12th YEAR OF PUBLICATION

NEW WORLDS SCIENCE FICTION

No. 73
VOLUME 25
2/-

NEW WORLDS SCIENCE FICTION

VOLUME 25

No. 73

MONTHLY

JULY 1958

CONTENTS

Editor : JOHN CARNELL

Cover Painting by LEWIS

TWO SHILLINGS

Subscription Rates

Great Britain and the Commonwealth 12 issues 28/- post free

United States of America 12 issues $5.00 post free

Published on the last Friday of each month by

NOVA PUBLICATIONS LTD.,

Maclaren House, 131 Great Suffolk Street, London, S.E.1.

Telephone : HOP 5712

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

Guest Editorial . . .

Your Editor, John Carnell, is enjoying a well-deserved, and long overdue vacation, and has asked me to stand-in for his regular editorial. Naturally the subject is—books.

The opportunity to promote my review column from the back to the front of the magazine is welcomed with mixed feelings, for I am reminded sharply that no book review has appeared for the past few months—on any page. This omission is due neither to indifference or laziness, nor—needless to say, any extended vacation on my part, but simply and sadly to the dearth of hard-cover science fiction from the English publishers.

I have received, in the past six months, a grand total of *three* books submitted for review, of which two bear the same publisher's imprint. Moreover they are all taken from American originals, from a period preceding the present doldrums also obtaining in the American science fiction book field.

The cornucopia of English science fiction books, as we all know, blocked itself finally with its own squashy outpouring of perished fruit, and after its spring-clean, appeared to have dried up forever. But an occasional plum teeters off the lip, and indeed two English authors—Brian Aldiss and Charles Eric Maine—have new offerings imminent. But apart from these the outlook is grim indeed.

However, American reprints are always welcome, particularly when written by such practised craftsmen as Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein and the brilliant off-beat stylist Jack Finney, who contribute the handful of books this month.

Asimov's **The Naked Sun** (Michael Joseph, 13/6) has been on sale for some time now, but must be recommended as a smooth and clever science-fictional 'who-dunnit,' which although lacking the impact of the first Elijah Baley investigation (*Caves of Steel*) opens up new horizons (literally) to the agoraphobic plainclothesman and his imperturbable robot assistant, R. Daneel Olivaw. The crime is murder on one of the Outer Worlds and the evidence conflicts irresistably with

. . . About Books

the First Law of Robotics. The hurdling of this obstacle makes intriguing reading, and Asimov's ingenuity obviously is boundless, and we can confidently anticipate more in this series.

The high standard of Robert Heinlein's writing is now a criterion in the genre, and he is one of the few science fiction authors whose sense of humour and gift for characterisation can give to a trite plot an aura of realism whatever its time or place in the universe. He uses these talents to great effect in **Double Star** (Michael Joseph, 13/6) with an unusual central character of a vainglorious and impecunious actor, but with a gift for impersonation, who is tricked into substituting for a kidnapped statesman. The setting is Mars and Earth of a distant future Terran Empire, and the most unheroic ' hero ' is drawn inexorably into a relentless chain of exciting adventures, subtly revealing his true worth and nobly carrying out his assumed duties to the final extreme test.

It can be argued that Heinlein has merely dressed-up Anthony Hope in modern science fiction idiom, and the plot would fool nobody but the kiddies. I suggest that you take this warmly human, and often moving, story at its face value, and enjoy one of the more pleasurable pieces of escapist entertainment I have read for a long time.

The most rewarding buy of the month, though, is surely Jack Finney's **The Clock Of Time** (Eyre and Spottiswoode, 13/6). Noted for his slick thrillers with a touch of fantasy, Finney here turns his keenly analytical and imaginative mind to the mystique of ' time.' In a round dozen exquisite short stories, full of brilliant originality and powerful ideas, Finney explodes the *ennui* of previous ' time ' stories with an insight comparable to that of Bradbury and Collier in their own fields. A real find this book and not to be missed on any account.

Leslie Flood

SEGREGATION

This month's lead novelette has several unusual features which add up to a biological mystery. If our knowledge of an alien culture was based entirely on the information supplied by a survivor crash-landing on a planet and living there twenty years, how much would be fact—and how much imagination ?

By Brian W. Aldiss

At other times of day, the pigmies brought the old man fish from the river, or the watercress which he loved, but in the afternoon they brought him two bowls of entrails. He stood to receive them, staring over their heads through the open door, looking at the blue jungle without seeing it. He was in pain. Yet he dared not let his subjects see that he suffered or was weak ; the pigmies had a short way with weakness. Before they entered his room, he had forced himself to stand erect, using his heavy stick for support.

The two bearers stopped before him, bowing their heads until their snouts were almost in the still steaming bowls.

" Thank you. Your offering is received," the old man said.

Whether or not they really comprehended his clicking attempt at reproducing their tongue, he could not tell. Shaking slightly, he patted their scaly heads, after which they rose and departed with their rapid, slithering walk. In the bowls, oily highlights glistened, reflected from the sunshine outside.

Sinking back onto his bed, the old man fell into his usual fantasy : the pigmies came to him, and he treated them not with forbearance but hatred. He poured over them the weight

of his long-repressed loathing and dispisal, striking them over the heads with his stick and finally driving them and all their race for ever from this planet. They were gone. The azure sun and the blue jungles were his alone ; he could live where nobody would ever find or worry him. He could die at last as simply as a leaf falls from a tree.

The reverie faded, and he recognised it for what it was. He knotted his hands together till the knuckles stood out like cobble stones, coughing a little blood. The bowls of intestines would have to be disposed of.

Next day, the rocket ship landed a mile away.

The big overlander lumbered along the devious forest track. It was losing as little time as possible with Barney Brangwyn's expert hand at the wheel. On either side of the vehicle, the vegetation was thick, presenting that sombre blue-green hue which characterised most of the living things on the planet Kakakakaxo.

" You neither of you look in the pink of health !" Barney observed, flicking his eyes from the track to glance at the azure lights on the faces of his two companions.

The three members of the Planetary Ecological Survey Team (PEST for short) appeared to have blue snow-shadows shading every plane of their countenances : yet in this equatorial zone, and with the sun Cassivelaunus shining at zenith, it was comfortably warm, if not hot. The surrounding jungle grew thickly, with an almost tropical luxuriance, the bushes seeming to sag under the weight of their own foliage. It was strange to recall that they were heading for a man who had lived in these uninviting surroundings for almost twenty years. Now they were here, it became easier to see why he was universally regarded as a hero.

" There's plenty of cover here for any green pigmies who may be watching us," Tim Anderson said, peering at the passing thickets. " I was hoping to see one or two."

Barney chuckled at the worried note in the younger man's voice.

" The pigmies are probably still getting over the racket we made in landing," he said. " We'll be seeing them soon enough. When you get as ancient as I am, Tim, you'll become less keen to meet the local bigwigs. The top dogs of any planet are generally the most obstreperous—ipso facto, as the lawyers say."

He lapsed into silence as he negotiated a gulley, swinging the big vehicle expertly up the far slope.

" By the evidence, the most obstreperous factor on Kakakakaxo is the climate," Tim said. " Only six or seven hundred miles north and south of here, the glaciers begin, and go right on up to the poles. Admittedly our job is to vet the planet to see that it's safe for colonists to move in, but I shouldn't want to live here, pigmies or no pigmies ; I've seen enough already to tell you that."

" It's not a question of choice for the colonists," Craig Hodges, leader of the team, remarked. " They'll come because of some kind of pressure on them : economic factors, oppression, destitution, or the need for liebensraum—the sort of grim necessities which keep us all on the hop."

" Cheer up, Craig !" Barney exclaimed. " At least Daddy Dangerfield likes it here ! He had faced Kakakakaxo for nineteen years, wet nursing his pigmies !"

" Don't forget he crashed here accidentally in the first place; he's just had to adjust," Craig said, unwilling to be shaken out of a melancholy which always descended on him when the PEST first confronted the mystery of a new planet.

" What a magnificent adjustment !" Tim exclaimed. "Daddy Dangerfield, God of the Great Beyond ! He was one of my childhood heroes. I'm greatly looking forward to seeing him."

" Most of the legends built round him originated on Droxy," Craig said, " where half the ballyhoo in the universe comes from. I am chary about the blighter myself, but at least he should prove helpful to us—which is why we're going to look him up."

" Of course he'll be helpful," Barney said, skirting a thicket of rhododendron. " He'll save us a wack of field work. In nineteen years—if he's anything like the man he's cracked up to be—he should have accumulated a mass of material of inestimable value to us. You can't tell me Daddy won't simplify our task enormously, Craig ; don't be a pessimist."

The PEST task was seldom simple. When a three-man team landed on an unexplored planet like Kakakakaxo, they had to categorise its possible dangers and determine exactly the nature of the opposition any superior species might offer to colonising man. The superior species, in a galaxy tumbling with diversity, might be mammal, reptile, insect, vegetable, mineral, or virus—but frequently it was, as Barney hinted, so

obstreperous that it had to be obliterated entirely before man could move in—and exterminated so that the ecological balance of the planet was disturbed as little as possible.

Their journey ended unexpectedly. They were only a mile from their ship when the jungle on one side of the overlander gave way to a cliff, which formed the base of a steep and afforested mountain. Rounding a high spur of rock, they saw the pigmies' village ahead of them. When Barney braked and cut out the atomic motor, the three of them sat for a minute in silence, taking in the scene.

Rapid movement under the trees followed their arrival.

" Here comes the welcoming committee," Craig said. "We'd better climb down and look agreeable, as far as that is possible; Heaven knows what they are going to make of your beard, Barney. Get your gun on, Tim, just in case it's needed."

Jumping to the ground, the trio were almost immediately surrounded. The pigmies moved like jerky lightning, enclosing the ecologists. Though they appeared from all quarters, apparently without prearranged plan, it took them only a few seconds to form a wall round the intruders. And for all their speed, there was a quality of stealth about them, possibly because they made no sound. Perhaps, Tim thought encouragingly to himself, it was because they were shy. Yet there was something menacing about their haste ; they were ugly creatures.

They moved like lizards, and their skin was like lizard skin, green and mottled, except where it broke into coarse scales down their backs. Pigmy-sized, none of them stood more than four feet high. They were four-legged and two-armed. Their heads, perched above their bodies with no visible neck, were like cayman heads, fitted with long, cruel jaws and serrated teeth. These heads now swivelled from side to side, like gun turrets on tanks seeking sight of the enemy. It looked an apprehensive gesture.

Once they had surrounded the ecologists, the pigmies made no further move, as if the initiative had passed from them. In their baggy throats, heavy pulses beat.

Craig pointed at a cayman-head in front of him and said, " Greetings ! Where is Daddy Dangerfield ? We intend you no harm. We merely wish to see Dangerfield. Please take us to him."

He repeated his words in Galingua.

The pigmies stirred, opening their jaws and croaking. An excited clack-clack-clackering broke out on all sides. Overpoweringly, an odour of fish rose from the creatures. None of them volunteered anything which might be construed as a reply. The wave of excitement, if it was that, which passed over them emphasised their more formidable features. Their stocky bodies might have been ludicrous, but their two pairs of sturdy legs and, above all, their armoured jaws would deter anyone from regarding them as figures of fun.

"These are only animals!" Tim exclaimed. "Look at them—they relieve themselves as they stand, like cattle. They possess none of the personal pride you'd expect in a primitive savage. They wear absolutely nothing in the way of clothes. Why, they aren't even armed!"

"Don't say that until you've had a good look at their claws and teeth," Barney said cheerfully. He had caught the loathing in the youngster's voice, and knew how often loathing cloaks fear. He himself felt a curious, dry tension, originating less from thought of the pigmies than from the reflection that the three of them were in an unknown world, without precedents to guide them; when he ceased to feel that tension, he would be due for retirement.

"Move forward slowly with me," Craig said. "We are doing no good just standing here. Dangerfield must be about somewhere, heaven help him."

Thigh-deep in clacking caymen-heads, who kept them encircled, the PEST men advanced towards the settlement, which lay in patchy tones of blue sunshine and blue shade ahead. As far as they could tell, this manoeuvre was resented by the pigmies, whose noise redoubled. When they spoke, their grey tongues wagged up and down in their long mouths. They backed away without offering opposition. Following Craig's lead, Barney and Tim kept their hands above their sidearms, in case of trouble.

So they moved slowly into the village. The strange aspect of the place now became apparent. Bounded on one side by the cliff face, the village stood under trees which grew straight out of the dark soil. Up in the thick blueish foliage of these trees, an immense colony of gay-coloured birds, evidently a sort of weaver, had plaited a continuous roof out of lianas, climbers, leaves and twigs. Under this cover, on the dropping-bespattered ground, the pigmies had their rude

huts, which were no more than squares of woven reed propped at any angle by sticks, to allow an entrance. They looked like collapsed bivouacs.

Tethered outside these dismal dwellings were furry animals, walking in the small circles allowed by their leashes and calling dolefully to each other. Their mewing cries, the staccato calls of the birds, and the croaking of the caymen-heads, made a babel of sound. And over everything lay the ripe stench of decaying fish.

" Plenty of local colour," Barney remarked.

In contrast to this squalid scene was the cliff face, which had been ornately carved with stylised representations of foliage mingled with intricate geometrical forms. Later, the ecologists were to find that this work was crude in detail, but from a distance its superiority to the village was most marked. As they came nearer, they saw that the decorated area was actually a building hewn in the living rock, complete with doors, passages, rooms and windows, from the last of which pigmies watched their progress with unblinking curiosity.

" Impressive ! Their claws can be turned to something else than attack," Tim observed, eyeing the patterns in the rock.

" Dangerfield," Craig called, when another attempt to communicate with the pigmies had failed. Only the whooping birds answered him.

Already the pigmies were losing interest. They pressed less closely round the men. Several scuttled with lizard speed back into their shelters. Looking over the knobby heads of the crowd, Barney pointed to the far side of the clearing. There, leaning against the dun-coloured rock of the cliff, was a sizeable hut, built of the same flimsy material as the pigmy dwellings, but evidently containing more than one room. As they regarded it, a man appeared in the doorway. He made his way towards them, aiding himself along with a stout stick.

" That's Dangerfield !" Barney exclaimed.

A warming stream of excitement ran through Tim. Daddy Dangerfield was something of a legend in this region of the inhabited galaxy. Crash-landing on Kakakakaxo nineteen years ago, he had been the first man to visit this uninviting little world. Kakakakaxo was off the trade routes, although it was only fifteen light years from Droxy, one of the great interstellar centres of commerce and pleasure. So Dangerfield had lived alone with the pigmies for ten standard years before someone had chanced to arrive with an offer of rescue. Then

the stubborn man refused to leave, saying the native tribes had need of him. He had remained where he was, a God of the Great Beyond, Daddy to the Little Folk—as the sentimental Droxy tabloids phrased it, with their usual affection for titles and capital letters.

As he approached the team now, the pigmies fell back before him, still maintaining their clacking chorus. Many of them slid away, bored by affairs beyond their comprehension.

It was difficult to recognise, in the bent figure peering anxiously at them, the young, bronzed giant by which Dangerfield was represented on Droxy. The thin, sardonic face with its powerful hook of nose had become a caricature of itself. The grey hair was long and dirty. The lumpy hands which grasped the stick were bespattered with liver marks. This was Dangerfield, but appearances suggested that the legend would outlive the man.

"You're from Droxy?" he asked eagerly, speaking in Galingua. "You've come to make another film about me? I'm very pleased to see you here. Welcome to the untamed planet of Kakakakaxo."

Craig Hodges put out his hand.

"We're not from Droxy," he said. "We're based on Earth, although most of our days are spent far from it. Nor have we come to make films; our mission is rather more practical than that."

As Craig introduced himself and his team, Dangerfield's manner became noticeably less cordial. He muttered angrily to himself about Droxy.

"Come along over and have a drink with us in our wagon," Barney said. "We've got a nice little Aldebaran wine you might like to sample. You must be glad to see someone to talk to."

"This is my place," the old man said, making a move in the direction of the overlander. "I don't know what you people are doing here. I'm the man who beat Kakakakaxo. The God of the Crocodile Folk, that's what they call me. If you had pushed your way in here twenty years ago as you did just now, the pigmies would have torn you to bits. I tamed 'em! No living man has ever done what I've done. They've made films about my life on Droxy—that's how important I am. Didn't you know that?"

Tim Anderson winced in embarrassment. He wanted to tell this gaunt relic that Dangerfield, the Far-Flung Father, the Cosmic Schweitzer, had been one of his boyhood heroes, a giant through whom he had first felt the ineluctable lure of space travel ; he wanted to tell him that it hurt to have his legend destroyed. Here was the giant himself—bragging of his past, and bragging, moreover, in a supplicatory whine.

They came up to the overlander. Dangerfield stared at the neat shield on the side, under which the words Planetary Ecological Survey were inscribed in grey. After a moment, he turned pugnaciously to Craig.

" Who are you people ? What do you want here ?" he asked.

" We're a fact-finding team, Mr. Dangerfield," Craig said levelly. " Our business is to gather data on this planet. Next to nothing is known about ecological or living conditions here. We are naturally keen to secure your help ; you should be a treasury of information—"

" I can't answer any questions ! I never answer questions. You'll have to find out anything you want to know for yourselves. I'm a sick man—I'm in pain. It's all I can do to walk. I need a doctor, drugs . . . Are you a doctor ?"

" I can administer an analgesic," Craig said. " And if you will let me examine you, I will try to find out what you are suffering from."

Dangerfield waved a hand angrily in the air.

" I don't need telling what's wrong with me," he snapped. " I know every disease that's going on this cursed planet. I've got fiffins, and all I'm asking you for is something to relieve the pain. If you haven't come to be helpful, you'd best get out altogether !"

" Just what is or are fiffins ?" Barney asked.

" None of your business. They're not infectious, if that's what's worrying you. If you have only come to ask questions, clear out. The pigmies will look after me, just as I've always looked after them."

As he turned round to retreat, Dangerfield staggered and would have fallen, had not Tim moved fast enough to catch his arm. The old fellow shook off the supporting hand with weak anger and hurried back across the clearing. Tim fell in beside him.

"We can help you," he said pleadingly. "Please be reasonable."

"I never had help, and I don't need it now. And what's more, I've made it a rule never to be reasonable."

Full of conflicting emotion, Tim turned and caught sight of Craig's impassive face.

"We should help him," he said.

"He doesn't want help," Craig replied, not moving.

"But he's in pain !"

"No doubt, and the pain clouds his judgment. But he is still his own self, with his own ways. We have no right to take him over against his expressed wishes."

"He may be dying," Tim said. He looked defiantly at Craig. Then he swung away, and walked rapidly off, pushing past the few caymen-heads who still remained on the scene. Dangerfield, on the other side of the clearing, disappeared into his hut. Barney made to follow Tim, but Craig stopped him.

"Leave him," he said quietly.

Barney looked straight at his friend.

"Don't force the boy," he said. "He hasn't got your outlook to life. Just go easy on him, Craig."

"We all have to learn," Craig observed, almost sadly. Then, changing his tone, he said, "For some reason we have yet to discover, Dangerfield is unco-operative. From first impressions, he is unbalanced, which means he may soon swing the other way and offer us help : that we should wait for : I am interested to get a straight record of his nineteen years here."

"He's stubborn," Barney said, shaking his head.

"Which is the sign of a weak man. That's why Tim was unwise to coax him ; it would merely make him more obdurate. If we ignore him, he will come to us. Until then, we work on our own here, studying the local life. Firstly we must establish the intelligence status of the pigmies, with a view to finding out how much opposition they will offer colonists. One or two other odd features may also prove interesting."

Thrusting his hands in his pockets, Barney surveyed the tawdry settlement. Now that it was quieter, he could hear a river flowing nearby. All the pigmies had dispersed ; some lay motionless in their crude shelters, only their snouts showing the blue light lying like a mist along their scales.

" Speaking off the cuff, I'd say the pigmies are sub-human," Barney remarked, picking from his beard an insect which had tumbled out of the thatched trees above them. " I'd also hazard they have got as far, evolutionwise as they're ever going to get. They have restricted cranial development, no opposed thumb, and no form of clothing—which means the lack of any sexual inhibition, such as one would expect to find in this Y-type culture. I should rate them as Y gamma stasis, Craig, at first blush."

Craig nodded, smiling, as if with a secret pleasure.

" Which means you feel as I do about the cliff temple," he said, indicating with his grey eyes the wealth of carving visible through the trees.

" You mean—the pigmies couldn't have built it?" Barney said. Craig nodded his large head.

" The caymen-heads are far below the cultural level implied by this architecture. They are its caretakers, not its creators. Which means, of course, that there is—or was—another species, a superior species, on Kakakakaxo, which may prove more elusive than the pigmies."

Craig was solid and stolid. He had spoken unemphatically. But Barney, who knew something of what went on inside that megacephalous skull, realised that by this very way Craig had of tossing away an important point, he was revealing a problem which excited his intellectual curiosity.

Understanding enough not to probe on the subject, Barney filed it away for later and switched to another topic. For such a bulky specimen of manhood, he possessed surprising delicacy ; but the confines of a small spaceship made a good schoolroom for the sensibilities.

" I'm just going to look at these furry pets the cayman-heads keep tied up outside their shelters," he said. " They're intriguing little creatures."

" Go carefully," Craig cautioned. " I have a suspicion the cayman-heads may not appreciate your interference. Those pets may not be pets at all ; the pigmies don't look like a race of animal-lovers."

" Well, if they aren't pets, they certainly aren't cattle," Barney said, walking slowly among the crude shelters. He was careful to avoid any protruding pigmy snouts, which lay along the ground like fallen branches. Outside most of the shelters, two different animals were tethered, generally by their

hind legs. One animal, a grey, furry creature with a pushed-in face like a pekinese dog, stood almost as high as the pigmies ; the other animal, a pudgy-snouted little creature with brown fur and a gay yellow crest, was half the size of the ' peke,' and resembled a miniature bear. Both pekes and bears had little black monkey-like paws, many of which were now raised as if in supplication as the ecologists approached.

" Certainly they are more attractive than their owners," Craig said. Stooping, he extended a hand cautiously to one of the little bears. It leapt forward and clutched the hand, chattering in appealing fashion.

" Do you suppose the two species, the pekes and the bears, fight together ?" Barney asked. " You notice they are kept tied just far enough apart so that they can't touch each other. We may have found the local variation on cock-fighting."

" Bloodsports might be in accord with the looks of the pigmies," Craig said, " but not with the character of these creatures. Even their incisors are blunt. They have no natural weapons."

" Talking of teeth, they exist on the same diet as their masters," Barney commented.

The little animals were sitting disconsolately on decaying piles of fish bones, fish heads and scales, amid which irridiscent beetles scuttled, busy almost beneath Barney's feet.

" I'm going to try taking one of these pekes back to the overlander," he announced. " It should be well worth examining."

From the corner of his eye, he could see a pigmy snout sticking out of its shelter not three yards away ; keeping it under observation, he bent down to loosen the tightly-drawn thong from the peg in the ground. The tethered creatures nearby, large and small, set up an excited chatter as they perceived what Barney was attempting. At the same time, the watching pigmy moved.

Its speed was astonishing. One second it was scarcely visible in its shelter, its nose extended along the ground ; the next, it confronted Barney with its claws resting over his hand, its ferocious teeth bared in his face. Small though the reptile was, undoubtedly it could have snapped his neck through. Its yellow eyes glared unblinkingly up at Barney.

" Don't fire, or you'll have the lot on us," Craig said, for Barney's free hand had gone immediately for his gun.

Almost at once, they found themselves surrounded by pigmies, all scuttling up and clacking excitedly. They made their typical noises by waggling their tongues without moving their jaws. Though they crowded in, apparently hostile, they made no attempt to attack Craig and Barney. Then one of them thrust forward and waving his small upper arm, commenced to harangue them.

