don't get in first and save them the job."

"You must get away," said Ormond in flat, definite tones.

"Impossible. We shouldn't get a hundred miles. Listen——" he cocked his head to one side, "——they're here now."

The faint hum changed quickly to a shrill whine outside the windows. It stopped abruptly.

Faber dimmed the lights, crossed to the window and glanced out. It was a large ship. Uniformed figures were pouring out of it.

Ormond began to frame a question but Faber cut him off briefly. "No. They can't see us—one-way vision."

"Have you a blaster?" Ormond said.

Faber half-turned. "Useless to attempt resistance. What would be the

point in killing a few more humans ?"

"May I have the blaster ?"

Faber shrugged, reached into his desk. He held the weapon out towards Ormond.

"Now kill me," said Ormond.

"What ?" Faber raised his eyebrows slightly.

"You must kill me," Ormond repeated. His tones were calm and matter of fact.

"Why ?"

"Then they will think that you too have been enraged by the massacre. I fled to you for help and you killed me. You could not be a traitor to the human race after such a dastardly act as the murdering of the Space Guard. Their suspicions will be diverted."

"And you ?"

"My death will mean nothing. But we cannot afford to lose such as you. This way one of us lives—alternatively both die. There can be no choice."

Faber made no move. His eyes still gazed out of the window. Sounds of running feet came from below.

Ormond said: "Hurry. They will be here in a moment." He thought of Lareenia and the Little People, and he could almost smell the flame-flowers —as if there were some right here in Faber's study. It was an unusual feeling. Strange that he should feel so . . .

Faber gazed at the body for a brief second. Then he put the blaster carefully on the desk before him and buried his face in his hands.

He did not look up again until the Patrol men reached the door.

THE LITERARY LINE-UP

RECENTLY we asked author F. G. Rayer, one of our most regular contributors, to try a novelette instead of his usual short stories. His answer to our request is "Time Was . . ." in the next issue. It tells of the project to get a faster-than-light ship out of our galaxy, and the reason it fails makes a fascinating story which has nothing to do with Time.

J. T. M'Intosh presents "When Aliens Meet," a dramatic story of the first Earth-Mars-Venusian contacts, and E. C. Tubb has his third successive story, entitled "Entrance Exam." Shorter stories are: "Question Mark" by Gregory Francis, "No Heritage" by George Longdon, and "Liaison Service" by Sydney J. Bounds.

STORY ratings for No. 9 (Spring), placed John Beynon's sequel to "Time To Rest" in first place.

1.	No Place Like Earth ..	John Beynon
2.	And All Disastrous Things..	A. Bertram Chandler
3.	Life Cycle	Peter Hawkins
4.	Balance	John Christopher
5.	Manhunt	Cedric Walker

The ratings for the Summer issue will appear in the next issue.

GREEK GIFT

By E. C. TUBB

The Temple offered immortality—guaranteed it, in fact. To die was a sin. Maybe death had some compensations, though.

Illustrated by QUINN

THE little old man in the white bed said: "My problem is really a simple one. I don't want to die."

Jeff Fenshaw stubbed out the butt of his cigarette and made no answer.

Thurston smiled. "Thank you for not stating the obvious. Now you know why I sent for you."

"I don't think so."

"No ? I would have thought it was very obvious."

Jeff sighed impatiently. "All I can assume is that you don't believe everything you're told. If you did you wouldn't have sent for me, you would have gone to the Temple."

"Exactly."

"But I still can't see why you sent for me."

The old man said nothing. Jeff lit a fresh cigarette, subtle air conditioning wafting the smoke away from the bed. Through the clear glass wall of the room he could see the city spread below him, the tiny bugs of runabouts, the lazy flight of helicopters. Vague in the distance, he could just make out the bulk of the Temple set in a surround of green lawn marked by the thin white threads of many roads.

A sigh made him turn towards the bed.

"You know," said Thurston. "I am very old, probably the oldest man in the world. I can remember way back. Back to before the Landing. Can you ?"

"The Landing ?" Jeff frowned. "That would be thirty years ago. I wasn't born then."

"Twenty-eight years ago," Thurston corrected. "Life was different then. A problem like mine just didn't exist. A man grew old and died. That's all there was to it. Now ?"

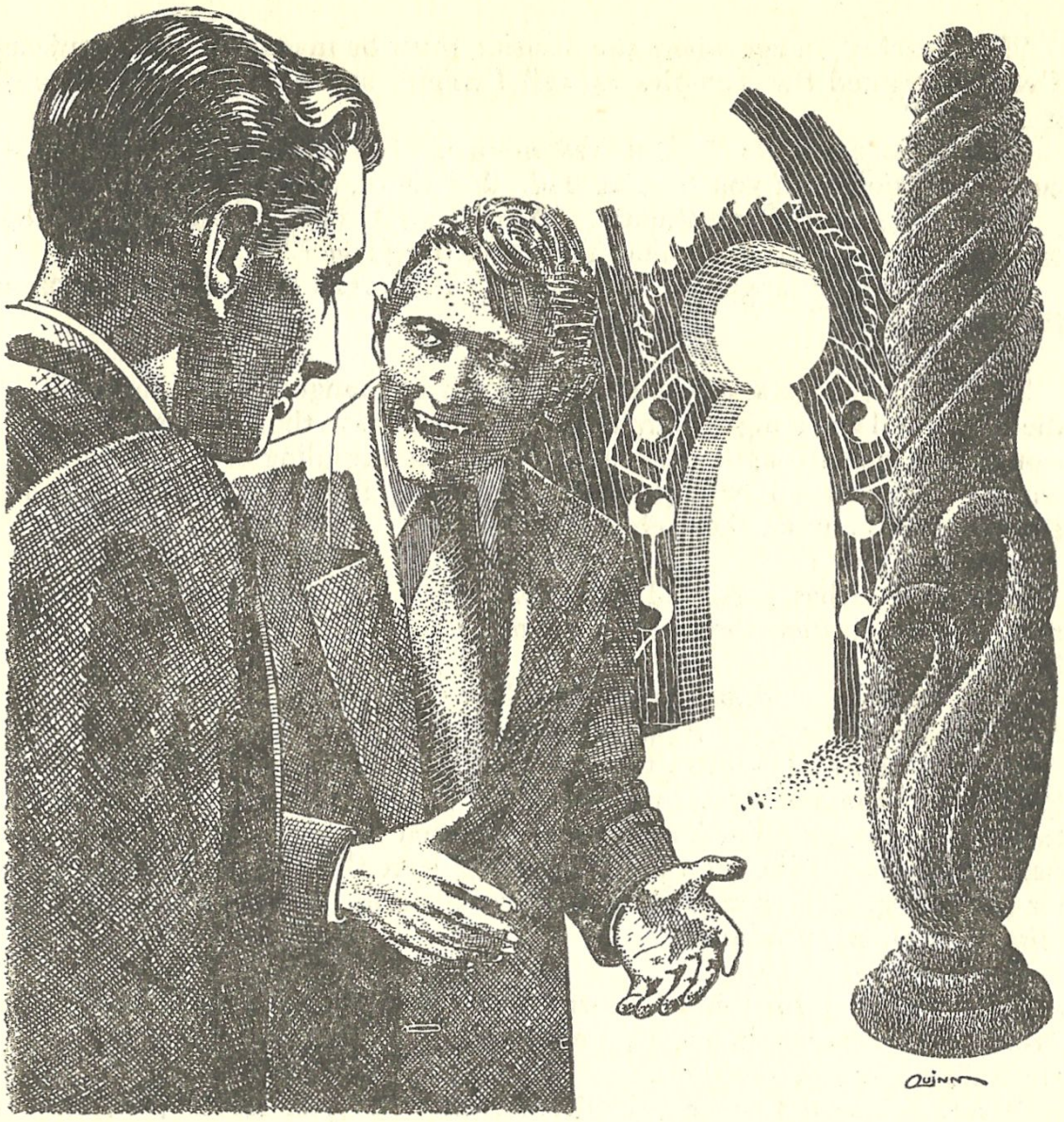
"Now we have the Temple, and no problem."

"The Temple," agreed Thurston, "but still a problem."

SILENCE fell again. Jeff stirred restlessly. The atmosphere of the room chilled him. The aura of age, of illness which even the lavish decor couldn't hide. He thought longingly of his own duplex apartment. Madge would be home by now full of idle chatter, and busy with the dinner.

"Tell me what you know of the Landing ?" Thurston's voice shocked Jeff back to where he was. He answered half angrily.

"They came from space about thirty years ago. From Vega they said. Humanoid and almost indistinguishable from men. They would not help us in scientific matters for their powers were too great to trust to the hands of children, but they gave man his greatest wish. Aside from the Keepers



they left a few years after landing."

"Brief, but in essentials correct," Thurston agreed. "The emotional side of course you know nothing about. Of the hysteria, the hate, the rule by violence. The Church tried to stop them, but what could they do? What the Church could but promise, the Vegans gave. Now of course there is no Church."

"And no death."

"And as you say, no death. Or should we say, no apparent death?"

Jeff was startled. "What do you mean? The Vegans granted all men the boon of immortality. Everyone knows that. If you are sick, or old, or injured the Temples are there to help you. All they ask is one-tenth of your possessions and the promise to work as directed for one hundred years. Anyone can take advantage of the offer."

"And everyone does," Thurston commented drily.

"Why not?"

The old man sighed. "It was not always so. I've seen men, good men, die on the very steps of the Temple scorning immortality for their faith in something better. But enough of that." He struggled upright in the bed.

"I've reached an age where the decision must be made, and made quickly. I've investigated the Temples as well I might, and now I want you to do it for me."

"But what can I do ?" Jeff was annoyed. "If I ask for immortality all communication with you is at an end. If I don't, what can I prove ?"

Thurston gestured impatiently. "You speak Unicon, I know. Now has anything struck you as peculiar about that language ?"

"The Universal language. The one the Immortals speak ? No. Nothing that I've noticed."

"HASN'T it struck you as strange that it is a language peculiarly apt for the giving and receiving of commands ? I should have thought that Immortals would have had a tongue more suitable for the beguiling of their eternity of leisure." He leaned back gasping. "Anyway, it is not the language the Keepers use between themselves."

"Are you sure ?"

"Money still has uses, and I've monitored every wave band possible for radio communication for the past twenty years. The Keepers do not speak Unicon."

Jeff frowned. "I didn't know that."

"Will you help me ? I'll pay anything you ask."

"I don't know. I want to think." He got up and strode about the room. What Thurston had told him, or rather hinted, had disturbed the basic tenets of a lifetime. The Temple had banished the fear of death, of mutilation, of misery. If life grew too tough there were the Temples. Immortality for the asking. It was impossible that one diseased old man could wreck the calm convictions of millions.

JEFF made up his mind. "Sorry, but I can't do it. I know that you're wrong. If I took on the job I'd only be making gestures, getting nowhere." He walked towards the door.

"Wait." The dry voice held desperation. "If you would just think it over. Decide later."

"No." He looked critically at Thurston. "If you'd take my advice you'd forget your problem. You haven't really any choice."

The door clicked shut behind him.

HE heard the sobbing as he left the elevator. In sudden panic he thumbed open the door and stepped into the apartment. The sobbing came from the bedroom, he was running by the time he reached it.

"Madge. Darling, what's the matter ?"

"Oh, Jeff !" She lifted her tear-stained face from the coverlet. "Poor Doris. It was awful !"

He held her close to him as a fresh storm of weeping shook her slim body. Gently he stroked the thick black hair, trying to calm her with his quiet presence. Gradually she quietened.

"I went shopping with Doris. She was getting married next week, and Jeff, she was so happy. Crossing the road a runabout . . . Oh, Jeff, it was awful ! All the blood !" She began sobbing again.

"They get who did it ?"

"Yes. But what good does that do ? She's dead, Jeff. Dead !"

He tightened his lips at a sudden nausea. Dead ! The word seemed somehow obscene. It was so final. So unnecessary. Madge stirred in his arms.

"This has settled it for me Jeff. We just can't afford to take chances. Let's go to the Temple to-morrow."

"No." He blurted out the word without thinking.

"But, Jeff, why not ? Don't you want to be with me ? Don't you want me close to you, forever ?"

"Look, darling." Jeff fought to keep his voice calm, to find reasonable arguments. "We are still young. We have plenty of time to decide. Why not let's enjoy life here first ? Have children, grow old. There is always time to go to the Temple."

"That's what Doris said, and now look at her. Dead. And she could have lived forever." Madge shook her head. "It's too much of a risk, Jeff. Every time that you go out I'll be wondering if you will ever return. I love you and I want to be with you always. I thought that you loved me too."

"I do, dear. I do." He held her close in a sudden rush of tenderness. "That is why I want you to wait. We have only been married a little while. Can you blame me if I want you just as you are ?"

"I daren't wait." Something in her voice made him glance at her in sudden suspicion. "I'm afraid. If you had seen John's face when he saw Doris lying there ! No Jeff. I never want to feel like that. To lose so much for the sake of a few years here. It's just not worth it." She sat up, drying her eyes. "I've decided to go to-morrow. I want you to come with me, but if you won't I'll go alone." A little smile trembled on her full lips. "I know that you'll follow me, and somewhere we'll meet again. Eternity is a long time."

HE felt numb. Sitting beside her he tried to force his own desire for life into her. To live *here*, not somewhere among the stars.

"You're upset, darling. Seeing Doris killed like that. But wait a little while, a week say, and then if you still wish it we'll go together."

"We could die a hundred times in a week." Madge held his face between her two palms, her blue eyes staring into his. "Are you afraid, darling ?"

"Afraid ?" He laughed shakily. "Of course not."

"Then why not come with me to-morrow ?"

Jeff looked at her strangely. "You really do believe that you will be immortal don't you ?"

"Of course I do." She spoke with all the calm assurance of twenty years of conviction. "Don't you ?"

"I'm not so sure. All I know is that I'm alive now. That you are alive, and that I want you as long as possible. Will you wait just a week if I promise to give up the rest of my life ?"

She stared at him in bewildered amazement. "Jeff, are you mad ? You talk as if I were asking you to die, not live." She laughed a little shakily. "You are trying to scare me. You will come to-morrow, won't you ?"

He held her from him, staring hungrily into the heart-shaped face, the wistful eyes. He hated to hurt her, and the thought of losing her was physical pain, yet something within him just wouldn't yield.

"No, darling," he said quietly. "I won't go with you to-morrow. If you

love me you will wait a week; it is little to ask in return for forty years."

"Forty years of what? Why wait? Anything could happen and it's too great a risk. No, Jeff." She slid from his arms, her face suddenly hard. "I do love you, but I never thought that you could be so selfish. Goodnight."

The door of the spare bedroom clicked behind her. In the morning she was gone.

