NEW WORLDS SCIENCE FICTION

No. 62
VOLUME 21
2/-

★ THE UNINHIBITED by DAN MORGAN ★

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No. 62

MONTHLY

AUGUST 1957

CONTENTS

Editor : JOHN CARNELL

Cover painting by TERRY illustrating " The Uninhibited "

TWO SHILLINGS

Subscription Rates
Great Britain and the Commonwealth, 12 issues 26/- post free
United States of America 12 issues $4.00 post free

Published on the last Friday of each month by
NOVA PUBLICATIONS LTD.,
Maclaren House, 131 Great Suffolk Street, London, S.E.1

Sole Distributors in New Zealand :
MESSRS. P. B. FISHER, 564 Colombo Street, Christchurch, N.Z.

Printed in England by The Rugby Advertiser Ltd., Albert Street, Rugby

Traditions . . .

You may have noticed numerous changes taking place in the general make-up of this magazine and *Science Fantasy* during recent months. In actual fact, most of the experiments were first made in our bi-monthly companion before being incorporated in *New Worlds*. Two months ago we changed the main type face to one more easily readable, without any loss of wordage, but by far the most significant change has been the gradual reduction of inside art work until, with this issue, there is none at all. Before a lot of people write in, let me review the situation.

Art work in the digest-size magazines is as out-of-date as a coal fire (you can work out the analogy)—the trend is for the cameo-type illustration one sees in journals like the *Reader's Digest*. In particular, art work in science fiction magazines is a hangover from the days of the large-size pulps, just the same as two columns of type is a hand-down from the old three columns of the large magazines. Both are traditions which are dying hard—but nevertheless dying.

Back in the late 1920's magazines were approximately 12 in. by 10 in. Without illustrations to break down the vast expanse of print they would have been boring tomes through which to wade. And, too, in those early days, illustrations were as much an introduction to science fiction as the stories themselves. Then in the 1930's the magazine size dropped to 9½ in by 7 in. with two narrow columns of type—it was during this period and into the 1940's that fantasy art work reached its peak and established itself as a tradition.

Towards the end of the '30's, sometime after John W. Campbell, Jr. became editor, *Astounding Science Fiction* bridged the gap between the pulps and the slicks and became the first science fiction magazine to change to the growing popularity of ' digest ' size. But throughout this shrinking period, the art work stayed.

Following in the footsteps of tradition, *New Worlds* used interior art work (although I was never very happy about it, and, except when Gerard Quinn was at his peak, seldom satisfied). The only breaks we made with tradition were dropping the two columns of type to one easily readable width (similar to that used in book production) and having no lettering on the cover illustration. Both were radical de-

partures from the norm and in those days (back in 1949) we were told that we would never get away with it.

Meanwhile, as 1950 came in, tradition-breaking started in U.S.A.—Tony Boucher's *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* cut across existing taboos by having no art work, no readers' letters, and only one column-width of text. It was a first-class tilt at the orthodox—the only fault being that the single column was too wide; the printing industry now having proved that a 4-inch wide column is the maximum for comfortable reading. Even at this measure the type-face used has a lot to do with that comfort. In actual fact, Times Roman, now used in this magazine, was designed specially for its readability at widths up to 4 inches.

The other magazine which tilted at tradition was Horace Gold's *Galaxy*, which abolished readers' letters but introduced a form of contemporary art still highly controversial.

While watching the changes in contemporary American magazines we still continued experimenting ourselves. For instance, we never had a *regular* section for readers' letters, but *Postmortem* was set up for anyone who had something really worthwhile to say about science fiction in general. It is still used occasionally but isn't available for bouquets or brickbats. These latter are taken to heart privately.

Our decision to cancel interior illustrations has been largely due to such a suggestion from numerous readers. As one Australian bitterly complained recently: "Your stories are top quality but looking through an issue on a bookstall a casual reader would never realise it unless he bought the issue. He might pass up buying the magazine on the strength of your poor art work." Which just about agreed with our own opinion. So we tried out a couple of issues of *Science Fantasy* without any illustrations. Result: not one single complaint.

There is another vital reason why I think interior art work should be dropped, at least for the time being, and that is the standard of work produced by both professional and amateur British artists in general. I think an entire editorial could be devoted to the subject. Let's say after the World Convention in September, when I will have had an opportunity of talking to a number of artists and prevailed upon some of the visiting Americans to express an opinion.

John Carnell

THE UNINHIBITED

It is in some measure a great credit to this magazine to note the progress made by some of the short story writers who have grown up with us, several of them having attempted first novels with considerable success —as witness James White, Kenneth Bulmer, and Lan Wright—such novels appearing first in New Worlds. *Dan Morgan's first novel which commences herewith is no exception and packs as heavy a British punch as Wilson Tucker's* Wild Talent *did in America.*

By Dan Morgan

Part One of Three Parts

I

Keenan killed the engine as he rounded the corner and coasted along the deserted street, braking gently. A pale moon of light glowed through the glass panel in the front door of the house which was his destination. Lolling backward in his seat he deliberately tried to rid himself of the tension which had been growing in him since he had first picked up the child over a mile away at the moment of its birth.

He reached under his left armpit and adjusted the control of his sub-voc. The radiation picked up by the tiny transceiver surgically implanted in his brainstem faded to a more bearable level. The sub-voc was a crutch ; a means of endowing his mind with a pale replica of the powers of a sensitive.

First contact always came as a rending shock, bringing with it a reflex sensation of fear and revulsion ; fear of the unknown power of the sensitive and a primeval urge to destroy him. Keenan was intelligent enough to recognise these reactions as pure animal and suppress them, but he could not prevent the doubts and suggestions of self contempt which lay on the fringe of his consciousness plucking at his self control. The months of careful planning, winning the confidence of these people, establishing a bond of friendship and mutual trust weighed heavily on Keenan. Especially in this case, because of the new element which had been added ; that of finding himself gradually, against his will, falling in love with Marie and seeing in her a growing response to his own feelings.

He reached over and picked up the bag from the seat beside him. Sitting here he was only prolonging the agony and increasing the danger. Getting out of the car he walked up to the front door of the house and rang the bell.

Charles Martin opened the door. He was wearing a sack-like turtle-neck pullover and rumpled tweed trousers which increased a general effect of stubbiness.

" Hello, doctor." His voice was tired as he assayed a faint smile of welcome. " Sorry to call you out at this time of night."

" Don't worry about that, Charles. These things seldom run to schedule." Keenan recognised the familiar bewildered helplessness as Martin ran a hand through his thinning, fair hair.

" It's a hell of a thing to be a woman," said Martin quietly. " Thank God Marie was here to take care of things."

Keenan headed for the stairs. " Why don't you try and get some sleep ? Everything is going to be all right, I promise you."

" No—not yet. I'll go back into the kitchen and make some more coffee." Martin paused. " Marie threw me out over an hour ago—but I'd like to go up there and see them . . ."

" Of course. I'll let you know," Keenan said.

As he reached the head of the stairway the lusty yell of the newborn child broke the night silence of the house. And, inside his mind, picked up by his sub-voc, charged with real fear and hate was the soundless replica of that cry. The child had sensed his presence and was calling for protection with all the means at its command. Reflexly he dampened his sub-voc still further and reduced the primitive appeal to a mere whisper of thought.

He walked swiftly along the short, carpeted corridor and quietly opened the door of the room. The child stopped crying abruptly. The effect was horrible, as if it had abandoned all hope of its meagre physical means of communication and was concentrating its efforts on the transmission of telepathic impulses.

The midwife, a colourless grey-haired woman, was busying herself over the cot in which the child lay. Marie was standing tensely in the middle of the room looking towards him. Her eyes were wide and her lips drawn back from her strong white teeth. As he closed the door she moved forward a step, her hands raising, fingers bent. She looked like some magnificent blonde tigress about to protect her brood against an intruder.

This was something which he had not envisaged. The child was getting through to her, despite the fact that like her sister she was an inhibited sensitive, setting up a barrier of antagonism by prodding her mind on a sub-threshold emotional level in a desperate attempt to obtain protection against the unknown menace which Keenan represented.

" Hello, Marie," Keenan said, warily. " Sorry I couldn't get here sooner. But you seem to have managed pretty well without me."

" You're not wanted here." Her voice was harsh, unmodulated, as if someone else were speaking through her.

" It's all right, Marie." He moved forward quickly and placed a hand on her arm. " I understand, darling. Judy and the baby are both quite safe . . . You must trust me."

He could feel the quivering tension in her relax as the sense of his nearness worked its alchemy on her emotional responses, wresting control from the pitiful appeal of the child. It was a cheap, despicable victory.

When she spoke again her voice was gentler, almost normal. " Of course, Peter. It's been quite a strain. I'm so tired I'm not even thinking straight."

Keenan nodded and increased the reassuring pressure of his grip on her arm. " You had better go down and have a word with Charles. This sort of thing is tough on fathers too, you know. I'll be down for a cup of coffee in a few minutes."

Her smile was a bright diamond that cut into his soul leaving a deep scar of anger at the deception he was forced to play upon her. He breathed easier as the door closed behind her and turned to the little midwife.

" Everything under control ?"

" Yes, doctor. A perfectly normal birth." She gestured towards the cot with a thin smile. " He's a fine boy."

Perfectly normal . . . " Thank you. If you would like to take a break I can handle things up here for a few minutes," he said.

" Very well, doctor," said the woman quickly, and left the room.

Judy Martin, the mother, lay unmoving on the bed. Her face looked very young and pale, crowned with the same rich blondness as that of Marie. One thin hand shielded her eyes against the muted glow of the bedside lamp. There would be no interference from her.

Keenan laid his bag on the chair and adjusted the lamp slightly. Bending over the cot he moved the clothing carefully to one side and looked down into the pink little gnome face of the child.

The eyes of the baby were wide open. There was something horribly mature in the way it glared silently up at him. In a way what he had to do would have seemed easier if it had yelled and kicked—but they never did. The only signs of its alarm were the emanations of defiance and despair in his damped down sub-voc.

The woman on the bed stirred, moaning slightly. The child was trying to reach her now. He must work quickly, before it succeeded in penetrating even her exhaustion drugged consciousness.

He snapped his bag open and lifted the small black case from its special pocket. The tiny inhibitors glistened like crystal needles in their bed of sterile wadding. The shining tube of the injector instrument lay beside them. Selecting an inhibitor he inserted it into the breech of the injector. The lines of his cheek and brow were deep-etched with shadow.

He lifted the unresisting child gently and laid it face downwards. His practised hands with their delicate fingertips ran over the soft, unset bones of the infant skull, and found the fontanelle. There was no sound in the room but the deep, relaxed breathing of the mother and the shallow, higher pitched respiration of the child.

Bending closer Keenan levelled the injector precisely over the fissure and pressed the catch on its side. There was a

sharp hiss of compressed air and the inhibitor slid through soft living matter to its destination deep in the brain of the child, leaving only a microscopic dot on the skin of the scalp as an indication of its passage.

The presence that had buzzed and hummed with lusty existence in the mind of Keenan ceased with the abruptness of a snuffed candle. The vibrations of the inhibitor blanketed out the emanations of the telepathic centres of the child's brain, switching them into a harmless feedback circuit which would never be broken whilst it remained in position.

He turned the baby over onto its back and rearranged its bedclothes. The eyes were again staring up at him. He tried to avoid them. This was always the worst time; the knowledge that his task had been performed finally and irrevocably . . . for good or ill. The child would soon realise, if realise was the word on such a level of awareness, that it no longer had the faculty which had been part of its mental makeup, even in the dim awareness of the womb. From now on its limitations would be that of a normal child, relying on sound alone as a means of communication, and its eyes and intuition as its only guide to the motives of people around it. Later still, very soon and completely Lockyer had assured him, all memory of any telepathic faculty would be lost, leaving nothing more serious than the normal birth trauma.

" What have you been doing to that child ?"

Keenan turned swiftly. Marie was standing in the open doorway. How long she had been there he could only guess, but her eyes burned with suspicion.

She pointed to the inhibitor case and the injector which lay beside it. " What is that ?"

" Just a thermometer." Keenan snapped the case shut and slipped it out of sight. " I was giving the boy a quick check-up. He's a fine specimen. You're going to be proud of your nephew."

She moved towards him, trembling with hostility. " You're lying !"

Somehow the child must have exerted the full extent of its powers in the moment before inhibition and jolted her mind with such a wave of panic that she had been forced to come back up the stairs to the room. Keenan picked up his bag

and walked towards her, but she recoiled from his outstretched hand.

" You're upset and tired, Marie," he said gently. " Let's go outside where we can talk without disturbing Judy and the child." She had witnessed the injection of the inhibitor, and although she could have no real conception of what had taken place a seed of doubt had been sown in her mind. A seed which could grow into a poisonous weed, ruining the precious relationship which had existed between them until tonight.

There was a simple routine procedure to take care of this kind of eventuality ; the mnemonic erasure of the dangerous witness. Lockyer would not have hesitated—but Lockyer was not in love with this vibrant, lovely girl; only with an ideal, which left no room for normal human feelings. He thrust the idea from him. Erasure would mean blotting from her mind all memory of himself, rendering her completely lost to him forever.

Outside in the corridor she turned on him again. " Well, Doctor Keenan—talk !"

" It's nothing, Marie. I've told you, Judy and the boy are both fine. Why should you think anything else ?" Stepping his sub-voc up to maximum power he poured reassuring hetero-suggestion into her.

She raised a trembling hand to her brow. " I don't know . . . It's just a feeling I've been having all evening ; something deep down telling me that terrible things are happening, things that I don't understand." She was suddenly warm, pleading. " Please, Peter, tell me it's nothing—that I'm just a silly, hysterical woman."

" You're overtired, and you've been worrying too much about that sister of yours," Keenan said. He placed an arm round her and this time she did not resist. " I prescribe a sedative and a good night's sleep. You'll have forgotten all this nonsense by tomorrow."

She smiled palely. " All right, Peter. You're the doctor."

They walked down the stairs together. But Keenan knew that for *him* tomorrow would not bring relief. Lockyer always insisted that no loose ends should be left to endanger the project, and he was sure to demand the erasure of Marie and all the rest of the people concerned in this episode.

II

Charles ate his way through a large breakfast, placidly absorbed in the morning paper. Marie, perched on a stool opposite him, lit another cigarette and sipped at her fourth cup of coffee. She had no use for food this morning. Despite the sedative Keenan had given her it had been a bad night, torn by nightmares and trembling awakenings. She could not rid herself of the idea that something was wrong, terribly wrong. Last night, after weeks of growing affection for Peter, she had walked into Judy's room and been confronted with a total stranger; there had seemed something utterly different and alien about him as she had seen him bending over the new-born child.

Despite their calming influence at the time she had since decided that his explanations were unsatisfactory. He was either lying or holding something back; about the child or himself, she could not tell which. Why had she felt such a sudden wave of antoganism for him as soon as he entered the room? She had been tired and on edge, but there was more to it than that. From somewhere, call it intuition, she had obtained certain knowledge that Peter Keenan was not all he seemed, and that he meant no good in this house.

Charles glanced up at the wall clock. "Good lord! I'll have to get moving if I'm going to catch that bus." He gulped the remainder of his coffee and rose from the table, brushing off his neat pin-stripe business suit.

Marie's brown eyes followed him as he moved towards the door. Could it be that it *was* all in her own mind?

"Charles!" she said abruptly.

He paused, looking exactly what he was, the dependable little man, the efficient little clerk with little imagination who was content to live a steady, ordinary life.

"What is it? I haven't got long," he asked irritably.

"How much do we *really* know about Peter Keenan?"

Charles frowned. "I should have thought you were the one who could best answer that. You've been around with him quite a lot in the last month, haven't you?"

"Yes . . . But what do we know of his background?"

"Nothing, except that he is Doctor Low's new assistant." Charles frown deepened. "Is there something you haven't told me?"

" Doesn't it strike you as rather strange that we haven't seen Doctor Low since that night six weeks ago when Keenan first called to see Judy ?" pursued Marie.

" I don't see why." There was an edge in Charles' voice. " Low put him in charge of the case; he wouldn't come round interfering. Besides, doctors are pretty busy these days."

" But the phone number Keenan gave us to call—that wasn't the same as Low's." Marie was voicing the points that had been nagging at her consciousness throughout the long night. " And Judy was quite capable of going along to the surgery for her checkups until a few days ago, but Keenan insisted on coming here to see her. Why was that, if they are so busy ?"

" Perhaps he wanted to see you. I don't know. Really—is this important ?"

" And the phone number ?"

Charles glanced at the clock again. " There ! I've missed that darned bus now, for sure." He moved back towards the table. " I might as well have another cup of coffee, there won't be another for at least ten minutes."

Marie picked up the pot and poured it out for him. Her hand was trembling violently and she slopped some of it on the table top. Picking up a cloth she began to mop up the mess, conscious of Charles' eyes on her. She knew there was not much point in continuing this conversation. Charles was the sort of person who would deliberately refuse to notice anything unusual until he was absolutely forced; his kind thrived on the security of normality and put up a stiff resistance to novelty of any kind, even on an unconscious level.

" I suppose it would be his private phone," Charles said. " I called him a couple of weeks ago when Judy had that rough patch. Darned good of him, I thought, just as if he had no other patients to worry about. Sometimes they keep you hanging about all day, but he was round in a quarter of an hour or so."

" As if she were the only patient . . . exactly." Marie gripped at the edge of the table. " That other time when *I* called, it was just the same as if he was sitting by the phone just waiting for a call from us."

" What *are* you getting at ?" Charles ran a stubby hand worriedly through his thinning fair hair.

" Just what you said—doctors are pretty busy people. Patients usually have to take their turn."

Charles' cup slammed on the table violently. " Don't talk in riddles, Marie. So he just happened to be home both times we called. What is so strange about that ?"

No, it was no use talking to Charles. How could she explain to him that she had lain awake in the darkness remembering little things about Peter Keenan, things which had gone unnoticed before because of the effect of his personal charm on her ? How could she explain those sudden, strange gaps in his knowledge of everyday things, little ignorances of events and people which a person who had lived any sort of normal life could not have helped knowing ? Only last night, with the growing suspicion in her mind had those lapses begun to add up and gain any significance. Now they were beginning to assume a frightening importance and a blurred picture was beginning to emerge. Perhaps she *was* being stupid and over-imaginative, but there were some things that she *must* know if she was ever to attain any peace of mind again.

" All right, Charles." She forced a smile. " Sorry I made you lose your bus. You'd better get along now and make sure of catching the next one."

Charles glanced upwards. " You're sure there's nothing *they* need ?"

" Don't you worry about Judy and the boy. They're *both* sleeping like babes." She rose and ushered him out into the hallway. " Mrs. James has promised to come in and keep an eye on the two of them until we get back tonight. I'll wait around until she arrives. They won't mind to an hour or so at the office—I said that I might be late this morning."

" All right, if you're quite sure." Charles fair eyebrows puckered as he stood for a moment on the front step. "Sometimes I don't understand you women." He turned and headed down the path to the gate. " 'Bye."

Marie smiled briefly, then returned to the kitchen and cleared away the breakfast things. This completed, she went upstairs to Judy's bedroom. Both her sister and the child were still sleeping peacefully. She tiptoed carefully down the stairs and began to put on her raincoat.

Marie chafed for almost three quarters of an hour in the crowded waiting room before her turn came to enter the surgery Just what she was going to say, or how she was going to say it, she was not sure.

" Good morning, Miss . . . ?" Doctor Low, pink cheeked and quite bald, smiled up at her with professional benevolence.

" Borneman," supplied Marie. " I am Mrs. Martin's sister —Mrs. Judy Martin."

" Why yes, of course. I should have recognised you. Please forgive me—so many faces, you know. And how are your sister and Charles ? I remember performing an appendectomy on him about a year ago. Fine chap, good steady type."

" My sister had her baby last night . . ." Marie stopped, a sudden pang of fear grasping at her stomach muscles as she saw Low's amiable face change.

" Indeed ? I had no idea . . . They have left the district ?"

Marie forced herself to speak with icy calmness. " No, they are still living in the same place. Surely you knew about it, your assistant, Doctor Keenan, had been attending her."

" Keenan, you say ? There must be some mistake. My assistant is . . ."

Marie fought the hysteria that was rising in her. This was the answer she had somehow been expecting; she had sensed it all along, but that did not make it any easier. *What now* ? *What now* ? the question hammered in her brain.

" Are you sure you feel quite well ?" Doctor Low was standing over her, his pink face full of concern.

" Yes, I'll be all right in a minute."

" This Doctor Keenan—what made you think that he was an associate of mine ?" asked Low .

Marie had to get outside in the fresh air, away from the smell of antiseptic, and the questions of the old doctor. There was no point in dragging through the whole thing with this kindly old man. *He* could not help her. She rose from the chair.

" I'm sorry to have wasted your time, doctor. I'm afraid I must have made a stupid mistake."

" I really don't think you ought to go yet, young lady," said Low. " Are you sure there isn't something else you wish to tell me ?"

" No—not now." She had started this thing and she had to go on with it, alone. Somehow the fear that was driving her had to be pursued to some logical conclusion. If Low did not know Keenan there was nothing to be gained by talking to him; she was only wasting time.

" But your sister—where is she ?" asked Low.

" At home, with the child. I would appreciate it if you would call some time during the evening when her husband and I are there. Perhaps we could have another talk then . . ." Marie rushed out of the surgery.

The fears of the previous night were gibbering entities tearing at her self control. She felt that she was standing on the edge of a black pit which her suspicion had opened up, and that her only course was to press on, plunging downward into the darkness. She could not back out now, whatever horror was yet to be revealed.

She walked quickly along the busy suburban street, searching. At last she found a phone booth and rushed inside, slamming the door behind her. For a moment she leaned against the wall, trying to quell the thing in her that was driving her on. Her face in the mirror over the phone was pale, her strong teeth biting into her lower lip. She lifted the receiver and dialled the exchange.

" Number please." The operator's voice was cool and impersonal, a shaft of sanity in the gathering darkness of her mind.

" I have a number here, and I want you to tell me the address to which it refers."

" Dial enquiries—nine eight."

Marie replaced the receiver. There was still time, she could stop here and now. But if she did she would never know the truth ; it would always be there with her, an unanswered question tearing at her sanity.

She lifted the phone again and waited for the dialling tone. A large red bus passed close by the booth, sounding its horn. Outside in the real, normal world, people went about their business, hurrying along unconcerned. God's in his heaven, all's right with the world. She dialled nine eight.

" Enquiries—can I help you ?"

" Can you give me the address of Central seven-four-three-one, please ?"

" We are not required to divulge that information," replied the operator remotely.

" Please, it's a matter of extreme urgency. I have to know that address."

" I will connect you with the supervisor. Hold the line, please." Click, whirr; then another cold, impersonal voice : " What is your reason for making this enquiry ?"

Reason . . . why did these people in their smug little routine worlds always want reasons? "Please, I've got to know—it's a matter of life and death."

The urgency in her voice must have kindled whatever warmth lay deep buried in the heart of the official. "Very well. This is highly irregular, but in this instance I shall use my discretion and obtain the information for you. Hold the line, please . . ."

Marie closed her eyes, easing her stiffened neck muscles with her right hand, trying to massage away the tension. Then at last: "The address you require is the Grosvenor Hotel, Knight Street."

"Thank you!" Marie replaced the receiver and stumbled out of the booth. She hailed a passing taxi and climbed aboard. Lying back in its dim interior she tried to calm herself as it made its way through the crowded streets. Would Peter Keenan be waiting for her, that sad half smile on his face when she arrived? Perhaps after all, what she was seeking was merely reassurance. She had loved him, still did, beneath the fear and suspicion that gripped her. Oh God, that he would take her in his arms and tell her that it had all been a bad dream, a waking nightmare.

The entrance lounge of the Grosvenor had a shabby mid-Victorian air of potted palms and dark patterned carpets. A vacuum cleaner whined somewhere in the distance and through the glass doors of the dining room Marie noticed a sprinkling of late risers still taking breakfast.

She walked unsteadily towards the reception desk, where a woman in a black shiny dress was bent over a large, leather-bound ledger.

"Good morning." Marie struggled to keep her voice at normal pitch as the atmosphere of the place clutched at her throat. "I would like to see Doctor Keenan. Could you tell me the number of his room, please?"

The woman looked up, her narrow eyes sweeping over Marie. "Who?"

Marie smothered her immediate reaction of anger and said quietly: "Doctor Keenan, Doctor Peter Keenan. He gave me this address."

"No Keenan here," said the woman coldly.

"Are you sure of that?"

" Look, miss—remembering names is my job," retorted the receptionist sharply. " If he was living here . . ."

" All the same, would you mind if I had a look at the register ?" pursued Marie.

The woman gave her a disparaging glance. " Help yourself, *madam.*" She pushed the volume across the counter and walked away, deliberately turning her back.

Marie started to leaf through the pages, the scrawled names blurring into one another as she skimmed anxiously down the columns. She went back carefully day by day, until she found an entry made some six weeks previously : KEENAN PETER. BRITISH. LONDON.

" Well ?" The receptionist had returned and was glaring at her haughtily.

Marie turned the book round, her index finger on the entry. " This is the person I'm looking for."

The thin woman snorted. " Hmm. Why didn't you say it was that far back ?" She examined the entry, her dark pencilled eyebrows raised. " Strange—somebody must have forgotten to check him out. Just a minute, I'll look it up in the account files." She walked over to a metal cabinet and returned a moment later carrying a small card. " I don't understand it—according to this he checked out this morning, and I've been on duty since seven o'clock. There's no forwarding address. Would you like me to call the manager, perhaps he can help you ?"

Another blind alley. There was no use in pursuing it any further. " No—thank you for helping," said Marie hurriedly. Peter Keenan was obviously gone from here, this time he had not covered his tracks quite so carefully, but he was surely gone.

She picked up her bag and walked quickly out of the hotel. Now at last, with the story of these two encounters she had something to tell Charles—something which might goad even him into action . . .

Marie waited impatiently, her fingers drumming on the edge of the coin box as the ringing tone buzzed in her ears.

" Hallo, Charles Martin speaking. Who is this, please ?" Her brother-in-law's voice sounded pompous and affected in the receiver.

She pushed the button with a jerky movement. " Charles ? This is Marie."

" Is everything all right," his voice sharpened with concern and became more familiar. " Where are you calling from ?"

" I'm in High Street," she said breathlessly. " You remember what we were talking about at breakfast this morning ? I've been doing some checking up on Doctor Keenan. Low has never heard of him, and he's checked out of his hotel."

" *Doctor Keenan* ? Who on earth are you talking about, Marie ?" Charles said, quite distinctly.

Marie's breath stopped with an audible click, and she put a hand to her throat. " Peter Keenan, the doctor who . . ." her voice trailed away as a feeling of sheer helpless horror swept through her. The pattern was complete—somehow Keenan had vanished, both physically and from the minds of the people who should have known him. Except for her—and perhaps Judy . . .

Judy ! She slammed the phone back into its cradle as Charles' questioning voice commenced again. Suddenly she was sure that the most important thing in the world was that she should get back to Judy. Quickly. before—*before what* ?

There was no answer to that yet—but she *must* hurry back.

III

Lockyer lived in a street near Russell Square. The cafes and provision shops of the busy little backwater had a continental air, in contrast with the defiant Britishness of its two public houses with their frosted glass and mahogany stained fronts.