" Some traces of a primitive speech pattern," Craig observed coolly. " Let me try a little barter for your pet, Barney, while we have their attention."

Dipping into one of the pouches of his duty equipment, he produced a necklace in whose marble-sized stones spirals of colour danced, delicate internal springs ensuring that their hues changed continually as long as their wearer moved. It was the sort of bauble to be picked up for a few minicredits on almost any civilised planet. Craig held it out to the pigmy who had delivered the speech.

The pigmy leader scrutinised it briefly, then resumed his harangue. The necklace meant nothing to him. With signs, Craig explained the function of the necklace, and indicated that he would exchange it for one of the little bears ; but abundant though these animals were, their owners showed no sign of intending to part with one. Pocketting the necklace, Craig produced a mirror.

Mirrors unfailingly excite the interest of primitive tribes—yet the pigmies remained unmoved. Many of them began to disappear, speeding off with their nervous, lizard movements. Putting the mirror away, Craig brought out a whistle.

It was an elaborate toy, shaped like a silver fish with an open mouth. The pigmy leader snatched it from Craig's hand, leaving the red track of its claws across his open palm. It popped the whistle into its mouth.

" Here, that's not edible !" Craig said, instinctively stepping forward with his hand out. Without warning, the pigmy struck. Perhaps it misinterpreted Craig's gesture and acted, as it thought, in self-defence. Snapping its jaws, it lunged out at Craig's leg. The ecologist fell instantly. Hardly had he struck the ground when a blue shaft flashed from Barney's blast-gun. As the noise of the thermonuclear explosion rattled round the clearing, the pigmy toppled over and fell flat, smoking.

Into the ensuing silence broke the terrified clatter of a thousand weaver birds, winging from their homes and circling high above the tree tops. Barney bent down, seized Craig round the shoulders, and raised him with one powerful arm, keeping the blaster levelled in his free hand. Over Craig's thigh, soaking through his torn trousers, grew a ragged patch of blood.

" Thanks, Barney," he said. " Let's get back to the overlander."

They retreated, Craig limping painfully. The pigmies made no attempt to attack. They mostly stood still, crouching over the smoking body and either staring fixedly or waving their snouts helplessly from side to side. It was impossible to determine whether they were frightened by the show of force or had decided that the brief quarrel was no affair of theirs. At last they bent over their dead comrade, seized him by his hind feet, and dragged him briskly off in the direction of the river.

When Barney got Craig onto his bunk, he stripped his trousers off cleansed the wound, and dressed it with antiseptic and restorative powder. Although Craig had lost blood, little serious damage had been done ; his leg would be entirely healed by morning.

" You got off lightly," Barney said, straightening up. " It's a deep flesh wound, but that baby could have chewed your knees off if he had been trying."

Craig sat up and accepted a mescahale.

" One thing about the incident particularly interested me," he said. " The cayman-heads wanted the whistle because they mistook it for food ; fish obviously is the main item of their diet. The mirror and necklace meant nothing to them ; I have never met a backward tribe so lacking in simple, elementary vanity. Does it connect with the absence of any sexual inhibitions which you mentioned ?"

" What have they to be vain about ?" Barney asked. "After five minutes out there, I feel as if the stench of fish has been painted on me with a brush."

Five minutes later, they realised Tim Anderson was nowhere in the overlander. Craig pursed his lips.

" Go and see if you can find him, Barney," he said. " I don't like to think of him wandering about on his own."

The afternoon was stretching the blue shadows across the ground. In the quiet, you could almost hear the planet turn

on its cold, hard axis. Barney set out towards the distant murmur of water, his face anxious. He turned down a narrow track among the trees, then stopped, unsure of himself. He called Tim's name.

An answer came almost at once, unexpectedly. In a minute, Tim emerged from the bushes ahead and waved cheerfully to Barney.

" You had me worried," Barney confessed. " It's wiser not to stroll off like that without telling us where you are going to. What have you been doing ?"

" Only taking a preliminary look round," Tim said. " The river's just beyond these bushes, wide and deep and fast-flowing. Do you think these cayman-heads could be cold-blooded by any chance ?"

" They are," Barney confirmed. " One of them put a paw on my hand, and I observed a complete lack of heat in it."

" Just as well for them," Tim remarked. " That river water is ice cold. It must flow straight down off the glaciers. The pigmies are superb swimmers, very fast, very sure ; they look altogether more graceful in the water than they do on land. I watched them diving and coming up with fish the size of big salmon in their mouths."

Barney told him about the incident with the fish-whistle.

" I'm sorry about Craig's leg," Tim said. " Perhaps you can tell me why he's got his knife into me, and why he jumped at me when I went after Dangerfield ?"

" He hasn't got his knife into you. When you've been on this team a little longer, Tim, you'll see that Craig Hodges doesn't work like that at all. He's a neutral man. At present he's worried because he smells a mystery, but is undecided where to turn for a key to it. He probably regards Dangerfield as that key ; certainly he respects the knowledge the man must have, yet I think that inwardly he would prefer to tackle the whole problem with a clean slate, leaving Dangerfield out of it altogether."

" Why should Craig feel like that ? PES H.Q. instructed us to contact Dangerfield."

" Quite. But Craig probably thinks the old boy might be —well, misleading, ill-informed . . ."

They turned and began to make their way back to the settlement, walking slowly, enjoying the mild air uncontaminated by fish.

" Surely that wasn't why Craig was so ragged about helping Daddy Dangerfield ?" Tim asked.

Barney sighed and tugged at his beard.

" No, that was something else", he said. " You develop a certain outlook to things when you've been on the PEST run for some years because a way of life induces an attitude to life. PESTeams are the precursors of change, remember. Before we come, the planets are in their natural state—that is, unspoiled or undeveloped, whichever way you phrase it. After us, they are going to be taken over and altered, on our recommendation. However cheery you feel about man's position in the galaxy, you can't help a part of you regretting that this inevitable mutilation is necessary."

" It's not our business to care," Tim said, impatiently.

" But Craig cares, Tim. The more planets we survey, the more he feels that some mysterious—divine—balance is being overthrown. I feel it myself ; you'll grow to feel it in time ; directly you land on an unmanned planet, an occult sense of *secrecy* comes up and hits you . . . You can't avoid the idea that you are confronting an individual entity—and your sworn duty is to destroy it, and the enigma behind it, and turn out yet another assembly-line world for assembly-line man.

" That's how Craig feels about planets and people. For him, a man's character is sancrosanct ; anything that has *accumulated* has his respect. It may be simpler to work with people who are mere ciphers, but an individual is of greater ultimate value."

" So that's what he meant when he said Dangerfield was still his own self, I suppose."

" More or less," Barney agreed.

" Hm. All this business about attitudes to life seems a bit mystical to me."

" Not a bit of it !" Barney said emphatically. " It's damn practical. You take it from me, that when we've eventually taken Kakakakaxo to bits to see what makes it tick, we shall have nothing but a lot of integrated attitudes to life on our hands !"

" And a stink of fish," Tim said sceptically.

" Even a stink of fish has—" Barney began, and broke off. The silence was torn right down the middle by piercing screams. The two ecologists looked at each other and then ran down the trail, bursting full tilt into the clearing.

Under the spreading thatch of the treetops, a peke creature was being killed. An excited rabble of pigmies milled everywhere, converging on a large, decaying tree stump, upon which two of their kind stood in full view, the screaming peke held tightly between them.

The furry prisoner struggled and squealed, while to its cries were added those of all the others tethered nearby. The screaming stopped abruptly. Without fuss, cruel talons came up and ripped its stomach open. Its entrails were then scooped steaming, into a crudely shaped bowl, after which the ravaged body was tossed to the crowd. With delighted cries, the pigmies scrambled for it.

Before the hubbub had died down, another captive was handed up to the executioners, kicking and crying as it went. The crowd paused briefly to watch the fun. This time, the victim was one of the little bear-like animals. Its body was gouged open, its insides turned into a second bowl. It, too, was tossed to the cayman-headed throng.

" Horrible !" Tim exclaimed. " Horrible !"

" Good old Mother Nature !", Barney said angrily. " How many more of the little blighters do they intend to slaughter ?"

But the killing was over. The two executioner pigmies, bearing the bowls of entrails clumsily in their paws, climbed from the tree stump and made their way through the crowd, which ceased its squabbling to fall back for them. The vessels were carried towards the rear of the village.

" It almost looks like some sort of a religious ceremony," Craig said. Barney and Tim turned to find him standing close behind them. The screaming had lured him from his bed ; in the tumult, he had limped over to them unobserved.

" How's the leg ?" Tim asked.

" It'll be better by morning, thanks. I can feel it beginning to heal already."

" The fellow who bit you—the one Barney killed—was thrown into the river," Tim said. " I was there watching from the bank when the other turned up with his carcass and slung him in."

" They're taking those bowls of guts into Dangerfields' hut," Barney said, pointing across the clearing. The two cayman-headed bearers had disappeared ; a minute later they emerged, empty-handed, from the hut by the cliff, and mingled with the throng.

" I wonder what the old boy wants guts for," Tim said.

" Good God ! The hut's on fire !" Craig exclaimed. " Tim, quick and fetch a foam extinguisher from the vehicle. Run !"

A ball of smoke, followed by a licking flame, had shown through Dangerfield's window. It died, then sprang up again. Craig and Barney ran forward as Tim dashed back to the overlander. The pigmies, some of whom were still quarrelling over the pelts of the dead peke and bear, took no notice of them or the fire as the men pelted past.

Arriving at the hut first, Barney burst in. The interior of the first room was full of smoke. Flame crawled among the dry rushes on the floor. A crude oil lamp had been upset ; lying among the flames, it was clearly the cause of the outbreak. Only a few feet away, flat on his bed, lay Dangerfield, his eyes closed.

" He's fainted—and knocked over the lamp in doing so," Craig said. Pulling a rug from the other side of the room, he flung it on to the fire and stamped on it. When Tim arrived with the extinguisher, a minute later, it was hardly needed, but they soused the smouldering ashes with it to make doubly sure.

" This might be an opportunity to talk to the old boy," Craig said. " Leave me here with him, will you, and I'll see what I can do."

As Tim and Barney obeyed, Craig saw the two bowls of entrails standing on a side table. They were still gently steaming.

On the bed, Dangerfield stirred. His eyelids flickered.

" No mercy from me," he muttered, " you'll get no mercy from me."

As Craig bent over him, his eyes opened. He lay looking up at the ecologist. Blue shadows lay like faded inkstains over the planes of his face.

" I must have passed out," he said tonelessly . . . " Felt so weak."

" You knocked over your oil lamp as you went," Craig said. " I was just in time to save rather a nasty blaze."

The old man made no comment, unless the closing of his eyes was to be interpreted as an indifference to death.

" Every afternoon they bring me the bowls of entrails," he muttered. " It's a . . . rite—they're touchy about it. I

wouldn't like to disappoint them . . . But this afternoon it was such an effort to stand. It quite exhausted me."

Craig fetched him a mug of water. Dangerfield accepted, drinking without raising his head, allowing half the liquid to trickle across his withered cheeks. After a minute, he groaned and sat up, propping himself against the wall. Without comment, Craig produced a hypodermic from his emergency pack and filled it from a plastic phial.

" You're in pain," he said. " This will stop the pain but leave your head clear. It won't hurt you ; let's have a look at your arm, can I ?"

Dangerfield's eyes rested on the syringe as if fascinated. He began to shake slowly, until the rickety bed creaked.

" I don't need your help, mister," he said, his face crinkling.

" We need yours," replied Craig indifferently, swabbing the thin palsied arm. He nodded his head towards the bowls behind him. " What are these unappetising offerings ? Some sort of religious tribute ?"

Unexpectedly the old man began to laugh, his eyes filling with tears.

" Perhaps it's to placate me," he said. " Every day for years, for longer than I can remember, they've been bringing me these guts. You wouldn't believe me if I told you, Hodges, that one of the chief problems of my life is hiding guts, getting rid of guts . . . You see, the pigmies must think I swallow them or something, and I don't like to disillusion them, in case—well, in case I lost my power over them."

He laughed and groaned then at the same time, hiding his gaunt beaky face in his hands; the paper-thin skin on his forehead was suddenly showered with sweat. Craig steadied his arm, injected the needle deftly, and rubbed the stringy flesh afterwards.

Standing away from the bed, he said deliberately, " It's strange the way you stay here on Kakakakaxo when you fear these pigmies so much."

Daddy Dangerfield looked sharply up, a scarecrow of a man with a shock of hair and a sucked-in mouth. Staring at Craig, his eyes were suddenly very clear, as if he realised for the first time that he was confronted by someone with an awareness of his own. Something like relief crept into his expression. He made no attempt to evade Craig's statement.

" Everyone who goes into space has a good reason driving them," he said ; " you don't only need escape velocity, you need a private dream—or a private nightmare." As always he spoke in Galingua, using is stiffly and unemphatically. " Me, I could never deal with people ; it's always been one of my troubles ; perhaps that was one of the reasons why I was touchy when you arrived. Human beings—you never know where you stand with them. I'd rather face death with the pigmies than life with humanity. There's a confession for you, Hodges, coming from Far-Flung Father Dangerfield . . . Maybe all heroes are just escapees, if you could see into them, right into the core of them."

The injection was taking effect. His words were coming more slowly.

" . . . So I stay on here, God of the guts," he said. His laugh wrecked itself on a shoal of wheezes ; clutching his chest, he lay back.

He hunched himself up in the foetal position, breathing heavily. The bed creaked, and in a moment he was asleep. Craig sat quite still, his face expressionless, integrating all he had learnt or guessed about Dangerfield, without entirely realising what he was doing. At last he shrugged, rose, and slipped the PEST harness from his shoulders ; unzipping a pouch, he extracted two specimen jars. Standing them on the table, he poured the bloody contents of the mud bowls one into one jar, one into the other. He set down the bowls, stoppered up the jars, and returned them to his pack.

" That solves his worry about disposing of the tribute for today," Craig said aloud. " And now, I think, a little helminthology."

As he returned through the village, he noticed that several pigmies lay motionless on the ground, glaring unwinkingly at each other over the two lacerated heaps of fur. Circling them, he entered the overlander. It was unexpectedly good to breathe air free from fish.

" I think I've broken the ice with Dangerfield," he announced to Barney and Tim. " He's sleeping now. I'll go back over there in a couple of hours, to try and treat his ' fiffin,' and get him in a proper frame of mind for talking. Before that, let's eat ; my stomach grows vociferous."

" How about exploring the temple in the cliff, Craig ?" Tim asked.

Craig smiled. " If it *is* a temple," he said. " We'll let it keep till the morning. We don't want to upset the locals more than possible : though I admit they're a pretty phlegmatic lot, they might well take umbrage at our barging in there. And by morning I'm hoping Dangerfield will have given us more to go on."

Over the meal, Barney told Craig of two weaver birds he and Tim had snared while Craig was with Dangerfield.

" The younger one had about one thousand six hundred lice on it," he said. " Not an unusually large number for a bird living in a colony, and a youngster at that, not yet expert at preening. It goes to show that the usual complex ecological echelons are in full swing on Kakakakaxo."

When they had eaten, drunk some of Barney's excellent Aldebaran wine and were lingering over the coffee, Tim volunteered to go over and sit with Dangerfield.

" Excellent idea," Craig agreed, gratefully. " I'll be over to relieve you when I've done some work here. On your way, take a look at what the pigmies in the clearing are up to. And be careful—night's coming."

Collecting his kit and a torch, Tim went out. Barney returned to his birds. Craig closetted himself in the tiny lab with his jars of entrails.

Outside, curtains of night drew across the sky with sad finality. Tim zipped up his jacket. Striking through the grass a yard away from him passed a lithe serpent resembling the fer-de-lance, that deadly snake with the beautiful name. It ignored Tim. Cassivelaunus was sinking below the western horizon. Beneath the sheltering trees, darkness was already dominant ; a fish scale gleamed here and there like a muddy star. The weavers were settling to roost, making a perpetual uneasy noise overhead. Kept apart by their tethers, peke and bear lay staring at each other in disconsolate pairs, indifferent to day and night. Hardly a pigmy moved ; joylessly they lay beneath their crude shelters, not sleeping, not watching.

Five pigmies lay in the open. These were the ones Craig had noticed earlier. As he made his way across the clearing, Tim saw that they were waiting, two round one body, three round the other body of the two creatures who had recently been sacrificed. They crouched tensely about the two little bundles of battered fur, glaring at one another, not moving as Tim skirted them.

In Dangerfield's hut, he found the overturned oil lamp and a jar of fish oil to refill it with. He trimmed the wick and lit it. Though it gave off a reek of fish, he preferred it to the glare of his own atomic torch. Dangerfield was sleeping peacefully. Tim covered the old man with a blanket, settling down beside him.

Over him moved a feeling of wonder, or perhaps it was what Barney had called ' the occult sense of secrecy ' emanating from an unknown planet. Tim experienced it with the strange sense man still does not officially recognise ; and the vast barriers of space, the glaciers of Kakakakaxo, and the old hermit sleeping with a head stuffed full of untapped knowledge were all part of it. He experienced nothing of Craig's dislike of altering the nature of a planet, but suddenly he felt impatient for the morning, when they would integrate and interpret the riddles they glimpsed around them.

A succession of leathery blows sounded outside, rousing him from his reverie.

Jumping up, seizing his blaster, Tim stared out into the fishy shadows of the clearing. In the thick silence, the noises were crude and startling.

The three cayman-heads who had crouched over one of the mutilated pelts were fighting. They fought voicelessly, with terrible skill. Though they were small, they battled like giants. Their main weapons were their long jaws, which they wielded as deftly as rapiers, parrying, thrusting, slashing, biting. When their jaws became wedged together in temporary deadlock, they used their barbed paws. Each fought against the other two.

After some five minutes of this murderous activity, the three fell down again, collapsing with their faces on the ground, to eye each other motionlessly once more over the body of the sacrificed bear.

A little later, the two pigmies crouched over the dead peke rose and also did battle, a ferocious duel ending with a sudden reversion into immobility. However much any of the five pigmies suffered from any wounds they received in the engagements, they gave no sign of pain.

" They are fighting over the gutted bodies of their slaves."

Tim turned from the window. Dangerfield had roused, woken by the thumping outside. He spoke tiredly, without

opening his eyes. By a quirk of the dim lighting, his eye sockets and the hollows of his cheeks looked like deep holes.

"What are they fighting for?" Tim asked, instinctively dropping his voice.

"Every night they fight in the same way."

"But *why*?"

"Tenacity . . . fight to the death . . . Sometimes goes on all night," the old man muttered. His voice trailed off.

"What does it all mean?" Tim asked, but Dangerfield had drifted back into sleep, and the question faded unanswered into the darkness. For an hour, the old man slept undisturbedly. Then he became restless, throwing off his blanket and tearing open his shirt, although it had grown chilly in the room. Tossing on the bed, he clawed repeatedly at his chest, coughing and groaning.

Bending over him anxiously, Tim noticed a patch of discoloured skin under one of the sick man's ribs. A small, red spot was growing rapidly in size, reddening perceptibly, and lapping at the surrounding grey flesh. Dangerfield groaned and cried; Tim caught his wrist helplessly, steadying him against a crisis he could not understand. The growing patch formed a dark centre like a storm cloud. It oozed, then erupted thick blood, which trailed round the circumference of the ribs to soak into the blanket below. In the middle of the tiny, bloody crater, something moved.

A flat, armoured head appeared. It belonged to a small brown larva which now heaved itself into the light, lying exhausted on the discoloured flesh. Overcoming his disgust, Tim pulled a specimen jar from his pack and imprisoned the maggot in it.

"I don't doubt that that's what Dangerfield calls a fiffin," he said. He discovered his hands were shaking. Sickly, he forced himself to disinfect and dress the hermit's wound. He was still bending over the unconscious man when Craig came in to relieve him, carrying a tape recorder. He was glad to leave before he fainted.

Outside, in the darkness, the five cayman-heads still fought their intermittent, interminable battle. On every plane, Tim thought, endless, meaningless strife continues; he wanted to stop trembling.

The dead hour before the dawn: the time, on any planet in the universe, when the pulse of life falters before once more

quickening its beat. Craig, walking a little stiffly, entered the overlander with the tape recorder under his arm. Setting it down, he put coffee on the hotpoint, rinsed his face with cold water, and roused the two sleepers.

" We shall be busy today," he said, patting the recorder. " We now have plenty of material to work on—very dubious material, I might add. I have recorded a long talk with Dangerfield, which you must hear."

" How is he ?" Tim asked as he slipped on his tunic.

" Physically, not in bad shape. Mentally, pretty sick. He's a maniac-depressive type, I should say. Suddenly he is chummy and communicative, then he's silent and hostile. An odd creature . . ."

" And the fiffin ?"

" Dangerfield thinks it is the laval stage of a dung beetle, and says they bore through anything. He has had them in his legs before, but this one only just missed his lungs. The pain must have been intense, poor fellow. I gave him a light hypalgesic and questioned him before its effect wore off."

Barney brought the boiling coffee off the stove, pouring it expertly into three beakers.

" All set to hear the play-back," he said.

Craig switched the record on. The reels turned slowly, recreating his voice and Dangerfield's. Barney and Tim sat down to listen : Craig remained standing.

" Now that you are feeling a little better," Craig-on-tape said, "perhaps you can give me a few details about life on Kakakakaxo. How much of the language of these so-called pigmies have you been able to pick up ? And just how efficiently can they communicate with each other ?"

A long silence followed before Dangerfield replied.

" They're an old race, the pigmies," he said at length. " Their language has gradually worn down, like an old coin. I've picked up all I can in twenty-odd years, but you can take it from me that most of the time, when they sound as if they're talking, they're just making noises. Nowadays, their language only expresses a few basic attitudes. Hostility. Fear. Hunger. Determination . . ."

" What about love ?" Craig prompted.

" I never heard one of them mention the subject . . . They're very secretive about sex ; I've never seen 'em doing it, and you can't tell male from female. They just lay their eggs in the river mud . . . What was I saying ? . . . Oh yes, about

their manner of speech. You've got to remember, Hodges, that I'm the only human—the *only* one— ever to master this clicking they do. When my first would-be rescuers asked me what the natives called this place, I said ' kakakakaxo,' and now Kakakakaxo it is ; that's the name on the star charts and I put it there ; it used only to be called Cassivelaunus 1. But I made a mistake, as I found later. ' Kakakakaxo ' is the pigmy answer to the question ' Where is this place ?'; it means ' where we die, where our elders died '."

" Have you been able to explain to them where you came from ?"

" That's a bit difficult for them to grasp. They've settled for ' Beyond the ice '."

" Meaning the glaciers to the north and south of this equatorial belt ?"

" Yes ; that's why they think I'm a god, because only gods can live beyond the ice. The pigmies know all about the glaciers. I've been able to construct a bit of their history from similar little items—"

" That was one of the next things I was going to ask you about," Craig-on-tape said, as Barney-in-the-flesh handed round more coffee to the other two listeners.

" The pigmies are an ancient race," old Dangerfield said. " They've no written history, of course, but you can tell they're old by their knowing about the glaciers. How would equatorial creatures know about glaciers, unless their race survived the last Ice Age ? Then this ornamented cliff in which many of them live . . . they could build nothing like that now ; they haven't the skill. Their ancestors must have been really clever. These contemporary generations are just decadent."

After a brief silence, Craig's voice came sceptically from the loudspeaker : " We had an idea that the temple might have been built by another, vanished race. Any opinions on that ?"

" You've got the wrong end of the stick, Hodges. The pigmies look on this temple as sacred ; somewhere in the middle of it is what they refer to as ' the Tomb of the Old Kings,' and even *I* have never been allowed in there. They wouldn't behave like that if the place hadn't a special significance for them."

" Do they still have kings now ?"

" No. They don't have any sort of rule now, except each man for himself. These five of them fighting outside the hut,

for instance ; there's nobody to stop them, so they'll go on until they are all dead."