THE Temple stood in a wide expanse of perfectly kept lawn. From the perimeter the straight white lines of roads converged on to a broad parking ground before the soaring arches of the entrance. A fairy palace of upthrust spires, graceful lines, and long clean sweeps of modern architecture. It was vital, alive, and beautiful.

Jeff had no eyes for beauty. As the hired runabout slid to a halt before the entrance, he jerked open the door, flung money at the driver, and raced into the Temple.

Within was a gay entrance hall. Giant murals covered the walls, bizarre in their earthly conception of other-world scenes. Fountains sparkled among low benches, and flowers filled the air with their delicate odour.

The Keeper was young, vital, and very courteous. Only the down-slanting eyes, the odd-shaped head and the six-fingered hands betrayed his extra-terrestial origin. "Information, sir?" he asked pleasantly.

"I'm looking for my wife," Jeff panted. "Name of Fenshaw."

"Yes sir. One moment." The Keeper moved across to a file, returned with a slim folder. "Your wife asked for, and received immortality at nine-thirty this morning." He glanced at his wrist. "About fifteen minutes ago. As she is now legally dead her effects, minus the usual tenth, will be made over to you within a few days."

Jeff leaned heavily on the counter. He felt sick. He had tried to get here in time, but sheer stubbornness had delayed him. He had been so sure that she would wait. He had been wrong. He turned to the Keeper. "If I asked for immortality now, would I be with her?"

"You would be close to her. You wish to apply?"

Jeff hesitated. "Could I communicate with her?"

The Keeper made no reply.

"Where is she?" Jeff insisted. "How could I find her? What does she look like—now?"

"I cannot answer your questions." The Keeper stated flatly. "But you may easily find out for yourself." He gestured towards the high, mist-filled archway at the end of the hall. "You wish to enter?"

"Later. I have some things to do. To-morrow perhaps." He turned from the impassive face of the Keeper, hating himself for the weak explanation, yet feeling that some excuse was necessary.

AROUND him a busy tide of life surged. Oldsters, accompanied by friends and relatives, making their final farewells. One or two sick-looking men eagerly awaiting their turn at the application booths. Young couples nestling on the soft benches. Wide-eyed children staring at the vast murals. A normal day at the Temple.

Outside the sun shone with a pleasant warmth. From overhead came the soft cooing of doves as they wheeled among the spires. The scent of fresh-cut

grass hung heavily on the air.

Jeff stood in indecision, leaning against one of the soaring columns of the entrance. From one of the roads a siren screamed a peremptory warning. He looked up without moving. A white ambulance raced down the road, skidded to a sudden halt before him. Men spilled out, ran to the back of the vehicle, handed down a stretcher, and still running, entered the Temple.

He had a glimpse of a livid face, starting eyes, and a sense of desperate urgency, as the man was carried past him. Jeff walked over to the driver of the ambulance.

"What's the matter ?"

The driver spat. "Same old thing. Couldn't make up his mind, then at the last moment we've got to rush him here against time."

"Get many like that ?"

"Yeah. Too many."

"Why do they leave it so late ?"

The driver shrugged. "May've been a member of the old Church. We get a lot like that. Or an ex-convict, just released. Who knows ? Me—I'll make sure. Soon as I reach fifty, I'm in. I'm not chancing forever just to hang on to this stinking job a few more years."

"Don't blame you," said Jeff. "I feel the same." He walked away, down the road across the lawn away from the Temple. He had lied. He didn't feel the same.

IT was a nice bar, Jeff decided. Not too crowded and the drinks were good. He half lay in the shelter of the booth, idly listening to recorded music and refilling his glass from the coin-dispenser. Some time, he supposed, he would have to return to the apartment, but not now. Not while he could still pretend that Madge was at home waiting for him. The thought of the apartment without her was unbearable. Time for that later. Much later.

At first he didn't recognise the man who slumped into the seat beside him. He straightened angrily, then, eyes focusing in the dim light, held out his hand.

"John. It's good to see you. Have a drink." He fed coins into the dispenser.

"Thanks." John finished the drink at a gulp. "You heard about Doris ?"

"Yes. Madge told me. I'm sorry, John."

"Yeah." He sat nursing a fresh drink. "How is Madge, Jeff ?"

"Immortal." Jeff answered curtly.

"But I thought——"

"She went alone. I don't want to talk about it."

John stared down at his drink. "Are you going to follow her ?"

"I said that I didn't want to talk about it."

"Sorry." He held out his glass. "Another drink ?"

"Sure." As Jeff filled the glasses he cast a sharp glance at John. The tragedy had altered him. He looked shrunken, and had lost his usual devil-may-care attitude. Jeff suddenly regretted his curtness.

"We had a quarrel. Doris dying the way she did frightened her. She wouldn't wait, and I wouldn't go with her." He shrugged. "She said that we'd meet again. I'm not so sure."

"Why ?"

"No logical reason. I'm just not sure any more."

John sighed enviously. "At least you know that Madge is alive, that you can be with her. If Doris had entered the Temple I would have gone with her. As it is there is only one way we can be together."

Jeff frowned. "How do you mean ? She's dead !"

"That's what I mean." John stood up, left the booth, made towards the door. In sudden alarm Jeff ran after him, tripped over a stool, and got up cursing.

"John !" he yelled at the closing door. "John. Wait !"

He reached the street just in time to see John deliberately step in front of a speeding runabout.

THE driver was a little fat man. His face was deathly white and he trembled with fear. "He stepped right out in front of me," he bleated. "I didn't have a chance."

Jeff made no answer. He bent over the body of his friend, anxiously searching for signs of life. It was a waste of time. Both the neck and back were broken. He rose to his feet filled with cold anger. "You swine," he grated, "you killed him."

"What happened ?" snapped an official voice.

Several members of the crowd clustered about the body tried to speak at once. "Quiet !" yelled the Peace Officer. "You there." He singled out a man at random. "What happened ?"

"That road hog cut him down without a chance," explained the man coldly. "He ought'a be hung." A growl from the crowd echoed the sentiment.

"I didn't I tell you," gasped the accused. "He stepped right out before me. I couldn't miss him."

"Yeah ?" a voice jeered. "You hit him hard enough."

"There's too much of this sort of thing," a tall, thin, hollow-chested man announced. "Too many of us get cut down on the roads and robbed of immortality. I'm on my way to the Temple; it could have been me. Is it just ?"

The burly man who had spoken first turned to the crowd. "He's right. We gotta stop this sort of thing. Let's make an example. Are you with me ?"

The crowd roared approval. Something, a bottle it seemed to Jeff, hurled through the air. The little fat man went down; when he regained his feet blood rilled from a wound on his forehead.

"I couldn't help it," he screamed. "It wasn't my fault. For life's sake you've got to believe me." He began sobbing in his terror.

Jeff plucked at the Peace Officer's sleeve. "What you want ?"

"He's right," said Jeff. "He couldn't help it. "He," he gestured towards the body, "wanted to die."

"Wanted to die ?" The officer looked at him suspiciously.

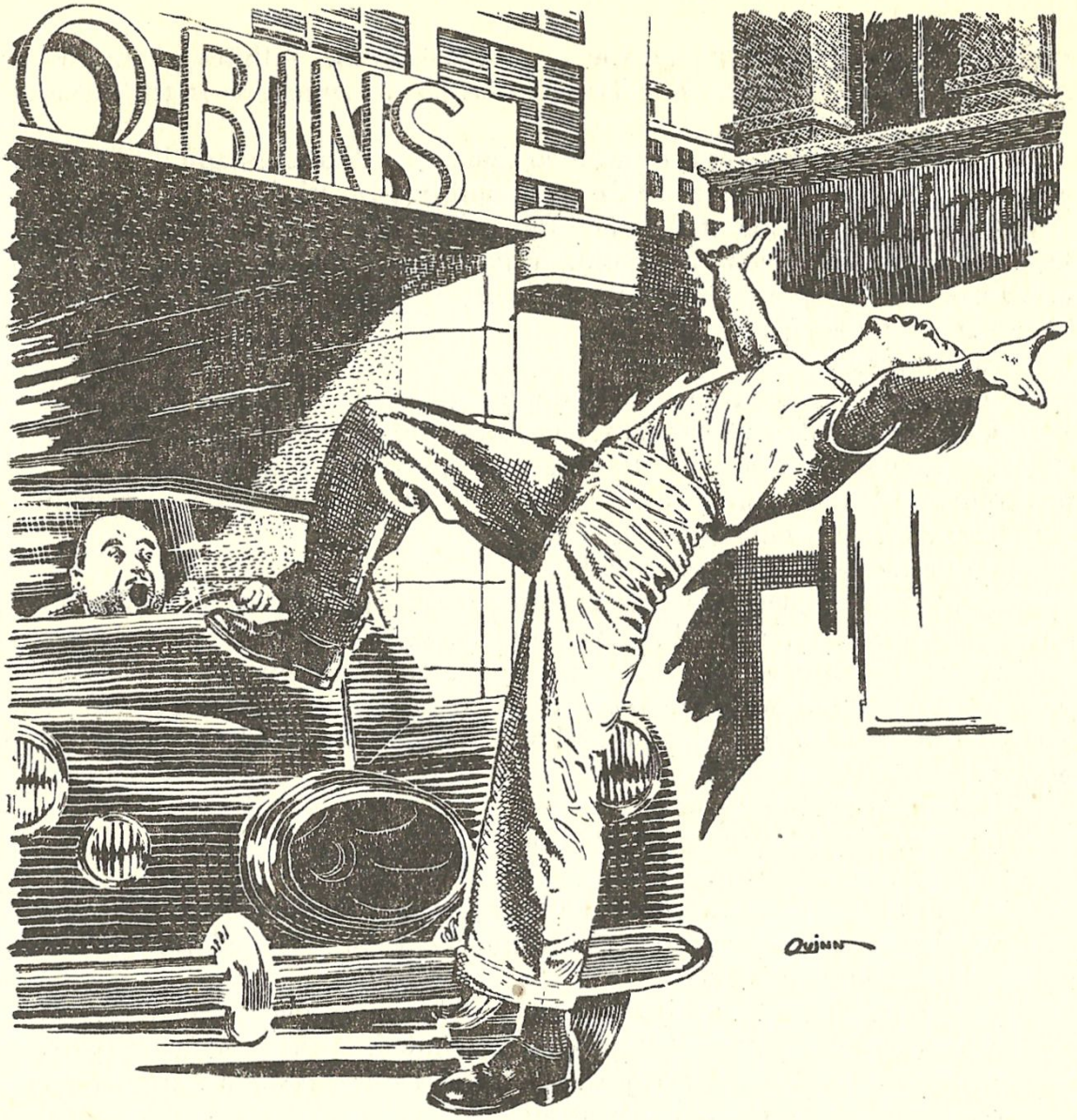
"Yes. His fiance was killed yesterday. He wanted to be with her."

"Was he crazy ?"

"Maybe," admitted Jeff. "But I do know that he committed suicide."

"Suicide !" The officer snorted his contempt. "All right you," he yelled to the crowd. "Break it up. The guy was a suicide."

They recoiled from the body as if it had the plague. In minutes the



street was clear. The officer turned to the little fat man. "Beat it. But watch your step. The next time nothing will save you."

"Thanks," he wiped blood from his forehead. "There won't be a next time. I'm off to the Temple." He almost ran to his runabout.

The officer commenced speaking into his belt radio, calling for a vehicle to remove the body. He looked utterly disgusted.

Jeff re-entered the bar.

THURSTON said: "So you came back. What made you change your mind ?"

"Personal reasons," Jeff answered curtly. He rubbed his hand wearily over his unshaven chin, and felt the sour taste of old liquor on his tongue. "I want to talk to you."

"What about ?"

"Immortality. You don't believe in it. Why ?"

Thurston shifted restlessly in the huge bed. "I didn't say that."

"You inferred it. I want to know your reasons."

Thurston was silent. Jeff stared wearily out of the glass wall. It was

raining. Sullen clouds hid all the sky, softening the outlines of the nearer buildings, hiding the rest. The Temple was just a vague blob in the distance.

"Well ?"

"I was thinking how best to put it so that you will understand." Thurston gestured him nearer. "I can't talk very loud, my breath."

Jeff sat closer, staring at the aged face of the old man. Idly he wondered how any man could live to be so old. Why any man should cling to life when every breath was agony. Bedridden, decrepit, death, or the Temple, would have been a blessing.

"I'm listening."

"When the Vegans came we thought that the millenium had arrived. We had dreamed of space travel for so long, and it seemed as if it were here at last. At first we were afraid; wars were common in those days, and the possibility of invasion had been considered. For a while there was panic." He slumped back gasping for breath.

"That is history," Jeff reminded.

"When the Temples were first founded there was great opposition. They offered the unbelievable. Men couldn't believe it, but they wanted to, and so they did. Men gave the Temples their name. Men made a semi-religion out of them. Men were offered, at a nominal sum, something they had wanted from the dawn of history. The prize was too great. It couldn't be rejected."

"What's this leading up to ?"

"Men took the Temples on faith alone !"

Jeff was startled. "How do you mean ?"

"No one has ever seen, conversed with, or had any proof other than the bare word of the Keepers, that the immortals exist. For all we know, the whole thing could be a hoax."

"No !" Jeff cried out in blind protest. "You're wrong ! It can't be !"

"I was alive at the time," Thurston reminded. "For over twenty years I've wondered. I've tried every way I know to find out for sure. There's only one way left now—and I'm afraid."

"What of ? If you're right—and you can't be—it's only death. It will come anyway. Why hang on in pain and misery ?"

"Life is sweet. Even to a man living in agony."

"Nonsense !" Jeff snorted. He looked at the sick man in sharp understanding. "I begin to see now. It's greed. Every instinct drives you to the Temple, but greed for the very last drop of life makes you hang on." He paced the floor. "What a fool I've been. Letting your senile fears cloud my judgment."

"No," gasped Thurston. "You don't understand."

"I understand well enough."

"You don't. You think that you do, but you don't. You've been conditioned. Everyone has been conditioned to believe that the Temples offer immortality. It's faith, blind faith, but you don't *know* !"

JEFF laughed curtly. "You talk like a fool. I've never seen an atom, but they exist. No man has ever seen electric current; does that mean that there is no such thing ? Some things must be taken on faith."

"But it isn't the same," wailed Thurston. "Would you believe in ghosts,

spirits, fairies ? Of course you wouldn't, yet they are just as certain as immortality."

"To you maybe, not to me. I know where I'm going."

"Where ?"

"To join Madge."

Thurston stared at his back until the door cut off vision. Tears began to trickle down his withered cheeks. He could never be certain. Never. He wanted to go, but he had to be certain first, *had* to be, but he never would.

Torn between desire and suspicion he lay in the bed and wept tears of horrible doubt.