Keenan got out of his car and glanced uneasily up at the windows of the second floor flat. He was not relishing the thought of the coming interview. The curtains were drawn, as always. Lockyer abhorred the sunlight. The Spanish cafe on the ground floor was still shuttered and dark. On the street only a few early risers hurried about their business in the chill morning air. Keenan walked over to the door at the right of the cafe entrance and headed up the narrow, shabby stairway.

At the back of his mind was the picture that had remained there throughout the long, sleepless night, the memory of the sudden change in the attitude of Marie. When she looked at him as he left the house he had detected in place of the old tenderness a new hardness of fear and suspicion through which his reassurances had been unable to penetrate. All of

this reinforcing the logical reasons why her memory should be erased, whatever the personal cost to him.

At length Keenan stood, breathing heavily, before the door of the flat. He pressed the bell push and waited.

" Good morning, Keenan." Pattin stood in the doorway. Keenan returned the greeting curtly. He would have preferred to have spoken with Lockyer alone, without the surveillance of Pattin's cold, snake eyes, and the menace of his smooth round face. Since his arrival with the relief ship six months before Keenan had not been able to satisfy himself as to the exact nature of Pattin's duties, although several disquieting alternatives had occurred to him. The man was always in the background listening, and offering the occasional barbed comment with an expression of smug contempt.

Keenan walked into the small hallway. " Is Lockyer awake ?"

" But of course." Pattin's voice was oily smooth. " You look tired, Keenan."

Keenan ignored the patronising tone of the remark and opened the door of the lounge. Despite its Earth furnishings there was something in the arrangement of the apartment which always gave him a fleeting impression that he had stepped through some hole in space-time and back onto his home world of Lessigia. And yet it was not a feeling of being home, rather an uncomfortable sensation of incongruity. Although Lockyer had been on Earth for a number of years now he only wore the customary clothes of the planet on his infrequent excursions from the apartment. At all times he seemed to carry with him his exclusive aura of alien existence, accentuated by his thinly veiled distaste for the primitive culture of Earth.

Lockyer was seated in the gloom of the curtained lounge. In his fawn house-robe he looked like a member of some monastic order, a single-minded aesthete of simple and fervent belief. His grey hair grew in a natural tonsure above a bony, lined face with hollow cheekbones and pinched nostrils.

Pattin took his place quietly on a sofa near the wall. moistening his full lips with a sliver of pink tongue.

Lockyer's deep brown eyes were on Keenan. " A day is begun. You have something to report ?"

" My assignment is completed." Keenan's voice was bitter. " A human child was born onto this planet with a God-given, wonderful power and I maimed it with a stroke of my injector."

Lockyer moved a pale hand along a crease in the silky robe. "There was some difficulty?"

Keenan slumped his long form into a chair opposite his superior. Could he explain? Could he make this man understand his feelings? His task would be difficult. He felt tired and sick of the whole business.

"The child was a high grade sensitive. It was able to set up an emotional reaction in the inhibited sensitive who was present at the birth."

"To what extent?"

"The woman's suspicions were aroused—but I believe I was able to calm her satisfactorily," lied Keenan.

"You performed an erasure?"

"No—it was not possible. There were others present."

Lockyer's expression hardened. "That was careless. You could have made an opportunity, surely?"

"No—I felt that I could not interfere further with a situation which was already aggravated."

A flicker of annoyance, like the sudden sparking of a dead ember, passed over Lockyer's bony face. "Still the sentimentalist I see, Keenan. You allow yourself to become too deeply involved with these Earth people."

"They *are* human beings," protested Keenan.

"By our cultural standards they are dangerous primitives," Lockyer said sharply. "They still wage futile internecine wars and would destroy their own telepaths if their existence was revealed. We cannot allow that to happen."

"It happened on our own planet," said Keenan, recalling the records of the dark years when the telepathic gene had been eradicated from his race by a bloodbath of ruthless persecution.

Lockyer bowed his head. "You make your point, Keenan. But that was almost two thousand years ago; we have learned by our mistakes. On Earth we have managed to arrest the process in time by concealing the very existence of the telepaths."

"And robbing the sensitives of their powers," Keenan said. "Has it ever occurred to you to ask yourself what right we have, what special moral mandate we have to play God in this way?"

"We are the only ones who have the resources to preserve this priceless gift for the future of the humanoid races of the

galaxy. Once their numbers are great enough, the telepaths can be allowed to develop their powers unchecked. But not whilst they remain such a small minority, and could be so easily destroyed. At that time the strain will be introduced back into our own race and the mistakes of the past will be eradicated."

"We are tampering with their minds for our own selfish ends. What you speak of will take hundreds of years to achieve, the mental maiming of untold thousands who will grope their way through life alongside the normals because of our interference. Does that rest easily on your conscience, Lockyer?"

"They never know of these powers—their lives are quite happy," Lockyer said.

Pattin stirred. "You talk like a non-interventionist, Keenan," he said, with quiet menace. "You were fully briefed on every aspect of the project before you entered the training school; at any stage up to your embarkation you could have withdrawn."

"The whole thing was in the abstract then," Keenan said. "I could not even imagine at that time just how close to ourselves these people are. They are spoken of as primitive humanoids, something near to animals; instead I find that they have high cultural and moral standards, alien it is true, but none the less equally as worthy of consideration as our own. True they have not yet learned to live in peace with each other—but I do not have to remind you again of the bloody mistakes of our own people in the past."

Lockyer's eyes were wide and visionary. "Your view is limited. On this planet lies the seed that can be the hope of the future for humanoid life throughout the universe. It is our duty and sacred task to maintain that seed in safety against the time when it can be spread—at whatever cost in personal suffering."

Keenan found himself helpless. There was no use in arguing with Lockyer; he was a man dedicated to his mission a personality in whom some lack of natural warmth had compensated itself with this fanatic belief in the project. He could not explain that he was gradually becoming aware of the basic moral flaw in the whole idea of the project as it now stood; they had no right to carry out such an operation secretly, without the consent of the sensitives. He had never listened to the arguments of the non-interventionists on Lessigia; but

now it seemed that he had travelled many light years to Earth only to begin to understand their point of view.

He must talk to Pelee about this. Perhaps between them they would be able to make some sense of the whole thing, to find some reasonable compromise which would not bring disaster. Lockyer had been more perceptive than he had imagined when he had decided that the two new members of the project should be separated so soon after arriving on the relief ship. Pelee Huizinger, Keenan's lifelong friend, was with the Birmingham section, Anreel and Warnock, both members of the original party.

Keenan was aware of a heavy silence. He pulled a cigarette case from his pocket. It was a habit he had acquired since arriving on Earth; on Lessigia the habit was unknown. At first it had been one of the details of his protective cover, but now he found that he automatically lit one of the things in moments of stress.

Lockyer seemed withdrawn, almost in a trance state. Keenan guessed that the head of the project was in sub-voc contact with Pattin, but he did not dare switch in his own transceiver for fear of the thoughts that might thus be revealed in his own consciousness stream.

" You are still very young, Keenan," Lockyer said at length, opening his eyes. " Perhaps it would be better if you returned to Lessigia on the next relief ship. There need be no disgrace; the matter will not be made public if you agree to a selective mnemenic erasure—it is a necessary precaution, you understand. We cannot afford to allow our non-interventionist opponents in the council the use of your specialist knowledge."

" No ! I would rather . . ." Keenan stopped himself, but it was too late.

" You have some reason for wishing to stay on this planet?" Lockyer's voice cracked like a whiplash, his face suddenly alert.

Pattin's hand moved delicately along the rounded line of his cheekbone as he cocked his head slightly to one side. There was a glimmer of triumph in his deep hooded eyes as he said : " Some *human* reason, perhaps, Keenan ?"

So Pattin knew about Marie. Keenan ground out the cigarette, it suddenly tasted foul.

" Yes—I have been checking on you," Pattin said.

" What did you hope to find ?" asked Keenan angrily.

" A loyal worker for the project," Pattin replied smoothly. " My work is merely a necessary part of administration."

" And ? "

" I discovered a romantic young fool who had allowed himself to become involved with an alien female, who even more incredibly was an inhibited sensitive," spat Pattin venomously.

The colour drained from Keenan's face, his right hand grasping convulsively at the fabric of the chair.

" Do you deny this ?" Lockyer's expression was contemptuous.

" No—why should I ? It is true that I have spent a great deal of time with Marie Borneman the sister of the woman whose child I have just inhibited. But it has not interfered in any way with my work on the project."

" Of all the millions of other *native* women with whom you could have gratified your desires you had to pick on this one," said Lockyer icily. " Are you indeed such a complete fool ?"

" And you still insist that you had no opportunity to perform the mnemonic erasure ?" Pattin's full lips parted in a moist smile.

Keenan's anger increased as he realised the ruthless manner in which Pattin had been playing with him, building up to this humiliating exposure. He *had* tried to resist his feelings for Marie, for her sake, knowing that eventually there would come a time when they must separate. But this was no sordid affair, as Pattin and Lockyer implied.

" It was not possible to erase her under the circumstances. Any false move would have aroused the suspicions of the other people in the house. It would have been dangerous to have attempted it at that time."

" More dangerous than leaving things as you did ?" said Lockyer. " Every moment those people remain in full command of the memory of your existence the threat to the security of the project increases. The girl, in particular, is a menace to us."

Despite his personal feelings, Keenan's reason told him that Lockyer was speaking the truth. He had known it all along, but had rationalised because of his love for Marie, and because he knew that by erasing her memory he would be surely destroying their relationship. But above all he owed allegiance to his fellow workers on the project—he did not have the right

to jeopardise their lives. If their existence became known to the people of Earth they would be destroyed as alien invaders, there would be no quarter for men from another star who had interfered in such a manner with the lives of Earth people.

" *I* will take care of this matter," said Pattin. " We must make sure that there are no further mistakes."

" No !" Lockyer raised one pale hand. " This is Keenan's assignment. Despite the doubts he has been honest enough to voice he must understand the necessity." He looked steadily at Keenan. " All members of the Martin family must be erased immediately ; also anyone else who has been involved in this episode."

There was real disappointment in the face of Pattin for a brief moment, then the suave mask fell back into place.

" Thank you for your trust, Lockyer," Keenan said, rising from the chair.

" Afterwards it would be better if you left that district," Lockyer said. " There are no further cases calling for your immediate attention in the area. When you have finished what you have to do, you will come back here."

To remain under the watchful eye of Pattin until the relief ship arrives, thought Keenan, grimly. He said : " I have already checked out of the hotel in which I was living. The removal of all traces that I ever existed will not be difficult— I had few other contacts."

Lockyer rose from his seat, raising his right hand in the traditional sign of goodwill. " Very well, Keenan. There is no time to be lost. You must go immediately."

Keenan returned the sign and walked quickly out of the room, avoiding the hooded eyes of Pattin.

IV

Ralph Tern, senior surgeon of the Saint Vincent Neurological hospital, bent his head to look through the twin eyepieces of the microscope again. A sharp-featured little man in his late fifties, with greying, bushy hair and a thinly trimmed moustache, Tern was considered the finest brain surgeon in the country. But the nature of the object on the slide baffled him.

Three nights previously it had been revealed by his probing knife during an intricate operation. It resembled a tiny crystalline needle, but so far had defied all attempts at chemical

analysis. At first he had assumed that it was some natural formation which had accidentally become embedded in the brain of Dashiell, his patient, perhaps acting as some kind of triggering factor in the creation of the tumour from which the man had been suffering. Such a possibility was one which could not be ignored. Every tiny clue was something to be grasped at and prized in the hope that it might set mankind further on the long heartbreaking road towards conquering the malignant horror which preyed on its body with increasing virulence.

Tern placed his faith in the methodical investigation of each case which came into his hands. There was no luck, or bluff in his kind of medicine. He attacked each problem with a dedicated determination which was increased by the knowledge of his own personal tragedy in the loss of his wife to that same disease several years before. Perhaps Hughes, his assistant, had been right when he had suggested that there was no connection between the crystal needle and the disease, but it was a chance which Tern was not prepared to ignore.

Dashiell, the patient, had been brought into Saint Vincent's three weeks before, suffering from headaches, speech defects and most of the other items which made up the classic brain tumour syndrome. On the face of it the man was a routine case, and surgically the operation had been a success. Tern had performed a craniotomy, followed by a deep incision into the tissue of the cortex and located a large, well demarcated *glioma*, alongside which was the object now laying on the slide of his microscope.

Before the operation, the patient's response to any kind of mental stimulation had been sluggish in the extreme and intelligent conversation was completely beyond his powers. Tern suspected that even in a healthy state the man was possessed of a very low I.Q., and that under the paralysing grip of the disease his personality had been dimmed even further.

Despite Tern's skill, Dashiell's post-operative behaviour had proved a crushing disappointment. Where his responses before had been poor, they were now almost non-existent. Although his involuntary reflexes were improving steadily, it was now impossible to make any kind of conversational contact with the man whatsoever. For three days and nights Dashiell had lain during his waking hours with his eyes open staring at the ceiling above his head, seemingly deaf to any conversa-

tional overtures. Rather than effecting a cure it seemed to Tern that he had done nothing more than push the man further into a half-world of living death.

The phone buzzed briefly. Tern made a small hiss of irritation and walked over to his desk, abandoning the microscope.

" Tern, here."

" Hallo, sir. Can you come up right away ?" said the Welsh accented voice of his assistant Hughes. " I just looked in on Dashiell—there's been a change !"

"Be specific, man !" snapped Tern. "What sort of change?"

" He spoke to me. I was just . . ."

Tern cut him off briskly. " Right. You can explain when I get there." He slammed down the phone and hurried out of the room, revitalised by the thought that perhaps after all this was not to be one of his failures. For the time being the crystal enigma on the slide of the microscope was forgotten.

Hughes was waiting for him in the corridor outside Dashiell's ward, a blonde-haired six-footer with the open, well-scrubbed face of a schoolboy.

" What happened ?" demanded Tern.

Hughes' pale eyebrows lowered. " I was on my usual evening routine tour of the wards. When I opened Dashiell's door he was sitting up in bed looking toward me as if he had been expecting someone."

Tern nodded. " Well, that's something at least . . . You say he spoke to you ?"

" Yes. He looked at me with a strange sort of half-smile and said : ' No, Doctor Hughes, I'm not going into a schizoid withdrawal pattern.' "

" *Schizoid withdrawal* ! Where the devil did he get hold of *that* phrase ? Had you mentioned it to the nurse in his presence ?"

" There was no one else in the ward, sir," replied Hughes quickly. " And I had not spoken a word."

" Well, go on, man ! There's something else, isn't there ?"

" Yes," continued Hughes grudgingly. " I had been thinking about Dashiell's case on my way along the corridor, trying to suppose some reason for his lack of normal response."

" I don't see the connection," said Tern tartly.

The big man coloured under the piercing eye of his superior. " It's only that the particular phrase he mentioned had been in my mind a moment before I opened the door."

" So ?" queried Tern.

Hughes' confusion increased. " I . . . I don't know."

" All right." Tern smiled briefly to reassure the young man. Despite his rugged exterior Hughes had the makings of a first class brain surgeon and Tern had a genuine affection for him. " Let's go in and see if friend Dashiell has any more pearls of wisdom for us." He pushed open the door of the ward.

Dashiell, a big man, with hairy, muscular arms was sitting up in bed. His face was knobbly, with skin of a texture and colour almost that of a red beet, and crowned by the skull-fitting white bandage.

" Evening, Doctor Tern." He grinned, showing a mouth full of large, tobacco-stained teeth.

The surgeon smiled thinly. Dashiell was not an attractive person, but he was after all, a fellow human being, and a patient. " I'm pleased to find you so much improved, Dashiell."

" Oh, I'm okay. When do I get out of here ?"

" All in good time." Tern looked down at the man, fingering the stiff bristle of his moustache. " Tell me—why have you refused to communicate with us over the last three days, despite the fact that you have been fully conscious ?"

One corner of Dashiell's mouth dropped and he looked away, avoiding Tern's steady gaze. " How do you know that?"

Tern ignored the question. " I want you to remember that we are here to help you. It is in your interest to co-operate with us. Now—why wouldn't you talk before ?"

" I had to have a chance to think things out." Dashiell's voice was a sullen rumble.

" What in particular was bothering you ?" asked Tern, smothering his irritation. Dashiell was a type he had all too frequently encountered in the lower I.Q. groups—the kind of person who regarded all professional men, particularly doctors with suspicion and mistrust.

Dashiell was evasive. " I felt different after the operation, that's all. I just didn't want to talk to people, not then."

" And what has suddenly happened to make you change your mind ?" persisted Tern.

" Well, I don't want to be stuck in here for the rest of my life; and I might be if you thought I was a schizophrenic. I'm all right now, and I want to get out of here as soon as possible."

Tern leaned closer, looking into the man's face. "Naturally —but who told you that we thought you were a schizophrenic?"

Dashiell passed a hand over his ruddy forehead and shifted uneasily. " You can't make me tell you that."

Tern found his annoyance growing. " Good God, man! I'm not trying to bully you into anything. But I warn you that it will pay you to be frank with me. You should be out of here within a couple of weeks, but I can't allow that until I am *fully* satisfied with your progress."

Dashiell stiffened, his face suddenly pale. " What's this crystal needle business ?"

Tern was totally baffled. Only himself and Hughes had any knowledge of the object which had been found in Dashiell's brain. He looked across at his assistant who was standing a few feet away, his eyes glued on the patient. No, Hughes would not have been so foolish as to discuss his own case with Dashiell. There was something deeper, some greater mystery which had to be explained.

" You *must* tell me everything, Dashiell," he said coldly. " Remember, I have the authority to keep you here as long as I may consider necessary. No one would question my judgment."

" Drop it, please, Doc." Dashiell was pleading now, an animal fear in his eyes.

" Why ?" snapped Tern.

" Because if I tell you, you will probably make up your mind that I *am* mad," said Dashiell.

" I don't relish the idea of having you certified, you stupid man." said Tern. " That would be an admission of failure on my part, can't you see that ?"

" Yes—but you would do it, just the same." Dashiell rolled over suddenly, pulling the bedclothes back, and placed one foot on the floor.

Hughes moved quickly. Before the patient had time to raise his other leg from the bed and gain his balance the muscular young doctor had grasped him by the shoulders and forced him gently but firmly back into a lying position.

" Don't struggle, Dashiell," said Hughes. " I have no wish to hurt you. Just lie there like a good lad and answer Doctor Tern's questions."

The ruddy, dark-jowled face writhed for a moment as Dashiell's suppressed rage sought for expression, then his

broad mouth sagged at the corners as he realised that he was helpless. " All right, but you've got to believe what I tell you."

" That's more like it." Tern disliked the use of physical restraint. He motioned Hughes away. " Just bear this in mind, Dashiell, in case you might have any ideas about leaving here *without* my permission. Although you may feel perfectly fit, that wound in your head is going to require careful attention for some time to come; attention that can only be given by skilled hands. Now, tell me what happened from the moment you regained consciousness after the anaesthetic. Take your time, but give me the facts."

Dashiell nodded, subdued. The brevity of the struggle had shown him that he was not quite as fit physically as he had believed. " It started as soon as I woke up," he said. " I was feeling pretty lousy. I had expected that, but what I didn't get was all the noise ; voices, people talking and shouting. It was just as if I had come to right in the middle of some darned football game. I opened my eyes to find out where I was and what I was doing there. I thought maybe I was drunk or something, and I'd passed out—or perhaps I'd just had another of those blackouts. My eyeballs felt hot and scratchy as I looked up and saw the ceiling of this room, and I was as thirsty as hell.

" The noise was still there, but I seemed to be alone. There was all kinds of stuff; like you might hear in a ward full of madmen—and women. I had a moment of panic there; maybe the operation had gone wrong and I was crazy. Alone—but there was still all that noise. Noise—it was about there that I realised that *it was not noise.* The room was perfectly quiet. Outside I could hear a nurse wheeling a trolley along the corridor, and through the window the drone of a plane passing overhead.

" The voices, whatever they were, *were inside my head.* I lay there for about an hour trying to figure the thing out. Then a nurse came in to look me over. I could hear her talking as she approached the door, and she went right on as she came in and closed it behind her. But she wasn't talking to me, she was just pattering away about some guy she had been out with the night before, how she hoped to see him again tonight, but she had to watch herself with him and play a bit more hard to get. You know, all that junk—a lot of woman stuff,

the sort of intimate business you read about them thinking in stories, but they never say in real life. I couldn't figure why she should go on like this in front of me. She knew I wasn't unconscious because she must have seen me lying there with my eyes wide open looking at her.

" *Looking at her.* Then it began to make some sort of crazy sense. Her lips weren't moving ! Her voice was like those other voices—*inside my head.* She spoke to me then, using her mouth this time. But I didn't answer; I was listening to her other voice, and it went on without stopping, running on like water out of a tap all the time. It was louder than the others, although they were still there. It was just that *she* was closer to me, I suppose."

" I got to wondering again then about whether I was crazy, because the only way I could figure it was that when I heard that other voice, the one that didn't use any lips or sound, it was her mind, the thoughts that were moving through it. *Just as if I was reading her mind* ! I just lay there like a dummy while she changed the bedclothes and tidied up the room. I didn't say anything to her, because I didn't know what to say. Maybe she wouldn't like it if I told her what was happening ; and anyway I didn't care, I just wanted to be alone, for her to get to hell out of there and give me time to think about this thing.

" If that was the way it was with her, I guessed that the other voices must be the same thing. So I lay back and tried to identify some of them. I soon found that with practice I could damp down the others and concentrate on one at a time. It was like screwing up your eyes when you're looking at something, only I didn't screw up my eyes, I did something inside my head, just *what* I wasn't sure.

" Soon after this, you came in. The nurse must have called you. You tried to talk to me, but I kept quiet, just listening in on your mind, trying to figure out the score. After all, you were the doctor—maybe you knew what was going on. It didn't take me long to find out that you knew nothing about it—*that scared me, bad.*"

" But why didn't you say something about all this ?" asked Tern gently.

" Because you wouldn't have believed me," said Dashiell. He looked at Tern pleading. " Don't you see ? I was alone, I had to be. I couldn't talk anything about what had happened

to me that would make sense. I was all mixed up, and on top of that was the fear that I had gone completely crazy. Such things don't happen, I kept telling myself, except to crazy people. I *had* to figure the thing out as best I could for myself." He leaned forward. " You don't really believe me now, do you ? I can hear those words going through yout mind ; paranoid, badly hallucinated state, delusions of persecution . ."

" I am a scientist," said Tern quietly. " It is my job to have an open mind on all subjects." He paused. " Tell me, Dashiell, what am I thinking now ?"

The patient frowned uncertainly, then quoted : " *In the non-isolated parts of an isolated system there will be regions in which the entropy, defined according to a suitable definition, may well be seen to decrease . . .*"

Tern placed a hand on the man's hairy arm. " All right, Dashiell, that will be enough."

The craggy face brightened. " What do you mean ? Yes, I see, you believe me."

" Unless your preferred reading matter is Norbert Weiner's *Cybernetics and Society*, which I very much doubt, I am forced to admit that you took that quotation right out of my mind," said Tern.

" And you'll let me leave here ?"

" Not yet, Dashiell. I am speaking in your own interest. This is something entirely new; with a power like this you could destroy yourself and others, it must be investigated further."

Dashiell bowed his head. " Yes, a freak. An eavesdropper on the private thoughts of people around me."

" Now you're quoting me again, Dashiell," said Tern. " Don't you see the kind of trouble that sort of thing could get you into if you started to do it outside these walls ? Bear with me for a few days until we can understand more fully what had happened to you. I can assure you that it will repay you in peace of mind in the long run."

Dashiell eyed the thin-faced little doctor, probing his thought-stream carefully. Yes, the man was sincere. Perhaps it would be best to stay here, for the time being, at least. His mind could still rove at will, and the power was growing day by day. There were other things which he had not mentioned, but they were as yet only on the fringe of his consciousness. From the hospital he could still carry on his explorations. He might even be able to make definite contact with those others

whose emanations had as yet only been fleeting traces on the fringe of his perception.

" All right, doctor. I'll do as you ask for the time being," he said.

" Good man." Tern rose from the bed. " I'll be in to see you again later tonight. In the meantime it would be better if you did not speak to anyone else of this."

Dashiell nodded. " Okay, doctor, anything you say. Oh, by the way," he added as Tern made for the door. " Better explain to Hughes that business you were thinking about the strange dog in the pack, before he nips out and calls that reporter pal of his."

Hughes flushed angrily as the two doctors walked out of the ward. " I was going to ask your permission first, of course, sir."

" And I would refuse it," said Tern curtly. " If a story like this got into the newspapers it could ruin both our reputations."

Hughes was puzzled. " I don't see what you're getting at, sir. He *is* a telepath, isn't he ?"

" Yes, for some reason that God alone knows he apparently is. But how many fake telepaths, how many sensational publicity hunting stories have there been about this kind of thing in the past ? We can't afford to become mixed up in that kind of a circus. First we must explore the full extent of this man's powers and satisfy ourselves whether or not they are permanent. They may still be due to some passing effect caused by some accident of surgery."

Hughes fell into step beside his superior. " Yes, I see what you mean. By the way, what did he mean with that business about the strange dog ?"

" Just a metaphor," Tern said quietly. " The pack is humanity, Hughes, never forget that. Do you imagine that they could bear the knowledge that someone with Dashiell's gift existed amongst them without wanting to destroy him? Remember your own reaction just now when you realised that he had read your intention to speak to the newspaper man ?"

Hughes lapsed into a moody silence as they entered the elevator.

V

Marie rounded the corner, her heels tapping a staccato rhythm of urgency. How she was going to explain her agitation to Judy, or what she expected to find, she did not know. She had deliberately kept her thoughts on the surface of her mind throughout the journey, not daring to delve too deeply into the fear that lay beneath.

Her step faltered, a sudden tightening in her throat made her aware of the beating of blood in her eardrums. A car was standing in the street in front of Judy's house; a familiar long black Jaguar. She walked onwards, deliberately steeling herself.

About fifty yards along on the other side of the street a policeman was walking away from her with steady, measured tread. If she ran forward she could catch up with him before he rounded the corner; or if she called, he would hear her and come back.

And she would tell him . . . what?

She was only a few yards away from the car now. Peter Keenan was sitting in the driving seat watching her, his long face half in shadow.

The policeman reached the end of the street and rounded the corner without looking back. Forcing herself on faltering legs Marie walked slowly forward. She deliberaately looked away from the car, searching the front of Judy's house, seeking some reassurance from its calm exterior.

" Marie !" Keenan's voice was a soft, urgent whisper.

She stopped and looked at him through the open side window of the car. He seemed tired, the thinness of his face more pronounced, with dark lines about the mouth and eyes.

" I must talk to you, Marie," he said with soft insistence.

She hesitated. Part of her wanted to listen, but . . .

" Don't worry about Judy. She's all right, I give you my word."

" And that is worth, *doctor* ?" her voice was a harsh whisper through a tense throat.

" Can you believe that I would harm anyone who belonged to you ?" There was a note of tenderness in his voice that she remembered ; remembered too well. " Here, come and sit in the car for a moment while we talk."

Marie looked down the street, at the comforting neatness of the trimmed hedges, and the quiet normality of the brown-

painted house fronts. Nothing could happen to her here . . . What did she expect would happen ?

Keenan reached over and clicked open the offside door. " Get in . . . please."

Marie walked round to the front of the car and did as he asked, lowering herself tensely onto the edge of the seat her hand on the door handle.

" Who—*what* are you ?" her voice was struggling on the brink of hysteria.

" A man who loves you, Marie." Peter leaned towards her and she was deeply reminded of the essential maleness of him. His face, thin and lined, brought back a vivid recollection of a painting of the crucifixion she had once seen.