" Why should they fight over the pelts ?"

" It's a custom, that's all. They do it every night ; sometimes one of them wins quickly, and then it's all over. They sacrifice their slaves in the day and squabble over their bodies at night."

" Can you tell me why they attach such importance to these little animals—their slaves, as you call them ? The relationship between pigmies and slaves has its puzzling aspects."

" Oh, they don't attach much importance to the slaves. It's just that they make a habit of catching them in the forest, since they regard the pekes and bears as a menace to them ; certainly their numbers have increased noticeably since I've been here."

" Hm. Why do they always keep the two groups separated ? Anything significant in that.?"

" Why should there be ? The pekes and bears are supposed to fight together if they are allowed to intermingle, but whether or not that's true, I can't say. You mustn't expect reasons for everything these pigmies do . . . I mean, they're not rational in the way a man is."

" As an ecologist, I find there is generally a reason for everything, however obscure that reason may be."

" You do, do you ?" The hermit's tone was pugnacious. " If you want a reason, you'd better go and find one. All I'm saying is that in nineteen years here, I haven't found one. These pigmies just go by—well, instinct or accident, I suppose."

Craig reached forward and switched the recorder off. He lit a mescahale and looked searchingly at Barney and Tim. Outside, beyond their heads, he could see the first light pencilling in outlines of trees.

" That's about all that's relevant," he said. " The rest of Dangerfield's remarks were mainly autobiographical."

" What do you make of it, Craig ?" Barney Brangwyn asked.

" Before Dangerfield crashed on Kakakakaxo, he was a salesman, a refrigerator salesman, I believe, hopping from one frontier planet to another. He was untrained as an observer."

" That's so," Barney agreed. " You obviously feel as I do : that he has misinterpreted just about everything he has seen, which is easy enough to do on a strange planet, even if you

are emotionally balanced. Nothing in his statement can be trusted ; it's useless."

" I wouldn't go so far as to say that," Craig remarked, with his usual caution. " It's untrustworthy, yes, but not useless. For instance, he gives us several leads—"

" Sorry, but I'm adrift," Tim Anderson said, getting up and pacing behind his chair. " Why should Dangerfield be so wrong ? Most of what he said sounded logical enough to me. Even if he had no anthropological or ecological training to begin with, he's had plenty of time to learn."

" True, Tim, true," Craig agreed. " Plenty of time to learn correctly or wrongly. I'm not trying to pass judgment on Dangerfield, but as you know there is hardly a fact in the universe which is not open, at least superficially, to two or more interpretations. Dangerfield's attitude to the pigmies is highly ambivalent, the classical love-hate relationship. He wants to think of them as mere animals, because that would make them less something to be reckoned with ; at the same time, he wants to think of them as intelligent beings with a great past, because that makes their acceptance of him as their god the more impressive."

" And which are the pigmies in reality, animals or intelligent beings ?" Tim asked.

Craig smiled mysteriously.

" That is where our powers of observation and deduction come in," he said.

The remark irritated Tim. Both Craig and Barney could be very uninformative. He turned to leave the overlander, to get away from them both and think things out for himself. As he went out, he remembered the jar with the fiffin lava in it ; he had forgotten to place it in the overlander's tiny lab. Not wishing to give Craig cause for complaint, Tim slipped it in now.

Two jars already stood on the lab bench. Tim picked them up and examined them with interest. They contained two dead tapeworms ; by the labels on the jars, he saw that Craig had extracted them from the entrails of the animals sacrificed the afternoon before. The cestodes, one of which came from the peke, one from the little bear, were identical : white tapes some twenty-four inches long, with suckers and hooks at the head end. Tim stared at them with interest before leaving the overlander.

Outside, dawn was seeping through the thick trees. He drew the cold air down into his lungs ; it was still flavoured with fish. The weaver birds were beginning to call or preen drowsily overhead. A few pigmies were about, moving sluggishly in the direction of the river, presumably in search of breakfast. Tim stood there, shivering slightly with the cold, thinking of the oddity of two diverse species harbouring the same species of tapeworm.

He moved into the clearing. The night-long fight over the dead animals was ended. Of the five pigmies involved, only one remained alive ; it lay with the gutted bear in its jaws, unable to move away on account of its injuries. Three of its legs had been bitten off. Tim's horror and compunction dissolved as he saw the whole situation *sub specie aeternitatis*, with cruelty and kindness as mere facets of blind law, with pain and death an inevitable concomitant of life ; perhaps he was acquiring something of Craig's outlook.

Possessed by a sudden inspiration, Tim picked up three of the dead pigmies, shouldered them, and, staggering slightly under their combined weight, carried them back to the overlander. At the door, he met Craig about to take some breakfast over to Dangerfield.

" Hello," Craig exclaimed cordially. " Bringing home the lunch ?"

" I thought I'd do a little dissection," Tim said guardedly. " Just to see how these creatures work."

But once in the lab with his burden, he merely donned rubber gloves and slit open the pigmies' stomachs rapidly one by one, paying attention to nothing else. Removing the three intestinal sacs, he found that two of them were badly damaged by worms. Soon he had uncovered half a dozen roundworms, pink in colouration and still alive ; they made vigorous attempts with their vestigial legs to climb from the crucible in which he placed them.

He went excitedly in to Barney Brangwyn to report his findings. Barney was sitting at the table, manipulating metal rods.

" This contradicts most of the laws of phylogeny," Tim said, peeling off his gloves. " According to Dangerfield, the pekes and bears are both recent arrivals on the evolutionary scene here : yet their endoparasites, which Craig has preserved in the lab, are well adapted to their environment inside the

creatures, and in all respects resemble the ancient order of tapeworms parasitic in man. The roundworms from the pigmies, on the other hand, bear all the marks of being recent arrivals ; they are still something more than virtual egg-factories, they still retain traces of a previous more independant existence—and they cause unnecessary damage to their host, which is always a sign that a suitable status quo has yet to be reached between host and parasite."

Barney raised his great bushy eyebrows approvingly and smiled at the eagerness on the young man's face.

" Very interesting indeed," he said. " What now, Doctor Anderson ?"

Tim grinned, struck a pose, and said, in a creditable imitation of Craig's voice, " Always meditate upon all the evidence, and especially upon those things you do not realise are evidence."

" Fair enough," Barney agreed, smiling. " And while you're meditating, come and give me a hand on the roof with this patent fishing rod I've made."

" You have some crazy ideas, Barney ; what are you up to now ?"

" We're going hunting. Come on ! Your worms will keep."

Getting up, he produced a long, telescopic rod which Tim recognised as one of their spare, collapsible aerials. The last and smallest section was extended, and to it Barney had just finished tying a sharp knife.

" It looks like a gadget for shaving by remote control," Tim commented.

" Then appearances are deceptive. I'm still hankering after catching myself one of the local pets, without getting bitten into the bargain."

Climbing up the stepped pole which led into the tiny radio room, Barney undogged the circular observation dome which gave an all-round view of their surroundings. With Tim following closely, he swung himself up and onto the roof of the overlander. He crawled forward on hands and knees.

" Keep down," he muttered. " If possible, I'd like this act of folly to go unobserved."

Under a gigantic tree which spread its boughs over them, they were well concealed. Cassivelaunus was only just breaking through low cloud, and the clearing below was still fairly empty. Lying flat on his stomach, Barney pulled out the

sections of aerial until he had a rod several yards long. Steadying this weapon with Tim's aid, he pushed it forward.

The end of it reached to the nearest pigmy shelter. Outside, the two captive animals sat up and watched with interest as the knife descended. The blade hovered over the bear, shifted, and began rubbing gently back and forth across the thong which secured the little animal. In a moment, the thong was severed.

The bear was free. It looked owlishly about, hardly daring to move, and obviously undecided as to what it should do. It scratched its yellow poll in a parody of bewilderment. The neighbouring peke clucked encouragingly at it. At that minute, a procession of pigmies appeared among the trees some distance away, spurring it into action.

Grasping the aerial in its little black hands, the bear swarmed nimbly up it. It jumped onto the overlander roof and stood facing the men, apparently without fear. Barney retracted the aerial as Tim made coaxing noises. Unfortunately, this manoevure had been seen from below. A clacking and growling started as pigmies emerged from their shelters and moved towards the overlander.

The alarm had been given by the line of pigmies just emerging from the forest. They wore the look of tired hunters, returning with the dawn. Over their shoulders, trussed with crude thongs, lay freshly caught bears or pekes, defeated by their opponents' superior turn of speed. When these pigmies saw what Barney and Tim were about, they dropped their burdens and scuttled at a ferocious pace to the PEST vehicle.

Alarmed by the sudden commotion, the weavers poured from their treetop homes, screeching.

" Let's get in," Barney said hastily.

Picking up the little bear, which offered no resistance, he swarmed down inside the overlander, closely followed by Tim.

At first, the creature was overcome by its new surroundings. It stood on the table and rocked piteously from side to side. Recovering, it accepted milk and chattered to the two men vivaciously. Seen close, it bore little resemblance to a bear, except for its fur covering. It stood upright as the pigmies did, attempting to comb its bedraggled fur with its fingers. When Tim proffered his pocket comb, it used that gratefully, wrenching diligently at the knots in its long coat.

" Well, it's male, it's intelligent, 't's quite a little more fetching than its overlords," commented Tim. " I hope you won't mind my saying so, Barney, but you have got what you wanted at considerable cost. The wolves are at the door, howling for our blood."

Looking through the window over Tim's shoulder, Barney saw that the pigmies, in ever-growing numbers, were surrounding the overlander, waving their claws, snapping their jaws. Undoubtedly their ire was roused. They looked, in the blue light, at once repulsive, comic and malign. Barney thought to himself, ' I'm getting to hate those squalid bastards; they've neither mind nor style ! '

Aloud he said, " Sorry we roused them. We seem to have offended against a local law of property, if not propriety. Until they cool down, Craig's return is blocked ; he'll have to tolerate Daddy Dangerfield for a while."

Tim did not reply ; before Craig returned, there was something else he wished to do. But first he had to get away from the overlander.

He stood uncertainly behind Barney's back, as the latter lit a mescahale and turned his attention again to his new pet. A moment later, Tim climbed up into the radio nest unobserved opened the dome, and stood once more on the roof of the overlander. Catching hold of an overhanging bough, he pulled himself into the big tree ; working his way along, screened from the clacking mob below, he got well away from them before dropping down from a lower branch onto clear ground. Then he walked briskly in the direction of the cliff temple.

Dangerfield switched the projector off. As the colours died, he turned eagerly to Craig Hodges.

" There !" he exclaimed, with pride. " What did you think to that ?"

Craig stared at him. Though his chest was still bandaged, the hermit moved about easily. Modern healing treatments had speeded his recovery ; he looked ten years younger than the old man who had yesterday suffered from fiffins. The excitement of the film he had just been showing had brought a flush to his cheeks.

" Well, what did you think of it ?" he demanded, impatiently.

" I'm wondering what *you* think of it," Craig said.

Some of the animation left Dangerfield. He looked round the stuffy confines of his hut, as if seeking a weapon. His jaw set.

" You've no respect," he said. " I took you for a civilized man, Hodges. But you've no respect, no reverence ; you persist in trying to insult me in underhand ways. Even the Droxy film makers recognised me for what I am."

" I think you mean for what you like to think you are," Craig said, rising from his rough seat. A heavy stick caught him an unexpected blow on the shoulder ; he seized the stick, wrenching it from Dangerfield's grasp and tossing it out of the door.

" Don't do that again," he warned.

" You insult me ! You think I'm mad !" Dangerfield cried.

" I wouldn't go as far as to say that," Craig said coolly, " although I confess that your sanity is not of a type that appeals to me."

Leaving the hut, he made off briskly across the clearing. The first indication Barney had of his return was when the besieging pigmies set up an increased noise outside. Looking through one of the windows of the overlander, Barney could watch Craig approaching ; he drew his gun, alert for trouble. The cayman-heads were still in an aggressive mood.

Craig never hesitated. As he drew nearer, part of the rabble detached itself from the overlander and moved towards him, jaws creaking open. Craig ignored them. Without slackening his stride, he pushed through the scaly green bodies. Barney stood rigid with apprehension ; he knew that if one of the pigmies moved to the attack, Craig would be finished. The mob would be swarming over him before anyone could save him.

But the pigmies merely croaked excitedly as Craig passed. Jostling, shuffling their paws in the dirt, they let him get by. He mounted the step of the overlander and entered unmolested.

The two men faced each other, Craig reading something of the relief and admiration on Barney's face.

" They must have guessed how stringy I'd taste," he remarked ; and that was all that was said.

He turned his attention to Barney's bear-creature, already christened Fido. The animal chattered perkily as Barney explained how he got it.

" I'll swear Fido has some sort of embryo language," Barney said. " In exchange for a good rub down with insecti-

cide, he has let me examine his mouth and throat. He's well enough equipped for speech. His I'Q's in good trim, too. Fido's quite a boy."

" Show him how to use a pencil and paper, and see what he makes of it," Craig suggested, stroking the little creature's yellow crest.

As Barney did so, he asked Craig what had kept him so long with Dangerfield.

" I was beginning to think the lost race of Kakakakaxo had got you," he said, grinning.

" Nothing so interesting," Craig said, " although it has been an instructive session. Incidentally, I think I may have made an enemy of Dangerfield ; under the surface, he resents having had to accept our help. He has been showing me a film intended to impress me with the greatness of Dangerfield."

" A documentary ?"

" Anything but. A squalid solid made by Galactic Studios on Droxy, and supposedly based on the old boy's life. They presented him with a copy of it, and a viewer, as a souvenir. It's called ' Curse of the Crocodile Men '."

" Ye Gods !" Barney exclaimed. " I'll bet you found that instructive."

" In many ways, it is very helpful," Craig said seriously. " The script writers and director spent two days—just two days !—here on Kakakakaxo, talking to Dangerfield and ' soaking up atmosphere,' so-called, before returning to Droxy to cook up their own ideas on the subject. No other research was done."

Barney laughed briefly. " I presume the result was phoney through and through ?"

" Absolutely false. After the usual preliminaries—spectacular spaceship crash on mountainside, etcetera—a Tarzan-like Dangerfield is shown being captured by the bear-race, who stand six feet high and wear tin helmets. The pekes, for simplicity's sake, never appear. The bears are torturing our hero to death when the Crocodile Men, the pigmies, raid the place and rescue him. The Crocodile Men, according to the film, are a proud and ancient warrior race, come down in the world through the encroachment of the jungle. When they get Dangerfield, they don't like him. They, too, are about to put him to death when he saves the leader's son from foot-rot or something equally decisive. From then on, the tribe treats him

like a god, build him a palace and all the rest of it. Appalling, 'B' feature stuff, full of fake dialogue and settings."

"Hm, I see," Barney said. He sat silent for a minute, looking rather puzzledly into space, tweaking his beard. "It is odd that, considering this hokum was cooked up on Droxy, it all tallies surprisingly well in outline with what Dangerfield told you last night about the great past of the pigmies and so on."

"Exactly!" Craig agreed with satisfaction. "Don't you see what that means, Barney? Nearly everything Dangerfield knows, or believes he knows, comes from a hack in a Droxy studio, rather than vice versa."

They stared at one another, Barney rather blankly. Into both their minds, like the faint sound of a hunter's horn, came the reflection that all human behaviour, ultimately, is inexplicable; even the explicable is a mystery.

"Now you see why he shied away from us so violently at our first meeting," Craig said. "He's got almost no first-hand information because he is afraid to go out looking for it. Knowing that, he was prepared to face Droxy film people—who would only be after a good story—but not scientists, who would want hard facts. Once I had him cornered, of course, he had to come out with what he'd got, presumably hoping we would swallow it as the truth and go."

Barney made clucking noises. "He's probably no longer fit to remember what is truth, what lies. After nineteen years alone here the old boy must be quietly crazy."

"Put the average person, with the mental conflicts to which we are all prey, away on an unlovely planet like Kakakakaxo for nineteen years," Craig said, "and he will inevitably finish as some sort of fantasist. I don't say insane, for a human mind is very resilient, but shielded away from reality. Fear has worked steadily on Dangerfield all this time. He's afraid of people, afraid of the cayman-heads, the Crocodile Men. He hides from his terrors in fantasy. He's a 'B' feature god. And you couldn't budge him off the planet because he realises subconsciously that reality would then catch up with him."

Barney stood up.

"Okay, doctor," he said. "Diagnosis accepted. All we have collected so far are phantoms. Now just tell me where exactly PEST work stands after this revelation of the uselessness of our main witness. Presumably, at a standstill?"

" By no means," Craig said. He pointed to Fido. The little bear was sitting quietly on the table with the pencil in his hand, licking the point with nonchalance.

On the paper, he had crudely drawn a room, in which a bear and a peke were locked in each other's arms, as if wrestling.

A few minutes later, when Craig had gone into the laboratory with some beetles and other insects culled from Dangerfield's hut, Barney saw the old hermit himself coming across to them, hobbling rapidly among the pigmy shelters with the aid of a stick. Barney called to Craig.

Craig emerged from the lab with a curious look on his face, at once pleased and secretive.

" Those three pigmy carcasses which Tim brought into the lab," he said. " I presume Tim cut them up—it certainly doesn't look like your work. What did he say to you about them ?"

Barney explained the point Tim had made about the worms.

" Is there anything wrong ?" he enquired.

" No, nothing, nothing," Craig said in an odd voice, shaking his head. " And that's all Tim said . . . Where is he now by the way ?"

" I've no idea, Craig ; the boy's getting as secretive as you are. He must have gone outside for a breath of fish. Shall I give him a call ?"

" Let's tackle Dangerfield first," Craig said.

They opened the door. Most of the pigmies had dispersed. The rest of them sped away when Dangerfield waved to them. The old man agitatedly refused to come into the overlander, his great nose standing out from his head like a parrot's beak as he shook his head. He wagged a finger angrily at them.

" I always knew no good would come of your nosing about here," he said. " It was foolish of me to condescend to have anything to do with you in the first place. Now that young fellow of yours is being killed by the pigmies, and serve him right, too. But goodness knows what they'll do when they've tasted human flesh—tear us all apart, I shouldn't wonder. I doubt if I'll be able to stop them, for all my power over them."

He had not finished talking before Craig and Barney had leapt from the overlander.

" Where's Tim ? What's happened to him ?" Craig asked. " Tell us straightforwardly what you know."

" Oh, I expect it'll be too late now," said Dangerfield. " I saw him slip into the cliff temple, the interfering young fool. Perhaps you will go away now and leave me—"

But the two PEST men were already running across the clearing, scattering brilliant birds about their heads. They jumped the crude shelters in their path. As they neared the temple in the cliff, they heard the monotonous clacking of the pigmy pack. When they reached the ornamental doorway, they saw that it and the corridor beyond were packed tight with the creatures, all fighting to get further into the cliff.

" Tim !" bawled Barney. " Tim ! Are you there ?"

The clacks and croaks died instantly. The nearer pigmies turned to stare at the men, swinging their green snouts inquisitively round. In the silence, Barney shouted again, but no answer came. The mob continued its struggle to get into the temple.

" We can't massacre this lot," Craig said, glaring at the mob of cayman-heads before them. " How're we going to get in there to Tim ?"

" We can use the cry gas in the overlander !" Barney said. " That will shift the pigmies." He doubled back to their vehicle, and in a minute brought it bumping and growling across the clearing towards the temple. It was tough going. The high roof ploughed through overhanging trees, breaking down the weavers' carefully constructed roof and sending angry birds flying in all directions. As the vehicle lumbered up, Craig unstrapped an outside container, pulling out a hose; the other end of it was already connected to internal gas tanks. Barney threw down two respirators, to emerge a moment later wearing one himself.

Donning his mask, Craig slung the spare over his arm and charged forward with the hose. The reeking gas poured over the nearest pigmies, who fell back like magic, coughing and pawing at their goat-yellow eyes. The two men entered the temple; they moved down the corridor unopposed, only impeded by the pigmies' wild fight to get out of their way. The noise of croaking was tremendous ; in the dark and mist, Craig and Barney could hardly see their way ahead.

The corridor changed into a pigmy-sized tunnel, working gently upwards through the mountain. The two ecologists had

to struggle past kicking bodies. It occurred to Craig that the pigmies, for a tribe of savages little higher than brutes, had behaved fairly phlegmatically until now. But now they were confronting cry gas ; they could not comprehend it, and they were really frightened.

The supply of cry gas gave out. Craig and Barney stopped, peering at each other in surprise and some apprehension.

" I thought the gas tanks were full ?" Craig said.

" They were. One of the cayman-heads must have unwittingly bitten through the hose."

" Or Dangerfield cut it . . ."

Dropping the now useless hose, they ran forward. Their retreat was cut off : the pigmies at the mouth of the temple would have recovered by now, and be waiting for the men to return. So they forged ahead, both throwing off their respirators and pulling out blaster-guns as they turned a corner.

There they stopped. This was the end of the trail. The tunnel broadened into a sort of ante-room, on the opposite side of which stood a wide wooden door. A group of pigmies who had been scratching at this door—its panels were deeply marked by their claws—turned and confronted the men. Tears, crocodile tears, stood in their eyes : a whiff of the gas had reached them, but it had served only to anger them. Six of them were there. They charged. There was no avoiding them.

" Get 'em !" Barney yelled.

The dim chamber twitched with blinding blue-white light. Blue hieroglyphs writhed on the wall. Acoustics, in the roar of the blasters, went crazy. But the best hand weapon has its limitations, and the pigmies had speed on their side. Terrifying speed. They launched themselves like stones from a sling.

Barney scarcely had time to settle one of them than another landed squarely in his stomach. For a small creature, it was unbelievably solid. Every claw dug a point of pain through Barney's thick suit. He jerked his head back, falling backwards, bellowing, as the jaws gaped up to his face. Its grey tongue, its serried teeth, the stink of fish—he tried to writhe away from them as he fired the blaster against the pigmy's leathery stomach. Even as he hit the ground, the pigmy fell from him, dead, and in a dying kick knocked the weapon from his hand.

Before Barney could reach it, two other assailants had landed on him, sending him sprawling. He was defenceless under their predatory claws.

The blue light leapt and crackled over him. An intolerable heat breathed above his cheek. The two pigmies rolled over to lie beside him, their bodies black and charred. Shakily, Barney stood up.

The wooden door had been flung open. Tim was there, holstering the blaster which had saved Barney's life.

Craig had settled with his two attackers. They lay twitching and smouldering on the floor in front of him. He stood now, breathing deeply, with only a torn tunic sleeve to show for his trouble. The three men looked at each other, grimed and dishevelled. Craig was the first to speak.

" I'm getting too old for this sort of lark," he said.

" I thought we'd had it then ; thanks a lot, Tim," Barney said.

His beard had been singed, its edges turned a dusty brown. He felt his cheek tenderly where a blister was already forming. Sweat poured from him ; the heat from the thermonuclear blasts had considerably raised the temperature in the anteroom.

" Why did I ever leave Earth ?" he growled, stepping over one of the scaly corpses.

" You got yourself into a nasty spot," Craig said to Tim. The young man instantly became defensive, looking both embarrassed and defiant.

" I'm sorry you came in after me," he said. " I was quite safe behind this door, as it happened. I've been doing a little research on my own, Craig—you'd better come in and see this place for yourself, now that you're here. I have discovered the Tomb of the Old Kings that Dangerfield told us about ! You'll find it explains quite a lot we did not know."

" How did you manage to get as far as this without the pigmies stopping you ?" Craig asked, still stern.

" There was a diversion on when I entered. Most of them were clustered round the overlander. They only started creeping up on me when I was actually inside. Are you coming in or aren't you ?"