THE rain had driven the doves to shelter so that they no longer wheeled, cooing, about the spires. Few vehicles stood in the parking space, it was a bad day for sightseers. Jeff slammed the door of the hired runabout, staring up at the soaring arches, feeling the rain against his face.

"That'll be one-eighty," said the driver over the dying whine of the turbine.

"That all ? Here." Jeff emptied his wallet into the outstretched palm.

"Why, thanks ! Going in ?"

"Yes," breathed Jeff. "I've someone to meet."

"You're lucky," grunted the driver pocketing the money. "I've got a family to raise. Soon as they're grown though." The runabout shot away sending spurts of water from the wheels. Jeff entered the Temple.

The Keeper at the application booth smiled as he greeted Jeff. "You wish to enter, sir ?"

"Yes."

"Your name, please ? Address ? Age ? Do you speak Unicon ?" The questions seemed endless as the bland Keeper filled in the form with practised ease. "If you will just thumb-print and sign the contract sir ?"

"What is it ?"

"Just your agreement to work as directed for one hundred years, also the usual tenth to be willed to the Temple."

Jeff grunted and pressed his thumb first on a pad, then on to the foot of the contract.

"Who is your next of kin, sir ?"

"Why ?"

"For purposes of inheritance. As you know you are legally dead once you accept immortality."

Jeff looked at him curiously. "I will really be immortal, won't I ?"

"Barring accident you will be aware, conscious, and active for eternity. More I will not tell you."

"Why ? Is it a secret ?"

"It is the law. Your next of kin, sir ?"

Jeff thought a while. He didn't have much, a few thousands, the furniture in the apartment; he shrugged. "I'll leave it to the Temple." He glanced at a group of children and grinned. "For facilities to amuse the young."

The Keeper nodded gravely. "Thank you, sir. It is greatly appreciated. Sign please. Thank you." He slid the form into a slim folder and regarded Jeff gravely.

"Before you go through the Portal there is something I must tell you.

Eternity is a long time. To be bearable at all there must be enthusiasm, interest, the desire to live. It can only be found in creative effort—work. As an immortal you owe a duty to those with you, about you, and above you. And always remember—we offer immortality—and we give it. You accept it of your own volition."

"I understand," said Jeff quietly.

"Good." The Keeper turned to gesture towards the huge archway at the end of the hall. "Enter the archway. Beyond the mist, at the end of the passage, you will see a door. Enter it."

"Is that all ?"

"That is all." He turned to deal with a fresh applicant.

JEFF stared at the mist-filled archway a long time before moving towards it. He felt peculiar, much the same as he did before going to the dentist. It was nonsense he knew—but he wished that Madge was with him.

He felt a calm detachment as he passed the little groups of the curious, and sightseers. He had no part of their world. Nothing they could do had the power to affect him. He felt a giant among pygmies. With almost a sense of shock he realised that the Portal was only a few steps away.

He stopped and looked at it with a new interest. It was beautiful in its clean simplicity. The mist which filled it seemed to be restrained by some barrier from spilling into the hall itself, coiling and eddying like billowing smoke. Not disturbing with its promise of hidden mystery, but somehow —exciting. He stepped forward.

There must be perfume in the mist, he thought, breathing deeply. An intangible odour that calmed tight-strung nerves and soothed uneasy feelings. The archway wasn't very long, about twelve steps, and he was through the mist; before him, another six paces away, was a door.

An ordinary door. Blue tinted by the half light that filtered through the mist. It swung open as he approached, and there was more mist beyond. For one fleeting instant panic seized him. The desire to turn, run back into the normal world, live a normal life, almost overwhelmed him; he fought it down. Fear of ridicule. Of the shamed-faced admission of cowardice to the Keeper. Fear of losing Madge. He stepped forward.

The door swung relentlessly behind him.

ON an alien planet, under a sun that sent heat shimmers over pools of molten lead, workers toiled incessantly. A new world had to be tamed, levelled, made habitable for the coming population spread. Great machines bored, ground, scraped. It was a long job, but it had to be done.

The workers didn't pause. They never slept. Not for one second did they so much as rest. It had gone on for a score of years. It would go on for hundreds more.

Jeff Fenshaw looked up at the sun. Swollen, angry, menacing. He didn't feel tired, he never felt tired. He never slept, he couldn't. Bitterly he clashed metal arms against metal sides, and cursed the day he was born.

Bitterly he remembered the words spoken by a thousand eager lovers, by old greedy men, by something who had once been named Madge.

Eternity is a long time.

Especially when you're a robot.

THE END

(*Photo : Sharpe*)

INTERNATIONAL FANTASY AWARD—left to right: Ben Abas (Holland), Sigvard Ostlund (Sweden), Forrest Ackerman (U.S.A.), G. Ken Chapman (London), Lyell Crane (Canada), Wendayne Ackerman (U.S.A.), John Carnell (London).

1951 INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION

By JOHN CARNELL

THE sun streamed through the stained glass windows of one of the ballrooms of the Royal Hotel, London, on Saturday, May 12th, casting a kaleidoscope of colour upon the highly polished floor. Muralled pictures of puzzled Victorian ladies frowned down upon the oak panelling, now adorned with futuristic art work of spaceships in flight, of alien monsters, and heroes and heroines in dire peril. In front of the Chairman's table, across from the clutter of cables, microphones, wire-recording equipment, camera projector and sound equipment, a half circle of red leather chairs formed a perimeter of comfort for the hundred and fifty to two hundred delegates, representing eight countries, who were attending the first International Science Fiction Convention. Behind them, tastefully dressed out on tables along the walls, were magnificent displays of fantasy books and magazines. Thus the setting for an historic moment in the annals of science fiction.

For, while the past eight American conventions have been termed "world" affairs, this was the first truly international gathering, with Britain host to

some twenty delegates from seven countries, and the Committee responsible for the success of the enterprise had worked prodigiously to see that everything was in readiness for the great event.

The previous two evenings had seen as many as one hundred delegates, both professional and amateur, getting acquainted at London's celebrated "White Horse" tavern off Fleet Street, so there was little reluctance or shyness upon the part of the conventioneers as the opening speeches and addresses were disposed with.

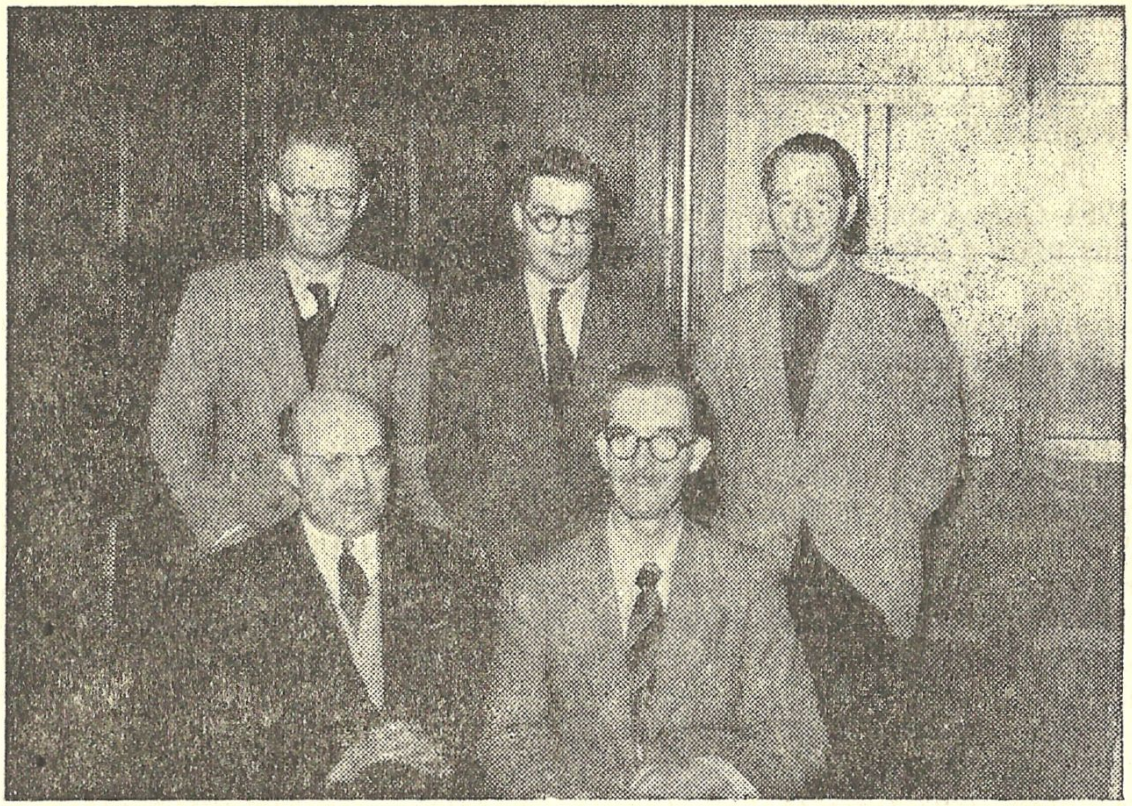
Walter Gillings gave an interesting talk upon his theories of the future of science fiction in this country, followed by Forrest Ackerman from California, talking about the publishing activities in the U.S.A. Author William F. Temple then gave an hilarious "lecture" on how to write magazine serials (never having written one himself !), which was followed by some more humour, in the form of a radio playlet, acted by Committee members, entitled "Life Can Be Horrible." This, and the evening satirical playlet "Who Goes Where ?" were written by Milton A. Rothman of Philadelphia for earlier American conventions. They were highlights of some of the lighter moments.

DURING the evening session on the first day, just as the concealed lighting came on in the glass ceiling, author John Keir Cross, who adapted Paul Capon's recent book *The Other Side of the Sun* for B.B.C. serialisation, discussed his efforts at interesting Broadcasting House in this type of story, and was followed by author Arthur C. Clarke, who gave a humorous account of his antics before the television cameras at Alexandra Palace in recent astronautic programmes.

Later, after an exciting auction of books and magazines, which bore some slight resemblance to "bear" days upon the Stock Exchange, and a brief break for a buffet supper, the lights dimmed and the audience relaxed and watched the film of Conan Doyle's "Lost World," which had lost little of its excitement during the twenty-five years since it was made.

MAJOR session of the Convention was arranged for Sunday afternoon, May 13th, when a delegate from each of the visiting countries gave a summary of the activities taking place in his own territory. Lyell Crane, from Toronto, Canada, discussed the Canadian plan for an international organisation, preferably with an H.Q. outside the two major publishing countries of Britain and U.S.A.; Forrest Ackerman, one of the American delegates, explained how fandom in the United States was becoming more sought-after by publishing houses, radio, TV. and film people, for their specialised knowledge of the field; George Gallet, journalist and editor from France, long a well-known personality in the French field, discussed the new publishing venture he has started there, producing pocketbooks in French of some of the better-known fantasy novels. *The Star Kings*, *Vandals of the Void*, and *Stowaway to Mars* were amongst titles listed for forthcoming publication.

From Holland, artist Ben Abas explained, with many personal humorous reminiscences, the Dutch interest in science fiction, stating that he and his father were responsible for attempting to produce a regular science fiction magazine in Holland recently, but the interest was not sufficiently high for them to continue after four issues. Sigvard Ostlund, from Stockholm, discussed the small amount of publishing which goes on in Sweden, and surprised the assembly by telling them that a weekly science fiction magazine



(*Photo : Sharpe*)

CONVENTION PERSONALITIES—left to right (back row): Arthur C. Clarke, William F. Temple, John Beynon; (seated) editors George Gallet (France) and John Carnell (London).

is published there—but that quite often detective and western stories are mixed in the issues.

Of two Australian delegates, only Ken Paynter from Sydney spoke, but enlivened the gathering with a pithy and witty account of events "down under." Wendayne Ackerman gave a glossary of earlier Germanic excursions into science fiction; Walter Willis, from Belfast, covered the Irish field; and Frank Arnold, representing Britain, gave a comprehensive coverage of all European fantasy book publishing, proving that science fiction was indeed international. During the debate which followed, guest Lee Jacobs, another American who had flown from Versailles to attend, discussed the number of technical and professional men he knew who were fans.

THEN followed the highlight of the entire Convention, which came as a complete surprise to most of the attending assembly. This was the 1951 International Fantasy Award, an idea which had been thought up only a few weeks before by some members of the London Circle, and was intended to be a presentation trophy offered to the authors of the best science fiction novel of 1950, and the best technical book in the field for the same year.

Announcing the award, G. Ken Chapman on behalf of the Award Committee explained that it was hoped the Award would be a yearly one, and that other branches of fantasy, such as art, films, short stories, and publishing would be embraced by similar trophies. "But, for this year," he continued, "owing to the limited funds and time at our disposal, we decided that only

two awards were possible. A design has been approved and put on the draft-board, but it was not possible to have the actual trophies available at this Convention. An exact replica in wood, however, has been made for to-day's ceremony."

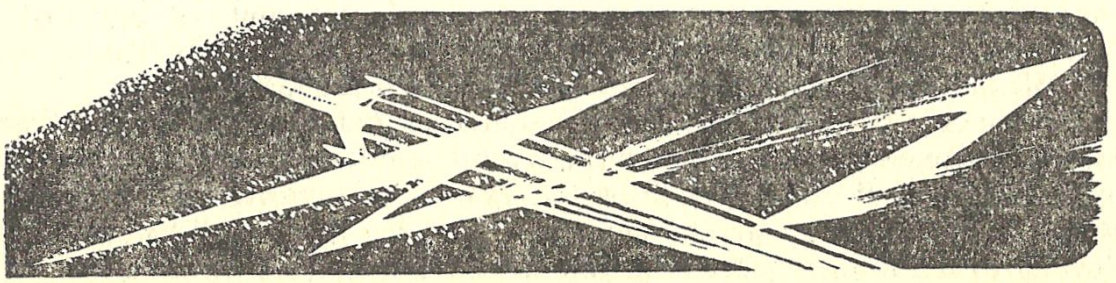
The trophies, taken from a Bonestell design on the cover of the February 1951 *Galaxy* magazine, would be a 12 in. high metal spaceship resting its fins upon a mahogany base, attached to which would be a beautiful global lighter. The fiction award would be in chrome, and the non-fiction in a bronze-coloured metal. The awards would be permanent and a suitable inscription would be placed on the base.

Mr. Chapman then stated that, after due consideration by the Award Committee, it had been decided that Dr. George R. Stewart had won the fiction award for his book *The Earth Abides*, and Chesley Bonestell and Willy Ley would share the non-fiction award for their joint book *The Conquest of Space*. Both books had been published in Britain and America, but this was not a necessary qualification. Amidst thunderous applause from the assembly and the glare of numerous flashlight bulbs Forrest Ackerman then accepted the replica trophies on behalf of his fellow countrymen, and it was hoped that the actual awards would be ready for him to take back to U.S.A. when he left and present to the winners.