" But last night. What were you doing when I came into the room ? You never explained."

" The work I have been sent here to do," Peter said. "Can't that be explanation enough, darling ?"

She wanted to trust him, to believe in him, but there were so many unanswered questions. " I went to your hotel this morning. The woman there didn't know you. *How could that be, Peter* ?"

His face twisted as if with physical pain. " I can't tell you. Won't you just believe that ? There are reasons, very good ones why you should not ask too many questions."

" But there was Doctor Low, too. He had never heard of you. Why is that, Peter ?" she asked. " Why did you masquerade as one of his assistants ?"

He sighed deeply. " Low and the woman at the hotel forgot that I exist; they were helped to do so for their own good as were Charles and your sister."

She grasped at his arm in sudden terror. " Judy ! What have you done to her ?"

" She is perfectly all right. This thing is absolutely painless and there is no harm to the subject."

Marie subsided crushed. " And me . . . am I to be made to forget you too ?"

He seemed to hesitate. His voice was unnecessarily loud as he answered : " No ! You must never forget, or it would all become meaningless."

" Explain . . . please, please," she sobbed. " How can you do this to me when you know the way I feel ?"

" Not now, Marie. All I can do is to ask you to trust me, until I come back, at least."

" You're going away—where ?"

" I can't tell you that. But believe me, I shall find some way to come back to you." He moved impulsively, placing his arms about her. She resisted for a moment, then relaxed. There was nothing she wanted more than this.

" When I come back—would you be prepared to break with everything, everyone you know and build a new life with me ?" he asked softly. " I've no right to ask this of you, nothing other than my love."

" I . . . I don't know. If only you could tell me more."

" Trust me—that's all I ask," he said. " Until I come back try to forget that you ever knew me. You will be the only one who could identify me. Don't mention my name, and if anybody questions you, deny my existence."

" The police ?" she asked.

" Perhaps, but please believe me. Other than pretending to be Low's assistant I have done nothing illegal; nothing of which you need feel ashamed."

" You're sure that Judy and the baby will be all right ?" She realised that in his closeness she was forgetting the fears that had brought her here.

He held her tightly. " Yes, Marie. I *am* a doctor, you need not worry about my skill in that direction. My training was of the best."

" In that case, why have you performed this deception ?"

" I will give you the reasons, all of them—in good time."

" I want to believe you, Peter, but . . ."

" You are still confused ?" He pushed her away gently and looked into her eyes. She could feel the waves of comfort sweeping through her. " You must wait and trust in me. Doctor Low will come along to see Judy and the child this evening. As far as he knows now he has been handling the case from the very beginning. He will not remember having met you this morning."

" You were able to do *that* ?" Her voice was breathless. " Peter, who, *what* are you ? Why haven't you done the same thing to me ?"

" Do you have to ask that ?" Keenan's face was tender. " If I interfered with your mind I would lose you. I am taking a risk in not doing so, but for me it is the only way."

" You will tell me everything when you come back ?"

" Yes, if you still want it then." He released her from his arms. " Just wait, and trust me, darling." He leaned over

and opened the car door. " Now go to your sister. You will find her quite happy and well."

" And you ?" She stepped out onto the road.

" I will come to you as soon as I am able," Keenan said, starting the engine. " Goodbye."

It was over. Keenan drove back towards the city, his foot pressed hard on the accelerator. The whole thing had been simple, damnably simple. Except for the moment of madness in which he had decided that he *could not* erase the memory of himself from the mind of Marie. Now he was on his way to face the cold eyes of Pattin and to report to Lockyer that all the people concerned had been erased. Lockyer would accept that report without question, he felt confident. He shuddered at the thought of what might have been, of Marie with her memory erased, still vibrantly alive and desirable, but unattainable.

Until the very moment that she had appeared at the corner of the street he had fully intended to carry out Lockyer's orders to the letter. But he had found that he could not go through with it, even if his very life depended on him doing so. The project, the universe itself—nothing in that rending moment of desire had seemed more important to him than the promise of a future that included Marie. Without her there was nothing.

Even so, he wondered if he would be able to keep his promise to return to her; or if he had condemned her to a lifetime of hopeless waiting. Lockyer would never understand, that was certain. It might be possible to appeal to some higher authority; the Supreme Council itself perhaps, and obtain permission to take Marie back to Lessigia with him. However the matter was approached it would entail his admission that he had failed to do his duty as a member of the project. Perhaps there was some way in which he could remain here on Earth with her, for Marie that would be better; he had already had some foretaste of the attitude of his own people towards the ' primitives ' of Earth.

He turned off the main road, with its crawling stream of traffic and was soon heading through open country on a little-used bypass. He was driving automatically with only part of his mind and he wanted to avoid the strain of manoeuvring the car in city traffic as much as possible. His head and limbs

were aching with fatigue and his thoughts were whirling in a closed circuit which he seemed unable to break.

The interior of the car seemed hot and stuffy. He reached out with a fumbling hand to increase the ventilation, but it did not seem to make much difference.

Deliberately he tried to break the circle of thought which was closing in on him, seeking for less painful associative chains. Thoughts of home, snatches of sad, lilting songs, the road unravelling like a dirty fawn ribbon beneath the wheels of the car. He was . . . very tired. In a half fantasy state now, his foot pressing the accelerator reflexly, his hands compensating for bumps and slight curves in the rolling road. Speed gradually increasing.

Removed from his surface thoughts a bright pinpoint of fear glowed helplessly. Watching as his mind began to slide down a spiral of repetition which could only end in sleep. A small island of awareness which would resist the creeping numbness until at last, it too was engulfed, and there was only the car; a leaping black shadow, rushing mindlessly along the lonely road.

And then, growing deep in his consciousness came the recognition of the pattern. His mind, tired and low in resistance as it was, was being deliberately lulled into sleep by a telepathic suggestion which was setting up a parasitic hypnotic pattern.

He struggled to rally his ebbing energies and the pattern receded slightly. Then it was there again, this time more violently, as the manipulator tried to counter Keenan's own efforts. The variation was sufficient to create an instability. He was fighting now for his very life as he tried again to obtain control of his own mental processes.

He jerked wide awake with a start that cracked his tautening muscles. In a split second of horrified time he was once more aware of events outside his own mind, in control of his perceptions.

The car was rushing down a steep hill at over seventy miles an hour. He recognised the spot instantly from previous journeys. A bare twenty yards ahead was a corner where the road turned abruptly, almost doubling back on itself.

At the speed he was travelling it would be impossible to manoeuvre the corner.

He slammed on his brakes and wrenched at the wheel in a vain effort as the white painted metal railings, shielding a fifteen foot drop into a drain, loomed closer. His actions were intuitive survival reflexes, there was no time for coherent thought.

Tyres screamed and he felt the rear wheels lurch away in a sickening skid as the powerful car cracked itself like a whip. Instinctively again, one hand moved up to shield his eyes, while the other still attempted to master the twisting wheel and jerk it into some position that might carry him round the impossible corner.

A metal hand screeched along the side of the car. The engine stalled and a second later it stopped with a jerk, the deceleration throwing Keenan forward onto the wheel with a force that exploded the breath from his body and almost caved in his ribs.

Refusing to consider the horror that was only now dawning on him, he took stock of his situation with deliberate calmness. The car was hard up against the white painted railing on the wrong side of the road. He tried the door. It would not open. Looking out of the window he saw that the whole side of the body work had been badly battered out of shape by the railings.

The front wheels were about four feet up a soft grassy bank which succeeded the railings on the far side of the corner. It was this which had finally checked his speed after the scraping action of the railings and his own braking.

He pressed the starter button hopefully. The motor purred into life. Sliding gently into reverse he backed the car down the bank and onto the road, doing further damage to the once immaculate body as it wrenched free of the railings.

It was only when he had left the scene of the accident several miles behind and was once more speeding towards London, that Keenan allowed himself to consider the implications of what had just happened to him. Such an attack could only have been made by a telepathic sensitive. And he knew full well that no mature Earthborn sensitive had been allowed to exist in an uninhibited natural state since the commencement of the project.

He was chilled and bewildered, his body shaking now from the after effects of the shock which he had just suffered. But he was fully aware of his surroundings and wide awake.

He manipulated his sub-voc into a self sustaining interference pattern, which rendered it useless from a communication point of view but set up an imprenetrable screen through which no one, however powerful, would be able to penetrate his mental processes. Used in this way its function was very similar to that of the inhibitors, setting up a barrier on the telepathic frequencies.

VI

Dashiell opened his eyes. He was once more aware of his own body, slumped back in the hospital bed. He lay for a moment, clammy with perspiration and trembling with a backwash of the fear which he had just experienced through the mind of Keenan. With increasing consciousness of his physical surroundings, the knowledge that he was still in control of himself and unharmed, an elation, a sense of god-like power began to grow.

He had reached out into the mind of a complete stranger travelling in a car several miles away. From the first contact he knew that here was something different, more receptive. And so he had gone on, probing deeper and deeper, until suddenly the thread of contact had been broken. There was nothing there now; the other, this Keenan, was probably dead, he guessed. That was good—from what he had discovered in the man's mind Keenan was an enemy, intent on destroying the powers of any telepath whom he detected.

Any telepath ! That was the important thing. Dashiell now knew that he was not alone, a single freak created by the accidental interference of a surgeon's knife. There were more, probably many others, like him. Keenan was not like him, of that he was sure; but even so his mind differed from the others Dashiell had contacted since he had begun his explorations. For one thing, Keenan had known that he was being probed. Not at first, but as Dashiell dug deeper into the layers of his consciousness the man had become aware of his surveillance.

Dashiell turned the new knowledge over and over in his mind, like a miser with a bright fabulous jewel. He was not a thinker, and the act of logical consideration needed to assemble the pieces of the jigsaw of logic which had been presented to him would once have given him considerable difficulty. But he was beginning to realise that now he must

adapt, find new ways of approaching the world. He pictured himself in the past as something brutelike, a creature acting for the most part at the bidding of habit and instinct. But now he was discovering newer, more efficient methods of thought through his probing of the minds of others.

And he was learning greater control of his powers hourly. He had learned to close his perception to the babbling of the minds around him at will; so that instead of being continually plagued by the background ' noise ' of the brain processes of others, he could once more be entirely alone with his own thoughts.

Survival with his new-found powers would present a challenge. He had been certain of that, even before he had contacted Keenan. Despite the interest and helpful attitude of Tern and Hughes it was easy for Dashiell to see in their minds the fear and revulsion, the unconscious hostility they felt towards him as a telepath. He must tread warily and make sure that the secret of his powers was not revealed to others. The time was fast approaching when it would be better if both Tern and Hughes were eliminated. That should not be difficult, and then his secret would be safe—*except when he came into contact with others like Keenan.*

But for the time being he would not take any action against the two doctors. There was much to be learned from Tern, in particular; knowledge of the workings of the human mind which would help him on the road to power. Later, when he had sucked dry all the minds of his immediate vicinity, and perhaps contacted others of his own kind, would be time enough to leave the safety of the hospital. Until then he would wait, gathering strength and experimenting with his talent. There were no limits to the power he might attain in the future, but first he must be sure that he could protect himself.

It was growing dusk as Keenan left the elevator at the Russell Square Underground station and headed towards Lockyer's place. He had abandoned his car at a garage on the outskirts of the city, not wishing to attract attention by its battered condition. He walked unsteadily along the street, one hand to his aching forehead, until he came to the tables outside the Spanish cafe. An overwhelming aroma of spiced food swept out to him, and for a moment he was gripped by such a spasm of nausea that he was forced to grab at the back of a chair for support.

The occupant of the chair, a small woman wearing tartan slacks with a horse-tail hair-do and protruding teeth, looked round at him startled. Her bald, bespectacled escort half rose to his feet. "The man's drunk . . ."

"No! He's ill," said the woman. "Please get him a seat, Henry."

"I'll be all right." Keenan mumbled his apologies and staggered to the door of the apartment building, which was only a few feet away. He was aware of the angry voice of the man as he almost fell inside and leaned against the wall to recover before mounting the stairs to Lockyer's flat. The pain in his head was a crashing, tearing thing.

At last, after an endless, reeling climb he pressed the bell push and waited, breathing in retching sobs.

Lockyer opened the door. "Keenan! Come inside at once. What happened to you?"

Keenan lurched past him into the lounge and collapsed into the nearest chair. His abused body was in revolt, his mind tired, yet racing like an ungoverned engine.

"I was attacked on the way back here." His voice was slurred with fatigue. He shuddered at the memory of that probing, icy tendril of thought as it bored into his consciousness. "For God's sake get me something for this head! I feel as if a red hot knife was digging into my brain."

Lockyer hurried into the other room and returned a moment later with a hypo gun. Working with quiet efficiency he bared Keenan's arm and discharged the contents of the hypo into an artery.

Keenan lay back in the chair as the blessed coolness of the drug washed through his body killing the pain and leaving him relaxed, aware that above all things he needed sleep. He pushed back the beckoning haze of unconsciousness and forced himself to alertness.

Lockyer was standing over him. The old man looked very tall and thin in his yellow robe. But something, someone was missing. Keenan looked round the room. "Where is Pattin?"

"He is out on an assignment." Lockyer's pale hands fluttered. "It is not important. Tell me what happened to you?"

"It was some form of telepathic hypnosis. I only just managed to break the circuit in time."

Lockyer's eyes widened. "Only a sensitive could make such an attack—are you sure?"

" Yes," said Keenan grimly. " It seems that your wonderfully organised project is not as efficient as you had imagined. A sensitive in full control of his powers, seeking information, and prepared to kill me in the process."

" Impossible ! No sensitive could have reached telepathic maturity on this planet without being detected and inhibited. The Vion detectors would have picked up his radiation long ago."

The waves of sleep were beckoning again, but a sudden thought jerked Keenan upright in the chair. " Try your detector now, Lockyer. I put my sub-voc in an interference pattern as a shield, but it *is* possible that I may have been followed here."

Lockyer nodded and left the room again. Keenan fumbled in the pocket of his jacket and produced his cigarette case. The drug had killed the pain, but his limbs were numb and clumsy as he placed the cigarette in his mouth and lit it. The first draught of smoke into his lungs made him cough uncontrollably and brought back the nausea. He ground out the cigarette and lay back waiting.

" No, there is nothing but the radiation of our two sub-vocs," said Lockyer, returning. " You're sure that it *was* a sensitive ?"

" Who else would be capable of carrying out such an attack?'

" But how could such a person exist ?" asked Lockyer, his fingers grasping at the folds of his robe. " The inhibitors are infallible. Short of their actual physical destruction, they must continue to function whilst there is life in the brain in which they are placed."

" One could have been removed."

" That would entail a surgical skill far beyond these primitives." Lockyer shook his head.

" You underestimate them continually," said Keenan impatiently. " Couldn't you be wrong about that ?"

" Perhaps, but why should this sensitive attack *you* ?"

" Because my sub-voc would stand out like a beacon on his plane of perception," Keenan said. " He must have been probing me for some time before I became aware of it."

" But we are here to help them," protested Lockyer.

Keenen thumped his fist on the arm of the chair. " Are you so blinded by this magnificent project of yours that you imagine a sensitive would see it that way ? Think of him,

alone, just exploring his new found talent, trying to orientate himself in his new consciousness of the world. *To him*, we would be enemies, prepared to rob him of his powers. Our reasons would be uninportant. It would be a matter of survival for him, and his first instinct would be to defend himself."

"How much information did he get from you before you switched onto a shielding pattern?"

"I have no way of knowing," Keenan said. "My first thought was to get back here. We've got to do something about him, Lockyer."

The old man turned away. "There's nothing we can do. In this case we would not be dealing with a child unable to defend itself. He will be expecting us to make some move."

"Then we must strike quickly."

"No. First I must contact Anrael in Birmingham. He will then be able to inform Lessigia of this development by long-range communicator."

"Inform Lessigia? For what reason?" asked Keenan.

"So that they can push forward the relief ship schedule." Lockyer turned, his face haggard. "We were totally unprepared for this, Keenan. It may truly mean the destruction of the entire project."

Keenan was startled by the hopelessness of Lockyer's tone, and disgusted at the cowardice implied by his attitude. "All this for one uninhibited sensitive?"

"You don't understand. We have no experience of the destructive powers of an uninhibited telepath, but from what we have deduced theoretically he would be a formidable enemy." The doorbell of the apartment buzzed briefly. "That will be Pattin." Lockyer walked out of the room.

Keenan slumped back in the chair, giving way to the fatigue which coursed like a sluggish poison through his body. What kind of a man was this Lockyer, who was fully prepared to countenance the maiming of innocent children, but whose morale collapsed so completely at the sign of any real opposition? He was dimly aware of a hum of conversation nearby and a moment later Lockyer re-entered the room accompanied by Pattin and Megoran. Megoran, a thickset, balding man, was another of the original members of the project, but Keenan had found him more approachable than either Lockyer or Pattin.

" Hallo, Pether." Megoran's broad face was grim. " You look as though you've been through a rough time."

Keenan dragged himself to his feet. " Lockyer has told you what happened ?"

Megoran nodded.

Pattin flicked a cold glance at Keenan and turned to Lockyer. " We shall have to re-inhibit this sensitive, of course ?"

" We can try with the means at our disposal," Lockyer said. " But first I must make sure that Anrael and the others have all information, so that they at least will be able to avoid the danger."

Pattin frowned. " You're making too much of this, Lockyer. Despite his telepathic gifts, the man is a primitive. It should not be difficult for us to persuade him that re-inhibition would be the best thing for him."

" *Persuade* ?" Keenan was incredulous. " How can we possibly do that ? He would attack as soon as one of us came within range of his perception."

" He cannot harm us mentally whilst our sub-vocs are in a shielding pattern," Lockyer said.

" But this man is a killer," protested Keenan. " He was coldly experimenting with me, making me crash that car. Surely he should be eliminated altogether before he can do more harm to any of us ?"

Pattin rounded on Keenan contemptuously. " So our sentimental friend calls for the blood of one of his beloved primitives."

Keenan's face was very pale. " This is a matter of survival for all of us. If he can be re-inhibited without loss of life, let's do it. But I believe that such methods are only inviting destruction."

Pattin stood his ground. " They are the only methods of which we are capable . . . Tell him, Lockyer."

" Whatever he does to us, we *cannot* kill this sensitive." The face of the project leader was grave. " I had hoped that it would never be necessary to tell you about this. During our training, a sub-threshold conditioning was placed in the mind of each one of us with respect to the natives of this planet. That conditioning would drop us in our tracks immediately, as soon as we tried to make any kind of physical attack on a native of Earth which might result in his death."

" You mean we cannot kill—not even to defend ourselves?" Keenan said. " That is madness ! You willingly allowed

yourselves to be exposed to the possible danger of an alien planet under such conditions ?"

" It was a secret measure insisted on by the non-interventionist members of the supreme council," Lockyer said. " Submitting to it was the only way we were able to gain their consent to the project."

" But Huizinger and I were not trained with the rest of you —we have only been on Earth a few months."

Lockyer shook his head. " The conditioning still applies. It was contained in the standard language tapes which were fed into your mind by hypno learner."

" Satisfied, Keenan ?" said Pattin coldly. He turned to Lockyer. " Now perhaps we can discuss the method we shall use to re-inhibit this sensitive. When do you propose to move against him ?"

" We can do nothing tonight," Lockyer said. " It is most important that the Birmingham communicator group should have full details, in case we are unable to handle him. I shall call Anrael shortly and give him all the information we have.'

Keenan slumped in the chair again, his fatigue increased by the feeling of helplessness that Lockyer's revelation had aroused. At last he understood his leader's apparent cowardice. The re-inhibition of the sensitive would be like approaching a raging wild beast, naked and unarmed and attempting to quell its fury with sweet reasonableness.

VII

Keenan looked through the windscreen. Lockyer and Pattin in the car ahead were carrying the Vion detector which would warn them as soon as they came within the area of the sensitive's perception, and that must happen any time now. They had already passed the point at which Keenan had crashed his car the previous afternoon and were speeding through the rolling green of the open countryside.

" Why did you allow yourself to be subjected to such a conditioning ?" asked Keenan. " Surely you could see the dangers ?"

Megoran, his blunt face creased into a ready smile, looked away from the road briefly. " I thought the project was worth taking *any* risk for—don't you believe that ?"

" I'm not sure—not now. Perhaps there could have been some other way of handling the whole thing."

"Like landing openly and telling the people of Earth that we had come to help them." Megoran shook his balding head. "No, Pether. Believe me, all those things were discussed at the time. A civilisation has to do its own growing up. This was the only plan we could persuade all the members of the council to accept."

"But the danger . . ."

"That was part of the game, and we were all younger then. Perhaps the greybeards hoped we would fail. Many of them hated Lockyer and mistrusted his idealism. Idealists can be dangerous, but when curbed in such a way they are more manageable."

They reached the brow of a hill and saw that the car ahead was slowing down as it reached the valley beyond.

"And yet you still volunteered to join the project?" Keenan said.

"Of course. The gift of telepathy must not be allowed to perish; the future of the human race in the galaxy depends on it," said Megoran simply. There was no further qualification to be added to that, Keenan decided. This was no fanatic, merely a far-sighted man of good will, prepared to risk his life for his belief. In the face of such blunt honesty he felt a pang of shame at his own misgivings.

Lockyer's car had halted alongside a large gateway in a high stone wall. Megoran pulled up behind and the two of them stepped out and walked along to the gateway. About a quarter of a mile down the drive they could see a large modern building of concrete and glass, standing quite alone in the wooded valley.

Lockyer, seeming smaller, almost wizened in a suit of Earth clothes, was bending over the circular screen of the Vion detector in the back seat of the car. The sub-vocs of the Lessigians showed as a cluster of small dots near the centre of the screen, but they were almost engulfed in a pulsating spiral of light close by.

"We've found your sensitive." Pattin, who had been driving the car, pointed up the drive towards the building.

"A hospital," said Lockyer, looking up. "It seems that Keenan was right. The inhibitor must have been surgically removed.'"

"Now what?" Megoran asked.

"We must find exactly where the sensitive is in the building, and *who* he is—the Vion cannot help us there," said Lockyer.

" That should not be difficult," Pattin said. " I will drop my screening and scan the place."

" For God's sake be careful !" Keenan said.

Pattin eyed him briefly. " I can take care of myself."

" But you have no idea of the power . . ." Keenan stopped as Megoran placed a restraining hand on his arm.

" Someone *has* to do it," said the short man. " It's the only way."

Pattin leaned back in the seat, his smooth face deathly pale and his eyes closed. " Yes . . . I'm getting it now. He was right, Lockyer. This is the strongest radiation we have ever contacted . . . Like a torrent of consciousness, a tearing river that batters in through your sub-voc . . ."

His mouth twisted and he raised both hands to his head. " I don't think I shall be able to take much more of this . . . The man must be mad; I've never encountered such imagery, such fantastic twisted concepts in the mind of a sane person . ."

" Just stay long enough to get what we need—then cut out," whispered Lockyer urgently.

" Da . . . Da . . . Dashiell !" Pattin was having difficulty in forming his words now, his whole body writhing as the emanations of the sensitive dragged at his conscious control and shot random impulses through his motor nerves. "Third floor . . . room on his own . . ."

Pattin's voice rose to a scream. " My God ! He's not mad ! The imagery was a dream—*and he's waking now* !"

An ambulance shot past them, turned into the gates and headed up the drive with a screeching of tyres.

" Cut your interference pattern in !" Keenan said, the memory of his own experience still unhealed.

" It's too . . . late. He's coming into my mind . . . I can't stop him now .. ." Pattin's voice trailed away in a gasping whisper. His hands clutched spasmodically at his shirt, tearing his collar loose. His eyes were wide open now, starting from their sockets, filled with a piteous terror.

" Can't we *do* something ?" Megoran pushed forward, opening the door of the car.

Pattin's tortured, twisting body suddenly stopped its struggles and flopped limply towards him like a puppet whose supporting strings have been severed.

" He's . . . dead," Keenan said. He knew with a dreadful certainty that the sensitive had drained all life and knowledge from Pattin and discarded him.

Megoran bent down, examining the empty husk. At length he turned his wide-eyed face to Lockyer, who still sat huddled in the back seat of the car. " Keenan is right. Now what do we do ?"

" We're finished—we must get away from here." Lockyer's slight body was trembling uncontrollably.

" No !" Megoran said strongly. " We know where Dashiell is now—we can't give up. We would not be safe from him anywhere on this planet."

" Our sub-vocs will protect us," Lockyer said, hopelessly.

" No, we can't maintain them on interference forever ; sooner or later we would have to sleep, then we would be defenceless."

" There is nothing we can do," protested Lockyer weakly.

Megoran flashed him a pitying glance. " Here, give me a hand with this, Keenan." He grasped the body of Pattin by the shoulders. " You can drive Lockyer back to the city. I'm going to go in there and finish what we came here to do."

Lockyer got out of the car and watched them as they placed the body on the floor in front of the back seat. He seemed stunned, all air of command gone from him.

" No, Megoran," Keenan said, grimly sure of what he *had to do*. " Lockyer can drive the car himself. We'll go in and complete this mission together. Two of us will stand a greater chance of getting out alive."

" Thanks." Megoran thrust the old man into the driving seat without further discussion. " Ditch the car near the city and go back to your place some other way. If we're not back by this evening, you'd better start running."

Lockyer nodded, his pale lips remained closed as the engine of the car burst into life and he drove away.

" So much for our leader. When the dreamers falter it's the practical man's job to take over," Megoran said as the two of them walked back towards the other car. " Any suggestions ?"

" Yes." Keenan removed an inhibitor case from his pocket and charged the injector. " Drive me up to the front entrance of the hospital, and wait with your engine running. I'll go inside and take care of this Dashiell ; I owe him that much."

Megoran looked at him curiously. " Any other particular reason why *you* want to be the one to do this ?"

Keenan was asking himself the same question. " Perhaps it's because I'm just beginning to understand what the project

is all about," he said. " This man would be a menace to his own kind as well as to us, if he were allowed to continue in this way."

" You'll do," said Megoran curtly. He started the car and turning in the gateway headed quickly up the drive between the close-cropped lawns and well ordered trees of the hospital grounds.

Keenan got out of the car as it stopped in front of the building. " Give me a quarter of an hour."

Megoran nodded. " Good luck."

Keenan smiled briefly and walked without hesitation through the glass doors of the main entrance. A white coated clerk at the reception desk looked up as he entered, but he kept his eyes straight ahead. Several nurses stood near a notice board on his left, talking quietly, but apart from them the hall was deserted.

His steel-tipped heels seemed to echo his tension as he hurried across the highly polished composition floor towards the line of elevators. He flashed a quick glance round and saw that the clerk had risen from her seat and was looking at him curiously. The doors of one of the elevators were open. He stepped inside and closed them behind him.

Punching the control button he occupied the ascent in re-checking the inhibitor injector. Everything depended on speed. The doors opened again at the third floor and he walked out into a gleaming, antiseptic-scented corridor.

" Good morning, can I help you ?" A stout, grey-haired nursing sister questioned him in a broad Scots accent.

"Thank you, sister. Where shall I find the patient Dashiell?" Despite the risk he dropped the shielding pattern for a moment and scanned her. There was a quick stir of association in her sub-vocal thought-stream and he had the information he required including the name of the surgeon in charge of the case : Tern. He switched in his shielding pattern again.

The nurse, assuming from his air of authority that he was a doctor, replied without question. " You will find him in ward 36—just around the corner on the right."

