NEW WORLDS
SCIENCE FICTION

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Belfast

"Editor Carnell has suggested that if fantasy art in this country deteriorates any further it will cease to grace the pages of this magazine at least — can you imagine *New Worlds* without interiors ? However, few of our artists show the inventiveness of American artists and it can well be argued that our magazine would do better without interior illustrations. But to pinpoint the seeming failure of British artists would require many more words than this brief comment.

"The most pointed reason for my own economy of line in recent months has been lack of time—and still is. Commissions for science fiction are few and my services are often better employed elsewhere although I would prefer to spend all my time working in our own specialised medium. Intricate line-work was once my pride and pleasure but for the time being I will have to continue my approach to fantasy work with the simpler style that has been evident of late—but that simpler method is not synonymous with poor work. I intend to apply myself just as diligently to our favourite medium as time will allow and occasionally I may even produce work that readers term as "back to form."

"Finally, I am still learning to draw and paint and the joy of new discovery in my efforts is one of the minor pleasures of life as an illustrator."

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Horrors To Come ?

One of the first remarks Arthur Clarke made to me upon his recent return from another underwater filming expedition (this time off the coast of Ceylon) was " I've just seen the film *Forbidden Planet*—it's excellent ! At last Hollywood has produced a motion picture which does justice to science fiction and I hope that it marks the beginning of a new trend." Here is the considered opinion of the man who probably commands more respect among the general public *and* the various scientific stratas than any other writer in the world. The fact that I had previously agreed with his views in the June film review and most British newspapers also gave excellent reviews must surely mean that amongst the experts their considered opinion is that it is *the* best film so far.

Yet we have a most peculiar *contretemps* in the opinion of a prominent Hollywood personality who has been a leading participant in interesting American film companies in the production of science fiction films. Writing in the Australian magazine *Etherline*, Forrest J. Ackerman states : " Followers of this department who may think that I enthuse about all science fiction films had better prepare for a shock—*I did not like* ' *Forbidden Planet.*' I was *almost* as disappointed in it as ' Conquest Of Space.' Among the ' forbidden ' things should have been the comic relief of Robbie-The-Robot (and) the story is astenuous as the vacuum of space."

While expressing his dissatisfaction in general with the film (which took three years to make at a cost of $ 3,000,000) he does add the qualifying remark that he only saw a preview and by the judicial use of editing it could be much better.

This, surely, is a case of the resident expert not being able to see the wood for the trees, yet is all the more surprising considering the appalling amount of junk which has come from Hollywood labelled " science fiction " and, if Mr. Ackerman's predictions are to be considered correct, then an even greater avalanche of celluloid slush is shortly to be inflicted upon us—American publicity having decided that the horror and monster film can best be sold by allying the name to science fiction (as witness the atrocious publicity when " The Day The World Ended " and " Phantom From 10,000 Leagues " went out on circuit as a double feature).

Forbidden Planet, despite Mr. Ackerman's smog-shrouded opinion, is now the yard-stick for future films, taking the place so long held by *Destination Moon.* It is the almost perfect translation into a two-

dimensional moving image of magazine science fiction as read and enjoyed by so many thousands of readers for over two decades—although the book-of-the-film is so shoddy and low-grade that no magazine editor would ever want to publish it.

Let us be quite fair about *Forbidden Planet*—if you wish to be hyper-critical you can find flaws but there aren't many films that *are* perfect these days—until a better one comes along it is unwise to be too harsh about minor details and let us at least be pleased that M-G-M didn't include a floor show, two name bands, performing seals and a gum-chewing space-hand from Brooklyn. The film could so easily have been in the three-ring circus variety.

If you want to know what the Hollywood treadmill does to writers when they go there I can pass on some first-hand information from an author friend of mine who has just finished scripting his own book. It is like a giant mincing machine where ideas, inspiration and individual personalities go in at one end, are prefabricated into robot-like components, and shot out the other end labelled " This Side Up—Made In Hollywood." The result on the actual films made during the author-processing is a production-line assembly of cardboard characters all speaking the same dialogue with no individuality or personality. Not for the first time (or the last) have I heard a writer say " Hollywood? Never again !"

From this vast assembly line we are to be embellished with a stream of films with such titles as : " It Conquered Earth," " They Lived A Million Years," " The Beast With One Million Eyes," " The Creature That Walks Among Us," " The Girl From Beneath The Sea," " The Beast Of Hollow Mountain," " Earth v Flying Saucer," " Creature From Green Hell," and a host of other drivelish titles which can only empty still more cinemas in the course of time.

Giving Mr. Ackerman his due he does state : " It seems to me that there are too many films playing up the ' beast ' theme. If anything will kill the science fiction film boom it is a preponderance of this type of film." Surely the understatement of the year ! We need fewer horror films and more science fiction of the calibre of *Forbidden Planet* —but if there *must* be " horror " films (and some people must go to see them otherwise the movie moguls would not keep making them) then at least let them not be classified as science fiction.

John Carnell


SIDENT'S
PRIVATE
GERARD QUINN

It is inevitable that the mystery story will occasionally overlap into science fiction but few readers will have any objection to a first-class "who-dun-it." In the following story we know who is in trouble but not why. It is the reason and the method of application which makes the story so tense and exciting.

TIME WILL TELL

By Lan Wright

Illustrated by QUINN

I

Hal Romberg left the cross-city roller road a couple of minutes before he needed chiefly because he wanted time to think, but also because he believed in small doses of physical exercise. He left the main thirty-mile an hour strip and moved expertly across the decelerating bands before walking into the narrower side streets. He was still half a mile or more from the Centre, but the ten minutes or so he would need to get there allowed him time to ponder the reasons why the Director of Iberia City should need to call upon an industrial psychologist.

Romberg had met the Director only twice before in the course of business, but, although he was an old man, Calder had seemed to be a remarkably well-adjusted person. Therefore, assumed Romberg, he had been called in for reasons other than the personal needs of the City Director.

Above him as he walked the brilliant silver bands of the autoways carved wide straight paths between the towering pyramids of the buildings. High over the pinnacles, almost invisible to the naked eye, the wide, arched sweep of the City dome completed Man's greatest monument to himself. Personally, Romberg had always been sceptical of the advantages of the hive-like community that made up the City. He had read in the course of his studies about the seeming lack of psychological illness in the old days before mankind began to congregate. All the contemporary authorities took the view that it was due to the lack of psychiatric knowledge in those far off days, but Romberg had his private doubts that improved techniques were entirely responsible for the rising figures over the past half century.

The white stone-and-metal block of the Centre was on him almost before he realised it, and he walked up the wide steps and through the colonnaded arch of the main entrance. His request to see the Director brought raised eyebrows from the supercilious blonde at the main enquiry desk; the afterthought that he had an appointment changed the girl's outlook, and brought forth a uniformed guide who whisked him into an express lift up to the top floor of the three hundred story building, where Calder had his offices.

Two more secretaries and a security guard lay between the outer office and the ornate inner sanctum that was City Director Calder's headquarters. Calder himself, despite his age, still retained the powerful frame and hunched shoulders of an athlete. His great dome of a head was almost entirely bald, and wisps of hair, white and silky, sprouted incongruously from around his ear lobes.

He greeted Romberg warmly and motioned him to a chair beside his desk.

"You're probably wondering why I want a man of your talents," he smiled, his blue eyes appraisingly on Romberg's neatly dressed form.

Romberg smiled in return. "I must confess that the thought had crossed my mind. I came to the conclusion that it was not for personal diagnosis at all."

"That's kind of you." Calder folded his hands on the desk before him. "No, it isn't personal in that sense. Tell me, what do you know about accidents?"

Romberg blinked in surprise. Calder had come to the point so rapidly that he was caught quite off guard by the question.

"What type of accidents do you mean?" he enquired cautiously.

"I mean the incidence of various forms of neurosis occurring in industrial accidents. That is, accidents which affect the safe running of the City."

Romberg shrugged. "I can't say I've made a study of it."

Calder nodded slowly. "Not many people have. I am one of the few, but I'm not a psychologist." He leaned back and made a pyramid with his fingers in front of his face. "The City, Mister Romberg, is a very complicated machine. Each section and each part of that machine is entirely dependent on all the other parts. All of which is why an accident to one section can be fatal to the whole if it takes place at the right time and under the right circumstances."

Romberg nodded agreement, uncertain exactly what line of thought the Director was developing.

"Do you know anything at all about the number of accidents which take place each week or each month in the various parts of the city?"

"Well, as far as figures go I'm as ignorant as the next man," replied Romberg. "Oh, I hear rumours and see items in the news sheets. There are the flashes on the telescreens that a generator has thrown a sector into darkness, or there's been a holdup on a section of the cross town road." He motioned vaguely with one hand. "Apart from that—"

"Quite so," nodded Calder. "And that is all any of the general public knows. The actual fact is, Romberg, that in the past ten years the incidence of accidents which directly affects the running of the City has risen by something like three hundred per cent."

The figure drew a whistle of amazement from Romberg.

"Those figures are not for public release so I hope you will respect my confidence. At first we put it down to carelessness on the part of some of the technicians, and we took steps to discipline those we thought responsible. In spite of that the figure continued to rise. You can see why we don't care to advertise the position."

"Naturally, but I don't see—"

"Where you come in?" Calder smiled. "You will." He tapped a large dossier that lay beside him on the desk. "This folder contains the entire record of every accident that has taken place in the City over the past ten years. It covers careless drivers, careless pedestrians, careless mechanics, everything in fact that can be tied down to a known cause. Those causes may be human or they may be mechanical. This file covers all those items, and it covers too,

everything that cannot be pinpointed. The inexplicable things which have no explanation, and you will be surprised how many of them there are. I want you to take it away with you and study it for as long as you may need to reach your conclusions."

"Are you looking for a psychological tie up?" asked Romberg.

"Possibly. Possibly not. It seems strange that the City should run itself so well and so efficiently for well over two hundred years and then, suddenly, over a period of ten years, begin to fall apart in so startling a manner, doesn't it?"

The final phrases were not lost on Romberg as he took the folder from Calder. "Fall apart? Is it as bad as that?"

Calder nodded sombrely. "One of these days something is going to happen that will be fatal not only to the few people immediately involved, but to the entire City—unless we can pinpoint the causes and do something about it in time." He rose and came round the desk. "Take your time about it, and if you want any further help don't be afraid to ask for it."

Romberg nodded. "I'll do that. One thing before I go, have you consulted any of the other City Councils to see if they're having the same trouble? It seems that if the whole business has its foundation in some mass psychological trends that they would have recognised the rise in the accident rate just as you have done."

"No, Mister Romberg, I haven't." Something in Calder's tone made Romberg look at him sharply, and he detected a grimness that should not have been there. "You see," went on Calder, "I am not convinced that the trouble is psychological."

"What?"

Romberg felt a hand on his arm, and Calder guided him firmly towards the office door. "There has been no war on Earth since the Blowup which resulted in the foundation of the City system. It occurs to me that we may be faced with a deliberate campaign of sabotage and if that is so—" He patted Romberg's shoulder. "I leave the thought with you for what it is worth. Don't forget to call me if there is anything you need."

Romberg was outside in the street before the full import of Calder's last remarks made itself felt on his bewildered brain. He did not question for a minute that Calder was sincere in his almost unthinkable suggestion. The possibility of inter-City war was so remote that it was non-existent as a topic of conversation, and a matter for speculation only by the wildest of imaginations. Yet here was no less a person than the City Director putting it forward as a serious explanation for an inexplicable rise in the accident rate.

Almost without thinking Romberg clutched the bulky folder tighter, and looked round to see if anyone was paying him close

attention. The weight of the file and its thickness told him that he would have a lot of work ahead of him if he was to give Calder a coherent report within a reasonable space of time.

He turned towards the wide stretch of the roller road, aware that there was within him something that he had not known since he was a child—fear!

He crossed the moving strips towards the centre band that would take him the greater part of the way to his flat, and pondered on the variables of the situation.

The whole question seemed to be deep-rooted in the general sociology that made up the City-State existence of Mankind. Romberg knew from long study that the City structure of civilisation had been thrust upon the human race by two factors for which the race was, itself, responsible. The first, and possibly the greater of the two factors, was the psychological 'growing together' of individuals within the race. This had gone on for several hundreds of years and had culminated in the semi-blowup war of 2073, when barely four hundred bombs of varying size and power had been exploded in three terrible days. Each bomb had left behind it the huge ugly scar of radio-active wasteland where, short hours before, had been a city.

Romberg shuddered as he thought about it. Once, in his youth, he had seen a colour film of one of the Pest Holes, and the sight had remained with him ever since. The bare thought that the green of the planet was marred by nearly four hundred similar sores was almost unbearable.

The remnants of the race had huddled together in futile protection hoping for the best and expecting the worst. The best was the foundation of the City State. How near the race had come to self-extermination had been shown by the rash of mutant births—caused by the radio-activity, and brutal extermination coupled with rigid self-discipline had kept the balance of normalcy on the credit side.

Each City State grew, under the urgency of need, beneath an all-embracing dome of protection which allowed only purified air to enter from the deadly "outside." Each City became a giant machine catering for the needs of its millions of inhabitants with the benevolence of an all-powerful fairy godmother. With the passing of time the machine had become more and more complex. Hydroponics and sea culture replaced the unused and unusable field, and arid acres of rolling grassland covered the once fertile agricultural lands of Earth.

Romberg was sufficiently intelligent to see the disadvantages of the situation, but, like everyone else, he could see no ready alternative. Now, his interview with Calder had opened up further speculation, and he began to wonder what would happen in a few hundred years' time if the machine broke down. He foresaw, somewhat gloomily, the gradual decline of the race through over-indulgence of leisure that was made possible by the efficiency of the machine that was the City. His wilder imaginings pictured a priest-ruled world where superstition had taken the place of knowledge, and human sacrifice accompanied the mystic ritual of pushing a button.

The sudden break in his gloomy reverie was accomplished by a violent push in the back which sent him spinning across the band. He dodged disaster by a mere inch as he came to rest on his stomach with his face overlooking the thirty-mile band nearby. He turned quickly, rising on one elbow to see who had been responsible for the nerve-shattering experience, and was in time to see a grey-clad figure skipping nimbly away across the neighbouring band. Clutched in the stranger's left hand was the folio which Calder had given him. Two others were chasing him and shouting, but even as Romberg watched the grey-clad form slid on to the slowest band and was lost in the distance.

Someone helped him to his feet, and someone else brushed him down with suitable murmurs of sympathy.

"Damn band jumpers! They're getting too cocky lately. They'll be robbing the Director himself soon. You all right, fellow?"

Romberg nodded shakily, and had to choke back a semi-hysterical laugh as he thought how near the speaker had been when he joked about the Director being robbed. If only he knew!

He forced himself to calmness, and made his way unsteadily across the slower bands to the solidity and safety of the sidewalk. After that experience he hardly felt like trusting himself to the roadway again. He walked into the nearest building and took the lift up to the roof. From there he treated himself to the luxury of a copter ride back to his flat.

Once secure in the comfort of his study he relaxed in an armchair with a long, strong drink to steady himself before he called Director Calder and broke the bad news. Somehow he felt an acute embarrassment at having to confess that he'd been robbed within minutes of leaving Calder's office. Placed in its proper perspective the incident seemed to bear out what Calder had said about accidents being anything but accidental.

He swallowed the last of his drink, intent on making his call to the Director, but even as he set his glass on the table the visiphone

buzzed on his desk. He crossed to it and completed the connection, watching with surprise and some apprehension as the face of Director Calder swam into view.

"Surprised, eh, Romberg?" The Director smiled slightly. "I heard of your unfortunate accident a little while ago. I hope you're all right."

Romberg swallowed his confusion as best he could and nodded. "I was about to call you—"

"To tell me of your loss." Calder nodded. "I already knew of it. Two of my men shadowed you from the office and reported back to me at once."

"I seem to have been rather careless."

"Nonsense. In any event it is of little consequence." Calder reached off screen, and lifted into view a folder—Romberg blinked—the same folder, surely, that he had seen disappearing with the grey clad stranger.

"Then your men caught the thief?"

"Unfortunately, no."

"Then—"

"I'm afraid I anticipated trouble for you." Calder smiled apologetically. "This is one of five folders which contain the statistics I told you about."

"Five?"

Calder nodded. "Details affecting a City of five million people over a period of ten years would take considerably more than the one folder I gave you earlier. That was a decoy. I wanted to find out two things. One, whether the reason for my summoning you was guessed at by other interested parties; second, whether it brought into the open some of the suspicions which I aired to you in my office." His lips pursed into a thin, grim line. "It seems that my suspicions were justified, and it seems also that we have drawn first blood in making the opposition reveal their existence."

Romberg shifted uneasily. "It could have been a band jumper," he put in.

"Do you really believe that?"

Romberg shrugged and then shook his head. "No, not now, I don't."

"You will receive these folders this evening, and there will be a watch maintained on your place of residence for such a period as you may require to complete your findings. You will be free to go where you please and do what you please, but there will always be someone at your shoulder, though you may not know who it is." Calder smiled and nodded. "Good luck, Romberg." Then he broke the connection.

Romberg sat back slowly in his chair and gazed at the bare desk top before him. Earlier, less than two hours ago, in fact, he had been feeling pompously important over a summons by the City Director. He had been slightly elated that he, of all the experts within the City boundaries, had been called upon for advice. Advice! He grinned ruefully to himself. Any qualified statistician could sift information from the data he had been given. Even assuming the Director's suspicions to be correct a psychologist was more likely to overlook details than a statistician would be.

Romberg frowned suddenly. A new facet of the situation opened up to him. Why an industrial psychologist? Why the hints on sabotage? A statistician could look at the figures and tell at a glance whether sabotage was responsible.

He shrugged and put the thought from him. City Director Calder moved in a world where decisions of policy were so great as to be above the minds of ordinary persons. No doubt he had his reasons.

II

It took Romberg just four days of concentrated study to bring to light one shattering piece of information.

His search and tabulation of the main bulk of the five folios, was not even started when certain preliminary figures showed one startling fact. Such things as fires in private residences, copter crashes, pedestrian accidents and the like had not increased by more than a fraction of one per cent during the period under review. The periodic variation of the figures was also limited to a similar degree.

His preliminary figures on industrial accidents showed an entirely different picture. Power plant failures alone had increased by three hundred and forty per cent over a comparable figure at the start of the ten year period. Road failures were up two hundred and sixty per cent. In every major industry or service upon which the life of the City and its inhabitants relied there was a similar calamitous increase in breakdown figures.

Romberg sat back shakily as the realisation was born upon him that a continued rise over the next ten years would see the end of the City as a living unit and shelter for its people. One day, in the not too far distant future, the accumulation would mount to a climax and there would be a disaster which no scientist or technician would be able to unravel. On that day the City would die—and so would its inhabitants.

Far more important was the fact that Calder's suspicions of sabotage now had a firm basic foundation. Had Calder not voiced

his fears Romberg new that he would have spent weeks, perhaps months, in chasing some obscure psychological explanation that didn't exist.

Thought of Calder stimulated Romberg's actions. He reached for the visiphone to call the Director's home. It was late evening and Calder would be relaxing in private, but Romberg knew that the seriousness of his preliminary findings was excuse enough for disturbing him.

The Director's face swam into view on the tiny screen, and he smiled a greeting at Romberg. "So late? It must be important."

Romberg nodded grimly. "It is. I've just completed a quick survey of the main features. I thought you'd be interested to know—"

He broke off as the screen flickered and Calder's face vanished to be replaced by the unbroken grey of an unused screen.

Romberg cursed silently and wondered if some minor piece of sabotage was responsible for the broken connection. Another call produced no answer, and a request for information from the automatic enquiry bureau elicited the information that Director Calder's phone was temporarily out of order.

Romberg relaxed and pressed his finger tips to his throbbing temples. He felt desperately tired and the minor frustration of the broken call did not improve his nervous tension. The wall clock told him it was after eleven, and reason told him to wait until morning. Somehow, he was convinced that sabotage was the reason for the broken connection; how, he couldn't guess, but it looked as if someone didn't want him to pass his information on to the Director.

The thought took hold and grew, bringing with it fear of the long night ahead. If they had tapped his call and knew he had something important to say to the Director then he dare not wait until the morning.

He got up abruptly and went into his bedroom to collect a night cloak for protection against the cool air drafts that were blown through the City during the dark hours to purify and freshen the atmosphere. Then he made his way to the roof.

He switched on the copter call-light, and had barely a minute to wait before the bright cabin light, surrounded by the dark body of the machine, swooped out of the sky and lighted gently on the flat roof. He climbed into the passenger seat at the rear of the pilot's cabin and gave City Director Calder's address. He relaxed in the soft padded seat and allowed the gentle hum of the engine to lull his jumping nerves.

A stirring in the luggage hold behind him reached the edge of his consciousness, but before it had time to register, something hard and painful blotted out the thought and obscured his being in a deep monotony of aching blackness.

How long the period of deep unconsciousness lasted he never knew. He did know, much later, that it had been pierced by moments of near clarity when self-awareness fought to push back the dark, enveloping curtain. The struggle was unavailing. The darkness kept flooding back.

Later still, though strict chronology was impossible, the dark was replaced by revolting, colourful dreams like the nightmares of a damned soul. Life and death, pain and passion, beauty and obscenity, all chased endlessly through his tortured, writhing brain in a hideous kaleidoscope that made him shudder ever afterwards when he thought about it.

There were moments when he thought he had won the battle back to reason and clarity, but these were all too short and were, themselves, tainted with the stuff of dreams and madness.

Then, at last he awoke.

Romberg was lying on a couch, and the blanket that covered him was rough and harsh beneath his fingers. The room in which he lay was deep shadowed and lit only by a low-powered bulb in the centre of a dirty, crumbling metal ceiling. The only other article of furniture he could make out in the gloom was a curved metal chair, corroded with rust, and with one leg bent and twisted. Awareness of his surroundings brought complete awareness of himself, and, as he sat up, wave upon wave of nausea swept through him, wracking every muscle in his body. His head dropped helplessly between his knees as he retched horribly, and he put up his hands to hold his head against the monstrous aching of his brain. His cheeks were rough under his hands, and he eased his fingers wonderingly through a thick scrub of beard.

The implication behind the strength and thickness of his beard hit him with a shock of terror that banished the sickness from his stomach and replaced it with the rumblings of unknowable fear. How long had he been out to be able to grow a beard like this? He stood up abruptly and staggered under the light of the single bulb to make out other details of his dress and person. And as he searched the fear grew stronger.

His clothes were little more than rags.

They were the cast-off remnants of a degenerate who could sink no lower. He almost vomited with the filth of them. In the sickly light he held up hands that were leprous with filth and streaked

with grime, and a closer examination of his befouled body brought him nearer to insanity than he would have dreamed possible in all his days as a psychologist.

He retched again and dropped on the dirty, hard couch, striving to seek some order in the jumbled madness of his brain. To one who had never been even mildly dirty in his life before, the sight of actual foulness on his own body was a sickening horror such as he had never thought possible.

Gradually he pulled himself together, forcing his mind to regain its self-control, and he began to focus his attention on the door. Outside it lay—what? He had a momentary vision of stumbling, reeking as he was, into the broad light of day, a scarecrow for all to see. Then he realised that such a wretched cell as this would not be allowed to exist anywhere near the upper levels of the City. His thoughts revived old stories he had heard of the half-life deep in the subways below the power lines and inspection chambers. What crime there was in the City bred there, among the degenerates who preferred the easy drift of drink and drugs and other vices, to the clean sweep of the psychiatric blade that could turn them into useful, law abiding citizens.

The Law Squads made periodic raids on the sub-levels, and occasionally during his career Romberg had been called upon to treat and cure the wretched dregs of humanity that had fallen into the net. Later, he knew, they were put to work on the more menial tasks within the City, and never did they return to the lower levels.

Romberg ran his arid tongue around cracked lips. The way out of the sub levels lay through the corridors and chambers of the power rooms, and he knew little of the City's layout below ground-level. Still, if he kept going upward—he felt a surge of hope at the thought. If he kept going upward he would be sure to meet someone, and even if they called a Law Squad he would be able to establish his identity. Eagerly he rose and crossed uncertainly to the door, his legs weak under him. The door creaked open on unoiled hinges and he found himself in a narrow, ill-lit corridor. He paused uncertain which way to go, and as he stopped a man came out of another door a few yards along and to the left.

He chuckled harshly as he saw Romberg.

"Hiya, bum. Ya'wake?" There was a rough accent to his voice that was vaguely familiar to Romberg, but that fact was lost under the sudden menace of the unfriendly greeting.

"Yes," he managed. "Yes, I'm awake."

"Then ya getta hell outa here!" The menace grew stronger as he moved towards Romberg, a giant of a man who had run to fat,

his heavy chins wobbling sweatily over an immense, sagging paunch. Yet there was power in the thick arms and heavy legs that spoke of trouble to anyone who crossed his path.

"Wait—wait a minute. How long have I been here? Please." The unconscious entreaty and the fear in Romberg's voice stopped the man in his tracks. "I don't remember much."

The other laughed, a croaked, evil sound that echoed in the cramped corridor. "Youse dope bums is all alike," he growled, and again the accent tripped memories in Romberg's mind. "Ya bin here three—four weeks, I dunno. I just fed ya the juice while the dough held out. Now its finished, an' ya get out."

A whole month! The horror of it washed around Romberg's brain as he tried to sort order out of chaos. "Look, how did I get here?"

"Ya pals dropped ya. Youse was hopped. They said to feed ya the juice until ya money quit. Dat's what I done. Now, ya find some more or ya git out."

He moved menacingly.

Romberg shivered and drew the rags closer around his body. "All right, I'm going. Which way is—is out?"

"It don' matter."

Romberg turned right, away from the menace of the grotesque giant, and stumbled along the corridor for nearly thirty yards before he came, abruptly, into a larger, better-lit subway. It was high and circular, a giant pipe, the floor of which was littered with the dust and debris of ages. Smaller pipes and corridors showed as dark holes in the length of it as it swept away to the right and left in a long arching curve. In the distance a vague figure moved slowly towards him, weaving uncertainly among the rubbish. Fear of the unknown moved Romberg hurriedly in the opposite direction, and he walked as fast as his shaking legs could carry him until he came to another and smaller pipeline. The tinkling music of water made him choose it in preference to its neighbours, and he had to walk along it with legs astride to avoid sloshing in the inch or so of water that ran down the centre of it. The source of the water was not hard to find. A broken tap dripped endlessly to feed the stream, and its flood was cooling nectar to Romberg's parched lips and mouth.

He quenched his thirst and stripped off the rags to wash some of the filth from his body. The water was icy and he shivered at the feel of it, but the discomfort was small beside the feeling that he was partially clean again. He washed the rags as best he could, and arranged them, still wet, about his body. The fear of chills

and pneumonia would be gone once he reached the safety of the upper levels.

He went back to the main subway and followed it for another hundred yards before he found a small alcove, apparently empty, in which he could rest. He sat down shivering in his damp clothes, but feeling better now that the grime had partially disappeared.

"Got a weed, mister?"

Romberg's stomach turned over at the whining croak, for he hadn't seen the owner of the voice moving slowly in the shadows beside the alcove, and the voice came to him seconds before the dark hunched form of its owner.

Fright and loathing prompted his snarled, "Get out of here, you bum," before he realised that he had spoken in unconscious imitation of the fat dope peddler.

Again the indefinable accent probed at the germ of memory. The hunched figure whined and moved away quickly. Romberg sat back, a little weak from the reaction, and tried to identify the harsh syllables and the quick, clipped tones, that were quite unknown in the upper levels of the City.

He sat up stiffly as a thought grew and took hold. In his time he had treated thirty, perhaps forty, of the shiftless wrecks that the Law Squads had taken in their sub-level raids, and never yet had he come across one who spoke with the same accent as the two he had encountered so far. They spoke in a rough, uncouth way, true, but their accent was, basically, the same as the normal upper level speech.

Romberg tried to take the fat man's crude tones and break them into milder, less harsh, framework. Very little effort was needed, for once the keys of his memory started turning remembrance brought a long forgotten flood of knowledge. And with the knowledge came greater fear.

Romberg knew, too well, that he was not in his native Iberia City.

III

On occasion in the past Romberg had met visiting celebrities, traders, students, and travellers from other Cities. Each of them had an air, a way of speaking, a difference of dress or manner that set them apart. Romberg recalled the dark-skinned, gaily-clad men and women from Solar City, on the plains of Africa. The pallid people of the Arctic and Antarctic domes were not so familiar as the heavy, brown folk from the Cities of the western continents, for the latter were the traders on whom the main roads of world commerce relied. And these were the ones with clipped, staccato accents of the fat man.

The knowledge that he was half-way around the globe from his native Iberia City brought with it the grim realisation that his position was worse than he had originally supposed. The very idea of giving himself up to the Law Squads and trying to tell them that he was a famous psychologist who had been kidnapped from his own City and brought half way around the world—

Romberg cursed viciously as he thought about it. He had nothing to back up his statements, and he could hardly tell them of his mission on behalf of Director Calder.

No, he decided; any help he got would have to be unofficial and of his own choice. In his early days as a student Romberg had met

men and women from many Cities. The international brotherhood of learning and knowledge had not been killed by the semi-isolation of the City States one from the other, and the first thought that came to Romberg was wonder if any of his old acquaintances lived in this particular City. If so, did they remember him and would they help him?