An Award Fund has now been opened, whereby anyone may donate monetary gifts from time to time during each year, and all donors will automatically become adjudicators for forthcoming awards.

THE closing sessions of the two-day affair were even more convivial than any before. After a two-hour auction of books, magazines, and original art work, presided over by author E. C. Tubb as auctioneer, and another buffet supper, the audience settled down to an hour and a half's enjoyment of a series of short fantasy films (London Films having kindly loaned a complete projector equipment for the occasion). Arthur Clarke presented a technicolour film on rockets which had been made in U.S.A., and Forrest Ackerman had brought four films from Hollywood—one a weird playlet enacted by members of the Los Angeles Fantasy Society; another entitled "Monsters of the Moon" which had been salvaged from the cutting-room floor and the scraps fitted together to make a coherent fantasy by Bob Tucker of Bloomington, Illinois.

By popular request the visitors asked London to stage another Convention next year, and it seems almost certain after the success of the 1951 gathering, that London—after it gets over its aching back—will be only too pleased to start planning for an even bigger 1952 Convention.



THE TREE

By JOHN CHRISTOPHER

It was sentient, and telepathic, and it only wanted to help Mankind—but Man could become a slave to such a beneficient plant.

Illustrated by QUINN

TELECOMMUNICATIONS INTER-SECTION MEMO

Cartwright from Sotrenski 17-3-78

Assignment completed. Story herewith.

Appended note:

Dave:

It was a lot easier than we had thought. Larkin may be difficult to get at, but he's a friendly old cuss, garrulous in fact. It certainly was tricky getting to him. As you know, he practically owns southern Italy and within his sphere of influence he's managed to ban every form of transport more recent than railroads. TOURISTRADE and the Vatican support him in this.

I took stratoliner to Firenze and went by rail from there. Less than three hundred miles and it took me all day ! The train got into Naples around 19.00, and a small branch line (electrified) took me out to Larkin's place at Castellammare. It's a small villa as they go in these parts, but the grounds are extensive. It squats on the lip of the cliff; there's the Bay of Naples in front and Vesuvius steaming away just behind. When I reached the inner sanctum it was dusk, following a bright spring day. The sea was all purple and glassy and somehow from the height shadows seemed to fall squarely on it, making it look like some kind of diffraction grating. Further over there were the lights of the city, like nothing I remember seeing before. And out on the bay a single-masted ship with white sails—a beer boat, Larkin told me ! There was some kind of big bird, too, a golden colour, drifting down in wide circles to that purple-checked sea.

All right, I'll save the adjectives. It's only that I know you will be reading this in Plymouth, and by God those March winds will be tearing your guts out, and I'm still in Castellammare, in the best guest room at the Villa Campanese. Larkin seems glad of the company, and I know I'm glad of the rest.

He's not the cock-sure, arrogant type I'd half expected; he was pleased to hear we were including him in the "Makers of the Modern World" series and, I think, genuinely flattered. He made some very intelligent comments on the Hewison programme of last December, and gave me some information on Hewison's part in the Tycho rebellion affair that I've never even heard rumoured in Mick's place on a Saturday night. It's all *sub rosa*, of course, and even you won't get under this rose-bush.

In fact, his remarks were so intelligent that I more or less left it to him what story we should use to feature him. There were a lot of possibles. That first business on Venus, the de Passy case, the isotopes boom . . . I thought he might choose one of those, or even something more obscure still. But he didn't. He chose the obvious.

After all, as he confided to me over a litre of *Lacrimae Christi*, Orvieto, '54, it was the only time he could be said, categorically and with hardly any shadow of doubt, to have saved the world.

Story follows.

WHEN, by an act of justifiable homicide, Max Larkin removed de Passy's daughter and his solitary success in his attempt to create a *homo supremus*, Genetics Division went somewhat off balance. For twenty years the planning staff had been making their preparations for the day when Helen de Passy

would put fathomless power into their hands; when, inevitably, the dynamic balance of the managerial society of the twenty-second century would be resolved into a dictatorship of one body, Genetics Division, and one small group of men. The dissolution of this dream had an unsettling effect, to put it as mildly as that.

Genetics had always been one of the most severely disciplined of the major organisations; and their discipline, during the years of hopeful preparation for power, had reached fantastic limits. This was now, by a deliberate act of policy by the planning staff, reversed. De Passy had been a lone wolf, and de Passy had brought them within sight of the promised land. Lightning might just possibly strike twice. To encourage its chances their young men of promise were scattered wide and left to their own resources, oiled by frequent and generous applications of the necessary finance.

One of the young men was Harl Parrish.

It is interesting to remember that Parrish only just qualified for the support that Genetics were, at this stage, pouring around like water. He had a good, but not exceptional degree, and his post-graduate work had merited no more than a cautious—"Might do things: personality unpromising"—from the Director of the Cologne Lab. Anyway, he got the grant. He returned to his native Hampshire, to a small village between thirty and forty miles north of Bournemouth. There, on wooded slopes overlooking the village, Genetics Division built him a small, one-man laboratory.

They didn't quite forget about him. The cheques he cashed were entered in the usual files, and so were the laconic monthly reports he sent. It's doubtful if anyone, at that stage, bothered to read them. If they had it is difficult to imagine that even the laxness then current in Genetics administration could have passed them without action. Max Larkin has a photostat of the first report Harl Parrish sent in. It's headed:

"Some Preliminary Notes on Work in the Evolution of Plant Intelligence."

THERE have been many sane and level-headed men who devoted their lives to the unravelling of what their contemporaries would certainly have regarded as fantastic lunacy; and who unravelled it. Parrish was not of that type. If the research worker of genius is a fifty-fifty blend of critic and dreamer, Parrish was more like ten-ninety. It's quite clear from his reports that he never got round to any detailed plan of work, or even to any clear view of what he was aiming at and what the obstacles were that lay in his path. Any practical observer would have put his chances of doing anything at all at very close to nil. He tried irradiation—with everything from ordinary light and sound to mesons—chemical impregnation, Lysenko grafting, controlled challenges and inhibitions, and something that reads perilously like an offshoot of Steiner's theosophy. He tackled a range of subjects from pansies to sequoias, without any kind of system. If there had even been a good accountant at Genetics H.Q.—a layman without any pretensions to understanding of the genetics field—Parrish would certainly have been stopped in his first year and put on to a safe, uneventful clerking job. Common sense would have stopped him. And common sense would have been wrong.

For Harl Parrish had one quality, developed to an extraordinary degree, that impregnated every wild scheme he followed with the possibility of

success. He could see things when they happened.

That's a poor way of putting it, of course. You might call it, with a finer shade of understanding, the Eureka faculty. The bath water rises by an amount equivalent to the displacing volume. An apple falls, and someone sees why. A mould grows accidentally in a laboratory, and a man notices that around it there is sterility. The events are accidental, but the apprehension is not. Harl Parrish was grotesquely inferior, in almost every way, to Archimedes and Newton and Fleming, but in just this one respect he was their peer—in fact, their master. He muddled away in his small log-cabin laboratory and all he needed was a really fantastic stroke of luck. In due course he had it.

From his notes, which were sketchy, imprecise and generally woolly, the only thing that emerges clearly is that the plant concerned was originally a magnolia. It grew in a spot at once sheltered and sunny in the garden of the village priest, and Parrish brought a slip back with him one autumn evening after one of his usual strolls, which generally took in vespers, a few drinks in Hanna's Tavern, and a call to discuss gardening with Father Lucas. That is the point of departure, but subsequent events are less clear. Parrish took the green slip of magnolia with him. He possibly froze it, half roasted it, waterlogged it, deprived it of water, packed the roots with radium salts, lashed at it with his small cyclotron, subjected it to ultra violet, infra red and supersonics, grafted a couple of dozen other things on to it—and it's impossible to guess what else. We can't dismiss the possibility that he chanted incantations at it under a waning or waxing moon. He gave it, you might say, his customary work-out. Only the plant survived, and this time something worked.

WHEN Parrish first noticed something the plant had been put on one side. It had been potted out in the normal way, and stacked, with a hundred other little pots holding various mutilated and misshapen twigs, in the out-house behind his small cottage. It was a lean-to shed, and the only natural light filtered in through a crack between the sloping roof and the walls. When Parrish went in one morning—to get a length of hose he had stacked away there—and switched the fluorescent lighting on, he noticed, of course, that the potted plants were kinked in the direction of the thin shaft of exterior illumination. Simple phototropism. There was nothing unusual in it. But he stayed in the shed for three or four minutes, examining the hose for perishing, and at the end of that time, as he was on the point of leaving, he glanced at the array of discarded experiments again. And he noticed something else. One of the plants wasn't kinked at all. It was upright.

Put in this way, it seems obvious that Parrish should—as he actually did—have gone across to examine it. But it isn't obvious at all. Acuter, more methodical men than he would never even have noticed the minor deviation in stance of one small plant among more than a hundred. This would have been thrown with the rest into the furnace that periodically took in the dead wood of experiments that had not succeeded. But at this point Parrish's one talent intervened. His mind remembered the array of sloping plants; correlated it with the second vision of one plant standing out of the line of the rest—and the discrepancy clicked. Unusual mobility. He picked out the plant, and took it with him, back into the laboratory. When he got it

there he made routine checks. Among other things he analysed the soil in the pot. The local earth had a copper percentage around .0004. In this sample there wasn't any copper at all.

It isn't easy for a normal person to put himself inside the mind of a man like Harl Parrish, and it is quite impossible for anyone now to envisage the kind of results Parrish hoped for from his work, "Notes on the Evolution of Plant Intelligence." A lot of his preliminary work was on mimosas, those strange plants that wither into a tangle of dry spikes at the approach of an intruder but which can be *tamed* to accept the ministrations of one particular hand of one particular man. Parrish apparently made quite a few mimosa pets during his early months. And he froze them and baked them and flooded them with hard X-rays, and all the rest—but without success. The mimosas died, or stayed just mimosas.

But he had had the experience; the essential experience of treating a plant as though it had an animal's sentience. And he applied that experience now to the strangely mutated magnolia twig. He watered it with a good solution of copper salts, he tried all kinds of fertilizers—tentatively and carefully—on its roots, and he applied a battery of impulses, light and sound and electricity, to its stimulation. The plant thrived. It thrived enormously. And after a time—after quite a short time—Parrish's treatment of it ceased to be a matter of trial and error. There were no more setbacks of the wrong fertilizer, the wrong concentration of copper salts solution, the excessive stimulus. Everything he did contributed positively to the magnolia's increasing luxuriance. It wasn't until much later that he understood why.

THE record of his dawning apprehension is interesting. It's all there, in the scrappy monthly reports that no one bothered to read.

December 2063:

Concentrating entirely on the magnolia, X35/7, now. Altogether astonishing degree of mobility in main stem and small branches, now budding well. Originally phototaxic, but recently undeniable responses to my own person. When I entered the laboratory two nights ago the lighting was on—and the magnolia swayed unmistakably in my direction. This really is astonishing.

Continuing to apply heavy solutions of copper salts. Copper as a trace element obviously isn't enough. It flourishes in a soil with copper above 3,000 p.p.m.

New leaves burgeoning are glossy, vaguely ivy-shaped, deep blue-green in colour.

January 2064:

Good leaf growth during month, stem thickened from 1.7 to 5.3 centimetres diameter.

Curious event on the 3rd. Was about to water with the usual copper-nitrates solution when I had the insistent idea of adding alum. Not unusual, but when I had done this and watered the plant there was a peculiar sensation of well-being. Difficult to account for.

Mobility continues.

February 2064:

Three new side-branches, eight new leaves. Stem diameter 8.4 centimetres.

Decided to remove X35/7 from pot in laboratory and bed out in wood.

Or did I ?

March 2064:

Stem diameter 37 centimetres (!) Side branches over a hundred; leaves uncountable. Round the magnolia, for a matter of ten yards in all directions, every other tree and bush is displaying clear signs of withering.

The Tree explains that it is killing them, because it has to.

PARRISH submitted no further reports. And he cashed no more cheques. Under anything like normal conditions, even allowing for the laxity over his unusual progress reports, there would have been an investigating party along as soon as the reports stopped and the money began to pile up in Parrish's account. But the chaos at Genetics H.Q. didn't even flicker. And no one bothered to correlate a report from the village of Marsh Hanna, in the valley below Parrish's hide-out, of a strange new vegetation sweeping at a fantastic rate along the hillside.

April was cold that year, after a reasonably bright March. May came in with bursting sunshine over the county of Hampshire. And on the 2nd of May, the village of Marsh Hanna broke off its communication with the outside world.

The world, of course, woke up with a bang. Telecommunications acted, tentatively at first—the usual junior reporter in a gyro, without even a mobile telecaster. But his report, and the dozen stills he sent, brought full action.

From the air it was still possible to make out some vague outlines of the village—the church spire was lovingly entwined with foliage but its shape could still be discerned, soaring out of the tossing blue-green sea all round it. That sea extended a matter of more than a mile up the valley on either side of the village, and its peripheral expansion was a clearly visible growth of about ten yards an hour. The growth was by running suckers, both above and below ground.

The natural, automatic reaction was of counter-attack. Flame throwers were brought up and blasted an avenue several yards into the tangled, burgeoning mass before their effect failed, and the large, glossy, ivy-shaped leaves began to float eagerly, hungrily forward into the very breath of the flame. Acids did not even have any temporary effect; their spray dripped off the smooth, oily foliage to wither the few small plants surviving in the shade of the monster. An experimental electrified fence was simultaneously vaulted and broken by the pushing, blue-green tentacles.

Atomics brought an atom bomb out of stock. When the foliage had advanced another three miles along the valley they used it. The crater formed was overgrown in less than three hours. And miles away from the original centre small blue-green offshoots systematically began removing competing vegetation.

As far as United Chemicals were concerned the prevailing feeling was still, even at this stage, rather one of pique than of serious alarm, an annoyance slightly modified by the fact that World Electrics and Atomics had had even less effect in stopping the plant growth than had their own initial efforts. Director Hewison explained this to Max Larkin with his usual pompous agitation.

MAX said: "Flame, acids, electrocution, and now atom bombs won't

touch it. It overgrew the atom crater immediately. I take it we can rule out radioactive spraying as well then."

Hewison paused in pacing up and down his well-appointed office to stare with blood-shot vision at a recently acquired canvas of Jan van Eyck.

He said: "I'll tell you how much that cost me some day, Max. Worth it, too. Worth every penny. Radioactive spraying ? Of course it's a waste of time. Atomics are trying it all the same. Everybody's trying everything. Genetics are hopefully plastering the area with fungi. Fungi !"

Max said: "It isn't such a bad idea to try everything." He paused. "By the way, what makes people think it's lethal ?"

"Lethal ? The plant ? Well, damn it, it kills off everything else bigger than a pansy. You've seen the telecasts."