They entered, Tim barring the door behind them before turning to pick out the details of the long room with his torch beam. The proportions of the place were agreeable. Despite its low roof, it was architecturally impressive. Its builders had known what they were doing. Decoration had been left at a minimum, except for the elaborate door arch and the restrained

fan-vaulting of the ceiling. Attention was thus focussed on a large catafalque, upon which lay a row of several sarcophagi. They had a pathetic, neglected look. Everywhere was deep in dust, and the air tasted stale and heavy.

Tim pointed to the line of little coffins, the outsides of which were embellished with carvings.

" Here are the remains of the Old Kings of Kakakakaxo," he said. " And although I may have made myself a nuisance, I think I can claim that with their aid I have solved the mystery of the lost race of this planet."

" Good !" Craig exclaimed encouragingly. " I should be very interested to hear any deductions you have made."

For a moment, Tim looked at him penetratingly, suspecting sarcasm. Reassured, he continued.

" The curious thing is that the problem is like a jigsaw puzzle to which we already possessed most of the pieces. Dangerfield supplied nearly all of them—but he had fitted them together upside down. You see, to start with, there is not one lost race but two. This temple—and doubtless others like it all over the planet—was hewn by the races who have engraved their own likenesses on these sarcophagi. Take a look at them ! Far from being lost, these two races have been under our noses all the time : I mean, of course, the creatures we call pekes and bears. Their portraits are on the sarcophagi and their remains inside. Their resemblance to Earth animals has blinded us to what they really are."

Tim paused for their approval.

" I'm not surprised," Barney said, to Tim's regret, turning from an inspection of the stone coffins. " The bear people at least are brighter than the pigmies. As I see it, the pigmies are pretty stodgy reptiles whom nature has endowed with armour but precious little else. I had already decided that there was another thing Great God Dangerfield had garbled : far from being an ancient race, the pigmies are neoteric, upstart usurpers who have appeared only recently on the scene to oust the peke and bear people. Any knowledge of the glaciers they may have is, of course, because they drifted down from the cold regions until the river brought them to these equatorial lands. As for the bear people—and I suspect the same goes for the pekes—their chatter, far from being the beginning of a language, is the decadent tail-end of one. They're

the ancient races, already in decline when the parvenu pigmies descended on them."

"The helminthological evidence supports this theory," Tim said eagerly. "The cayman-heads are too recent to have developed their own peculiar cestodes; they were almost as much harmed by interior parasites, the roundworms, as was Daddy by his fiffin. As you know, in a long-established host-parasite relationship, the amount of internal damage is minimal."

"As was the case with the peke and bear cestodes I uncovered," Craig agreed.

"Directly I saw these roundworms, I realised that Dangerfield's claim that the pigmies were the ancient species and their 'pets' the new might be the very reverse of the truth. I came over here at once, hoping to find proof: and here it is."

"It was a good idea, Tim," Barney said heartily, "but you shouldn't have done it alone—far too risky."

"The habit of secretiveness is catching," Tim said.

He looked challengingly at Craig, but the chief ecologist seemed not to have heard the remark, striding grimly over to the door and putting an ear to it. Barney and Tim listened too. The noise was faint at first; then it was unmistakable, a chorus of gutteral grunts and croaks. The cry gas had dispersed. The pigmies were pressing back into the temple.

Almost visibly, this sound took on depth and volume. It rose to a sudden climax as claws struck the outside of the door. Craig stood back. The door shook. A babel of noise revealed that the pigmies had arrived in strength.

"This is not a very good place in which to stay," Craig said, turning back to the other two. "Is there another exit?"

Hastily, they moved down the long room. Its walls were blank. Behind them, urging them on, the wooden door rattled and groaned dangerously. At the far end, a screen stood. Behind it, two steps led up to a narrow door. When Barney tried it, it would not open. With one thrust of his great shoulders, Barney sent it shattering back. Rusted hinges and lock left a red, bitter powder floating on the air. Climbing over the door, they found themselves in a steep and narrow tunnel, so small that they were forced to go one ahead of the other.

" I should hate to be caught in here," Tim said. " Do you think the pigmies will actually dare to enter the tomb-room? They seem to regard it as sacred."

" Their blood's up. A superstition will hardly bother them," said Barney.

Still Tim hesitated.

" What I still don't understand," he said, " is why the pigmies care so much for the temple if it has nothing to do with them."

" You probably never will," Craig said. " The temple must be a symbol of their new dominance for them and one man's symbol is another man's enigma. I can hear that door splintering ; let's get up this tunnel. It looks like a sort of priest's bunk-hole—it must lead somewhere."

One behind the other, Barney leading, they literally crawled along the shaft. It bore steadily upwards at an angle of forty-five degrees for what seemed like miles. They seemed to crawl for ever. On all sides, the mountain made its presence felt, dwarfing them, threatening them, as if they were cestodes working their way up a vast alimentary canal.

The shaft at last turned upwards still more steeply. They had climbed at this new and more difficult angle for some while when Barney stopped.

" The way's blocked !" he exclaimed.

In the confined space, it sounded almost like a death sentence.

Tim shone the torch. The tunnel was neatly stoppered with a solid substance. " Rock fall !" he whispered.

" We can't use a blaster on it in this space," Barney said, " or we'll cook or suffocate."

Craig passed a knife forward.

" Try the blockage with this," he said, " and see what it's made of."

The stopper flaked reluctantly as Barney scraped. They examined the flakes ; Tim recognised them first.

" This is guano—probably from bats !" he exclaimed. "We must be very near the surface. Thank goodness for that !"

" It's certainly guano," Craig agreed, " but it's almost as hard as stone with age. Look, a limestone shell has formed over the bottom of it : it must be thousands of years old. There may be many feet of guano between us and the surface."

" Then we'll have to dig through it," Barney said.

There was no alternative. It was an unpleasant task. The ill-smelling guano rapidly became softer as they dug, until it reached the consistency of moist cake. They rolled lumps of it back between their knees, sending it bounding back, down into the mountain. It clung stickily to them, and emphasised the parallel between their situation and a cestode in an alimentary canal. They stuck at it grimly, wishing they had kept the respirators.

Twenty-five feet of solid guano had to be tunelled through before they struck air. Barney's head and shoulders emerged into a small cave. A wild dog-like creature backed growling into the open and ran for safety. It had taken over this cave for a lair long after the bats had deserted it. When Barney had climbed out, the other two followed, standing blinking in the intense blue light. They were plastered with filth. Hardly uttering a word to each other, they left the cave and took great breaths of fresh air.

Trees and high bushes surrounded them. The ground sloped steeply down to the left, so they began to descend in that direction. They were high up the mountainside ; Cassivelaunus gleamed through the leaves above them.

" Thank goodness there's nothing else to keep us any longer on Kakakakaxo," Barney said at last. " We just file our report to PES HQ, and we're off. Dangerfield will be glad to see the back of us. I wonder how he'll like the colonists ? They'll come flocking in in no time once HQ gets our clearance. Well, there's nothing here the biggest fool can't handle."

" Except Dangerfield," Craig added.

" The man with the permanent wrong end of the stick !" Tim said, laughing. " He will probably see out his days selling the colonists signed picture postcards of himself."

They emerged from the trees suddenly. Before them was a cliff, steep and bush-studded. The ecologists went to its edge and looked down.

A fine panorama stretched out before them. Far in the distance, perhaps fifty miles away, a range of snow covered mountains seemed to hang suspended in the blue air. Much nearer at hand, winding between mighty stretches of jungle, ran the cold, wide river. On the river banks, the ecologists could see the lumpy bodies of pigmies, basking in the sun ; in the water, others swam and dived, performing miracles of agility.

" Look at them !" Craig exclaimed. " They are really aquatic creatures. They've hardly had time to adapt properly to land life. The dominating factor of their lives remains—fish !"

" And they've already forgotten all about us," Barney said.

They could see the crude settlement was deserted. The overlander was partially discernable through the trees, but it took them an hour of scrambling down hazardous paths before they reached it. Never had the sight of it been more welcome.

Craig went round to look at the severed cry gas hose. It had been neatly chopped, as if by a knife. Obviously, this was Dangerfield's work ; he had expected to trap them in the temple. There was no sign of the old man anywhere. Except for the melancholy captives, sitting at the end of their tethers, the clearing was deserted.

" Before we go, I'm setting these creatures free," Barney said.

He ran among the shelters, slashing at the thongs with a knife, liberating the pekes and the bears. As soon as they found themselves loose, they banded together and trotted off into the jungle without further ado. In a minute they were gone.

" In another two generations," Barney said regretfully, " There probably won't be a bear or a peke on Kakakakaxo alive outside a zoo ; the colonists will make shorter work of them than the cayman-heads have. As for the cayman-heads, I don't doubt they'll only survive by taking to the rivers again."

" There's another contradiction," Tim remarked thoughtfully, as they climbed into the overlander and Barney backed her again through the trees. " Dangerfield said the peke and bear people fought with each other if they had the chance, yet they went off peacefully enough together—and they ruled together once. Where does the fighting come in !"

" As you say, Dangerfield always managed to grab the wrong end of the stick," Craig answered. " If you take the opposite of what he told us, that's likely to be the truth. He has always been too afraid of his subjects to go out and look for the truth."

" And I suppose he just doesn't use his eyes properly," Tim remarked innocently.

" None of us do," Craig said. " Even you, Tim !"

Barney laughed.

" Here it comes," he said. " I warn you, the oracle is about to speak, Tim ! In some ways you're very transparent, Craig ; I've known ever since we left the Tomb of the Old Kings that you had something up your sleeve and were just waiting for an appropriate moment before you produced it."

" What is it, Craig ?" Tim asked curiously.

Barney let Fido out of the overlander ; the little creature hared off across the clearing with one brief backward wave, running to catch up its fellows.

" You were careless when you opened those three pigmies in the lab, Tim," Craig said gently. " I know that you were looking for something else, but if you had been less excited, you would have observed that the cayman-heads are parthenogenic. They have only one sex, reproducing by means of unfertilised eggs."

Just for a minute, Tim's face was a study in emotion, then he said in a small voice, " How interesting ! But does this revelation make any practical difference to the situation ?"

Barney had no such inhibitions. He smote his forehead in savage surprise.

" Ah, I should have seen it myself ! Parthenogenic, of course ! Self fertilising ! Its the obvious explanation of the lack of vanity or sexual inhibition which we noticed. I swear I would have hit on the answer myself, if I hadn't been so occupied with Fido and Co."

He climbed heavily into the driver's seat, slamming the door. The air-conditioning sucked away the invading smell of fish at once.

" Yes, you have an interesting situation on Kakakakaxo," Craig continued. " Try and think how difficult it would be for such a parthenogenic species to visualise a bi-sexual species like man. The concept would probably be beyond them ; it is easier for us to visualise a four-dimensional race. Nevertheless, the pigmies managed to do something of the sort—they're not so foolish as you may have thought, for all their limitations. What is more, they grasped the one fatal weakness of the bi-sexual system : that if you keep the two sexes apart, the race dies out. So without quite realising what they were doing, they did just that, separating male and female. That is how they manage to hold this place. Of course, no scheme is perfect, and quite a few of both sexes escaped into the forest to breed there."

Barney revved the engine, moving the overlander forward, leaving Tim to ask the obvious question.

" Yes," Craig said. " As Fido tried to explain to us, the ' bears ' are males, the " pekes ' the females of *one* species. It just happens to be an extremely dimorphous species, the sexes varying in size and configuration, or we would have guessed the truth at once. The pigmies, in their dim way, knew. They tackled the whole business of conquest in a new way that only a parthenogenic race would think of—they segregated the sexes. That is how they managed to supercede the intellectually superior peke-bear race : by applying the old law of ' Divide and conquer ' in a new way ! I'm now trying to make up my mind whether that is crueller or kinder, in the long run, than slaughter . . ."

Tim whistled.

" So when Dangerfield thought the pekes and bears were fighting," he said, " they were really making love ! And of course the similar cestodes you found in their entrails would have given you the idea ; I ought to have twigged it myself !"

" It must be odd to play God to a world about which you really know or care so little," Barney commented, swinging the big vehicle down the track in the direction of their spaceship.

" It must be indeed," Craig agreed, but he was not thinking of Dangerfield.

The old man hid behind a tree, silently watching the overlander leave. He shook his head sadly, braced himself, hobbled back to his hut. His servants would have to hunt in the jungles before he got today's offering of entrails. He shivered as he thought of those two symbolic and steaming bowls. He shivered for a long time. He was cold ; he was old : from the sky he had come; to the sky he would one day return. But before that, he was going to tell everyone what he really thought of them.

Going to tell them how he hated them.

How he despised them.

How he needed them.

Brian W. Aldiss

From the comfort of our earth-bound armchairs it is virtually impossible to visualise the immensity of outer space and the mind-destroying effect it will have upon human beings when once the Earth has been left behind. A simple repair job on a spaceship in flight between planets will not be accomplished as easily as film versions depict.

OUTSIDE

By Sydney J. Bounds

Teague blinked uncertainly at the wavering pattern of the radar screen. It should mean something, he felt. He was a short man, inclining to fat, with a polished bald skull. He new a lot about trading, something about rockets, and practically nothing about radar.

Davidson knew about radar. He was younger, lean, with a wolfish cast to his features.

He said : " Aerials' been hit by a meteorite. Someone will have to go outside and fix it."

Teague shuddered, the first ripple of fear spreading through his paunchy body, turning his legs to jelly. *Outside.* Outside was the black void of space, endless, airless and star-studded—but the stars were far off, meaningless. Outside really meant the great nothingness, a cold dark infinity that spread out and away from the ship. Just thinking about the *outside* did things to his stomach, nasty unpleasant things.

He moistened his thick lips.

" No way of fixing it from inside ?"

" No way at all." Davidson was sure of it, so sure that Teague began to think he *wanted* to go outside. " It won't take long."

It would have to be fixed, Teague thought dully. The ship was three-quarters of the way along the trip ; turning back was out of the question. So was landing on cloud-covered Venus without radar . . .

Davidson's eyes watched him, thin lips twisted in a cruel smile.

" Scared ?"

Teague mopped his brow ; sweat trickled down his fat body under thin, loose-fitting clothes. It was hot, but it wasn't the heat that made him sweat.

He nodded. " Yes, I'm scared." His simple statement managed to cover itself with dignity.

And so would you be he thought, if you'd lost contact and seen your ship drift away. It was not an uncommon experience and many veteran spaceman suffered from the fear of going outside. Psychologists had invented a fancy name for it, but nothing they'd thought up ever cured it.

Davidson was young, brash and inexperienced—he didn't know, yet.

" I'll go alone," he said abruptly, and began to insert himself into his suit.

Teague began to feel like a hunted man.

" Can't allow that," he muttered. " Regulations. One man can't go out alone."

Davidson ignored him. He adjusted his air cylinder, strapped on magnetic-soled boots, coiled a rope about his waist and made for the lock. He thrust a reaction pistol into his belt.

Teague watched him go, trembling. If only he'd taken on another crewman . . . too late now. His pudgy hands fumbled with the harness of his own suit. His mind was blank as he prepared to follow Davidson.

Air hissed out through the lock. The outer door opened automatically. Teague paused on the threshold of space, unable to take the final step. He closed his eyes and held the safety rail with the grip of a desperate man. Paralysis claimed him.

Davidson's out there, alone, he thought.

He switched on the suit radio.

" Davidson. I'm coming after you."

He snapped the hook of his safety line to the rail and slid one boot over the metal hull. He forced himself to open his eyes, praying silently.

Black and clear, the void yawned before him, terrifying in its immensity. Vertigo made him giddy. He shut his eyes again and took a deep breath. When he opened them next, he kept his head down, staring hard at the curving hull. Slowly, he moved towards the radar aerial.

Fear was a living entity inside him, gnawing at him. He was afraid to stop now. Only a deliberate concentration on reaching Davidson could keep his shaking body under control.

The magnetic soles of his boots gave firm contact ; it felt like wading through glue. His gauntlets were unwieldy ; it was hard to get a grip on the rail. He kept his rope close-hauled. The chemical air hissed in his helmet, reminding him to look at the dial on his chest ; two hours' supply.

" You alright, Davidson ?"

" Sure." The metal-hard voice echoed carelessness. " Nothing to it."

Teague reached the bottom of the aerial jutting from the ship's hull like a spider's web, and looked up. Davidson's suited bulk seemed suspended in nothingness ; the aerial shimmered silver—and the dreadful emptiness beyond drew his gaze, filling his soul with fear.

Teague shut his eyes tight, and shuddered. Dried sweat made his bald scalp itch but there was nothing he could do about that. He seemed to have no strength left, but floated. . . *floating* . . . he clutched the rail again, looking down. His feet had never left the hull. Momentary relief flooded him.

Cautiously, he lifted his head, fixing his gaze on Davidson.

" You fool !"

Davidson had discarded his safety line and was holding the mast with one hand, working with the other.

" Fasten your line," Teague shouted.

" I can work better without it."

Davidson braced himself to bend a metal rod back into place —slipped, the impetus of his own effort carrying him away from the ship. He turned slowly in space, pulled out his reaction pistol. He pressed the firing stud . . . and nothing happened.

Teague stood rooted to the hull, fascinated and horrified. Words choked in his throat :

" Throw it—*throw it* !"

Davidson panicked. He was still revolving when he threw the useless pistol from hin ; and he threw it at the wrong angle. Teague groaned as he saw him drift further away.

Davidson's voice had a sharp edge inside his helmet : " For God's sake . . . throw me a line, man !"

Teague's gloved hands fumbled as though frozen ; he could not control his fingers. He was imagining himself in Davidson's place, sick with terror. He stumbled forward, reaching for the discarded safety line ; it was stiff and snarled itself about the base of the aerial.

He got it free at last, and then he had to look up—up into the emptiness where Davidson was silhouetted against the stars. He couldn't bear to look, but shut his eyes as he cast the line, and inevitably missed.

Davidson was held at a distance by the ship's gravity, a living satellite. In orbit, he disappeared below the horizon of the hull. Teague waited for him to appear again and it was the longest waiting he had ever done.

He felt numb. Davidson was saying something but the meaning was not clear. Teague roused himself.

" I'll reach you next time round," he said without confidence.

He kept his eyes down, watching the edge of the hull round which Davidson must appear. Each second seemed a year. Then a moving form showed against the jet black sky.

Teague cast his line carefully, forcing himself to watch his target. But the rope was short . . .

Davidson floated past, just out of reach, continuing on another circle.

Teague pulled out his own reaction pistol. He *could* shoot himself at Davidson ; the charge was enough to bring them both back. But if he missed . . . well, his own death would not help the man out there.

And the fear was strong in him. He knew he could never force himself to leave the hull. There had to be another way.

Davidson was gone from sight. The air hissed noisily in Teague's helmet, reminding him there was a time limit. Hysterical animal sounds came over the radio.

" Don't panic," he said. " I've thought of something."

It was no easy thing to do, he found. He looped one end of his own rope about his bulky form, taking in the aerial mast as well. He tied himself securely. The trailing end he knotted to one end of Davidson's line, for extra length.

There's no risk if I keep cool, he told himself. He bent over and unstrapped his left boot. The ankle-grip of his suit should be air-tight and he was wearing two pair of thick socks, so the cold would take a little while to penetrate. He tied the boot to the rope and prepared to cast.

Davidson was mumbling something about his soul. I'd never have thought him a religious man, Teague thought, marvelling at this revelation. He was not in sight yet. There was only the yawning void beyond the curving shaft of metal, and the bright far-off stars. One of them wasn't so far off though—one of those glittering dots was Venus.

Davidson showed. Teague, by a desperate effort, kept his eyes wide open and his concentration focused. He took deliberate aim and threw the boot ahead of the orbiting spaceman. It travelled leisurely, held back by the rope . . .

Cursing Teague hauled in and threw again. This time he put his whole strength behind it, and the aerial bent behind him. If it works, he thought, a little light-headed, I'll quit space and turn fisherman.

He watched the rope uncoil, let it pass easily through his gloved hands. The boot seemed somewhere near Davidson now, but he couldn't judge accurately.

" Can't you reach it ?" he yelled, exasperated.

Davidson said : " Too far."

Teague's foot was beginning to feel cold. It seeped up his leg. He squinted along the line, like a rifleman sighting a target. Something was happening at the far end. The permanent magnet that formed the sole of the boot had located Davidson's steel air cylinder, and now it homed on it, slowly, ever so slowly.

Teague held his breath. The line grew taut. No sound travelled as boot and cylinder kissed. Gently, he pulled on the rope . . .

" Davidson ? Can you hear me ? Get hold of the line if you can. Hold it tight !"

Davidson's arms flailed wildly. The cylinder was strapped to his back, the safety line behind him. Teague took up the slack sent it rippling forward—and Davidson caught it.

Eyes shut again, Teague hauled in his catch.

They stood on the hull, side by side, not speaking. Then Teague struggled into his boot while Davidson finished repairing the radar aerial. It did not take long.

They stumbled along the hull and through the airlock.

Davidson removed his suit with a muttered, " Thanks." He kept his head down, his eyes averted.

Teague touched him on the shoulder.

" You're a spaceman now," he said softly. " You will learn to live with it."

A long shudder racked Davidson's lean body and his eyes, when he lifted them, reflected Teague's own fear. The fear of space, of . . . *Outside.*

Sydney J. Bounds

THE LITERARY LINE-UP

As mentioned in the May Editorial James White's novelette " The Ideal Captain " was waiting to be placed and this will commence next month's issue. White has interwoven several fascinating themes in a story which deals with the early conquest of the solar system by space ships of different world powers. It would be unfair to mention any of them here, as the story is full of surprises. There is also another very fine Lester del Rey story entitled " Stability," a long Kenneth Bulmer story " Space Command," and other short stories by Calvin M. Knox and Sydney J. Bounds.

Story ratings for No. 69 were :

1. Wasp (Part 1) - - - - - Eric Frank Russell
2. Painters of Narve - - - - Francis G. Rayer
3. Captain Bedlam - - - - Harry Harrison
4. Next of Kin - - - - - Robert Presslie
5. The Lonely One - - - - Robert Silverberg
6. Secret Weapon - - - - - John Boland

It was as long ago as August 1955 that we published a Lester del Rey story—the beautifully written thought-provoking "Alien"—and we will apologise right now for the delay, because Lester has gone right on producing first-class science fiction. Take a man and his dog, for instance . . .

KEEPERS OF THE HOUSE

By Lester del Rey

Outwardly, there was nothing about the morning to set it apart from thousands of other such mornings the dog had smelled. Yet his great, gaunt body shifted nervously on the rocky shelf over the river, and his short hackles lifted slightly as the skin on his neck tautened. He raised his head, sniffing the wind that blew from the land, and his ears searched for wrongness in the sounds that reached him. Once he whined.

The feeling left from the dream was still troubling him. He had bedded down in a dry shelter back from the water. After he had scraped away the ancient, dried bones of rabbits, it had seemed like a good place. But sleep had been too busy, full of running and of tantalizing smells. And finally, just when he was tearing at something with an almost forgotten flavour, the warm scent in his nostrils had changed to another, and a voice had pierced his ears. He had snapped awake, shivering, with the name still ringing in his head.

"King!"

The dream memory of Doc had bothered him before, but this time even the warmth of the sun had failed to quiet it,

though his nose reported no trace of a human odour now. There was something about this territory. . . .

Abruptly, a motion in the water caught his attention. He edged forward, rising to his feet, while his eyes tracked the big fish. Overhead, a bird must have seen the same prey, since it began dropping. King growled faintly and plunged down into the unpleasant chill of the water. Necessity and decades of near-starvation had taught him perfect form in this unnatural act. A moment later, he was heading for shore with the fish clamped between his jaws.

He found a hollowed spot of dry sand, shook the water out of his short fur, and began tearing at the fish. It was a flavourless breakfast, far inferior to the big salmon that were so easy to catch along the northwestern rivers, but it filled him well enough.