The first problem was to find out just exactly where he was. That wasn't difficult. A short search dug up an evil-looking gnome of a man who eyed him curiously when he asked, but supplied the answer.

And so, he was in the City of Great Plain, almost in the centre of what had once been the United States.

He had known several natives of Great Plain in his youth, but a number, who had been mere acquaintances, he ruled out at once. On the final count there were only two of whom he could be fairly sure. One, Anton Cullen, a drinking companion over a long period seemed the best bet to start with—if Romberg could solve the problem of reaching him.

It was over an hour since he had walked away from the grotesque giant in whose cell he had awakened, and the thought of action made him realise that there was a tight belt of hunger around his middle. His head ached when he stood up, and the need to get food was thrust painfully before him.

An hour later the problem was still unsolved.

By that time Romberg had found it was dog eat dog in the half light of the sub levels. Nine people had he asked for food, and nine people had laughed harshly when he told them he had nothing to offer in exchange.

The tenth didn't get a chance to laugh.

The proceeds of Romberg's first attempt at robbery with violence yielded a broken leather bag containing three tins—unlabelled—a dirty mug and a rusty can opener. He also relieved his victim of a jerkin that was clean and not too old.

By that time he realised that he had been dumped in the most disreputable part of the sub levels. The human flotsam he had come across so far was only the caste of sub-level life. He ate the contents of one of the tins, and knew grimly that one case of robbery wasn't going to solve his problems. The jerkin had been a good start, but shoes, trousers, a haircut and shave, and more food were the immediate necessities. Until he was reasonably respectable he daren't venture into the light of day.

The shoes and trousers cost him a split lip and a set of grazed knuckles. With the trousers went a few crumpled money bills

which got for him a haircut and a shave in one of the busier subways. For safety's sake he insisted on shaving himself before the barber got busy with his rusty scissors.

Half-way through the shave disaster hit him.

The amiable, wizened runt of a man was gnawing at the back of his neck with an archaic set of hand clippers, when he stopped suddenly, and asked, "Somethin' wrong wit' ya?"

Romberg lifted his head in surprise. "No. No—" and then he realised that he was shaking slightly from head to foot. The memory of his cold shower and the time he'd spent in wet clothes made him curse the thought of the chill he had caught. Then other symptoms following hard upon each other dismissed the idea of a chill and brought bewilderment with them. The shivering grew until every muscle in his body was jumping uncontrollably, and perspiration began to pour from his racked body even though he felt as cold as ice.

"Ya better lie down," the elfin barber said. "For cash I can fix ya."

"Yes—yes. Ta-take what you want." Romberg's teeth chattered terribly and he could hardly talk.

The man took most of the money from inside his jerkin pocket and was gone from the tiny metal room. He was back in a couple of minutes, but by that time Romberg was shaking horribly and his nerves had reached a point of almost uncontrollable hysteria. He hardly knew what was happening as the barber rolled up his sleeve to push a hypodermic needle into his upper arm. In moments the shivering subsided, and a feeling of warm well-being and confidence began to seep through Romberg's body. He lay back quietly, shaken by the fear of his experience.

"Ya mighta warned me ya was doo for a shot when ya came in," the barber complained.

"What do you mean?" Romberg demanded sharply.

The man sighed. "You hypos is all the same—" he began. Romberg stood up and grabbed him by one shoulder. "Take ya hands off me."

"What are you talking about?" rasped Romberg. "What was wrong with me just now?"

The man gaped at him and then cackled harshly. "Say that's a good one—that's the best yet. What's wrong wit' him, he says."

"I'll break your scrawny neck."

"All right, all right. I was only jokin'." Romberg released his grip. "Youse a hypo, mister. You bin on the juice, an'—"

"What juice?"

"D.V.L. The devil juice. What else? You want ta watch it. Take much more an' you're a gone goose, buster. Still, that's your affair."

A cold knot of horror settled deep in the pit of Romberg's stomach as the barber's words sank into his stunned brain. There came remembrance of the fat man's words when he had regained consciousness. "I just fed ya the juice while the dough held out," the man had said. But the significence of the remark hadn't registered on Romberg's dazed mind.

Everyone knew what D.V.L. alias the 'devil juice' was. In the hands of the pedlars and the addicts it was the greatest scourge of any narcotic known to man.

Someone or some persons, at present unknown, had dumped him with the drug dealer and paid enough money to keep him doped on D.V.L. and out of the way for almost a month. The deeper significance struck even greater horror into Romberg's being. A month on devil juice meant that he was a confirmed addict and subject to the terrible fits of nausea and hysteria from which he had just recovered. The shot that the barber had bought for him was enough to cure the fit. A far larger shot would be needed to bring on the dazed, erotic dream-state that was the ultimate desire of the addict.

The horror of the dream-filled nightmare had at last explained itself.

He sat quietly while the barber finished trimming his hair, and then threw the man the remainder of his small change.

"Which way is up?" he demanded.

"Up? Ya mean topside? Are ya crazy? In your state—"

"Which way?" insisted Romberg.

The barber shrugged. "Okay. It's your trouble, mister. Down ta the right from here an' about a hunnerd yards there's a ladder goin' ta one of the power rooms. It's only an auxiliary room, but it leads up ta one of the main power-chambers for the roller road. At the far end of the main chamber there's another ladder an' a corridor leading ta one of the inspection entrances. It opens out inta the back ways."

"Thanks. Think I'll pass muster in the open?"

The man eyed him critically. "Ya might—if ya keep clear of the Squads. It's dark up there now, but you better fix yaself up better 'fore morning."

It was well after midnight and the cool breezes made the air beneath the City dome fresh and sweet after the foul and dirty atmosphere of the sub-levels. There were few people about, and

Romberg knew that before morning he had either to be more respectable than he was at present, or safely tucked away out of sight of the Law Squads. His main—no, his only hope—lay with Anton Cullen.

It took him some minutes to locate a line of public visi-booths—and several more minutes to locate Cullen's address and call number. He memorised both before he realised that a preliminary call was out of the question as he had no money. A large wall map in the vestibule of the phone block gave him a rough idea where Cullen's apartment was. From where he was at present it would take him nearly half-an-hour to walk there, and it would be nearly one o'clock before he could knock on the door.

He grinned wryly. At least it would have the effect of ensuring that Cullen was alone, apart from family and servants—if any.

Several times during that walk he had to turn off the path to avoid meeting late strollers. He never let himself get nearer to anyone than could be avoided, and, as a result, the half became almost three quarters before he reached the apartment block wherein Cullen had his flat.

Fortunately, there was an automatic lift and no hall porter in sight, and he went straight up to Cullen's flat on the twenty-seventh floor. He rang the bell for several minutes before the door was opened by a tousle-haired oldster who had 'man-servant' written all over him.

"Well?" he eyed Romberg with considerable disfavour.

"Will you apologise to Mister Cullen for the lateness of the hour, and tell him that Hal Romberg wishes to see him."

"I suggest you wait until the morning," replied the other stiffly.

"Unfortunately, my business can't wait that long. I am an old friend of Mister Cullen's from Iberia City, and I'm sure he will see me."

Grudgingly, the man stood aside and showed him into a tastefully furnished anteroom. "I'll tell Mister Cullen, but I'm sure he will be most displeased at this hour."

Displeased or not, Cullen was out in five minutes, his black hair neatly combed and his tall, slim form elegantly attired in a red and green night gown.

"Hal! By all the stars! Where did you spring from?"

Romberg grinned happily at the greeting, and felt some of the worry slip from his shoulders. Cullen hadn't changed a bit.

"It's good to see you again, Anton. I'm sorry to have bothered you at this hour—"

"Nonsense. Sit down. Tell me things, boy. Where have you been hiding?"

Romberg sank gratefully on to a soft couch and Cullen pulled a low chair opposite him. As he sat there Romberg saw Cullen's eyes moving steadily and unobtrusively over him, and he knew he didn't cut a very elegant figure.

"Look more like a bum on the touch, don't I?" he said.

Cullen met his gaze frankly. "You don't look good, Hal. Down on your luck?"

"At the moment, yes, but not in the way you mean it."

"Well, if it's money—"

Romberg waved the offer aside. "Thanks, Anton. But it's rather more than that. I want to tell you a rather long and strange story, and I've got to leave out some of the details. At the end, I want some advice, and if you can give it, some help."

Cullen nodded and passed over an engraved cigarette box. "Go ahead."

The cigarette tasted good between Romberg's lips, and he launched straight into the story right from the time he had received Calder's summons. He omitted the reasons for that summons, and Cullen did not ask for them. He said that he had made a discovery without saying just what it was. Every detail, from the broken phone call onwards was too fresh in his mind to be forgotten. Even though a month had passed to the outside world it had been just a long night of sleep and dreams to Romberg. The horror and fear of the last few hours were translated realistically into words, so that, when he had finished, Cullen was sitting grim faced and serious.

Romberg stubbed the cigarette in the ashtray. "That's it, Anton," he ended. "That's why I've come to you."

Cullen sat back and shook his head in grim bewilderment. "It's rugged, boy. Sure is rugged," and then he lapsed into silent consideration of the facts. "Tell you what," he said after a few moments. "You sleep here to-night—I've got a spare room—and in the morning we'll see what comes out with the clear light of day. How 'bout that?"

Romberg smiled his thanks. Even telling someone made him feel better, more relaxed; and the thought of a soft bed made him realise how tired he was physically.

Cullen showed him to a small, quiet room, and left him with a reassuring, "G'night, Hal. An' don't worry too much. Something will come up."

It was late in the afternoon of the next day before Romberg awoke.

He lay on his back and looked out of the window at the towering City blocks outlined against the transluscence of the City dome.

The long sleep had done him good, and he felt better. At the side of the bed a complete set of clothing lay on a chair, and a half-open door opposite the foot of the bed gave a glimpse of a white tiled bathroom.

Romberg washed, shaved and dressed. The combination of a smooth face and clean clothes completed his sense of well-being, and he went through into the dining room. The butler came from the kitchen as he stood uncertainly inside the doorway.

"Mister Cullen is in his study, sir. He asked that you join him there when you have eaten."

Romberg nodded. "Thank you."

He sat down at the table and savoured the gentle aroma of fresh vegetables and fruit that lay in the coloured bowls before him. The first few mouthfuls were pure heaven to his palate, and served merely to whet his appetite for the grilled trout and herbs which followed the hors d'oeuvres. As he placed the plate of golden-brown fish before Romberg the butler hesitated, then he asked gently, "Is anything wrong, sir?"

Romberg looked at him in surprise. "Why, no. Everything is delicious." He moved to pick up a knife and fork and realised with a return of terror, what the man was getting at. His hands wavered so much that he couldn't hold the exquisite silver implements, and, even as he watched, the trembling grew worse. It spread through his body turning his legs to water. He pushed his chair away from the table and tried to stand up, but his weakened muscles wouldn't hold him.

He managed a choked, "Oh, God—" before the twitchings of his throat muscles made speech impossible.

Cullen came through from his study at a run as the butler shouted for him, but their brief conversation was lost in the roaring hysteria that crowded sound and thought from Romberg's horribly contorted body. He was only dimly aware that the two men levered him from the floor and pried his mouth open to force several white tablets between his lips. The water to wash them down slopped crazily over his clothes and on to the floor, but enough of it got past the reflex gagging of his throat to carry some of the pills with it.

It was several more tortured minutes before Romberg lapsed into unconsciousness.

He awoke to find himself lying on the bed again with Cullen and another man standing beside him.

"Hi, Anton," he said with a twisted grin.

"Look rough, boy," replied Cullen seriously. "The doctor here's fixed you up."

"What's the verdict, doctor?" Romberg asked.

The grey-haired man pursed his lips and shrugged. "Not good," he replied. "I really ought to report your condition to the authorities. But, Mister Cullen has told me some of the reason for your addiction, and provided you take a private cure in a sanatorium I'll take no action." He turned to Cullen. "I'll make some enquiries in a few days, and I'll act on the situation as it is then."

"Thanks, doc," smiled Cullen. "We'll work something out."

While he was showing the doctor out, Romberg sat up on the edge of the bed. His head ached vilely and spoke clearly of the sedative given by Cullen. He rose unsteadily and walked to the door. Cullen was in the lounge.

"Feel like a talk, Hal?" he asked.

"The sooner the better," Romberg assured him grimly. "I can't go on like this much longer."

They went into Cullen's study, a high cool room, with books around and a couple of pre-blowup oil paintings side by side over an old-fashioned wood-burning fireplace that was only spoiled by the built-in smoke-excluder which took the place of a chimney piece.

"Don't really need a fire," smiled Cullen as he saw Romberg's eyes fixed on it, "but it's restful and I think it looks nice. Sort of takes me back to the old days—before the Cities came."

They sat down on either side of the hearth, and Cullen went on to ask, "Thought about it at all, Hal?"

"A little, and I don't like what I've thought."

"So?"

"Look, I can't tell you what the deal is, but it was a pretty long-term thing I was working on for Calder. It isn't likely that anything would blow up in a month. It might take six months or a year to reach a climax."

"With you so far."

"I can't see the point of putting me out of the way for a month when whoever did it must know that at the end of that time I'd be back in circulation and keener than ever to find out what's going on. I've a nasty idea that a month was all they needed, and if I try to get back to Iberia and to Calder openly—well, I'm liable to have some shocks waiting for me."

"I see the point," said Cullen. "I suppose you've an answer?"

"With your help. I doubt if there will be any internal news from Iberia on your local files, but if you could get someone to

look up the news sheets and telescreens in Iberia about the time I got taken."

"Can do."

"Don't associate yourself with the enquiries in case they try to check back. That's item one. Item two, do you have anyone who might be able to check the sub-levels and find the fat boy who doped me? If you have then they might get a lead from him on who dumped me there."

Cullen looked at the floor, deep in thought for several seconds, then he nodded, "Yes, I've got a friend in the Law Squads who owes me a favour. I'll get him on it. Might take a couple of days. What'll you do in the meantime?"

Romberg smiled coldly. "How long does a cure for devil juice take?"

"A month to six weeks, a load of cash—and it's rugged, boy."

"Then I'll have to skip it for the time being. That is, if you can stand having a shaker around?"

Cullen laughed. "Sure I can. Anyway, the doc left some pills to shoot into you whenever the heat's on. They'll hold you for a while if you carry them with you. I'll get some more if you need them."

IV

Romberg stayed at Cullen's flat for three days while the enquiries were going on. He had three more attacks of the 'shakes' and was able, from experience, to judge their frequency at around twenty hours, plus or minus an hour. The tablets left by the doctor worked pretty well. They were no substitute for the drug, but they knocked him cold for a couple of hours, leaving him with a slight headache but without the shakes.

He spent his time mostly in Cullen's study, alone. He read from the extensive collection of archaic books, surprised that a man in Cullen's position should prefer this to the more modern method of micro-projector and screen. At first he tried to sit and think about the facts he possessed, attempting to knit his theories in with them. He didn't get very far, for his knowledge was too small. Neither did the first reports from Cullen's contact in the Law Squad help very much. They carried out a raid on the strength of Romberg's information, but, although they took eighteen people, including the wizened barber, the fat dope pedlar had moved on.

On the morning of the third day Cullen left Romberg alone after breakfast, but inside half an hour he was back. He joined Romberg in the study; his face, grim and pale as it was, told a story of misfortune before he had spoken a word.

Romberg smiled thinly as he noted the other's expression. Some intuition confirmed the correctness of his earlier speculations. He knew what Cullen was going to tell him, even if the details were, themselves unknown.

"It's bad, Hal," was Cullen's first remark.

"I thought it might be. I've had time to think about it all, and I can see only one answer."

"And that?"

"I'm still alive because I can do them no more harm. I can do them no harm because they, whoever they are, have had a month in which to ensure that I am incapable of hurting them. Anton, I don't think they would be stupid enough to make an elementary error like allowing me to live if there was the slightest chance that I could upset their plans.

"You want the details?"

"Yes, of course. Go on."

"Well, first of all, I've no proof that what I'm going to tell you is right. I've only my man's word for it. Seems that the clerks at the Central Records Bureau were warned to keep an eye on anyone enquiring about news items around the dates in question."

Romberg frowned. "Are they doing that officially?"

"I don't know. But it seems unlikely that anyone outside the law would have enough resources to maintain a check like that."

"Go on."

"The boy I had on the job made out he was after some technical data that was published around that time—"

"Get to the point, Anton."

"Okay." Cullen shrugged. "Briefly, you're the biggest rat and traitor since Judas Iscariot. You swiped some secret files loaned to you by the Director for secret research purposes, and lit out before they knew what was happening. They looked all over for you, even circulated nearby Cities, and that's an honour, believe me. At the moment the news has died down and you're just a small side-line in the "brief facts" column. I gather that all you have to do is show your face in Iberia and they'll chop your head off before you can blink."

Romberg studied the carpet between his feet, and Cullen fell silent. It was several long minutes before Romberg asked, "What do you think, Anton?"

"About what?"

"Me. Guilty or not guilty?"

"I get it. For my money you're clean. I'm a sucker from way back, but if you sold out on them like they say, you ought to be hitting the high spots somewhere on the proceeds, not swigging

devil juice in the sub-levels and rushing to your nearest pal to find out what's going on."

"Thanks. I appreciate it, Anton."

"What are you going to do?"

Romberg considered the question carefully for some seconds, and then he said, "I'm going to give away official secrets. If I'm to get anywhere I've got to have your help, and you can't very well help me without knowing what's going on."

Slowly and carefully, Romberg sketched in the details that he had left out earlier, and Cullen sat opposite, his face becoming more and more surprised as Romberg spoke.

"So there it is, Anton. Somewhere in those figures and folios is a tale of deliberate sabotage and destruction. It's clear that I was too close to the truth to be safe. The way things are I can only do one thing—go back to Iberia."

"Are you crazy?" bellowed Cullen. "Why, they'll—"

"Not as myself," Romberg interrupted gently. "Do you—"

Cullen laughed. "Sure, I'm way ahead of you. Do I know a man who'll give you a complete camouflage and keep his mouth shut. Boy, you must like trouble." Cullen shook his head in wry admiration. "I'll get things moving at once. With any luck you can ship out in a couple of days."

By his conscious time-sense it was only a week since Romberg had left Iberia City. The jumbled chaos of the drug-filled month in the sub-levels was a missing piece of his life which he could never recapture; it was a week-old nightmare, and the memories of it were almost non-existent as he stood on the broad sidewalk beside the cross-town roller road.

Cullen had dug up a make-up artist in less than twenty-four hours, and the man's work had been so effective that Romberg had hardly credited the change when he looked in a mirror afterwards. His skin had been darkened to a shade that matched Cullen's own light mahogany, and the eyes darkened to match. A dozen well-spaced hyper-protein injections beneath the skin-surface had filled out his normally lean cheeks. Tiny stitching at the back of his ears had pulled them closer to his skull and, at the same time, narrowed his eyes slightly.

No attempt was made to alter his bodily contours. Such efforts were not always successful and could easily be discovered if a close scrutiny was made. The effect of altering his gait and figure was achieved by dressing more flamboyantly and by wearing the flat sandal-type shoes that were popular in the western cities.

Even to himself Romberg was barely recognisable.

What he intended doing when he reached Iberia had not been clear, and when he told Cullen so the other shrugged resignedly and told him, "All right, boy. It's your affair. Just remember, if you get in trouble, Uncle Anton won't be around to help you out."

"What about the Doctor? He'll be checking soon."

"Forget it. I'll convince him you're taking the cure. Oh, I almost forgot." He went to his desk and took a bundle of papers and a well-worn wallet from one drawer. "You won't get far without these. At least you'll be able to identify yourself."

Romberg grinned to himself as he stood on the sidewalk, and his arm pressed the comforting packet of letters and papers that made him out to be Curt Lynn, financial adviser, of Great Plain, on holiday in Iberia.

Cullen had thought of everything.

During the two-day trip Romberg had stayed in his private cabin in the giant luxury coach as it sped through the long, wide tunnels beneath the Earth's surface. He didn't want to mix with the other passengers, and he needed the time to think. By the time he alighted at the Trans-Globe Travel Terminal he had a good idea what he intended doing.

His plan entailed no great rush, so he spent a couple of days after he registered at an hotel, in performing the usual round of pleasure and sight-seeing that any normal traveller would do. The only danger was the periodic attacks of the shakes. He had to be sure he was safely in his hotel room before the dreaded hour crept up on him. When they happened at night it was easy enough, but the daily ones meant that he had to miss a meal and plead some minor incapacity for his absence. He spent his evenings in the hotel bar and struck up conversations with several fellow guests. Even now, almost six weeks later, the treachery of one, Hal Romberg, was liable to crop up in conversation, and when it did Romberg proclaimed his innocence of knowledge loud and long so that his informants were only too eager to tell him all they knew. And that wasn't very much. All of them had the bare facts of the case, but all of them had, in addition, their own embellishment of the most hair-raising rumours.

Romberg's plan was governed by the fact that he had absolutely nothing to go on, and nowhere to start his search. Therefore, he reasoned he had to bring the search to him. It was almost certain that the scrutiny of enquirers at the Central Records Bureau was still going on, and it was there, on the third day of his stay, that Romberg went.

He sauntered casually into the main enquiry office and asked to see the news sheets and film records concerning the disappearance of Hal Romberg.

The clerk behind the desk eyed him speculatively. "Might I know the reason for your interest, sir?"

"Sure. I got in from Great Plain three days ago, and since then I've heard little else but this fellow's name. I heard all sorts of rumours and I'd like to read the full story."

The man nodded and made a note in the ledger beside him. "Booth number seven, sir. The films and papers will be there waiting for you. Just down the corridor and to your right."

Romberg thanked him and went in the direction indicated.

A small roll of film and two bundles of papers shuttled out of the pneumotube as he shut the cubicle door, and he settled himself in the easy chair to study them. The news sheets told the story a little more fully than the report Cullen's contact had made, but they didn't add to Romberg's knowledge. There were a few minor details such as a Law Squad report that he'd left his apartment hurriedly, taking only the secret files and a bare minimum of clothing and cash. A large sum of money had been found in his safe, and the authorities assumed that he expected to be well recompensed elsewhere for his treachery.

Romberg smiled grimly as he read it. He wished they could have seen him when he recovered his senses in the sub-levels. Perhaps they would have revised their ideas.

The film was no better than the news sheets. It merely repeated the facts in chronological order, and gave brief, uninformative interviews with a Law Squad officer and City Director Calder.

Romberg took his time over the records. He wanted news of his interest to filter through from the desk clerk to whoever was responsible for the check. It was half an hour before he placed the film and the papers in the Return To File tube and left the booth. He went to the desk and checked out with the clerk. The man recorded his going with utter disinterest, and no one else appeared to query his intentions.

It was a little after ten-thirty when he left the Bureau. It was too early for lunch and too late for a second breakfast, so he killed another hour over a few drinks before going back to his hotel. He settled himself in the lounge with some periodicals and waited for something to happen. By one o'clock the only concrete occurrence was the tautness of his nerves, which were stretched like bowstrings under the strain of waiting. He went to lunch apprehensively, wondering why the approach was taking so long. Perhaps the check at the Bureau had been called off? But the clerk's initial

show of interest dispelled that thought, for it wasn't usual to enquire the reason for anyone's curiosity over any particular news item.

Romberg ate his lunch slowly, not really enjoying the beautifully cooked dishes that were arrayed before him. It was nearly two before he finished, and by then he was even more worried, for soon he would have to go to his room and prepare for his attack of the shakes. If *They* wanted him while he was unconscious—

For the first time he wondered if perhaps he had misjudged the whole situation.

He ordered a drink and lingered over it as long as he dared while the tension built up inside him. At two-thirty he daren't wait any longer, and the rapidly approaching danger of a drug collapse in the restaurant drove him to his room.

He locked the door and turned the sign to "not in residence." It was just after three when the first twitchings of his muscles drove him to his bed, and he swallowed the tablets that lay handily beside the divan. As he fell asleep he wondered hazily what had gone wrong with his plans. Why had no one approached him? Had he been wrong to go to the Bureau? As consciousness left him an aimless idea hovered on the fringes of his mind—and was lost forever as sleep engulfed him.

V

He awoke with the dim realisation that something was wrong.

That last, waking suspicion was still with him, but it wasn't that which brought uneasiness as he lay quiet and somnolent, his mind wrestling hazily with a new and unknown wrongness. The dull ache in his head was the same as it always was when his drugged sleep left him, and his mouth had the all-too-familiar coating of nauseous fur. He stirred slightly and as he did so the fear came strongly to him, bringing with it further wakefulness. The cloth of the bedcover beneath his hand should have had the delicate softness of finely woven hotel linen. Instead, the cloth was rough and coarse beneath his idly twitching fingers. For a moment the remembrance of another time, when he awoke in horror in the sub-levels, made his head throb nauseatingly.

His eyes opened sharply and he blinked under the strong light that lanced through his aching head.

Around him the room was colourful and strangely furnished. It was neat and had an austere bareness about it that was alien in all his experience. The walls were white and plain, the furniture was made for use and not decoration. Much more important, it was not the hotel room in which he had gone to sleep.

Dully, Romberg totalled the factors in his mind. First, his interest at the Bureau had borne fruit. Second, *They* had contacted him at a time best suited to themselves. With the addition came realisation, and with the realisation came fear. Third, they had known about his druged sleep, and they had known when it would take place. Fourth—

And then he saw his hands!

They shook ever so slightly as he held them. The whiteness of them appalled him, for it was a paleness that was all to familiar—or had been a week earlier, before the makeup artist had got to work on him. Panic arose as he felt the lines around his face, seeking for the unfamiliar bulges and contours resulting from the injections. All of them were gone, and in their place were the old

angular lines of jaw and face, the firm hardness of an aquiline nose that belonged to Hal Romberg.

Fourth, *They* knew who he was.

The futile knowledge depressed him more than the fact of his being kidnapped. He got up slowly from the bed and crossed to the door. As he had expected it was locked on the other side. He stood for a moment wondering what to do. Before long someone would come and see if he was awake, that might be in a few minutes or in an hour. For a second he was tempted to bang the door and put and end to the waiting, but then—

He turned and lay down again in the same position as he had been when he awoke.

Almost he drifted off to sleep again as he lay there and the minutes slipped by. Then, suddenly, he jerked into taut awareness as a key rattled in the door lock. He relaxed, his eyes hooded as the door opened and the feet of the newcomer rang slightly on the bare floor. Romberg tried to peer through lowered lids, but the light was too strong for identification and he feared that flickering eyelids might give him away. He had a brief glimpse of a shadowy form against a white background, a glimpse that was enough to orientate his surroundings. He sprang wildly from the bed and lashed out with terrible ferocity at the approaching form. His reflexes were bad but his aim was good, better than it had any right to be under the circumstances, and he felt his fist land with bone-crushing force on the unprotected jaw. The owner crumpled silently to the floor.

Romberg half turned towards the door, intent on making sure that no-one had heard the slight scuffle. But something about the huddled form stopped him in his tracks and he turned back in growing bewilderment to look at the slim figure whose half concealed curves bulged informingly through a tight jerkin.

He dropped on one knee beside her, horror springing within him that he should have dealt such a blow to a mere chit of a girl. He cradled her dark head in hands and touched the swelling bruise on the left side of her jaw. As far as his medical knowledge went she didn't seem to have suffered more than a severe knock-out. For a moment instinctive chivalry urged him to bring her round and make sure that she was all right. The thought that she was one of his captors killed the idea, and he picked her up and dumped her unceremoniously on the bed.

His one intent now was to make full use of the opening he had carved for himself. The door was open and no one had been disturbed by the scuffle.

At the end of the short corridor a stairway led in a curve to the lower floor, and he went slowly down it, testing every step against the slight creak that might give away his presence. The room below was deserted, and a thick carpet acted as a cushion to his feet as he crossed to the door on the other side. The handle turned easily and through the small gap he could see the tidiness of a deserted hallway with two more doors on the far side. Through one of them, half open, came the whisper of murmuring voices.

As he opened the door wider Romberg could see yet a third entrance, glass panelled to give light. Through it a green symphony of flowers and shrubs glistened in the sunlight. For a moment panic seized him again. If that was a roof-garden then he was still a long way from freedom. He might have as many as one hundred stories to get down to ground level again and lose himself in the crowded rollerways.

He crossed the hall rapidly and gained the small annex. The glass door opened silently and he slid through in to the open, dropping almost on all fours as he scrambled to lose himself among the low shrubbery. His heart was pumping madly as he stopped and rested behind a large green bush that hid him from the doorway.

Around him sprang sights and sounds that were unfamiliar, and he sat straighter trying to place the myriad chirpings and twitterings, the hundreds of meaningless whispers that made up an alien atmosphere. Something black and quickly-moving shot on fluttering wings across his line of vision. His stomach turned over in horror as he recognised a bird, a large bird with a yellow beak and a black, shining body, a bird that he had last seen when his parents had taken him to an historical museum. It chirped and fixed him with a bright, beady eye as he moved suddenly under the impulse of his fear—then it was gone in a flurry of wings up into the clear, blue sky.