"Yes, plants," Max said patiently. "I was thinking of animal life. Does it strangle rabbits ?"

Hewison looked at him. "I don't know." He flicked a switch on his desk. "Telecommunications, Vienna. Get me Nachtvogel. Hans ? Can you give us a view of that damned forest at some place where our people aren't bouncing chemicals and germs off it ? The north side, perhaps ? Thanks."

Movement spun into the screen. The leaves were advancing across rough scrub grass. They saw a hare, its ears laid back, crouched in its form in the path of the advancing tide of blue-shot green. The tide crept over it, and the animal did not move. At a word from Max the telecasting gyro swooped down, almost brushing with its under-carriage the brightly flickering leaves. Something dropped—an old box. There was catapulting movement at the tide's edge as the hare, scared by the noise of the dropping object, bounded out beyond the compass of plant growth, visibly unharmed.

Max turned away from the screen.

"Well," he said to Hewison. "Well, that's interesting."

Hewison was twisting a small saint, an ivory paper weight, in moody preoccupation. He put it down and looked at Max blankly.

"So what ? We're not rabbits. What do we live on when that stuff rolls across the wheat belts ? How do we run our factories when they're twenty feet deep in those goddamn tendrils ? How do we even keep communications open ?—though, thank God, that's not our particular pigeon."

Max smiled. "We don't know, do we, yet ? But we can go and have a look. If a hare can run in and out, perhaps a man can, too. It wouldn't do any harm to look at the seat of the trouble. At Parrish's laboratory."

HEWISON took hold of the small, delicately carved figure again. His shoulders were hunched in nervousness.

"I'm scared now, Max," he said. "I wasn't before. Seeing pictures of the stuff rolling on in the face of flame and acids and everything else we put in front of it—that didn't scare me. I don't know why, but it didn't. But seeing it roll across that empty field . . . Do what you think best, Max. Don't waste any time, though. You'll take the strato-liner from Graz. I'll see about it."

"A gyro," Max said firmly. "A small gyro, and I'll run it myself. I don't like any kind of air travel, but they aren't all equally detestable." He paused, on his way out of the elaborately furnished room. "By the way—that painting. It's not a van Eyck, you know. They sold you a pup. Seventeenth

century imitation, for my guess."

Hewison shook his head sorrowfully after the retreating figure.

THE tide of blue-green was still advancing, at about fifteen yards an hour now. The local U.C. men shepherding Max led him across a ploughed field towards it. A long way over to the left he could see the tiny figures of the fighting party, still futilely messing about with sprays and canisters. Spennythorpe, the local Manager, shook his head.

"You see, Director Larkin—if you'd only take some means of defence with you . . . it's a great responsibility."

"Mr.", Max said, "not Director. Look—can I carry an atom bomb with me ? And they've tried atom bombs already. This is a case where there's no future in force. At present, anyway, diplomacy's the only hope. Don't worry, I'm confident enough."

But he wasn't entirely confident as he took the last few steps on his own and ducked forward under the towering crest of branching leaves. It was like plunging into a surf of leaves; he pressed through them, feeling their glossy smoothness against his hands and face like a caress full of deadly warning. The going was very hard. Scrambling over branches that could not have been there a few hours before and were already as thick as his arm, he wondered whether there was any hope at all of getting through to the centre. If it were like this all the way . . . He began calculating how far he could go in and still have a chance of getting back. The thought that behind him the sea was still relentlessly spreading outwards was no cheerful reflection.

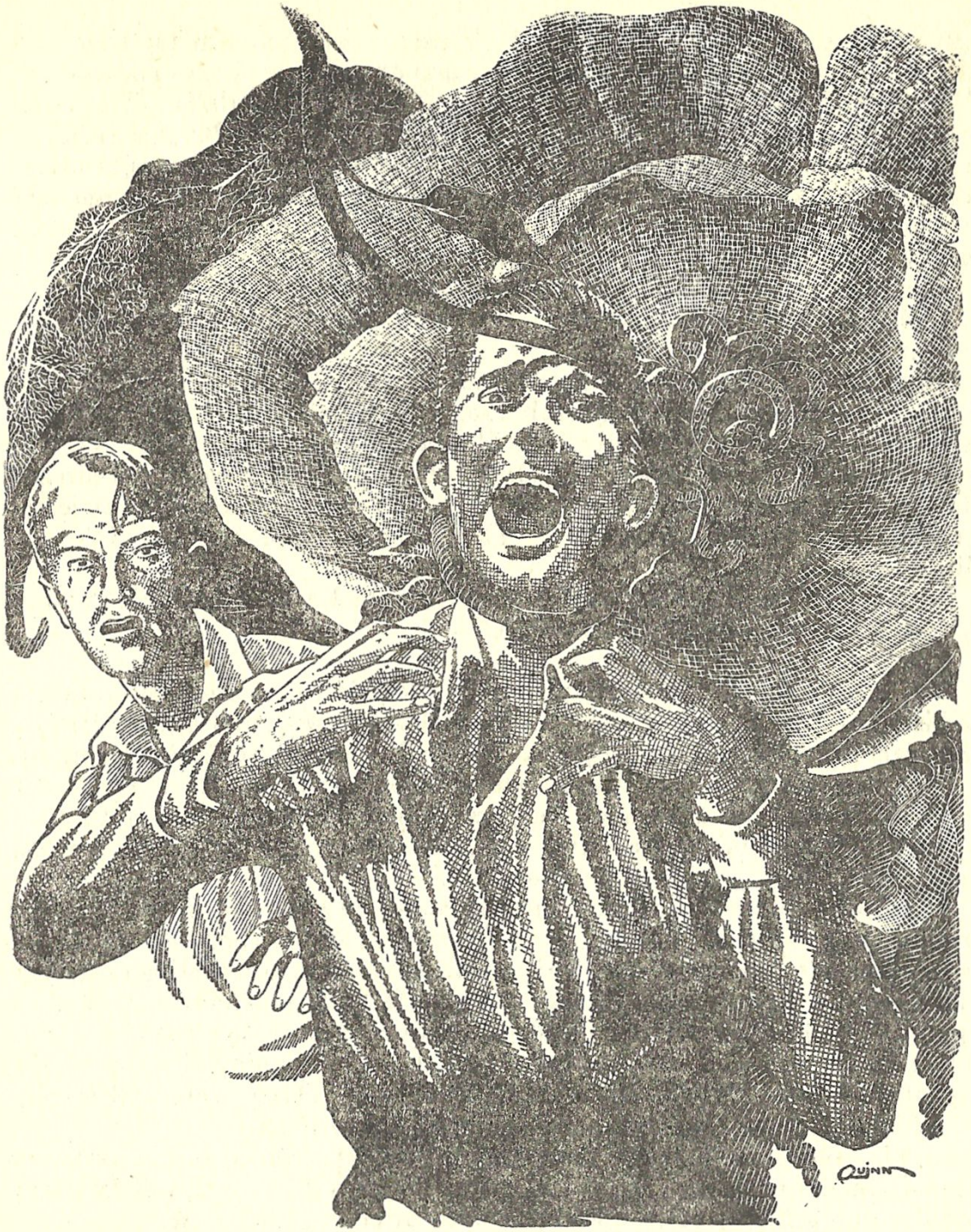
The change was startling and almost clear-cut. The tangle thinned, thinned rapidly, and he broke through into a strange spaciousness. In front of him there was a glade, and beyond it others, to the very limit of vision. Soft, blue-green light filtered through the tangle of leaves that hid the sky some thirty feet above his head. This spreading canopy was supported by more or less regularly spaced columnar trunks, between thirty and forty feet apart. He saw how the branches arched out from the main trunks to meet, and support the high arches of leaves. It was like some underground limestone grotto, but here there was the warmth of life rather than the damp chill of stone. On the floor of the glades small plants apparently flourished, and he saw traces of animals, and heard the high fluting of birds.

From that point he went ahead easily enough. It was about six miles in to the centre, and he took just over an hour and a half on the journey. He was looking for the village, but he found its inhabitants first.

A LOT of them were resting in what he first thought were artificial hammocks, but later recognised as elaborately intertwined constructions of leaves and small branches growing out of the main stems of the tree-columns. It gave him a shock to realise that the men could not have constructed these; the tree itself had provided them. Others of the villagers were strolling about, or watching an energetic few who were playing a scratch game of cricket in one of the glades. They were mostly stripped down to shorts; some were naked. They didn't show much surprise, or even interest, at Max's appearance. One man called from a hammock:

"Hi, there. What's it like outside ?"

"Nervous," Max said. "Everybody's nervous. But you don't look worried."



The man considered this for a moment before laughing.

"What have I got to worry about ?" he said. "I calloused my hands as a carpenter for twenty years. The big boys—the Managers and Directors—they may be nervous. It's different for ordinary Joes. I never had any smart uniform or office boys to kick around. I'm not losing anything."

"Are you still interested in eating ?" Max asked gently.

"Eating !" The laughter was immediate this time. "I never ate so good. Second on the right for the canteen. This Tree provides more kinds of fruit than they used to bottle sauces. And drink, too. It's the life of Riley, brother, the life of Riley."

It was a typical reaction. He heard the same from others, especially the

group clustered round the "canteen." Three or four columns together were thickly laden with a profuse variety of fruits of different shapes and colours. Max helped himself to some, and sampled them thoughtfully. The tastes were all new and, in their different ways, satisfying. One fruit was full of a clear, green liquid that quenched thirst remarkably well. He was throwing away the empty husk when he became aware of someone beside him who was as incongruous as he himself was in the half-naked throng. It was a tall, stooped man of about forty, dressed as a priest.

Max said: "It tastes all right. What's your opinion, Father ?"

Father Lucas pulled at his collar. It was very warm in here, Max reflected. Father Lucas said:

"I thought at first it might be an improvement. From my point of view I mean, naturally. I've always felt that a lot of good time was wasted in work that could be used for worship. But now—well, look at them. They're good neither for man, beast, nor God. It's only been a week and already they are almost too idle even to play. And I don't notice any particular improvement in their characters. They remain quite humanly idle and dissolute and vicious."

Max said: "I'm glad I found you, Father. I think you're probably the man who can take me to find Harl Parrish."

ON the way up the hill he explained to the priest that, from the evidence of his reports which had now at last been studied, Parrish was almost certainly the author of what was taking place. Father Lucas nodded, comprehending.

"It's very likely so. He hasn't been down in the village for a few weeks. I missed seeing him at Sunday Vespers. I have been up to his hut a time or two. There aren't any bearings now, of course, apart from the lie of the land, but I think we should be close to it."

They were close to something and, set round by a thicker circle of soaring trunks, they found it. It lifted from the ground in the centre of the circle, more than five feet across, its glorious, waxed whiteness pulsating to strange vibrations—a tremendous, leafless flower. It had no scent, but as they approached they were aware of its presence in more ways than by sight. Their heads seemed to beat in tune with the odd, rippling rhythms of the gigantic blossom. They stared at it, bewildered. They were still staring when Parrish came from behind it and approached them.

In his face, Max noticed, there was a striking absence of the ordinary human quality of pride. He looked rather white and strained, but intensely humble and selfless. Here was the acolyte, attending the shrine.

He said, quite sanely: "Father Lucas ! I'm very glad to see you." He looked enquiringly at Max.

Max showed him the small badge that was his passport.

"United Chemicals," Parrish said. "But why not my own people ? Why didn't Genetics send someone first ?"

"At present," Max said cheerfully, "they are more concerned with trying out their collection of bugs to see if one of them won't bite this tree of yours where it hurts."

Parrish nodded. "I know about that. And the flame throwers and acids and the rest. It's a waste of time, of course. But the Tree doesn't mind. It realises that people can't be made to understand right away."

Max said gently: "Understand what ?"

"That the world's great age begins anew," Parrish said triumphantly. He looked at Father Lucas. "That heaven smiles, and faiths and empires gleam like wrecks of a dissolving dream."

"Shelley . . ." murmured Father Lucas. "And leave, since naught so bright may live . . . What precisely is going to happen in our newer Athens ?"

"The thing to realise," Parrish explained, "is that practically nothing is beyond the power of the Tree to achieve. And it is not hostile to men—quite the reverse. It wants to help them. Food and shelter—in abundance. It has a beautiful control of its own metabolism." His voice rose to enthusiasm as the scientist reinforced the disciple. "All that any other plant ever did by accident of growth and evolution, the Tree can perform by its conscious will. All that, and more. Misery and want are banished from the planet."

"Want, possibly," Father Lucas said. "Misery . . .? I suppose this green gloom is a necessary evil. This tree of yours can't spare the sunshine ?"

"A very temporary necessary evil," Parrish said. "An umbrella while those fools toss their acids and lighted matches about. When the Tree is world-wide, though . . . there will be open spaces for men. They'll have sunshine, too. Watch. It's about time."

FOLLOWING his gesture, they looked up. As though at a command, the vast towering canopy of leafy branches swept outwards and the bright vertical shafts of the sun's rays plumbed down to the small group, and to the thirsty white petals of the great flower. For more than a minute it drank in the warmth and light, before the umbrella closed over them again.

"It generally lasts longer," Parrish said. "A gyro was coming."

They heard, reinforcing his words, the steady aerial hum, louder and then dying away as the patrol gyro passed over.

"Your communication ?" Max said. "Telepathic ?"

Parrish nodded. "A *rapport*. It takes time. But eventually everyone will have it. We will all live in communion with the Tree."

"That," Father Lucas said briskly, "is ordinary blasphemy, and I know how to deal with it."

Before the other two realised what he was about, he had walked across to the flower, and was tearing at the great, waxy petals with his hands. The white translucent substance shredded away as he savaged it. Harl Parrish cried out in grief and anger and made towards him, but before he could do anything they felt the deeper throb of para-sensory pain in the air about them, and saw the tentacular branches drop like snakes to tighten about the priest and lift him, struggling helplessly, into the air. And they saw the branches rip his limbs from his struggling body and toss the mutilated, bloody corpse to one side like a fly dropped from a swatter.

Max said evenly: "He was a good man, Parrish. He was a friend of yours once. He believed in man's independence and freedom and he's gone to his death for it. Well ?"

He kept his eyes on the strained white mask of Parrish's face. Parrish said in a choked voice:

"Why did he do it ? Why did he have to do it ?"

Max said: "If the Tree rules this planet for fifty centuries men will still

come and do the same thing. There always will be men who put the race's freedom first. Parrish, the Tree can never succeed in bribing men with free food and drink and never-ending leisure to barter away their independence. They will fight against it, and it will have to fight back. You can't be on both sides in this business."

Harl Parrish said: "I only wanted people to be happy. The Tree . . . It all seemed simple enough."

"It is," Max said. "Simple enough, but not in the way you thought. Man or the Tree, Parrish—there's no middle way."