" Thank you." Keenan hurried along the corridor.

Outside the door of the ward he paused for a moment, steeling himself. Everything depended upon him being able to maintain this bluff of being a member of the medical staff. If the sensitive guessed at his real identity and offered any physical resistance he would be helpless.

There was no point in delaying any longer, every moment was precious. The receptionist might have raised the alarm already. He opened the door and slipped into the ward, closing it quickly behind him.

Its interior was a sudden contrast to the orderliness of the corridor. A small grey-haired man in a white smock lay on the littered floor beside an overturned table. Near his head was a pool of water in which glittered the shattered remains of a carafe. The windows of the ward were open and the curtains flapped noisily in the wind.

The bed was empty and its clothes lay strewn in disorder on the floor. Keenan moved forward and bent over the fallen man, the injector poised ready. He had no way of recognising the sensitive other than by his mental emanations, and as the man was unconscious he dropped his shielding pattern for a brief moment.

There was no response.

Through the open window he heard the roar of an accelerating engine. He rushed over and looked out onto the hospital grounds.

An ambulance, the one which he had half noticed at the gates a few minutes before, was moving away swiftly down the drive towards the main road.

Instinctively he killed the shielding pattern and reached out with his sub-voc towards the ambulance. And grasped at the window frame for support as the tearing, familiar horror of the sensitive's telepathic emanation flowed into his brain.

For a moment he stood unprotected beneath the mental Niagara, as confused perceptions of motion and chaotically mingled patterns of thought battered into his consciousness. There was no attacking probe, just an unintegrated cataract of raw radiation.

He held onto it for as long as he could endure, then retreated to the protection of his sub voc. Dashiell was in the back of the fast retreating ambulance. There had been no attack because the man was lying in a drugged stupor.

He turned away from the window, the knowledge of defeat bitter in his mind. He was too late.

The man on the floor groaned and opened his eyes.

" Who the devil are you ?" he asked, looking at Keenan.

To be continued

Every civilisation has its Rosetta Stone, upon which archaeologists will eventually build a picture, but the interpretation of the original civilisation will not necessarily conform to what it really was. The interpretation will be in the eye of the beholder working from a very rough yardstick.

THE BOOK OF POWER

By Bertram Chandler

It was sunrise when Laurens and Parker left their ship, walking slowly across the concrete apron to where they had left the hired tractor parked. They were small men, both of them—big men are rare in the Astronautical Service—and even the bulkiness of their Mars suits and helmets did little to lend them stature. They walked slowly because their muscles were unaccustomed to exercise, even in the light Martian gravity, after close on nine months of free fall. They would have preferred to have had a few days to become accustomed to planetary conditions once more, but their names were first on the roster for planet leave—and planet leave was compulsory.

" I still think," said Parker, " that we'd have done better to hole up in a hotel for our leave. A fortnight of beer and blondes would have done us good . . ."

" It wouldn't have done our pockets any good," replied the other. " Imported beer is a millionaire's tipple, and the local stuff is just plain horrid. As for the blondes—I'll save *my* money for the much better specimens back on Earth. Furthermore," he added virtuously, " the Company's rules specify *healthy* recreation for one's planet leave."

" What's healthier than beer and blondes ?" demanded Parker.

" There's nothing healthy about the local variety of either," said Laurens.

They reached the tractor. Laurens first, they climbed the ladder to the pressurised cabin mounted a-top the heavily shielded power unit. Parker, as soon as he was inside, dogged tight the outer and inner doors of the tiny airlock. He saw that Laurens was removing his helmet, so followed suit.

" There was no leakage last night," said the Navigator, " or very little. That's a good sign. Some of these hired jobs wouldn't hold water, let alone air."

" It's lucky," said Parker a little sarcastically, " that I have such a seasoned explorer with me."

" What else is there to do on Mars ?" asked Laurens. " When you've been running here as long as I have you'll lose all your taste for the bright lights—not that they're fearfully bright. And there's always the chance that the amateur archaeologist might turn up something really important. You wouldn't know Peterson—he was before your time in the Company. He found a book—the Rosetta Stone of Mars, they call it. Peterson's sitting pretty on his mink farm in Canada now, and as far as he's concerned the stars are just pretty lights in the sky."

" I've heard of Peterson," said Parker. " Who hasn't in this concern ? And I've heard about the book he found—a sort of child's picture and spelling book, wasn't it ? What can we find that will be as important—*if* we find it ?"

" Nobody knows what happened to the Martians," explained the Navigator. " They reached a high cultural level, and then . . . And then there just weren't any more Martians. If we could find out what really happened to them . . ."

" We're spacemen," said the Third Pilot, " not archaeologists."

" Peterson was a spaceman, too," said Laurens. " Anyhow —what about checking the stores and equipment ?"

" It was all checked last night," complained Parker.

" Then check it again. I've no desire to be stranded in the Macdonald Range foothills short of *anything*. If anything breaks down we shall be as alone as we should be in Deep Space."

" Oh, all right," said the Third Pilot. " Ready ? Concentrated food tablets, two full cartons . . . Cigarettes, twelve cartons . . . Conditioning units, air—one in use, three spare . . ."

A little later Laurens spoke into the microphone of the set that would, a bare hundred miles from the spaceport, be virtually useless—a high Heaviside Layer is essential to efficient radio communication.

" Lieutenants Laurens and Parker," he said slowly, clearly, " in hired tractor LX419, calling Spaceport Control. Request permission to proceed as arranged."

" Request granted," came the reply. " Good hunting, Laurie, and good luck !"

" Thank you, Bill," said the Navigator.

A fresh voice broke in.

" Captain Hall here, Mr. Laurens. Have a good leave."

" Thank you, sir."

" And mind you're back on time !"

" We shall be, sir."

He switched off the set.

" All right, Peter," he said. " Take her out. Keep to the course I've laid off on the chart—070°. It'll bring us to the eastern foothills of the range."

" I can see," said Parker.

The turbine whined shrilly as the almost incandescent gases drove through the intake, impinging upon the spinning blades. Parker let in the clutch, and the big machine lurched forward on its huge balloon tyres, dipping like a ship in a seaway as it left the solidity of the apron for the loose, pulverised sand. Laurens looked through the rear window of the cabin—to the low spaceport administration buildings, to the sleek hull of *Martian Queen* standing proud and slim and shining against the dark sky. He thought, as he always did on these occasions, that this might be his last time on Mars, that a lucky find would make him as financially independent as the fortunate Peterson.

He went and sat beside Parker, glancing at the dial of the repeater compass. Normally the youngster would have resented this carefulness on the part of his senior, but this time it seemed to the Navigator that the Third Pilot was even more excited than he was himself.

" I've got a hunch, Laurie," he laughed. " I've got a hunch that we're going to strike it rich !"

" I hope you're right," said Laurens soberly.

The journey was interesting enough at the beginning and the end, but the two days in between were boring and uncom-

fortable. The food was the worst part of it. Spaceships feed well, they have to, for the sake of the morale of crew and passengers, but Mars tractors cannot run to such luxuries as hydroponic tanks and tissue culture vats. When the low peaks of the Macdonald Range loomed over the red horizon both men were heartily sick and tired of concentrates, as well as feeling an uncomfortable emptiness in their bellies.

Darkness fell before they had reached the foothills. Laurens called a halt as soon as the stars came out, used his bubble sextant and the chronometer to determine the position. The tractor, the two men having taken it in turns to drive, had made a good course, a correction of only one degree being necessary to bring them to the valley that the Navigator had decided upon as the scene of operations.

" For some reason or other," explained Laurens to Parker, " it's never been fully explored—yet it seems to me to be a logical sort of site for a rock city . . ."

" Why ?" asked the Third Pilot.

" Water," explained Laurens. " According to the aerial survey it's a deep canyon when you get well into it, and it was in just such deep canyons that Mason and Hardacre found traces of water as well as rock cities."

" Then why hasn't it been explored before ?" asked Parker.

" Because," said Laurens, " there just aren't enough archaeologists, either amateur or professional, on Mars. Those that are here—the professional ones—are spending all their time collating the material that's already been found. The average technician just hates to stray far from the Domes. The average prospector explores only those localities where he's liable to find the things that he's looking for. All the big discoveries of recent years have been made by people like us . . ."

" And like Peterson," said Parker.

" Like Peterson," agreed Laurens. " Well, now that we know where we are we'll carry on. There's not much light from the moons, but our headlights are quite efficient. We'll be coming to some low cliffs shortly—keep your eyes skinned for a sort of huge pillar of rock standing by itself—the entrance to the valley is just to the left of it . . ."

" We'll be among the foothills shortly," demurred Parker, " and I don't much fancy driving at night among all the rocks and the sharp rubble." He grinned suddenly. " But I had a hunch, didn't I ? We'll ride it, Laurie !"

" But not so fast !" said Laurens in sudden alarm as the tractor lurched heavily.

They camped that night in the entrance to the valley marked on Laurens' chart. They gulped an unsatisfactory meal of food tablets, washed down by a mouthful or so of the carefully hoarded water. Laurens went into the tiny cubbyhole that served as a washroom while his shipmate converted the cabin seats into beds. He stared out through the little port at the steeply rising slope, to the black sky and the bright stars beyond. He wondered, as he had often wondered, what the Martians had been like. Their physical appearance—manlike, but fantastically tall and attenuated—was known, but so far little was known of their culture, their way of life. Nothing was known of the catastrophe that had driven a civilised race into extinction. But, thought Laurens, we don't even know what happened to the Cretans back on Earth—and they must have been the most civilised people in the Mediterranean, in the world, when it, whatever it was, happened . . .

He stared out through the port, not seeing the frost crystals, pitifully sparse, gleaming like microscopic diamonds in the light from the tractor, not seeing the stars and the two tiny moons in the black sky beyond the crest of the slope. He saw, instead, the people who had once lived in this valley, striding past on their stilt-like legs, bound on incomprehensible errands, saw the huge, spidery vehicles skimming by, laden with unimaginable merchandise.

And had armies with banners passed this way, he wondered. Had murderous hordes streamed in from the desert? Had a handful of survivors straggled out—remnants of the invading army or refugees from the city—to perish miserably in the thirsty sands?

But we don't know that there's a city here, he thought. We only hope that there is. And yet—I *feel* somehow that this valley was inhabited. I feel that there are ghosts . . . Dammit, I don't believe in ghosts. I'm a Twenty First Century man and have received the benefit of a first class scientific education. Even so . . .

He stared through the port, and saw vividly the shadowy army, the huge standard flapping against the stars, the moonlight and the starlight gleaming on the polished metal of strange, fantastic weapons.

" The beds are ready !" called Parker from the main compartment. Then, as Laurens joined him, " Spooky sort of place, isn't it ?"

" Not especially," lied Laurens.

With the dawn they were up.

Their morning ablutions did not take long, neither did their breakfast. Laurens took the first trick at the controls of the tractor, sending the vehicle roaring and lurching through the valley, down the slope that was gentle at first but that later as the canyon walls rose higher and higher on either side, became a steep declevity.

The Navigator drove slowly and cautiously, his eyes ever alert for indications of the dead civilisation. Once he stopped, then hastily donned his helmet. Parker was going to follow suit, but was told to remain where he was. The Third Pilot saw his shipmate scrabbling with gloved hands in the rubble, saw him slowly straighten up and, holding something carefully, return to the vehicle. As Laurens came in through the airlock Parker asked, " What did you find ?"

" Nothing much," replied Laurens, his voice muffled by the helmet that he had yet to remove. He tossed something small to Parker. Parker caught it, then gasped with wonder. He had seen the elaborate trinkets worn by the Martians, both men and women, in the museum at Marsopolis, behind glass, and felt for them an academic sort of admiration. But this was different. It could be handled.

He laughed shakily.

" I almost feel that we should hand this in to the nearest police station," he said.

" So do I," agreed Laurens. " Look at it—the gold and the platinum still bright, the diamonds—I suppose that they are diamonds—shining like little stars . . . And look at the workmanship ! Imagine the skill and the patience required to turn out that elaborate tracery—like impossibly delicate fern leaves—without breaking a single threadlike wire, without producing a single curve or angle that's not exactly right . . ."

" It's a lovely thing," agreed Parker.

" Yes," said Laurens, " it is. And we'll find more like it in the city . . ."

" Unless it's been looted, like all the others," said the Third Pilot.

" According to *your* hunch," said Laurens, " we're going to find something important. Anyhow, as soon as I've found suitable stowage for this thing, we'll push on."

They pushed on, winding deeper and ever deeper below the surface of Mars. The sky, now, was no more than a thin, tortuously winding ribbon of deep blue directly above them. The intense beams of their headlights were absorbed rather

than reflected by the dark red basaltic walls of the canyon. They knew that it was sunset only by their watches—little light penetrated into the chasm from above.

Still they drove on, snatching hasty meals of the food concentrates whilst maintaining a look-out. Each of them was tired, but neither of them felt like sleeping. The discovery of the trinket had fired them with lust for the city that they knew, now, must be hidden somewhere in the deeps.

At one point at a sharp bend, they had to halt for all of an hour to clear the way. They toiled feverishly over the crumpled wreckage of tall, flimsy wheels and twisted body framework. Luckily for them the Martians had built their vehicles with what was, by Earthly standards, an impossible lightness and economy of material—even so, even in the light gravitational field, the task was a heavy one. Both men were sweating profusely inside their suits when they returned to the cabin. As they drove on they discussed what they had found.

" It looked," said Laurens, " like an ambush. Did you see the marks of fire on the canyon walls, and the marks that must have been made by flying splinters ?"

" So they were wiped out by war," said Parker.

" Yes, it looks like it. I read an article by old Dr. Kalshaw about it. He reckons that the nomadic desert tribes made war on the people of the cities, who were either killed and eaten or dragged off into slavery. Of course, that's only *his* theory . . ."

" Seems quite tenable. But if that's the case—what can *we* find that'll be so precious ?"

" Something to show what the war was about. For example —was it a Holy War, on the lines of the Moslem Jehad ? If it was a Holy War—then what were the religious principles involved ? When men fight, be they Earthlings or Martians, they fight about *something*. If our history is any guide it's usually religion."

" I had a girl friend back on Earth," said Parker, " who was a Marxist. She still is, for all I know. She maintained that the causes of wars were always economic . . ."

" I don't agree, Peter," replied Laurens. " My own reading of history inclines me to the view that wars have always been fought over ideas—and the Marxists' own wars, back in the Twentieth Century, are proof of that . . . Anyhow, it looks as though Dr. Kalshaw is right in *his* ideas. The city dwellers

were wiped out by the nomads, and the nomads hadn't the technological resources to cope with the climatic changes that finally wiped *them* out . . ."

" The wars could still have been of economic origin," persisted Parker. " Battles for food and water . . ."

" Then why didn't the nomads stay in the cities once they had conquered them ? No, Peter, it was all a matter of opposing ideas, possibly incompatible religions." He paused, peered intently ahead. " Slow down, will you . . . Stop ! Now—swivel that spotlight along the cliff face . . ."

Straight and sheer stood the cliff, sheer and smooth, too smooth to be natural. At regular intervals, black against the ruddy darkness of the basalt face, were rectangular apertures that were doors and windows. An ever rising zig-zag was the ramp used by the Martians as a footway to their homes.

" We're here," said Laurens.

Reluctantly, although they were both dog tired, the two spacemen decided to sleep before continuing their exploration. Once they were in their bunks they talked a little, but not much. Laurens realised that to frame even the simplest sentence was becoming too much trouble, said a brief goodnight to Parker. It seemed to him that he fell asleep whilst he was still uttering the last syllable. He slept, but not heavily, his rest being troubled by dreams. He dreamed of the city as it must have been—the lights shining from the doors and windows in the cliff face, the passage of the tall, fragile citizens up and down the ramp. He dreamed of the attack from outside, of the nomad hordes streaming along the canyon floor, of the hand to hand fighting, of the swaying banners lifted high above the struggle.

In his dream he strained his eyes to distinguish the devices of the flags. Cross ? Crescent ? Hammer and Sickle ? Swastika ? The identification of the symbols became of the utmost importance to him. Suddenly, he himself was in the thick of the fight, thrusting his way through the battle to where a knot of the soldiers of the city defended their standard. The dream was horribly real. More than once he slipped on the spilled blood, and the acrid reek of it—like vinegar it was—was always in his nostrils. Wickedly curved swords, gleaming and bloody, flashed before his eyes, grenades burst around his feet. And then he was standing before the standard bearers, demanding that they lower their flag so that he could

identify it. They ignored him, and he felt a desperate sense of frustration and attacked the Martians with his bare fists.

There was no substance to them, and they crumpled before his attack, and the tall staff leaned and fell, and he screamed as he was enveloped in the choking folds of the flag.

When Parker, who was annoyed at having his sleep disturbed pulled the blanket off his face he woke up. He found it almost impossible to get to sleep again, and when the alarm sounded shrilly he was already awake, blear-eyed and unrefreshed.

When they left the tractor they carried torches, a camera, their water bottles and a supply of food tablets. Laurens led the way over the canyon floor.

He said, " We must be methodical. We'll start at that first door, at the far end, then work our way along. Then we'll do the same at the next level. And the next. And so on."

" How long will it take ?" asked Parker. " We're bound to get hungry and thirsty, and it'll not be safe to take our helmets off."

" What do you think that valve in the face plate is for ?" asked the Navigator. " Yes—I know it's for speaking through, but it acts as a little airlock as well. Just push the tablets in and take 'em with the tip of your tongue. For drinking—use the tube."

" When I was a little boy," grumbled the third Pilot, " I always thought that spacemen lived hard and dangerous lives. But life in Space is one long picnic compared with this carry-on . . ."

" Life in Space," said Laurens, " is deadly monotonous. This is not. Come on, Peter. We've some exploring to do."

" And they call this recreational leave," grumbled Parker.

They came to the first doorway. It gaped emptily. Laurens shone his torch on to the frame of it, pointed out the marks left when the metal door had been wrenched from its hinges.

" Metal hungry they must have been," he said. " The nomads, I mean . . ."

" Which all bears out," said Parker, " my theory that wars are fought for economic motives. What do you say, Laurie ?"

" I say that it's all hogwash," replied Laurens.

He led the way into the cave dwelling. They found themselves in a passageway, the walls of which were faced with almost white tiles. They exclaimed with wonderment at the

decorations—the intricate geometrical designs in colours that were still, after millenia, rich and glowing. But vandals had been at work. Great areas of tiling had been scraped clear of the bas reliefs that had adorned them. Fragile shards still littered the floor. Laurens squatted down, attempted to reassemble some of the larger fragments. Parker watched as a picture took shape, the representation of one of the stilt-limbed Martians accompanied by an animal that was like a spidery panther.

He said, "You should forget Marx, and read the real histories of some of the early wars on Earth. To the Moslems the representation of any living being was anathema, still is. These nomads must have had a similar religion. This struggle must have been analagous to the clash between Cross and Crescent—a war of the books . . ."

"A war of the books, Laurie? What do you mean?"

Laurens got to his feet, careful not to disturb the almost complete figure in the ancient dust.

"Did you never hear of the Books of Power?" he asked. "Earth history is full of them. *The Holy Bible*, the *Koran*, *Das Kapital*, *Mein Kampf*, *To The Stars* . . . They're the books that influence history, that *make* history. Now and again it happens that two, or more, of the books are contemporaneous—and then the fur starts to fly. For example—the *Koran* and the *Bible*, *Jehads* and *Crusades* . . . Or *Das Kapital* and *Mein Kampf*, and the world wars of the Twentieth Century . . ."

He led the way through the empty house. Empty it was, stripped of all furnishings. The long ago looters had been thorough—thorough with a fine disregard for the feelings of any archaeologists who might follow in their footsteps. In the next house it was the same, and in the next.

And the next.

Along the second level they searched, and the third. The nomads had left nothing but the mute evidence of their destructive spirit. Laurens was disappointed and Parker, despite his earlier hunch, was frankly bored with the proceedings. But Laurens was stubborn.

It was on the twelfth level, in the last house of the tier, that they found the shrine. Somehow it had escaped destruction. Well back from the cliff face it was, at the end of a long passage. The door at the end of the passage was still intact and, to the surprise of the spacemen, opened easily once they had mastered

the simple—but strange to Earthly experience—locking device. The room behind the door was large. Its walls, as were the walls of all the other rooms they had entered, were tiled but in this case the tiles were undamaged. Lifelike depictions of beasts stood out in vivid bas relief—of animals and what must have been plants and flowers. And on the walls hung burnished, glowing utensils, the possible uses of which baffled the Earthmen.

At the far end of the room stood an altar. About five feet long it was, and four feet high. It, too, was made of the gleaming metal—an alloy of gold, of platinum?—and was encrusted with heavy ornamentation.

Without being told to do so, Parker took the torches and arranged them so that the interior of the chamber received the maximum illumination. Laurens unslung the camera. The whirring of it, as he shot foot after foot of film, was surprisingly loud. He found himself hoping that the noise of it would not disturb whatever deity it was who was worshipped here.

At last he was finished.

He put the camera back in its carrying case, advanced into the shrine. Curiously he took one of the metal things down from the wall. Oval it was, with a long handle. Laurens stared at it. His own face, its features distorted by the thick plastic of the helmet, partially obscured by the eating and drinking valve, stared back at him.

"A mirror," he said. "I wonder what part it played in the rites of worship?"

Parker was holding something that looked like a bowl.

"And this was to receive the blood of the sacrifice," he suggested. "Well? What do we take back? Everything?"

"No, said Laurens. "Just what we're holding now—just enough to show that we have found something. The archaeologists like things to be left undisturbed as much as possible. We shall be credited with the find." His eye was caught by something else by itself on a shelf. He handed the mirror to Parker, lifted the other object down. "A book," he said. "The Bible of the lost race. For all we know, the cause of the war between them and the nomads . . ."

"One of your Books of Power?" asked Parker.

"Yes—a Book of Power. It may have built a civilisation, it may have destroyed one. But they'll be able to tell us at the Museum. We must get back at once."

" The reward will be worth claiming," said Parker, hugging the mirror and the bowl to himself.

" Come in, gentlemen," said Dr. Kalshaw. He was old, and tall, and thin, and looked not unlike the Martians upon whom he was the greatest living authority. " Take a seat, will you." He regarded the two young men from under thick white eyebrows. " Spacemen, aren't you ?"

" Yes sir," said Laurens.

" And what can I do for you, gentlemen ?"

Laurens opened his bag. He took out the bowl and the mirror, handed them to the archaeologist. Dr. Kalshaw's eyes gleamed.

" Where did you get these ?" he asked.

Laurens told him.

" There are more things in the temple," he concluded. " I had some stills from the film blown up—look ! You see, sir, there's the altar. And there's the shelf where we found the book, the Bible. It will give us a clue perhaps, to the religious wars that wiped out intelligent life on Mars."

" If I can read it," said Dr. Kalshaw. " The Martians may have had more than one language."

" It's rather important that you do," said Laurens.

" Why, Lieutenant ?"

" Because it must be a Book of Power."

" A Book of Power, Lieutenant ?"

" Yes. One of the books that have shaped history. Who knows, it may have lessons for us, even."

" Let me see the book," said Kalshaw, putting the bowl and the mirror on his desk.

Again Laurens opened his bag. Reverently he took out the book, handed it to the old man. Kalshaw took it with equal reverence, his long fingers playing in an almost sensual way over the metallic cover.

" They must have been nature worshippers," said Laurens. " The city dwellers, I mean. There's the picture of some sort of plant or animal on every page. There're other pictures too, but I can't make them out. They're not just ornamental designs, though . . ."

" I'll see if I can understand it," said Kalshaw.

He opened the book. Laurens and Parker got to their feet, stood one on either side of the archaeologist, looked down at the golden pages, the glowing pictures, the queer, angular script.

" Yes," said Kalshaw at last. " This book may well have changed history . . ."

" So it is a Bible of sorts," said Laurens. " Have you any idea what those things we brought from the temple are for ?"

" This one," said the archaeologist picking it up, " is obviously a mixing bowl . . ."

" For wine," said Parker, " and the blood of the sacrifice."

" And this," went on Kalshaw, ignoring him, " is a frying pan."

" A frying pan !" exclaimed Laurens. " In a temple ! Sir, you're joking !"

" No, Lieutenant. Look at these photographs of yours again. Look at what you thought was an altar. Now—just imagine that you're a member of a race that believes in ornamenting everything—even cooking stoves !"

Parker started to laugh.

" So much for your Book of Power, Laurie ! A cookery book made to the same ornate standards as the rest of the kitchen . . ."

The archaeologist smiled.

" As you say, Mr. Parker, a cookery book. A most extravagant one too—those little six legged lizard things must have been scarce even when the Martians were in their hey-day, and yet this first recipe is for a dish of lizard tongues sautied in something that I can't quite translate, yet which seems to mean the fat of a nomad woman . . .

" As you say, a cookery book—but still a Book of Power. Any people sufficiently decadent to make it their Bible were just asking to be wiped out. You are right, Mr. Laurins, in saying that this book may have changed the course of history . . ."

Laurens rather hated himself for being mercenary—but as he stared through the wide windows at the red desert he knew that this was a scene that he need never see again, that the reward for his discovery, even though shared with Parker, would make him financially independent for life.

" Anyhow," he said, " it has the power to change the course of *my* history."

Bertram Chandler

We have always maintained that John Kippax is a natural fantasy writer rather than a science fiction one, although he strongly disagrees with its contention. The following story certainly conforms to our science fiction requirements—yet it could just as easily be published in Science Fantasy. *You will see why as the story unfolds.*

THE UNDERLINGS

By John Kippax

When the Terrans first came among us, it had been hard for us to accept that there could exist other sentient beings of our standard of intelligence: but they landed on Kolem and lived among us, quietly, not working in our factories, nor eating with us, but going about, observing, talking pleasantly, harming no one. They were quiet, beautiful people. First came male creatures, but later, female. These went about in the same way, as though they understood and had compassion for all Kolem—for we, the superior beings, and for the sheep and the cows, for the smaller creatures and the horses which once upon a time had been draught beasts, but which now were used for pleasure riding, except when they became the food of the poor. I had eaten a lot of horse, up to the time I met Jacqueline.

Such lovely creatures, those females. I do not know what agreement our government made with the Terrans, for they were never mentioned in the newscasts, nor in the printed

journals : yet they were known, and liked for their goodness everywhere. Some said that they were waiting until respect for them grew so much that they began to be the centre of a new religion, but I never knew the truth of this. Perhaps I shall know the truth soon though.

So we were a hundred and fifty million Kolem living on our planet, so green and well tempered of climate, and we were a people largely at peace. We had radio communication, and electric light, and the recently invented television, good sanitation and a fair standard of education. And living among us were representatives from the third planet of Sol, a star which our best telescopes could just detect. It was a thing of utter wonder that living beings could have travelled from there: it seemed an honour that we should be chosen to receive these quiet wonderful people as guests.

Most of us did not begin to guess how wonderful: perhaps, if I had had a little more pride, I should never have found out myself, and I should be spared the pleasure and the pain which now are mine.

It was one evening during the cool season, and I was feeling immeasurably depressed. I stood at the corner of the street, wondering what to do: useless to go back to my lodgings: I had made my escape, and I owed too much money. Musicians were not organised on Kolem: under our system, the government interfered hardly at all with the lives of the ordinary citizen: it trusted, and let sleeping bodies lie.

I had played in a few bars that evening, and had been poorly rewarded for my efforts. I stood wondering, hating and despairing, with whirling emotions blinding my thoughts and crippling my good sense.