Romberg croaked with the sudden fear that dried his throat and turned his stomach to water. There were no birds in the Cities. There never had been. And above him, where the creature had vanished into the heavens, there were no towering spires, no pinnacled buttresses to break the sky. Even the faint opaqueness of a City dome was not visible beneath the glare of the brilliant sun.

All care was gone under the nerve-shattering horror that brought him to his feet and sent him staggering across the grass towards a low white fence. Beyond the fence was no yawning chasm that might have told him he was on the topmost floor of the highest building. There was only a rough, dusty concrete road that stretched into the distance between rows of odd two- and three-storied wooden houses.

Beyond them, heat-hazed by the sun and shimmering in the clear air, lay the clouded horizon of a distant range of hills.

Romberg sobbed hysterically as he lifted his eyes up to the sun-blinded heavens, and the full terror of agoraphobia swept over him. There was no City dome to protect him, he was out in the open with the poisoned air and fear of a million living things naked around him. There was death in a thousand forms and fear in ten thousand shapes.

Behind him from the house came a burst of sound, of voices raised in consternation and surprise. Feet pounded across the lower floor and he turned to run, to hide, to get away from those that were after him. To get away—to what? There were other people along the road in both directions, odd figures that moved slowly about their own affairs. The crushing bleakness of the heavens seemed to close in around him for there was no protecting dome to guard him; he was a child outside the mother womb, naked to a world he did not understand.

He crumbled, sobbing, into the dust of the alien roadway.

He was dimly aware of feet pounding on the ground near him, and a voice cried, "Here he is."

Around him feet clattered and arms hoisted him roughly from the ground.

"If he's hurt Karen—"

"Don't be a fool, Onslow. She was only knocked out."

"Only? I'd like to kick his teeth in."

They half carried, half dragged him back into the house. They bundled him into one of the lower rooms and into a chair. He sat there stunned and sickened by his experience, a little better now that there was a roof over his head.

"Take it easy," someone said calmly. "Here drink this."

He took the glass that was thrust into his hand and choked over the strong liquor that coursed fireily down his throat.

"Thank you." He managed to raise his eyes and take in the room in which he sat. It was cool and light, barely, almost harshly furnished. The chairs were padded hide and wood, there was no carpet on a floor of polished wood blocks, and around the walls rows of books completed a scene that was almost historic to Romberg's wondering eyes.

Behind a desk sat another man, an older man than the other two who stood by the door. He had a plump, round face that spoke of a joviality denied by the ice-blue eyes set beneath bushy white brows. At first glance he seemed a gentle humorous person, but

beneath the facade was a strength of will and determination that Romberg was quick to spot.

He smiled gently. "Feeling better?" he asked.

"Yes." Romberg nodded. "Yes, a little, thank you."

"It's a terrible experience when you're not prepared for it. You should have waited until we told you what you'd find out there." His tone was mildly reproving, rather like a schoolmaster warning a pupil not to play with fire.

Romberg licked his dry lips. "How—how is the young lady?"

"More angry than hurt. Blaming herself for allowing such a thing to happen. She'll be all right."

"It may sound silly," remarked Romberg. "But I didn't realise she was—well, a girl, when I hit her."

The man laughed. "I don't think I should tell her that when you see her. It might make matters worse."

Romberg flushed with sudden embarrassment, and hastened to change the subject. "Would it be too much to know who I'm talking to?"

The other bowed slightly in his seat. "Dirk Mallow," he said. "And this is Karen's brother, Carl Onslow. The other is Jan Rowan. So, you know us all. Now, what do you want to talk about?"

Romberg laughed at the quiet irony in the voice. There was so much he wanted to talk about and to know, and Mallow knew it. "I know some of it," he replied. "But not enough. I want you to fill in the gaps."

"If I can." Mallow inclined his head in brief acknowledgment.

"I know you and your friends were responsible for having me kidnapped and dumped in the sub-levels of Great Plain. I know you made me a drug addict—"

There was something cold and forbidding about Mallow's face, there was a hardness in the eyes that stopped Romberg in mid-sentence.

"You know so much, don't you?" Mallow's voice was cold with suppressed rage. "I thought by now you would have seen just what you were in the middle of, but apparently you haven't." He jerked his head at Onslow. "Carl, go and fetch our other guest for Mister Romberg to look at."

Bewilderment blotted the questions from Romberg's mind. This was the last reaction he had expected to what were, he considered, perfectly justified accusations. Onslow was gone from the room barely two minutes, but that period of time only served to extend the chaos so far as Romberg was concerned. When Onslow returned he ushered in at gun point a slim, pale man whose face and bearing

were familiar to Romberg. His eyes flickered fearfully around the room, but when they came to light on Romberg the fear became a living thing that blazed in his face and manner like a beacon.

Mallow chuckled sombrely in the background. "Recognise him, Romberg?"

"No." Romberg shook his head in puzzlement, but even as he did so the knowledge of the other's identity flooded over him in an all-enveloping surprise that turned his mouth dry and brought a return of fear to his entire being. "Yes," he nodded. "Yes, I—" but he could go no further.

"Rather a startling likeness, isn't it?" said Mallow. "I imagine whoever was responsible must have had the finest plastic surgeon in the world at his disposal. If I didn't know I'd have a great deal of trouble deciding who was the real Hal Romberg."

Numbly Romberg agreed with him. The stranger was exactly like the reflection he had seen so often in his mirror.

"Who is he?" asked Romberg.

"That we don't know—yet. I imagine the information will not be worth very much when we get it. It is his part in the overall picture we're interested in."

"I still don't see—?"

"Don't you?" Mallow sat down again and rubbed his hands down his cheeks in a sudden weary gesture. "You've still got a villain complex about us, Romberg. You think ill of us because we are all the concrete evidence you have of the mess you're in. I suppose it's natural. You haven't started asking yourself questions yet—at least, not the right questions. You've learned one thing to-day. You know now that life outside the Cities is not impossible. The Outside doesn't kill as you've been taught. We proved it over twenty years ago, and now, you're caught up in the web that stems from that knowledge. Ask yourself one thing, Romberg. Why hasn't this been known before? There's only one answer. It has been known before. Then ask yourself something else, ask why it hasn't become common knowledge."

He stood up suddenly.

"It'll soon be time for your tablets. We kept you drugged while we brought you here. Go back to your room and rest. Later, I want you to meet someone who will arrive in a few hours."

Obediently, Romberg rose and turned towards the door. He paused, his eyes fixed on the pale man who eyed him with such apprehension. Who was he? Where had Mallow got him from? The whole thing was a turmoil in his mind; nothing had been explained, and everything was even more confused than previously.

"Take him back, Onslow," said Mallow, and Romberg the second went almost eagerly out of the door, Onslow's gun a ready threat behind him.

"Meet someone?" Romberg turned back to Mallow. "Who?"

"Think about it and sleep," replied Mallow with a tired smile. "I will send for you when he arrives." The too-obvious mystery he was building annoyed Romberg but he could do nothing except follow Rowan back to his room.

As Rowan locked the door Romberg sank gratefully on the divan, eager to rest his shattered nerves and tired body. Mallow's last words echoed in his mind, bringing more questions and no answers. Who was he to meet? And how did the—this double fit into the picture?

There was water on the low wooden table beside the divan, and the white tablets lay in a plastic dish beside the tumbler. Soon he would have to take them, but before he did so Romberg badly wanted the answers to a whole lot of questions.

Somewhere in the tangled web of events covering the last few weeks there lay some of the answers. His visit to Calder; the robbery on the roller road; the broken phone call; the ambush that lurked in the rear of the copter. There were people, too. The drug pedlar; the wizened barber; Cullen and his butler; Mallow and his associates. These and a score of others known only by their faces, chased in endless circles through his thoughts. But still the question was unanswered. Who?

Who knew of his visit to Calder? Who knew enough to plan the robbery when he left Calder's office? There had to be a watch on his phone calls. There had to be copter waiting, available if necessary to abduct him. Once abducted, there had to be money to keep him out of the way. All of it spoke of a large and powerful organisation—an organisation such as these people, these "Outsiders"—could hardly command without some help from inside the City.

And then a light dawned!

Calder had provided him with a guard—in case the robbery was repeated or another crime attempted. The guard hadn't been around when it was most needed. And the phone call! It hadn't been broken off at his end. He remembered that the auto-exchange had said that the Director's phone was temporarily out of order. The Director's—not his. Suddenly the pieces fitted. The train of thought, once begun, moved surely to its conclusion.

Calder had the power and the resources. Calder was the one who had been in a position to co-ordinate the robbery. The fact that he had sent Romberg away with a false folio helped to confirm it. If Calder wanted to plant the fact of sabotage firmly in his mind there

was no better way of doing it. With that psychological push Romberg's entire study of the records had been directed to looking for evidence of sabotage.

Romberg pounded a fist into the softness of the divan. It all fitted, every single piece. When he called the Director by phone to report, Calder had broken the connection from his end. While he had dithered and wondered what to do Calder had tipped off his associates, withdrawn the guard, and left him wide open for the next inevitable step.

But still he didn't know why!

His hands, lying clenched in his lap, began to tremble slightly. Hurriedly, he reached for the tablets and water, and cursed the necessity for his action. The attack had come too soon for his thoughts to ferret out the full answer. He lay back as drowsiness plucked at his consciousness. Later, he would know it all. When he awoke, Calder would be waiting in Mallow's study, smiling his benign smile and answering the last and greatest question of all. Why?

VI

Romberg was awakened by someone shaking him roughly by the shoulder. He stirred, turned on his back and sat up, blinking his eyes against the light that flooded into them. He had a monstrous headache and a heavy taste in his mouth.

A voice said, "I should have tried punching you. It might have had the opposite effect on you."

Romberg focussed his eyes guiltily on the slim, dark form of Karen Onslow. As he did so she tilted her head slightly so that the light showed up the dull, purplish bruise on the left side of her chin.

"Come on," she said. "You're wanted. How many tablets did you take, anyway? You've been asleep over four hours."

"I was tired quite apart from the dope," replied Romberg. "And I'm—er—sorry about—" he gestured vaguely.

"Well, at least you have the good grace to blush, Mister Romberg," she taunted him gently. "Under the circumstances, and having regard for your obvious ignorance, I think I might forgive you." She spoke gravely, but there was an undertone of mocking humour that made Romberg feel even more uncomfortable.

"I suppose Calder has arrived.?" he said, turning the subject in his own favour.

"Calder?" The girl gaped at him in surprise. Then she laughed. "Oh, I see. You followed Dirk's advice and did some thinking." She laughed again with obvious humour. "And you figured on Calder. I can't wait to see Dirk's face when he hears that one."

Romberg felt bewilderment rise in him again. So it wasn't Calder they were expecting. Then . . .

"Come on," said Karen. "I imagine you're even more anxious to know who it is now."

Romberg rose from the divan. "Yes," he replied grimly. "Yes, I am."

He followed the girl down the stairs and across the entrance hall to Mallow's study. Karen knocked on the door and ushered Romberg inside. The plump figure of Mallow turned from the window as they entered, and from a chair beside his ancient wooden desk another figure rose to greet him. Romberg's eyes flickered towards it instinctively and came to rest with surprise and shock on the tall slim figure of Anton Cullen.

Romberg's jaw dropped in stunned amazement, and a myriad ideas and thoughts whirled in kaleidoscopic fashion through his brain. The last person in the world he had expected to see was Cullen, and yet here he was, grinning cheerfully and obviously relishing the humour of the situation.

Then as if a button had been pushed inside his mind, the whole mental chaos crystallised as the fact of Cullen's presence registered. He remembered how angry Mallow had been when he had accused the Outsiders of kidnapping him and drugging him. If he'd not been forced to take those tablets when he had that fact would have followed in its turn. He would have gone further with his thoughts and recalled that only Cullen and the make-up artist had known exactly what he looked like with his disguise. Only Cullen or someone connected with him, could have organised his removal from the hotel after he had gone to the Records Bureau. And only Cullen had known exactly when he would be forced to drug himself to escape the effects of the shakes.

It was clear, now, that Calder was at cross purposes with Mallow; it was clear that Cullen was an ally of Mallow. From there on the page was blank—all he could do now was to wait.

"He was expecting Calder," said Karen drily.

"What!" Mallow and Cullen looked at each other in surprise.

"I fell asleep before I had time to think any more," put in Romberg. "I'd only got as far as Calder."

Mallow smiled and nodded. "That's reasonable. Well, perhaps Anton will put you straight on the rest of it."

Cullen motioned Romberg to a chair. "I gather from Dirk that you think we are the villains of the peace, Hal?"

Romberg shrugged. "Under the circumstances, what else was I to think. I've been in the dark all along."

"Would you be very surprised if I told you that Calder was the man at the back of all your adventures?"

"Adventures?" Romberg laughed ironically and shook his head. "Right now, I'm willing to believe anything."

"At least you've got an open mind." Cullen lit a cigarette and pushed the packet and the lighter across the desk to Romberg. "We've been out here over twenty years, Hal. That's the first point. There are several thousand of us spread in isolated communities all over the world, living the lives which our ancestors lived before the Blowup. We're learning the old techniques of growing food in the soil instead of in hydroponic vats. We're learnnig to live on the produce of our labours as our forefathers did two centuries ago." He paused and flicked ash from his cigarette. "It's been known for half a century that the world was safe to live in again. The radiation's gone, nature has cleansed herself more thoroughly than anyone thought possible. The rain, the wind, the running streams have cleansed the land. The true strains of the birds and beasts were too strong for the mutant outbreaks that occurred. Fifty years ago a lot of important people knew that Man could go outside and take possession of his world again, but," Cullen gestured wearily, "no one who knew wanted to go. No one wanted to leave the Cities. The news was stifled, cut out before it could become too public. Later, a few people rebelled, a few adventurous spirits came out in secret and began living the life that Man was meant to live. They grew from a few people to several thousands who set up townships like this one. And yet the whole business has never been allowed to become public knowledge. Hal, doesn't that strike you as being very strange?"

Romberg remembered his own feelings of agoraphobia when first he had realised that he was outside the all protecting City dome. He magnified the emotion ten million times, the population of a City, and then shook his head. "No, not really. People are happy in the Cities."

"Are they? Perhaps that's because they don't realise there is anything else. And what happens if the Cities fail?"

"There's no reason why they should. Apart from sabotage."

"Ah, and there we have it. Calder did a good job of persuading you that all the troubles were due to sabotage. He didn't know any other answer himself, but that was the one he wanted. That was the answer he needed for his own plans." Cullen leaned forward in his chair. "There is another answer, Hal, one which any one of you so-called psychologists or psychiatrists would have seen at once if you'd wanted to. The City has become too big and too self-important. Its inhabitants regard it as all-powerful, a thing by which they live and without which they die. The City has ceased to be the slave, it is becoming the master. Why? The answer's there, in the attitude of mind of those who live within the Cities.

"Would you believe it if I told you that the whole human race is degenerating, slowly but surely, into a psychotic rabble that will soon be incapable of supporting itself? When that time comes what will happen to the Cities, Hal?"

Romberg sat stunned. He thought of his old fears regarding the rise in the rate of psychiatric illness. The old ideas that improved forms of diagnosis was responsible, were washed away if Cullen's story was true. He stirred and said, shakily, "But all this happened over a period of ten years! The records—"

"You saw the records for the past ten years," broke in Cullen, "but you didn't see the records for the past fifty. Calder showed you just as much as he wanted you to see, and what you saw backed up his sabotage ideas. This has been going on for a long time, Hal. It's a snowball that is growing bigger and moving faster as time passes. If you'd seen the records for the last ten decades instead of the last ten years you'd have had a different conclusion at the end of your studies."

"But Calder must have realised that something could be responsible. Why didn't he look for it?"

"Why didn't you and others like you?" countered Cullen. "You were the psychologists. No, Calder came up with the sabotage theory because that was what he needed to turn the whole business to his own advantage. He wasn't worried about other causes. Calder is a big man, but, in his own opinion, he isn't big enough. He, and the other City Directors have known of our existence for years, and they've regarded us as a serious threat to the safety of the Cities. Mankind is all nicely bundled up in tight little groups that are easy to control. The Directors didn't want anything to happen to upset that nice, tidy system. So far they haven't been able to do anything about us because they didn't want knowledge of our existence to be generally known. If it got out they're afraid others would join us, that there would be a general return to the thousands of scattered communities that existed before the Blowup."

Romberg was sitting straighter in his chair. "Go on," he said, grimly. "You've got me interested."

Cullen smiled. "That was the idea. Well, this has been the overall picture for years. We've got stronger, and the Directors have got more worried without knowing what to do about it. Calder came up with an answer of sorts, and with that answer came the clue to his own future greatness. Unhappily for him, he counted without our power and without your tenacity of purpose. He had you kidnapped—"

"And dumped in the sub-levels," broke in Romberg.

"Right. But with the help of our organisation you were dumped where we wanted you dumped. You had to be sent somewhere, so we just made sure that the place suited us. With you out of the way Calder arranged for your double to appear in Solar City splashing money around as evidence of your treachery. Naturally, it would appear to everyone that Solar City was at the back of the whole thing and that would have produced a diplomatic break. It might even have resulted in splitting the world into two camps."

"You mean Calder was plotting war?" said Romberg with growing horror.

"He was too clever for that. He planned that you should be released at the critical moment. He thought you would give yourself up to the Law Squads, claiming you'd been kidnapped. Calder would then be able to produce you, announce the existence of the Outsiders, and blame them for trying to cause unrest between the Cities. Your double was supposed to confess his part in the plot, and the diplomatic break would have been healed by the diligence and foresight of City Director Calder."

"I begin to see the light," remarked Romberg softly. "With my evidence to back him up he would call for some action to be taken against the Outsiders, and after his efforts in uncovering the whole ghastly plot he was almost certain to be invited to lead any concerted action that was taken."

"And from there," broke in Cullen, "it was only a short step to overall leadership of the City States. He was gambling heavily, but it might just have come off but for two things."

"And they were?"

"First, we got your double out of the way before he could act his part. Second, you didn't give yourself up to the Law as he expected."

"Yes. But how did you know I'd contact you?" asked Romberg.

Cullen grinned. "Psychology. We'd fixed for you to be left in Great Plain, and you only knew two people there. One of them would have been unavailable, and the other—"

"Was you," grinned Romberg. "And of course, if I'd gone to Law Squads that was covered as well!"

"Right."

"But then, once having got hold of me, why did you turn me loose in Iberia again?"

"If you hadn't decided to go yourself, I'd have persuaded you. You see, we'd got Calder on the run and we had to make sure he didn't stop. He was worried about the disappearance of the man acting as your double, but that didn't upset his plans altogether. He still intended to go ahead without the planned diplomatic break.

He could still produce you and expose the plot. But then," Cullen grinned, "you vanished and Calder was up against it. He was really worried about the apparent strength of our organisation, and he hesitated, wondering what to do next. He still couldn't reveal our existence without something in the way of evidence to back up the hostile stories he wanted to spread."

"So you dangled me under his nose as bait."

"Right. And he bit. He got your fingerprints when you visited the Records Bureau, and knew at once that you had been an agent of the Outsiders all along—"

"But—?"

"But you hadn't. I know," grinned Cullen. "But that's the way it looked to Calder. He was faced with a large, well-organised and extremely clever enemy that had not only frustrated his own plans but had got concrete evidence to use against him into the bargain. His plan blew up in his face, and we can now make our own entry into the world as a free and desirable group of citizens. We can spread the good news that Man can live outside if he wants to, and we can act as a safety valve if the City structure breaks down too fast." Cullen laughed out loud. "And there isn't a damned thing Calder can do about it without signing his own death warrant."

"And you want my help?" asked Romberg.

"Of course." Cullen looked at him in surprise. "You mean you aren't convinced?"

Romberg laughed. "Yes, I'm convinced."

"We need a good psychologist," put in Mallow.

"Did you know, Hal," said Cullen, "that before the Blowup the human race had reached the Moon by rocket?"

Romberg looked surprised. "No. I thought it was impossible."

"It is at the moment. But three weeks before Mankind blasted itself into these hot-houses, four men landed a rocket on the plain of Tycho's Crater." He paused sombrely. "They died up there, watching their world blast itself back five hundred years. I read about it once in a history book when I was a kid, and I knew even then that before we could follow them we had to get out of the Cities and live under the open skies as our ancestors had done before us."

Cullen paused and grinned at Romberg. "I've got a feeling that City Director Calder helped us more than he knew when he made his plan for power. How do you feel about it, Hal?"

For the first time in weeks Romberg felt at peace. Once cured of his addiction for drugs he would have some purpose in his life for the first time he could remember. It would be good to do some real work for once. As for the future—only time would tell.

Lan Wright.

We have long been of the opinion that Brian Aldiss is one of the brightest stars in the field of British science fiction short story writing. As proof of this contention we learn that a collection of his works will be published by Faber & Faber next winter. His latest story below is yet another proof of his versatility in this medium.

CONVICTION

By Brian W. Aldiss

Illustrated by QUINN

The four Supreme Ultralords stood apart from the crowd, waiting, speaking to nobody. Yet Mordregon, son of Great Mordregon ; Arntibis Isis of Sirius III, the Proctor Superior from the Tenth Sector ; Deln Phi J. Bunswacki, Ruler of the Margins ; and Ped^2 of the Dominion of the Sack watched, as did the countless other members of the Diet of the Ultralords of the Home Galaxy, the entrance into their council chamber of the alien, David Stevens of Earth.

Stevens hesitated on the threshold of the hall. The hesitation was part-natural, part-feigned ; he had come here primed to play a part and knowing a pause for awe might be expected of him ; but he had not calculated on the real awe which filled him. He had come to stand trial, for himself, for Earth, he had come prepared—as far as a man may prepare for the unpredictable. Yet, as the dolly ushered him into the hall, he knew crushingly that the task was to be more terrible than any he had visualised.

The cream of the Galaxy took in his hesitation.

He started to walk towards the dais upon which Mordregon and his colleagues waited. The effort of forcing his legs to go into action set a dew of perspiration on his forehead.

" God help me !" he whispered. But these were the gods of the galaxy ; was there, One with no material being and infinite power ? Enough. Concentrate.

Squaring his shoulders, Stevens walked between the massed shapes of the rulers of the Home Galaxy. Although it had been expressly stated before he left Earth that no powers, such as telepathy, which he did not possess would be used against him, he could feel a weight of mental power all round him. Strange faces watched him, some just remotely human, strange robes stirred as he brushed past them. The diversity ! he thought. The astounding, teeming womb of the universe !

Pride suddenly gripped him. He found courage to stare back into the multitudinous eyes. They should be made to know the mettle of man. Whatever they were planning to do with him, he also had his own plans for them.

Just as it seemed only fitting to him that man should walk in this hall, it seemed no less fitting that of all the millions on Earth, he, David Stevens, should be that man. With the egotism inherent in junior races, he felt sure he could pass their trial. What if he had been awed at first ? A self-confident technological civilization, proud of its exploration projects on Mercury and Neptune, is naturally somewhat abashed by the appearance of a culture spreading luxuriously over fifty hundred thousand planets.

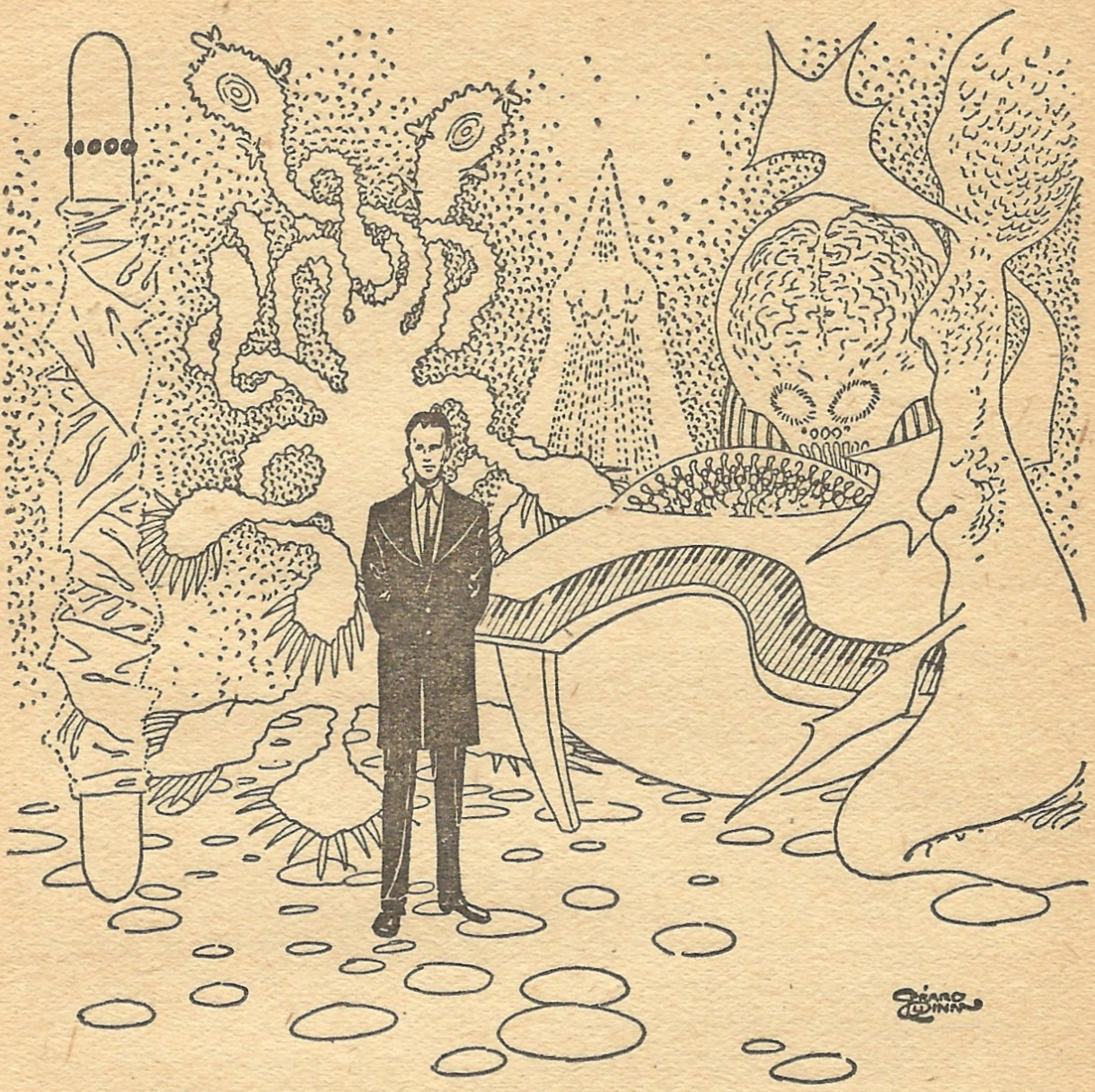
With a flourish, he bowed before Mordregon and the other Supreme Ultralords.

" I offer greetings from my planet Earth of Sol," he said in a resonant voice.

" You are welcome here, David Stevens of Earth," Mordregon replied graciously. A small object the size of a hen's egg floated fifteen inches from his beak. All other members of the council, Stevens included, were attended by similar devices, automatic interpreters.

Mordregon was mountainous. Below his beaked head, his body bulged like an upturned grand piano. A cascade of clicking black and white ivory rectangles clothed him. Each rectangle, Stevens noted, rotated perpetually on its longitudinal axis, fanning him, ventilating him, as if he burned continually of an inexorable disease (which was in fact the case).

" I am happy to come here in peace," Stevens said. " And shall be still happier to know why I have been brought here. My journey has been long and partially unexplained."



At the word 'peace,' Mordregon made a grimace like a smile, although his beak remained unsmiling.

"Partially, perhaps ; but partially is not entirely," Mordregon said. "The robot ship told you you would be collected to stand trial in the name of Earth. That seems to us quite sufficient information to work on."

The automatic translators gave an edge of irony to the Ultralord's voice. The tone brought faint colour to Stevens' cheeks. He was angry, and suddenly happy to let them see he was angry.

"Then you have never been in my position," he said. "Mine was an executive post at Port Ganymede. I never had anything to do with politics. I was down at the methane reagent post when your robot

ship arrived and designated me in purely arbitrary fashion. I was simply told I would be collected for trial in three months—like a convict—like a bundle of dirty laundry ! "

He looked hard at them, anxious to see their first reaction to his anger, wondering whether he had gone too far. Ordinarily, Stevens was not a man who indulged his emotions. When he spoke, the hen's egg before his mouth sucked up all sound, leaving the air dry and silent, so that he was unable to hear the translation going over ; he thought, half-hopefully, that it might omit the outburst in traditional interpreter fashion. This hope was at once crushed.

" Irritation means unbalance," said Deln Phi J. Bunswacki. It was the only sentence he spoke throughout the interview. On his shoulders, a mighty brain syphoned its thoughts beneath a transparent skull-case ; he wore what appeared to be a garishly cheap blue pin-stripe suit, but the stripes moved as symbiotic organisms plied up and down them ceaselessly, ingurgitating any microbes which might threaten the health of Deln Phi J. Bunswacki.

Slightly revolted, Stevens turned back to Mordregon.