Parrish looked in agony at the flower.

"I'm human," he said. "You're right, I'm a human being."

"Quick !" Max said urgently. "Is there any way ? You made it; you know how it thinks, what it needs, what it fears. What . . ."

AS he was talking, Parrish had looked up. Thoughts were forming in his mind, but the Tree gave him no time to utter them. One branch came down like the crack of a whip and swiftly and efficiently broke his neck.

Max stayed gazing at the flower for some minutes before he left the glade. He left the two bodies lying there, and began the long walk back to the outer world. At the foot of the hill the villagers called to him to stay and rest, but he walked on. He forced his way through the tangled branches at the periphery of the Tree's domain at last, and reached the open air. The tide had advanced another hundred yards by that time.

Soon after dusk the preparations began. All night the heavy equipment rolled into place. At dawn the air was heavy with the noise of gyro engines.

The thick black smoke belched out from the great circle around the limit of the Tree's advance, and from the circling gyros overhead. It lay like a deep, woolly blanket, hiding the glossy, blue-green leaves, stretching all over the too-symmetrical foliage, and beyond it, far beyond it. All day the smoke poured out, and all the next day, and the next day, for weeks and months. Until, at last, the smoke stopped, and as light seeped back to reveal the valley and the hillsides, it was clear that the Tree had long been dead.

End note appended.

Well, there it is, Dave.

I asked him how he knew—the Tree killed Parrish before he could say anything. That, he explained, was a good enough clue in itself. There was a way, a simple and effective way, or the Tree would not have acted so swiftly. As for what it was—Parrish's instinctive glance towards the sky was sufficient. The magnolia twig originally, remember, had been notably phototaxic. Confirmation from the observers outside that the advance had invariably ceased by night was all that was needed. United Chemicals provided a never-ending night locally.

It must have been a grim walk back, with Larkin trying not to think of the obvious, the essential clue, aware of the Tree's ability to communicate extra-sensorily, and hoping it would not be able to establish sufficient *rapport* before he got out of its clutches. Had it had more experience of human psychology, of course, it would have guessed what Larkin might have made of Parrish's last gesture. But in its experience human beings communicated by speech. Parrish had not been allowed to speak; therefore everything was fine.

There was one more surprise for me. We had had a good dinner, with a Tokay like liquid gold and a Friuli aquavita afterwards. He told me he had something to show me. He led the way—he's a bit doddery now, of course—out through the garden at the back and into a kind of covered courtyard, about fifty feet square and some fifteen feet high. There were no windows, or any other break apart from the entrance door. It was lit artificially. It was like a box.

"It's safe enough here," he said. "Solid concrete for twenty feet all round the roots. I ration its nourishment, and its light. When I die the door will be locked, and it will die within a week without light or food."

At the centre of the courtyard, from the white concrete, the Tree in miniature rose from a small oasis of earth. There was even a white, waxy blossom, but less than two inches across. It was very harmless and a little pathetic.

"I took a cutting," Larkin explained.

He went over and stroked the small blossom, as though it were a pet animal. He looked at me humorously.

"I come in here a lot," he said. "I bring a chair in. We get on well. We have some fine talks together."

Off the record, of course, Dave. Right off the record.

THE END

WELCOME, STRANGER!

By ALAN BARCLAY

Our first contact with alien intelligence may not be humanoid—and it may be so alien that we would want to destroy it.

Illustrated by HUNTER

LEFAUX is rather a tiresome character. He is a throwback to the twentieth century, the age of hustle and bustle, and go-getting, when everyone worked and worried so hard that they got digestive troubles and blood-pressure . . .

I lay back in my comfortable chair, thinking pleasant idle thoughts while Lefaux fulminated. He had, according to his standards, some reason to be annoyed, for it was over three weeks since I had received his summons calling me back from America. Lefaux, in addition to being a World Councilman, was the owner of the international paper that printed my stuff, and paid me the wherewithal to buy my bread and butter (and a certain amount of jam besides). My stuff was good stuff, and I had a reputation; I was Foyle, the traveller, the super-reporter, but at the same time if Lefaux should ever decide not to renew my contract (he could cut my broadcaster value too), I might find life rather less pleasant than it was at the moment.

So I didn't walk out on him; I let him talk.

"You're typical of this age of cotton-wool—no worries, no want, no hunger, no enemies. Mild adventures which don't even dirty your shoes; elegant flirtations—I'd be glad to meet one man with guts enough to get himself in a proper mess with a woman, or stinking drunk once in a while. It's a plush-lined world we live in . . ."

This went on for quite a little while. After he had worked some of the irritation out of his system, I asked:

"Anyway, now that I've arrived, what do you want of me ?"

"What do I want of you ?" he asked in exaggerated drawling tones, which I suppose were intended to mimic my own.

"I'll tell you, Foyle—oh, yes, I know you've got your eye on the blonde girl you were sitting beside at dinner; I know you intend taking her out in the garden and describing your solitary voyage up the Amazon in nothing more than a power launch with only one cocktail cabinet, but you're going to sit there and hear me instead. What I've got to tell you will put that sort of notion right out of your head—I've got a new adventure for you—a real one."

"Do tell."

"My boy," he said, grinning sadistically, "you're going out to Venus."

"Can't," I said. "I'm over age for space. Government wouldn't allow it."

"It will, this time—you're going on a Government job."

"Sorry," I said, "it's altogether too dull and boring and primitive—one just sits for three weeks inside an old iron can eating concentrated meats and dehydrated vegetables . . ."

"Listen, I'll tell you why I want you out there . . ."

Lefaux was in earnest. He filled up my glass, and leaned forward.

"I don't suppose you know anything about Venus, eh ?"

"Oh, yes, I do," I quoted. "First visited 2076; Jamieson, I think the chap's name was. Expeditions in 2079, '83 and '91. See the Venus Room in the International Science Museum. Photographs, geology, maps, fauna, etc. Atmosphere thin. No rotation. One hemisphere frigid. Venus Development started, let me see, 139 years ago—believe it or not, my grand-pop went out with it—the Mars Development started just after. Object: to provide space for anticipated overspill population."

"YOU'RE not bad, Foyle," Lefaux admitted, "not bad, I must say. It's hard to remember you're educated. Mars Development has been pressed on at a much greater rate, of course."

"But Venus Development is still jogging along in a quiet way according to plan."

"Oh, yes. I don't suppose you have the least idea what the Development consists of, have you ?"

"Oh, I suppose making homes fit for humans to live in, and so on, laying

on h. and c., building breweries—I hope !"

"Don't be a fool—the priority job is the manufacture of an atmosphere—and the planting of earth-type vegetation."

"Hasn't Venus got any of its own ?—the adventure stories I used to read always talked of 'lush vegetation'."

"It has vegetation, of course, but not the sort we can eat."

"I see. So what am I to do ?"

"Just go out there and make one of your famous reports—you're a good reporter, Foyle, although you're a lazy devil; you've got a nose for things—just go out there, see everything and everybody and come back and tell me all about it."

"My dear Mr. Lefaux," I told him, "I know you too well to accept that sort of briefing—you suspect there's something cooking. You must tell me."

"There's nothing. I just have a notion that I want an independent report."

"Be a good chap and tell me about your notion."

"You know I'm on a number of Committees—particularly on population questions. Well, one of these Committees gets an annual report on the Venus Scheme. It's pretty dry stuff; the thing's been jogging along according to plan for years, no trouble, no worry—not even much expense, as these things go—I don't suppose many Councilmen even read the reports."

"But you did ?"

"Sure," he agreed. "I always read reports; I'm always looking for something odd or funny—and I found it."

"Do tell," I urged him.

"One of the District Managers—one of the men who work on the perimeter—sends in a recommendation that the whole Venus Scheme be abandoned."

"Does his opinion matter a lot ?"

"Well, it's his livelihood, you know—good pay, good pension—why should he want the whole works abandoned ?"

"What reason does he give ?"

"The reasons are extremely quaint and old-fashioned. He says we have no right to be on that planet, and that great ill will come to humanity if we persist."

"Obviously gone bug-house."

"No. The Director says not. The Director adds he advised the man to scrap this report, but the man insisted it go forward; he's within his rights there."

"Little enough to cause you to send me off on a long, painful and uncomfortable journey," I protested.

"I admit that," Lefaux agreed, "but you're going. I feel that this Venus Scheme has jogged along far too long; it wants looking into. I have a notion there's a good story there, at least, so go you shall."

SO I went to Venus. The trip up to Terminus by rocket was comfortable enough, and in fact Terminus (I had visited it and done a write-up some years before) is a fascinating place. It is the threshold of space itself, this huge hollow cylinder lying about ten thousand miles out from Earth. As everyone knows, the Terminus cylinder continues to have segments added to it, and now measures nearly a mile in length. It is, quite simply, a hollow

shell with walls nearly fifty feet thick. The life of the place is lived within these walls, which are a honeycomb of rooms, halls, corridors, dormitories, workshops, and recently a dance hall, a theatre and a swimming-pool. Most surprising of all, there is even a maternity ward to the hospital.

Within the central hollow the great space ships lie cradled. There are always two or three for Mars, occasionally one for Venus, a considerable number of experimental jobs, and now and again one of the most exciting sort of all—an exploration ship. On my last visit there I had interviewed Edmund Shalston and his crew, just before he took off on his last ill-fated trip to Jupiter.

I made my way to the Dive, where I spent my time in an agreeable manner with a number of companions of like tastes. It was a little while before anyone grasped the idea that I was on my way out to Venus. They advised me against it. They said it was a rough trip. They told me the ship (the Z49) was the dirtiest and most uncomfortable tramp afloat (they always talked about these ships as being afloat, like that), and that in any case there was nothing to see once I got to my destination.

"It's just like a cement works in the middle of a thousand-acre sewage farm, in the middle of whole continents of pink flannel," I was told. I tried to conjure up in my mind a picture of the place based on this description, but the effort merely depressed me.

The worst piece of news came last of all.

"And of course, Jenkins, the skipper of the Z49, is crazy," someone told me over the rim of a large glass of genuine old Scotch whisky.

There was nothing I could do about it, of course. If I packed up and returned, I would undoubtedly lose my job with Lefaux papers—that is, unless my behaviour enraged him to the extent that he burst a blood vessel.

MOST of my new friends and drinking companions went off on the Mars Ship. I watched it towed gently out of the dock by tugs, floating out easily and buoyantly at the end of the cables until it was thirty or forty miles off. The tugs detached, and came back. The great ship lay out there while the atomic jets hotted up, then it slid away, the pencil of flame from its orifice turning from red to white and then to blue as its acceleration built up.

My own ship, the Z49, was brought alongside the cargo lock for loading after that. This process took fully two days, during which time I never saw the skipper and was not allowed aboard. Every time I asked about Jenkins I was told, with the most callous cheerfulness, that he was as crazy as a coot (or a March hare, or an owl or a goose). They called him Mad Harry.

When at last I got in sight of the Z49 I found it to be quite the smallest and ugliest ship I had ever encountered, not very different in shape from a cocoa tin. It wasn't rusty, for metals do not rust out in space, but one could see at a glance that it was the sort of tub that would have been rusty if it could have managed it.

I crept through the lock into this thing, dragging my valise after me. It was crammed to the roof with cargo. I literally had to crawl along an alley four feet high by two feet wide to reach the control cabin.

I remembered some of the stories I had read about space ships in my youth—I had written a few myself—I remembered the cabins, the air purifiers, the dining saloons, the flirtations that went on, and compared them

with this distasteful reality. The control cabin was twelve feet long by seven feet wide, and six feet six high. To starboard there was a miniature store cupboard and to port a small compartment containing sanitary facilities of a disgracefully utilitarian appearance. For three weeks I shared this cell with a large control panel, the most magnificent electronic gramophone I have ever seen, two narrow cots, a large window looking out into the depths of space, and Mad Harry himself.

Mad Harry was a small, bald, pink man, very fat, indeed almost globular, with tiny arms and legs. It was not in the least surprising that he was fat. He told me that he had not set foot on Earth—nor on Mars or Venus either, for that matter, for at least fifteen years. For the most part he lived in this little cell of his, never walking more than the step or two that would take him from one end of it to the other. Only rarely did he go ashore at Terminus, usually to check up his navigational data. And the folks who told me he was crazy were sure dead right.

HIS craziness did not appear until we were some hours out from Terminus. At manœuvring the ship he was above criticism; he jockeyed the ship round on to course with quick deft touches on the firing buttons, and we were under way in a few moments. But with the ship set on to course, he was occupied only at intervals, checking and correcting. He paid very little attention to me—sometimes he flung a word in my direction, but without expecting an answer. He talked to himself continuously, except when he played his gramophone. His instrument was one of the finest obtainable, and his collection of tape recordings probably unique. Bach was his favourite, and after that Wagner. These old masters are not my meat at all, not subtle enough, not sufficiently intricate, although they have a sort of old-fashioned dignity. But the skipper grew drunk on them. As the music swelled and throbbed in the tiny cabin, he would sit crouched over his desk, staring out into space. Once I woke after a sleep; the music was playing, swelling, soaring, thundering about my ears, and the skipper was standing by the observation window, beating time with his outstretched arms as if conducting an orchestra of the great multitudes of bright stars that blazed in the dark sky.

He played modern stuff too; something that meant less than nothing to me, but which seemed to enthral him.