The wind was growing stronger, reminding him of the cold that was creeping down from the north as it seemed to do at regular intervals. Each year, the cold drove him south and the warmth followed to let him move back again. Usually he took the same trail from river to river, but this time—as in a few other restless years—something had driven him to seek a new way, risking the long runs through the foodless wastelands, from river to river, looking for some end he never found.

He pawed out a stubborn bone from between his teeth and got to his feet again, the double drive overcoming the wish to rest in the warmth of the sun. Beyond the shelter of the dunes along the river, the wind was sharper and colder, tossing bits of dry sticks and rubble ahead of it.

He had no idea why he was heading inland, except that it seemed somehow right, until the damp odours on the wind told him that the river must bend in the direction he was heading. By then, he was out of sight of the water and the plants, birds and insects that lived along it. He settled into a steady lope as he came to what had once been a raised roadway. The banked surface was comparatively free of sand, making the going easier.

The road swept past what must have once been heavily wooded land, and King sniffed the familiar odour of rotted logs. A few trees were still standing, dead and girdled to a height above his head, but there was no life there. The sand and dust drifted into piles and shifted before the wind, cover-

ing and uncovering the ever-present broken rabbit bones, scouring at them and the standing trunks, as if to eliminate even this final evidence that there had been life. In some sections, a few trees and plants had survived and were spreading, but the great dust-bowl area here was barren. Except for the wind and the padding of King's feet, there was no sound.

Once the road ran among the wrecks of close-packed houses and King's hackles lifted again, his nose twitching uneasily. It had been twenty years since he had bothered to investigate a house, but this morning his mind kept prickling with strange sensations. He hesitated at a couple of the rust-crumpled cars ; the larger one held crumpled bones that almost meant something to him. Then he left the dead town behind, heading for the strengthening smell of the river.

Ten minutes later, he was staring out at a long concrete bridge that spanned the current. Beyond it lay the city.

The wind was colder now, driving along before a dull greyness that threatened a storm. Below King, the water stretched out, heading toward the south and safety for the winter. He moved uncertainly away from the bridge, then dropped to his haunches, his tongue rolling out doubtfully as he stared at the bridge and the city beyond. Something was wrong in his head. He scratched at his ear, turned to bite at the root of his tail, and still hesitated.

Finally he got to his feet and headed along the pitted surface of the bridge. A sign creaked, jerking his ears forward. It was only half a sign, without a place name, but carrying an iron engraving of its population, now smeared over with weathered paint. King bristled toward it, smelled it cautiously and abruptly nosed behind it. There was only the whisper of the ghost of an odour there, and it was too faint to stimulate his sense more than once. He clawed at it, whining, but the scent from his dreams refused to return.

He began running again, leaping over gaps in the paving. One newly fallen section was impassable, and he had to search his way across twelve-inch, rusty iron beams. He slipped twice, and had to scratch and fight his way back. At mid-point, with the limits of the small city spread out before him, he stopped to explode in a barking sound he hadn't made in thirty years. Then he was plunging on again, until the bridge was behind and he was coursing through the wide, ruined streets at a full run.

Twice he started on false trails through the shops and warehouses, but the third time something seemed to groove itself into his thoughts, like the feeling that led him back to the salmon run each year. It was weak and uncertain, as old memories fought against stronger habits, but it grew as he panted his way out of the heart of the ruined city. Glass fractured and clattered downward from one building, followed by a skull that shattered on the stones. King avoided the shower of fragments and redoubled his speed, his big body bent in arching leaps, and his ears flattened back against his head.

He knew where he was, even before he swept through the last of the rooming house section and came to the edge of the rolling university campus. Then, for a moment, the dawning memory in his mind spun and twisted at the ruin the elements had made. But it was the lack of familiar smells that bothered him most. Even at the end, there had been the eternal odour of the chemistry laboratory, and now even that was gone.

The big gate was open. His legs had begun to bunch for the leap and scramble over it, and the tension in them died slowly. He slowed to a trot, lifting his head in a double bark that rasped the unused muscles of his throat. A huge tree had fallen across the path, but a section had been cut away with an axe. Rotted chips sounded underfoot as King passed by.

Then he was darting around one of the big redstone buildings, heading down the path that led to the back of the campus. There most of the great tree holes still stood, with even their nakedness too thick a screen for his eyes to penetrate. He charged through the rubble of sticks and rabbit bones that filled the path there and took a sudden left turn, to come to a skidding halt.

The two-storey Promethean Laboratory building still stood, and across the fence beyond, some of the familiar houses were still there. King teetered toward one of them, back toward the laboratory, and then again toward the house. He let out two high-pitched barks, and cocked his ears, listening. There was no answering sound.

A sick whine grew in his throat, until the wind suddenly shifted.

The smell was stronger this time. It was wrong—incredibly wrong—but it was beyond mistake. Doc was here! And

with the instinctive identification of wind direction, he knew it had to be the laboratory.

The door was closed, but it snapped open with a groan of hinges as King hit it in full leap. He went rolling over and over across the floor of the littered hall, clawing against the stone tiles instinctively, while his mind rocked at the waves of human scent and the human voice that was beating into his ears !

The smell was so strong to his unaccustomed nostrils that he had no directional sense ; at first the echoes along the hollow corridors also made it hard to locate the voice. He cocked his ears, studying it. It was wrong, like the smell—yet it was the voice of Doc !

". . . as wrong as before. It didn't matter. It was better than starving like rabbits under the biocast. They were falling within minutes after the cable . . ."

King dove through the passage and into the room beyond. The voice went on without pause, coming from a box in front of him. And now the metallic quality under it and the lack of the random ultrasonic overtones of a real voice registered on him. It was only another false voice—another of the things men had, but which he had almost forgotten. Doc's voice—without Doc !

The sound dropped to the bottom of his awareness. King swung around the room. There was something in the scent that made his neck muscles tense, but he knew Doc was there. His eyes adjusted to the glaring light inside, while his nose tried to cut a trail through the thickness of the odours. Both senses located the source at the same time.

Beside the big machine with the slow-spinning rolls of tape there was a bed covered with ragged blankets. A hand lay on the edge of the tape machine, twisted into the controls, and an arm led down to the figure below on the bed.

King's tail flailed the floor, and his legs doubled for the leap that would carry him into Doc's arms. He never made the leap. The scent was wrong and the figure too motionless. King's tail grew limp as he crouched to the floor, inching his way forward, his whine barely audible. He raised his nose at last to the other hand that lay dropping over the side of the bed, and his tongue came out.

The hand was cool and stiff, and there was no response to welcome King's caress.

Slowly, cringing, King drew himself up to look down at what lay on the bed, and to nuzzle it. It didn't look like Doc. Doc had been young and alive, clean-shaven and with dark hair. The body was too thin, and the long beard and hair were stark white. Yet the odour said unquestionably that this was Doc—and that Doc was old—and dead !

Standing with his front feet on the bed, King lifted his muzzle upward, his mouth opening while the deep, long sound ached in his chest. But no sound came. He brought his face down to that of Doc and nuzzled again, whimpering. It did no good.

For a long time he lay there, whining and crying. The voice went on and something ticked regularly on the wall. There was the sound of the wind outside, faint here, but rising steadily. Once King heard his own name used by Doc's voice from the box, and his ears half-lifted.

". . . King and the other three. Probably starved by now, though, since there are no land animals left for them to feed on. King was a smart dog, but . . ."

His name wasn't repeated, though he listened for a while. Later, the voice stopped entirely, while the tape hummed a few more times, clicked, and began flapping a loosened end that knocked over a bottle of pills beside Doc's frozen hand. It clicked again, and slowed to silence, leaving the ticking of the clock the only sound in the room.

Abruptly, there was a rustling noise. King shot to his feet, whirling to face the source, just as a large white rat scuttled from the shadows near the door. It went rigid at his movement, coming slowly to its hind feet, its eyes darting from King to the body of Doc. It let out a high squeak.

The dog dived for it, snarling. But a thread of familiarity was clutching at his mind, slowing his charge. The rat twisted around and through the door, quavering out a series of squeaks. It went scuttling along the hall, through the opened door, and across the steps to the wasteland beyond. By the time King reached outside, it was heading for the great tower across the street and halfway to the rocket field.

King could smell its spoor mixed thickly with that of Doc as he leaped the fence and followed. He heard it squeal once more as it saw him, and heard its claws scrape against the rotted metal of the tower as it scurried up beyond his reach.

But he was slowing already. The tower was dead now, with the great ball of fire gone from its top, but the memory of the tingling, itching false smell that had plagued him while the fire glowed was rising in his mind to drive him back. He hated it as Doc had hated it—and there was still fear for what it had been. He stopped fifty feet beyond the massive girders, bristling as he backed around it.

The concrete hut under it was broken now though, and the guards were gone. He saw some of the guns scattered about —or what was left of them, in the jumble of sand and human skeletons that still lay around the tower. Some of the skeletons were further back, mixed with axes and other guns. An arm was still tangled with a shred of rope that connected to a faded metal sign. Where the great cable had been, a blackened line curved toward the tower, pitting the metal more deeply.

Somehow, King knew the tower of the tingling fire was dead. But he had waited too long. The rat had scrambled down and was heading toward the rocket field. He started after it again, halted, and reluctantly turned back toward the laboratory.

There was pleading in his whine as he found the body of Doc again, which still bore the smell of death. Instinct told King that Doc was dead, and would never be anything but dead. Yet there was the half-remembered smell of his brother Boris, after the sweet smells and the prickings, lying on the table while Doc and the men stood around. Boris had smelled dead—and Boris had walked again, smelling freshly alive. Before that, there had been the dead rats that would not stay dead. And the rabbits—though when the rabbits finally smelled dead, they were all dead, and no more rabbits lived.

He circled Doc uneasily, his lips lifted. He paced to the outer door, searching for any return of the rat, while his mind slowly remembered the other rats. With a quick check on Doc, King darted up the stairs, his legs make a familiar pattern of it, and into the great laboratory there.

There were no more rats. The cages were empty, and the scents he had learned here as a puppy were almost gone. Only the room itself was the same as the one that had haunted his hunger-driven dreams.

There had been the rats on the table when he was young and the tower was only a banging beyond the window. The

rats that died, and the three that did not, when the men drank smelly liquid and shouted and danced all night, shaking their fists at the base of the tower. The table was still there, beyond the place where the men mixed the strange smells. The table where strange things happened to him later that he could not remember. The tail he had owned before the last time on the table still hung there. There had been another wild night when the bandages came off his new tail, puppy-small and weak, but growing quickly enough. This room had been a good place, and some of his later dreams had been good.

Other dreams had brought back the bad times, as they returned to his mind now. The night the tower blazed with fire, Doc swearing while King felt the tingling until it was cut off. The men arguing with Doc, not coming back—even moving toward the hated tower. The huge celebration outside when the tower blazed again, while Doc and his one friend cried. The wild frenzy of stringing wires over the Promethean lab and into a vile-smelling box. After that, there was no more tingling in his nostrils inside the lab, but things had grown worse in spite of it.

King was trembling as he finished his inspection for rats, and his legs beat a frantic tattoo down the stairs. The fear was as thick as it had been when the men came and took him and his brothers away from Doc, to jam them into planes with other dogs and dump them far away, where the rabbits were thick—and almost useless for food.

Doc had fought then, even moving outside the safety of the laboratory, but the men had taken the dogs. Yet Doc had been alive. And now he was dead.

Fear twisted in King, settling into something sick. He paced around the body, growling and whining. Once he stopped to lick the hand ; it was colder now, and there was no moisture on it. The scent was growing more wrong as the body cooled.

Life had not come back while he was gone.

He licked Doc's hand again, and an answering chill went through the dog. The feeling of death began to settle deeper —a feeling inside that grew and swallowed him, a hungry feeling. He tried to shake it away, as he would have shaken the neck of the rat, but it stuck.

There was real hunger mixed with it. Eating was never good on the trip south, and he had burned too much energy chasing about that morning. The fish had not been enough. The smell of stale food of some kind in the room tantalized him, though he could find none, and reminded him there had been traces of the same odours along the path the rat had taken. The saliva was rising in his mouth at the thought. It drew him out, while the death inside pressed him away.

He started off twice, to return each time for another inspection. He whimpered and tried tugging at the sleeve of the arm. The rags parted, but Doc gave no sign. The death smell was stronger. King paced about, fighting the hunger and misery until they were too much. There was the food smell, the rat—and he would come back to Doc . . .

A faint mist was being driven along by the wind as he reached the tower again, braving it this time without stopping. Until the rain washed it away, the spoor would be all the stronger for the moisture in the air, and he followed it easily, until it ended on the blasted area of the rocket field.

King stopped at the sight of the bent and worn take-off cradles. From the distance, the first faint roll of thunder came, and he bolted stiff-legged, snarling with fear, as if one of the monster ships he had seen the men building so frantically were blasting up again.

The excitement of the frenzied construction had drawn him to it, even when it meant sneaking away from Doc—so that he had been present after the infants were all aboard, and the rocket took off. The thunder-booming roar, the gout of eye-searing flame and the smell that paralyzed his nose for hours had sent him cringing back to shiver at Doc's feet for hours, and each new take-off had brought a fresh attack. He still wanted nothing to do with the rockets.

The cradles were empty now, however—except for something that looked like one that had broken and was lying on its sides, the big tubes ripped away, and the ground scorched around it. And as he looked, the distant form of the rat appeared from below it and leaped upward through a door there.

King edged toward it, following the trail that led there, uncertain. It looked dead, but the other that had roared away on its lightning and thunder had also seemed dead. Then real lightning and thunder boomed behind him, and he forced himself to a faster trot.

The hulk seemed harmless. There were none of the chemical smells now, and the fumes of the ancient blast that had fizzled were gone. He moved gingerly toward the door, his nose twitching at the odours that came from it, just as the rat appeared.

It saw him and squeaked sharply, dashing back inside. King abandoned his caution. With a low growl, he leaped through the doorway above the ground. The edge of the metal tore at him, thin projections sticking out where it had been crudely hacked away. He snapped at it, then turned to find the rat.

There was enough light inside to see dimly. The rat had retreated into a narrow pipe that ran back. King tried to poke his nose into it, then fished with his paw. The rat drew back and snapped at him. Its teeth missed, but it was enough to teach him caution.

He drew back, crunching across a litter of dried papers, foil and junk he did not recognize. A thicker bundle twisted under his feet, and the thick, heavy smell of meat—red meat, not the weak flesh of fish—filled his nostrils. Without thinking he snapped down.

The stuff was dry and hard, disappointing at first. But as he chewed, over the salt and the odd flavourings, the almost forgotten flavour came through, sending saliva dripping from his mouth. From the odours here, he knew the rat had been eating it before he came, but it didn't matter. He finished the package, spitting out the wax, metal, and plastics that surrounded it as best he could. Then his nose led him along the trail of the rat's gnawing, back to the few tons of concentrate that were left.

The wrappings let through no smell to guide him, but he had learned to find food where it could be discovered. He tore into a package, gasping as a thick, fruity stuff seared at his tongue. He tried again, further away. He ripped away the covering first, and settled down with the brick between his paws, working on it until it was gone.

Outside, the rain had increased to a torrent. He studied the rat and the view outside, and finally curled up against the door, blocking the rat's egress. Some rain came through, making a small puddle on the floor and wetting his coat, but he disregarded it at first, until the thirst began to grow in him. He lapped at the puddle, finding some relief.

His stomach began to feel wrong then. It was heavy, full and miserable. He fought against it, lapping more water. The rat came out of its hole and found another brick of food. He heard it gnawing, but the effort of moving was too great.

When the sickness finally won, he felt better. But it was an hour later, while the storm raged and the lightning split the sky with waves of solid fear, before he could pull himself back to another brick. This time he ate more carefully, stopping to drink between parts of his meal. It worked better. The food stayed with him, and his hunger was finally satisfied.

He lay near the doorway of the old rocket, staring out through the darkness that was still split by lightning. The rat scurried about behind him, but he let it go. Now that it was harmless and his stomach was filled, some of the old patterns began to stir in his mind. The rat was one he had known so long ago, its smell grown old, but still clearly identifiable.

He had twice tried to leave the ship and force his way back to where Doc was lying, but the lightning drove him back. Now he lifted his voice in a long, mournful bark. There was no answering call from Doc. He began working himself up for another try.

Lightning crashed down in the direction of the laboratory. The building itself stood out in the glare, with every wire of its outer covering glowing white hot. There was a roll of sharp thunder close by, and then another explosion that seemed to open the laboratory up in a blossom of flame through the abating rain.

King muttered unhappily, licking his lips uneasily, while his tail curved tighter against him. But now, while the flame still smoldered around the distant building and the lightning might come back, now was no time to risk it.

He turned around several times, scraping away the litter, buried his nose in the tuft of his tail, and tried to relax. He was almost asleep when he felt the rat creep up to him. It must have recognised his smell, too, since it settled down against him as it had done when they were both together in the laboratory with Doc. He snarled faintly, then let it alone, and went to sleep. Surprisingly, there were no dreams to bother him.

The rat was gone in the morning when King awoke, and the sun was shining, though the quieter wind held a coldness that was too close to freezing to suit him. He hesitated, turning back toward the food stores. Then the sight of the rat, racing across the space near the tower, decided him. With an unhappy growl, he dropped from the hulk of the rocket and took out after it.

If the rat got there before he did, and Doc needed him . . .

In open running, the rat was no match for him. It drew aside, its high voice chattering, as he thundered up. He did not turn, but drove on, heading at a full run for the laboratory.

There was no laboratory ! The steps were there, blackened and cracked. Some of the walls still stood. But the building he had known was gone. Beside it, the trunk of one of the big trees had been blasted apart, and now had its tattered remnants strewn over the dirt, mingling with the coals from the fire that had gutted the building. A few were still smoking, though the rain had put out the blaze before it had completely burned out by itself. The heavy, acrid scent of damp, burned wood loaded the air, concealing everything else from his scent.

He uttered a short, anguished yelp and went dashing through the doorway. The ashes were hot, and the stones left from the floor were hotter, but he could bear them. He hardly felt them as he swung toward what had once been the room where Doc lay.

The box from which the voice had come was gone, but the twisted wreck of the tape machine was there. And beside it, charred scraps showed what had once been a bed.

King cried out as his nose touched the heat, but he was pawing frantically, disregarding the pain. He could stand it —and he had to. He shovelled the refuse aside, digging for something that was his. And finally, under the charred raggedness, there were traces. There was even enough to know that it had once been Doc.

And Doc was still dead—as dead as the meat that once came from cans had been dead.

King whimpered over the remains, while the rat climbed onto a section of the wall and chattered uneasily. But the dog was already backing away. He stopped beyond the hot ruins of the building to lift his head. For a second, he held the pose while the rat watched him, before his head came down and he turned slowly away.

The food in the rocket lay to his right, and the old gate through which he had first come was on his left. He licked his lips as his eyes turned to the rocket, but his legs moved unwaveringly left. The steady walk turned into a trot, and his stride lengthened, carrying him back to the rooming-house section, and on into the former business section. There had been other fires, and one had spread across several blocks. He swung around it and back to the street he had first taken.

Ahead of him, the bridge came into view, and nearer was the bank of the river on this side.

King did not waver from his course. His legs paced out onto the rotten pavement that would carry him across the stream. He moved on, slowing as he had to walk the girders again. When he was past that section, and at the mid-point of the bridge, something seemed to turn him.

The town lay behind him from here, most of it visible at the crest of the bridge. The rain and the storm had made changes, but they were too small to notice. And the university lay at the edge of King's vision, though some of the tower could be seen. He faced toward it, and then unerringly toward the place where the laboratory should have been.

Now his muzzle lifted into the air as he sank to his haunches. He seemed to brace himself, and his lungs expanded slowly. He could feel it, and the need of it. The instinct behind it was too old for remembrance, but the ritual came finally by itself, with no conscious control.

His mouth opened, and the dirge keened on the air, lifting and driving upward toward the empty sky above.

There was only the single requiem. Then King swung back toward the distant shore, picking his way along the worn bridge.

He slipped down the crumbled bank to the thin edge of sand near the stream and turned southward, trotting on steadily with the cold wind at his back.

Somewhere, there would be a place to fish for his breakfast.

Lester del Rey

It takes a long time to disseminate the scientific facts resulting from observations and experiments and although the planet Mars came close to us nearly eighteen months ago the following data is currently up-to-date.

LIFE AT LAST

By Kenneth Johns

During 1957 the news was released that life is not only a possibility but almost a certainty on the Red Planet. The first signs of extra-terrestrial life have been confirmed.

Dr. William Sinton has told of his experiments at the opposition with Mars of 1956, experiments that resulted in the detection of infrared absorption lines in sunlight reflected from Mars. And the absorption lines are typical of organic matter.

Using a sixty-one inch telescope and an extremely sensitive infrared cell, he kept watch night after night as Mars closed in on Earth, hoping to find the lines that he had already established as present in the light reflected from terrestrial plant life such as leaves and lichens.

His success means a number of milestones have been passed in the history of astronomy. Life—real life—at last on Mars ! And, into the bargain, the first factual knowledge we have that life does exist in the cosmos outside our own world.

Astronomers must be forcibly reminded of those famous absorption bands which once positively proved that chlorophyll existed on the giant planets, only to have later workers show the true sources. That line in the spectrogram showed chlorophyll on the four outer giants, being strongest on Neptune, and the obvious answer was a form of life that floated in the atmosphere : aerial plankton !

Then, when the true temperatures of the giants was established, those chlorophyll lines, looked at again, turned into absorption lines of ammonia and methane.

And it is only quite recently that these, in turn, have been proved to be only traces in an atmosphere of hydrogen and helium . . .

Dr. Sinton's success also means that the life he has discovered must be there now, for any long-dead vegetation would have been covered by the great dust storms that range over the Martian surface and on the latest conjunction interfered drastically with most of the astronomical photographs and observations made in that critical close period.

The results are not entirely unexpected, for no scientist was prepared to say that there could not be life on Mars—just as few were prepared to agree that it was a certainty.

However, carbon-hydrogen life forms are known on Earth which could colonise Mars successfully. This in spite of an environment equivalent to an earthly altitude of ten miles, and with far less oxygen available on Mars than is found at that height above Earth.

In 1935, bacteria collected at a height of thirteen miles by the balloon Explorer II were found to thrive when warmed. Whilst the limit for warm-blooded life is found at an altitude of about six miles, the limit for cold-blooded animals extends to fifteen miles and lichens can continue to grow at a pressure equivalent to that found at twenty miles high.

Some forms of terrestrial life become latent and can shut up shop and withstand temperatures down probably to absolute zero ; but all have to be within the temperature range lying between minus 5 degrees Centigrade and 100 degrees in order to be able to grow. This range is found in a 75 million mile zone around the Sun and includes the planets, Venus, Earth and Mars.

Lichens are the toughest form of plant life and in themselves are a prime example of the fascination of nature's methods. Each is a duel organism, being a symbiosis of a fungus and an alga. The fungus provides a blanket against cold and the loss of moisture whilst the alga utilises photosynthesis to form oxygen and create organic compounds. Normally they are very slow growing and when they reproduce, which they do vegetatively, filaments of the fungus break off. If these filaments contain algae then a lichen will result ; if they do not, then the fungus dies. Lichens are known to grow on otherwise sterile lava on the slopes of mountains and are usually the first type of vegetation to occur in the reclamation of devastated land.

With these facts known, it is logical to postulate that, as far as we can now tell, a lichenous type of vegetation would be the most likely to find on Mars.

In addition, a considerable portion of the fifty-two-and-a-half million square miles of the surface of Mars would have to be covered by plants to create strong enough absorption lines to be detected across the interplanetary gulf.

Further proof that carbon-based life in its lowliest forms is possible on Mars comes from a series of experiments on Earth. Attempting to duplicate the Martian environment, two scientists of the U.S. Air Force School of Aviation Medicine set up the first out-world chamber upon Earth.