" You are playing with me," he said quietly. " Do I abuse your hospitality by asking you to get down to business ? "

That, he thought, was better. Yet what were they thinking ? *His manner is too unstable* ? *He seems to be impervious to the idea of his own insignificance* ? This was going to be the whole of hell : to have to guess what *they* were thinking, knowing they knew he was guessing, *not* knowing how many levels above his own their IQ. was.

Acidic apprehension turned in Stevens' stomach. His hand fluttered up to the lump below his right ear ; he fingered it nervously, and only with an effort broke off the betraying gesture. To this vast concourse, he *was* insignificant : yet to Earth—to Earth he was their sole hope. Their sole hope !—And he could not keep himself from shaking.

Mordregon was speaking again. What had he been saying ?

" . . . customary. Into this hall in the city of Grapfth on the planet Xaquibadd in the Peripery of the Dominion of the Sack are invited all new races, each as it is discovered."

Those big words don't frighten me, Stevens told himself, because, to a great extent, they did. Suddenly he saw the solar system as a tiny sack, into which he longed to crawl and hide.

" Is this place Grapfth the centre of your Empire ?" he asked.

" No ; as I said, it is in a peripheral region—for safety reasons, you understand," Mordregon explained.

" Safety reasons ? You mean you are afraid of me ?"

Mordregon raised a brow at Ped^2 of the Sack. Ped^2, under an acre of coloured, stereoscopic nylon, was animated cactus, more beautiful,

more intricate than his clothing. Captive butterflies on germanium, degravitized chains turned among the blossoms on his head ; they fluttered up and then re-alighted as Ped² nodded and spoke briefly to the Earthman. " Every race has peculiar talents or abilities of its own," he explained. " It is partly to discover those abilities that you aliens are invited here. Unfortunately, your predecessor turned out to be a member of a race of self-propagating nuclear weapons left over from some ancient war or other. He talked quite intelligently, until one of us mentioned the key word ' goodwill,' whereupon he exploded and blew this entire hall to bits."

Reminiscent chuckles sounded round him as he told the story.

Stevens said angrily, " You expect me to believe that ? Then how have you all survived ? "

" Oh, we are not really here," Ped² said genially, interlocking a nest of spikes behind his great head. " You can't expect us to make the long journey to Xaquibadd every time some petty little system—no offence of course—is discovered. You're talking to three-dimensional images of us; even the hall's only there—or *here*, if you prefer it (location is merely a philosophical quibble) in a sort of sub-molecular fashion."

Catching sight of the dazed look on the Earthman's face, Ped² could not resist driving home another point. (His was a childish race : theologians had died out among them only some four thousand years ago).

" We are not even talking to you in a sense you would understand, David Stevens of Earth," he said. " Having as yet no instantaneous communicator across light year distances, we are letting a robot brain on Xaquibadd do the talking for us. We can check with it afterwards; if a mistake has been made, we can always get in touch with you."

It was said not with an easy menace, but Stevens received at least a part of it eagerly. They had as yet no instantaneous communicator ! No sub-radio that could leap light years without time lag ! Involuntarily, he again fingered the tiny lump beneath the lobe of his right ear, and then thrust his hand deep into his pocket. So Earth had a chance of bargaining with these colossi after all ! His confidence soared.

To Ped², Mordregon was saying, " You must not mock our invited guest."

" I have heard that word ' invited ' from you before," Stevens said. " This has all seemed to me personally more like a summons. Your robot, without further explanation, simply told me it would be back for me in three months, giving me time to prepare for trial."

" That was reasonable surely ?" Mordregon said. " It *could* have interviewed you then, unprepared."

"But it didn't say what I was to prepare *for*," Stevens replied, exasperation bursting into his mind as he remembered those three months. What madness they had been, as he spent them preparing frantically for this very interview ; all the wise and cunning men of the system had visited him : logicians, actors, philosophers, generals, mathematicians . . . And the surgeons ! Yes, the skilful surgeons, burying the creations of the technologists in his ear and throat.

And all the while he had marvelled, Why did they pick *me* ?

"Supposing it *hadn't* been me ?" he said to Mordregon aloud. "Supposing it had been a madman or a man dying of cancer you picked on ?"

Silence fell. Mordregon looked at him piercingly and then answered slowly, "We find our random selection principle entirely satisfactory, considering the large numbers involved. Whoever is brought here is responsible for his world. Your mistakes or illnesses are your world's mistakes or illnesses. If a madman or a cancerous man stood in your place now, your world would have to be destroyed ; worlds which have not been made free from such scourges by the time they have interplanetary travel must be eradicated. The galaxy is indestructible, but the security of the galaxy is a fragile thing."

All the light-heartedness seemed gone from the assembly of Ultra-lords now. Even Ped^2 of the Dominion of the Sack sat bolt upright, looking grimly at the Earthman. Stevens himself had gone chill, his throat was as dry as his sleeve. Every time he spoke he betrayed a chunk of the psychological atmosphere of Earth.

During the three months' preparation, during the month-long voyage here in a completely automatic ship, he had chased his mind round to come only to this one conclusion : that through him Man was to be put to a test for fitness. Thinking of the mental homes and hospitals of Earth, his poise almost deserted him ; but clenching his fists together behind his back—what matter if the assembly saw that betrayal of strain, so long as the searching eyes of Mordregon did not ?—he said in a voice striving to remain firm, "So than I *have* come here on trial ? "

"Not you only but your world Earth—and the trial has already begun !" The voice was not Mordregon's nor Ped^2's. It belonged to Arntibis Isis of Sirius III, the Proctor Superior of the Tenth Sector, who had not yet spoken. He stood like a column, twelve feet high, his length clad in furled silver, a dark cluster of eyes at his summit probing down at Stevens. He had what the others, what even Mordregon lacked : majesty.

Surreptitiously, Stevens touched his throat. The device nestling there would be needed presently ; with its assistance he might win through. This Empire had no sub-radio ; in that fact lay his and Earth's hope. But before Arntibis Isis hope seemed stupidity.

" Since I am here I must necessarily submit to your trial," Stevens said. " Although where I come from, the civilized thing is to tell the defendant *what* he is defending, *how* he may acquit himself and *which* punishment is hanging over his head. We also have the courtesy to announce when the trial begins, not springing it on the prisoner half way through."

A murmur circling round the hall told him he had scored a minor point. As Stevens construed the problem, the Ultralords were looking for some cardinal virtue in man which, if Stevens manifested it, would save Earth ; but which virtue did this multi-coloured mob consider important ? He had to pull his racing mind up short to hear Arntibis Isis' reply to his thrust.

" You are talking of a local custom tucked away in a barren pocket of the galaxy," the level voice said. " However, your intellect being what it is, I shall enumerate the how and the wherefore. Be it known then, David Stevens of Earth, that through you your world is on trial before the Supreme Diet of the Ultralords of the Second Galaxy. Nothing personal is intended ; indeed, you yourself are barely concerned in our business here, except as a mouthpiece. *If* you acquit yourself—and we are more than impartial, we are eager for your success, though less than hopeful—your race Man will become Full Fledgling Members of our great concourse of beings, sharers of our skills and problems. If you fail, your planet Earth will be annihilated—utterly."

" And you call that civilized—" Stevens began hotly.

" We deal with fifty planets a week here," Mordregon interrupted. " It's the only possible system—cuts down endless bureaucracy."

" Yes, and we just can't afford to watch these unstable communities any more," one of the Ultralords from the body of the hall concurred. " The expense . . ."

" Do you remember that ghastly little time-swallowing reptile from somewhere in the Magellans ?" Ped[2] chuckled reminiscently. " He had some crazy scheme for a thousand years' supervision of his race."

" I'd die of boredom if I watched them an hour," Mordregon said, shuddering.

" Order, please !" Arntibis Isis snapped. When there was silence, he said to Stevens, " And now I will give you the rules of the trial. Firstly, there is no appeal from our verdict ; when the session is over, you will be transported back to Earth at once, and the verdict will be delivered almost as soon as you land there.

" Next, I must assure you we are scrupulously fair in our decision, although you must understand that the definition of fairness differs from sector to sector. You may think we are ruthless ; but the Galaxy is a small place and we have no room for useless members within our ranks. As it is we have this trouble with the Eleventh Galaxy on our hands. However . . .

" Next, many of the beings present have powers which you would regard as supernormal, such as telepathy, deep-vision, precognition, outfarling, and so on. These powers they are holding in obeyance, so that you are judged on your own level as far as possible. You have our assurance that your mind will not be read.

" There is but one other rule ; you will now proceed with your own trial."

For a space of a few chilly seconds, Stevens stared unbelievingly at the tall column of Arntibis Isis : that entity told him nothing. He looked round at Mordregon, at the others, at the phalanx of figures silent in the hall. Nobody moved. Gazing round at the incredible sight of them, Stevens realised sadly how far, far from home he was.

" . . . my own trial ? " he echoed.

The Ultralords did not reply. He had had all the help, if help it was ; now he was on his own : Earth's fate was in the scales. Panic threatened him but he fought it down ; that was a luxury he could not afford. Calculation only would help him. His cold hand touched the small lump at his throat ; his judges had, after all, virtually played into his hands. He was not unprepared.

" My own trial," he repeated more firmly.

Here was the classic nightmare made flesh, he thought. Dreams of pursuit, degradation, annihilation were not more terrible than this static dream where one stands before watchful eyes explaining one's existence, speaking, speaking to no avail because if there is right it is not in words, because if there is a way of delivering the soul it is not to this audience. He thought, I must all my life have had some sort of a fixation about judgment without mercy ; now I've gone psychopathic—I'll spend all my years up before this wall of eyes, trying to find excuses for some crime I don't know I've committed.

He watched the slow revolutions of Mordregon's domino costume. No, this was reality, not the end results of an obsession. To treat it as other than reality was the flight from fear ; that was not Stevens' way : he was afraid, but he could face it.

He spoke to them.

" I presume by your silence," he said, " that you wish me to formulate both the questions and the answers, on the principle that two

differing levels of intelligence are thus employed ; it being as vital to ask the right question as to produce the correct answer.

" This forcing of two roles upon me obviously doubles my chance of failure, and I would point out that this is, to me, not justice but a mockery.

" Should I, then, say nothing more to you ? Would you accept that silence as a proof that my world can distinguish justice from injustice, surely one of the prime requisites of a culture ?"

He paused, only faintly hopeful. It could not be as simple as that. Or could it ? If it could, the solution would seem to him just a clever trick ; but to these deeper brains it might appear otherwise. His thoughts swam as he tried to see the problem from their point of view. It was impossible : he could only go by his own standards, which of course was just what they wanted. Yet still he kept silence, trusting it more than words.

" Your point accepted. Continue," said Ped[2] brusquely, but he gave Stevens an encouraging nod.

So it was not going to be as easy as that. He pulled a handkerchief from a pocket and wiped his forehead, thinking wildly, ' Would they accept *that* as a defence : that I am near enough to the animal to sweat but already far enough away to object to the fact ? Do they sweat, any of them ? Perhaps they think sweat's a good thing. How can I be sure of anything ? '

Like every other thought to his present state of mind, it turned circular and short-circuited itself.

He was an Earthman, six foot three, well-proportioned, he had made good in a tough spot on Ganymede, he knew a very lovely woman called Edwina. Suppose they would be content with hearing about her, about her beauty, about the way she looked when Stevens left Earth. He could tell them about the joy of just being alive and thinking of Edwina : and the prodding knowledge that in ten years their youth would be sliding from them.

Nonsense ! he told himself. They wouldn't take sentiment here ; these beauties wanted cold fact. Momentarily, he thought of all the other beings who had stood in the past where he stood now, groping for the right thing to say. How many had found it ?

Steadying himself, Stevens began to address the Ultralords again.

" You will gather from what I say that I am hoping to demonstrate that I possess and understand one virtue so admirable that because of if you will, in your wisdom, be able to do nothing but spare me. Since modesty happens to be one of my virtues, I cannot enumerate the others : sagacity, patience, courage, loyalty, reverence, kindness, for

example—and humour, as I hope that remark may hint to you. But these virtues are, or should be, common possessions of any civilization ; by them we define civilization, and you presumably are looking for something else.

" You must require me to produce evidence of something less obvious . . . something Man possesses which none of you have."

He looked at the vast audience and they were silent. That damned silence !

" I'm sure we do possess something like that. I'll think of it if you'll give me time. (Pause). I suppose it's no good throwing myself on your mercy ? Man has mercy—but that's not a virtue at all acceptable to those without it."

The silence grew round him like ice forming over a Siberian lake. Were they hostile or not ? He could not tell anything from their attitude ; he could not think objectively. Reverse that idea : ' he thought subjectively.' Could he twist *that* into some sort of a weird virtue which might appeal to them, and pretend there was a special value in thinking subjectively ?

Hell, this was not his line of reasoning at all ; he was not cut out to be a metaphysician. It was time he played his trump card. With an almost imperceptible movement of a neck muscle, he switched on the little machine in his throat. Immediately its droning awoke, reassuring him.

" I must have a moment to think," Stevens said to the assembly.

Without moving his lips, he whispered, ' *Hello, Earth, are you there, Earth ? Dave Stevens calling across the light-years. Do you hear me ?* '

After a moment's pause, the tiny lump behind his ear throbbed and a shadowy voice answered, ' *Hello, Stevens, Earth Centre here. We've been listening out for you. How are you doing ?* '

' *The trial is on. I don't think I'm making out very well.*' His lips were moving slightly ; he covered them with his hand, standing as if deep in cogitation. It looked, he thought, very suspicious. He went on, ' *I can't say much. For one thing, I'm afraid they will detect this beam going out and regard our communication as infringing their judicial regulations.*'

' *You don't have to bother about that, Stevens. You should know that a sub-radio beam is undetectable. Can we couple you up with the big brain as pre-arranged ? Give it your data and it'll come up with the right answer.*'

' *I just would not know what to ask it, Earth ; these boys haven't given me a lead. I called to tell you I'm going to throw up the game. They're too powerful ! I'm just going to put them the old preservation plea : that every race is unique and should be spared on that account, just as*

we guard wild animals from extinction in parks—even the dangerous ones. O.K.?'

The reply came fainly back : *' You're on the spot, feller ; we stand by your evaluation. Good luck and out.'*

Stevens looked round at the expressionless faces. Many of the beings present had gigantic ears ; one of them possibly—probably—had heard the brief exchange. At that he made his own face expressionless and spoke aloud.

" I have nothing more to say to you," he announced. " Indeed, I already wish I had said nothing at all. This court is a farce. If you tried all the insects, would they have a word to say in their defence ? No ! So you would kill them—and as a result you yourself would die. Insects are a vital factor. So is Man. How can we know our own potentialities ? If you know yours, it is because you have ceased to develop and are already doomed to extinction. I demand that Man, who has seen through this *stunt*, be left to develop in his own fashion, unmolested.

" Gentlemen, take me back home !"

He ended in a shout, and carried away by his own outburst expected a round of applause. The silence was broken only by a polite rustling. For a moment, he thought Mordregon glanced encouragingly at him, and then the figures faded away, and he was left standing alone, gesticulating in an empty hall.

A robot came and led him back to the automatic ship.

In what was estimated to be a month, Stevens arrived back at Luna One and was greeted there by Lord Sylvester as he stepped from the galactic vessel.

They pumped each other heartily on the back.

" It worked ! I swear it worked !" Stevens told the older man.

" Did you try them with reasoning ?" Sylvester asked eagerly.

" Yes—at least, I did my best. But I didn't seem to be getting anywhere, and then I chucked it up. I remembered what you said, that if they were masters of the galaxy they must be practical men to stay there, and that if we dangled before their variegated noses a practical dinkum which they hadn't got they'd be queuing up for it."

" And they hadn't got an instantaneous communicator !" Sylvester exclaimed, bursting into a hoot of laughter.

" Naturally not, the thing being an impossibility, as our scientists proved long ago ! But the funny bit was Syl, they accidentally *told* me they hadn't got one. *And* I didn't even have to employ that argument for having no mind-readers present."

" So that little bit of recording we fixed up behind your ugly great ear did the trick ?"

" It sounded so absolutely genuine I almost believed it was the real thing," Stevens said enthusiastically. " I'm convinced we've won the day with that gadget."

And then, perversely, the sense of triumph that had bouyed him all the way home deserted him. The trick was no longer clever ; to have duped the Ultralords gave him suddenly nothing but disappointment. With listless surprise at this reaction, he realised he knew himself less well than he had believed.

He glanced at the gibbous Earth, low over Luna's mountains : it was the colour of verdigris.

All the while, Sylvester chattered on excitedly.

" Phew ! You knock at least nine years off the ten I've aged since you left ! When do we get the verdict, Dave ?—the mighty Yea or Nay !"

" Any time now—but I'm convinced the Ultralords are in the bag. Some of the mammoth ears present must have picked your voice up."

Sylvester commenced to beat Stevens' back again. Then he sobered and said, " Now we'll have to think about stalling them when they come and ask for portable sub-radios. Still, that can wait ; after all, we didn't actually tell them we had them ! Meanwhile, I've been stalling off the news-hounds here—the Galactics can't prove more awkward than they've been. Then the President wants to see you—but before that there's a drink waiting for you, and Edwina is sitting nursing it."

" Lead the way !" Stevens said, a little more happily.

" You look a bit gloomy all of a sudden," Sylvester commented. " Tired, I expect ? "

" It has been a strain . . ."

As he spoke, the door of his transport slammed shut behind him and the craft lifted purposefully off the field, silent on its cosmic drive. Stevens waved it a solemn farewell and turned away quickly, hurrying with Sylvester across to the domes of Luna One. A chillness was creeping over him again.

Our Council of the Ultralords must be certain it pronounces the correct verdict when aliens such as Stevens are under examination ; consequently, it has to have telepaths present during the trials. All it asks is, simply, integrity in the defendants—that is the simple touchstone : yet it is too difficult for many of them. The men of Earth tortured themselves chasing phantoms, cooking up chimeras. Stevens

had integrity, yet would not trust to it. Those who are convicted of dishonesty perish ; we have no room for them.

The robot craft swung away from Luna and headed at full speed towards Earth, the motors in its warhead ticking expectantly, counting out the seconds to annihilation.

And that, of course, would be the end of the story—for Earth at least. It would have been completely destroyed as is usual in such distressing cases, but Mordregon, who was amused by Stevens' bluff, decided that, after all, the warped brains of Earthmen might be useful in coping with the warped brains of the enemy Eleventh Galaxy. He called it ' an expedient war-time measure.'

Quietly, he deflected the speeding missile from its target, ordering it to return home. He sent this message by sub-radio, of course ; dangerous aliens must necessarily be deluded at times.

Brian W. Aldiss.

THE LITERARY LINE-UP

Regular readers of this magazine will know that (editorially) we have been more than pleased with the progress author James White has made in recent years and so we have eventually prevailed upon him to attempt his first novel, serialisation of which commences in our next issue. " Tourist Planet " is a story that should please everyone—it has mystery and suspense, many twists of plot, and gradually moves into a van Vogtian type of finale. Next month you will meet Dr. Lockhart investigating the mystery of the ' dying grandfathers '—and the guessing game begins.

Four long stories make up the rest of the issue written by Francis G. Rayer, Kenneth Bulmer, George Longdon, and our recent American visitor, Richard Wilson.

Story ratings for No. 48 were :

1.	Who Speaks Of Conquest ? Part III - -	Lan Wright
2.	The Refugee - - - - - - - -	Alan Barclay
3.	Sun Cycle - - - - - - - -	Duncan Lamont
4.	To Make A Man - - - - - - -	John Brunner
5.	Period Of Quarantine - - - - -	Francis G. Rayer and E. R. James

This is a mutant story with a decided difference inasmuch as Sydney Bounds uses the delightful idea of employing the slightly "different" powers of a mutant human being to unravel the thought-processes of an alien race.

MUTATION

By Sydney J. Bounds

The telestat reproduced a formal message :

" The captain presents his compliments and requests the pleasure of Mr. Winter's company at his table. Permission to view the star-screen is granted if required."

Even as Robert Winter read the words, their implied meaning registered in his brain :

The captain regrets like hell that he cannot think up an excuse to avoid granting common privileges to a freak like Winter, who is a Very Important Person and must be treated as such.

Nevertheless, Robert Winter smiled and was happy to receive the invitation. He left his cabin and walked briskly along the main corridor of the interstellar ship, towards the forward control room. It had been a long trip and there was the desire in him to hear again the sound of men's voices, even though their speech would be guarded.

Doubtless, Captain Ffoulkes was praying that he would decline the invitation—but why should he ? He had stayed in his cabin throughout the trip, in deference to the unspoken wishes of all those aboard *Stella III*. Surely he was now entitled to some small measure of human company ? Or did they think he knew nothing of loneliness, he who was shunned by all levels of society . . .

Robert Winter strode the length of *Stella III*, a tall and handsome man with soft grey eyes and blonde hair : there was nothing about his physical appearance to set him apart from his kind. The corridor was metal-panelled, with concealed strip lighting ; the air was chemical-pure, throbbing slightly to the pulse of mighty engines.

Half-way to the control room, he passed one of the stewards ; the man did not speak, but moved on with tight-pressed lips and lowered eyes. Even his silence meant something to Winter.

I'm not opening my mouth—you read a man's soul in the words he uses.

He reached the door of the control room, and knocked once. There was the briefest hesitation before Ffoulkes answered :

" Come in."

I can't very well tell you to go to the devil, but that's how I feel.

Robert Winter, mutant, opened the door and walked in.

The control room was spacious and simply decorated in pastel colours. Beneath the star-screen, the pilot's console loomed like some mechanical nightmare, all dials and levers and push-buttons. The First Officer sat in the pilot's chair and Captain Ffoulkes stood with his feet apart and his hands behind his back beside the chart case.

Only the two of them in that large room ; the other officers would hastily have found duties elsewhere when the captain issued his invitation.

Winter walked forward and held out his hand to Ffoulkes.

" Nice of you to remember me, captain," he said warmly.

Captain Ffoulkes took his hand and grunted ; then, clearing his throat, he said :

" Below light-speed now—landing in a matter of hours."

And I'll be glad to see the last of you !

He waved a hand towards the pilot.

" You know Mr. Brand ? "

" Yes."

Brand nodded faintly in answer to the introduction ; he did not speak and seemed intent on his controls. Ffoulkes, a broad-shouldered, red-faced man, was at a loss for conversation. He swung about, abruptly, pointing a thick finger at the star-screen.

" That's the Andromeda nebula—Omega is the bright star in the foreground."

Must be careful what I say. Stick to facts. Give nothing away.

Winter looked at the black screen filling one wall. He saw a motionless spiral-form of lights, mere pin-points, distorted by a three-quarter viewpoint. Omega was an incandescent disc to the bottom-right of the screen.

" The rim of the galaxy," he said, musing. " The furthermost star from the centre of our own island universe. And beyond that, nothing for two hundred thousand parsecs—even *Stella III* is incapable of spanning that gulf in a man's lifetime."

" Omega is far enough from Earth for me," Ffoulkes grunted. " I'll be glad to turn round and go back."

Glad to get away from you.

" Will you take a glass of wine before we go in to dinner, Mr. Winter ? "

" Thank you, captain."

Ffoulkes made a ceremony of opening the sherry bottle and pouring the wine into two beautifully engraved glasses. He took his time over it because that saved him the trouble of speaking.

"A toast," said Robert Winter, raising his glass. "To a safe landing." He had been tempted to say : To a better understanding, but changed his mind at the last moment.

" To a safe landing," echoed Captain Ffoulkes, " and a speedy return."

Away from you . . .

" Shall we go in to dinner, Mr. Winter ? "

The captain's table was set apart from the others in the ship's dining room. Conversation dropped to a whisper as Winter walked in and seated himself under the mural portraying Man's first landing on the moon. Ffoulkes signalled to the steward and his signal implied:

Get this over as quick as you can. I have to sit here but I'm not enjoying it.

The meal began in a strained silence. At other tables, the officers of *Stella III* had been indulging in bawdy jokes and reminiscences, trivial gossip of home and the wives they had left behind. Trivial, revealing gossip. All that had stopped and the sound of heavy breathing and clatter of cutlery replaced it.

Winter thought : I'm losing the habit of easy conversation. Ffoulkes is married ; I could easily ask about his wife—but he'd misunderstand. He'd think I was prying.

He finished his soup and the steward removed the empty plate. Across the table, Captain Ffoulkes forced a smile.

" Embarrassing for both of us," he muttered.

Winter said : " You can relax, captain. I thought I had made it clear when I first boarded your ship that I am unable to read thoughts. My special ability lies in the fact that I read instantly the literal meaning behind words. It is no more than that."

Ffoulkes grunted non-committally.

What's the difference, you damned freak?

"Language, pictures, symbols," said Robert Winter. "Whatever mode of communication between men is used, there is always some loss of meaning, some confusion involved. But not for me. I comprehend the thought behind the words. The true meaning is immediately obvious to me."

"I suppose it's a useful thing to have," Ffoulkes replied.

"Useful—and disturbing. Because of it, I am avoided, captain. I am a lonely man."

The plates were cleared and dessert brought. Ffoulkes hurried the end of his meal, pushed back his chair and stood up.

"I hope you'll excuse me, Mr. Winter. I have some work to do."

I've done my duty—all I want now is to get away.

"Of course," Winter said. "I've enjoyed your company—thank you."

Robert Winter walked back to his cabin and lay on his bunk. Shunned by men because he was different; feared by them because he saw into the secret places of their hearts, he was alone with his solitude.

He picked up a book and read. And, as he read, the words became thoughts and he slipped into the mind of a man long dead. He understood completely what the poet tried to say with inadequate words; the whole, rich quality of winged imagination was his to savour.

Books were his friends. Words on a printed page, music from a tape, pictures on canvas: through them he conversed with other men. Confronted by him, these same men would have become inarticulate, afraid of revealing themselves. He could not be taken in with words designed to hide some base motive; through words he penetrated to the inner meaning and understood the man.

Winter was thirty-five and had been born with his special ability. Ever since he could remember, it had been an embarrassment to him; at school he had been hated and despised by other children. Growing through adolescence, avoided by every girl whose company he sought, he discovered the despair that loneliness could bring.

He obtained a job with the government, who were quick to find uses for his mutant talent; as human lie-detector in dealing with criminals, or in breaking the cipher of some potential enemy country; in promoting understanding between allies or searching out the abstruse meaning of mathematicians and philosophers. In these and similar roles he had no equal.

The realization grew in him that he was a man apart ; the first, perhaps, of a new species. His original talent isolated him from the main stream of humanity and, for years, he sought another of his kind. He found none on Earth.

In casual conversation, he learnt the base motives which drive men forward in the name of progress. The petty desires, the inherent viciousness, the self-seeking of those in high places ; all were bared to him in the words men used.

Sickened by his discoveries, he shut himself away from the world ; but not for long—the desire for company of his own kind forced him back into the society of men. They despised him because he was different, but he could not despise them ; he understood too well and understanding implied the acceptance of viewpoints other than his own.

Whether a man struggled to convey meaning or used language to hide it, he understood. Instinctively, he grasped the significance of the symbols used, without effort, as his birthright. Yet the reverse condition did not apply ; he could no more communicate the exact state of his mind than could another man to anyone but himself.

There had been a time when he struggled to create symbols which would resolve the confusion caused by an imperfect language—but not any more. The race of Man was not ready for full understanding.

He had left Earth for Venus, thinking he might be accepted into the more virile society formed by the colonists ; and was disappointed. His fame had grown with the years and already he was marked out as the man from whom no secret could be kept. He found himself as lonely on Venus as on Earth.

He travelled to a colony in a distant star-system, and again he found no companionship.

It was here that he met Natalie and suffered the ultimate torment. She was young in years but ripe in experience, a beautiful woman who fired his desire. He fell in love ; and she wanted him—wanted him for what she could get through him.

She spoke of love but her words lied. She was cold and hard and scheming ; a woman who calculated the risks and made her bid, to whom men were profit and loss. And she saw in Robert Winter the means to great power.

Her plan was simple ; by his talents, he would learn the dark secrets of men in positions of authority, and use that knowledge to extort money. Blackmail.

He could not do it and she could not understand why. The liaison did not last long. Winter's love could not stand the rack of knowing her base nature ; he left her and moved on to other colonies on other

star-systems. He travelled through the galaxy, alone and haunted by a love that could not be.

"Prepare for landing," ordered a mechanical voice over the cabin speaker. "Landing in thirty minutes."

Robert Winter relaxed on a pressure couch and thought about his visit to the planet of Omega, the galaxy's outermost star.

Archaeologists had discovered relics of an ancient civilization on this distant world; not that there was anything unusual in that—all through the galaxy, men had found traces of alien culture, of races who had lived and died before Earth was spawned. But here, on Omega's solitary satellite, were more than the usual meaningless bric-a-brac; here a written legend inscribed on endurable metal plates had been found.

No-one, so far, had been able to decipher the writings of this vanished civilization. Scientists throughout the galaxy debated in great excitement the discoveries that might be revealed when the legend was translated. And Winter had come to read it.

Stella III landed. Winter walked down the ramp swinging his grip while, behind him, someone began to sing. It reminded him that he had heard no-one singing on the trip to Omega.

The light had a strong orange tint and the air was warm and scented. The landscape reminded him of Earth, yet he was continually surprised by the unexpected shape of plants or a rock formation. The sun appeared larger than did the sun of Earth, and he found this somehow disquieting.