Then she passed.

The step came nearer, but I did not turn my head. The being stopped just behind me.

" What is the matter ?" she asked. I felt embarrassed, to think that I should have shown my feelings so clearly ! I knew that she was a Terran, even before I turned to look. They speak our language with an attractive slurring. She was more beautiful than I could have imagined: blonde hair reached to her shoulders, and her face, thus framed, was further surrounded by a cloak. Her features were fine: she was as tall as I, and she moved with a grace seldom seen in our own females.

" Everything is the matter," I answered.

She touched my instrument case.

" You are a musician ?"

" Yes, but I'm out of work."

She looked at me steadily, with that compelling gaze that Terrans possess.

" Why not come and play to me ?"

I hesitated. " I will pay you," she said.

" It's not that."

" Is it because I am a Terran ?"

" Yes."

" I will do no harm. Have you ever heard ill of us ?"

" Never."

" Then come and play for me : my name is Jacqueline Serrailler."

I tried the name : she repeated it : it wasn't so difficult.

" I am Efran Klira."

" That's an easy name : you will come then ?"

I nodded : they were so like us, and yet—no Kolem female would have spoken up as positively as that. But it did seem to me that the stories of their goodness and of their kindly ways were probably true.

As we walked to the apartment house where she lived, she asked me questions about myself, where I lived, and about my parents. A lift took us up to the tenth floor. She showed me into the room, and here my last fears vanished, for the room might have been one designed by Kolem for Kolem. There was even a three-bar electric fire, the normal heating for a room of this size : so much for the rumour that Terrans needed more heat than we did.

I stood wondering about how many other Kolem had had an experience like this befall them . . . when she came back from taking off her cloak she seemed more beautiful than ever.

" How about a drink, before you make some music ?"

I accepted gratefully. Again, there was nothing unusual : it was one of our own drinks : she took some too. Perhaps they were determined to live as much like Kolem as possible. Certainly the differences between our races seemed slight.

I took the instrument from its case.

" What shall I play ? Popular tunes—the radio stuff ?"

She relaxed on a couch : I could not help thinking that even in repose she looked more vibrantly alive than ever I had imagined a creature could be.

" No, play something of the people. ' The Forest Flies,' or ' Cows To Market,' or ' The Lovesick Shepherd.' "

I was surprised that she knew these, and I was embarrassed at being asked to play the last one, for it has a very intimate flavour, and is not often sung in mixed company : but perhaps a Terran could not be expected to know that. I began to play the first one, when she rose suddenly.

" Wait a moment." She took a key and opened a door, and went in. A moment later she returned, carrying an apparatus which she plugged into a power point.

" Sing to this : it will make a record of your voice."

This, she explained, was part of her equipment. I sang to the microphone and watched the turning reels. It seemed to me that as I dredged up scores of old Kolem songs from my memory all unhappiness was driven from me, and I was warmed in the sun of her presence. When I had finished I sat looking at her, my mind full of strange thoughts. She got up and switched off the apparatus, and stood close to me, her eyes searching my face.

" Beautiful, Efran, quite beautiful."

She went to a drawer and took out money.

" Let me pay you now."

I saw that she was offering me fifty credits.

" No, that is too much !"

She shook her head.

" I have had the value of that from you tonight. Please take it."

She pressed the money into my hand : it was the closest she had been to me. I felt that strange warm glow come through me. Then she began to ask me more about myself, and it was not long before I had told her all my troubles, and of how I had been at my wit's end when she spoke to me at the corner.

" Would you like to change from the place where you live, if you had the chance ?"

" The chance ?"

" If you had regular employment, perhaps."

" Yes."

She deliberated a moment. Then she walked over to a door : I could not take my eyes off her.

She asked, " Would you like to change to—here ?"

I felt overwhelmed at the suggestion. I asked, " You would like me to be here, with you ?"

" Yes, Efran."

She opened the door.

" See, in here. It is never used."

I came and looked inside, and saw a small neat room, with a brightly patterned cover on the bed. I wanted it at once : to stay here, and serve her ! It would be fulfilment.

I said eagerly, " I will come."

From the first week of my stay there, my luck seemed to change. I found employment in a new bar, not far from the apartment house. The clientele was of good standing, and appreciated my music. I was happy there, but I was happiest of all living near to her. When I had finished work, there was always a meal waiting for me. And after that, I would sit by the fire and tell her of anything interesting that had happened during my working hours, and of how the clients had received my playing. This of course was on those nights when she did not look in herself. Then, when I had talked myself out, she would say goodnight, and retire to that room which she always (so I believed) kept locked. This was the usual thing : it was a ritual I grew to love very much—the meal, the talk by the fireside, the sound of her voice. I do not think that I could have slept if it had been omitted, if I had not had her near me.

During the daytime we walked together, took trips outside the city visiting galleries, museums, going to theatres, to cafes, everywhere, hand in hand. She was detached, humourous, understanding, and it was not long before I began to feel that she was deferring to my needs to a very great extent. She seemed not to notice the pride I showed to the whole world of Kolem that I, *I* was the chosen friend of a Terran.

As the weeks went by and my prosperity and happiness continued I began to feel more than ordinary compulsions for her company, and I began to re-interpret her attitude to me in the light of what I knew about her : I became more and more certain that she looked on me with more than ordinary regard. It was not long before I knew, with absolute certainty that I loved her. I told myself that there was evidence that she loved me. I, Efran Klira, loved and *was loved by* a Terran ! And why not ? It could be seen that the difference between

these Terrans and the Kolem were slight indeed. How else could she be so understanding? Her constant solicitude, her desire to please, what else could they mean but affection, but love? I trembled with rapture at the thought that, through love, I had achieved parity with her, yet somehow, I did not dare to speak to her of it. Though she had taught me a simple form of the Terran language, I did not yet dare to use it to tell of my love. But I was bursting with happiness : through this, I had become her equal : I knew it. Because the Terrans had interstellar travel, that did not mean that they were essentially superior to the Kolem. I could feel that she was almost ready to declare her love for me : would a Terran love an inferior? I would wait.

One night she had been into the bar, and had heard me play. As soon as I had seen her, I felt inspired, and I played as never before. The applause had been wildly enthusiastic, and prompted by her, I had told the patron that I could not consider my contract being renewed at anything but a greatly increased figure. Half afraid, and at her suggestion, I named that figure, and the patron at once accepted. I was elated as I walked home with her through the warm scented evening. My heart was bursting with love. She took my hand, and we walked in happy silence.

Then she said : " You are trembling, Efran. You should have had your warmer coat on."

I said that I was all right. " Do Terrans feel the cold as much as we do?"

" Not so much perhaps. We are fortunate. But hurry Efran, being out in this night air will do you no good."

She quickened her pace. I had hoped that we might have strolled the long way home, and that I might have been given the opportunity of declaring my love for her.

When we arrived home she made me have a hot bath at once. After this we had supper, and then we sat in front of the fire. I was filled with a great happiness. I took her hand. She did not withdraw it. I summoned my courage.

" Jacqueline—I love you."

There was a sad, tender expression on her face.

" I believe you do," she said. " That makes me very happy."

I felt my heart leap with joy.

" Does that mean—that you love me too?"

" I am fond of you, Efran, very fond."

" But love—"

" But as for love—you must wait a little. Perhaps I can give you the answer tomorrow."

" Then—then it *is* possible ?"

" How could it be otherwise, Efran ?"

It was enough : I was supremely happy.

She said at length, " I think you should go to bed now. In the morning, we will speak of this again."

Much later, I awoke. I did not know the time, but I believe that it must have been just before the dawn. I felt a restless yearning possessing me : I was longing for the new day to come, when I could again speak to her about the thing that was more important to me than anything else in the world. I switched on the light, and I wondered what should be the source of the vague fears which assailed me.

I heard a faint humming and sputtering : I got out of bed, went to my door and opened it, and looked across the lounge. The sound came from her room, that room into which I had never been. I stepped forward, then I stopped, thinking that I heard her voice speaking Terran. A line of light showed that the door was ajar. A desire to know more about her, *now*, took hold of me. I crossed and peered through the crack. She was seated with her back towards me, facing an apparatus which looked like radio, and also a screen which looked like our newly invented television. On the screen were strange pictures, but before I could get used to them, or the language which accompanied them, they faded. Then another figure appeared on the screen. I was fascinated, terribly ; it was like nothing I had ever seen before : with what planet was she in contact ?

Then the figure, the *being* spoke Terran !

" I am recognised ?"

" Yes, master," she answered. *Master* ! How could that dreadful creature be her master ?

I could only understand the words of the figure on the screen with difficulty.

" The first Terran landing will be in six earth hours from now." What could that mean—the *first* Terran landing ?

The figure on the screen gave numbers, and she repeated them. Then—" Your special report ?"

"I have acquired a very good specimen, a male named Efran Klira. Intelligent, a musician—"

I listened hard, but the Terran language became more and more difficult to follow. I felt horror grip me : she spoke of me, in detail, and without love it seemed, comparing me to some four-footed creature they both knew. What could it be like? Certainly, I reflected miserably, it could not be more repulsive than the creature with two arms, two legs and a head but with two eyes to whom—to which?—she was speaking.

". . . the same stimuli as Rover and Patch . . . and when his head is stroked, there is the whine of pleasure . . ."

Was the thing on the screen a Terran, and if he was, what was she, who resembled nothing more or less than a beautiful young Kolem, as did all the other Terrans on Kolem?

I strove to understand what she said.

". . . six hours master . . . multiple aptitudes robot two three one signing off . . ."

The screen darkened. I crept back, and lay trembling. I do not understand : she *must* love me : of course she loves me. We are their equals. Why am I trembling? Oh, it is just that I do not understand. When the morning comes, and she wakes me, it will all be explained : she will tell me everything, and then I shall be happy again, as I can only be happy, with her.

John Kippax

THE LITERARY LINE-UP

Space being extra short this month there is little room to enlarge over next month's up-to-standard issue. Dan Morgan's serial "The Uninhibited" moves into its second exciting phase; Kenneth Bulmer has an unusual lead novelette in "Mission One Hundred"; and there are short stories by Bertram Chandler, E. R. James, and Peter Hawkins.

Story ratings for No. 59 were:

1. Green Destiny (conclusion) - - Kenneth Bulmer
2. Fourth Species - - - - - - E. R. James
3. All That Glitters - - - - - Lan Wright
4. The Man from Toombla - - - John Boland
5. Quick Freeze - - - - - Robert Silverberg
6. Death Of Glass - - - - - - Philip Carver

ANTARCTICA

This month officially opens the International Geophysical Year although a great deal of preparatory work has been going on during the past year. Throughout the I.G.Y. we shall be publishing numerous articles concerning the experiments taking place around the world, of which this month's deals with the work taking place in the Southern Polar region.

By Kenneth Johns

Antarctica, the unknown white continent that crouches at the foot of the world, is now being subjected to the greatest onslaught of science, technology, men and machinery it has ever witnessed. Keeping astride with the opening up of the space and underwater frontiers, the cold and lonely fastnessess of the largest remaining unexplored land-mass on the planet are being penetrated by the impatient flame of man's wanderlust.

The problems confronting anyone who ventures deep South, be he explorer, scientist, geologist, biologist, are different in kind and quality from the problems facing those same types of men when they venture out into space or down beneath the surface of the seas. More obviously than anywhere else on Earth, perhaps even more pointedly than on the high mountains and the burning deserts, nature seems to be saying to man : " You were not meant for Antarctica."

But meant or not, men have been going deep South for years and will continue to do so ; and the work done during the International Geophysical Year will lay a fresh course in the masonry of knowledge we have of the white continent. Since the end of the second world war Great Britain has been

very interested in Antarctica and the islands off the coast and has, in the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey, a magnificent instrument which has been continuously at work. Now, the Royal Society and the Trans-Antarctic Expedition are both represented by strong teams.

This work would have gone forward even if there had been no International Geophysical Year ; what IGY has done is to bring in many other nations and to give an aura of completeness to the conquest of the continent, besides bringing in more workers and a quickening in the tempo of discovery and penetration.

This up-to-the-minute scientific crusade is far removed from the early courageous, ill-equipped, often tragic expeditions that drew the world's attention to Antarctica and showed that the mysterious continent was potentially a vital land mass in the economic development of the planet. So far only the surface has been scratched ; what may be the future status of Antarctica will be decided during the coming year.

What is the secret continent like ? Cold ? Yes. Lonely ? Yes. Bleak ? Yes. But these words cannot convey the true feeling of utter desolation that assails the spirit of those overwintering there. There may be rich deposits of coal and oil and mineral ores. But it is going to take a grimly determined and fanatically dedicated country to make something of them.

Cold. The lowest temperatures ever recorded upon Earth so far were —67.7° Centigrade at Oymekon and —69.8° Centigrade at Verkhayansk, both in Siberia. In Antarctica, the lowest temperature so far was recorded at the Soviet satellite station Pionerskaya during the last winter, a temperature of —66.8° on September 20th, 1956. But the general feeling is that it gets a great deal colder than that at times in the interior. And now the Americans at the South Pole have experienced a record low 100.4° Fahrenheit below zero.

The biggest difference between Antarctica and the rest of the world is that the whole temperature range is so much lower. Not just isolated pockets of cold; everywhere is cold. The average is 45 degrees lower than in the Arctic. This brings peculiar problems. Internal combustion engines just die, their batteries so weakened that they no longer function properly. Grease cracks.

At a new research station set up in England both hot and cold climates may be artificially produced and exhaustive

tests have shown that a man's bodily reactions to heat and cold are surprisingly small. Body temperature does not drop when surrounded by a colder medium; the heart and body go into high gear, forcing blood at an increased rate through the surface capillaries. This throws a heavy demand on the body and extra food of high calorific content must be consumed. One part only of the body adapts. It has been found that the fingers, which at first are numbed, gradually become accustomed to working in the cold and will remain supple at reduced temperatures. This was strikingly evident when the second echelon of the British Antarctic expedition arrived ; their fingers were clumsy and stiff whereas those of the first party who had adapted were nimble. Within a couple of months both parties were level.

The only way the body can retain heat is to keep it in by artificial means ; plenty of warm clothes with air spaces and a windproof outer covering are essential. Animals do this in two ways, layers of blubber or feathers or fur. Putting on fat in the Antarctic helps—fat men do not feel the cold as much as thin—but both need the special clothing, such as the new synthetic fibre dress, equally. Man is living under alien conditions in Antarctica.

Having attended to the men's bodily needs in food and clothing, the most important problem to conquer is the peculiar feeling of lassitude, of unreality conjured up by life under these alien conditions. During the day, when the sun never sets from September 22nd to 22nd March, normal waking-sleep routine is seriously interfered with, and the same is true of the twilight or dark period, from 22nd March to 22nd September. Men feel that they can do without sleep, and then try all manner of tricks to become tired sufficiently to sleep, and lie awake hour after hour, gripped by the general insomnia. Vision across the snow is tricky. Pilots suffer from a ' white out ' when light is trapped between low clouds and the snow and everything seems to be wrapped in cotton wool. On the ground this phenomenon can cause confusion between distant objects and those close to hand ; there's just no reliable yard-stick.

Men have overwintered a number of times during the epoch of Antarctic exploration ; during IGY the whole continent will be spotted by their camps, huddled in the snow against the winds. These winds can reach 200 miles an hour ; the silence

that often follows is awe-inspiring, alien. During the winter men hear the sound of tiny bells ; they are hearing their breath which freezes and then blows across their face and ears and the ice crystals break up with an eerie tinkling.

Antarctica is shaped like a laughing elephant's head.

In conventional representations of maps, North is usually shown as ' up '; but in the Antarctic, surrounding the pole, all directions are up. So the continent is usually shown with the elephant's trunk raised (Graham Land) over the guffawing mouth (Ross Ice Shelf). Swinging round and back is the dome of the head (Queen Maud Land) with a slight projection of the ears (Enderby Land). Wilkes Land is the neck and chin, swinging round to the lower lip (Victoria Land) at the base of the Ross Ice Shelf. Between Wilkes Land and Victoria Land a vast trough of ice has recently been discovered extending back into the hinterland for thousands of square miles and ribboned with glacial ice. From this trough howl the icy gales of 200 mile an hour plus winds which fundamentally affect the rest of the world's weather. But for the fact that this great trough spews its cold breath out below the Ross Ice Shelf, one could well think of it as the icy laughter of the great elephant.

The continent contains five million square miles of land and only two million have so far been mapped ; although the expeditions now on the spot are vigorously pressing new ventures it is doubtful if even now every part of Antarctica will be seen. Inevitably, even using aircraft, there will remain spots completely unknown. Eighty-six percent of all the glaciers on Earth are in Antarctica and the planet is flatter there than anywhere else. But this flatness refers merely to the bulge of the planet—mountains are known rising to three miles and already others have been discovered and named after the men and ships connected with the exploration.

This is the South. Hostile environment, bleakness, unnatural day and night, freezing coldness that does not allow a single let-up, all combining to produce that insubstantial feeling of irritability, despair and loneliness that sweeps over the men working and living there.

What has man to pit against this power ?

His ships. These Antarctic ships are of very many different types, the best known of which, the ice-breaker, is not represented among the list of ships operated by Great Britain. So

far America has the largest ice-breaker, *U.S.S. Glacier*, 8,300 tons displacement, 21,000 h.p., as well as others involved in Operation Deepfreeze. The Russians have the ' River ' class ships, which have a depression in their sterns into which the prow of the next in line fits. The team of four ships, M.V. *Ob*, *Lena*, *Jenissei* and *Angara*, can then push as one unit with a combined horsepower of 28,000. New Zealand, with H.M.N.Z.S. *Endeavour*, ex *John Biscoe*, will be operating the only wooden-hulled ship off Antarctica. The Argentine has the *General San Martin*, a 4,500 tons, 6,600 h.p. naval ice-breaker built in Germany at a cost of over £1 million. Late news is that Russia is building a new ice-breaker to be fitted with atomic engines.

But once the ships have landed the men and stores and then commence the job of sustaining them, it all depends on the quality of what has been landed. The ships are shut out for a considerable time and an airlift could not hope to do more than alleviate a tragedy ; it could not prevent it.

His machines. Bulldozers with chains around the tyres will be used. The cold will crack the blades, that we know ; but fresh will be flown in. Weasels and Sno-Cats will crawl doggedly across the snow. Sno-Cats have an enclosed aluminium body and can carry 2,300 lbs., and can do one and a half miles to the gallon. They have two sets of caterpillar tracks, the front steerable, and will be used on the trip across the continent that stops off for a while at the South Pole. Aeroplanes will be used as never before in the Antarctic, and helicopters, although of limited use, will find many tasks although much of what they might be expected to perform will instead by done by Austers fitted with skis. When the Americans made the first aerial landing at the Pole they found that in a few moments the plane's skis had been firmly glued to the ice; they had to fire emergency jato bottles to get off and the explorers caught bronchitis.

Finally, the ever dependable dog, the Husky, will still haul a sled with vigour and elan and, very probably, will keep on going when the machinery has frozen solid.

The scientists who are braving the perils and discomforts of the deep South will take with them all the formidable battery of equipment that modern science can marshal to break the mystery, to understand and plan to use, the facts that await discovery. On their work depends the success of the whole undertaking. From the reports they make and the

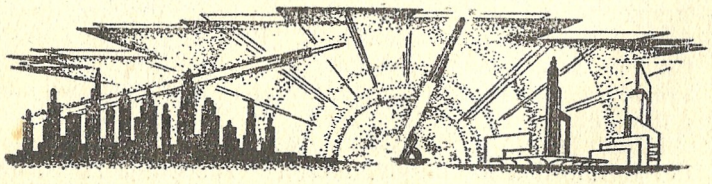
theories developed may well come a master plan that will transform the white continent into a new garden of Eden of the human race.

The ships and the machines. What of the men?

Anyone who ventures into the white silence is subtly altered, changed; the South casts a spell that grips and brings a man back season after season. The men who are now toiling out there to create the camps, to march inland, to understand the mystery of the continent, are true descendants of the pioneers. Dr. Vivian Fuchs who will lead the Transantarctic Expedition, Sir Edmund Hillary who will meet him in the frozen wastes, Colonel Smart in command of the Royal Society Expedition, and their teams can look with pride on the achievements of their predecessors Shackleton and Scott. The Americans have lost their commander, Admiral Byrd, who died in March, 1957; but Paul Siple who is in command of the South Pole Base, sailed with Byrd as a Boy Scout. Commander of the U.S. Naval forces is Rear Admiral George J. Dufek. These men with others, like Professor T. Nagata of Japan in command of their expedition, are worthy to plumb the secrets of the hostile continent, and to follow the paths blazed by Amundsen and Scott.

Opening up Antarctica is like opening up an alien planet. What results that may have are difficult to assess today. But the whole concept of I.G.Y.—and not least of the Antarctic part in the plan—will rank very high on the list of those activities of man that led to his understanding of his own planet, of his shaping that planet the better to suit himself, and of a new sort of 'know-how' that will aid him in settling on truly alien planets.

Kenneth Johns



In case anyone missed the "Profile" of John Boland in the June issue, his other literary abilities tend toward the detective field. In the following story he has combined both forms of plot and produced that somewhat rare hybrid—the scientific detective story.

MANHUNTER

By John Boland

Colonel Brandt finished reading the report, then looked up. "Really, Captain!" he said. "However you can insist that the youth is sane is more than I can understand! What about that fantastic story he told?" He shook his head. "No. He was unbalanced. No one in his senses would try to stow away on a time-shift vessel."

"Nevertheless, sir—"

Brandt held up a hand. "That will do, Captain. The case is closed: the youth has been sent for reconditioning."

"Sir, I saw that youth myself. The guards brought him straight to my office the moment the vessel touched down. I questioned the lad for an hour. He's as sane as I am." Captain Sneeth glared defiantly at his superior. Sneeth's square, rugged face was flushed, his rather full lips drawn into a thin line.

Brandt laughed. "As sane as you are . . . ? We'd better not go into that too deeply, Sneeth." The Colonel's usually

lazy voice took on a rasp. " The youth was unbalanced. All the records prove it. Look at 'em, they're all here. Patterns of brain-waves ; reflex actions ; drug hypnosis tests ; they all show the same thing . . . definite signs of abnormality."

" Sir, the lad had been subjected to time-shift without the protection of being locked in a TS shield. He had been without food for a week. He was tremendously frightened of *something*. There were bound to be abnormal patterns show up in the tests."

Colonel Brandt sat back in his chair, his eyes glittering. It was a danger signal, and Sneeth knew it. " Captain," the Colonel said evenly. " Are you a doctor ?"

" No, sir."

" Are you a psychiatrist ?"

" No, sir."

" I see. You doubtless have an—an intuition, which you prefer to back against experts in their own fields."

" I'm a policeman, sir. A good one."

" Are you now ?" Brandt's eyebrows shot up. " Well, here's a point we might argue. So you're a good policeman. Forty-six, a good policeman, and still only a Captain ? Has it ever occurred to you to wonder why you're still only a Captain ?"

" It's because my face doesn't fit." Sneeth was beyond caring. " The Controllers don't like me."

" Is that what you think ?" Brandt leaned forward. " Now listen, Sneeth. I'm going to tell you something for your own benefit. The reason why you are always passed over for promotion is because you're old fashioned ! Yes, that's what I said : old fashioned ! You imagine that just because you are in Inter-World Police, you have to behave like one of those pre-space detectives. You seem to think that all it involves is being a manhunter ; a sort of modern-day Sherlock Holmes.

" Well, you're wrong. Our job is mainly administration, not man-hunting. It's our business to take advantage of the latest techniques ; to use all the latest scientific equipment to detect crime and cure criminals . . . But you—you openly scoff at these machines."

" No machine can do my job."

" I did not say that one could."

" And I'd back my reasoned opinion against any results you cooked up from tests."

Two hectic spots of colour appeared, high on the Colonel's cheekbones. "Are you suggesting, Captain, that I *faked* the results?" His voice rose to a scream. "*Get out of here*! Get out, before I have you court-martialled!"

Back in his own office, Sneeth lit a cigarette and slumped back in his chair. He'd done it now; no doubt about that. Brandt would contact Controller Three, Forton, and he, Sneeth, would be out of a job. Forton, who was Commissioner of Inter-World Police, had never liked him, that Sneeth knew . . . . He sighed. Why had he been such an idiot! The youth meant nothing to him, so why had he taken such a deep, personal interest in the case? Was it because there was something about the desperate youth that roused the normally dormant father-instinct?

Sneeth blew out a streamer of cigarette smoke, his lips making a vulgar noise as he did so. Father-instinct! He was a bachelor, and very happy to stay that way, although it probably wouldn't be so funny as an out-of-work bachelor, for he had few illusions as to the chances of getting another job.

He smoked several cigarettes, then put a call through to Sergeant Johnson, in Records Office. "Joe," Sneeth said, "I want you to bring me everything you've got on Pheeloparia." He grunted. "That's right, Pheeloparia. Everything." Pheeloparia was the planet from which the youth, Harland Davis, had escaped.

Joe Johnson brought the files up himself. "Captain, sir," he said with the ease of an old friend, "what you been doing to upset the Colonel?"

"What do you mean, Joe?"

"Well, sir, 'tain't none of my business, but I reckon as you're either goin' to get promoted, or else blasted to dust." Joe's grey eyes were anxious. "You done something to upset him?" He shook his head. "I've just had to send your complete dossier to Controller Three's office."

"Don't worry, Joe. Every puzzle's got an answer." He smiled at the grey-haired man. Joe and he had been good friends for twenty years or more. "Now, what's the file on Pheeloparia say?"

"Not a lot, Captain. We don't get much come in from the new colonies; not for the first sixty years or so, and Pheeloparia was only opened up fourteen years ago."

But although there was not much on file, what was there Sneeth found very interesting. According to the reports sent in by Major Tallith, who was in charge of the tiny Inter-World Police office on the planet, Pheeloparia had an amazingly high death rate from accident. By the time he had compared Pheeloparia's statistics with those from comparable colonies on other planets Sneeth eased himself back in his seat and lit another cigarette thoughtfully.

He had found that the rate of fatal accidents on this particular planet was at least double that of the next highest on the list. And the youth, Harland Davis, had claimed that he stowed away *because he had been sentenced to death* ! His story had been that one day when he was in the bush, a man armed with bow and arrows had suddenly appeared before him and threatened to hunt Davis to the death !

According to what Davis had said, the man was masked, and definitely human in appearance. Davis had escaped ; he had told Sneeth a disjointed, incoherent tale about arrows shooting past him, missing by inches.

Somehow, Davis had escaped. Too frightened to go back to the settlement, for he had not recognised his assailant, and to go back to his companions might mean going to his death, he stowed away on the special time-shift vessel that was waiting to take off for Earth.

" Suppose there's a homicidal maniac loose up there ?" Sneeth muttered to himself. He had not at first believed the youth's story, preferring to think that it was a mask to shield the truth, but now he was not so sure. Suppose, just suppose Davis had told the literal truth ?

He knew it was useless, but he had to go to see the youth. Davis was sitting in the corner of a compound at the hospital, basking in the afternoon sunshine. His hair had been cut short and he looked in much better health. The strain had gone from his face, which seemed rounder, and was already touched with sun-tan. But although he looked healthy enough, there was nothing behind his eyes. Now that he had undergone brain-reconditioning, Davis lived for one thing only : to carry out whatever physical task he was commanded to do.

Sneeth left the hospital, a cold anger stirring in his breast. Davis hadn't been murdered on Pheeloparia, but he had suffered as bad a fate on Earth. When he got back to head-

quarters he collected the list he had compiled, and went to see the Colonel.