In the chamber they placed soil from a mountain top, dessicated it until it was almost bone-dry, purged out the life-giving oxygen with nitrogen and then pumped the pressure down to a tenth of an atmosphere. This was as near as they could get to known Martian conditions ; but they did not rest content with what they had done.

The final Martian simulation came when they alternately froze and warmed it to 21 degrees Centigrade over a series of periods corresponding to the progression of days and nights upon Mars.

No complex terrestrial life could withstand this sort of treatment. The important finding, however, was that the soil continued to teem with Earthly bacteria. They actually multiplied during the warm periods, when there was only 0.2% water present in the soil.

If the current theories of the melting of the wafer-thin polar ice-caps and the subsequent seepage of moisture from the

poles is correct, based on the colour changes that occur on Mars, then there is sufficient water available for this type of life. Maybe that life is lichenous in type. And, on Earth in the arctic regions, lichens are an important item of food. Maybe, on Mars, they are food, too.

But food for what we cannot at the moment tell.

Starting with simple bacteria, there is no earthly (or martian) reason why higher forms of life should not evolve from such humble beginnings and multiply in the environment of Mars.

We know from Terrestrial study that forms of life do not usually occur in a solitary state ; life moves in chains. Where there is plankton in the seas it becomes inevitable that there will be fish ; where there is succulent grazing then there will be herds of herbivores.

What Dr. Sinton has done with his discovery is to point out to us one link in such a chain. His absorption lines show that organic matter exists upon Mars.

Whether it be lichens or bacteria—or some *other* form of life of which we can have no conception—this means that the great dust storms that roil across the dead sea bottoms do not lash an empty and a lifeless land.

Kenneth Johns

TOWER FOR ONE

Although John Kippax's best medium is the fantasy story (he appears regularly in Science Fantasy *and has the lead novelette in No. 30) he occasionally turns in a rare gem for this magazine. As in the present instance—where an artist cannot see the picture because of the colours.*

By John Kippax

Everything about Margesson, from the hunched attitude of his body, the disarray of his black hair, the rubbing of the aquiline nose with the tip of the forefinger, the ash-removing twitch for the cigarette to the drawing down of the thick brows, showed that he did care what the art critics said.

" . . . hesitates to condemn such effusions," said the review. " Kurt Margesson is only thirty-one, and control over such effects as he attempts may come with maturity—or more practice . . ."

He stubbed out his cigarette with an angry gesture. " Or practice !" Damned with faint praise again ! He had met those critics at his first exhibition two years ago, and he had tried in vain to explain what he was doing. Jackals, all of them !

He slammed down the papers and strode about the room. It was a comfortable enough place, for now Margesson had money and to spare. He paused to look at the picture of himself taken nine years ago, just after he had graduated B.Sc. (Engineering). Next to it was another, of himself and a girl. That had been on water project three, seven years ago, on Mars. No, that life was over. It had finished when uncle

Herbert had left him ten thousand a year. He left the room and crossed to his studio, an airy, well-lit place. He surveyed the painting, and his handsome features were marred by a savage frown. He stared ; no, he did not doubt the rightness of what he was trying to do ; he did *not* doubt. Without taking his eyes from the canvas, his hand sought upon a table for a knife which he knew was there. With a sudden rush of violence he ripped a double slash across the picture. Then he flung down the knife and he swore bitterly. In this symbolically dramatic fashion did Kurt Margesson sever himself from the ties of his native planet, and all that he had tried to do there.

The travel agent had been doubtful and reassuring by turns. " Oh, yes sir, there's no doubt that you can get there. Our organisation on Alpha Centauri II has positively confirmed that . . ." He broke off and favoured Margesson with a doubtful stare.

Margesson thought that he understood the look. " If the stereos you have shown me are accurate, then I think that the planet will suit me admirably. They've had no visitors for a couple of hundred years, but that needn't matter, as long as they're earth people." He thumbed the typed sheets. "Mostly Indonesian and Japanese families, some industry and mining, mostly agricultural settlements, a kind of family hierarchy democracy. Climate, earth-type sub-tropical, native inhabitants humanoid, about eighty IQ. Never mind. Look at those colours ! I can paint there. I'll paint just for myself. What do I want with a world that rejects my work ?" He stopped when he found that he was talking out loud.

The travel agent pretended not to notice, but he put in, " I suggest that you take a good supply of painting material, sir. Freight charges are very heavy. Now, we will co-operate with your bankers in the transference of . . ."

Three earth months later, Margesson was on the last stage of his journey to Krios V, to paint for himself. But was that possible ? What would his inspiration be like if he did not have an audience ? Margesson could not see himself as some of those earth critics had seen him—as an artist manque ! He saw himself as a neglected genius, fleeing from the Philistines. He leaned back in his seat in the observation lounge,

no longer interested in the star patterns as the ship, now in normal space, decelerated for the orbiting with the planet.

An earth day after that, he was down at the small spaceport on Krios V. There was a little crowd there to see the landing. His kit was unloaded, and Margesson watched the freight officials superintending the stowage of some of the exportable products of the planet. He realised that, to these people, he was something of a curiosity. An official, looking both Chinese and Japanese, plus some other, rather fleshier strain, came forward smiling. " Mr. Margesson ? We know about you. Everything is ready."

" Good. Do I go to a hotel ?" He screwed up his eyes in the strong light.

" Oh, no. We have certain customs here which must be obeyed. You see . . ."

He rattled on about the mores of polite Kriosan society. Margesson put on a pair of sunglasses and at once felt better. The colours were all that the travel agent's stereos had made out. There were many greens, and the earth colours were red and tawny brown. In contrast to this, the colours of the buildings, some of concrete but many of wood, were pale. They seemed nice people, clean and brown-skinned, with the little children pretty as dolls.

" . . . that being so, sir, when we have cleared your few documents, you are asked to await the arrival of a young lady. Your bungalow is not quite ready, and it was thought, with an eye to good manners, that you would best get to know our lovely world as the guest of a family, for a few days. If you will come with me, sir—"

Margesson was lulled. He followed. At least they treated him as *somebody*. In the lounge Oshi, his guide, found him a chair, and a sparkling green drink. " Tega juice, Mr. Margesson. Rather scarce this year, as many of the plantations are flooded."

Margesson sipped the drink. " This is delicious."

Oshi gestured. " Here comes the young lady, now, sir."

Margesson got up. So this was Miss Mary Zensaku, daughter of Judge Zensaku, chief justice of all Krios. He was to be their guest. They *must* know that he was a famous artist.

And then she was standing before him. He felt slightly breathless. She was dressed in a pale lemon costume, a thing which was and yet was not a robe, and her hair was black,

and so were her eyes. Her complexion was smooth and brown, her lips were full and red, and the figure was exactly the sort to match such good looks. Behind her came two native Kriosians, thin, large-eyed creatures, dressed in white.

" Mr. Margesson ? I hope that you haven't been waiting long." Her voice was soft and musical. " You know all about staying with us ?"

He could not take his eyes off her. " Yes, I know. I'm very grateful to you."

The servants had taken his smaller grips. " That's all your luggage stowed," she said, dismissing the two men on their return. " Shall we go ?"

They went out into the sunshine, where a low, smooth landcar of expensive design was waiting. " The family's one luxury," she smiled, " do get in."

Margesson was still a little dazed and baffled by it all, but he got in, and soon they had left the spaceport and were on a broad highway which led through groves of fruit bushes, the leaves of which were a brilliant yellow green. Then they topped a rise, and the city of Krios lay spread before them. He could see that it had been laid out with care, with wide belts of parkland between the various districts, and with a distant industrial area well separated from the rest of the city. He noticed again that there was much building in wood. These things he observed in between taking long looks at his vivacious companion ; she was intensely human, a vivid, live creature. Are there any more at home like you ? he wondered.

As though in answer to the unspoken question, Mary Zensaku said, " You must do little for the first two or three days, until you have got used to the lighter gravity and the richer air. I and my five sisters will look after you."

" Thank you. I do appreciate your kindness."

" It's an old Kriosan custom."

He said, " How strong the colours are."

" Ah, yes," she replied, in her soft voice. " The colours. Naturally, you would notice that." She slowed the car, took a left turn to where a narrower road wound among the fruit groves, and taller trees with purple blossoms. As soon as they had passed through these, they came to a broad clearing, filled with lawns and trees and well-maintained flower beds, the whole dominated by a well-designed wooden house, which,

to Margesson's eye, was somehow lacking in the matter of colour. As they drew up to the wide loggia entrance, five girls whose ages ranged from about fifteen to twenty-two clad in playsuits, came running out. Margesson decided that he was going to like being on Krios V.

After he had been there two days, Margesson met the head of the household, Judge Zensaku. His worship had been on circuit in a distant part of the planet, but his arrival in no way interrupted the process of settling in with the family. Margesson had his own personal servant, his own airy quarters, and he could not have been more comfortable. Mary and her sisters were never guilty of the slightest intrusion upon him, but they were always there whenever he needed their company. On this world, there was none of the super luxury which had been at his call on Sol III, but the standards of Krios V, in their way, were very good and complete. His own bungalow was nearing completion, not far from where he was now living, but he did not go over to see it as the Zensakus assured him that this was not good manners. For the moment, he was content.

Judge Zensaku was a short, energetic man who barely came up to Margesson's shoulder. He claimed to be fifty-six, though he could have passed for ten years younger. His smooth black hair was touched only a little with grey, and his round face held black eyes that flickered with a sharp intelligence. Margesson found that if the women of the house did not ask questions, the men did. Not long after they had met for the first time, and they were talking alone, Zensaku said, " I see that you are a water engineer, Mr. Margesson. When I learned that I thought that you were just what we wanted. Then I wondered how and why a water engineer from Earth should come so far."

Margesson explained, without embarrassment, the details of his financial independence, and also the reasons, as he saw them, for his coming to Krios V. Zensaku looked very thoughtful, and, when his guest had finished, the judge beckoned the other outside. Zensaku slipped off his robe, and thus reduced his dress to a pair of trunks.

" Come," he said gravely, " let us lie in the water and talk about this."

Margesson followed his host into the swimming pool. Zensaku continued, " I find this very interesting. You, a

qualified man in an important branch of engineering, would sooner be an artist here?"

"Yes," said Margesson firmly.

"This intrigues me greatly." The older man flapped the water gently. The brilliance of the garden hurt Margesson's eyes. He sat feeling irritated, while Zensaku floated idly, talking to the sky. Margesson said, "Perhaps I do not make myself clear. I had always wanted to paint. When I got the opportunity, I took it." He told of the engineering project on Mars, and how the upsurge of the desire to paint coincided with his acquisition of independence. It seemed to him that Zensaku was only half listening. Margesson realised that he must try to understand these people, however. They had made a pretty good job of understanding him so far.

Zensaku asked, "You feel it worthwhile to spend your life doing this?"

"To be an artist," said Margesson sententiously, "is to be a ruler of the world."

There was no spite in the other's voice when he replied, "But you had to find another world to rule?"

Margesson suddenly decided that he wanted to swim, quite energetically.

When he moved into his house he admired it for many things, and the feeling that he had of its lacking something he put down to the natural alienness of the civilisation which had now grown away from the parent. He must not be too ready to criticise; he was of this planet now. His servants were good, and he had nothing to do but paint.

Mary Zensaku came to see him every day, to help, she said, with the adjustment of the native Kriosans to their new master, and to watch Margesson's diet. She was all kindness and grace, and Margesson looked forward to her comings.

He had been surprised to find that he could not buy a landcar for his own use. These were allotted on the basis of importance to the community, and Margesson did not stand a chance. He bought a bicycle, and even that he did not get at once. Mary chaffed him about it. "You must not be put out. A bicycle is a wonderful thing to have. Are you not happy?"

Despite a certain lethargy, Margesson admitted that he was in good shape. "Oh, I'm all right. I've rigged up the bicycle with a carrier, and I can get all the kit I want onto it."

She smiled and said that that was very satisfactory. He felt disturbed ; not once, in all her visits, had she asked about his paintings. Was it a part of their politeness code ? He said, " My studio is perfect, now."

She smiled. He said, " Come and see."

He showed her in. Here stood two easels, small tables with paints and oils and brushes, and a large drawing board on a table together with pencils and charcoal. It was very light and airy. He showed a large abstract, just begun. "This is what I am on at the moment. I call it, ' A First Sight of Krios '."

" We are honoured."

He asked clumsily, " Do you feel for this sort of thing ?" As his eyes sought her face, ran over his lissom figure, he knew that one day soon he must do a portrait of her. And he would make it the number one exhibit of the exhibition which he must soon begin to think about.

She answered, " I feel for it, certainly ; its rhythms are powerful. But it is not Krios. I see it as a wrongly prophetic rendering in terms of unhappy past experience. I'm sure that you know what I mean." She smiled a little ; " Shall we go into the sun ?"

Bemused, Margesson followed her out. Her words flew round him like bats silly in daylight. Margesson swelled a little, resisting what he knew to be right. How could she be so sure, how was she able to give such a swift judgment upon an unfinished work ? He had that feeling with her that he had had with her father—that there was some leg-pulling going on which he could not fathom.

They stripped to the minimum and lay on the grass, near the bushes blazing with colour. Though her last remark had irritated him, nevertheless he felt at ease with her. He said, " The long journey, and all things of Earth are behind me now. I'm glad. I didn't need Earth."

" Did Earth need you, Kurt ?"

She had called him by his first name. But that remark—she was needling again, perhaps without realising what she was doing. He said carefully, " I believe intensely in what I am trying to do. I shall create a durable new language in the medium I have chosen." That was well said, he thought.

She laughed, a clear sound made to dispel all pomposity, and which had the effect of making Margesson shelter behind his own. She said, "Take your time in getting to know us. We have the measure of ourselves, you know."

"So—?"

"Haven't you really come here to find the true Kurt Margesson?"

"You could say that."

She raised on one elbow to speak to him; she was a picture of golden-brown perfection. "Have you found him yet?"

"If I can't find him, who can?"

"Who can?" She was teasing. "Some girl on Earth, perhaps?"

He would not be put out. "Maybe." But he thought, I don't pretend to understand you people, but I know what I'm doing here, I know what I'm worth.

So Margesson worked on, covering canvas after canvas, some abstract, some naturalist in approach, and all the while he was filled with wonder at the rich, almost over-colourful landscapes. At first, his handling of the colour was by no means competent, but after a couple of months he felt that he could command any effect he wanted. He always had a fear of exact drawing, admitting privately that he was not the draughtsman that he should have been. How they'd lap up this stuff on Earth, he thought. Compared to a dozen canvasses which he had here, Gupta's moonscapes or Schuman's first Martian series would be quite put in the shade. How fine it would be to show all those critics who jeered! He admitted that he wanted the approval of others for his work, and one person above all others he needed to approve of him; that was Mary Zensaku.

He was becoming a Kriosan, very gradually. He took a daily paper, he listened to the radio. There was no video, no portation doors on Krios; this was the simple life.

One morning the newsreader said: ". . . in Rawaki have been devastated by the uncontrolled flooding of irrigation heads and flumes in the province. Local engineers estimate the damage at . . ."

Not entirely idly, he wondered what their system was like. He knew that the whole district was in the flood plain of a great river; because of the great amount of evaporation which took place daily, irrigation was necessary to distribute the

plentiful water supply. He stared at his latest canvas as he listened. The colours were getting soberer, he thought. Suppose he had them photographed in stereo, and then sent the stereos back to Earth? That could be done; then perhaps they'd eat their words . . .

". . . said that he believed that complete replanning of the entire water system was the only solution. The planet must look to the future, when more and more people will be living here, and when the standard of living must increase so that . . ."

Mary had strolled in. She looked cool and alluring, dressed all in white, with a green cummerbund and a flower in her hair.

"Busy?"

He smiled cheerfully; some of the overbearing intensity which formerly possessed him was gone from him now. He said, "I'm always busy." He walked to her and looked down at her, the most desirable girl he had ever known. "You look charming, as usual."

"Thank you." She made a little bow. "Have you made any arrangements to eat yet? Come over and have a meal."

"On my bike?"

She laughed. "No, I've got the car."

"I must go and freshen up."

He talked to her from the open bathroom door. "Special occasion?"

"No, but we have some people you might like to meet."

He did not press questions, but he hoped that they might be someone interested in his pictures, someone with whom he might widen his circle. The Zensakus, kind as they were, were interested only in him as a person, for the most part. He thought with a certain hunger about the new worlds to conquer.

Dressed in green and yellow, he went down to the car with her. They drove away. He said, "I know I'm getting used to being here. When I first came, I needed sunglasses, but I can do without now."

"That was to be expected; you will become more and more like us as time goes on."

"I'm one of you now. You know, with my latest paintings I find. . ." He loved to have her listen to him, and she seemed to like to listen. She smiled, and it seemed that her smile was tinged with a little sadness.

At the Zensaku house he was introduced to the two guests, Nishi and Ikeda. They were soberly dressed, middleaged men, and had the same kind of energetic air as Judge Zensaku. Conversation was studiedly light, as was the custom during the meal, and the Zensaku girls twittered like birds.

Nishi remarked, " So you came to Krios to be the kind of artist you felt you should be."

Margesson smiled and agreed.

" What could have been your motive in coming so far ?"

The question was courteous, but seemed to Margesson to have a deeper import. Margesson gave the reasons which he believed to be true ; certainly he believed them, for he had been over them many times in his mind.

Ikeda took up the gentle probing. " So, with all the great variety of art tradition on Earth, you did not feel that you could fit in ?"

Margesson pondered ; the question had a trap-like quality. " Yes, I think that's correct."

" How did the critics treat you ?" asked Zensaku. His question seemed quite light, almost idle.

Margesson answered stiffly, " I did not have time for the critics."

Then the conversation turned to other things. When the meal was over, the judge said, " If you will come into this room Mr. Margesson, I think you will be interested in what we have to show you."

The room at the end of a corridor was bare of all except the essentials. It was the sort of workroom which an architect would have had, if he had all the space he needed. There were tables and drawing boards about, and some expensive pieces of equipment, including a beautiful pantograph. On a table in the centre of the room was a large, carefully executed relief model of a lowland area.

Nishi took charge. " This model is of the lower basin of the Klada river ; Krios city is here. If you refer to the map on the board there, you will see where the flood areas are."

Margesson thought, this has been specially set up for me ? What are they after ? Nevertheless, he felt his interest quicken; it had been so long since he had touched anything like this, and filled his mind with memories of the Mars project.

Nishi continued. " You will see that once we have a big initial flooding, it is so difficult getting the water off in time before . . ."

Here was creative work too, not that it attracted him as his painting did, but both had their problems, different as the two occupations were. He began to ask questions about levels, control points, soil consistency, drain capacities. He asked and asked, and they had the answers for him. His brain grappled with the problem. They said that there was not too much money available for the work, but at the same time, they would be glad to have his opinion.

He thought that he had the solution. " It would be possible to make your temporary measures against this flooding, in fact, part of a bigger overall scheme which might take you ten years, or more. If you were to start taking off your volume here, higher up the river at this main confluence—"

As he explained, Mary looked in, and signalled to her father ; he smiled and nodded back. Margesson was intent upon his exposition. " Once you have pumping stations at these points, you will be able to—"

There was a silence when he finished. Nishi, Ikeda and Zensaku exchanged glances.

" You see," said Zensaku.

" Remarkable," said Nishi.

" So close," said Ikeda.

" Mr. Margesson," said Nishi, " we are most grateful to you. You will be pleased to know that your scheme coincided in all but the smallest details with that just outlined to the district council by Ryuji."

"And Ryuji is our greatest water engineer," put in Zensaku.

Margesson spoke quietly and sincerely ; " I'm honoured." He could feel the cordiality of the other three. Before this moment, he had been telling himself that he was a Kriosan, but now, for the first time, he really knew that it was true.

Zensaku said, " Now, Kurt, there is something else which we would like you see. Along here we have a little gallery, in which my daughetrs have hung some of their pictures."

Margesson looked surprised. " Do all your daughters paint ?"

Zensaku's smile was slow ; he was like the conjuror who has given satisfaction so far, but knows that his best trick is still to come. " Yes, indeed. So do I. Come and take another glimpse out of your ivory tower."

They're so gentle. thought Margesson ; you can't fight it. Ivory tower ? *Another* glimpse ?

Zensaku led them to a long room, entirely lit by natural light. The straw-coloured walls held a selection of pictures. They stood back and let Margesson move along the gallery alone.

The pictures were very reminiscent in style of the far eastern artists of Earth. They were free brush drawings, done straight onto the paper, without any preliminary sketching. In this sort of work, one single incautious stroke could bring irreparable disaster. It needed the highest possible standards of technique and control. Above all, the artist had to be a superb draughtsman ; no bodging over here, for a second attempt at an effect ! The pictures were in black, sepia, and russet brown, the very restraint adding to the beauty.

And his heart sank, for this work was flawless. They can draw, these people, he thought. They see the true line, and they go for it without hesitation. They can draw better than any artist I ever knew on Earth, certainly better than I can. The years of study needed for this sort of thing . . . then, with a cold rush of truth, he told himself that all this was the work of *amateurs* ! Every one of the Zensaku girls was a better artist than he was. His mind felt half-crazed. They had said nothing ! What did they seek—his humiliation ? Surely not—they were genuine people, and Mary, whom he knew he loved, she would not have allowed it ! In his mind rose letters of fire, and they spelled the truth about him. *Second rate*, said the letters, *second rate* !

" I shall never paint again, " he muttered. He walked back to the three men. Mary appeared and smiled at him, and told them that there was coffee ready. The three turned away, but Mary stayed just long enough to take his hand and hold it for a moment. Then he saw that the three men were looking at him again, and there was no malice in their smiles.

They all went in to where the five sisters were waiting. They took their cups ; no one spoke. He knew that they were waiting for him.

At last he said, " Those pictures were beautiful ; can you all —is that the sort of thing that people can do, generally ?"

Mary said, " They're about average."

" My God !" said Margesson softly.

" The movement and rhythm," he said, " the textures—it was all so fantastically beautiful."

" Show him, Tibbs," said Mary, to her youngest sister.

The girl brought a drawing block to Margesson. It was a portrait of him, it was Margesson laid bare in simple quite damning line and wash. It showed the real Margesson—Margesson ignoring the best in himself, engaged in inflationary self-revaluation, filled with self-pity and with self-admiration. As he looked, he knew that they had chosen the right moment for showing this, and he knew too, that such work was utterly beyond him.

" Genius," he muttered, thickly. The youngster smiled and shook her head, and he asked, " Why do you do this now, this afternoon ?"

Mary took his hand ; " It was time. We have seen that you were living in a world of self-deception. You knew the man you wanted to be, and you thought that it would take only time and money to achieve that. You sought for a world in which everything would come right for the person you were *not*. And you chose Krios on which to do that—as an artist !"

" What's wrong with Krios ?" he asked.

She smiled serenely. " Nothing that a stout heart cannot put right."

He chose his words carefully. He felt angry, and he could not wholly disguise it. " So, you made up your minds that I was living my life wrongly, and you thought that I should be taught a lesson. Suppose I tell you that you are wrong, and that I intend to go on painting ? Why, you—you seem to despise the colour that you have here : I don't !"

Mary said, " We do not despise it."

" Kurt," the judge said, " we knew that you were a water engineer, just the sort of man we needed. But when you arrived, we found that you wanted to be an artist. We could not stop you, but we soon discovered that you were deceiving yourself, that you did not have the ability to be an artist, especially upon Krios V. But, you could be a good water engineer, and you could be happy too; look at you this afternoon !"

Margesson was still a little overwhelmed by the little exhibition of pictures. " Why don't you people paint properly, in oils ?"

Mary said, " The brush drawings are part of our cultural heritage, but there is something else. We humans on Krios are born with perfect sight. But there is something in the light which, by the time we reach adolescence, makes us colour blind."

Now everyone was still. He whispered, " Colour blind ; all of you ?"

" Yes. Already it is beginning to affect you. The colours which you used in your early pictures here are not the ones you use now. One day, not so far away, you will find yourself trying to render an oils in monochrome."