A man waited beside an atomic-powered runabout, a tall, gangling man dressed in shorts and open-necked shirt.

"Mr. Winter?" he said formally. "I'm Johnson."

I'm not opening my mouth more than I have to—you're here to read the alien legend, not me.

So it was beginning all over again, even here, at the rim of the galaxy. Robert Winter despaired of ever finding one of his own kind, or a society that would accept him.

"It was nice of you to meet me, Mr. Johnson."

The runabout carried them swiftly towards the colony, a scattering of prefabricated huts surrounding a tunnel that sloped down into the ground.

"Everyone here is excited by the idea of learning whatever message the aliens may have left," Johnson said. "We've been looking forward to your arrival."

And when you've translated it, you can't get out of here fast enough to please me.

" I suppose it's very old ?" Winter asked. " No hope of meeting a survivor of this race ?"

" There can be no doubt that this race became extinct long before Man developed on Earth. No doubt whatever. Our research places the time of this culture so far back in prehistory that any assignable date would be meaningless."

" What kind of symbols are used ?"

" A picture language—but the pictures do not tell a story in the normally accepted sense. We suspect that each picture represents a symbol in the alien language. The nearest thing I can think of are the hieroglyphs of ancient Egypt—though there's no real similarity."

The runabout stopped.

" We've a house ready for you," Johnson said. " I suppose you'd like to eat or rest before starting work ?"

A house well away from the colony. We don't want you prying into our domestic affairs.

" No," said Robert Winter. " I'll take a look at the legend first."

" Right ! "

Good. The sooner this is over, the quicker we'll get rid of you.

No-one else came near them as Johnson led Winter into a building near the end of the tunnel. No-one wanted to meet the loneliest man in the galaxy. A large room contained six trestle-tables and on each table lay a sheet of engraved metal.

" We took these out of the ground and cleaned them with acid," Johnson explained. " There doesn't seem to be any more. Let's hope these six sheets tell the whole story."

Winter walked forward to study the first legend. In this, he thought, he could forget. Forget himself, his despair, his isolation, his strange talent. A long-forgotten race had something to tell him—him alone.

He saw deeply engraved lines representing figures not remotely human. His gaze travelled from one symbol to the next and his excitement grew. Each symbol was more than a letter, a phrase even ; each portrayed a complete step in the history of the race.

Johnson asked eagerly : " Can you read it ? "

He nodded, not looking up. Each separate picture covered an epoch in the development of this race and there were . . . how many ? . . . enough to cover six sheets. Time became meaningless. The culture died before Man began and their beginning went back till the term prehistory became synonymous with the present day. His head reeled at the thought.

The aliens had not originated on Omega's planet. From the centre of the galaxy, their empire spread from star to star and planet to planet, ever outwards—even as Man travelled now, so many aeons later. They had reached this last planet at the edge of the galaxy, and gone on. Their science made possible the enormous jump from one island universe to the next. They had gone to Andromeda.

And all this was so long ago that it was certain they had moved on to yet another galaxy, remoter even than Andromeda.

Robert Winter experienced a great happiness, for here, at last, he found the understanding he himself possessed. This alien race had the instinctive grasp of the meaning behind symbols. Not one lone member of the race, but all of them. Their ability to communicate was of such an order that men's fumbling words were no more than animal noises by comparison.

He learnt that they had not always known this strange talent, but that it had grown as the race matured. There had been a time when some non-human creature had first mutated, even as he had. This one, too, knew the misery of loneliness, of being one apart.

Winter lingered long on this picture, finding it in the mirror of his own feeling. But other mutants had sprung up with later generations, until the whole race accepted the new understanding as something normal and no longer peculiar. It was then that this alien race had experienced a spiritual renaissance, for with the new understanding old conflicts died.

With this understanding, a racial purpose was born. The aliens had reached for the stars—and now they were gone.

The parallel was plain. Man was evolving even as this ancient, non-human race—and he was the first link in a chain which would encircle the universe. Robert Winter was the prototype of the new Man.

It would not happen in his lifetime. Generations were necessary for the change to take hold ; but it would happen. Long after he was dead, men like him would reach for the stars. He thought : next stop, Andromeda.

" What does it say ?" Johnson interrupted his thoughts. " Can you write down a translation ?"

Write it down and then get out of here, you freak. . .

Robert Winter smiled.

" Yes," he said, " I will write it all down for you."

It was night on the lone planet of Omega and Andromeda was star-dust in the heavens. Winter walked by himself, head thrown

back and his gaze on that distant spiral of light. He looked into the future and saw his own kind speeding away from the galaxy, outwards to the rim of the universe itself.

There was a song in his heart for he had discovered purpose in his suffering. He was no longer alone. There had been others like him before and there would be others again. The thought sustained him.

He returned to the present. He was a freak, isolated and despised ; he would walk alone all his days and know no companionship. That was a thing he must learn to live with, but it would be easier now for despair had been replaced by pride and self-knowledge. His understanding at last touched himself and he was at peace with the universe.

Sydney J. Bounds.

In the following article author Kenneth Johns gives us up-to-date information on the various theories that are and have been in current circulation regarding the birth of the family of planets belonging to our Sun. Readers are left to decide for themselves which particular theory they wish to support.

THE ORIGIN OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM

By Kenneth Johns

The why and how of the creation of the Solar System—our little group of planets, satellites, asteroids and central Sun—has baffled practical and theoretical scientists for thousands of years. Only now has Fred Hoyle given a satisfactory picture of the train of events that led to a small cloud of impurities condensing to form a solid body such as a planet.

In general, we can accept that the Earth was *not* created in 4004 B.C. Geological evidence gives it a past history of between 3,000 and 4,000 million years whilst the Sun has existed for at least 4,000 million years.

Of the dozen or so scientific theories that purport to account for the origin of our solar system, only one explains all the known facts of our planets. Few are able to account for the extra-solar planets that have been discovered.

The detection of planets around other stars than our Sun—although as yet only massive ones can be found by present-day instruments—is a vital point. It means that the Solar System is not unique and, consequently, any acceptable theory must not include wildly improbable coincidences. 61 Cygni is the best known example of a star other than ours possessing a planet ; actually 61 Cygni is a double star and its planet is almost star-like itself in mass, 17 times the mass of Jupiter.

Theories must also give reasons for the existence of the asteroid belt and the satellites circling the planets, and why the composition of the planets varies with their distance from the Sun. There is also the curiously large size of the Solar System to be explained, together with the tendency for its units to rotate all in the same direction and to have orbits not only in the same plane but also approximately circular.

And, lastly, there is the stumbling block to be surmounted of the angular momentum of the Solar System. If we calculate out the factor made by multiplying together the mass, circular speed and distance of the planets from the Sun, we obtain their angular momentum. Then we find that 98% of the total angular momentum is held by the relatively small planets. In spite of its large mass, the Sun has only 2% of the angular momentum of the Solar System.

The *Comet Theory* was the first. Propounded by the Compte de Buffon, it put forward the idea that a large body had collided with the Sun. The splash produced a gas cloud and drops of stellar material that settled down in orbits to form the planets. Buffon suggested that the intruder was a comet, a " comete fatale," but he was thinking in terms of a body the size of a small star.

The *Tidal Theory* was advanced by Sir James Jeans and, for a considerable period, was the most popular and generally accepted theory. He suggested that a star larger than the Sun passed close enough to the surface to produce a giant tide on the Sun. This was pulled right off the Sun to form an enormous cigar-shaped cloud or filament of gas. In time, this cigar broke up into sections and condensed into drops, forming small planets at either end and giant ones in the middle where most of the mass was concentrated. And—except for annoying Mars—the planets would fit into this cigar-shaped outline. The satellites were then produced from the tides generated on the liquid planets by the pull of the Sun.

Many of the faults in this theory were overlooked at the time. It is the theory which, as scientific fact, has received widespread publicity and has been absorbed by very many people. Any fresh thinking on this subject is likely to be upsetting to them. But this theory does not explain why the planets rotate, why their angular momentum is so

large, why the outer planets are such a long distance from the Sun, why the plane of the planets almost coincides with the equator of the Sun or why the orbits of the planets are not elongated ellipses.

It was later suggested that the large amounts of gas and dust which broke away from the cigar remained in the Solar System so that the planets had to plough through this debris, with the effect that their orbits became more nearly circular. The extended size of the Solar System was explained away as being due to the Sun at the time of the creation of the cigar being very much larger than it is now.

The *Planetismal Theory* put forward the idea that the Sun's surface in the distant past was continuously erupting in solar flares—and another star came close enough to pull these out until they condensed into tiny planets. Then they condensed together to form the planets as we know them. The objections raised against the Tidal Theory also apply to this one.

The *Collision Theory*, put forward by Jeffreys, covered the possibility that another star once made a grazing collision with the Sun's surface. This, again, does not remove the faults inherent in the Tidal Theory, of which it is but an extension.

The *Double Star Theory* involved the approach of a third star to a double star system. Almost half the stars in the Galaxy are multiple star systems and the greatest proportion of these are binaries. If at one time the Sun had a companion and a third star came close, it was suggested that the tidal waves or the breakup of the companion would create the planets.

This gives a reason for the angular momentum of the planets and, if the companion had an orbit near Saturn, explains the remoteness of the outer planets. However, if the mass of the planets does not account for the entire mass of the companion, there is no adequate explanation of what happened to the companion—why it should have been removed by the wandering star but the gas cloud remained. Nor does it fully explain why the planetary orbits are so extended.

All suggestions involving the approach of a star close enough to the Sun for collision or the drawing off of enough gas to form the planets go far towards assuming that the Solar System is a unique phenomenon. Statistically, it can be calculated that only once in 50,000 million years in our Galaxy will two separate stars approach near enough for their surfaces almost to touch. There is only one chance in ten of this having occurred since our Galaxy was formed so, if this was correct, the Solar System was a very long shot that came off. Even if the theory that one galaxy collided with another is accepted, it can be shown that in the denser portions of the Galaxy there are several thousand star

diameters between stars, whilst nearer our section with its lesser density the figure increases to 12 million. The two galaxies would merely intermesh and pass on.

The *Fission Theory*, whilst ingenious, is one which demands one of these wildly improbable coincidences. As a star contracts it spins faster and faster until, it was suggested, it split into two to form a binary. It was postulated that if an intruder star came near as the Sun was about to split, then the fission would yield a cigar shaped cloud of gas as in the Tidal Theory. The difference is that it would be thrown out with far more energy, explaining the distance of the further planets. But the whole sequence is so highly improbable, demanding the already small chance of two stars approaching plus the exact moment at which the Sun was about to divide, that it is as near improbable as to be impossible.

The *Cepheid Theory* is another of these complex jugglings of cosmic architecture. A Cepheid variable—an unstable star pulsating over a period of days or weeks—is anything from five to twenty times as massive as the Sun. It was suggested that another star approaching would cause it to throw off enough matter to condense as Sun and planets. An ingenious suggestion which does not explain the uniformity of the planet's orbits, it demands the remote combination of cepheid, intruder star and new-born Sun.

One hundred and sixty years ago Kant put forward the *Ring Hypothesis*, which assumed a cloud of gas the size of the Solar System with a dense nucleus, the whole rotating. As it contracted under the force of gravity it spun faster and faster until its surface was spinning so fast that it was thrown off as a ring. This was said to have condensed to form a gaseous planet whilst the remainder continued to contract, other rings being thrown off at intervals. This theory explains the common direction of rotation of the planets, the circular orbits and the common plane. However, it is not accepted now as it does not explain the angular momentum of the planets.

The Marquis de Laplace adopted this idea and developed it into the *Nebular Theory*. He first produced his spherical gas cloud by a nova explosion of the Sun and then allowed it to contract and throw off rings of gas. These, as in Kant's theory, were supposed to condense to form planets. He had to explain the rotation of the Solar System as being due to the original rotation of the Sun before the nova, which does not fit in at all well.

Then, in 1943, Weizsacher in Germany evolved the *Nebular Cloud Theory*. He suggested that not only the Sun but the planets were produced by the condensation of interstellar gas and dust from a dark

nebula. The gas and dust, either left over from the creation of the Sun or drawn in by the gravity of the Sun, formed a giant, saucer-shaped envelope round the Sun.

Because of its high speed of rotation it was not pulled into the main stellar mass, thus accounting for the angular momentum of the planets. Then, by a process of collision, the particles in the cloud condensed to form the planets over a period of about a hundred million years. But it is now believed that it is impossible for dust particles to stick together of their own accord ; there must be some glueing agent present.

The *Electromagnetic Theory*, propounded in 1942 by Alfven, stated that the Sun's magnetic field should have as much effect on electrically charged atoms—ions—as does its gravitational field. Alfven postulated that the Sun entered a cloud of gas and dust which was attracted to it by gravity. Falling inwards, the atoms accelerated, smashed into one another and, with the radiation of the Sun, became ionised. Mathematically, it can be shown that these particles in a magnetic field would have accumulated in a ring near the orbits of Jupiter and Saturn and would have begun to rotate. Condensing, they formed the giant planets and their magnetic fields formed their satellites. But the theory did not account for the smaller planets nearer the Sun.

When a star goes nova it explodes, throwing off enormous quantities of gases. If the explosion is extremely violent, more than 90% of the star can be lost and the star radiates as much energy as the combined radiation of all the stars in the Galaxy. These are the few and far between supernovae.

Hoyle, in his *Nova Theory*, has suggested that if one star of a binary system explodes the gas could have condensed to form the Solar System. Sometimes the explosion is not symmetrical—as in the Crab Nebula—so a ring is formed and the recoil could separate the stars. The nova star could rocket out into interstellar space, leaving the cloud of gas behind.

According to Hoyle, the gas condensed to form solid bodies ; once a hundred mile diameter was reached the process was accelerated by the gravitational forces of the bodies. But these were not the planets we know. They were massive and unstable and broke up some 3,000 million years ago, the larger pieces forming the planets and the smaller pieces being caught as satellites. The remaining gas and dust in the Solar System slowed down the planets and gave them their nearly circular orbits.

Now, Hoyle has outmoded his first theory with a brand new one, the *Glue Theory*. It combines the best points of the early ideas and does give a logical sequence of events that could have occurred around most stars.

As a cloud of interstellar hydrogen condensed to form the Galaxy, it broke up into smaller clouds, each of which condensed to give a shower of stars. Some of these exploded as supernovae and the heavy elements created in their interiors were thrown into space. In time, a cloud of this material condensed, spinning faster as the cloud became smaller. When the Sun so formed had contracted until it was the size of the orbit of Mercury, the centrifugal force along the equator balanced the gravitational force of the main mass and the Sun formed a disc. The body of the Sun continued to contract, spinning faster and leaving the disc behind.

Then Hoyle took Alven's idea of magnetic forces interacting and showed that the spin of the magnetic field of the Sun would have speeded up the gases in the disc and that, as their spin increased, so they would have had to move further out. But as they moved out they cooled and drops and particles of the material condensed. Once they were no longer gaseous they were not acted upon by the magnetic field so they were left behind as the rest of the disc expanded. At different stages different materials condensed out of the gas with the ability to bind the particles together. With Venus it was probably oil and Earth was bound together with oil or a slush of ice and water.

A number of rings with glues contained in them were formed and each formed a planet and the satellites. By the time Mars had been formed there was little glue left and the remainder of the rock and metals could only form the asteroid belt. Further out, the lighter gases such as ammonia condensed to form the giant planets, giant because there was more of the hydrogen-containing gases. There was a large excess of hydrogen left and this was driven out into the interstellar space and disappeared.

As the Sun caused the disc to spin faster it was itself slowed down, satisfactorily explaining the large angular momentum of the planets compared to the Sun. The segregation of the heavy elements, as well as their formation, is accounted for and a reason is given for the size and distribution of the planets.

If Hoyle is right, then planetary systems will be found round most of the slowly spinning stars, the majority in the Galaxy. This gives us 100,000 million planetary systems to colonise once we have devised the star drive. If only one system in ten has an earth-like planet and only one in ten of these is inhabitable, we will still have 1,000 million planets capable of being colonised. If they don't already have their quota of other colonists !

It seems doubtful, though, if we shall find another race that believes that their solar system was formed and created on October 26th, 4004 B.C. precisely at nine o'clock in the morning.

Kenneth Johns.

The possibilities inherent in telepathic communication are many and varied and give many authors an opportunity of airing opinions and theories upon the subject. Have you ever given a fleeting thought to a telepath who could receive every thought ? Such is the theme which heralds Australian writer N. K. Hemming back to our pages.

DWELLERS IN SILENCE

By N. K. Hemming

It plunged down out of the sky like a strange, wounded bird, coming from the silent darkness into misty blue and at last to the final and lasting oblivion of death.

Paul Baron sighed when the heavens were quiet again, when the hissing and the rumbling had died to a muted murmur that stilled into the quietness of the valley and the silence of the brooding hills.

" Meteor ?" his mind questioned, but could not be sure.

He moved slowly towards it, reluctant somehow to face what he half suspected, yet the avid yearning of curiosity that was so much a part of humanity sent his footsteps in a line that would finish at the thin cloud of steam that hung like a sentinel over the crater that hid the thing from the sky.

It was almost buried, but the gleam of pale green metal could not entirely be masked. His footsteps, which had become more hurried as curiosity overcame unease, halted abruptly at the rim of the crater. The green shimmer struck into his mind with sharp warning and the ground began to tremble. A door opened jerkily in the half-buried ship, paused and went on again, thrusting a curved metal plate towards him as damaged machinery fought to perform the purpose for which it had been designed.

A man staggered to the dark cavity, golden skinned and completely human, dragging the unconscious form of a woman with him. Still clasped in her arms was the shrouded form of a child, whimpering softly, as any earthly child involved in tragedy would have done.

Paul moved quickly then, because whoever and whatever they were, whence and why they came, they were human and in trouble, but the man collapsed at the side of the woman he had tried to drag to safety before he could get to them. He knew as he stood at their side that neither of them would ever rise to their feet again—but the child still cried softly, as if it knew itself to be alone now and alien on this strange world.

The small ship quivered and a low malevolent thrumming came from something that was buried beneath tons of earth. Instinctively, he stooped to pick up the small, living bundle. The ground was already trembling beneath his feet as he scrabbled frantically up the steep sides of the crater, heaving like a giant imprisoned as he threw himself over the edge and ran for the steep bank of a dried-up river. Once he stumbled and picked himself up with desperate urgency, as the thrumming rose to a fiendish song of waiting destruction. Cowering down beneath the overhanging bluff of the riverbank, he felt the ground shake like a thing tortured and the thrumming whine rose away into a silence that seemed to last for eternity.

The explosion came at last, a surprisingly restrained crack after what had gone before, muffled and tempered by the tons of earth covering the ship. The overhang of the bank shook loose and something struck his head. The last thing he remembered was the child, laying there wide-eyed and silent.

The ground was still and the heavens were silent as he came back to consciousness. He shook himself free of the loosely packed, dry earth and gave his attention to the child still held in the crook of one arm. She was still conscious and quite unharmed, staring up at him with great solemn eyes that were the deep gold of autumn chrysanthemums. When he scrambled to his feet and looked over to where the crater had been, he knew that the mite in his arms was quite alone.

So swiftly it had come, dropping from the skies like a lost and wounded bird, and as swiftly it had gone in a final flash of destruction, leaving a small, golden-haired legacy from an unknown race.

"Poor mite," he said softly. "Poor wee mite from the stars. What will they do to you?"

What would they do to her, this small girl child from a race that had conquered the silent darkness between the stars?

Examine her; watch her every moment of her life. They would make a freak of her. She would be someone who did not belong and who would know she could never belong. They would never let her forget that she was not of Earth.

But only he knew—and she could give nothing to Earth. She could remember nothing of the civilisation of her own people. A baby could know nothing of the technology that would be of benefit to Earth.

The starship was gone, as if it had never been. He held in his arms a girl child who could have been born of Earthly parents—but with a swift intuitive certainty, as he remembered the golden woman of the ship, he knew that she would possess a strange exotic beauty as she grew from child to woman.

There was a faint stirring of the grasses in the soft wind that whispered down from the hills and nearby she could feel the contented thoughts of living things.

Carol moved lazily and turned her head to look at the dog sprawled at her side, pink tongue out and panting slightly in the summer heat. Tess gazed back at her with soft brown eyes that held an almost human affection. Carol smiled and rolled over on her stomach. The dog returned to contemplation of the purple shadows on the hills and a deep, quiet contentment wrapped around both of them.

She was a beautiful child, smallboned, with fine sensitive features and a skin the colour of soft, pale gold. She moved again and looked towards the farmhouse. There was a faint, puzzled frown between the brows that were a darker, burned gold than her hair.

There were things she did not understand. Only lately had they come to bother her. She let her memory dwell on the thought feelings. The valley was quiet and pleasant. Secluded. Not many people came there to visit them, but occasionally there were strangers and not quite strangers. Somebody had bought the land further down the valley and had built a farm there. They also would come to visit Paul Green sometimes—and they had a son, the nasty, sadistic type of small boy who pulled wings off flies and set fire to butterflies.

With Paul, her father, she had grown used to the thought feelings. They were always there, warm and protective, guarding her. They wanted to shield her against something. With these others, it was different. The thought feelings of the parents did not hurt her, as the other thought feelings did. They had only curiosity merging into plain indifference when they let their thought turn towards her, but Joey liked to hurt. If she had been a fly, he would have pulled her wings off too. They always sent him out to play with her, while they talked with her father.

She watched them come into the valley this morning, disrupting the quietness and the contentment. As usual they brought their son and she shivered slightly, because she did not want to play with him. She would have rather stayed out in the fields, talking to Tess. The dog seemed to understand her and, in some dim way, she could talk back to her with those thought feelings.

She felt the things that came from Joe's mind, the feelings of boredom, the condescension that he might fill in time by taunting her. It was so different with Tess—as much different as Joey's body was different from the sleek brown body of the dog.

Joey was a sturdy child of ten years, heavily built with a strength beyond his years. He was aware of the strength and that it gave him the power to hurt things younger and smaller than himself. He was bouncing a ball, after a sulky turning away from her, and Carol started to wonder if he would leave her alone—until she felt the thought feeling that told her he had turned and the impulse that came to him to throw the ball as hard as he could into the small of her back.

"Catch!"

Carol threw herself quickly to one side, without attempting to try to catch the ball. She knew, without turning, that the warning had been given too late. It was meant to be too late, since it had come long after the ball left his hand. She had been meant to turn, when the ball would have caught her in the chest and winded her. Joey would have doubled up in gales of howling laughter and his mind would have radiated a sadistic pleasure to her. Instead she felt his frustration and the immediate resolve to get his own back in some way that would hurt even more.

She looked at him and her lips trembled as she wondered why he was like it.

"Why . . .?" she faltered. "Why, Joey?"

"Why what?" He grinned insolently and picked up the ball that had been meant to hurt her.

"Why does your mind feel so horrible? It . . . it's a nasty mind, with . . . with hurt thoughts."

Joey watched her suspiciously. He was old enough to read comics and he had imagination—a little. He remembered things he had read in fiction. Children can believe in imagination and for the first time he felt a stirring of unease.

"You can read my mind! Peeping Tom! Peeping Tom!" he shrilled at her and ran towards the house, yelling at the top of his voice. "Ma! Carol's reading my mind. She's a sneak."

Carol followed behind him with lagging footsteps, because she felt that she should defend herself against the things he yelled to the adults in the house, but she was reluctant to come too close to him again, because then she would receive so much clearer the impressions from his mind and they sickened and frightened her. She could not understand why he should feel that he wanted to hurt her and why he was strangely frightened of her now. She did not like him and from choice she would have avoided him, but she would not have sought in her mind for a way to hurt him.

They were all on their feet when she came in. She felt the shock in Paul's mind—and something else. An undefined something that made her think of darkness—and the stars. The other two were different. The man was sceptical, but there was an oddly stirring fear in case it might be true. The woman was narrow and angular and her mind was shaped the same way. It almost seemed as if she looked at the child for the first time and found something there that brought mixed feelings of jealousy and suspicion.

"I . . . I didn't sneak," Carol excused herself miserably. "I just couldn't help feeling the way he was thinking. He wanted to hurt me."

Paul looked from her to the boy and under the man's grave searching eyes, Joey moved sulkily.

"I didn't want to hurt her," he muttered. "She's just making it up because she couldn't catch the ball."

The conversation had been safely channelled away from the dangerous subject of mindreading for the moment and, unobtrusively, Paul kept it that way. They had been neighbours, but never really friends. He did not care if he rowed with them and Joey was not a good companion for the girl. The suspicion had been planted in their minds and as Carol grew up the first seed planted when Joey accused her of reading his mind might strengthen if they had much further to do with her.

He let the argument develop into a nasty little session of vindictive biting at each other, knowing that Carol was looking at him wide-eyed

and wondering if she was reading his mind ; knowing that he did not mean some of the things he was saying.

They went at last and he turned to look at the child he had taken into his care. She looked back at him solemnly and he remembered the look she had given him years ago, when he had taken her from the ship.

" Were you reading his mind, Carol ? " he asked quietly.

" I didn't want to." She bit her lips and looked up at him miserably. " I wasn't sneaking. It just came. I couldn't help it."

" All right, child. I'm not blaming you." He smiled at her gently and told her to sit down. When she obeyed, he took a chair himself where he could watch her face. " Tell me about it, Carol."

The child moved uneasily in her chair. " It just comes." She shot a quick look up at him. " I can't stop it, honestly I can't."

Paul shook his head and smiled again, reassuringly. " Don't be afraid. Just tell me about it."

So Carol told him. She did not know when the thought feelings had first started ; they seemed to have been with her always, but they had grown stronger and she had started to notice them. At first it was just the feeling that someone was near, and then it had come to recognition of the person and the particular feeling. No words, just a general impression—and every year it had grown stronger. She had wanted to stop it sometimes, but had not known how to. With him she had not minded, nor with Tess.

That made him smile to himself, but it also gave him a deeply warm feeling of satisfaction, that she could feel the sensations of his mind and not be repelled by them, as she had by the few others she had met from beyond the valley.

" I can't help it," she said again, when she had told him all she could. " They just come. Shouldn't it happen ? Don't other people have it too ? "

Paul shook his head slowly. " No, Carol. They don't have it—at least we don't know that they do. If there is anyone else, they would probably keep it secret."

" Why ? "

She looked up at him guilelessly and he felt a grim amusement in his mind. He thought of all their suspicious fears, the voices that would cry out ' Peeping Tom ' as Joey had done ; he thought of the jealousies and the anger that the last stronghold of privacy could be violated—and he thought of the final conclusion they would arrive at.

Death !

There would be so many considerations. They would try to excuse themselves and at first they probably would not be able to carry out what they intended, but it would come at last. Perhaps they would cover it up with talk of national security and other high-sounding phrases, but it would all come down to the same thing in the end.

Human fear of the stranger who was different.

He knew how inevitable it was and how strong it could become, because even he could feel it, crushed down and controlled. If they knew who she really was they would not hesitate at all.

Carol's face had grown pale with horror. Her eyes, wide and staring, were on his face and something questioning dawned in them even as he watched.

"Who am I?" she asked. "Why did you think like that?"

"So you were reading my mind as well, Carol." He made his voice faintly reproving, to divert her from the slip he had made.

Instantly her face crumpled. "I didn't mean to," she said again. "It is just like hearing people talking, but I get feelings instead of words."

He let the hint of reproof slip from his face, but he went on talking to her, quietly and seriously. He had meant her to read those other thoughts of what would happen to her, so that he would have a foundation of fear and caution on which to build. For her own safety it had to be there. He knew he was hurting her, but it was the only way. It was more than possible that in the future the sense that was growing in her would increase to become even the true telepathy of receiving actual sentences, the exact semantic meaning of everything that passed through the mind, as well as those things that the average individual would rather keep hidden even from himself—and she was in for trouble if she naively confessed the dangerous talent she possessed.

In the end he succeeded. Carol realised that to let people know about the thought feelings was dangerous. She remembered the things he had let his mind dwell on and she remembered the way Joey's parents had reacted. They could be dangerous to her and therefore they must be kept secret.

She had yet to learn that they could also be agony.

The blow came when Carol was ten years old. Paul himself did not quite know how it happened. He had been out riding and the horse had shied at something. The next thing he remembered was Carol's anxious face bending over him.

That was only the beginning.

A doctor came out to the farm, accompanied by a nurse. Carol hovered around anxiously, until she was somewhat snappishly sent out

of the way. She went and consoled herself with Tess, but unashamedly she reached out as strongly as she could with the developing senses of her mind to 'overhear' what was going on in the house. She had never done anything like that before, because she did not want the thought feelings to get stronger, and she was surprised to find how much more clearly they came in when she deliberately sought them. It was as if they slipped through some hitherto unused part of her mind that had been waiting for awakening.

She knew now that the immediate crisis had past, but it left bills behind—heavy bills. Paul was worried, but he saw no other course than to raise a mortgage on the farm when they became pressing. Later on there were more bills and his headaches were worse.

When he died, six months after the accident, there was nothing at all left. They took Carol away to an orphanage and, for the first time in her life, she really knew what hell was like.

It was all around her, beating into her head in sickening waves. Those around her were not like Joey, but they had the unthinking cruelty of children—and the adults were worse. It was like continuous hammer blows on her unshielded mind. She never became used to it and all the time her mind was strengthening and bringing the thought feelings in more clearly and stronger.