Brandt looked at him with distaste. "Well?"

"Sir, I want you to look at some figures I've extracted from the files." He placed the sheet of paper in front of the Colonel. "Look at that, sir. Pheeloparia's record of fatal accidents. It's more than twice as high as for any other colonising project." He stabbed at the list with a thick forefinger. "Look at it, sir. Twelve per cent fatal casualties! It's not possible!"

"What about Trren? There were a hundred per cent casualties there."

"That was a cataclysm, sir. This is different."

Brandt shrugged. "So what? Some planet or other has to top the list."

"Yes, but not by so great a margin! There's more than accident at work on Pheeloparia, to my way of thinking."

Colonel Brandt placed the tips of his fingers together and stared over them at Sneeth. "Major Tallith does not appear to entertain similar doubts, Captain. And, let me remind you, he is on the spot!"

"The Major's old, sir. Maybe—"

"Maybe you think you should be sent there to investigate! Is that it?" Brandt's gaze was glacial. "Captain Sneeth! I have, I believe, been very patient with you. I have listened to your weird theories, I have put up with more than insubordination from you. Now let me tell you what I propose to do . . . I shall pass your reports to Controller Three, for his perusal. I don't think I can say fairer than that?" His thin lips parted in a humourless smile. "Now Controller Three leaves today on a month's space-cruise, so it will probably be five weeks before he reads your reports. And, Captain, in those five weeks I don't want one word out of you to anybody—to anybody, you understand!—about your ridiculous conclusions."

It was rather more than six weeks later when Sneeth arrived at headquarters one morning to find a note on his desk. He was to report to Colonel Brandt's office at once. He tapped on Brandt's door, went in, and was greeted by the smiling Colonel. "Ah! Good morning, Major!" Brandt laughed at the bewilderment on Sneeth's face. "Yes, I'm speaking to you, Major Sneeth! Congratulations on your promotion!"

Taken aback, for the first time in his life Sneeth felt himself blush. He had come to the office fully prepared to find himself out of the Service. Instead, he was promoted Major ! It was a bit difficult to grasp. He took the cigarette Brandt offered. " Thank you, sir . . . thank you for everything !"

Brandt laughed again. " Don't waste your thanks on me, Major. You earned your promotion yourself. Controller Three was very impressed with the work you'd done on those statistics from Pheeloparia. He'll be along shortly, and he wants to see you himself." He looked at his watch. " However, I've got something else to talk about for the moment . . . Have you seen the latest despatches from Pheeloparia ?"

" No, sir."

" Tallith's dead. Died two or three weeks ago. You'll be replacing him." He stared at Sneeth enigmatically. "Well, what do you say ?"

For the second time Sneeth blushed. How he had misjudged Brandt ! " If—if there's anything odd going on up there, sir, I'll soon get on to it."

" Well, I don't know. You'll have to watch yourself, Major. Tallith died . . . accidentally." Brandt cleared his throat. " I don't have to tell you to be diplomatic, Sneeth. While you are making your investigations, tell no one of what you suspect. We don't want a panic spreading all over the planet ; especially when it might be for nothing." He paused. " Send your despatches to me. Understand ?"

Two days out from Earth the vessel reached a point in space where the time-shift could be operated. Major Sneeth enjoyed being locked in the TS shield. It was the first voyage he had made into deep space, and everything was interesting, and when they came out of Shift, and he saw the purple world of Pheeloparia, with its triple suns, filling the TV conning screens, Sneeth felt a deep satisfaction.

He was the only passenger to alight, and there was a deputation to greet him. Four men, the oldest about his own age, welcomed him as representatives of the colony's council. Their leader, Hreeth, shook him warmly by the hand. " Welcome to Pheeloparia, Major. It is good to know that we are remembered—that we are not left without a representative of law and order."

Lobus, the main settlement, was a pleasant town with orderly rows of shacks, the purple earth giving a bizarre

effect, but the Major was too anxious to take over his new duties to spare much time for the town. Police Headquarters was in the rear room of one of the shacks, and he was pleased to see that Tallith had kept full records of everything of major interest that had happened.

Tantin, one of the younger men from the settlement, had been appointed as his guide until the Major learned his way around on the planet. Tantin was young, enthusiastic and full of the sense of wonder. He was also very easy to question, and the Major quickly got a picture of life on the planet.

"It's hard, it's dangerous, it's exciting," Tantin said.

"Why dangerous?"

"Well, all colonising is dangerous, isn't it, Major? But here . . . I just can't understand it. We thought it was a paradise . . ." He broke off, sighing.

"What do you mean?"

"Major, I've lost three of my family since we've been here. All by accident!" His momentary depression passed. "But we can't win a world without suffering, can we!"

Sneeth carefully studied the young man. "Look, Tantin," he said gently. "I don't want to pry, but . . . will you tell me about those accidents?"

"Why?"

The Major shrugged. "Maybe I could figure out a way to reduce their numbers. But before I do that, I've got to know how they happen."

Tantin's face shone. "It would be a fine thing to do so, Major!" Some of his enthusiasm waned. "But what can I tell you? They all happened in the bush. People go out into the bush; they do not come back."

"But what about the bodies? You must be able to tell from the bodies how the accidents happened?"

The youth smiled. "You're a new-lander, Major. You obviously do not know our planet. Listen: this is why we thought we had found a paradise. On Pheeloparia, Major, there are no animals that prey one upon the other. There are many life-forms, but they are all vegetarian, none of them is dangerous to man. So far we have not discovered any harmful microbes or viruses. Do you not see why we thought it a heavenly world? Here there is no law of tooth and claw. There is death, yes, but that is attended to by the sextons."

"The sextons?"

" Burying beetles, Major. There are some to be found on Earth, but here they are much larger. Any dead body that is left lying on the ground is attacked by these sextons. They squirt a sort of acid over it, and within twenty-four hours there is nothing left. Not a trace : nothing."

Sneeth sucked in his breath. What a perfect place for murder ! The one great drawback, from the murderer's point of view, the disposal of the body, taken care of by insects ! A fine chance he had of proving that the past deaths had not been accidental ! There was nothing he could do, other than to wait for another ' accidental ' death, and try to find the body before it was too late. And how the devil was he to do that ?

Pheeloparia, with .93 of Earth's mass, and with a slightly higher oxygen content in its atmosphere, was a comfortable place on which to live. Its three suns provided a high mean temperature, without much seasonal variation, and once Sneeth had become accustomed to the double shadow that accompanied him everywhere for two of the suns were always visible—and to the weird vegetation, he began to enjoy the life.

He made trips out to the geological expeditions in the mountains, visited the site where drilling was in progress for oil, and very often took a solitary stroll through the bush, out towards one of the farm settlements. The climate of the planet was ideal for farming, but unfortunately it was also ideal for growing wild vegetation, and the problem of clearing this wild vegetation was one that occupied most of the farmers' minds and time. It was a problem that had to be solved if the planet were to support a large population.

It was on one of the trips to a farm when he heard that a coloniser was missing. " Of course, there may be nothing to it," his informant said, " but the missing man should have been back yesterday at the latest."

But two days later the man was still missing, and a gloom seemed to have settled over Lobus. The Major saw Tantin, and the youth's face was drawn. " You don't look well, Tantin," Sneeth said. " Have you reported to the medical unit ?"

Tantin shook his head. " It is the waiting," he said slowly.

" The waiting ?"

" There will be other deaths. There is never an isolated one. They happen in fours."

" Nonsense ! That's pure superstition, Tantin. I'm surprised that you allow yourself to believe such rubbish !"

The youth looked at him with mournful eyes. " There will be more. You are a new-lander, Major, but you will learn !"

Sneeth went on his way, annoyed. He had sufficient matters to occupy his time without adding superstitions to the list. But his self-satisfaction received a severe jolt a few days later, when two more persons were reported missing. Hurrying through the thick jungle at the best pace he could manage, the Major reached the farm from which the two missing persons had set out, and organised a search party.

It was a hopeless task. In the dim thickness of the bush it was impossible to see more than a few yards, and impossible to travel in a straight line for more than a few feet. After thirty-six hours of slogging work, he called the search off and went back to Lobus. Tantin's words were echoing in his brain all the way there, and despite his fatigue, before he went to bed he looked through the records. Tantin had been right ! The ' accidental ' deaths occurred at irregular intervals, but always three of four deaths occurred within a period of fifteen to twenty days. Then there would be an interval of four, five months before the next crop of ' accidents.'

Sneeth cursed himself for not having noticed the cyclic pattern before. In his own mind it was proof positive that the ' accidents ' were manufactured by a mass-murderer, for it was straining coincidence too far to accept otherwise. Had Tallith, his predecessor, noticed it as well ? And was that the reason why Tallith had been killed ?

But that was idle speculation. The first thing to do was to assemble all the known facts, and then to see what deductions, if any, could be made from them. By evening he had completed the first part. The deaths had all occurred, presumably, in deep bush ; the nearest about twelve miles from Lobus, the farthest probably thirty miles from the settlement. They had occurred at all points of the compass without producing any discernible pattern.

" So !" the Major said to himself. " Now all I have to do is to find someone who has been missing from his job at certain times." He grinned as he imagined Colonel Brandt's expression when notified that Major Sneeth had uncovered a

case of mass-murder, and what is more, had solved it without the help of gadgets.

Unfortunately for the Major it was not quite so simple as that. The work schedules, which were meticulously kept, showed that every coloniser on the planet had his or her time fully accounted for. Because of the accidents that had happened, for any coloniser to be missing from their usual place for more than a few hours, meant that enquiries were started.

It was a set-back, but Sneeth accepted it philosophically. He had, if his belief was correct, about three months before the next batch of ' accidental ' deaths took place. It was not possible for him to contact Earth, which was light-years away, in that time, for no TS vessel was due for nearly six months.

He went before the Council. " Have you ever seen any trace of other people on the planet ?"

" Why do you ask that, Major ?"

Sneeth shrugged. " Just an idle thought. I wondered if there was any possibility of some of our folks being kidnapped.'

They laughed the suggestion to scorn. Pheeloparia had been carefully surveyed from the air before any colonisers had been permitted to land. There had been no trace of humanoid life, and none had been seen since the first landings. The Major returned to his tiny office and sat down to work again. He was convinced, absolutely certain, that there would be more murders. But what could he do to stop them ? Inform the Council ?

But there was no proof to put before them, and even if they believed him, what good would it do ? Work would probably be brought to a stand-still, the colonisers refusing to carry on with their tasks until they had adequate police protection. And that would cost goodness knows how many millions !

Sneeth's sleep began to suffer, and as the time drew nearer when he expected the next batch of deaths, he grew jumpy. To do nothing was intolerable. He *must* make some effort at combating the menace. He issued instructions that no one on the outlying farms was to be permitted to go through the bush unaccompanied. If any person was missing for more than six hours, he was to be notified.

With his meagre plans made, Sneeth settled back to wait. The murderer, he was sure, came from another planet. He killed secretly, for the sport of it and not with any intention

of stopping work on the various projects going ahead on Pheeloparia, for if he had wished to cause panic, he would have arranged for at least some of the bodies to be recovered.

Less than a fortnight after Sneeth had published the rules for people travelling through the bush, he got a report of a solitary youth who had been missing for at least a day. In a mad rage, Sneeth set out to visit the farm. The moment he saw the farmer, Sneeth raged : " Why in the name of space didn't you obey my instructions ? Didn't I make it plain that no one was to go out alone, and that anyone missing was to be reported when they were only six hours overdue ?"

The farmer flushed resentfully. " It wasn't my fault !" he said hotly. " I didn't know the young fool had gone snooping off to see his girl-friend ! We all thought he was in his bunk, asleep. It wasn't until this morning that we found he'd sneaked off."

Major Sneeth swallowed. " I'm sorry." He looked round at the thick bush. " Which way would he go ?"

" Down there." The farmer pointed. " There's a track leads down to the river. We'd got a boat there. He probably borrowed it, for his girl's farm is about three miles down-river."

" The boat isn't there now ?" The farmer shook his head. " Right. I'll go down-river and see what I can find. I want you to get in touch with the settlement and get a search party organised."

Cursing himself for the failure of his plans, the Major strode off into the thick bush, sweating in the humid heat of of place. Insects hummed, there was an occasional bird call, but nothing else happened to break the silence. His footsteps muffled by the rich, purple soil, Sneeth kept on until he came to the river bank. The bright-blue water flowed smoothly by, deep and unbroken, and he began to pick his way along the bank, easing his automatic in its holster prepared for anything unexpected.

An hour later, winded, he sat down on a fallen log. He was no longer in a rage. and for the first time since hearing of the youth's disappearance he was able to think calmly. Deep inside he knew that he was attempting the impossible. In this bush he could get within ten yards of the killer and never see him, and there were hundreds of thousands of square miles of such country on the planet.

How simple it would be to forget the whole idea of murder ! If he went back to his office this very moment, no one would think any the worse of him. And it was even possible that he was wrong—that the accidents were, in fact, no more than that. Wearily the Major mopped the sweat from his neck and face, then got up to continue his search.

When he came to the next bend of the river he saw, fifty yards further downstream, a boat tied up. It was the boat belonging to the next farm, and there were half a dozen people standing near it. There were four men and two young women, one of them red-eyed from weeping. It was the girl the missing youth had set out to see.

" What time did he leave you ?" Sneeth asked the tear-stained girl. But he had never arrived. The girl, with an engaged couple as companions, had walked down to the river to wait for the youth. " Bu—but he didn't come !" the girl wailed.

Unless the youth had got out of the boat and climbed on to the bank—which was improbable, Sneeth thought—it meant the killing probably took place on the river. " If it *is* murder !" he told himself bitterly.

Well, one thing was certain : if the youth *had* landed, it wasn't on the north bank, for there was no trace that the Major had been able to find. He stared broodingly across the river. to the jungle on the other bank. On the south side of the river there was no development. It was all virgin country.

"And the perfect place for any killer to hide-up," he thought. "And if that were so . . . the killer might be using the river as a highway." It fitted. It might be right. Well, there was only one way to find out. He turned to the farmer. " I want you to take me across the river."

The man stared at him. " But there's nothing over there !"

" The lad might have capsized his boat and swum ashore." It was a feeble explanation, but it satisfied the farmer and apparently cheered his companions.

Five minutes later, the Major was on the south bank. He watched the boat pulling away back across the water and resolutely turned to the task in hand. Slowly, examining every inch of the ground, he began to make his way along the bank. It was hard, hot work, the ground so broken and the trees so thick that it was difficult to make much progress.

Resting frequently, for he was feeling the strain by now, the police officer moved upstream. It was when he had covered about a mile that he saw the track leading off into the bush. Sneeth hesitated. Was the track one made by the missing youth, or did it betoken something more sinister? He stared uneasily at the footprint. It pointed away into the bush, and it had been made recently.

Suddenly the day seemed to have lost its heat. Warily the Major surveyed the scene. The killer might be lurking behind any tree, arrow notched to bow and ready to shoot. Sneeth looked at his watch. It would probably be hours before a search party arrived, by which time the trail most likely would have disappeared, for the plants grew with astonishing rapidity.

He made up his mind. Heart hammering with excitement and fear, he moved off into the bush; automatic slippery with sweat in his hand. Whoever had passed this way had made little effort to conceal their passing, and he followed the tracks fairly easily, his eyes strained to watch against possible ambush. Ahead of him the bush thinned; he was coming to one of the many hundreds of rocky clearings that dotted the bush.

Right on the edge of the clearing, Sneeth halted. Two hundred yards from where he was standing, he could see the gleam of metal. A small vessel of some sort was parked under an over-hanging cliff! The body of the vessel was covered with brushwood, but he could make out the nose quite plainly. The blood pounded in his head at the sight. Here, he knew, was the answer he'd been seeking for so long.

For an hour and a half he watched the clearing, without once seeing any sign of movement, and then, as the brief night came on, he began to edge his way towards the ship. There was plenty of cover, for the ground was very uneven, broken up into ridges and crevices, some of them quite deep. Then, when he was within fifty yards of the vessel, he sniffed. Someone had had a fire burning; the ashes were inches in front of his nose.

Cautiously he turned his head, looking for further evidence of a camp, and to his right, up the crevice in which the ashes lay, there was a patch of extra darkness. Inching forward, he saw that the darkness was the mouth of a cave, and from the interior of the cave there came the unmistakable smell of coffee.

Gun held steady, prepared for instant use, the Major crawled into the cave, pausing every few seconds to strain his ears for any sound. But all was quiet and he went forward. There was a faint, red glow from ahead: another fire, and as he cautiously poked his head round a corner of rock, Sneeth saw the other fire. There were some bundles of blankets near the fire. but nothing else.

He swore under his breath. If the unknown man should choose to enter the cave now, Sneeth would be trapped between the light of the fire and the mass killer. Almost sick with fear he moved towards the fire, but nothing struck at him. He stooped towards one of the bundles, pulling back the cover and seeing a quiver full of arrows. A noise coming from the entrance made him spring to the far side of the fire, and to his relief he saw that there was plenty of shelter.

Not until he edged behind the concealing wall of rock did he realise that the cave continued. Immediately behind him there was another chamber. He risked a light. Pulling his perma-match from it case, he struck it, holding the flaring stick above his head while he examined the second chamber.

It was a big place, too big for his light to reach over to the far side. Roughly circular, so far as he could judge, but with no sign of another exit. He was about to douse the light when his attention was drawn to the walls. Three quick paces forward and he was staring in horror at the row of scalps pinned to the rock. He was standing in the middle of a trophy room, whose walls were covered with trophies of the chase—*the scalps of the men and women who had been murdered on Pheeloparia* !

The startled oath that sprang to his lips alerted the man in the outer chamber. Sneeth heard a booming, chuckling voice yell at him. " Come out, friend, come out and be killed ! There's no other way out for you !"

Sneeth made a rapid decision. He crept forward, then hurled himself into the first chamber, finger on trigger. An arrow whistled past him, so close that one of its flights touched his cheek, and then he was firing at the figure on the far side of the cave. Three heavy slugs slammed into the bowman, throwing him back against the wall of the cave before he slumped.

The man was dead. Sneeth turned the body over and stared at the face, hardly able to believe what he saw. The dead man was Forton, Controller Three, Commissioner of

Inter-World Police ! Trembling, his mind and stomach in revolt, the Major stumbled to the cave entrance to get some fresh air. The short night was ending, but he was too upset to notice the roughness of the rocky floor and at the entrance he stumbled again.

This time it saved his life, for the arrow which had been aimed at the middle of his chest, struck high in his left shoulder. Before him, not thirty yards away, the Major saw another archer. The bowman was already fitting a second arrow and had half-raised his bow when Sneeth's first bullet hit him.

Retching with pain and fear, Sneeth forced himself over to the second body. If there were any more of these archers he was a dead man, for he could do no more. Only when he reached the body did Sneeth come to realise the complete pattern of events, for he was looking down at the face of his one-time superior, Colonel Brandt.

The Major, despite his wound, dragged the two bodies together and mounted watch over them, brushing away the occasional sexton beetle that came out enquiringly. Sneeth wanted the two bodies as evidence, and he was prepared to fight to keep them. He was still keeping his grim vigil when the search party found him.

John Boland

In the future not every invasion of occupied territory will necessitate superior armaments. It may well be that an alien race will perfect an entirely different method of overpowering defended posts—as Philip High presupposes in the following short story.

BURIED TALENT

By Philip E. High

Hudson gazed broodingly through the foot-thick transvex observation port. The greenish-blue twilight from outside gave his face a curious immobility, like a painted wooden mask. A mask which emphasised the heaviness of the muscles about his mouth and the permanent creases between his brows.

It was a good face in a way, authorative but not wholly unfeeling, positive without being aggressive, yet there was a bitterness in the grey eyes which had become permanent. The bitterness which comes from years of frustration and wasted effort.

He reached up, pressing a stud and a metal shutter slid silently over the port, shutting out the view.

The view was Ganymede, a desolation of jagged peak and black crevasse and the shifting phosphorescent light of Jupiter. Jupiter, which dominated the desolate satellite almost threateningly, a huge swollen sphere looking always as if it were hurtling downwards to crush and destroy.

Hudson looked round the command room with its cramped balsa-plast desk, single chair and wall bunk. Command room ! His mouth twisted, half with amusement, half con-

tempt. All the years of struggling and devoted service, service which had broken up his home and driven his wife to seek comfort elsewhere. All that until, finally, they had given him a command. A command ! Not one of the new powerful cruisers or even a fleet of space tugs but a detector post on Ganymede. A hive-shaped dome on an airless satellite with four men and a sergeant to keep him company.

He had given up telling himself that the posting was important. He knew it wasn't. Even with the increased tension and gradual advance of the aliens, the post was nothing more than an expendable speck in the vast perimeter of Earth's defence. Its very position made it of less importance than similar posts elsewhere because the bulk of Jupiter almost wholly nullified the detector instruments with which the dome was equipped. At most, they would have less than three minutes warning if the aliens decided to attack.

Hudson had no illusions about the possibility of attack. The aliens could walk in today, and out again, undetected. On Earth, of course, the news services spoke confidently of colossal perimeter defences, ceaseless patrols, detector posts and the heavily fortified space stations but it was so much hot air. It was impossible to guard the whole system with a million ships, let alone seven hundred. Only Earth, itself, had a moderately impenetrable defence system and, even that, had yet to be tested.

The aliens slipped through the outer patrols with almost insulting ease. They came in twos and threes, wiping out a minor garrison here, a detector post there, before an overworked patrol arrived on the scene to provide the necessary supporting fire.

On the rare occasions when the enemy had risked an engagement, honours were about even, suggesting that Earth was in now way technically inferior to the invader. In fact, investigation showed that Earth might even have an edge over the enemy. The aliens fought to a pre-determined plan. Earth, as usual, fought first and improvised a plan when the battle was nearly over. In such engagements, the enemy usually lost heavily.

There had been a time, thought Hudson grimly, when the dome would have stood a reasonable chance, but not now. Within the last two years a change had taken place. Patrols, alerted by the absence of routine calls, had found the domes empty and stripped of equipment. It looked as if the aliens

had some new and dreadful weapon, but what kind of weapon? Personnel had presumably been taken into captivity but there was never the faintest suggestion of resistance. It looked as if all the garrisons had surrendered as soon as an enemy ship appeared. The plan of attack, however, was becoming frighteningly obvious. The aliens were concentrating on detector posts and communication garrisons. They were blinding and deafening Earth's defences, thus rendering fleet movements almost useless. A space cruiser can carry just so much equipment and no more, the radar devices of a space ship are of limited range.

Hudson took his cap from the wall-peg, crossed to the mirror and made a careful study of his appearance. It was time for daily rounds. Whatever he may have felt, he was too precise a man to allow it to alter his ways. He ran the detector post with almost parade-ground efficiency and an humane, but quite unrelenting, descipline.

When he slid back the door of the command room, his appearance, as usual, was faultless. He might have stepped from the officers' quarters of some Earth barracks and straight onto the parade ground.

In the main room, vaguely defined in Service manuals as the recreation room, was the sergeant and the two men off duty.

Hudson inspected them with proper formality. "Loxton, you are improperly dressed." He turned to the sergeant. "Take this man's name."

If anyone had accused Hudson of lack of imagination, he would have stared at his accuser with cold hostility. This was a branch of the service, wasn't it? Discipline must be maintained and the men kept on their toes. The absurdity of parading two men and a sergeant never occurred to him.

When he had passed into the store room for a routine check, Loxton adjusted the offending button. "Who does he think he is? The Supreme Commander?"

"That's enough of that." The sergeant said it sharply but without force, a routine reprimand born of fourteen years in the service. "About turn—dis——miss."

Loxton returned to the galley, scowling. He was a conscript and suspected that Hudson disliked him on account of it. What did it matter? He shared the same risks as the regulars, didn't he? If it came to it, he could fight just as hard as they

could, probably a damn sight harder. He slid the door open angrily and slammed it shut behind him. Just let those damn aliens show themselves, these regulars would soon discover he could pull a trigger or thumb a firing stud just as well as they could and he didn't have to have his buttons fastened to do it, either.

Hudson continued his inspection. Loxton was, of course, a conscript and, obviously, poor material. He undertook his combined duties of cook and maintenance engineer with tolerable efficiency, but beyond that—.

At emergency drill, Loxton was an encumbrance. It took him longer to climb into a space suit than anyone Hudson had ever seen. At exterior exercise, outside the dome, he was simply and hopelessly awkward. If there was anything to fall over, Loxton invariably fell over it. If there were delicate instruments to be carried, they were given to someone else. Loxton either dropped them or, somehow, managed to break them.

Sometimes Hudson seethed inwardly. How in heaven could a man like that survive in an emergency or on some wandering asteroid where gravity was virtually non-existent?

He passed into the detector room where Langley and Connor were sweeping the prescribed areas of space with the radar-probes. There were automatic detectors, of course, but in the present crisis Hudson insisted on doubling precautions. He said a few brief words and continued his inspection.

When he returned, via the recreation room, Hammond, the soldier off duty, was bending over an object on one of the swing-out tables.

"What is that, Hammond?"

The man sprang to attention. "A pianette, sir."

Hudson nodded, he had seen them before. It was nothing more than a folding keyboard which clipped to the wall. It weighed, at a rough estimate, six ounces. Hudson was surprised, musical instruments among combat troops varied between the pocket tapnagraphs with a wire recording and the now rare harmonica. A pianette was almost unique.

"Is it yours?"

"Er—no, sir. It's Langley's, sir. A note was sticking and I offered to fix it for him. It works all right now, sir."

Hudson leaned forward and struck middle C experimentally. The note was surprisingly loud and melodious, particularly so

when one considered that the sound was inscribed on a wire thinner than human hair and less than an eighth of an inch in length. " Does Langley play well ?"

" I suppose he does, sir." Hammond sounded guarded. " He plays classical music, sir. I don't really understand it."

" I see." Hudson nodded abruptly and passed into the Command room, frowning. Of course, there was no regulation forbidding musical instruments or, for that matter, rendering classical music on them but it seemed symptomatic, somehow. It suggested that Earth was scraping the bottom of the barrel for manpower as, no doubt she was, but did she have to draft him the scrapings. First Loxton, who was a fool, and now a radar man who played classical music.

Fortunately, for Hudson's peace of mind, he didn't know about Connor. Conner had had a book of verse published before the war, a great deal of which had gone onto tapes for serious verse lovers.

In the detector room, Langley was, as usual complaining bitterly of the boredom. He was a tall, dark man with a long horse-like face and deep-set dark eyes. " If you ask me, this is a sheer waste of time. There's so much damned interference on these bands that they could be on us with a whole fleet before we could even get a beep on the screens."

Connor said : " Sure, sure." in a placating voice and tried to look at Jupiter through the narrow observation port. The giant planet fascinated him, the bands of colour and the curious phosphorescent glow which was somehow never static. If you looked closely you could see sudden swirls of colour slide across the planet like snaking rainbows. There would be sudden eruptions of light and inexplicable whirlpools of colour.

" You dreaming over that damn great balloon again ?" Langley scowled at him.

" It fascinates me, the changing colours set against all that majesty. I wonder what forms those bands and why the background is never static. "

" It's a gas giant isn't it ?" Langley said almost angrily, as if the words accounted for the phenomena. " You'd better watch yourself, too. If the commodore comes in and sees you gazing there'll be hell to pay."

" I wonder if he knows we call him the commodore," said Connor, dreamily.