He felt angry, at first, and then a despair took hold of him. " That's the penalty ?" But he had time to think, these people are my friends. They want me for what I can do well, as much as for myself.

" You can look at it like that Kurt," she told him, " or you can decide that we have analysed your trouble, and shown you the way back to the full life that you are still capable of living."

" Which you must live," added the judge, " for all our sakes."

They remained still ; Mary took him by the hand and led him into the garden which he saw now, was not the riot of colour it had seemed when he had first arrived. They walked through the trees. When they were alone, she stopped, and turned and faced him. " I will help you in that decision, Kurt . You will not try to evade it ?"

He put his hands on her shoulders ; looking down at her, he managed a faint smile. " Thank you, Mary," he said, " I shall not try to evade it."

John Kippax

During the hundred years which have elapsed since the action of the first 'Troon' story even the family name has undergone a change and 'Ticker's' grandson is of Brazilian birth. Indeed South America and Australasia are now the remaining centres of world culture and the first landing on Mars has been accomplished.

THE THIN GNAT-VOICES

By John Wyndham

MARS A.D. 2094

The calendar-clock tells me that, at home, it is breakfast-time on the 24th of June. There's no reason, as far as I can see, why that should not be so : if it is, I must have been on Mars for exactly ten weeks. Quite a time ; and I wonder how many more weeks to follow . . . ?

One day, other people will come here and find, at least, the ship. I ought to have tried to keep a regular log, but it did not seem worth while—and, anyway, it wouldn't have been regular for long. I have been—well, I had not been quite myself . . . But now that I have faced facts I am calmer, almost resigned ; and I find myself feeling that it would be more creditable not to leave simply a mystery. Someone is sure to come one day ; better not to leave him to unravel it by inference alone, and perhaps wrongly. There are some things I want to say, and some I ought to say—besides, it will give me something to occupy my mind. That is rather important to me ; I don't want to lose my hold on my mind again if I can help it. Funny, it is the early things that stick : there used, I remember, to be an old drawing room song to impress the ladies : 'Let me like a soldier fall !' . . . Hammy, of course, and yet . . .

But no need to hurry. There is, I think, still some time to go . . . I have come out on the other side of something, and now I find in the thought of death a calmness ; it is so much less frightening than the thought of life in this place . . . My regrets have turned outwards—the chief of them is for the distress my Isabella must now be feeling, and for the anxieties I must leave her to face alone as George and Ana grow up . . .

I do not know who is going to read what I am writing. One supposes that it will be some member of an expedition that knows all about us, up to the time of our landing. We gave the bearings of our landing place on the radio, so there should be no great difficulty in finding the ship where she now lies. But one cannot be sure. Possibly the message was not received: there may be reasons why a long time will pass before she is found. It could even be that she will be discovered accidentally by someone who never heard of us . . . so, after all, an account may serve better than a log . . .

I introduce myself : Trunho. Capitao Geoffrey Montgomery Trunho, of the Space Division of the skyforce of Brazil, lately of Avenida Oito de Maio 138, Pretario, Minas Gerais, Brazil, America de Sul. Citizen of the Estados Unidos do Brazil, aged twenty-eight years. Navigator, and sole-surviving crew-member, of the E.U.B. Spacevessel, *Figurao.*

I am Brasileiro by birth. My grandfather, and my father, were formerly British subjects, and became Brazilian by naturalization in the year 2056, at which time they changed the name from Troon to Trunho, for phonetic convenience.

Our family has a space tradition. My great-great-grandfather was the famous Ticker Troon—the one who rode the rocket, at the building of the first Space-Station. My great-grandfather was Commander of the British Moon Station at the time of the Great Northern War, and it is likely that my grandfather would have followed him there later, but for the war. It so happened, however, that the war broke out during my grandfather's term of groundwork at the British Space-House—or, to be more acurate, at one of the Space-House's secret and deep-dug operational centres ; and it happened, further, that the actual outbreak of hostilities occured when he was off-base. He was, in fact, on leave in Jamaica, where he had taken his wife (my grandmother) and my father, then aged six, on a visit to his mother's recently bought house.

Many books have been written since the event, showing that that war was inevitable, and that the high councils knew it to be inevitable ; but my grandfather always denied that. He maintained that on the highest levels, no less than in the public mind, it had come to be thought of as the-war-that-would-never-happen.

Our leaders may have been foolish ; they may, in a long state of deadlock, have been too easily lulled : but they were not criminal lunatics, and they knew what a war must mean. There were, of course, incidents that caused periodical waves of panic, but however troublesome they may have been to trade and to the stock-markets, they were not taken very seriously on the higher political levels, and from a service point of view were even felt not to be a bad thing. Had the never-happen attitude been quite unperturbed there would, without doubt, have been cuts in service allocations, technical progress would have suffered in consequence, and too much of a falling-behind could conceivably mean that the Other Fellows would have gained enough ascendancy and superiority in armament to make them think a quick war worth risking.

In the opinion of his own Department, my grandfather asserted, an actual outbreak seemed no more likely than it had seemed two years, or five years, or ten years before. Their work was going on as usual, organising, re-organising, and superseding in the light of new discoveries ; playing a kind of chess in which one's peices were lost, not to the opponent, but to obsolescence. There never has been, according to him, any conclusive proof that the war was not touched off by some megalomaniac, or even by accident. It had long been axiomatic on both sides that, should missiles arrive, the form was to get one's own missiles into the air as soon as possible, and hit the enemy's potential as fast and as hard as one could—and, in 2044, there was little that could not be considered a part of his potential, from his factories to the morale of his people, and the health of his crops.

So, one night, my grandfather went to sleep in a world where peace was no more restive than it had been for years ; and in the morning he woke in one that had been at war for four hours, with casualties already high in the millions.

All over North America, all over Europe, all over the Russian Empire there were flashes that paled the sun, heat-waves

that seared, and set on fire, whole country-sides. Monstrous plumes were writhing up into the sky, shedding ashes, dust, and death.

My grandfather was immediately obsessed by his duty—his obligation to get back somehow to his post, which was that section of the British Service located in northern Canada. For two days he spent nearly all his time in Kingston, badgering the authorities, and anyone else he could find.

There were plenty of aircraft there, plenty of all kinds, large airliners, crowded freighters, small, owner-flown machines, but they were all coming from the north ; most of them pausing only to refuel, and then fleeing on like migrating birds, to the south. Nothing took off for the north.

Communications were chaotic. No one could tell what fields were still available, still less how long they would remain so. Pilots resolutely refused to take the risk, even for large sums, and the airport authorities backed them up by refusing to sanction any northward flights with an impregnability against which my grandfather, and members of anxious United States citizens battered in vain.

On the evening of the second day, however, he succeeded in buying someone out of a seat on a south-bound aircraft, and set off with the intention of making a circuit via Port Natal, in Brazil, Dakar, and Lisbon, and so to England where he hoped to be able to find a service machine to get him to Canada. In point of fact, he arrived at Freetown, Sierra Leone, about eight days later, and got no further. News there was still scarce and contradictory, but there was enough of it to convince not merely pilots, but everyone else, that even if an aircraft should safely get through, a landing almost anywhere in Europe would mean delayed, if not immediate, suicide.

It took him two months to get home again to Jamaica, by which time, of course, the Northern War was almost history.

It was however, such recent history that the non-combatants were still numbed by the shock. The near-paralysis of fright which had held everyone outside the war-zone for a month was relaxed, but people had still not fully got over their astonishment at finding themselves and their homes surviving undamaged. Still persisting, too, was that heightened awareness which made each new, untroubled day seem a gracious gift, rather than a right. There was a dazed pause, a sense of coming-to again before the worries of life swept back.

And all too soon the worries were plentiful—not only over radiation, active dusts, contaminated waters, diseases threatening both flora and fauna, and such immediate matters ; but also over the whole problem of re-orientation in a world where most of a hemisphere had become a malignant, unapproachable desert . . .

Jamaica, it was clear, was not going to have much to offer except exports for which there was virtually no market. It could sustain itself ; one might be able to go on living there, with much diminished standards, but it was certainly no place to build a new life.

My grandmother was in favour of a move to South Africa where her father was chairman of the board of a small aircraft company. She argued that my grandfather's knowledge and experience would make him a useful addition to the board, and that with most of the great aircraft factories of the world now destroyed, a tremendous growth of the company was inevitable.

My grandfather was unenthusiastic, but he did go as far as to pay a visit there to talk the matter over with his father-in-law. He returned unconverted, however. He was not, he said, at all taken with the place ; there was something about it that made him uneasy. My grandmother, though disappointed, refrained from pressing the matter—which turned out to be fortunate, for a little over a year later her father, and all her relatives there, were among the millions who died in the great African Rising.

But before that took place my grandfather had made his own decision.

" China," he said, " is not out, but she has been very badly mauled and reduced—it will take her a long time to recover. Japan has suffered out of proportion to the material damage there because of the concentration of her population. India is weakened, as usual, by her internal troubles. Africa has been kept backward. Australia is the centre of the surviving British, and may one day become an important nation—but it will take time. South America, however, is intact, and looks to me to be the natural focus of world power in the immediate future ; and that means either Brazil or the Argentine. I should be very much surprised indeed if it were to turn out to be Argentine. So we shall go to Brazil."

To Brazil, then, he went, offering his technical knowledge. Almost immediately he was put in charge of the then rudiment-

ary Space Division of the Brazilian Skyforce to organise the annexation of the battered Satellites, dispatch provision-missiles to the British Moon Station, and then to direct its relief, the rescue of its company—including his father—and its annexation, together with that of the entire Lunar Territory, to the Estados Unidos do Brasil.

The cost of this enterprise, particularly at such a time, was considerable, but it proved to be well justified. Prestige has varied sources. In spite of the fact that the moon Stations and the Satellites had exerted an infinitesimal, and almost self-cancelling, effect upon the Northern War, the knowledge that they were now entirely in Brazilian hands—and perhaps the thought that whenever the moon rose one was being overlooked from Brazilian territory—undoubtedly made a useful contribution to the ascendancy of the Brasilieros at a time when the disordered remnant of the world was searching for a new centre of gravity.

Once he had the space project well in hand, my grandfather, though not yet a Brazilian citizen, was given the leadership of a mission to British Guiana, where he pointed out the advantages that an amputated colony would derive from integration, on terms of full equality of citizenship, with a powerful neighbour. The ex-colony, already uneasily conscious of pressure on its western border from Venezuela, accepted the offer. A few months later, Surinam and French Guiana followed its example; and the Carribbean Federation signed a treaty of friendship with Brazil. In Venezuela, the government, bereft of North American support and markets, fell to a short, sharp revolution whose leaders also elected for integration with Brazil. Columbia, Ecuador, and Peru hastened to sign treaties of support and friendship. Chile concluded a defensive alliance with Argentina. Bolivia, Paraguay, and Uruguay were drawn together into nervous neutrality, and declarations of goodwill towards both their powerful neighbours.

My grandfather took out his naturalization papers, and became a loyal and valued citizen of the Republic.

My father graduated from the University of Sao Paulo in 2062 with a Master's degree in Extra-Terrestrial Engineering, and then spent several years at the government testing-station in the Rio Branco.

It had long been my grandfather's contention that the development of space craft was not simply a matter of prestige,

as some thought, and certainly not the expensive frivolity that others proclaimed it, but a wise precaution that would some day prove its worth. For one thing, he argued, if Brazil were to neglect space, someone else would take it over. For another there would arise, sooner or later, the need for an economic space-freighter. The whole foundation of modern technology rested upon metals ; and with the rich metalliferous areas of Canada, Siberia, and Alaska now unworkable ; with Africa absorbing all she could mine ; India in the market for all she could buy, and South America consuming at an increasing rate, the shortages already apparent in the rarer metals would become more extensive and more acute. The cost, when it should become necessary to seek them in sources outside the Earth, was bound to be great ; at present it would be prohibitive, but he did not believe it need remain prohibitive. If practical freighters were developed it could mean that one day Brazil might have a monopoly of at least the rarer metals and metalliferous earths. . .

How much faith my father had in the argument behind the policy, I do not know. I think it possible that he did not know, either, but used it simply for the problems it raised ; and out of all these his hardiest and most favourite concerned what he called ' the crate '—his name for an economical, unmanned freighter—and the space-assembled cruiser. Numbers of ' crates ' of various types exist on his drawing-boards, but the cruisers—craft radically different in conception from those that must resist the stresses of take-off against the pull of gravity—still remain somewhat fluid in conception.

I myself, though I inherit my family's almost pathological interest in matters beyond the ionsphere, do not share my father's ability to sublimate it in theory and design, wherefore, after taking my degree at Sao Paulo, I attended the Skyforce Academy, and was duly commissioned in the Space Division.

A family connection has its uses. I should not, I am sure, have received preference over better qualified men, but when the original list of twenty volunteers for the appointment of navigator aboard the *Figurao* had been whittled down to four, all equally qualified, I suspect that the name Trunho—and Troon, before it—had some influence on the decision.

Paul Capaneiro, our Commander, very likely owed his selection to not unsimilar circumstances, for his father was a

Marshal in the Skyforce. But it was not so with Camilo Botoes—he was with us simply because he was unique. His intention of visiting another planet seems to have formed about the time he was in his cradle, and, not a great deal later it would appear, he had conceived the idea that some unusual qualification would give him an advantage over the one-line man. He set out to acquire it, with the result that when the call for volunteers came, the Skyforce discovered with some surprise that it had among its personnel a capable electronics officer who was also a geologist, and not merely a dabbler, but one whose published papers made it impossible to ignore his competence to produce a preliminary study in areology.

My own appointment to the crew troubled my mother, and distressed my poor Isabella, but its effect on my father was dichotomous. The *Figurao*, the Big Shot, was the product of his department, and largely of his own ideas. Its success would give him a place in history as the designer of the first interplanetary link ; if I were to go with it, his connection would be still more personal, making the venture something of a family affair. On the other hand, I am his only son ; and he was sharply conscious that the very best of his skill, care, and knowledge must still leave the ship at the mercy of numerous unguessed hazards. The thought that he would be exposing me to risks he had been unable to foresee and could not guard against, was in painful conflict with his awareness that any objections he might make to my going would be construed as lack of confidence in his own work. Thus, I put him in a rendingly difficult situation ; and now I wish, almost more than anything else, that I had the means to tell him that it is not through any shortcoming of his that I shall not be going home to Earth . . .

The launch took place on the 9th of December, a Wednesday. The preliminary jump was quite uneventful, and we followed the usual supply-rocket practice in our intersection with the Satellite orbit, and in taking up station close to the Satellite itself.

I felt sentimentally glad that the Station was Estrellita Primeira ; it made the expedition even more of a family affair, for it was the first space-station, the one that my great-great-grandfather had helped to build though I suppose that most parts of it must have been replaced on account of war and other damage since those days.

We crossed over to Primeira, and put in more than a week of earth-days there while the *Figurao's* atmosphere-protection envelope was removed, and she was refuelled, and fully provisioned. The three of us carried out tests in our various departments, and made a few necessary minor adjustments. Then we waited, almost wishing there had been more readjustments to keep us occupied, until Primeira, the moon, and Mars were in the relative positions calculated for our take-off. At last, however, on Tuesday, the 22nd of December at 0335 R.M.T., we made blast, and launched ourselves on the main journey.

I shall not deal here with the journey itself. All technical information concerning it has been entered by Raul in the official log, which I shall enclose, with this supplementary account, in a metal box.

What I have written so far has two purposes. One is, as I have said, to cover the possibility that it may not be found for a very long time ; the other is to provide factual material by which any more imminent finder may check my mental condition. I have read carefully through it myself, and to me it appears to offer sufficient evidence that I am sane and coherent, and I trust that that will be the opinion of others who may read it, and that they may therefore consider what follows to be equally valid.

The final entry in the log will be seen to record that we were approaching Mars on a spiral. The last message we sent before landing will be found on the file : ' About to attempt landing area Isidis—Syrtis Major. Intended location : Long, 275 : Lat, 48.'

When Camilo had despatched that message, he swung the transmitter across on its bracket to lock it safely against the wall, and then lay back on his couch. Raul and I were already in position on ours. My work was finished, and I had nothing to do but wait. Raul had the extension control panel clamped across his couch in a position where he would still be able to operate it against a pressure of several gravities, if necessary. Everything had gone according to expectations except that our outer surface temperature was somewhat higher than had been calculated—suggesting that the atmosphere is a trifle denser than has been assumed—but the error was small, and of little practical significance.

Raul set about adjusting the angle of the ship, tilting her to preserve the inclination in relation to the braking thrust as we slowed. Our couches turned on their gimbals as the speed decreased and the braking thrust of the main tubes gradually became our vertical support. Finally, when the speed was virtually zero, and we were standing balanced on our discharge, his job, too, was over. He switched-in the landing-control, and lay back, watching the progress of our descent, on the dials.

Beneath us, there now splayed downwards eight narrow radar beams matched for proximity, and each controlling a small lateral firing-tube. The least degree of tilt was registered by one or more of the beams, and corrected by a short blast which restored the ship to balance on the point of the main drive. Another beam directed vertically downwards controlled the force of the main drive itself, relating it to the distance of the surface below, and thus regulating the speed of descent.

The arrangement lowered us, smoothly, and there was only the slightest of lurches as our supporting tripod set down. Then the drive cut out, vibration ceased, and an almost uncanny peace set in.

No-one spoke. The completeness of the silence began to be broken by the ticking and clicking of metal cooling off. Presently Raul sat up, and loosed his safety straps.

" Well, we're there. Your old man did a good job," he said to me.

He got off his couch carefully, cautious of the unfamiliar feeling of gravity, and made for the nearest port. I did the same, and started to unscrew its cover. Camilo swung the radio over on its bracket, and transmitted : " *Figurao* landed safely Mars 0343 R.M.T. 18. 4. 94. Location believed as stated. Will observe and verify." Then he, too, reached for the nearest port-cover.

The view, when I had my port uncovered, was much what I had expected ; an expanse of hummocky, rust-red desert sand reaching away to the horizon. Anywhere else, it would have been the least exciting of all possible views. But it was not any where else : it was Mars, seen as no-one had ever seen it before . . . We did not cheer, we did not slap one another on the back . . . We just went on staring at it . . .

At last Raul said, rather flatly :

" There it is, then. Miles and miles of nothing ; and all of it ours."

He turned away, and went over to a row of dials.

" Atmosphere about fifteen per cent denser than predicted ; that accounts for the overheating," he said. " We'll have to wait for the hull to cool down a bit before we can go out. Oxygen content very low indeed—by the look of things, most of it has been tied up in oxidyzing these deserts." He went over to a locker, and started pulling out spacesuits and gear. He did it clumsily ; after weeks of weightlessness it is difficult to remember that things will drop if you let go of them.

" Funny that error about atmosphere density," said Camilo.

" Not so very," Raul replied. " Just that someone's crack-pot theory about air leaking away into space got written into the assumptions, I reckon. Why the devil should it leak away unless there is a large body around to attract it ? Might as well suggest that our own atmosphere is leaking to the moon, and then back again. Beats me how these loony propositions get a foot in, but I expect we'll find plenty more of them."

" Were they wrong about gravity, too ?" I asked. " I seem to feel a lot heavier than I expected."

" No. That's as calculated. Just a matter of getting used to weight itself," he said.

I crossed the floor, and looked through the port that he had uncovered. The view was almost the same as through mine—though not quite, for in that direction the meeting of sand and sky was marked by a thin dark line. I wondered what it was. At that distance I could see no detail—nor, indeed, judge how far away the horizon was. I turned back, intending to find the eyepiece that would adapt the telescope, but at that moment the floor shifted under my feet . . .

The whole room canted over suddenly, sliding me across the floor. The heavy port cover swung over. It just missed me, but it caught Raul, and sent him slamming against the main control-board. The room tilted more. I was flung back on the couch I had just left, and I clung to it. Camilo came sliding past, trying to grab at the couch supports to stop himself.

There were several thuds, a clatter, and finally a kind of crunching crash which set me bouncing on the couch springs.

When I looked round I found that what had, for the brief period since our landing, been the floor, had become a vertical wall. Obviously the *Figurao* had toppled over, and now lay on its side. Camilo was huddled in the angle made by the erst-

while floor and the curved wall, all mixed up with spacesuits and their accessories. Raul was spreadeagled over the control-board, and I could see blood trickling across it.

I dropped off the couch, and approached Raul. I started to lift his head, but it did not come easily. Then I found out why. It had crashed down on one of the control levers, and the handle had gone in at the temple. There was nothing to be done for him. I scrambled across, and looked at Camilo. He was unconcious, but there was no visible damage. His pulse was strong enough, and I set about trying to bring him round. Several minutes went by before his eyes opened, then they looked at me, screwed up, with lids fluttering, and closed again. I found some brandy. Presently he sighed, and his eyes opened again. They looked at me, wandered about the control room, and came back to me again.

"Mars," he said. "Mars, the bloody planet. Is this Mars?"

There was a silly look about him that made my spirits sink.

"Yes, this is Mars," I told him.

I lifted him on to one of the couches, and made him comfortable there. His eyes closed, and he went off again.

I looked round. The only part of the equipment, other than the spacesuits, that had been loose was the radio-transmitter. Camilo, after using it had pushed it aside, leaving it free to swing on its bracket; it had done just that, and been stove-in when it met one of the couches turning in its gimbals. It looked suitable for writing-off.

I couldn't just sit there, doing nothing but look at the other two, so I disentangled one suit, and coupled it up with its air-supply and batteries, and tested it. It worked perfectly. The thermometer giving the outside hull reading was down quite a bit from what it had been, and I decided to go outside to find the trouble.

Fortunately, as the ship lay, the airlock was at the side, the right side as one faced forward; had it been underneath, it would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, to have got out at all. Even as we lay, it was awkward enough, for the lock had been built to accommodate two men standing and now one had to sit doubled up inside it. It worked, however —though when the outer door opened, the telescopic ladder could not be made to project at a suitable angle. I had to get out by jumping down six feet or so, and my first contact with the surface of Mars was undignified.

To stand there at last was, in the event, depressing. Not just because the only view was arid miles of red sand, but evermore because I was alone.

It was the moment we had thought and talked of for so long, worked so hard for, risked so much for—and this was all. Anti-climax there would surely have been, but it would have been less dreary with someone to share it, with a little ceremony to mark the occasion. Instead, I just stood there, alone. Under the small, weak sun in the purplish sky I was dwindled to a tiny living mote with the barren wilderness pressing all about me . .

Not that it was different from my expectations—in fact, it looked only too like them—and yet I knew now that in all my imaginings I had never remotely touched its real quality. I had thought of it as empty and neutral; never suspected its implicit hostility . . .

Yet there was nothing there, nothing to be afraid of—except the worst thing of all : fear itself. The fear that has no cause, shape or centre ; that same amorphous fear that used to come creeping out of the dark, massing to invade the safety of one's childish bed . . .

I could feel the old panic, forgotten for so many years, rising up again. I was back in my infant self ; all that I had learnt in the years between seemed to vanish ; once more, I was the defenceless, beset by the incomprehensible. I wanted to run back to the ship, as to my mother, for safety. I all but did that . . .

Yet not quite . . . A vestige of my rational mind held me there. It kept on telling me that if I gave in to panic now, it would be far worse the next time, and the time after . . . And gradually, while I stood, the vestige gathered the strength to push the panic back. Soon I could feel it winning, like warm blood flowing in. Then I felt better. I was able to force some objectivity.

I looked carefully round. From this low viewpoint there was no trace anywhere of the dark line that I had seen through the port when the *Figurao* was vertical. All the way round, red sand met purple sky in an endless, even line. There was nothing, nothing at all, on the face of the desert but the ship and myself under the centre of a vast, upturned bowl.