She knew that the young under-matron had slept with the husband of the matron and that many of the older girls knew about it and speculated crudely among themselves upon how long the affair would last and what the old girl would do when she found out about it. She knew many things that caused her horror and made her feel sick.

All around her the waves of the uncensored human mind beat into hers and that first night away from the valley it became too much. Her tortured brain lapsed into unconsciousness and for a little while there was relief and peace. It had to end though. She awoke and it was all there again.

They could not understand why, during those first few months, she so often lost consciousness.

That stage passed at last and she could train herself to a dull acceptance of what humanity was like beneath its cloak of civilisation. They were not all bad—far from it. Time and again some thing of sheer beauty would slip like healing balm through her aching mind.

Sometimes she thought about Paul, but the life in the quiet peace of the valley had become something far away and unreal. When she did think about the valley though, the questions she had asked about herself came flooding back—because she knew now that Paul had not been her father.

He had never admitted it, but the feeling had been there in his mind. She had received an impression of something falling from the sky and of him finding a child before the wreckage blew up and she told herself that it must have been an air-crash, that he had known the people who had been killed. She tried to make herself believe that it was the answer to why he had tried to bring her up as his own child, but always something told her that there was something else she had not been able to learn. Why had he said that they would kill her if they learned who she really was ?

The truth was somewhere there, but it eluded her.

When she was of the right age, they found work for her. They had trained her as a stenographer and she was efficient, but after the first day she rushed back to them and asked them to find her some other position. They were annoyed and questioned her, but she could not tell them that it was the things she sensed in the mind of the man they had sent her to work for that had frightened and nauseated her. Curtly she was ordered back again and for three months she endured the tortures of a mental hell that was far from mythical and, she was sure, worse than that supposed domain of cinders and sulphur.

When he tried to kiss her, the torture was complete.

Her guardians allowed her to change her work when she could give them proof they understood, but she could give them no hint of the things that had been far worse than physical. No human being should have been able to experience thought feelings of that kind. To her his mind had made him not a man but an animal with every bit of the veneer of civilisation stripped from him. Her talent was no gift but a trojan horse full of horror.

Those who had the care of her looked at her and cynically noted the ethereal loveliness of her. This time they found her work with a woman.

Mary Kennedy watched her secretary with curious eyes. There was something about the girl that puzzled her. It was not a feeling that caused her any particular unease, just one of strangeness and sympathy. She always looked pale and almost ill, with a shadow of horror lurking at the back of her eyes.

" Carol," she said quietly one day, " you are a strange girl."

Carol paused, her pencil still touching the glossy white surface of the notebook. The elder woman watched her closely, trying to understand the reaction. It was not exactly a stiffening, but it was still a movement of someone who was wary and waiting for questions that had to be parried.

What was she afraid of ?

Carol met her glance with one that she tried to make casually amused.

" In what way, Mrs. Kennedy ? "

" You're so quiet and you move around like a shadow." She frowned. " You don't like meeting people. Why ? "

" Perhaps people don't like me," Carol suggested with an evasiveness that tried to turn the questions she knew were coming and would not be evaded.

" Nonsense ! " Mary's voice was brusque and brooked no argument. " You have a lovely personality, child, if you would only unbend a little."

" Lots of people are reserved, Mrs. Kennedy." Carol forced herself to smile. " I suppose it is something I just can't help—like the mind I have," she added to herself with a shiver that could not be controlled.

Mrs. Kennedy saw the shiver. Her quiet, serious eyes watched the girl, unwavering until a tinge of colour ran up into the cheeks that were too pale and then receded, leaving her whiter than ever under the pale gold tan of her perfect skin.

" What are you afraid of, Carol ? " she asked quietly.

Carol did not start. She had almost anticipated the question, because of the sensations she had been receiving from the woman's mind.

" I don't understand ?" She tried to shrug unconcernedly. " What have I to be afraid of ?"

" I don't know. I am asking you."

Persistent and calm, trying to break down her defences, trying to make her speak of the things that tortured her and made her afraid, trying to make her betray the revulsion that so often beat into her mind and was only lessened when she could be in a comparatively quiet place like where she was now. Even then, she was still not alone enough. There were people around her ; too many people. Their thoughts and desires, their ambitions and petty jealousies. The bad thoughts and the good thoughts. Mostly the bad thoughts. The things that made her wonder just what humanity was under its guise of civilisation.

Was she like that as well, she sometimes wondered ? Then the sickness became all the more intense that she might be and that if there had been anyone else like herself they could sense it.

But they were things that could not be mentioned. These questions had to be turned aside, deflected to paths that did not so flagrantly fly the red flag of danger. Even Mrs. Kennedy, if she guessed, would call her monster and freak—and then the witch hunt would be on. She had learned enough during her years away from the valley to know

that Paul had been right in those things he had made her read from his mind.

She looked at Mary Kennedy and her eyes were candid, trying to hide the horror that lurked there so often.

" If I am afraid, perhaps it is fear of the world," she said quietly. " It was isolated in the valley where I used to live. Hardly anyone came there."

" Then it is time you controlled your fear." She smiled and shook her head. " The world is not such a bad place, if you take your head out of the sand and look around."

The world was not a bad place. It was the persistent din of countless thoughts beating into her defenceless mind.

" Don't you ever want to get married ?" Mary asked and was shocked into silence by the look of stark horror that Carol could not control. It flashed its way across her mobile features with a poignancy that chilled the elder woman and made her think that at last she knew what had happened. " So that was it," she said quietly.

Carol let her think that it was the truth, because it was something to satisfy her. It was not only men. Some of the thoughts that came into her mind were far from concerning her personally—in fact most of them were quite impersonal. They did not even know of her and she did not know the people they originated from. Men could make the horror worse though, because they could make it personal. One only had to look at her and appreciate her beauty and she would cringe, anticipating the other thoughts that would follow, all the worse because they were just thought feelings and not word defined, some of them coming from the deep subconscious that had never known civilisation.

It was not only them though. They were only a small part of a great whole. She knew she was caught in a cleft stick where there could be no compromise. Eventually she knew that she would have to find somewhere remote, away from all civilisation. It would be the only way she could find any measure of peace. Perhaps she would be able to save enough money to buy a small farm somewhere and that would leave only loneliness, but even loneliness was better than what she had now.

Carol was almost twenty-one when Mary Kennedy's son came home from abroad. He brought his wife with him and, although he was still deeply in love with her, he could not stop his eyes straying to his mother's secretary. It did not go unnoticed. His wife had sharp eyes and a tongue that could lash, but because she was a woman she lashed out at Carol and kept her charm to draw her husband back to her.

Carol listened in agony to the things that she said, but the feelings that came from the woman's mind were worse. The bitter injustice of it choked her, so that she turned and ran, for the first time angry instead of afraid, crying out against the cruel trick of fate that had made her what she was.

Who was she ? Again she asked herself the question, as she had so many times—and again there was no answer. There had been so great a certainty in Paul's mind that nobody must find out who she was that she had found herself strangely reluctant to pry into the past, to try to discover for herself the secret of her birth and the identity of her real parents.

Now it was different. There was rebellion and a fierce anger against fate. She would find out who they had been. Somehow and sometime, she would discover what had made her as she was.

And afterwards ? She did not know. She could never be really happy on earth, but if she could understand who and what she was, perhaps that would make it easier. Perhaps it would bring peace and calm to smooth over the agony she must know if she went among people and the loneliness she must endure if she made a hermit of herself.

But tonight, there was no calm and peace. She stood alone, feeling the usual discordant chaos of thoughts boiling at the fringe of her consciousness from those she had left behind, but over them all was the raging fury of her own rebellion.

Dry eyed and stiff with challenge she threw back her head and demanded of the vaulted heavens :

" What am I ? "

She felt it slip through that part of her mind she had used only once before, when Paul had been injured.

" *Who are you* ? "

Who am I ? She started to lash out in anger—but it became a thing abortive, because she recognised suddenly what had happened.

She had cried aloud to the starry reaches of space—and they had answered her.

Someone had answered her.

" *Who are you* ? " it asked again.

" Who . . . who are you ? " she sent back in shock and bewilderment.

" *We are the dwellers in the silence.*"

" Silence—oh, if only I lived in silence and yet was not alone," she said with a childish yearning.

Something warm and soothing curled around her mind. She felt that within seconds it would know all about her, but she did not want

to stop it. For the first time she knew peace and companionship and with it came a yearning to hold on to what she possessed in this moment that might be only too short.

"Who are you?" she asked them again. "Who are the dwellers in the silence?"

There was a soft chuckle. "*I am Ravoric, the leader of the small colony that is nearest to the world you are on. You are Liahnna, the daughter of Soril and his wife Veela.*"

At last she understood. They uncovered hidden, baby memories in her mind and they shared others of their own. She saw beyond Earth many worlds, thickly populated. Some races were human and others were not. A mutated section of one race became telepathic and their home world became a thing of horror to them. She did not need that explained to her, because she knew how it had been for her on Earth.

Luckily for those others, thousands of years ago, there had been space travel on their world. Mighty ships linked distant star empires and a solution had been found for the mutants. They left their world and built new homes for themselves in great ships out in space. They were safe from each other, because their thoughts had to pass through some kind of 'filter' and they had to be conscious of the desire for them to reach another of their kind before contact could be made.

At first they were lost and unhappy even then, missing what they had left behind—except the one thing that had driven them away—but at last they found themselves adapting and their new methods of life became acceptable. Even from choice they would no longer have gone back to the planets had the thing that sent them into space been overcome. They became the dwellers in the silence. They became proud of their mighty 'world' and gave it the deep loyalty that once had been possessed by their lost homeland.

They started to build. Colonies appeared that were like towns on their world of space and great ships plied between the towns, quickly and silently. Space accepted them and became one with them, so that they became greater than any of those other empires had ever been, because they had all space as their world.

They were a proud and independent race, respected yet not feared, and any others who became as themselves were welcomed among them.

The memories became closer and yet dim, because they were her own, of that time so long ago when her baby mind had received impressions. She saw the tiny ship and the man who fought its damaged controls. She felt the arms of the woman who held her and she felt sadness because she had known them for so short a time, but it was so

long ago that the sadness soon passed and she wanted only to go out there where she belonged, to join those who were her own people.

She heard Ravorix laugh again. "*It will not be long. We have found a ship that is near to your planet, nearer than we are. Zandovar . . .*"

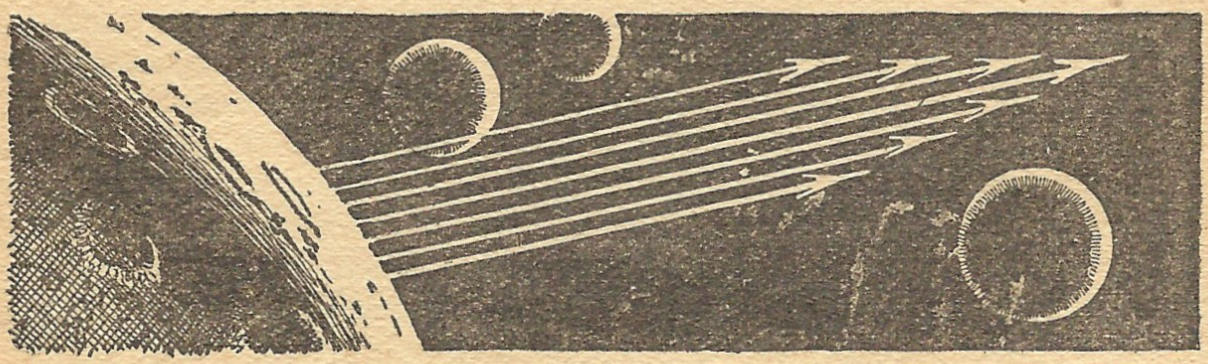
The thought tailed off and there was another in her mind, a different one, the young laughing voice of the man who piloted the ship.

"*Patience, Liahnna,*" he said. "*You will soon be back among us.*"

There was no strangeness. It was all as it should be. One moment she spoke across light years to a man who led a colony of starborn people and the next she spoke to a man who piloted one of their ships and who even now had changed slightly the course he had been following so that Earth was its new destination.

All she had to do now was wait.

N. K. Hemming.



CREEP

Metal fatigue has long been the primary headache of aeroplane designers and with increasing heights and speeds this problem is still a dominant factor. Now—extend that problem to an atomic powered spaceship out of range of planetfall and you really have metallurgical trouble.

By E. R. James

Ting-g !

Steve Tinder had been only half-listening to the conversation ; the sharp sound, like the vibrations of a tuning fork, alerted his every sense.

He seemed to see batteries of creep-testing machines in his laboratory on Earth and felt the urge to turn to the data panel to discover which piece of metal under test had reached its breaking point . . .

Then he came out of his dreamy state as though a cold hand had been laid on his spine. He was on the A.S.S. *Romulus*, Earth-bound from the Saturn System, and that orb banded with glorious colours through the observation port in front of him was Jupiter.

His tingling ears again began to hear the conversation around him, and he realised he was being addressed.

" Mr. Tinder ! "

" H'm ? "

" Tinder, I was talking to you ! "

Steve's eyes focussed on the big man who had been doing most of the talking. " Yes, Mellard ? "

Bellamy Mellard puffed out his florid cheeks. " I was telling everyone of the great lengths we go to in the Queen Pyrometals Company so that ships like this may cross the vastness between the planets in perfect safety."

"Were you?" Steve was not impressed. Mellard was always holding forth like a bag of wind about the factory. Now he would be sounding off more than ever because the boss's daughter was on the passenger list of this maiden voyage of the latest, biggest and fastest civilian atom-powered space ship.

Steve's gaze wandered around the faces of the listeners. Yes, there was Anna Queen's dark aquiline face in the background, just as he had expected. And he could see that she had been listening with approval to Mellard's speechmaking. A new qualm of chagrin beat on countless other suppressed feelings.

It would have been different if Mellard had been a real metallurgist —instead of a loud-mouthed know-all with a flair for getting into the favour of people who mattered—such as old Roscoe Queen. No true scientist would have been content with so little actual experience of the materials that went through the testing laboratories.

Steve glanced from face to face, all intent on Mellard's harangue— even Anna's was composed as she listened. A half smile curved her lips and she reclined at her ease.

No one seemed to have heard that *Ting-g* !

Perhaps he had dreamt it.

A ship's officer was coming through the throng. "Excuse me. Excuse me. Captain Anson presents his compliments and would like to speak to the Queen metallurgist . . ."

Steve began to stand up, in response.

"Yes?" said Mellard.

The officer smiled. "Mr. Bellamy Mellard?"

"That's right!" Mellard smirked visibly, preening himself under everyone's—especially Anna's respectful gaze. Only seldom were individual passengers asked for by the remote figure of the Captain.

Steve watched him go. Another little triumph for Mellard ; another little humiliation for himself, the real metallurgist . . . whose existence was probably unknown to the officer.

Restlessly he walked to the port and stared at Jupiter. Here in the void it seemed that but for the faint grey tinge of the anti-radiation glass he could have just reached out his hand and plucked the planet like a glowing apple from off the invisible tree of the Solar System . . .

He felt vaguely afraid. Never before had he left Earth ; this trip was supposed to be a reward for all the years of work—his work perhaps more than any other—which had made materials capable of standing the stresses of true atomic propulsion.

Older atomic rocket engines utilised the thrust of superheated steam or other materials ; the drive of this ship in comparison with them

was like the thrust of the jet aircraft which had improved upon the mechanically more wasteful piston engine.

He remembered the teething troubles of nations ingenious enough and brave enough to build the first commercial jets. Britain's Comet had had its share. It had been the creep of materials used in the hulls of those ships which had brought them crashing down . . .

Of course techniques had advanced since then ; but it had been those early and tragic experiences which had developed those techniques.

He turned his back to the unfamiliar view. Each time mankind took a stride forward in his methods of transport, there was always some danger. Many of the alloys used in the engines of the A.S.S. *Romulus* had been chosen by himself, because they had fitted the specifications that other experts had calculated. He trusted the integrity and patience of his staff as sincerely as he worshipped those qualities in himself, but it was always possible that in something new like this ship a detail might have been overlooked, or the experts might not have allowed for disasters when deciding on a safety margin . . .

He was certain he had heard that Ting-g !

With sudden decision, he headed towards the door leading back into the ship. He was too quiet a man to make friends easily and the celebrities attracted by a maiden voyage were as different from him as is gold from steel, so that he attracted no notice as he passed between the groups of seats—

" Sorry sir—"

" Eh ? " He almost bumped into the crewman, small but formidable, who barred his passage. " What's the matter ? "

" Nothing serious, sir. Captain just asks passengers to stay in the lounge while adjustments are being made."

" Adjustments ? What sort of adjustments ? I'm a metallurgist—Steven Tinder—" Steven broke off, baffled by the man's obstinate face.

" Sorry sir. No passengers at all allowed aft."

Except Mellard, thought Steve, the muscles of his jaw working and his fists clenching.

Footfalls sounded behind the crewman and he stood aside to allow four women and a man—who had obviously been disturbed from their cabins—to join the rest of the three score or so passengers in the first class lounge. The officer who had come for Mellard followed them, halted just inside the door, and called for silence.

" Captain Anson apologises to you all for this break in free flight. There is no danger at all, we assure you. But a small course alteration has become necessary. It will be of great assistance to the working

of the ship if you will all take your places as quickly as possible in the acceleration seats."

Steve hesitated. The crewman had mentioned *adjustments* . . . The officer spoke of *course alterations* . . . There had been that *Ting-g* . . . If some metal part had broken under stress, Mellard was not fit to supervise an emergency repair that would have to stand up to the further stress of a change of flight direction—

He realised that his hesitation had cost him his chance of speaking to the officer as other passengers crowded around, pushing him back in their eagerness to ask useless questions. Baffled resentment alternating with uneasiness in his mind, he went towards the nearest vacant seat in the row along the rear wall of the lounge.

"Steve?"

In the act of fastening the seat straps, he turned in surprise at the quiet, cool voice of Anna Queen. His heart began to pound when he realised she was taking the seat on his left. It always beat a little faster when she was near him. "Yes, Miss Queen?"

"Do you think it's anything serious?" she asked, and once again he noted that she shared the objective, unpanicking approach to any material problem that he always strove to cultivate in himself.

He shrugged. "Bellamy Mellard would know. They'll tell me nothing more than everyone else knows."

"Oh."

Secretly fuming because she accepted without comment this admission of his own lack of standing with the Captain, he helped her to fasten her straps before securing his own.

Gradually the lounge reached the state of order required by the officer. Steve found himself unusually aware of the curve in the floor. While "free flight" routine was continuing, it was easy to forget that there was no gravity in Space. But as soon as something like this broke that routine, one at once became very much aware that the "floor" on which they stood was the hull. Atomic space ships never called at planets or any other interplanetary body with an atmosphere. The A.S.S. *Romulus*, although revolutionary in engine design, followed the usual "dumb-bell" pattern of true interplanetary ships. The front half of the dumb-bell was like a huge drum, nearly 250 feet in diameter. Centrifugal force, when this was revolved independently of the rear half, gave the impression of weight necessary for the comfort of passengers.

The officer took his place and spoke into a microphone at the side of his seat. "Stand by for stress!" he warned. And his utterance of the word "stress" hit Steve like a blow.

Silence came to the lounge. Jupiter glowed a warning amber through the port to the left of that immediately facing Steve. The curve of the floor was like a mocking grin . . .

A roar as faint as the Ting-g he was sure he had heard seemed, to the imagination, to tilt the lounge so that the centre of gravity moved from beneath the curving floor to somewhere beneath the angle made by floor and rear wall.

Steve heard Anna catch her breath. She, who was so sure in handling people, was more frightened than he by the mechanics of space flight.

His sense of the materials with which he worked made him forget his fear. He felt the strain on each section of the great ship, just as though they were all extensions of his own body. He could feel them all move. Almost all metals when under moderate stress at " normal " temperatures immediately deformed to a small but calculable amount. He could only hope that whatever " adjustments " had been made, suitable materials had been chosen to fit into the pattern of the ship. If the pattern of stresses had been changed, it was possible that a wrong material might actually increase the strain on undamaged original members of the hull. Or, if the wrong materials had been used in a part of the engine room under high temperature, it was very likely that they would " creep "—that is to be slowly pulled out of shape, and perhaps finally break—

Crack !

The rear wall kicked at him, fell away. The curved floor again became the apparent floor as the course change ceased.

Steve bit his lip hard, remembered Anna Queen's fears and reached out a hand towards her to find it seized and gripped as though it were an anchor. A murmur of alarmed speculation rippled down the line of acceleration seats, then died away as the passengers saw that the officer was speaking into his microphone.

Finally he nodded, struck away his securing straps and walked out to address his charges. " There is no cause for alarm, ladies and gentlemen. You are still requested to remain in the lounge, but you may now move about as you please. One other thing, however. Is there a Mr. Steven Tinder amongst you ? "

" Yes." Steve's fear fell away from him. This was his hour—and perhaps his greatest testing time : he would need all his experience and faculties. " My name's Tinder."

" If you'll come with me, sir. Mr. Mellard wants a second opinion."

Steve smiled wryly. Anna's sharp footfalls hurried after him. Her voice came quietly authoritative. " Mr. Tinder and Mr. Mellard are in my employ," she told the officer.

He opened his mouth to protest but his eyes fell before hers and he turned. Steve followed her, his mind too full of recalled data for any feelings beyond a vague amaze at her sure handling of men. Even that slipped from his impressions as he stepped after her into a bare-metal corridor beyond the passenger's quarters. The study of metals was his life work. Between walls of titanium alloy he felt at home. This was a world he had helped to create.

He glimpsed crewmen off watch, but had only a clear picture of the aluminium fittings around which the men sat or on which they were lying.

An unmistakeable alloy of zirconium caught his eye in a wall squarely facing him as he stepped through yet another bulkhead and came out into some kind of control room. Only as a voice speaking to him did he become aware of the presence of several men including Mellard.

" Tinder. I want you to give a second opinion."

A second opinion ! Steve glared at Mellard—noted in some surprise that his colleague's face was grey as lead, and looked quickly at the others.

Captain Anson's eyes were looking him up and down and made him feel nondescript. The Captain's face was set in a frown, his feet were braced wide and his hands were squarely placed upon a table behind him. He clearly resented having intruders in his domain.

Steve's antagonism towards Mellard melted in a more general feeling of fear lest they all be ejected and he turned for support to Anna.

She was smiling, at ease. " My men will be only too happy to place their experience at your command, Captain Anson."

" H'm." Some of the grimness peeled off the Captain's stiff uniform.

Steve cleared his throat. " Exactly what has happened, Captain ?"

" M'm. You know about engines ?"

" No, sir. That's a subject for specialisation—just as is the study of metals. But I will understand enough of what you tell me about this ship. Please tell me what happened."

" Over here." Anson strode to a viewing tube, pointed. " See that bracing strut on the upper left of the fission chamber ?"

" Yes." Steve's mind concentrated through the apparatus, into the strange and fantastic world of controlled fission. " Is that what broke first ?"

" You know ?" Anson turned quickly.

Steve nodded. " I heard it. But no one else did—not in the lounge . . . Beryllium, isn't it ? "

" Is it ? I wouldn't know. On Mr. Mellard's advice I had it repaired with the alloy units suggested for such repairs—"

"One of the A.S. N-C's, I suppose?"

"Eh?"

"Yes," said Mellard. "8985p. It was ready, and—"

"I see . . . it, over against the far wall," murmured Steve. He turned to the Captain. "Yes, it would have served in the ordinary way. Why were we turning?"

"An unforecasted meteor shower—" Anson's face reddened. "Jupiter's mass tends to pick them up with its attraction."

"But . . . at least we're clear of it now?"

"No, I'm afraid not," admitted Anson. "That's why I've called you people in. I've assistance coming from the Ninth Moon, but that will be cutting things very fine." His saturnine face was getting redder and redder, his voice more grim with each sentence. "We want power. Ten minutes half blast would save us from possible damage."

Steve's eyes followed Anson's sideways glance towards what was evidently a repeater screen picturing radar images from the control bridge in another part of the blunt nose of the big ship.

"Then what happened when the repair cracked?"

"The pile's moved off its base," said the Captain between clenched teeth.

Anna's voice whispered in Steve's ear. "The owners urged him to make a record run. Other spaceship lines will have ships of this sort ready very soon. He was told he must be first to complete the double passage in two months."

"Oh!" Steve glanced at her.

She warned him with her eyes. "He didn't want to come so close to Jupiter . . ." she breathed.

Steve peered into the deadly world of the other half of the ship, trying to see exactly what damage had been done.

Mellard said: "Bits of the second fracture destroyed both other viewing eyes—"

"I can't work on guesses," muttered Steve. "Captain, can I get in there?"

"What? *You'd* go in there . . . with one of my men . . ."

"Is there any other way?"

"No . . ."

"What are we waiting for then?"

As he struggled into the thick protective clothing, Steve's mind went over every detail of the stresses for which he had been called upon to provide suitable alloys. The crewman helping him was lifting the helmet and he was absently ducking his head into it, when he became aware that everyone from the men at control panels to Anna herself was staring at him . . . although he was only doing his job.

Mellard seemed to choke. " Good luck, Steve !"

" Eh ? " He lifted his heavily gloved hand and felt Bellamy Mellard grip it.

Then Anna had her arms around his neck, and her lips were firm against his.

The helmet came down and he peered at them through its hazy glass, feeling foolish.

He made some kind of vague gesture with his muffled arms and turned after his guide. A little lift carried them up towards the hub of the drum. Weightlessly they floated and pushed their way back through the communicating tube. The crewman said " Two minutes maximum inside. I'll warn you at one minute forty-five."

A lead alloy hatch swung open and even in the lights of unbroken tubes Steve was aware of the faint glow of *everything*. He kicked off towards the vast bulk of the shielded pile and in mid-space felt his first queasiness, only to forget it as he automatically noted and assessed the mixture of metals and ceramics which enclosed the pile.

It came up at him. He gripped a faintly glowing rung and dragged himself down. He stared at the unseated base-plate of the mass and then up at the top plate over his head, trying to check the pile's alignment between these sandwiching, girder-braced slabs of metal.

His eye, used to pattern and order, fixed upon a girder pulled out of true. That would have to be strengthened. He found his voice, and relayed instructions back to Anson.

Even while mechanical hands, remote controlled from the front half of the ship, began to select and move angle girders and clamps up, his attention shifted to bent shackle pins in the upper securing plate. Hearing his companion take over direction of the first repair job, he forgot it.

The base plate seemed secure. No sense in meddling unnecessarily. It was easy to see what had happened now that he was on the spot. In his mind's eye grew the pattern of stresses as they would be now, developing out of the old pattern and the superimposed alterations caused by the movement of the thrust chamber enclosing the pile.

Something hit his shoulder. " Uh ? "

" Wake up, man ! "

He realised that voice had been shouting at him for some time. " One minute, fifty !" it said hoarsely.

He nodded. One more look. Yes, he had it all clearly in his mind. He turned and sprang at the lead hatch below—or was it above him. Strange how dizzy he felt, how distractingly disoriented to his surroundings.

He was being urged into the communicating tube by the crewman behind him. The door closed behind him. He heard no sound but felt its vibrations in the cobalt steel of the tube through his glove. His thoughts drifted back to the problem of anchoring the dead weight of the pile so that it would not again burst free and he was only faintly aware of actual physical movement until he felt himself clutched and held helpless while hoses beat some thick liquid all over him. He peered at the muffled figures around him. They seemed to know what they were doing . . . Something to do with radioactivity he would have picked up during his inspection.

Suddenly the complex jig-saw of stresses fell into place in his thoughts. Anson could have ten minutes' full blast with the right age-hardened nickel-cobalt alloy, in three spring-action girders. The pile would move into correct alignment as the other original members gave to form the matrix of forces.

It would be a blow to the man in charge of this great ship to have to put in to the Ninth Moon of Jupiter for repairs instead of claiming that record. The life of that alloy would be no more than those ten minutes. Alternatives with the limited repair resources of the *Romulus* were out of the question.

" Captain !" he called.

No answer. He struggled against the figures holding him. If his radio was blocked by metal of the ship or its sending capacity ruined by this everlasting sluicing, he had to speak normally. Why the devil wouldn't they let him go ?

The jets of exploding liquid fell away and he was hustled into an inner room. Men in lighter protective clothing dragged his heavy suit from him, ripped off the helmet, hurried him on into yet another room. Two doctors moved to meet him.

" Go to hell !" he shouted at them. He spun on his tormentors. " I've got to speak to the Captain right this minute !"

In silence like a frozen wall, a crewman pointed at a wall telephone set. Steve picked up its hanging receiver. " Captain Anson ?"

" Yes. That you, Tinder ?"

Steve detailed what was necessary, the Captain calling it out to be taken down.

" Will you manage it in time ?" finished Steve.

Seconds dragged by then the Captain's harshened voice inquired : " Have those doctors looked you over ?"

" Hell !" swore Steve. " Answer my question first."

" Yes," said Anson.

Steve nodded over the microphone and remembered the ship's officer doing the same useless action—invisible to the man at the other end—back in the lounge, and grinned.