"I don't know and I don't care." Langley still sounded angry. "The point is, he behaves as if he is and we have to suffer him in silence." He turned back to the screens.

Sergeant Benton, of course, knew of the nickname, a good sergeant knows everything. He was a good sergeant but still young enough to contemplate a life other than the Service. At the moment he was busy among the hydroponic beds tending the plants almost lovingly. If he ever got out of the Service—alive—he was going into the country to grow things. He liked plants, almost they seemed to obey him and people had often told him he had 'green fingers.' Yes, when he left the Service, he'd take up market gardening. A few hydroponic beds and some land to try out stock.

Hammond folded the pianette and put it away in the wall drawer. He wished there was something else to fix, he liked fixing things. He was a man constantly fascinated by machinery and was only really happy when he was working. But for this damned war, he would have his own factory by now, something really new. He had an idea for a kick-back relay which would cut the floor space of an auto-factory in half. Given the time and facilities, he had a number of ideas which would bring in a useful profit. Hammond rather fancied himself as an inventor.

The missile burst soundlessly and unobserved above the dome. There was no flash, only a spreading cloud of whiteness which drifted slowly downwards, glittering faintly. The powder-fine metallic particles were activated, successfully blanking the screens and completely cutting communication.

Five minutes later the alien commander put his ship down behind a thousand foot boulder almost within sight of the dome. Visual observation in the uncertain light being only a few hundred feet, he was close enough for a ground assault.

The rest was routine. After a short period the aliens emerged from the ship, burdened with equipment. In the shadow of the boulder but within sight of the dome, they stopped. The space suits were curiously designed by Earth standards, much of the equipment being contained in the helmets but despite their top-heavy appearance they moved skilfully and easily.

Two aliens set up a tripod and screwed a spherical object on the top. A third plugged in leads from a portable solar battery and fitted what looked like a reflector device behind the sphere. It was not an enclosed sphere but a maze of hair-fine silver wire with a centre support.

One of the aliens made a gesture and the leader threw the master switch. There was no spectacular gush of fire or warping of natural forces. A few fat blue sparks crawled about in the interior of the sphere, the wires began to glow faintly and that was all.

The aliens stood around to wait. With their curious tall helmets and black space suits, they looked rather like a group of bulbous witches gathered round a cauldron.

As soon as he received the news that the screens were blanking, Hudson knew the dome was under attack and the crackling in the communicator bands confirmed it beyond doubt. He gave brief orders for the weapons to be manned and tried to decide what form the attack would take.

Would the aliens descend from above or would they land among the fantastic terrain of peak and boulder and approach on foot? He decided that the latter method was the most likely. The dome was constructed to repel attack from above and the major armaments could not be depressed sufficiently to meet a ground attack.

Hudson began to sweat slightly. The real problem was to decide whether to meet the assault from outside or within. If the attackers were already in position, to send his miniature force through either of the airlocks would be suicide. The men would be picked off as soon as they appeared. There were a thousand hollows and minor fissures surounding the dome where the enemy could conceal an army and, in the uncertain light, one could pass within thirty feet of a man and never see him.

He ordered emergency dress—full space suit but open visor—and issued small arms. At least, if the aliens tried to enter they would pay heavily in the attempt.

He began to pace restlessly to and fro, turning the position over and over in his mind. He cursed the designers of the dome for perhaps the hundredth time. Visual observation was severely limited and, without the radar probes, it would be almost possible to land a fleet unobserved. Again, the major weapons were designed to repel attacking vessels within, or above, orbital approach and, even if he were able to depress them sufficiently to meet a ground attack, the resulting eruption would probably take the dome with it.

Hudson sat down heavily and drummed steel fingers angrily on the desk. The old bitterness and frustration was rising and

clouding his mind like a mist. No matter what he undertook something always stood in his way. Here, obviously, was a major chance to prove his ability and lack of foresight on the part of the High Command tied his hands completely. His mouth hardened, angrily. They'd never given him a chance. Even in time of war, it was obvious that friends in high places lead to responsible commands. The years of service, the almost fanatical devotion to duty meant nothing, nothing at all. He knew, given the chance, he had organising genius and a far-sighted ability to plan a campaign.

He scowled at his metal gauntlets, unseeingly. In point of fact, the High Command was handling the present situation with almost culpable lack of foresight and a wasteful expenditure of fuel and reserves. The overall strategy was obviously at fault and fleets were poorly placed as a consequence.

He rose and studied the stellar map thoughtfully, then slowly removed one of his gauntlets. A squadron station on Pluto, for example; ready to blast off at a moment's notice on an interceptor trajectory—. He pressed a small red magnetic button, signifying squadron strength, on the outline of Pluto.

In the useless detector room, Langley and Connor peered worriedly through the narrow observation port. After ten minutes of careful observation their imagination began to play tricks. In the luminous blue-green light, shadows, even mountains seemed to be shifting and swaying. The whole terrain crawled with imagined movements and shadowy space-suited figures. Langley even imagined he saw some sort of tracked vehicle until careful study finally convinced him it was a boulder he had noticed earlier. " You come and look, my eyes are playing hell."

Connor took his place and stared in silence.

" God !" Langley tried to insert a gauntlet inside the visor and brush sweat from his face. " They could hide a dozen armies out there and you'd never see them. I wonder what happened to the other posts, they say they never fired a weapon, just taken without a fight." He looked at Connor for a moment then pulled him back with angry alarm. " What the hell are you looking *up* for ? You know, damn well, the Commodore said ' watch for ground attack.' "

Connor shook his head dazedly. " Yes, yes, of course." He stared at the other almost without recognition. " It's that

damned planet, I can't help looking at it. Do you think it's —" he fumbled for words, "—sort of hypnotic ?"

" Don't be a fool." Langley sounded frightened and angry at the same time.

" It could be you know. All those colours, sweeping and swirling like rainbows, never settling. You could write a poem or a symphony about it."

" Symphony !" Langley's voice was harsh with bitterness. " What chance have you of writing a poem or a symphony in this madhouse ?" He peered quickly through the observation port then turned back with an angry gesture. " You talk like a fool. Don't you realise that nothing creative comes out of war ? They take people like you and I, creative people, and try and fit them into a war machine. They never understand why we don't make good soldiers. We were born to create, not to destroy—" He broke off, staring unseeingly in front of him. Presently he said: " It would be an achievement wouldn't it ? Composing in these conditions—." He paused again. " A symphony—opening softly, a little weirdly—"

" The Jupiter Symphony," said Connor softly. " It brings a line to my mind which I could make worthwhile." He reached for the notebook he always carried and was almost surprised to find he was still wearing a space suit.

Sergeant Benton crouched over a long barrelled gun. It was fully loaded and pointed menacingly at the airlock but he had forgotten it. He was sure, with a little skilled grafting and a few minor alterations in the chemical content of the hydroponic beds, he could double the output of clean air within three weeks. He had a good mind to slip off now, set aside a square foot or so for experiments. He turned. " What are you up to, Hammond ?" The tone was conversational.

" Just an idea for a kick-back relay." Hammond was staggering under the weight of an armful of spares, wire, equipment and a tool box."

" Good." The sergeant nodded. " You'll be here to keep an eye on the gun, just going to take a look at the plants." At the door he turned. " Call me if anything breaks."

The aliens grouped about the weapon began to stir. The leader flicked a switch and made a ' forward ' motion with his arm. Long experience of such attacks had given them an

easy confidence in their ability to capture and strip the dome without opposition.

Years ago, the aliens had captured a small number of prisoners, prisoners who proved extremely valuable as test subjects. The fact that none of the captives had survived the tests was immaterial, the important fact remained that from a study of the humans' brains certain facts had come to light. Facts which, after much experiment, had led to the development of the weapon. Its effectiveness took time to develop and was limited, in consequence to purely static defences but, no doubt, after a few more years of experimentation and development . . .

The weapon exerted a peculiar effect on the human mind. It acted directly on the brain cycles, stimulating some at the expense of others and, at the same time, excited specified sections of the unconscious mind. The result was to emphasize or exploit, man's latent talents, real or imaginery, at the expense of other faculties. Hudson's bitterness and misplaced confidence in his own ability to assume supreme command came irresistibly to the forefront of his mind at the expense of all other faculties.

Connor's real talent became almost a psychotic urge to write and keep on writing—

Langley had to get at the pianette—.

The alien High Command however, would puzzle for years, wondering how their wonderful weapon had fallen into human hands. They had failed to take into account one vital detail—.

Loxton worked steadily in the galley, his blunt competent fingers assembling an exploder-gun. His mind felt curiously clear and alert and quite without fear. If the aliens were going to attack, they were going to walk into something they didn't like.

He was quite aware but wholly untroubled by the fact that the others in the dome were no longer dependable as fighting units. At first he had run from one to the other, trying to point out the urgency of the situation but he had been greeted either by curses or complete indifference. Commander Hudson, in his shirt sleeves, the spacesuit tossed carelessly in a corner like a discarded cocoon, had been drawing lines on the stellar map. He had not even heard Loxton enter or even speak to him.

Loxton was only vaguely aware that the inability of the crew to defend the dome was in some way due to the aliens. His main thought was that the enemy was coming and that this was the chance he had been waiting for. All his life he had been hoping that one day he would meet the aliens in a hand-to-hand encounter. He believed in himself and in his ability to handle any such situation with flying colours, a belief which Hudson's thinly veiled contempt had served only to increase. He scowled at the gun. They thought he couldn't fight because he was careless and untidy and because it took him a long time to adjust to changing gravities. Well, he was going to show them what really mattered in a fight, the kind of fight that was now almost history.

Loxton had not only the very necessary aggressive attitude for close combat but he had the brains to think out the attack first. In point of fact, he had the situation in his mind quite as clearly as the Commander. The aliens would come in through one of the airlocks and rushing in to attack them straight away would be suicide. All he would get out of it would be a burst of counter fire which would plaster him all over the wall. No, he had to have some method of diversionary attack, something to demoralise and get the aliens grouped together.

He placed the exploder-gun carefully on a shelf and looked thoughtfully at the compressor pistol. The weapon was not really designed for a heat dart but it would fire one with just about enough force to penetrate the armour and remain embedded.

He began to whistle tunelessly to himself, his forehead crinkled with concentration. He'd lie low and wait until things were set right then let them have it. The exact plan came to his mind with almost startling clearness and, he thought he had never felt so alert in his life. True, it was a little difficult to remember his name or how he had arrived in the dome but he knew exactly what he was going to do when the aliens entered it.

Loxton, in fact, was the vital detail that the designers had failed to take into account when they constructed the weapon. It had never even occurred to them that a human might believe in himself as a first class man in close combat. The weapon exploited man's latent talents, real or imaginery, at the expense of all other faculties. It was unfortunate that, loosely speaking, Loxton had a talent for being a hero.

The aliens manipulated the airlock with a skill born of long practise and passed inside. The atmosphere within the dome was not to their liking but they could live in it. They waited until the guages showed the correct pressure, removed their helmets unhurriedly and slid aside the inner door.

They entered the dome proper to the crashing chords of the newly composed ' Jupiter Symphony.'

In the centre of the room, Hammond squatted over a complicated contrivance of fine wire, surrounded by a mess of tools and spares.

Sergeant Benton was in the hydroponics room and Hudson was still planning the supreme strategy.

The aliens looked at the scene without surprise, they had seen it all before. Humans who wrote, sketched or harangued their fellows. Humans who danced, sang, or stripped the domes of vital equipment to follow some inventive urge.

The alien leader walked slowly across the room and crashed downwards with a metal fist on the pianette, breaking it in half.

Langley looked up at him dazedly and began to blubber. " You've broken it, now I can't finish—"

The leader laughed hissingly and the other aliens joined him. One of them kicked the gun over contemptuously—

Loxton's counter attack was superbly timed and planned to distract.

There was a pinging sound and the alien leader staggered slightly, his face puzzled, an expression which gradually changed to alarm. He began to tear frantically at release screws as the breastplate of his suit turned slowly from cherry red to glowing white. The alien opened his lipless mouth in a thin whistling scream, ran blindly into the wall and toppled sideways.

The other aliens grouped together uncertainly, weapons drawn but unable to comprehend what had happened. Their uncertain grouping was exactly the move Loxton had been waiting for. The door of the galley slid open four inches and the squat barrel of the exploder-gun stuttered yellow flame.

There is nothing quite so deadly at close range as a Terran exploder gun, for a fraction of a second the air was filled with a fine mist of bluish blood, pieces of space suit and fragments of flesh. When the gun stopped there was very little left of what had once been four aliens.

Loxton stepped out of the galley still cradling the gun and looked about him. His mind felt curiously clear and detached, almost dreamlike, yet he was ready to deal with any further attacks should they occur. The knowledge slowly came to him that there was no one left to fight and the realisation was almost intoxicating. He'd shown them, really shown them, they wouldn't laugh at *him* anymore. It just went to prove what he'd always thought, in a real fight it was guts that counted and it didn't matter two damns if your hair was untidy or you had a button undone. He could see Hudson in the Command room, still bent over the map, still in his shirt sleeves.

Loxton waved the gun at him cheerfully. " It's all over, Commander, all over." The effects of the weapon were beginning to wear off and Loxton staggered a little, the sense of intoxication increasing. " Commander," he said, thickly, " don't look now but you're improperly dressed—"

Philip E. High

It is always a pleasure to present the first story by a new writer to science fiction. Usually there is something 'different' about the writing style at least. Paul McClelland has tackled the "duplication" theory of Hoyle's in an interesting manner. We hope that he continues writing in this field.

ACCORDING TO HOYLE

By Paul McClelland

Some old scientist had once said—was it Fred, first Baron Hoyle ?—that the Universe contained so many galaxies, so many planetary systems that the statistical odds were such that in this infinity of worlds even the individual man might be duplicated. Find himself duplicated. In twenty years of wandering in space Challis hadn't seen even the lowest form of intelligent life. Nor had anyone else, either. So much for Hoyle. First Baron.

Whistling tunelessly Challis re-read his orders. His one-man scout ship was bound for Calixtus III, IV and V to see what there was to be seen, and of course report. Challis hated reporting. Hated the superior, young-looking officials in their neat, clean uniforms. Hated their disbelieving expressions and worse than that, their boredom. Looking into the tri-di viewer at the pictures he had taken and talking over their shoulder to him and to each other, impatient to get back to their homes, their wives, and what have you.

It was true that there was little danger in scouting, and that Challis himself was the last person to want to shoot a line, but

they might give some indication that they thought what he was doing interesting or worthwhile.

" Routine " said Challis, savagely, plotting his co-ordinates. " Out to the stars goes Man, and what does he get ? Routine. I might as well have stayed at home and watched the Bug-Eyed Monsters on TV."

Cal. V enlarged on the scanner. Pampas and prairie and darn little else by the look of it, which was what the original survey team who had first quartered this corner of the Galaxy had prophesied. His job was to check, confirm and inventory so that Cal. III, IV, and V would make several interesting lines in Bartholomew's *Gazeteer of the Galaxy*.

" And for what ? " griped Challis. " So that some Professor back on Earth could consult it in some library."

Man had exploded across the Galaxy, but breed he never so hard he would not need these planets for generations, untold generations. Challis's might be the first and last human feet to tread their soil. Occasionally he had a partner on these trips and they had the pleasure of grumbling together.

" Heroes " said Challis, stepping out of the air lock and breathing the cool, thin air. " Heroes, that's what we were going to be. Intrepid spacemen. Death defying." He stumbled over a tussock of grass. Grass type grass. The distant hills were blue and he enjoyed them, his discontent dying away as it always did and he used his tri-di camera lavishly. He would get a minute of film about that, he knew, stressing the need for economy.

He stayed three days. Cal. V was a kind world with a large population of small friendly animals, mostly rodents, who chattered and squeaked about Challis and the scout ship. They showed little fear and Challis used up several reels in a calculated defiance of authority. " Getting something back for m' taxes " he said stowing the film carefully in his locker before taking off for Cal. IV and volcanoes.

And lizards. He took lizards from all angles, flame-coloured ones and some with scales more irridescent than any peacock. But Cal. IV wasn't a world to linger on and presently he was in the scout ship orbiting on Cal. III.

At first he thought he was a victim of the hallucinations which had been feared before Man actually went into space. A fear which had proved groundless. But as the image grew larger and larger in the scanner there was no doubt about it.

Cal. III was an exact duplicate of Earth. There were the familiar seas and continents. Sweating he corrected his co-ordinates and decided to home in on London, the outer capital of United Europe (Province IIc.) Not exactly *on* London, of course, but on Kent-Sussex the vast spaceport where the liners took off for all parts of the Galaxy. At the week, on the week.

The Port wasn't there. Panicking he checked his bearings. They were correct. He came in dead slow, the picture in the scanner changing gradually. Kent-Sussex had gone, but in the middle of a giant conurbation—this Earth was obviously back in the Dark Ages—there was an open space which appeared to be a landing ground of sorts.

Landing took all Challis's skill and the manual controls which he so rarely had to use. He put the scout ship down gingerly and lying back in his seat, exhausted, waited for the Security Officer to arrive and clear him. He felt sure there would be a Security Officer.

Outside a siren began to sound and various vehicles dashed towards the ship. Fascinated Challis hauled out his camera and took pictures.

" Internal combustion engines " he murmured. " And hand guns. I'll be damned. And they *are* men. Men in the Galaxy . . . " He stopped taking pictures and made for the air lock, pressing various buttons on the way. That would take care of the outer ladder, and other things.

There was no doubt that the men, if that's what they were, were as surprised to see Challis as he was to see them. " A man ! " was about the only distinguishable phrase that came from the milling crowd of officials who had already discovered that they were unable to get nearer than about ten yards to the ship. Something invisible held them off. The words force-field were already being bandied about.

Challis removed his helmet. The atmosphere was just like that back home. It was even raining. He held out his hands to indicate that he was unarmed. Half the crowd dropped their weapons. The other half tightened their finger on the trigger.

" I come in peace " said Challis. A sentence he had often rehearsed before entering a new world, but which he had never needed until now.

" It speaks English." The ' It ' annoyed Challis. He hadn't expected to be taken for a God from the sky, though

he knew that there were scouts who secretly hoped that one day they might be mistaken for one. But ' It ' !

" Ask It if it comes from a Flying Saucer " called a voice.

" There are no such things " Challis said authoritatively. " Mass hallucination "

" Ask it where it does come from then."

" I am a Man, I come from Earth. May I get down now ?" he said plaintively, after noting the remarkable reaction to his words.

" You see," said the High Official who had been summoned to the airport's offices. " This is Earth. Or so we like to think," he added.

Challis leaned back in his chair and through the rain streaming down the windows—glass his mind had already noted—watched the Army doing sentry go round the force-field.

" I thought so," he said. " About two hundred and fifty years back judging by your technology—and the furniture. Bang in the middle of the Dark Ages. I suppose it might have been worse. I always did like the historico reels on the TV. Have you invented television yet ? "

Half an hour of conversation with Challis had convinced the V.I.P.'s that either they were suffering from hallucinations or that he was. But the scout ship, although its construction was unlike anything they had ever seen before, looked too solid to be imaginary and Challis's English, though rather oddly inflected, was undoubtedly English. As for his claim that he had come from Earth, a planet in a solar system on the far rim of the Galaxy, which was in all respects identical with their own world, except that it was 250 years on in time . . . " " I think we need a physicist," said the High Official suddenly, " and perhaps a metaphysicist, too."

" I should send for Lord Hoyle," said Challis lazily. " I think he could explain it. That is if he's been born. I can't remember dates very well."

Lord Hoyle ? The V.I.P.'s went into a huddle. The H.O.'s pink-cheeked stooge said nervously, " I think he means Fred Hoyle, the physicist. You know, sir. Third Programme."

" Oh, him," said the H.O. " But he's not a Lord. And he's in Australia at the moment."

The door burst open. " So this is the chap who's come from the stars in a battle wagon powered by thought. How's your P.K. factor today, George ? "

" Ah, Baynton," the H.O. was cold. " This is Baynton, our leading Government boffin. And this is Challis. From Earth."

Baynton's eagerness spilled over. " If half I've been told is true . . . ! "

" It isn't," Challis sat up. " There's a perfectly good scientific explanation for *Snowflake*, that's my ship, only . . . "

" Only what, man ? "

" Only I don't happen to know it. I'm a galaxy surveyor. Not a scientist in your sense."

" But, Good Lord," said Baynton, " you don't need to be. There's your ship and here we are. Just let us loose on her, better still take us back to your Earth. Our scientists are bursting their boilers to get to the Moon, and you come along. The representative of a technology that roams the Galaxy. Think ! We can short-cut two hundred and fifty years. Space is open to us ! "

Even the H.O. ran a little at the edges. " H'm. Yes. Rather solves the population problem."

" Hang the population problem," said Baynton enthusiastically. " The question is, will my math stand up to it. Now I know its not something ethereal like parapsychology there's a hope. Wait till my boys hear of this."

Challis slumped back into his chair. The sentry had reached the point of no return and was returning. " I shouldn't bother," he said. " I'd wait if I were you."

" Wait ! " said Baynton. " You mean wait two hundred and fifty years. Whatever for ? "

" It's not worth it," said Challis, earnestly. " You'll see. Boredom. That's what space means. Boredom and routine. Once you've done it nobody cares any more. Getting there's the only real thrill. What you're doing now. Pioneer work, that's the exciting thing. Working and striving and fighting and failing. To me crossing the Galaxy has no more meaning than catching a bus—have I got my dates right?—has for you."

It was quite obvious that no-one believed him. They were all starry-eyed.

" I can't wait to meet your scientists," Baynton went on. " Tell me, is your ship capable of carrying passengers ? "

Challis shook his head. " Designed stricly for one. We do have passenger and cargo carrying craft, of course, but they're too extravagant for scouting."

" Oh well, we shall have to wait until you've reported back. But in the meantime you'll let us look over your ship ? "

" You don't believe me," Challis said. " But I'm telling you the truth. If I hadn't come, the next two hundred and fifty years would have been the best years of your civilization. We've done everything. Para-what-you-call-it has proved a dead end: we've reached the limit scientifically. For the last fifty years progress has slowed to a stop. Oh, I know all our people don't think as I do, but when you're a scout you have time to think and I can only agree with our philosophers who say that our civilization will have to die before there's any more progress. Just as the Greeks had to go. All you want is a short cut to death."

He might as well have saved his breath. The rain had stopped. The sun had come out and the room was filled with light. Crowds of people had gathered at the airport to catch a glimpse of the ship from the stars. Rumour had run through London despite all the security checks that had been imposed. *Snowflake* was too big to hide.

The H.O. pointed to the crowds pressed against the fence, to the police controlling them. " Do you want to deny these people their heritage ? " he enquired rhetorically, the politician rather than the civil servant.

" Since you put it so originally," said Challis, " No."

" Then you agree ? " Baynton was overjoyed. " You'll take the force-field off the ship ? "

" Yes," said Challis. " I'll take the force-field off the ship if you'll agree to remove the sentries and anyone else standing near. It's a delicate and dangerous operation."

" And you'll come back ? " said Baynton anxiously. " You won't take off and leave us ? "

" No, I won't do that ! "

" I don't like this," said the H.O. " After all, I'm responsible to the Minister for this. I don't like removing the sentries."

They watched Challis enter the airlock and then after a few minutes come out again. He was carrying his tri-di camera, a case of spare reels and a viewer. He walked across the field to where the H.O., Baynton and party were waiting for him.

" You see," Baynton said. Challis broke into a run and began to call to them. " Lie down ! Lie down ! "

" Wha . . . " the H.O. was stopped in mid-word by a mighty concussion; a hand seized Baynton and threw him onto the concrete. The sound of thunder rolled and echoed across London. The official party arose, battered, to an airfield empty of the scout ship.

" She's gone ! " wailed Baynton. " The ship's gone ! "

" Yes," said Challis. " I've set her for home."

" Oh." Baynton was relieved. " Then your survey will send a ship back to relieve you ? "

" No." Challis was examining his camera tenderly, checking that no damage had occurred as he had swept Baynton to the ground. " No, they won't do that. I've fed in my report that Cal. III, IV and V are barren worlds and that I'm ill of an unknown plague and so have set *Snowflake* automatically for home. Scouts have done that before. No, the survey won't be back."

" You . . . traiter," choked the H.O.

" I'm sorry I had to cheat you," said Challis to Baynton, who stood stricken. " But, believe me, it was the best thing to do. You'll thank me yet." He took a deep breath and looked around at this Earth which was going to be his home. " I shall like living on a pioneer world." It had already occurred to him that a man could have a really good try at being his own great, great, great grandfather.

Paul McClelland

NATIVE LAW

Kenneth Bulmer introduces herewith a very fine idea concerning interplanetary law. If an inhabitant from another planetary system commits a crime whilst on Earth, to which should he be answerable ? His own planet's code—or Earth's ? But before you say the latter read all the complications in the story.

By Kenneth Bulmer

The first thing Yagdil did when his ship made planetfall on Earth was to kill a customs official. It was the natural thing to do. The fellow had been persistent about opening baggage. Yagdil warned him, of course, politely and off-handedly at first, scarcely crediting that the man was serious, and generously taking into consideration the possible low-class mentality of the people of this newly opened-up planet.

But the man persisted. His face grew red above the tight blue uniform collar and he thumped the plastic case which contained the illusomech. The illusomech was fragile equipment and had cost Yagdil's second wife a million credits as a parting gift for the voyage. So, of course, there was nothing else to do. Politely, formally, and according to punctilio, Yagdil said: " On your own head be it. Article 397 Subsection 26."

And ran his sword cane through the customs man's body.

Which should have been the end of the affair, if one could dignify the incident by such a name. Instead, the Terrans proved their peasant origin and their current lack of galactic manners and breeding. They actually laid their sweaty paws on a first-class noble.

Once Yagdil accepted the fact that he was not dreaming, the nightmarish qualities of the situation struck him forcibly.

He struggled to keep his composure, so strong was the feeling of revulsion that rippled over him. This was too much !

Around him was bedlam in the customs shed.

" He killed him ! " a rouged and jowelled female chattered. " I saw it all ! " She collapsed unheeded.

Yagdil was aware, even whilst fingers ripped the sword cane away and hysterically powerful arms gripped him, that the sense of his flesh creeping and writhing to escape the physical contact was merely illusionary; none the less it was unpleasant. An uproar of Earth people shouting and questioning filled his ears. It sounded like the anthropoid cage in the Sirian zoo. He could not move.

Uniforms gathered like vultures over a corpse and projectile weapons were brandished—literally—as though this were a mass duel or melee. Yagdil's composure returned at once. He began to examine the position and realised immediately that there were no precedents. Earth had so recently come into the Galactic mainstream that it was perfectly possible that aside from old Jargon the Ambassador and his staff of bureaucrats no-one else from Outside with noble rank was on the planet. It was an odd experience.

He submitted to being led where these people took him, still only half convinced it was actually happening; but aware that their irrational display of power was sufficiently strong to enforce their will. He was lodged, wrapped in an icy cloak of noble dignity, in a concrete, steel-barred cell.

As the metal door clashed on him, one of the uniformed lackeys sheathed his gun and wiped an arm across his forehead.

" The first big-shot from Outside," he said bitterly. " He might just as well have dropped a cobalt bomb. Wait until the people hear of this."

" Yeah," his comrade said. " He'll be crucified."

Which wasn't, strictly, accurate.

Every TV and radio channel and every remaining newspaper carried the news. It formed a miasmic cloud around the planet.