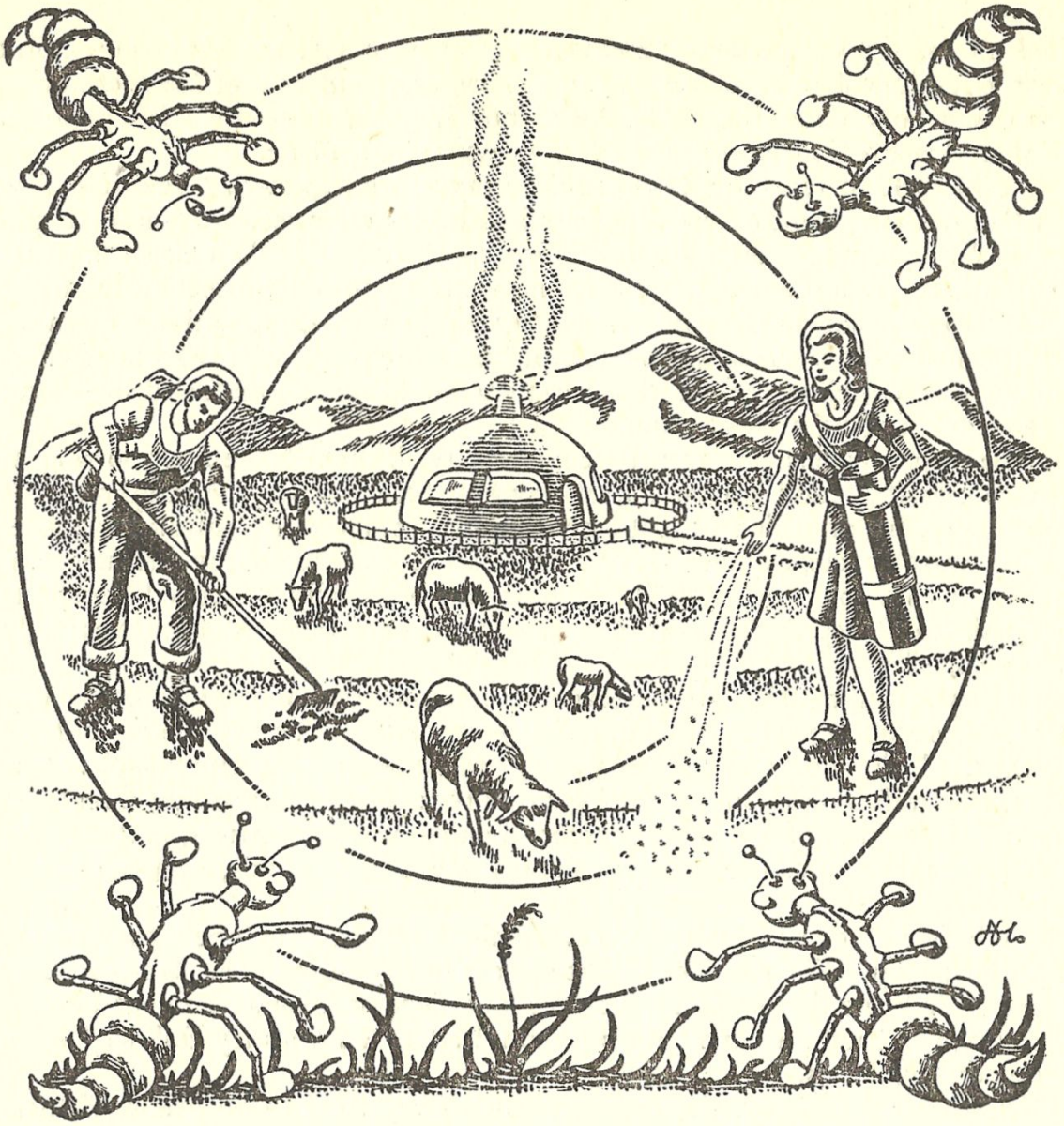
"Magnificent," he cried to me. "Magnificent." He was almost in tears. "That's Nickolai, you know; that's his latest . . ."

I had just heard of Nickolai, no more than that.

"He really understands, doesn't he ?" the little man went on. "He really understands—he has been out here, of course—he made three trips with me, back and forth; he sat just here staring out at them, neither speaking nor eating for days on end—wonderful musician ! Of course he's mad, you know, mad as a hatter !"

"That would make two of a kind," I thought to myself, "the two of you together."

"I never go ashore now," the skipper told me a day or so later. "I feel it's a waste of time; haven't taken leave now for four years—but what is there better than this ? Some day," he said, mostly to himself, "I'm not going back. One day I shall turn the ship aside and set it going outwards, out among the stars, and I shall sit at this window for ever . . ."



"If you start doing any such nonsense this trip, old timer," I thought to myself, "you'll see stars all right—the kind that happen from a bash on the head with the fire extinguisher."

What with dehydrated foods, water for drink, Mad Harry, Bach, the small cabin, Nickolai repeated *ad nauseam* and the rather twentieth century sanitary arrangements, I was happy indeed to reach our destination without any noticeable loss of mental equilibrium.

OUR destination was Venus Terminus, a poor man's copy or utility version of Earth Terminus—without bar or bath. I waited there for a couple of days and then was taken down by rocket to Berg. This dump—that word has never been used with greater exactitude—had been originally christened Venusberg by some character without any sense of humour, but it looked so little like the original Venusberg and so much like a cement factory that people used to burst into tears every time they heard the name pronounced—so Berg it is now called by everyone.

I wasn't the President, nor a Chief Councilman, nor a radio star, but yet I had been sponsored by Lefaux, and rated an official welcome of the order

laid on for semi-important personages—that is to say, the Governor didn't turn out himself to meet me at the airport, but sent one of his secretaries, who was very charming. The Governor hoped I would be his guest at dinner this evening, and meet a few personages, said he.

I said little in reply for I was finding my shore legs with some difficulty. At this time the atmosphere of Venus had been under rectification for about a hundred years and was now described as "breatheable." This meant that it was just not too awful to bear. One walked without protection from the rocket to the waiting car which was a sealed saloon with filtration apparatus. The atmosphere purification plant still had a few years of work ahead of it. There was sufficient carbon dioxide in the air to make one feel drowsy and headachey within a short time.

The Venus project has to run economically; it must be self-supporting as far as possible, and above all, it must function with the minimum of machinery, all of which is still imported across space at fantastic expense. There were in consequence very few aircraft, and not many private cars. The one that took me from the airport ran on locally produced vegetable alcohol, and despite the nature of the fuel, proceeded at a distressingly sober speed.

Berg was built inside six or seven interconnected concrete domes, all of which were quite well lighted and nicely ventilated. We left the car outside in the air-lock, and finished the journey in a little open electric vehicle. The town was well lighted, and a good gentle breeze of conditioned air circulated pleasantly. There was a lot of concrete about—concrete houses, paths, shops and pillars, but to call it a cement factory was a little unfair, I thought.

THE Governor and his friends were nice to me. They knew they would get a write-up. Their names might appear in my next book. On the other hand, they knew that should I uncover any piece of mismanagement I could turn such a spotlight upon it as would lead to an enquiry followed by a series of dismissals.

They were a bit pathetic, these people. They tried to be proud of their work. Some spoke as if they were even fond of this dreary planet, but all the while they asked about home, about the theatre, the films, the actresses, the latest scandals. The women's fashions were about five years out of date; they were, of course, not in reach of Earth radio or television, and saw very few films, so I spent a lot of time sketching and describing clothes for them.

And how jealous they were of the Mars Development people ! There were cars and aircraft on Mars. There was a holiday zone in the mountains. They had radio, and theatres and pleasure cruisers. Why could some of that equipment not be diverted to Venus ?

These, of course, were the administrative staff. They lived and worked in Berg, pushing the paper around. But after a day or two I met another sort of man—the outside worker. These men (and one or two women also), worked outside the town. They travelled in sealed vehicles (they called them jalopies), did their jobs in breathing suits, and slept and ate and rested in small dome-shaped huts, each with its air filter. They came into Berg to rest and have some fun. They were the old type—the pioneers. They were rough and tough, and drank a lot—they even carried a sort of gun, a long-barrelled affair which was supposed to be a defence against a species of

particularly vicious little animal, but which they sometimes used in the course of arguments among themselves.

As I said, they drank quite a lot, which indicates the level upon which I made contact with them. I spent a few evenings with them, acquiring a lot of information and a few hangovers. They liked Venus. They didn't want to go home to our plush-lined civilisation. They wanted to stay there, feed the ants (I learned later what that meant), come into Berg for a holiday now and then and go on a bender. All they required was that Earth should send out a greater number of drinks in greater variety, and a few actresses and other assorted women. Some of them even said they liked the atmosphere.

Of course, the administration laid on visits for me. I was taken out to the atmosphere plant. It was an atomic-powered job, built into a mountain. Air was drawn into an immense cavern with a loud roaring sound. Somewhere in the heart of the mountain it was robbed of its CO_2 and then shot out of another equally immense cavern on the other side of the mountain with a similar roaring sound. That was all. It had been running for over a hundred years, and was due to run for another hundred or so. Seventy-five men had lost their lives bringing it across, installing it and starting it up. I embarrassed my guide extremely by asking him what happened to all the CO_2—he didn't know but would look it up.

ANOTHER gentleman explained the project to me. Having had an education, and having ears in my head which, as a journalist, I make a point of using, I was perhaps less ignorant of the subject than he supposed, but it was nice to get the whole story from A onwards, with maps, charts, and coloured diagrams.

"The project was conceived in 2183 . . ." he began. I'll spare you that bit, though, and also the story of the construction of the atmosphere plant.

" . . . the plan then crystallised into its present form," my instructor continued, leading me to a wall-map. "Eight centres were selected on the sunward side, equally spaced one from the other—roughly, that is," he qualified, "at which to begin land reclamation and planting. As the reclamation proceeded outward, making a steadily widening circle around each starting point, crops could be grown, sheep, cattle and pigs raised, and these can be made to support a steadily increasing population which, in turn, will cause the green circles to expand at an ever-increasing rate—as can be seen clearly from the annual rings, here . . ." he pointed to the maps.

"I'd like to ask a stupid question," I interrupted. "Why not feed the cattle on the local vegetation ?"

"But my dear sir—it's unsuitable; it's alien—it . . . well . . ."

"I get you. Then why not just put on about a thousand power ploughs, keep 'em going night and day, plough up the whole hemisphere, and plant our own stuff ? Why the slow progress—why the ever-widening circles ?"

"But, my dear Mr. Foyle—I—you must meet our biologists; come this way."

HE led me into another room, and rather irritably handed me over to the biologists.

"You see, Mr. Foyle," one of my new instructors explained, "things are

not so simple as you suppose."

"I hadn't supposed anything," I objected, "I'm only asking."

"I see . . . I see . . . well, the situation is this—that, of course, our cattle can't eat the Venus stuff because it's alien. Different cellular structure, quite different—very interesting, some of it, but odd. So we must reclaim land and plant our own, and before our own vegetation will grow, the ground must be prepared."

"You mean cleared and ploughed ?"

"No, I don't—though, of course, that must be done too—I mean prepared bacteriologically."

"Go on," I urged him.

"Earth-type vegetation will only grow in soil that has been prepared for it by earth-type bacteria. The particular kind we are concerned with are thermophillic bacteria. These exist in earth soils and convert mere ground-up rocks into soil suitable for absorption by the plant."

"So before cattle comes the vegetation, and before the vegetation come the bacteria ?"

"Exactly," he agreed.

"You know, you people want a publicity agent—no one on Earth knows anything of this."

"We rather hope you will be our publicity agent, Mr. Foyle, we sometimes feel that too little is known of our difficulties out here."

"Leave everything to me," I promised. "Now, tell me—any snags—any set-backs—any headaches ?"

"Well, of course, we had one some years ago, but that has been taken care of now—that was the ant problem."

"Never heard of it," I said, "tell me."

"There is a native insect here, usually called an ant. Needless to say, it's not an ant, but the resemblances are quite striking; intelligent, well organised, well disciplined; behaviour patterns less inflexible than Earth ants, if anything—well, despite the differences of cellular structure and even of molecular structure in our earth-type vegetation, this ant took a fancy to it; began to swarm round the perimeters; multiplied. For a time our perimeters were in retreat. We tried everything, of course—poison spray, poison dust—all that sort of thing, all to no good. In the end, however, we hit on the ideal method. The best solution to every problem is a simple solution . . ."

"And that was ?" I asked.

"We brought over some of our own Earth-type ants, and settled colonies of them round the perimeters—they proved to be more than a match for the Venus creatures; they keep them outside the planted areas."

"SO that really, on every perimeter, or on every frontier between ourselves and the native life of Venus, there is a continual unceasing war ?"

"Eh ?" my informant asked. "Yes, I suppose so. That's rather a romantic way of putting it, I suppose, but it's quite true—of course, it's just another example of struggle for survival."

"I take it, then, that these ants have fared very well since they have been transplanted ?"

"Oh yes, better than we had expected. The scheme was put up by one of my predecessors, and I understand was not highly thought of at first; every-

one rather surprised that it was so successful—the ants—a certain amount of anomolous behaviour has been noted, but nothing significant."

"Tell me what you mean by anomolous behaviour ?" I begged.

"Ants run extremely true to type, you know—always behave according to pattern. Very regular, very systematic. Well, sometimes they don't here, that's all. There are times when their behaviour is, well, just what I have said—anomolous."

"But this doesn't mean a thing ?" I asked.

"Not a thing," he agreed indifferently.

"Wouldn't it be a funny thing," I suggested to him, "if the two kinds of ants decided to quit fighting and get together ?"

He looked at me rather as if I were some sort of ant myself.

"Very funny," he agreed. "Anything else I can tell you, Mr. Foyle ?"

"Not a thing," I answered, "not a single thing."

LEFAUX had sent me out here because he smelled something wrong. I respected his sense of smell. I had a very highly developed sense of smell myself, on which I depend to earn my living, but not a sniff had I got since leaving Earth. The domed towns scarcely deserved to be compared to cement factories, but were about as lacking in mystery as if they had been. The surrounding green belts, unkindly compared to sewage farms, were just extensive areas of excessively lush undulating grass—or vetches or clover—enlivened here and there, particularly on the hill slopes, with plantations of young, rather sickly trees. The third element—the red flannel—I had not inspected yet. Nor had I sensed anything wrong in the administration; no tampering with funds, no industrial or mining disasters with the numbers of fatalities suppressed. Nothing at all.

Nothing, that is, except one thing—the ants. I was almost frightened to say even to myself that the story of the ants had stirred the short hairs at the back of my neck, and I certainly did not intend to have myself certified as a cosmic ass by describing these stirrings to anyone else. The thing was so like the stories I had read as a boy—giant ants, alien intelligences, foes of mankind—you remember the sort of thing. I believe the ant business started with a science-fiction writer of the nineteenth century called Wells. And of course these were just the ordinary sort of busy little, stupid little ants going round the same short busy life cycle as they had done for millions of years. I explained to myself that I had read too many of these stories as a boy, that my professional instincts were at fault this time, that I had been here long enough, that I had already gathered enough material to do some good articles, and that if I got back to Earth and went to Europe I would be in time for the power-pack ski-ing in Switzerland.

After I had told myself all this I went and made arrangements to be taken out to the perimeter at one or two points to have a look at the ants.

I INSPECTED an awful lot of ants in the next fortnight or so. I was taken out to perimeters at various points and on several continents. I lived in sealed houses. I met a good many congenial characters and drinks. I got claustrophobia wearing a breathing helmet and a number of violent headaches when I tried to do without one—and as I say, I saw an awful lot of very ordinary looking ants.

The Venus ants were sometimes as much as an eighth of an inch in length, deep red in colour, and they built well-proportioned hives two feet or so in diameter and four feet high. At certain points on the fringe of most of the reclaimed areas these hives were dotted about the landscape rather extensively. Their inhabitants just loved our earth-type grasses. One could see them thrive and flourish on them. Wherever the local ants grew so numerous as to attain to plague proportions colonies of imported black soldier ants were deposited. These made an onslaught on every hive in sight, slaughtered the inhabitants, ate them, ate their grubs, and moved on. I saw them attack and invade one ant-heap and clear it out in about ten minutes. The ground around the foot of the heap was scarlet with the corpses of red ants.