Arms were drawing him away from the telephone and he let them have their way with him.

Thirty minutes later he walked into the lounge and felt a vague surprise to see that Jupiter was still glowing in all her magnificence through the same front port.

Mellard's voice was booming. "Another triumph for Queen Pyrometals—" but it cut off as the man's florid face turned at the sound of footfalls.

Steve felt himself the cynosure of all eyes. Silly fools, he thought. Looking at me like that . . . when I was only doing my job. Why can't they leave me alone, as they did before?

Mellard was clapping him on the back and whispering in his ear. "Old Roscoe Queen's retiring. Anna—Miss Queen's taking over as General Manager. You're to be promoted Production Manager—"

"Eh?" Steve's roving eyes located Anna's aquiline face smiling as it came towards him through the crowd.

Mellard's voice was exasperatingly condescending: "You were to be told soon after reaching Earth—"

"Was I?" growled Steve, resentfully.

Anna reached his side and opened her mouth but something seemed to snap in Steve's mind just at that moment. He grabbed her arm and pulled her after him, shutting the door behind him.

"That man Mellard," he barked. "If your father's retiring, what's Mellard going to be in the new set-up?"

"Executive Manager," gasped Anna, looking at him with eyes wide.

He snorted. "I'll only take my orders from you, I warn you!"

"Of course—"

He lost all control as something seemed to go Ting-g in his head. A metal—or a man—could only stand so much; both would give a little and then begin to creep towards change until finally came the break.

He kissed her hard and . . . felt some surprise since she seemed to be kissing him in return. Just as he knew his metals . . . he realised that *she* knew her men . . .

But he did not really care—

The trouble was that some idiot in the uniform of a ship's officer was trying to get them back into that damned lounge into acceleration seats for some change of course or other.

E. R. James.

Author J. T. McIntosh can always be relied upon for a first-class story irrespective of the subject he chooses for the basis of his plot. "Report On Earth" is an extremely simple approach to the alien invasion idea yet told with such direct forcefulness that you cannot help but thrill to the sequence of events.

REPORT ON EARTH

By J. T. McIntosh

Illustrated by HUTCHINGS

I

"You're going to Earth," Wallin was told.

He showed no sign of surprise, elation, horror or anything else. Quinnans seldom did make any visible reaction to even the most startling news, for a certain very good reason.

"We don't know very much about Earth, do we?" Wallin asked.

"Nothing at all," said Nar, "except that conditions there would suit us very well indeed, that there's life there, probably human, and that there's been time for it to reach a civilized level."

"How long am I to be there?" Wallin inquired.

"A Terran lifetime," said Nar bluntly. "That's about fifty years. Fifty years more, I mean. You'll start as a mature man."

"If they are men," said Wallin.

"If they are men," Nar agreed. "And if the physiologists are right about the effect of Terran conditions on longevity."

"And when I die," said Wallin, "I'll be back here?"

Nar nodded. "With the rest of your own life to live. Your body will be waiting for you."

"But nobody I know," said Wallin drily.

"Not many," Nar admitted.

"Do you think I'll manage to live fifty years on Earth?"

Nar shrugged. "I've no idea. You may not last five minutes."

"What exactly am I to do? What's wanted?"

"Information."

"If I get it soon, is it in order for me to commit suicide—to get back here, I mean?"

"Only if you have to. We prefer you to live out your natural span of life. That way you'll bring back a complete Terran human life history."

"If they are human," Wallin said.

"If they are human. One thing—don't get killed through destruction of the brain. Death through illness or damage elsewhere is all right, but if the brain is destroyed rapidly we may not manage to pick you up."

"What sort of information do you want? The usual? Whether it's justifiable to clear Earth and colonise?"

Nar nodded.

That was all. The rest Wallin knew already. Neither Wallin nor Nar was aware of the significance and importance—to an agent going to Earth—of the fact that this conversation took thirty-five minutes.

Wallin's awakening on Earth couldn't have been much better. He found himself alone in a room, resting on a couch. This meant that his first mental survey could be accomplished without hurry, without anyone seeing his reaction.

He was now Herbert F. Connor, Herbert Frank Connor, and of course Connor was mad. But Wallin had known that before he left Quinna. The Quinnans were a highly moral race and committed, in their investigation of other planets, only crimes which they regarded as justifiable. For a Quinnan agent to go to another planet it was necessary for some Earthman to die. The Quinnans always set their transmitters so that it was the mind of a young, physically healthy madman which was selected.

The destruction of Connor's poor, tortured ego was no loss to anyone, even himself.

The principal surprise to Wallin was that Connor, though quite mad, had been free, under no restraint. Wallin looked round. He knew from Connor's mind already that this was a boarding house, not the asylum in which he had expected to awaken. Did these people, then, have no asylums? Were their madmen allowed to run around loose?

Examination of the matter in Connor's brain, however, showed that Connor was free only because he had committed no crime known to the authorities.

There was something, something dark and secret, down in the depths of Connor's mind, but investigation of that would have to wait till later. Wallin had time at the moment for only a preliminary survey.

The Quinnan method had many disadvantages, one of which Wallin found as he surveyed the lumber in his mind. All the information he had of Earth was twisted, perverted by Connor's insanity.

The information he possessed, however, was by no means useless. The distortion followed a clear pattern. Wallin could see the pattern and straighten it out to some extent.

Though he used Connor's brain, his capacities in no way depended on its capacities. He was Wallin in every significant mental respect. He could have used the brain of a cat or a dog in the same way.

Connor, though his brain still lived, was utterly and completely dead. Nothing remained of Connor except his body and the twisted information in his mind—like a book after the death of its author.

Now Wallin would have to stop even thinking of himself as Wallin. He was Herbert F. Connor. Francis Connor.

Connor got up from the couch and experimented with his body. It was in good shape, rather more powerful than Wallin's Quinnan body. Of course, Earth was a richer, fresher world. The human life span on Earth, about which he now had first hand information, was rather shorter than on Quinna—but then, on Earth it was fuller.

In just half an hour he was due downstairs in the dining-room for supper. He had a lot to find out in that half hour. First, what position did Connor occupy in this world ? How was he regarded by the people around him ?

Some of the answer was easy enough to find. In the boarding house run by Mrs. Bentley everyone knew that Connor was more than a little crazy, but no one regarded him as dangerous except possibly Louise. There was a strange tangle of emotions in Connor's mind regarding Louise. This would have to be sorted out later ; at present there was no time for more than a preliminary survey.

Connor would have to go downstairs as usual. It would seem strange if he stayed in his room. Later he would go out, as Connor usually did in the evenings. Since he was one hundred percent Wallin mentally, not Connor, people were bound to detect a difference. It couldn't be avoided. Some changes in his manner were inevitable.

The best thing to do was make the change so gradual that no one would be able to decide that Connor had changed at one particular point in time. If he could make the change gradual enough he would convince people that Connor had slowly and steadily recovered his sanity. That, he knew, would be a strange and almost incredible thing, but people would accept that very much more readily than they would believe the truth.

There was a tap on the door, light and gentle.

" It's me, Frank," said a voice which he knew was that of Louise.

He searched his mind rapidly for Louise's second name, having learned enough of the social customs of the world from Connor's mind to know that she must have one, and was astonished to find that Connor didn't know it. The crazy mind doesn't operate like the

sane mind. A sane mind records even though some bias is present. The crazy mind sometimes doesn't record at all.

The tap was repeated. "Frank, are you all right?" said Louise's voice again, with some anxiety in it this time.

"I'm coming," said Connor. He went to the door and opened it.

He had known what Louise looked like, of course, but rather as if he had seen her photograph than from personal knowledge. What Connor remembered of her was more like a photograph than the girl herself, and Wallin saw at once how unreliable Connor's recollections could be.

Louise was a trifle colourless. She wore no lipstick, and though she kept herself ordinarily neat, she obviously paid no particular attention to her appearance. In her late twenties, she had given up all ideas of being a glamour girl, if she'd ever had any such ideas. Nevertheless, she was a very pretty girl, and that hadn't been the impression Wallin had gained from Connor's mind.

He didn't speak, and they went downstairs together silently.

Connor was trying to postpone as long as possible doing anything at all. It was much better to be thought unusually silent than to make a mistake which would land him in trouble. Not that he believed anyone would ever suspect the truth—it was possible that what he did as Connor might make someone investigate Connor, and there was that blank patch in Connor's mind which suggested that Connor had much better not be investigated.

Wallin had been lucky in finding himself free, unexpectedly lucky. He wanted to stay free if that could be managed.

As in the case of Louise, the people at the table were not quite as Wallin expected to find them. Connor had barely been aware of their existence. Tom Riley was short and thick, the kind of man who should be strong and athletic but who had let himself go to seed. John Rayburn was slimmer, older, smarter. The only other person there was Hari Dawn.

Connor blinked at her with something like shock. She was something unknown in his Quinnan experience. There were Quinnan girls quite as beautiful, quite as well dressed, girls who took just as much care of their appearance, and yet on Quinna he had never seen a girl who made quite the effect of this one.

Fortunately she didn't look up from her plate.

"Hullo, Frank," said Riley, and Rayburn mumbled something.

Louise intercepted the greetings and returned them. This Connor knew, was in no way unusual, but for some reason he wanted to say something. He nodded to the men and said "Hullo." It was a mis-

take, he realised at once from their reaction, though he couldn't see where the mistake lay.

He scanned through Connor's mind again. Yes, Connor quite frequently spoke in just that way. Yet Rayburn, Riley, and even Louise had cast a quick glance at him as if something was very much wrong.

He dropped in his seat, pretending to notice nothing, but he was perturbed. He had made his first mistake and didn't even know what it was.

It didn't take him long to find out.

Riley said something, Louise replied. Rayburn said something else, Riley spoke, Louise answered.

And to Connor the effect was as if they had rehearsed these speeches and gabbled through them as fast as possible.

Feverishly, he referred to the only authority he had—Connor's mind. No, Connor found nothing unusual in this. The truth was, as Wallin realised almost at once, that his own reaction times were very much slower than those of the people of Earth.

No, it wasn't his reaction times which were slower. As if to demonstrate that fact to him, a housefly settled on his wrist and he made an instinctive jab at it which showed that his reaction times were fast enough.

It was in thinking time that the Earth people were faster than him. It took little or no time in his scale of values, for them to think out what they were going to say or do. One would speak, another would be replying immediately.

There wasn't the pause for thought which always occurred on Quinna.

This was going to be a real problem, he realised. He knew of no way in which he could speed up his thinking time.

The longer he stayed at the dining table, the more dazed he became. Mentally these people were like fish darting around a turtle. It was all he could do to understand what they were talking about, without trying to take any part in the conversation.

He was relieved to see that Hari Dawn took no part in the talk. One didn't have to, apparently.

As he was watching her she looked up. He smiled. She looked surprised for a moment, then smiled too.

Connor, the other Connor, had never really looked at Hari Dawn. How was that possible ?

As soon as he could he made his escape back to his room. Earlier on he had noticed that there was a radio there, a small portable. He switched it on.

Music was of no use to him. He twiddled the knob until he found a play. The play went almost too fast for comprehension. He could only just understand what was going on.

Everything was, at a guess, about one and a half times the speed it would have been on Quinna. Experimentally, he tried repeating a few words after the players. If he knew exactly what he was going to say it was possible for him to speak only a little more slowly than they did.

But he couldn't cut down his thinking time.

This was going to make things very difficult. Perhaps he could never pass as an ordinary sane human being on this world, among the people of this world. Perhaps, even after he could show that his madness was gone, they would consider him abnormal because of the abnormally long time he needed to think things out.

Another point of considerable significance was this : speed of thought was generally a function of intelligence. It was looking less and less likely that Quinna could justifiably eliminate the Terrans and annexe their planets. It was even beginning to look possible that the Quinnans wouldn't be *able* to eliminate the Terrans.

II

Later on, at Connor's usual time, he went out and walked round the streets nearby. The boarding house was almost on the edge of a city. Only a few hundred yards to the south the open fields began. His body was strong and powerful, and he found walking not only easy but actually enjoyable, which he had never found on his own planet, in his own body.

He walked quite a distance, simply for the pleasure of walking. He knew, too, that Connor generally did this and that no one would think it strange.

He was taking due note of everything he saw. At first he had been concerned merely with the city, but cities the galaxy over tend to be very much alike—a large number of people, too many people, in too small a place.

Outside the city, however, it was a different story. This was Earth, this was what the planet was like, and he found himself liking it very much. The sky wasn't as dramatic here as in some of the planets he knew. Earth had a rather thick, vaporous atmosphere which tended to cut out many of the stars. Apart from the sky, the countryside, the noises, the smells, all suggested a planet which had about three times as much life and vitality as any he knew.

Yes, this was a marvellous world. Not only that, it was an extremely beautiful one. He could tell that even from walking in the semi-gloom.

He had thought of himself as entirely alone, but gradually he became aware that there were steps sounding behind him. He was being followed. He didn't know whether to pretend to be unaware of this or to turn boldly and confront the person who was trailing him.

He stopped to tie his shoelace, knowing already that this was a familiar trick on Earth and saw that the person behind was Louise. He turned and waited. The way she came up to him showed that she hadn't really been trying to keep her presence secret.

He consulted his encyclopedia, Connor's mind, once again. It was apparently quite common for her to follow him like this.

"What's the matter, Frank?" she asked as she came up to him.

"Nothing," he said.

"I don't want to bother you, Frank," she said, "if it's something you don't want to talk about . . ." She let the sentence trail away into nothingness.

"You're not bothering me, Louise," he said gently.

He was managing he thought, to talk almost as fast now as the others he had met. As fast as Riley, Rayburn, and Louise herself. Not quite as fast as some of the people he had heard on the radio.

They walked on together. Very little was said. Connor would have liked to talk, but he didn't dare initiate it. Louise didn't seem to be talkative.

It was fairly late when they started back together. They went up the stairs, and rather unexpectedly Louise followed Connor into his room. Hastily he consulted his memory. She was going to put him to bed. She always did.

He wanted to object, but knew he couldn't. He couldn't afford to do anything Connor wouldn't do. Not yet. It was obvious enough why Louise always made sure he was in bed. Connor had had the habit of waiting up. If no one saw he went to bed he would stay up all night. If someone put him to bed, habit took over and he went to sleep like a child.

"Goodnight, Frank," Louise said at last, and went out slowly, closing the door quietly.

Connor was left to his own reflections. Louise was unexpectedly kind and sympathetic. She seemed to spend a lot of her time looking after him, most of her leisure time. Was she here to look after him, he wondered? Was that in some way her job?

Next morning Wallin began to appreciate the boredom of being Connor. Connor didn't do any work. He was almost certainly unemployable. But everybody else at the boarding house was out all day.

Riley was a sales clerk, whatever that was. Rayburn was the manager of a small departmental store. Louise worked with a legal firm. Connor didn't know what Hari Dawn did. Even Mrs. Bentley was seldom to be found at the house after about eleven o'clock. There was a Mr. Bentley, but he took no part in the running of the boarding house and never met the roomers. He even came and went by a separate door.

Most important of these was Louise, and she wouldn't return until about half-past five.

Connor wondered again about Hari. Why had he paid so little attention to her? He probed, and found the answer.

Connor had been denying the existence of sex for years now. It was something to do with that dark cavern in his mind. And it was difficult to pay much attention to Hari and still deny the existence of sex. So Connor had paid no attention to her at all.

That, too, was why Connor hadn't thought of Louise as an attractive girl. He had refused to see her as an attractive girl.

Crazy people could do things like that.

As usual, Mrs. Bentley brought him his breakfast on a tray once the other roomers had left. He ate reflectively, without enjoyment. These Earth people, to judge by Hari, had found a technique of sex appeal which the Quinnans had completely missed, but they knew nothing about preparing food. He wasn't going to have a really first-class meal, Conner reflected, for the next fifty or sixty years.

Connor was supported by relatives who didn't want to see him again and who would be relieved never to hear anything about him. Every two weeks a money-order arrived for him.

All this was interesting but hardly relevant to his main task. Wallin's job was completely unconcerned with Connor, completely unconcerned with Louise, or for that matter with any individual. He was supposed to reckon up Earth and its inhabitants as a whole, and he hadn't started yet. He had nothing to go on. Though there was no particular hurry, the sooner he did get something to go on, the better.

About ten-thirty, following Connor's usual pattern, he got up, dressed and went out. First he went out into the country the way he had gone the night before. It was much better to leave investigation of the city till he knew more. Besides, he wanted to see by daylight the country he had seen the night before.

He had expected a great deal, and found that Earth was even more impressive than he had expected, if this was a representative sample. Earth, and for that matter this whole solar system, must have had a tougher time than most universes. It generally happened that the harder things had been for a system, the more beautiful they were after it.

Connor felt envious as he looked at this world. Quinna could certainly use it. It was a wonderful world.

Feeling more confident after a while, he went back to the city and spent quite a while walking round the suburbs. Undoubtedly Earth was livelier, fresher, more vital than any of the Quinnan worlds. And the people were the product of their environment.

Physically all the human races were quite similar. Temperamentally they differed a great deal.

Quinna was a safe, slow, placid world. Hence the Quinnans—slow, placid, friendly. Not lazy, just slow, thoughtful, ruminative. The Quinnans had never set much store by doing things in a hurry. Every new factor, whether it was a word, an action, or a piece of news, was something to be assimilated, evaluated, and only then acted upon.

Connor wished it were possible for him to go and have himself tested, as it would have been on some planets he knew. That would have shown to some extent how Quinnans and Earthmen compared. On Earth they did have intelligence tests, but one couldn't just go and be tested and be supplied with the result.

After a morning of investigation he went back to the boarding house. Only one other roomer was there for lunch—Hari Dawn.

"Hullo, Hari," he said.

She looked up at him, surprised. "Hullo, Frank," she said guardedly. He had already noted signs that these people were more suspicious than Quinnans. But probably their suspicions could be driven away just as Quinnans' were—by continued, open friendliness.

He smiled. "Don't act as if I were going to bite," he said. "I'm not."

"I didn't know I was," she said. "Look, leave me alone, will you?"

He frowned. He was sure he was speaking fast enough and normally enough. But perhaps she was afraid of him.

He looked closely at her. By any standards, Quinnan or Terran, she was an unusually beautiful girl. However, that was only the beginning of the effect she made. He had no idea yet what the rest was.

"What do you do for a living?" he asked abruptly.

She looked up again, startled. "I'm a model," she said.

He nodded, though he wasn't quite sure what a model was.

"And listen," she went on. "Don't make any passes—I get enough outside without having them here, too. Especially from—" She bit back what she had been about to say.

Connor grinned. "I'm not really crazy, you know," he said. "Slow, yes, but given time to work things out, I'm as smart as you. Smarter, maybe."

She was interested but sceptical. "Can you do this one?" she asked him.

It was one of those problems about getting six pints when you only have a four and a five pint measure. He told her the answer. She was impressed.

"Why, you're no slower than me," she said.

That didn't surprise him, for he had already realised that Hari Dawn, though something special in beauty, was no genius among Earth people. Certainly not a mathematical genius. She would be liable to do a problem like that by trial and error instead of tackling it in a logical way. Even with his slower speed of thinking he had probably reached the conclusion more rapidly than she would have done by a less scientific method.

"Look, you did something once," she said suddenly, in a burst of frankness. "I've always wondered what it was."

He looked back at her with a very faint smile. "I'm wondering myself," he said.

She frowned at that and he wondered if he had made a mistake. She was again beginning to think of him as a man not quite right in the head.

"No, I mean it," he said. "Haven't you heard of people suffering mental shocks and not really knowing what happened? I guess I'm a bit like that."

She nodded, half convinced.

"Gosh, I've got to fly!" she said suddenly, gathered up her things and hurried out. Connor guessed she wouldn't have had to fly if she hadn't felt that the conversation had taken an awkward turn.

III

In the afternoon Connor stayed in and read books. There weren't very many lying around the house, but he did manage to find a novel or two, an old encyclopedia, a dictionary, a Bible and a number of other miscellaneous books. He didn't care what they were, any book would be interesting, and once he had scanned through a few of them he no longer had to depend only on the information which had been in Connor's mind.

The Bible puzzled him most. It was rather like the sagas that abounded in very early history, the very early history of all races, and yet there was more to it than that. It wasn't simply myth and legend.

What else it was he couldn't decide. He had to leave that for later investigation.

The novels he found extremely interesting because they showed how people were supposed to act, not people like Frank Connor but ordinary people, interesting people.

He saw that he had taken more or less the right line with Hari Dawn.

By the time Louise and the others arrived he was ready for them. Louise again tapped on the door to take him down to the evening meal. Apparently this was regular.

He'd wondered a lot about Louise. Her interest in him was more than the ordinary friendliness of someone who happened to live in the same boarding house. She was really looking after him for some special reason. He wondered for a moment if she was paid by his relatives, the relatives back east who sent him remittances. That didn't seem to be so, because obviously she had no more money than her job was likely to bring her. Besides, if she had been employed in that capacity she'd have had more time to spare to look after him than she had.

At the table this time Connor was able to take some part in the conversation. He didn't initiate any topic, but he threw in a remark here and there to show that he knew what was going on. He ignored the surprise of the others, particularly Louise and Riley, at some of the things he said. It was the normality of his remarks, not their abnormality, which surprised them.

Hari Dawn was there again and she wasn't unduly surprised. The explanation was simple enough. She had had so little to do with Connor before that she hadn't known how disordered his mind had been.

No, it was Louise in particular who was surprised at the change, because Louise, probably more than anyone else, *had* known how disordered Connor's mind had been.

Connor tried not to overdo it. He certainly didn't want to give the impression of being a genius, but that wasn't likely, anyway. His thought processes were so slow that quite often they had to wait for him. Nevertheless, though slow, his observations were intelligent enough, and he saw that he was being considered in a new light by everybody.

Afterwards, when he went out for his usual walk, he looked around for Louise. If she was going to follow him anyway, they might as well go together.

A girl came out, but it wasn't Louise. it was Hari. Louise followed her immediately afterwards. When Connor looked at Louise and gestured with his eyes to suggest that they might go together, Hari

Dawn looked from one to the other of them and said tentatively : " Mind if I come along ? "

" Not in the least," said Connor. He noticed Louise's surprise. She had expected to be left to answer that question.

They walked together over the route that Connor had already followed twice.

" I shouldn't have thought you'd be very keen on walking," Louise remarked to Hari.

" I'm not," said Hari, " but I've got to do it. After all, my figure's my fortune."

Connor got the impression they'd hardly ever spoken to each other. Louise spoke so little that this wasn't at all surprising. Besides, they were completely different types. Even a stranger to Earth like Connor could tell that.

Once again he enjoyed the beauty of Earth, drinking it in. It had all kinds of beauty, not the one special type which one usually found on other planets. Earth had peacefulness, grandeur, colour, variety, warmth, drama. From the pictures he had seen in some of the books he'd been reading that afternoon, it seemed that in some places Earth even had the chilling beauty of the more sombre worlds.

" Oh," said Hari suddenly, " excuse me," and she was gone.

They saw her join someone she knew, a man. They walked away together.

" I think she's nice," said Connor. " Not very bright, but a nice kid."

" Frank," said Louise, with unexpected intensity, " what's happened to you ? You—"

" Nothing," he said, and marvelled. He had managed to interrupt someone. Of course, having done so, he had to pause for what must seem a long time to gather his thoughts, but it showed how he could seem to think faster than he did. Say something, anything, then pause to think—that was the method.

" No, that's not true," he admitted. " Something has happened to me, Louise. I'm coming alive."

" But you've always been—" she started to say soothingly, then recognised with sudden intuition the fundamental sanity of his words, his tone.

" Don't rush it," he said quietly. " Help me, Louise. You'll do that, won't you ?"

" You know I will, Frank," Louise said.

" Do I ?" he said, half to himself. " It's amazing how little I do know."

" Anything you don't know I'll tell you," Louise said eagerly.

"Anything?" he asked. Louise caught her breath, and there was sudden tension in the air.

Connor retreated quickly. He couldn't handle this yet. That dark, secret thing, that thing that even he didn't know—Louise knew it. He could sense that. She was in it, she was part of it.

And it was too soon to ask her about it. If she told him, though somehow he was certain she wouldn't tell him anyway, he wouldn't know what to do, what to say.

He walked on in silence and was grateful that Louise was prepared to do likewise. They said hardly a word more the rest of the evening. Again he let Louise put him to bed. He wondered if she guessed it was for the last time.

When Connor came downstairs next morning and went into the lounge to look for more books, Hari was curled up in one of the armchairs. He grinned at her and moved to the bookcase.

"Sorry I ran out on you last night," Hari said. "That was a photographer I work for."

"Think nothing of it," said Connor. "You're not usually here during the day, are you?"

"Not often, thank goodness," said Hari. "Today I've no bookings until seven o'clock. Sit down a minute, Frank."

She moved a couple of inches to make it clear he was supposed to sit beside her. Connor sat down, wondering. Even his limited experience told him she was being more than friendly, and he had no idea why. Especially after her caution the day before.

"Tell me about yourself," she said.

"What for?" he asked blankly.

She seemed taken aback. For once he had time to think instead of having to hurry to keep up with these Earth people.

"Most people like to talk about themselves," she said.

"All right. You talk about yourself. I'll listen."

Hari shook her head thoughtfully. "I can't make you out."

"Why, don't you want to talk about yourself, either?"

He watched her trying to work him out, label him. He guessed that most men treated her in one of two ways—like prospective customers who wanted a free trial or like whisky drinkers handed a bottle of beer. Connor hadn't read four novels the day before for nothing. And Hari was puzzled because he neither made a bid for the free trial nor turned up his nose at the bottle of beer.

"If you want to know about a model," she said, "the best way is to see her pictures. Like to see some of mine?"

The four novels Connor had read hadn't happened to mention this gambit, and Connor's previous experience didn't include it. Even if they had, the time of day might have convinced him he was wrong.

They went up to Hari's room. It was untidy, as he'd have guessed —untidy but very very feminine. There was nothing in it that a man would have chosen. Ornaments, magazines, clothes, the placing of everything—it was just like Hari herself, except that she was immaculate and the room wasn't.

He stood over her as she opened a box on the floor. She wore a pale green dress, so soft and limp that it swirled about her with every movement. She was frighteningly attractive.

Connor wondered why the women of Quinna had never learned the art in which Hari was so skilled. He wondered what would happen if a Quinnan woman was sent to Earth, what such a woman would think of Hari. He guessed that the woman of Quinna just hadn't realised that what Hari was doing, what Hari was, could be done. Given a chance to watch her, examine her, and think about her methods, the woman of Quinna could become quite efficient Hari's, he thought.

He wasn't in much doubt that they'd want to.

"Here," she said, handing him some big glossy pictures.

He'd seen glamour pictures in magazines, but these were more effective because the quality was so much better. They showed Hari in various pin-up costumes and poses, looking so desirable that he became acutely uncomfortable.

"And these," she said with an unusually prim look. "I don't show these to everybody."

They were nudes. Actually they were less effective artistically than the others. Hari's speciality was clothes. Without clothes she lost some of her special charm. The pictures didn't lower Connor's temperature, nevertheless.

She showed him a lot of photographs, naively proud of them and delighted by his reaction, until it became more than just a reaction to a collection of photographs. When he handed the last of them back to her he moved against her clumsily and touched her hip tentatively.

"Now, Frank," she said warningly, moving away.

"Hari," he said, moving after her.

She eluded him neatly. "Let's go downstairs again," she said, laughing. "Quickly. In fact I'm way ahead of you."

She hurried lightly out into the corridor.

"Why, hullo, Mrs. Bentley," Connor heard her say. He took this as a warning to him, and waited until Hari and Mrs. Bentley had gone on down the corridor before he emerged.

That evening Connor again went for a walk with Louise. This time there was no Hari with them. She was working.

For once Connor didn't feel like walking. "Let's go to a movie," he suggested.

Louise stopped and stared at him. "But you never go to movies, Frank. You wouldn't—" She stopped, embarrassed.

"You were going to say I wouldn't understand it," Connor said. "Shall we try it and see?"

He enjoyed the picture. Long ago Connor had learned a secret which many people of Quinna and Earth didn't know, particularly intelligent people. This was that the only way to enjoy any entertainment was to meet it on its own level. The level of this film wasn't very high, and many people, both on Quinna and Earth, would have sneered at it. But Connor enjoyed it.

He enjoyed it the more because Louise was with him. They didn't touch, they didn't hold hands, but nevertheless he knew all the time she was there, enjoying it too.

When they went back later to the boarding house Louise, followed Connor to his bedroom door, intending to come in as usual.

"No, Louise," he said gently, "I can manage, thanks."

For a moment there was something in her eyes, something naked and passionate and startling. Then she nodded and went to her own room.

Connor went inside, thinking about what he had seen. For a moment he'd thought it was joy in Louise's eyes, but then decided it wasn't —particularly when she turned away.

Louise was hurt, terribly hurt. Was it because he didn't need her any more? Did she want Connor always to be helpless, always dependent on her?

IV

In the next few days Connor learnt a lot about Earth. He discovered the public library and became a frequent visitor there. He found he could learn more from books meantime than from first-hand observing. If he went out and looked at things he could only see what happened to be there. Reading a book, he could select his subject, select his author, and finally select his information, scanning some books, reading others carefully and critically.