" *Alien murders Earthman.*"

" *Monster slaughters Joe Dingle*, 39, *married.*"

Pictures of Dingle and his wife and three children. Pictures of Yagdil, the alien claiming nobility from some remote star system. Pictures of the spaceport and the customs shed.

Pictures of the ' murder weapon '—Yagdil's patent of nobility, his jewelled sword-cane.

A clamouring hub-bub, crescendoing and rising on the spilled blood of one man. Earth had only recently joined up with the Galactic cultures; she was still unsure of her step, uncomfortably aware that there were many facts, many ideas, that she must learn before she could fit in without strain.

Earth was the hick from the sticks.

And a city-slicker has called in, and immediately murdered good old Joe Dingle, 39, married, with three kids.

Something was going to pop. Something was going to bleed all over.

And the tabloids and cheap TV channels guessed they knew just who that was going to be.

The President's image faded on the screen and Lanson switched the machine off, to look up and then stare levelly around the mahogany table at the seven men in the room.

" That's it, then, gentlemen. It's up to us to find a way out of this mess."

Caught in the afternoon sunlight from the tall windows, Augustus Bicker's famous shock of white hair quivered silver. His square face was hard, angry, like his fists.

" What way out, Lanson ? It's simple enough. This alien comes to Earth and murders a man. Open and shut——"

" Not quite, Bickers." Magruder, small and shrewd and living on pills, interrupted. " There's angles."

" So there's angles ! " Bickers thumped the table. " Open and shut. He should stand trial." He glared around the room. " This session is a sheer waste of time to my mind. This Yagdil fellow must learn he can't come to Earth and go running round killing people."

Lanson refrained from the impulse to point out that only one man had been killed. One was too many.

" The President wants us to look the situation over," he said mildly. He turned. " Doctor Helmsdorf, perhaps you'd care to give us a run-down on this Yagdil's background, his culture patterns. Bickers—you'll probably find this interesting." Lanson allowed the hint of a bite to creep into the last words.

Doctor Helmsdorf steepled his fingers and said: " This Yagdil is a noble. Now, that isn't anything like what we used to think of as nobility. He comes from a solar system we

classify as Paulus XXVI, which is a lot of light years away, and ideas of nobility there evolved differently from ours, which is normal. Be abnormal if they didn't." Helmsdorf coughed and twitched his bow-tie. He was nervous before so many distinguished men of the planet's government.

" Since interstellar traffic began ten years ago we've only touched the fringe of the Galactic peoples. We know that and are attempting to adjust. This Yagdil's home planet contains a class set-up, and what we'd call their middle classes or bureaucratic elements are so far the only ones we've had contact with. Other Galactic peoples have different set-ups——"

" We've fifty-two Ambassadors on Earth already," Tai-tsung grumbled from the far end of the table. " Many more and the situation will become impossible."

" Quite so," Lanson said pleasantly. " I understand that you are saying, Doctor, that from the planet in Paulus XXVI we've had only one . . . class of person ? "

Helmsdorf nodded like a teco bird.

" That is so. Yagdil was the first of the nobility to visit us."

" Better for him he should have stayed at home." That was old Boronstein, looking like a ruffled grizzly.

" Agreed, perhaps, with reservations," Lanson picked up a pencil. " But we're not settled to any way of thought yet." He pointed the pencil. " That seemed clear enough, Doctor. Thank you. Now, General Starke, may we have your views, please ? "

Starke could have been a Grecian statue with artificial-fibre clothes and contact lenses. He stood up to speak.

" My views on the purely internal aspects of this situation might be out of place here, gentlemen." he said in his soft Southern drawl. " But militarily, we of Earth must face the fact, unpalatable though it may be, that we dare not oppose any other race of the Galaxy. Not yet, that is."

" Are you suggesting——? " began Boronstein.

" Nothing, gentlemen." General Starke lifted his chin. " I can see which way thought around this table is trending. All I can say is that Earth is powerless in any contest of force. As a military man it grieves me to say that, partly because I know we could put up a damn fine show, but the venture would be insane. We just haven't got the technology or the know-how this side of the next twenty years."

Whilst Starke was sitting down there were currents running round the table as though some of those present were inclined to argue the point with the general. Lanson was realistic enough to know that the military man spoke the truth; and profoundly grateful that a military man had the insight, the integrity and the courage to take up that position. Heaven protect him from a firebrand, in a situation as ticklish as this.

He began to sum up indications so far; " Yagdil is a noble member of an alien race. He looks enough like a man to arouse no suspicion that he's anything else; how he thinks is obviously unknown—and equally obvious quite unhumanlike. He has murdered an Earthman. He belongs to an extremely powerful race who could blow the Earth out of space without our being able to stop them."

There were low rumbles around the table. Fifteen years ago these men, and their friends, had ruled the world. Lanson was fully cognisant of the gall in the knowledge that they no longer counted in any contest of strength. Aliens held the whip hand.

He said firmly: " I put before you for your consideration that we should handle this alien in exactly the same way we would handle any ordinary person. We cannot be brow-beaten by possibilities. Once a precedent is set up that aliens receive exemption and special treatment, well," Lanson tossed his pencil clattering on the table. " Earth wouldn't be worth living on."

" Hear, hear," Bickers cried.

" Now just a minute——" began Magruder.

The others were all trying to talk at once.

Through the excited noise the phone shrilled like a bacon slicer. Lanson answered.

" What ? He's here ? Now ? " Lanson held up a hand. " Just a moment, gentlemen ! Please ! " He returned to the phone. The screen had remained dead. " All right. Wait five minutes, then have him shown in. And be polite ! "

Lanson switched off and, his face grave, faced the six men representing the government of Earth.

" Jargon, the Paulus Ambassador, is here."

By the time the alien was ushered in they were sitting quietly, some breathing heavily, perhaps, but outwardly a solid hegemony. Jargon seated himself facing the table. His jewel-encrusted cloak parted to reveal his startlingly Earthly grey pinhead business-man's suit. He began at once.

"You have committed a noble of my race, Yagdil, to prison. I demand his immediate release."

"Just a minute, Jargon," Lanson said slowly, trying to regain his breath after the abrupt effrontery of that opening. "Yagdil is not in prison—yet. After the due processes of the law he may wind up there, or he may be sent for a prefrontal——"

"Monstrous!" exclaimed Jargon. "Yagdil is a noble of my race and such treatment is impossible."

"He killed an Earthman."

"What of it? The man was insulting, completely out of his station——".

"You mean to say you condone this crime?" demanded Bickers, his heavy face beneath the white hair outraged.

"Crime?" Jargon swung on Bickers, his cloak rustling in the swift silence. "Crime? No crime has been committed."

There were gasps of incredulity, of shocked surprise, of cynical understanding around the table.

"You mean you'd like us to take that line, eh?" Magruder said. "You'd like to make a deal."

"I'm unaware of the matters——"

"Take no notice," Bickers stormed, jumping up. "Your noble killed an Earthman. Lord knows I'm not an emotional sort. I don't take much of a charge from the TV screams." He glowered at Magruder, then swung back to stare challengingly at the alien. "But the whole world is mad at this Yagdil. It wouldn't be clever to buck that amount of world-opinion!"

Lanson sat quietly, his forearms resting on his blotting pad. It was always pleasant to allow others to do the hard work in conference; Bickers and Magruder were setting up an interesting situation. If only Starke and the military weren't so sure . . . Lanson tightened his mouth. The solution lay away from those old bitter, blood-soaked grounds.

Jargon said: "You don't seem to appreciate the position, gentlemen. I said there has been no crime committed, and there hasn't!" He waited fractionally, and then went on "The nobles of Paulus, acting under the Articles of our Constitution, are perfectly at liberty to take whatever action they see fit in any situation involving the lower classes. The customsman was wearing a uniform. Automatically, that

placed him in a peasant occupation." Jargon didn't look at General Starke.

Starke emitted a choked sort of bark, and then said frostily: " Very interesting. Please go on."

" Nobles are free of customs inspection. When the man insisted, in an insulting way, be it remembered, Yagdil had no other course than the one he followed."

" On your world if a peasant gets fresh, a noble is entitled —by law—to kill him ? " Lanson said without looking up. " For a race who consider a soldier a serf, that seems an odd attitude."

Jargon moved his lips stiffly. " To you, perhaps. Our military technology has become so all embracing that we have left it behind, in the care of the lower classes. Wars are things of the past. But the nobility remain; they are a law unto themselves." He stood up. " I must ask you to release Yagdil at once."

" Not so fast." Bickers stood up also, stood face to face with the alien. In the electric atmosphere, Bickers said: " So, on Paulus your nobles are allowed to kill any poor devil they take a dislike to. All right. That's nothing to do with us although, purely as a personal opinion, the whole concept strikes me as savage and primitive and sickens me to the stomach ! " He waited until one or two growled " Hear hears ! " subsided.

Then thrusting out his finger directly at Jargon, Bickers said triumphantly: " But you're on Earth now, and you're under the jurisdiction of Earthly laws ! We don't recognise the right of any man, or alien, to kill another. Yagdil has committed a crime according to our law, and he must be dealt with under our jurisprudence."

Jargon smiled unpleasantly. " I am sorry, sir, but you are totally wrong."

" How can I be wrong ? You're on Earth, aren't you ? "

" Of course. But under the Articles of Constitution of Paulus—I'm using your name—any individual, whether noble, bureaucrat or peasant, is within the jurisdiction of those Articles anywhere in the Galaxy." Jargon flicked his cloak over his shoulder, turning on his heel. " Your local laws have no bearing on the matter. Galactic law is what counts here! And I want Yagdil released as of now." He walked towards the door, slowly, obviously awaiting the call that would halt him.

Grimly, Lanson let the alien approach right up to the door. Alien laws operating on Earth ! It was completely unconstitutional. And yet, the damn alien could make it stick. There had to be another way out.

The usages of state had become lax of late, some side-effect of the collision with stellar cultures, yet Lanson had been forcibly struck by the extreme informality of the proceedings of this meeting. Gone were the long, involved sentences. Swept away by the veneer of affability; if a man thought his opponent was a scoundrel today, he upped and said so. Jargon had reached out a hand for the doorpush.

" Ambassador Jargon," Lanson said clearly across the room. " We have a saying on Earth. " When in Rome do as Rome does." It is particularly apt in the present predicament."

Jargon faced them, cool, calm, certain of himself and the authority of the stars at his beck and call.

" Predicament ? " he said as though puzzled. " I am unaware of any predicament."

Lanson breathed hard through pinched nostrils and clasped his hands together. Through the tall solemn windows the sunshine streamed in with a golden afternoon radiance, buttercup, slanting lances almost—but not quite—out of place in this meeting room where ideologies and personalities clashed. That was old Sol up there, reassuring, telling him that, even if the human race had existed for a mere heartbeat in the life of other peoples, the promise of continued life was ever present. Even if Jargon was being difficult.

" The predicament is simple," Lanson said, as Jargon returned to his seat. " Our government will definitely fall if it shows weakness in this. You've seen what public opinion makes of it; we cannot admit that Earthly laws are not even valid on Earth any more."

" Public opinion, my dear Lanson," said Jargon with a cynical mimicry of Terran bonhomie, " is moulded by what people read over breakfast and, for a favoured few, by what they hear over cigars and brandy after dinner." His smile was contemptuous, deliberately assumed for the Earthmen's benefit. " You, as Vice-President, could completely alter public opinion in two days. It might be convenient—and wise."

To gain a thinking space, Lanson said: " I notice you are aware that the President is a mere figurehead and that the ultimate power on Earth resides in this room."

Augustus Bickers was boiling up to say something. Lanson turned his eyes away, surveying with something of wondering horror the prospect that he *could* influence public opinion. Perhaps not in quite such a direct and crude way as Jargon had suggested; but he could certainly set about a systematic plan whereby the public would accept the alien nobles' way of life to the extent that they'd forget this particular unhappy episode. Then reality struck him.

" Sorry, Jargon. Even if I wanted to go along with that scheme, it wouldn't work. You can't stop a world full of individuals from having their own ideas, their own opinions. You, nor I, not even the latest tridi blonde world's-favourite can stop this avalanche. Don't you understand ? An alien has murdered a Terran. It's black and white to the millions over their breakfast cereal watching TV."

Magruder, shrewdly, leaned forward, said quickly: " It could be done. There's angles."

Bickers hammered his fist on the table.

" By God, no ! " His face was inflamed with his inner convictions seeking violent escape. " Dammit all to hell—you can't sell the world short ! "

The alien ambassador glanced at him fleetingly.

" I think, I really, think, that if it could be done it should be done." He smiled. " Of course, you understand that I am not in the slightest concerned whether your government collapses or not."

" I had that impression," Bickers said bitterly, pushing his white hair back. " But it's nice to know."

Jargon stood up once again. His eyes, deep, black, entirely unimpassioned—the eyes of an alien—studied the men of Earth's government impersonally.

" I have been studying your history," he said in a low, even voice. " Let me remind you of something you may have forgotten. You claim the old adage: ' When in Rome do as Rome does '. I'd like to remind you of the position of white men opening up the African continent. Of white men penetrating into the interior of America. Did they abide by the laws of the negroes and the Red Indians ? " He nodded to Bickers. " As you would say: ' Did they hell ! ' " He held up a hand. " The European took his own code of laws with him and not only did he refuse to accede to the strange codes with which he came into contact, he forced his own beliefs onto the natives he conquered."

Magruder said: " But you haven't conquered us."

Then he, with them all, fell silent at the enormity of that remark. Lanson looked covertly at Starke. He felt acutely uncomfortable.

Jargon pulled his cloak about him. He appeared not in the slightest embarrased.

He said: " The Constitution of Paulus applies on the Earth. I'm afraid your internal problems are of no concern of mine. I do not need to threaten you. Just arrange for Yagdil to be released immediately. Good day."

After he had gone Lanson, Bickers and Magruder went into conference together. They drew deep formfits up to the window and sat gazing out over the city parklands.

" Unless we figure something out," Magruder said darkly, " We're finished."

The wall TV screen came alive under Lanson's fingers.

Channel after channel conveyed the same story, the same hysterical crusade. It all added up to a pattern.

" The opposition are running hog-wild on this," Bickers said grimly. " They see a foolproof way of getting rid of us."

Lanson laughed, and switched the screen off on the impassioned words of a professional preacher.

" If they're successful then what do they inherit ? The same problem. I've half a mind to cut loose and let them take over. I'm sick and tired——"

" We can't do that ! " Bickers sat up straight, his formfit lagging behind the swiftness of the movement. " You know as well as I do, quite without any bombast, that we are the only fit people to run the planet."

" Do I ? " Lanson said softly. " Are we ? "

He licked his lips and reached for a cigar. " Look. Let's get down to cases. Dispense with the phoney idealism and glory cliches." He cut the end from the cigar. " I just don't like the idea of justice—our kind of justice—being flaunted like this. It makes my skin itch. We know we can influence public opinion to an extent, probably enough so that we could ramrod through an excluder, a first time only, because Yagdil is an alien and ignorance of the law could be taken into consideration."

Bickers rumbled but remained silent.

Lanson went on: " Suppose we got at Yagdil. Convinced him that he had committed a crime, a crime against his own

laws. Arranged so he'd be willing to stand trial. We could fix it so he got an acquittal. That way we'd sooth our own people's feelings. We've got to break this idea that they can commit murder on Earth and get away with it."

" There's more to it than that," Magruder said. " His own pride seems as high as the moon."

" Agreed. We can drop him in a pit using that. If he believes that it is a crime to murder on Earth, we're safe."

" Since capital punishment no longer exists and since I don't like the idea of anyone undergoing a prefrontal we must use his own codes as a yardstick for punishment."

Lanson shook his head. " The punishment doesn't matter. What counts is that Earth demonstrates her right to her own kind of justice. White men in Africa—hell, he's right, you know ! "

" It's the future of Earth we're discussing now," Bickers rumbled. " What happens ten centuries from now depends on what we decide here in this room."

" I can feel that pressing on my spine like a ton of bricks," Lanson said. He was perfectly serious. Personal danger would not have distressed him half so much. He felt sticky and irritable and his mind refused to work clearly.

He said, with an effort: " Suppose we convince him that he's committed a crime. And he falls into the opposite tack and kills himself under their cock-eyed rules ? "

" Good riddance," Magruder said spitefully.

" Well—I don't know." Bickers heaved himself up to stride about the room. " The fellow hasn't committed a crime in his own mind, and that's what counts."

And there, of course, Lanson saw what must be done.

" It's what you think of your actions that constitutes a crime. Higher legality very often overlooks that point; in protection of life and property, when a mind is unbalanced, the law has got into the habit of working from ethics laid down in the body of laws. But this man is not insane. He's working to a different set of mores from ours. If we can switch our outlook around, he's no criminal." Lanson sighed. " But we've got to convince him that he is."

" How ? " Magruder scowled at Bickers. " Stop pacing about like a caged tiger."

" How ? " Bickers halted, thrust a broad hand through his white hair. " I'll tell you. First we introduce an anaesthetic gas shell into his cell. When he's under we stick a needle

behind his eye into the forepart of his brain and pump in Procaine. That'll give the effect of a pre-frontal, a temporary short-circuit, lasting about two or three days."

Magruder's eyes gleamed. "Then we brain-wash him," he said softly.

"Precisely. He'll agree to anything after the psycho squad get through with him. He'll stand trial——"

"And in any law there is a loophole. Acquitting him will be no trouble."

Bickers nodded. "We'll have the hypno squad in on this too. They'll induce a post-hypnotic command preventing him from ever returning to Earth. He'll go back to——"

"The stars and tell his fellow nobles that he stood trial on Earth for murder and that any of them will have the same treatment!"

Bickers and Magruder shook hands. They looked triumphantly at Lanson. He was sitting hunched up in his formfit, a look of utter disgust on his face.

He said quietly: "This Yagdil may be an alien, but he is an intelligent being, on a par with a human being. I think you are allowing his criminal act to occlude your minds to the fact that he is still a human being."

"Going soft, Lanson?" Magruder asked unpleasantly.

"Well——" Bickers began; and stopped, puffing out his lips.

"Don't you think Yagdil's friends will soon discover he's been hypnotised, brain-washed, given the pre-frontal treatment even if it's only temporary?" Lanson's tired face was bitter. "I don't think they'd like that."

"It's the first constructive suggestion," Magruder pointed out, his thin face worried.

"Lord knows I don't like it," Bickers said. "But what else is there?"

"Look at the wider view," Lanson said fretfully. "Yagdil is a member of an interstellar culture. He, or his friends, must have visited other planets besides Earth. What happens there? This sort of situation must have occurred before."

"You're right!" Bickers was thunderstruck.

Magruder chewed his lip. "So we find out, contact a culture that's had previous experience. They must——"

"There's no time!" Lanson dialled a tray and took the frost encrusted glass. He drank thirstily. "By the time we'd

contacted any culture to give us the answers it would be too late. Jargon was really on the warpath."

"This means that these people of Paulus are, in effect, carrying out an invasion of the Galaxy," Magruder said. "I think we ought to brainwash this Yagdil. Once we have established the precedent, we can go on from there."

Lanson stared at the little man. "What to ?" he asked tiredly. "Straight to an interstellar war ? That is, if such an improbable thing is possible. I wouldn't care to handle logistics on it."

The politely insistent burr of the phone drifted across the high-ceilinged room. Lanson answered.

"Spaceport Central," a voice said, followed immediately by a shifting of colours on the screen and then Williams, the space travel department chief came on. His broad face was set in rigid lines of stubborn decision.

"I'm down at the spaceport, sir," he said. The undercurrent of tension in his voice was clearly apparent to Lanson. "We've just had a flash that another noble is coming from Paulus, on board the next ship, due tomorrow noon." His lips tightened. "Request permission to refuse landing permit, sir. We can't have these aliens running all over Earth killing just who they like !"

Lanson crushed his annoyance. "I agree we cannot allow that, Williams. Take no action until you are advised. Thank you for your prompt advice. Goodbye." Very firmly, Lanson switched off. He lay back in the formfit for a moment, fighting the woolly pressures smothering his brain, and trying not to allow a trapped and helpless feeling to break down the final barriers surrounding his will-power.

Then he said: "Send in Doctor Helmsdorf."

To the doctor, fidgeting nervously with his bow-tie, he said: "Sit down, doctor. I'd like to know more about the people of Paulus, their lives, what they eat and drink, what they do, their industries, sports, relaxations. Just talk away and I'll listen."

What eventually built up was a broad outline, a formless mass of minor detail without a strong linking pattern which told eloquently that mankind knew very little of the other races swarming in the galaxy and even less of the people living on Paulus. The peasants performed the manual work, the uniformed jobs and the repetitive labour, while the bureau-

cratic class handled the professions, leaving to the nobles the enjoyment of the luxury accruing from such a cultural organisation. Heredity and not wealth were the deciding factors. Tradition was a living flame. Men obeyed the law.

" So if we convinced Yagdil that he had committed a crime, what would be the result, doctor ? "

" I'm not familiar with their punishments. Should he die, however, there would be a ceremonial funeral. They're like us in that respect, although I believe the idea of capital punishment is as abhorrent to them as it is to us." Helmsdorf was growing less tense. " Mind you, when the lower classes die they are sent to the factories, where their proteins and fats and carbo-hydrates are all reclaimed. There is no wastage. To a non-cannibalistic culture like ours that conduct is unthinkable and of course it explains why it is no crime for a noble to kill a peasant." Helmsdorf shook his head, and added disapprovingly: " All our Earthly experience tells us that such a culture must be decadent, but there is no sign of it on Paulus. At least, not yet."

" Thank you, doctor." Lanson stood up, terminating the interview. To Bickers, he said quietly: " Get Mrs. Dingle on the phone. What I'm going to do is for the good of Earth and leaves me no other choice. But it sickens me to my stomach."

Somehow, into that high room with the fading orange bars of sunset rusting the floor, there had crept a new quality of tension. The helplessness had gone out of it; now the tension was compounded of purpose and action.

Rich red earth rattled against the coffin in the raw, open grave. In the serene silver quiet of the early morning with still a few last wisps of mist coiling about the black, shrunken-in, isolated mourners, that brittle sound echoed round the world, and sped on wings of light out to the planets and satellites beyond.

Lanson had directed that the funeral should be a private experience for the close members of the family: Mrs. Dingle and the three children, the mother and father, a sister. With the heightening of moody, angry resentment they were becoming more than puppets. The funeral cortege had crept through silent, emotion-ridden, suffocating streets, where the feelings of the multitude were like a static in the air. Thousands of people had been prevented from approaching the grave and

the interment by overnight barricades. Floral tributes covered three acres of sacred ground.

By choosing to watch from a small reserved space near the barricade, Lanson realised, suddenly and with shock, that he had been deeply affected. It was almost like self-hypnotism. His decision to stop the planned funeral, which would have included miles' long processions of friends and neighbours, in favour of this simple family function, he saw now, was more potent than he had at first envisaged.

The key-note was sincerity.

The animalistic desire of those thousands beyond the barrier and the millions watching TV screens all over the system to be a part of this ceremony, to identify themselves with the emotions of the dead man's family, forced itself conclusively upon all the watching minds. This was the phenomenon of brotherhood which united mankind in moments of stress and joy and mourning—and which fell apart the moment its usefulness had been served.

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At his side Yagdil stood brooding. The alien had been brought here by a tortuous detour on his way to release. After this he would be free. Lanson wished he could read the thoughts beneath that smooth, basilisk face that betrayed nothing.

A pace to one side Bickers and Magruder formed a neat step arrangement around Jargon, upon whose face anyone who wished could read barely-controlled anger, pride and a biting impatience to be gone. And yet, in all humanity, he could not have refused to attend.

" It's all over," Bickers said heavily. " God rest his soul." His white hair stirred in the early breeze.

Lanson turned on his heel.

" May I offer you a lift back, Jargon ? "

" Thank you. I have my own flier."

" Very well." He nodded to Bickers and Magruder. " Come, gentlemen. We have much to do."

As they took off the ground beneath them was alive with the slow-moving, earth-shaking multitude, walking back to the city. Each one felt, as did Lanson in that moment of empathy, that he had laid a brother to rest. Then he looked back at the aliens' flier, and prayed.

The high-vaulted, tall-windowed room did not look the same. There was a brown shadow blurring everything. Lanson shook his head. He had gambled. Now was the time for the pay-off, the show-down, the final twist of fate for all of Earth's future.

When Jargon and Yagdil were announced it was an effort to keep his features placid. He motioned them to seats. Unobtrusively, Bickers and Magruder and the others of the high council slipped into the room. Lanson put both hands together; serenely, calmly, quite coolly, he said:

" Well, gentlemen ? "

Jargon glanced at Yagdil. He cleared his throat.

" I have your word that Yagdil would be acquitted if he agreed to stand trial ? You understand that the laws of Paulus go with the nobles of Paulus and are not to be flouted——"

Yagdil interrupted. For the first time, Lanson saw evidence of passion.

" Enough of this lawyer talk ! I have committed a crime against the sacred laws of Paulus. Therefore I must stand trial."

The words, no less than the gasps of astonishment from Bickers and Magruder and the others, were like incense to Lanson's senses. His bruised ego regained its poise.

" You have my word." He spoke firmly. " I understand that Yagdil, at the time of the crime, did not realise what he was doing. Normally, we do not recognise ignorance as an excuse. However, under these circumstances—I assure you, Jargon, that we of Earth have only the wish to remain on a friendly footing with you of Paulus. The jury will acquit Yagdil."

When the aliens had gone, Jargon visibly disturbed, Yagdil straight-backed and pale-faced, Lanson lay back in his formfit and let out a sigh that released all the pent up strain and frustration that had boiled inside him since the beginning of this interstellar complication.

" What happened ? "

" How did it . . . "

" What did you *do* ? "

The visiscreen lit up and the President's face stared out. Satisfaction and relief mirrored the looks of those excitedly arguing in the tall room.

Lanson let them babble.

Presently he stood up and went over to stare out across the parklands. Somewhere out there, laid in the ground, was a man needlessly killed. But, because of him, there would be no more to suffer from a similar cause.

" We were all looking at the wrong end of the problem," he said at last. The room became very still. " Quite obviously, we had to look at these peasants that could be killed with impunity. There lay the wedge to prise open the problem." He smiled. " At first I thought they might be androids. Killing them would be no crime; just a nasty action. Then I thought they might be different from men, different in some outstanding way. Four arms or three eyes."

They were hanging on his words now, but Doctor Helmsdorf was opening his mouth, a glimmer of dawning understanding in his face. Lanson cut in quickly. He felt entitled to his moment of glory.

" What held the class system of Paulus together ? Not money. Not physical prowess. Not economical power. Why did a society of a high order permit men to be sent to

factories to be processed as food and raw material ?" He dialled a tray, stood with the cold glass in his hand.

"Religion. Nothing else could cement an otherwise unwieldy society together. And, as a concomitant to that, the peasants were not human beings, or alien beings. They could have no significance in the religious beliefs of the nobles. They were less than men."

"They had no souls !" Bickers breathed.

"So we convinced Yagdil that the man he had killed had a soul. That he was, in very truth, a man."

The sun was just beginning to lay its strips of buttercup yellow across the carpet. The world was very fair.

"There will be no more problems from Paulus," Magruder said with intense satisfaction.

"More than that." Lanson savoured the words. "We may have to act. After all, Earth cannot stand idly by and see men with souls condemned as animals without. It may be necessary to send missionaries to Paulus. That may be very unfortunate for the nobles and their economy; but, undeniably, it may become necessary."

The high council of Earth looked at each other in dawning comprehension.

Kenneth Bulmer