"What happens when our chaps find no more worlds to conquer?" I asked.

"You mean when the red ants are all destroyed? They settle down to their ordinary ways—they don't multiply to any great extent as the food resources of the country are pretty meagre once the red ants are gone."

"How long does it take the soldiers to clear an area?"

"It varies—on the New London perimeter, where I was stationed until two years ago, we set down colonies at fifty points, equally distant. The length of the perimeter is about a thousand miles, so that each colony had to travel twenty miles to meet its neighbour. Well, they met in just over a year, which is an average rate of travel of about a hundred yards a day—and they cleared out every red ant in that strip."

"Busy little b——s, aren't they?" I commented. "Nothing odd about them?"

"No," my informant replied, "they're just ants."

"You don't do much to keep me from starving to death, do you?" I grumbled.

DON'T imagine I had forgotten the man who had sent in the comic report—the one who had attracted old man Lefaux's attention by recommending that the Venus Development be abandoned. I went to see him also. He was a senior overseer of sub-professional grade, who lived on the perimeter of No. 21 area—it had no other name as yet.

The present diameter of this area was no more than a hundred miles, but it already at one point lapped up against the foothills of a considerable range of mountains called the Woolmers. On the other side of the Woolmer Mountains lay another smallish area, No. 22. At one point the two perimeters were only about fifty miles apart.

I met the overseer, Johnstone, and found him normal enough. He was a reserved, serious, rather mystical type of Scottish extraction, and never touched liquor. My customary line of approach was therefore closed to me. I decided upon a direct attack.

"Mr. Johnstone," I said, "you included a number of rather curious observations in your annual report for last year."

He looked at me calmly and steadily.

"I thought you said you were a newspaper reporter," he replied. "How did you come to see that report?"

"I am a newspaper reporter. I never saw your report. Your remarks were quoted to me."

"What remarks?" he parried, still quite calmly.

"As follows," I said. "Quote: 'Great ill will come to humanity if this project be persisted in, and I therefore recommend that it be abandoned forthwith,' Unquote."

"I remember that, Mr. Foyle; I did write that."

"Would you care to comment on it?" I asked.

"Certainly—I had an illness and a fit of depression last year—I am of Scottish-Celtic origin, and my inherited religious and mystical make-up is odd and complex. Last year during my depressive fit I got to reflecting that mankind had no business to be away out here on alien planets. I thought of those who builded a tower to reach up to the sky—the Tower of Babel, Mr. Foyle—and how they were confounded. I have now quite recovered my health."

He stopped in a way that was final and definite. I thought that his explanation was very reasonable, very understandable, very pat. I thought it had been delivered very fluently as if it had been prepared beforehand. I thought it was completely phoney.

I THINK I examined every square yard of Johnstone's territory. I saw every ant-heap, almost every ant. He assisted me in every way, and showed no desire to steer me away from anything.

"It's difficult to imagine any sort of sinister secret in this landscape," he remarked to me, as we stood together looking out over mile upon square mile of rolling green.

By now I was sure that he had something—and that he knew that I knew. I glanced towards him. He was looking over in the direction of the Woolmer hills.

That evening I had a radio conversation with one of the friends I had made in Berg. I persuaded him to pay No. 21 area a visit, by helicopter. This took rather more doing than one might think, for there were very few of these machines on Venus, and a complicated system of priorities as to their use.

Nevertheless he came, and took me for a little flip. To be precise, we cruised slowly back and forth along the lower slopes of the Woolmers. I lay flat on the floor, scanning the ridges and valleys through a pair of binoculars.

"All right," I told my pilot at last, "take me back now."

"Seen something ?"

"Something, yes—up in that valley. I'll go and visit it accidental-like to-morrow morning."

LEFAUX put aside the sheaf of notes I had brought him, and shuffled through the photographs absently.

"What size are they ?" he asked.

"Twenty to twenty-four feet high, average twelve feet round the base, spaced at about eighty feet intervals."

"Yes, yes," he nodded, "but their intelligence, man—tell me how you are certain of that."

"Very well," I said, "for the fifth time, here goes. They communicate with each other. The first ant-heap I approached sent out inmates to intercept me. They started pouring out when I was four hundred yards away. They blocked my path. I put my hand down among them. They did nothing. No bites, no stings. 'It' was examining me. 'It' found me O.K. 'It' passed the word along to the others—this is just a harmless newspaper guy—so the others didn't bother to send out protective screens. They've got mental control over Johnstone—he is their source of information and contact with our race. He keeps people away from their valley."

"What for cripes sake do you mean by 'It' and 'The Others' ?"

"Each heap is a being, an entity. They communicate with each other by telepathy. They are intelligent beings."

"Go on," Lefaux urged.

"The interior of each heap is heated. There are stale air orifices in the sides. I put my hand near one and felt a soft gentle blast of hot air flowing out. These individuals have caused bridges to be constructed—metal cables —metal, mind you—spanning the stream and hollows, so that their workers can get around. When I say bridges, let me tell you I swung on one of them and it didn't break."

"But intelligence . . .?" he protested.

"They are widening the valley. They have dammed the stream . . ."

"All right, all right," he waved a hand. "I believe you—matter of fact, I believed you some time back. You haven't told me yet that you had a long chat with them by telepathy—you know, like the books say, 'A bell-like voice sounded, but it sounded inside my head, saying "Beware, stranger ! Return whence you came ! This is forbidden ground" '—nothing like that."

"No," I admitted. "But they examined me. I felt or heard that I was being inspected—I reckon communication could be established with them, but at that moment I was just a new phenomenon, being surveyed."

"I understand, so far—now, your explanation; tell me that over again, slowly."

"LIKE this," I said. "Remember I asked that goof of a scientist what would happen if the red and the black ants—the Venus and the Earth types—gave over killing each other ? Well, I reckon that one day they did. They got together. They're a symbiosis. For millions of years ants have been running round in a rut, doing the same old thing time and time again. Evolution at a standstill. Taking Earth ants out there gave them an evolutionary jerk. Putting them beside the red Venus ants gave them another. They broke out of the evolutionary squirrel-cage."

"Yes, yes, but to be intelligent you must have a brain somewhere."

"They have—let me tell you. Johnstone, the loony Scotsman, told me one of his staff cut one of these ant-heaps open with a pick-axe. At the top, about two feet in diameter, was an area packed with red ants—almost solid. One red ant doesn't have much brain, but a swarm of them of that diameter, linked together by telepathic means, may have a pretty powerful brain. Not the same sort of brain as ours, of course—different. Thinking in different ways. Getting different angles on things—but still, a brain. By the way, the others killed the man who cut that ant-heap open."

"And the black chaps do the work, carry out orders, eh ?"

"Exactly."

Lefaux shuffled the photographs, gazing at them absently.

"What do you think, Foyle ?"

"I think this is a new and non-human intelligence. We have talked a lot about meeting new sorts of intelligence later when we get out among the stars, but here we have accidentally created one near at home. As a writer, I feel my imagination stirred. I cannot help thinking what might result from a contact between this intelligence and ours—but of course, that is mere idle speculation."

"You end on rather a bitter note, Foyle," he commented. "Why such bitterness ?"

"Why ?" I asked. "Surely you must see why. However interesting the possibilities may be, I know quite well what will happen to the newcomer as soon as the Council has considered my report. 'A potential danger to humanity,' I quoted; 'an alien intelligence'; 'no one can afford to take the risk . . .' and then a gentle dusting off with arsenical smoke, or a small job of bombing, and that will be that. Finish. That's why Johnstone has tried to keep the matter quiet."

"I think your guess at what might happen is a pretty shrewd one," Lefaux nodded. "These old tabby cats, my colleagues on the Council . . . Myself I'd like to see humanity take a bit of a risk. I think the risk would stir its spiritual liver in a very salutary manner. I think contact with another sort of brain would be a darn good show. I think if these ant pals of yours were left in peace for a while, they might learn enough to speak for themselves . . ."

He began to tear up my report. He grinned at me—a nasty grin.

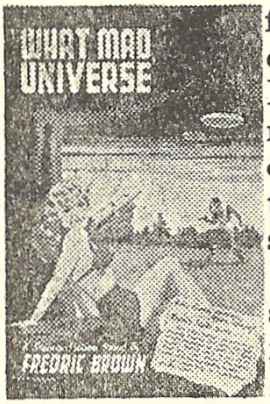
"You're a clever fellow, Foyle. Sensitive—imaginative—you must go back and spend some time trying to strike up a conversation with these New-Arrivals."

THE END

WELCOME, STRANGER !

BOOK REVIEWS

What Mad Universe. By Fredric Brown. T. V. Boardman & Co. Ltd., London. 8/6.

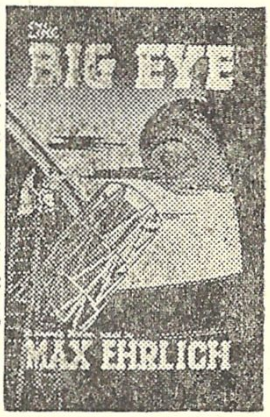


THIS is, undoubtedly, the most humorous science fiction satire for many years. Written by a master of detective stories, himself an ardent science fictionist, Fred Brown has, with tongue in cheek, debunked the American magazine trend of putting "lovelies" on the covers. Not only that, but he has gone further and written the whole theme of science fiction magazine editing into an hilarious series of incidents in another dimension.

When Keith Winton, editor of *Surprising Stories*, became switched into another dimension, he found that a former fan of his was now editor in his place, and that many of the incidents in stories he published were actualities. There was a space war going on with the inhabitants of Arcturus, and General Eisenhower was chief of a Sector in space—and girls who had voyaged in space wore the cover uniform of jackboots, bra and bikini swimsuits, whatever the weather.

From there on editor Winton becomes more and more involved and bewildered as he lives the plots from his own magazine. Even the end of the story provides another surprise. This is one book too good to miss.

The Big Eye. By Max Ehrlich. T. V. Boardman & Co. Ltd., London. 8/6.



MAX EHRLICH'S exciting novel is perhaps better suited to readers who prefer one central theme placed upon Earth rather than the exigencies of spacial action. Set in 1960, at a time when the countries of the world are about to launch themselves atomically at each other's throats, the news of an approaching planet into the Solar System is hardly noticed at first.

Gradually, however, as observatory reports plot the wanderer's path into a head-on collision with Earth, the world forgets its personal squabbles as vital industries begin to fail, along with power plants, farming, transport, and governments, as the citizens of the world pursue vague, elusive or real pleasures before the two-year death sentence is executed.

Not a little of the story is taken up by the central character's efforts to discover more about the mysterious planet, and of a small community of people who take refuge in one of the observatories to see out the final grandstand play of *homo sapiens*.

This is adult, non-magazine science fiction. Over half a million people read it last year when it was the choice of the American *Dollar Book Club*.

The Star Kings. By Edmond Hamilton. Museum Press, London. 9/6.

AFFECTIONATELY known as "World-wrecker" Hamilton by devotees of science fiction in America, this most prolific author has been writing consistently for a quarter of a century. Surprisingly enough this is only his second book from a British publisher since Philip Allan did his *Horror on the Asteroid* back in 1936.

Yet, among the many recent offerings to the general public who have yet to become aware of the more thought-provoking concepts which, to be successful here, must be introduced gradually, this romance of the far future is an admirable choice. Set audaciously in a galactic empire period some two thousand centuries in the future, it is a fairy tale wrapped in the tinsel of spaceships, ray-guns, and court intrigue of the ultimate in cosmic civilisations, and the Prince Charming is a mundane insurance clerk of the 20th century who is transported by mind-transference into the glamourous person of a galactic Prince of one of the future star kingdoms.

How the hero, in a strange, fantastic setting, battles successfully against dastardly villains, upholds the prestige of the Prince whose body he inhabits, and wins the hand of the beautiful princess, is told with unabated action and convincing human appeal.

Only hardened science fiction fans could fail to be enthralled, and to those who have yet to enjoy this eminently readable story, be forewarned—it is a can't-put-it-down-until-finished book.

L.F.

Best Science Fiction Stories. Edited by Bleiler & Dikty.
Men Against the Stars. Edited by Martin Greenberg.
Voyage of the Space Beagle. By A. E. van Vogt.
Grayson & Grayson, Ltd., London. 8/6 each.

THE publisher of these three books has set a high standard of literature for his first entrance into the widening British field of hard covered science fiction. The books chosen are admirable ones for readers of the genre who know a little of the background of the field and have been reading magazine fiction for a few years or more.

The Bleiler and Dikty edited collection has been taken from one of a yearly American anthology whereby the best stories of each year are put permanently between covers. In this particular volume, from the year 1950, Grayson's have selected the best eight stories (from the original thirteen) to fit their book length, and presented such gems as Henry Kuttner's "Private Eye"; the child-psychology classic of Wilmar Shiras, "Opening Doors"; Fred Brown's brilliant "Mouse," the story of a tiny spaceship which came to Earth; a beautiful post-war story by Robert Moore Williams entitled "Refuge for To-night," and other material by Will Jenkins, Clifford Simak, Robert Spencer Carr, and the evergreen classic by Murray Leinster, "The Life-work of Professor Muntz."

A beautiful balanced collection of short stories containing something to suit all tastes.

Men Against the Stars, equally as star-studded with stories by top authors, presents a theme throughout its pages. Each story is fitted into the pattern of Man attaining space flight and making his way to the stars. It opens with Isaac Asimov's "Trends," a story about the first flight to the Moon, and goes on to the title story, by Wellman, depicting the probable struggles and trials of the men who will take the ships through space.

In this volume Robert Moore Williams has "Red Death of Mars," and van Vogt's brilliant "Far Centaurus" tells of the first flight outside our System to the nearest star. Other noted writers included in the collection are Hal Clement, H. B. Fyfe, Lewis Padgett, and Ron Hubbard, and Asimov has a second story, "Bridle and Saddle."

THE booklength novel is van Vogt's *Voyage of the Space Beagle*, probably one of the finest space stories ever told. Originally written as four short stories, the author has rewritten and connected them into a fast-moving highly intelligent novel of an exploration ship, the *Space Beagle*, charting and recording the various universes and systems of the galaxy their faster-than-light ship visits. But it is not these facts so much as the varying life-forms they encounter, and the *unearthly* types of science they come across which forms the basis of the story.

In one sequence of events they meet a cat-like creature who feeds on the energy of living beings; contact with another world finds a weird, bird-like race equipped with hypnotic powers; yet another adventure takes place in the cold blackness of space itself, when the voyageurs net a malignant monster which can transform its atoms, pass through metals, and absorb energy. But these brief plot outlines do not do justice to the smooth writing and exciting storytelling of a master craftsman. *Space Beagle* is adult science fiction right out of the top drawer. J.C.