He spent every evening with Louise, but didn't see much of Hari. She was always busy.


L.A.HUTCHINGS

One night a week Louise spent with relatives on the other side of town. Left to his own devices, Connor settled down in his room to make a first assessment of what he had learned. He meant to think about Earth, about Quinna, about his job on Earth. He found himself thinking about Connor, Louise, Hari, Mrs. Bentley, Sarah Smith the librarian, Riley, Rayburn and all the others he had met.

It was time anyway, he decided, that he investigated that curious blank in Connor's mind. Putting aside all thought of Quinna for the moment, he looked into the brain of Connor.

Very soon he found that this wasn't going to be nearly as easy as he'd thought.

And a little after that he found it was going to be impossible.

Connor's information about himself was reasonably complete, though distorted, for the last four years or so. During the last four years Connor had been exactly as he had been at the moment Wallin edged him into limbo, During all that period he had known Louise, Louise had been with him.

Before that there was a blank, a curious gap of several years.

Earlier still there was a complete and much less distorted record up to the time when Connor had been about twenty-four.

Connor had never been completely sane, but probably to the age of twenty-four he had been legally sane. Sane enough to know what he was doing most of the time. If he had remained as sane as that, Wallin would never have been concerned with Herbert Francis Connor at all. The transmitters on Quinna, working on a pattern arbitrarily set up for them, would have sent Wallin's ego and personality and memories and capacities into some other mind, some more tortured mind.

But by the time Wallin had been sent to Earth, Connor's mind had collapsed and he was a perfect host for Wallin.

Wallin looked more closely round the edges of the gap in Connor's mind. When it started, Connor was twenty-four and hadn't yet met Louise.

When it finished, Connor was quite crazy, and Louise was with him, his constant companion—nurse, almost.

He could find little more than that.

Some scientists and psychologists, on both Quinna and Earth, said that the human mind could never forget anything. That anything which ever happened to a human being, even during periods of sleep or unconsciousness, was there and could be brought out if the record could be read.

Connor didn't find this to be so. Something had certainly happened to Connor during his years of forgetfulness, but whatever had happened,

Connor himself had made it as if it had never been. He had in effect dug a moat round this period, a moat which Wallin couldn't cross. He didn't think he'd ever be able to.

Connor abandoned the attempt and told himself impatiently that the affairs of the former Connor, Louise and the others, were unimportant. What mattered was Earth and Quinna.

Well, for a start, it was almost out of the question to destroy these people. Quinna was desperate for living space. When observers went out, like Wallin, they were not so much looking for a planet they could justifiably take over as for a planet they had some excuse for taking over.

Connor could find very little excuse for taking over Earth.

True, the humans of Earth were cruel, stupid, irresponsible, still not far removed from the savage. The incidence of crime in human society was appalling. There were murders on Quinna, certainly, but nothing on this scale. Just a day or two since a man had thrown a girl from a seventh-floor window, only a few hundred yards from where Frank Connor was now. His trial was due to start the next day.

Many cities on Earth had a murder a day.

Yes, in many ways the humans of Earth were so savage, so backward, so uncivilized, that there might seem to be plenty of excuse for liquidating them. But Connor had heard two of the symphonies of Beethoven, only badly reproduced on a gramophone record of Riley's admittedly. He had seen reproductions of Michelangelo's wonderful paintings in the Sistine Chapel. He had scanned books on Einstein's work. He had read poetry by Shelley, novels by Balzac, plays by Shakespeare.

No, it couldn't be done. He would meet a lot of opposition when he got back and told his people, on the one hand, what a wonderful world Earth was, and on the other that they couldn't touch it. However, that was what he was going to be forced to do—in fifty years' time . . . unless anything happened in the meantime to change his mind.

Having reached that preliminary conclusion Connor returned, his conscience satisfied, to his own affairs. What had Connor done? Something pretty terrible, undoubtedly, and Louise knew about it, whatever it was. He'd have to find out some time from her, if from no one else.

And what was he going to do about Louise? Connor had meant a lot to her for some reason. But Connor was dead, completely, utterly dead. If Louise had loved Connor that was all the more reason for not loving the man Connor had become.

Connor looked up at an interruption. Without knocking, Hari had come in.

"Hullo, Frank," she said, and smiled. "I was lonely. Are you?"

"No," he said, "but I'll pretend I was."

She sat down. She wore a wrap of heavy blue silk. Her hair was beautiful. She was all beautiful, but her hair, brushed out, was particularly lovely.

"Tell me, Frank," she said. "What's Louise to you?"

"I don't know," he said truthfully. "I was just wondering."

Hari raised her eyebrows. She also crossed her legs, and the wrap fell away from them. Undoubtedly she knew that, but acted as if she didn't.

"I can't believe that," she said. "You don't have to tell me if you don't want to . . . but you must know."

Connor shook his head. "It's true," he said. "I don't know what Louise is or was to me. You didn't know me well before, Hari, but the truth is I was crazy."

Hari pounced on the one word. "Was?" she exclaimed.

"Yes, I think it's over," said Connor. "I'm as sane as anyone now."

Hari frowned. "I didn't think it worked like that," she said. "People who are crazy never get better, do they?"

"It doesn't," said Connor, "but I'm different."

"I know," Hari said. "That's what gets me about you."

Connor went over and sat beside her. He didn't know what was going to happen, but he was very interested in finding out. When Hari moved to give him room, her wrap fell open at the top, too. She didn't seem to notice that either.

He kissed her. Half a minute later she stood up, laughing, pulling her wrap about her. "When I said I was lonely," she protested, "I didn't mean that."

"Didn't you?" Connor said. "Frankly, Hari, my impression was you could be had."

"I don't say you're wrong," she said, "but it isn't as easy as that. I never had much in the way of morals, Frank, but I've got a lot of pride."

"Then you'd better take it away," Frank told her, "because if you stay here something's going to happen, and you know what."

Still laughing, Hari went.

Later in the evening Connor saw Louise briefly. They didn't say much, they only met for a few moments in the corridor. But Frank guessed something. She knew about Hari. Perhaps she'd tried to come into the room, heard voices, and listened. Perhaps she'd seen Hari coming out. At any rate, she knew.

Connor paused, wanting to say something. For the first time in days he was conscious of the ponderousness of his mental processes. Here he stood, facing Louise, wishing with an intensity which surprised him to say something to her, and not knowing what. It was like a description in a book he'd read of a nightmare sequence—being pursued by some horror and being unable to run, finding his feet stuck in glutinous mud, being too slow, too slow, *too slow* . . .

Connor had never had that dream. He had it now as a wide-awake experience, facing Louise and unable to find the words to say unable even to think what they'd be about. He had forgotten about Hari. There was nothing but Louise and him . . . and the gap in his mind, and fear, and indecision, and the horror of being unable to move or speak or think.

He didn't know whether he loved or feared Louise, whether he wanted most of all to get rid of her or whether losing her was what he most feared.

But he did know deep in his mind that he wasn't just Wallin masquerading as Connor any more, he had taken over Connor's life as well as his brain and body, and Connor's responsibilities, and Connor's problems, and Connor's past, present and future . . .

Louise turned away from him and went into her bedroom. Connor stood still, shaking. The moment had passed. He should have spoken then, and he hadn't known what to say. He turned slowly and went into his room.

He felt as if he had failed terribly.

The next day Louise was gone. She hadn't slept in her bed that night, Mrs. Bentley told everyone excitedly. It was only because it was Louise that Mrs. Bentley was excited. Louise was the last person to do anything unusual.

Connor cursed himself for a fool. The night before he should have known . . . when he and Louise stood and looked at each other like that it was a farewell, only he hadn't had the sense to realise it.

Hari had had something to do with it, but not everything. If he'd known what to say, what to do, Louise needn't have gone.

Connor didn't know, and he didn't take the time to try to work out, why he was so concerned that Louise had gone. The obvious reason was that he had to know some time what this secret in his past was, and Louise was the only one from whom he could learn it.

First he went to the office where Louise worked. They knew nothing there. They were still expecting her to come in. They were astonished that Louise had disappeared. She had struck them as a quiet, dependable person—which of course she was.

Connor went back to the boarding house and questioned Mrs. Bentley, certain that Louise must have left some forwarding address. He was soon satisfied that Mrs. Bentley knew less than he did. She did, however, know where Louise's relatives lived. That was Connor's next port of call.

This visit paid off no more than the others. They had seen Louise the night before, she had behaved exactly as usual, and they had no idea where she might be now. They didn't take the affair too seriously. Louise was too steady, too businesslike to do anything sensational.

Connor got the strange idea that little as he knew about Louise, he knew her better than they did. Quiet, dependable people did strange things occasionally. And once or twice he'd caught a hint of passion in Louise's make-up which he was prepared to bet these relatives of hers didn't even suspect.

Connor went next to the missing persons bureau. They already had a report from Mrs. Bentley, and they took further particulars from Connor. They, too, didn't seem inclined to take the matter very seriously. It often happened, he was told, that someone went away for a day or two. Relatives and friends became perturbed, but after a while the person simply came back.

Connor then went to the offices of the local paper, and put in a personal ad. He didn't strive for originality ; his ad read like a thousand others : *L. Come back. Frank.*

After that there was only one other thing he could do. Some time ago he had given up the task of trying to prise information from that blank section of Connor's mind. If Connor had still been alive, still the possessor of that mind, Connor might have broken down the barriers that he himself had set up, with the help of a competent enough psychiatrist. But Connor was dead. Wallin was using his mind now, and Wallin had no power to break down these barriers which Connor had set up.

Now, however, there was nothing else he could attempt. He had to tackle once more that moated stronghold.

Well, there was one other possible source of information—his relatives who sent him money. They must have known where he'd been, probably even where he had lived during this blank period of his life. Perhaps they even knew about Louise. It was even possible that Louise had gone to them.

Possible, but no more than that. Connor was certain that he hadn't visited them for ten years or so. He could think of the locality and of the people without feeling the slightest relevance to the black spot in his mind.

If all else failed, he'd contact these people and find out what they knew. But it wouldn't be much. They didn't want to know anything about him. They just wanted him not to bother them.

Connor tackled the plague spot in his brain again. He didn't attempt this time to find the real secret that Connor possessed. He was looking only for a location. Where had Connor and Louise been? Where had Connor met Louise? Where had they lived before they came to this city?

He knew somehow, had know all along that it hadn't been here that they'd met, that . . . whatever it was had happened.

He probed at the mind with that question foremost—not *what*, but *where*? He realised as he did this that Louise meant far more to him than he'd guessed. Much more than Hari. In fact, now that he was thinking of Louise, now he was worried about Louise, Hari seemed completely unimportant.

Louise, after all, had been with him a lot—him, Wallin, not just the dead Connor. She hadn't said much, she hadn't done very much, but he had liked her, he had become accustomed to her.

Connor tackled the blank spot in his mind from the near end, then went and attacked it from the other end. He told himself, knowing it was true, that the thing Connor had walled up so grimly in his mind couldn't be so very serious, so very horrible. Such things never were. In successful psychiatric cures the patient generally wondered: "Was *that* what I was afraid of? Was *that* what caused all the trouble?" —and laughed.

It would be a little thing, an unimportant thing, which had become very big and important to Frank Connor. He had to find it—or at least where it had happened.

He was pretty sure that Louise had gone back to the place where it had happened.

After half an hour of effort which brought the sweat out on his forehead, Connor caught something.

At some time, and it could only be in this blank period in his life, Connor had been in Edinburgh.

Connor went to the local bank and drew all the money he had in his account. Louise had looked after the money sent regularly from his relatives. There wasn't much there, but quite enough for Connor's immediate purpose.

He went to Edinburgh by train. The city was familiar. He had a vague idea now why he had been there. His relatives—he must look them up some time, once he was ready for them—had regarded him as a nuisance but a responsibility. At one time he'd had quite a lot

of money from them, before they realised that the more he had to spend, the more trouble he was liable to get into.

He'd been in Edinburgh to visit a famous doctor who might be able to do something for him. This had been when he was twenty-four, when Connor was still close enough to sanity for it to be possible for his relatives to hope . . .

That didn't matter now. He headed for Glasgow, but didn't actually get there. On the way something gave, and he knew that it was after this that he'd met Louise, in a place called Borne in Northumberland.

He went straight back to the station. As soon as he arrived in Borne he knew where Louise might be—with a girl friend, one of those eternal friends one can always go back to. He didn't quite know the friend's name, but he guessed that if he saw her it would come back.

He and Louise had lived in Borne, together.

He went to the address he knew, and Louise opened the door.

For two seconds she stared at him. Then she fainted.

Connor carried Louise inside. The friend—he remembered her name now, but that was another thing that didn't matter—wasn't home. He was conscious of a feeling of almost overpowering relief. Whatever happened now, he had found Louise. He realised that the thing he had been most afraid of, the only thing he had been afraid of, was losing Louise—not being able to find Louise.

IV

She didn't take long to recover. When Connor was loosening her clothes she sat up. Connor noticed that she wasn't embarrassed about that. She was embarrassed about something else, however.

"Wait a minute, Frank," she said. She got up and hurried into another room.

"Are you sure you're—" Connor called after her, but the door was shut behind her.

Connor smiled at the incongruity of it. She'd fainted whenever he appeared, and on recovering she didn't say a word about how he'd managed to find her, why he wanted to find her—nothing like that. Perhaps she was thinking the thing out now, preparing herself to meet him and talk to him. Was she . . . could she be afraid of him?

He looked about the room. No, they hadn't lived here, He'd seen Louise here often enough, but that was before . . . Before what?

Connor's mind, having yielded this much, seemed quite determined not to yield any more.

Frowning, Connor glanced at his watch. Louise had been in the next room for half an hour. Was there another door? Had she made her escape from him again? He moved to the door, put his ear to it. No, she was still there. He heard movement.

He had almost forgotten that he was Wallin, Quinnan agent. As a matter of fact, he wasn't Wallin any more, and hadn't been from the moment, and that must have been early, when he had decided the Terrans couldn't be destroyed. He was a man called Frank Connor, and Frank Connor's problems were his.

He had realised that very forcibly when he had faced Louise in the corridor of Mrs. Bentley's boarding house and knew there was something he had to say to her, but didn't know what.

At last the door opened and Louise emerged.

Connor understood a lot at that first glance. Louise had run away because she believed he wasn't hers any more, he was Hari's. The fact that he had looked for her and found her must have reassured her, and now she was fighting for him.

In good clothes—and it was a shock to see that Louise knew how to wear clothes, after all—and with some work done on her face, Louise was decidedly pretty. She didn't have the sensational looks of Hari, but then, one didn't always want sensation. Louise was—yes, she was beautiful, and Connor let his face show his awareness of it.

If the circumstances were all set for a touching reconciliation, that didn't seem to be quite what Louise had in mind.

"You're not Frank," she said bluntly.

Connor laughed. "If I not Herbert Francis Connor, Louise, I'd appreciate it if you'd tell me who I am."

"I don't know," she said, "but you're not Frank. I've known that for quite a while. I've kept telling myself I must be crazy, that I knew you were Frank, but that wasn't really what I knew. I knew something quite different."

"What would you like me to tell you that only Frank Connor could tell you?" Connor asked.

She shook her head. "I don't mean that. You know all that Frank ever knew, and more, much more. I kept telling myself that you were the same, that you'd changed as people do change, but were fundamentally the same person. It didn't work. I couldn't make myself believe it. And when I knew that you and Hari were lovers—"

"We're not," said Frank. "I swear that, Louise."

"Does that mean anything but technically?" Louise asked wryly.

"No," Connor admitted. "But doesn't the fact that I came after you, and managed to find you, mean something, too?"

"I know it means something," Louise admitted. "I wish I knew what."

"I love you, Louise," said Frank. "I want to marry you."

Louise drew in her breath sharply. "You don't mean it. You—"

She stopped. "How much do you know?" she asked.

"I know you and I were together here," Connor said. "I don't know what happened except that it must have been pretty terrible whatever it was."

Louise took a long, shuddering breath. "Yes," she murmured "It was."

"Tell me about it," Connor said.

Louise shook her head. "No. It made you crazy once."

"It won't again," he assured her.

"Because you're not Frank?" Louise suggested, a challenge in her voice.

Connor frowned. "Look, Louise, when you say I'm not Frank, what do you mean? Who am I if I'm not Frank? I don't get it."

She shook her head. "I can't explain it. I don't know. All I know is—"

Connor anticipated her. "That I'm not Frank Connor. Listen, Louise. When you met me I wasn't quite crazy, but I wasn't really sane either. You knew that, didn't you? Or did you try to make yourself believe I was? I'm sane now. So in a sense you're right. I'm not the Frank Connor you knew. I'm the real Frank Connor, the sane Frank Connor."

She looked at him longingly. "I want to believe that," she said. And for a moment the passion of which she was capable showed.

"I'm glad you do. And you *can* believe it." He was safe in saying that, it was much easier to believe than the truth. "But I have to know the rest of it. What happened here, Louise? What was it?"

She got up. "Let's go out," she said.

He was going to protest when something in her manner showed that she meant to tell him, that she was taking him somewhere to show him something. Silently he followed her.

For five minutes they walked without a word being spoken, then suddenly Connor said: "I hadn't realised before how beautiful you could be, Louise."

"Don't talk like that, Frank," she said. "If you're going to make love to me, wait till afterwards. After you know. I still don't know if I'm right to tell you. If your mind could take this, you'd remember it."

They walked out of town. Now there was the road, the fields at the side of it, and nothing else. It was half familiar to Connor. He knew he had been here before, but if Louise were to turn and go back and leave him to go on, he wasn't sure he'd be able to find anything.

At last Louise stopped. She didn't speak. Connor saw she was looking off the road towards a small house, a mere cottage, some hundred yards off the road. There was a small track to it, overgrown with weeds.

A closer look showed that it wasn't a house, but the shell of a house. It had been burnt down, and nothing but the shell remained. The roof was gone, the windows were gaping eye-sockets. Connor found himself shuddering.

" Do you remember ?" Louise asked softly, staring at him, hoping he'd remember.

" No," Connor said. " We lived here, yes—I remember that. No more."

" Six years ago," Louise said, her voice calm and controlled, " we went through a form of marriage, you and I. I don't know how legal it was. Probably it wouldn't stand up in court. I didn't care. I loved you, Frank, and I wouldn't risk losing you. If you'd been examined, if anyone had asked questions, they might not have let us . . . Anyway, we came here to live. We had a son."

For the first time her voice broke.

" I had to work, you couldn't. The money from your people had stopped. We didn't want them to know where you were, in case . . ." She stopped and turned to look at him, in sudden fear that what she'd said already had been too much for him.

Connor returned her look with a calm, steady gaze.

" It was all right while Michael was a baby," Louise went on. " You were very good with him then, Frank. Very careful and gentle. I could leave him with you perfectly happily, without having to worry. You knew what you could do and what you couldn't. When he cried you picked him up in your arms. You knew how to feed him. He was a perfect baby, Frank. Not—not feeble-minded, or anything like that. I'd been afraid . . . but even before he was a year old I was quite certain. He crawled at five months, began to say words before he was a year old, and took his first steps just after that."

She turned her back on the ruined cottage.

" We don't need to stay here any more," she said. " There's nothing to see. I only brought you out here in case it would help you to remember."

They began to walk back towards the town.

"It was when Michael was a little older that I began to get anxious," Louise said. "You'd let him crawl or walk about, and forget him. If I left him in his playpen you'd pick him out when he cried, and forget to put him back."

She paused again. Connor didn't need her to tell him the rest of the story now. He could guess what had happened.

"One night," said Louise, her voice unsteady for the first time, "I came back and found the cottage ablaze. I don't know how it happened. I guess you'd left Michael and he'd found a box of matches, or something like that. When I came back you were trying desperately to get into the house. You knew Michael was there . . . I had to stop you, it was too late to do anything. By the time I got there, nothing could have been alive in the house."

They went on in silence for a while.

Then Louise said: "After that you were as you've been until a week or so ago. You didn't know anything about Michael. You were—"

"Crazy," Connor said. "Yes, I know. I understand now. I don't remember, but I know what you've told me is true. And after that Louise, you still loved me?"

"It wasn't really your fault," she said softly. "You couldn't help it. That sort of thing happens even when—even to—"

"Even to people who are perfectly sane," Connor said.

She didn't answer.

"Come back with me, Louise," Connor said. "Marry me properly this time—if it isn't too late to start again."

"It isn't too late," she said, almost in a whisper.

As he kissed her, not passionately but gently, tenderly, Connor was wondering if any Quinnan agent had ever so completely, so quickly, pushed his mission to the back of his mind.

"But it's not starting again," Louise murmured.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"It's starting afresh. You're not Frank. No, don't say anything. You're not Frank, but I love you."

He couldn't see her eyes in the deep shadow across her face. His hands were on her cheeks, tilting her head upwards.

"I don't know what happened, Frank," she said quietly, "but for me it's . . . release. What do you think it's like to love a man and every month see less of him when you look in his eyes—until at last there's nothing left? It was . . . I think it was worse than coming back to the house that night and finding what I did. And it went on so long . . . Now some miracle has happened, and it's over. I

couldn't leave Frank, I could never leave him. You're not Frank, but you're the only Frank there is. Do you understand ?"

" I understand," Wallin said softly. He kissed her again, a tender kiss for a quiet, faithful girl who had known too much pain.

She wasn't going to know any more if Connor could help it.

Somehow the sad little story he'd become part of seemed the final piece of evidence that made Quinna's plans for Earth impossible. You couldn't destroy people like these, no matter what was wrong with their society. You couldn't even take the risk of helping them, in case you discovered a thousand years too late that you'd destroyed them in another way.

But in the case of one of them, just one, it was different. Louise, who had helped Frank Connor for so long, was going to be helped now to find something she hadn't know for a long time—happiness. Helped by Wallin, Quinnan agent on Earth.

He knew already how his report on Earth, in half a century or so, was going to begin :

On Earth I knew a woman . . .

J. T. McIntosh

Londoners at New York Convention

This year's 14th World Science Fiction Convention which is being held at the Biltmore Hotel in New York on August 31st to September 3rd will have a number of British delegates to support London's bid for next year's Convention to be held in London. Guest of Honour will be author Arthur C. Clarke who leaves by air on August 28th. His co-partner in underwater adventures, Mike Wilson, reaches New York on the 30th. And at the time this issue is published I shall be somewhere on the Atlantic and due to reach the Convention city on the 28th where next month's Editorial will be written.

At least two other ex-members of London's famed Circle group of professionals and amateurs will be in attendance—Audrey Lovett, now a resident of New York, and Kerry Gaulder now of Hamilton, Ontario; in 1951 Kerry was the film operator at London's First International Convention.

A full report of this fabulous Convention will be in next month's issue.

John Carnell

On my bookshelf I have a volume inscribed by the author " To Les Flood—even if you don't like it !—Arthur Clarke." The book is *Against The Fall Of Night* published in the U.S.A. only a few years ago, and which was a fuller version of the original story in *Startling Stories* five years before. My criticism at that time was that it failed to fulfil the promise of its grand theme, despite its poetic qualities and the realisation that here was the germination of the major novel of Clarke's career. I like to think he agreed with me. At any rate, during the years that he was to add to his science-fiction laurels with *Prelude To Space*, *Islands in the Sky*, and *Childhood's End* (the latter showing that his better work lay in the departure from the realistic sagas of the solar system in which he was already supreme) the stillborn epic of Diaspar must have been nagging his conscience, and being the writer he is, he has now produced the intended masterpiece in **The City And The Stars** (Frederick Muller, 13/6d).

To dispel a canard (inspired by his remarkable commercial success and ubiquitousness in print ?) this is *not* the same *Against The Fall Of Night* under another title. That was merely the précis of this brilliant new and substantial novel. His literary style has matured beyond the criticism of all but the most exacting arbiter of letters, and is a joy to read, whilst his imagination can encompass a sweep of time and space with a totality and awareness unattainable by lesser authors. *The City and the Stars* is Clarke's longest book to date, and indeed I found the commencing chapters somewhat slow, but they proved to be careful and necessary preparation for an enthralling epic of Man's rise and fall in Galactic history, revealed through the enquiring mind of the unique youth Alvin who penetrates beyond the confines of Diaspar, the astonishing wonder-city of Man's twilight in the remote future of Earth. Against such a background strong characterisation is difficult, and this was never Clarke's good point, but the exciting scientific concepts which pour from his fertile mind make this a superb science-fiction novel of the highest calibre which deserves the durability of Diaspar itself.

Arthur Clarke's many-faceted talent reveals itself in yet another field (his astronautic treatises are perhaps standard works)—undersea photo-

graphy, and his companion new book this month, **The Coast Of Coral** (Frederick Muller, 21/-) is the fruit of his recent exploration of the Great Barrier Reef off the Queensland coast of Australia. It deserves mention in this column for of all the strange new worlds revealed beneath the oceans of the Earth, Clarke achieves, as was to be expected, equal success in this area with the earlier pioneers of this fascinating hobby. True, friend Mike Wilson is a poor substitute for say, Lotte Haas, and I found the excellent photographs of the denizens of the deep more interesting in this case (the weird stonefish on p. 17 is enough to put one off piscatorial cuisine for ever !). The hazards and escapades make remarkably good reading, and, from the humdrum life of London, one is tempted to envy this skin-diving lark in exotic waters, which has proved to be more than a pastime and has, in fact, an important bearing on marine research and commercial ventures such as pearl-diving, etc.

Not one more literary comment on the writings of Ray Bradbury can be made and lay claim to originality. Since this truly individual imagination—a fey and horror-caressed embryo nurtured in such pulp magazines as *Weird Tales* and *Planet Stories*—swiftly blossomed into the pages of most of the world's better periodicals, many distinguished critics, including Christopher Isherwood and Herschel Brickell, have acclaimed his literary integrity, his brilliant flair for peopling unusual themes with real human emotions, his ability to induce tears and laughter (with cynicism or descriptive beauty or unusually acute perception of an ordinary event twisted with macabre intent) in one mood, and in the next, with shuddery abruptness, to create a horror which can rock your senses. His first five books collected the best of published stories under the titles *Dark Carnival*, *The Martian Chronicles*, *The Illustrated Man*, *Golden Apples of the Sun* and *Fahrenheit* 451 and were published on both sides of the Atlantic, achieving, perhaps more than any other writer of this decade, wider recognition for science-fantasy in the mainstream field. A recent Bradbury review in a literary Sunday journal suggested it was a pity he should have been classed with the writers of science-fiction. A typical narrow view of a " discoverer " of talent from our genre, but containing a grain of truth in that Bradbury's highly imaginative gifts show to greater effect in the weird tale, comparable to the best of his predecessors on the pedestal of horror and fantasy—Poe, Blackwood, Lovecraft, Collier and Saki—and like them, universal acclaim as a writer of distinction is restrained only by the limited imaginations of the great, and sadly normal, reading public.

If anything can be done to alter this state of affairs then Bradbury's **The October Country** (Rupert Hart-Davis, 15/-) will greatly help.

Only small editions of his first book, *Dark Carnival*, were published here and in the U.S.A. It was for my own taste—and Bradbury is the only writer I have read who can make me feel *uncomfortable* (a masochistic pleasure of Bradburyian propensity)—his finest and most unforgettable book. Now fourteen stories of that original collection—slightly revised to some advantage—form the basis of *The October Country*, to which has been added five stories not previously published in book form (not *six* as the dust wrapper, and the aforementioned Sunday critic, claim) plus some mood-catching line drawings by Joe Mugnaini. These new gems, which I feel show Bradbury's later maturity of style, if not ideas, are "The Dwarf," a masterpiece of sordid characterisation; "The Next in Line" whose mounting and subtle horror blends perfectly with the customs of a heat-ridden Mexico; the slightly plodding atmosphere of "Touched With Fire" (but what an idea!); and the brilliant satires of "The Watchful Poker Chip of H. Matisse" and "The Wonderful Death of Dudley Stone," both the more effective for the disturbing grain of wisdom Bradbury sows beneath the soil of contrived wonder.

As for the rest I envy the reader making his first acquaintance with such highlights of a remarkable literary career as shocking as "The Small Assassin," as intensely moving as "The Lake," and "Jack in the Box," as frightening as "Skeleton" and "The Emissary" and "The Man Upstairs," as sardonic as "The Scythe" and "The Jar," as ghostly queer as "The Wind" and "The Cistern" and "The Crowd," as deftly humorous as "There Was An Old Woman," and as Addamsish, but most moving, as "The Homecoming," and "Uncle Einar." A thrilling and emotionally rewarding reading experience I must recommend to you.

Another non-fiction item is devoted to a background of present day development in space-flight preparations. **An Introduction To Rockets And Space Flight** by Eric Burgess (Hodder & Stoughton, 12/6d) includes much seemingly necessary repetitive material common to books on astronautics, but I suppose the constant exposure to the facts (rapidly increasing as practical research continues apace) and possibilities, must surely have the result that the first manned space-flight will have far less impact on the public when it happens than the A-bomb did at Hiroshima (figuratively speaking, of course!) The present book deals competently with basic principles, covers recent stratospheric flights, guided missiles, satellite stations (will we see the first space-flight in the International Geophysical Year which begins next July?), planetary probe techniques, and the inevitable speculation on extra-terrestrial life.

Leslie Flood

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