Then I made myself pay attention to the ship. It was easy to see what had happened. Below the light dust of the surface the sand had formed a crust. Our weight had caused the

pediment plate on one of the tripod legs to break through the crust, and we had toppled over. I wondered for a moment if Raul would be able to contrive some way of getting us vertical again—and then suddenly recollected why he would not . . .

I went back into the ship, and looked for something to dig with. Camilo had not moved, and appeared to have fallen into a natural sleep. Luckily, someone had thought of equipping the ship with a sort of entrenching tool. It was small, but it would have to do. Getting Raul outside was unpleasant, and far from easy, but I managed it, and laid him on the sand while I dug. That was not easy work, either, in a spacesuit, and I thought it might take me several shifts. But at about twelve inches down I suddenly broke through, and found myself looking into a black hole. Considering the misadventure to the ship, it seemed possible that the place was honeycombed with such cavities. I enlarged the hole a little until I was able to slide poor Raul into it. Then I blocked the opening with a slab of caked sand, covered it as best I could, and went back to the ship again.

I came out of the airlock to find that Camilo was now awake —not only awake, but sitting up on his couch, regarding me with nervous intensity.

" I don't like Martians," he said.

I looked at him more carefully. His expression was serious, and not at all friendly.

" I don't suppose I would, either," I admitted, keeping my tone matter-of-fact.

His expression became puzzled, then wary. He shook his head.

" Very cunning lot, you Martians," he remarked.

After we had had a meal he seemed a little better, though from time to time I caught him watching me carefully out of the corner of his eye. Indeed, he was paying so much attention to me that it was some time before it occured to him that there should be three of us.

" Where's Raul ?" he asked.

I explained what had happened to Raul, showed him the switch lever that had done the fatal damage, and pointed out through the port the place where Raul now lay. He listened closely, and nodded several times, though not always where a nod seemed appropriate. It was difficult to know whether he was not quite grasping the situation, or whether he was making

reservations of his own. He did not show distress about Raul, only a quiet thoughtfulness, and after he had sat in silent rumination on the matter for a quarter of an hour, it began to get on my nerves.

To break it up, I showed him the radio transmitter.

"It's taken a pretty nasty bash," I said, somewhat unnecessarily. "Do you think you can get it going again?"

Camilo looked it over for some minutes.

"It certainly has," he agreed.

"Yes," I said impatiently, "but the point is, can you fix it?"

He turned his head, and looked at me steadily.

"You want to get into touch with Earth," he announced.

"Of course we do. They'll be expecting reports from us right now. They know our time of landing, but that's all, so far. We've got to put in an immediate report about Raul, and about the state of the ship. Tell them the mess we're in . . ."

He considered that in an unhurried way, and then shook his head, doubtfully.

"I don't know," he said. "You're so cunning, you Martians."

"Oh, for heaven's sake—!" I began, but then made a quick decision that it might be unwise to antagonise him. Rather than drive him into obstinacy, I tried to put across a calmly persuasive line.

He listened patiently, with a slight frown, as one taking into consideration every possible angle. At the end, still without committing himself on whether he thought he could make the radio work or not, he said that it was an important matter that required thinking over. I could only hold my temper for fear of setting up a worse conflict in his mind.

He retreated to his couch and lay on it, presumably to do his important thinking. I stood looking out of the port a while, and then, realising that the day would soon be coming to an end, got out the colour camera, and busied myself with making the first records ever of the stages of a Martian sunset.

This was not a spectacular affair. The small sun grew somewhat redder as it dropped towards the horizon. As it disappeared from sight, the sky turned immediately from purple to black—all except a wispy stretch of cloud, quite surprising to me, which still caught the rays, glowing pinkly for a minute or two, and then vanished. Looking through another port I

could see a small bright disc just above the rim, and climbing almost visibly up the spangled blackness. I took it to be Phobos, and turned the telescope on to it. It does not appear to be of any great interest ; not unlike our own moon, but less mountainous, and much less cratered.

All the time I was uneasily conscious of Camilo. Whenever I took a look in his direction I found his head turned my way, and his eyes watching me in speculative fashion that was difficult to disregard. I did my best, however, and busied myself with fixing the camera to the telescope. The speed of the satellite rendered it none too easy to keep it centred in the field of view, but I made a number of exposures. Camilo had fallen asleep again by the time I had finished, and I was tired enough to be glad to get on my own couch.

Once I had dropped off I slept heavily. When I woke, there was daylight outside the ports, and Camilo standing beside one of them looking out. He must have heard me move for he said, without turning :

" I don't like Mars."

" Nor do I," I agreed. " But then, I never expected to."

" Funny thing," he said. " I got it into my head last night that you were a Martian. Sorry."

" You had a nasty knock," I told him. " Must have shaken you up quite a bit. How are you feeling now ?"

" Oh, all right—bit of a muzzy headache. It'll pass. Damn silly of me thinking you were a Martian. You're not a bit like one, really."

I was in the middle of a yawn and failed to finish it properly.

" What," I inquired, with some caution, " what *are* Martians like ?"

" That's the trouble," he said, still looking out of the port. " It's so hard to see them properly. They're so quick. When you're looking at one place, you see a flicker of them moving in another, just out of the corner of your eye, and by the time you look there they're somewhere else."

" Oh," I said. " But you know, I never noticed any when I was outside yesterday."

" But you weren't looking for them," Camilo pointed out, and truly.

I swung my feet off the couch.

" What about some breakfast," I suggested.

He agreed, but remained by the window while I set about getting things ready—an awkward job with a curved wall for a floor, and everything at right angles from its intended position. Now and then he would glance quickly from one side of the view to the other, often with a little sound of exasperation as though he had just missed something again. It was irritating, but on the whole a slight improvement on being taken for a Martian myself.

" Come and eat," I told him when I had the food ready. " They'll keep."

He left the port with some reluctance, but started in on the food with a good appetite.

" Do you think you'll be able to fix the radio ?" I inquired presently.

" Maybe," he said, " but is it wise ?"

" Why the devil shouldn't it be ?" I demanded, with some restraint.

" Well," he explained, " they might intercept our messages. And if they learn what a mess we're in it could very likely encourage them to attack."

" We'll have to take a chance on that. The important thing for us now is to get into touch with home, and see what they suggest. It seems to me possible, just possible, that we may be able to get the ship back to the vertical somehow—with the gravitation as low as it is. I can plot the course and time of take off, and look after that side, but can we manage her without Raul ? He was the one with experience and special training. I have a *general* idea of the controls, and I suppose you have, but it is only general. This ship isn't built to stand up to the strains of ordinary takeoffs—that's why she had to have a special casing to get her from Earth to Primeira.

" She must have a specially calculated programme of safe velocities for takeoff from here—and that will have to be amended on account of the atmosphere being denser than was reckoned. We don't want to burn her up, or melt her tubes. As things are, I don't begin to know about her acceleration schedule, her safety factors. Damn it, I don't even know, off hand, the escape velocity of Mars."

" It should take you all of two minutes to work that out," Camilo interrupted.

" I daresay, but there are a hell of a lot of things we can't work out without the data. Some of it we'll be able to get from Raul's technical papers, no doubt, but there are bound to be all kinds of questions arising that we shall need advice about."

" M'm," said Camilo, doubtfully. His eyes strayed towards one of the ports for a moment, and then came back to me, looking suspicious again. " You didn't talk to them while you were out there ?" he asked.

" Oh, hell," I said impatiently, and unwisely. " Look, there's nothing out there—nothing but sand. Come out with me, and see for yourself."

He shook his head slowly, and gave me the smile of a man who knows a trick worth two of that.

I was at a loss to know what line to take next. After I had thought about it a bit, it seemed to me that we were not going to get far while he was worried by these Martian phantoms, and the sooner they could be laid, the better.

Perhaps I was wrong there. Perhaps I ought simply to have waited, hoping that the effect of the concussion would wear off. After all, except for the anxiety that must be going on at the other end of our radio link, there was no pressing hurry. The sun-charger would keep our batteries up, even at this distance from the sun ; water is on an almost closed circuit, with very little loss, air-regeneration, too ; there was victualling enough to last two of us for eighteen months. I *could* have waited. But it is one thing to consider a situation retrospectively, and quite another to be at close quarters with a single companion who is slightly off his head, and wondering whether time is likely to make him better or worse . . .

However, as the radio seemed to be in some way entangled in his mind with the intentions of his cunning Martians, I decided to lay aside that subject of the moment, and tried tackling him on his other speciality. I pulled out a lump of the caked sand that I had brought inside, and handed it to him.

" What do you reckon that is ?" I asked.

He gave it the briefest of glances.

" Haematite—Fe_2O_3, "he said, looking at me as if I had asked a pretty stupid question. " Mars," he said, patiently, " is practically all oxides of one kind or another. This'll be the commonest."

" I've been thinking," I said. " One of our main objects, after getting here at all, is to bring in a preliminary report on the geology of Mars."

" Areology," he corrected me. " You can't possibly talk about the geology of Mars. Doesn't make sense."

" All right, areology," I agreed, finding his lucidity encouraging and irritating at the same time. " Well, we can at least make a start on that. There is a dark line on the horizon, over that way, that wants looking into— might be vegetation of some kind. If we get the platform out, we could have a look at it, and at the topography in general, too."

I made the suggestion with a casual air, and awaited his answer with some anxiety, for I felt that if I could use his geological—or areological—interests to lure him outside, even a brief expedition might serve to dispel this notion of lurking Martians, and once that had been achieved, he would be willing to get on with the repair of the radio.

He did not reply immediately, and I restrained myself from looking up for fear of seeming anxious enough to rouse his suspicions. At last, when I had started to consider the next step, he said :

"They wouldn't be able to reach us once the platform lifted, would they ?"

" Of course not—if they are there at all. I've not seen one yet," I said, trying not to give any encouraging support to his fancies.

" I *nearly* saw one half a minute ago. But they're always just too damned quick, blast them," he complained.

" There'd be no hiding from overhead observation in this desert," I pointed out. " If they are there, we'll be able to spot them easily from the platform."

" *If*—" he began indignantly, and then stopped, apparently struck by an idea. After a pause he went on in a quite different tone :

" All right. Yes, that's a good idea. Let's locate the platform, and start getting it out."

His change of front was sudden enough to make me look at him in astonishment. His expression now was enthusiastic, and he gave an encouraging nod. Apparently I had chosen the right line, though I hoped he would not back off the idea with the same unexpectedness that he had veered on to it. At the moment, however, he was certainly all for it, and pulled a file of papers out of a locker.

" The lading plan ought to be here," he said. " I'm pretty sure the platform was stowed in Number Two hold-section . . ."

It was soon pretty clear that Camilo's ' let's ' was a manner of speaking. What he meant was that I should get the platform out. I made one attempt at persuading him to put on a space-suit, and give me a hand, but he was so clearly averse to that that I gave up rather than risk having him turn against the whole idea. Once I had it assembled, and he could step straight on to it, I could lift it at once, and *show* him that nothing could be lurking in that desert. So presently I went out alone, and opened up Number Two hold-section to get the platform out.

There had been something of a tussle over the provision of a jet-platform for us. The type that had proved itself on the moon over fifty years ago would not do : there, an object has only one sixth of its Earth weight ; on Mars, it weighs double its moon weight, and therefore any carrier must be heavier and more powerful. A wheeled vehicle would have been much lighter, but we were opposed to that for use on an unknown terrain. A platform could skim safely above any kind of surface, and my father had supported us. In the end, he had designed a suitable platform in three sections which were dispatched to Primeira to be stowed aboard the *Figurao* when she called there. Thus, for the main lift we had been spared the weight of the biggest single piece of equipment that we carried, and could simply jettison it on Mars when we took off for the return.

I found the three main sections, even at their Martian weight, quite as much as I wanted to handle, encumbered by my space-suit. Once I had them laid out side by side on the sand, however, the bolting together was comparitively easy.

Camilo had switched on the helmet-radio belonging to one of the other spacesuits. From time to time he inquired :

" Have you seen any of them yet ?"

Each time I assured him that I had not but, somehow, whether he answered, or remained silent, he managed to convey scepticism.

When the main floor was assembled, I went ahead fixing the control-pillar. Thoroughly absorbed in the job, I lost all sense of my surroundings, remembering the empty stillness only when Camilo spoke. But when, after some two and a half hours, I had the assembly complete, and needing only a final check before the mounting of the fuel containers, my attention slackened and, with that, the bleakness and loneliness all about seemed to press closer and crowd me.

I decided I had put in a long enough spell outside for one day, and would be wiser to get back to the familiarity of the ship and the comfort of a meal before the willies could encroach enough to trouble me badly. As I came through the airlock I found Camilo seated on the pull-out stool in front of my charting-board. He turned round and watched me attentively; when I took off the helmet he seemed to relax, and looked somewhat relieved. I glanced at the radio transmitter, hoping that he might have started to tackle that, but it was clear that it had not been touched.

He asked how things were going, and nodded when I told him.

"We'll need the two-man dome, and gear for it, and of course the fuel containers—might as well unload the lot of them while you're at it; just as well to have them stacked handy; no point in leaving them in the ship. And some cases of food, and bottles of water, and—"

"Steady on," I protested. "We shan't be going on a week's expedition right away. All I expect to do tomorrow is to try the thing out, and perhaps have a short flip over to see what that dark line is. We can take the dome and some food against an emergency, but there's no point in loading up useless extra weight."

"Tomorrow?" he repeated. "I thought—I mean, there's about five hours of light yet . . ."

"Possibly," I admitted, "but I've just done nearly three hours steady work in a spacesuit. If you are so anxious to hurry it on, you try a shift on the job yourself."

I had scarcely expected him to rise that, and he didn't. Instead, he watched me for a minute or two without speaking while I collected some food. Then he went back to looking out of the window. He'd stand there, motionless, peering intently for a time, then he would suddenly turn his head quickly from side to side, like a spectator watching an unnaturally fast rally at a tennis-match, and draw his breath in quickly. After that, there would be another motionless interlude for a bit. I was already edgy from the spell outside, and it soon began to get on my nerves.

"You won't see anything," I told him. "Come over here, and have soom food."

Rather surprisingly, he came without demur.

"I suppose you told them to keep out of sight," he said. "Well, they're doing it, but they aren't fooling me."

"Oh, for God's sake—!" I began, letting my temper slip a bit at last.

"All right—all right," he said, hurriedly. "Perhaps *they* told *you* not to let on about them. It doesn't matter, really. Comes to the same thing."

I gave up trying to follow that, and simply grunted.

During the rest of the meal, and after it, we maintained a state of tactful truce, but when this had been disturbed some five times by his leaping to a port in an attempt to catch his Martians unaware, I was driven to suggesting a game of chess to keep our attention occupied. It worked pretty well, too. For a time he seemed to forget all about hostile Martians, played a well-considered game, and beat me by a better margin than usual. At the end of it, things felt much more normal until he remarked.

"That's just it, you see. You Martians are cunning, all right, but not quite cunning enough. We can beat you every time, if we put out minds to it."

The next morning I went outside, and finished checking over the platform, then I got a couple of fuel containers out of the hold-section, and mounted them. Camilo, watching through the port, repeated on the helmet radio his suggestion of unloading them all. I appreciated that by lightening the ship there would be an advantage when it came to an attempt to raise her to the vertical, but they were heavy, and I did not see why I should do all the work—that part could wait until Camilo was in a state where he was willing to come out and help. I did add a case of food, a couple of bottles of water—and also the two-man Flandrys Dome, for it isn't much good carrying rations against an emergency unless you also provide somewhere to take off your helmet so that you can eat them. And then there had to be the recompression gear to deflate the dome after use, and a matter of half-a-dozen small standby air-bottles for the suits. Altogether, it took me nearly an hour to stow and make fast that lot, but then, at last, I was ready to make a test.

I stepped aboard, and told Camilo to stand by and observe. I tried the under-jets individually first, and they all responded satisfactorily. Then I put them in concert. The platform throbbed, and a large cloud of red dust blew out from beneath it. It lifted, slightly up by the rear right-hand corner. I trimmed, and levelled her off about eighteen inches above the ground;

then, when she was stabilised, took her up to ten feet. At that height I slanted and slid her a bit in each direction, and she answered well. She felt more solid and steadier than a lunar-type platform ; a little less sensitive, too—better that than the other way, I thought. I raised her to a hundred feet of so, with a smooth lift.

From there I had a real view. The dark line was revealed as no longer just a line, but as a wide stretch of darker ground reaching away into the distance. To the north and to the south the desert was spread out in utter monotony, but on the eastern horizon there were hills—once mountains, perhaps, but now ground down and rounded off like very old molars.

I reported to Camilo, but he was not interested in the landscape. He demanded :

" Can you see any of *them* ?"

" No," I told him. " There aren't any."

" I don't believe you."

" Very well. Just put on a spacesuit, and come up and see for yourself," I suggested.

" Oh, no you don't. I wasn't born yesterday. That's how you got Geoff."

" What the hell are you talking about ? I *am* Geoff," I protested.

" It's no good trying that on me. I know your game, and it's not going to work this time."

' 'But look here, Camilo—"

" I know what happened. When poor old Geoff went outside soon after we landed, you were waiting for him. You jumped him, invaded him, turned the real Geoff out, and you've just been using his body as a disguise. But I spotted you right away. Now you want to get me outside so that another of you can do the same to me. Well, you aren't going to bring that off. Poor old Geoff hadn't been warned, but I have ; so it won't work."

I started to bring the platform down.

" Camilo," I told him, " stop talking a lot of bloody nonsense, there's a good fellow. If you don't know me after being cooped up with me all these weeks, you damned well ought to. I never heard such a fantastic, rubbishy—"

" Oh, you put up a very good show," said Camilo. generously. " Very cunning you are—but it's just because I *do* know Geoff so well that I could spot you."

I hovered at a foot or so, and let her down gently. She made a nice easy touch, though she blew a cartload of dust about.

"I've seen through your little idea, too," he went on. "You've spotted a chance to get away from this god-forsaken planet. And I don't blame you ; anybody in his senses would do his best to get off this ball of sand. So you want to take over this ship, and get to Earth on her. But you aren't going to do it. Not this time, you're not."

I tried my most authoritative voice.

"Lieutenant Botoes," I ordered, "put on a suit, and come out here."

He laughed.

"Think you've got me, don't you? You toppled the ship over, and killed Raul, then you pushed Geoff out of himself, and took him over. I'm the only obstacle now, aren't I? But you haven't got me yet. I'll soon show you."

Then there was a clang that hurt my ears. I guessed he had been holding the helmet to speak into its radio, and had now dropped it. Then I saw the outer door of the lock swing shut. I ran to it, and battered on it, telling him not to be a fool. I had the winding key to open it from outside, but it would be no good trying that for a minute or more—to attempt it while the automatic mechanism was still securing it would simply have taken me round with the handle.

I went to the port. It was just a little too high for me to see in, so I jumped, in order to get a glimpse of what he was up to. At the same moment the port went blank as the cover closed.

I hurried back to the airlock door, put the key in, and began to wind the locking-bolts back. The telltale inside must have shown him what I was up to, for the key suddenly reversed in my hands as the mechanism started again. I swore, and snatched it out.

"Camilo!" I called, hoping my voice would reach him from the dropped helmet. "Camilo, you've got it all wrong. Don't be a damned fool! Let me in!"

His only reply was, very faintly, a jeering laugh.

"Camilo—" I was beginning again, when suddenly the ship trembled, and there was a huge spurt of dust and sand, forward. I hadn't a moment's doubt what that meant, and I ran for my life.

Even encumbered with the suit, I covered the ground with great, leaping strides a dozen yards long, and was some eighty yards away in a few seconds, before I misjudged my step, and fell.

Still sprawling, I looked back at *Figurao*. A cloud of dust and sand was spurting from beneath her forepart. Some of the grit was pattering on my helmet. As I watched, the forepart swayed, and then lifted clear of the ground. Most of the loose stuff had been blown away, and I could see the ship better now; well enough to guess what Camilo was trying to do. The three lowermost steering-jets were fiercely blasting as they lifted her nose. I could see the idea, but I doubted whether he would get enough thrust out of those small jets to push her back to the vertical.

He turned up the power, and she lifted a little more on the two exposed legs of the tripod ; no longer nosedown, but tilted a little above the horizontal.

I judged he had the jets on full power. They were holding her up ; making a third supporting leg, but they weren't raising her nose any further. I suddenly understood why he had been so anxious to have the platform out of her, and the fuel, and the rest of the stuff, too. Freed of them, she might just have had power enough, but with most of the gear still aboard, she was still inclined only very slightly above the horizontal. The jets kept on roaring and gushing, but still they gave her no more lift. I wondered if it was the leg that had broken through the crust that was keeping her anchored. Clearly she was not going to be able to make it . . .

Then the main drive fired ! Crazy . . . crazy !

I suppose he thought that, if he could tear the buried leg free, the side-jets would be able to tilt her nose skyward.

She leapt forward, almost horizontal, and with the pediment of the trailing leg dragging a furrow through the sand, like a huge plough-share. She dipped by the head, bounced her belly on the sand, rose again on the supporting side-jets, and he let the main drive have it again.

By God, it was well tried ! For a moment I thought he had done it. She lifted until the foot of the trailing leg was barely touching the sand. She was accelerating fast, but at such an angle to me that I could see little more than a cloud of dust with an exhaust flare in the middle of it.

She must, I suppose, have dipped again—and touched. I can't say. All I saw was the silver shape leaping suddenly

above the dust cloud, turning over and over in the air, with her drive still flaring. She fell back into the dust, and bounced to appear again ; she didn't go so high, and she was spinning differently this time. Then once more she disappeared, and the dust and the sand sprayed up, looking like a shellburst at sea . . .

I put down my head, hugged myself to the ground, and waited . . . She was, I guessed, nearly three miles away by now, but that was unpleasantly close for the kind of explosion I was expecting. I held my breath as I waited . . . and waited . . .

The explosion did not come.

At last, I looked up, cautiously. Of the *Figurao* herself I could see nothing. There was just a dust-cloud—with a red flare still burning steadily in the middle of it.

I went on waiting. Nothing happened except that the lighter dust was blown away, and the cloud grew smaller. After some more minutes I risked standing up. Scarcely taking my eyes from the spot, I made my way back to the platform. I found it half-buried in sand thrown up by the *Figurao's* blast, but it lifted all right, and the sand slid off as I tilted it and slid it away to a safer distance, to land again.

For over an hour I sat on the platform, watching. Gradually the loose sand and dust had been blown away, and I could see the silver glint of the ship herself, and the steady flame from her tubes.

I realised that somehow, perhaps on the first bounce, the main drive had been reduced to a pretty low power, or the ship would have gone a lot further and fared a lot worse, but I still did not know whether she was going to blow up or not and, if not, how long the fuel would continue to burn at the present setting.

Perhaps Camilo had been able to check the power at the moment of the first bounce, but he could have had no chance after that. One could not imagine that even strapped to the couch, as he would be, either he himself, or the gimbal system could have withstood what the *Figurao* had been through . . .

And at that thought I was suddenly swept by the terrifying realisation that, whether the ship blew up or not, I was now alone . . .

Almost in the same moment I became aware again of the hostile desert all around. I began to feel the awfulness of utter desolation stalking in on me once more . . .

I pulled the two-man dome off the plarform, and set it up. Flimsy though it was, one could find some illusion of protection inside it. The howling of the wilderness was not quite so close to my elbow ; the prowling of the agrophobic monsters was kept a little further off . . .

The day wore on. The puny red sun declined, and disappeared. The constellations shone out, familiar still, for against the panorama of the heavens the leap from Earth to Mars is the tiniest of hops. One day, I am sure, the constellations will look different, when our hops have indeed become great leaps—for me, that is an article of faith—but it won't be for a long time yet . . .

The night closed down. Through the dome's small windows all but the stars was dark—except at one point where, across miles of sand, I could see the glow of the *Figurao's* main jet, still flaring where she lay.

I broke open a packet of rations, and ate some food. I felt no hunger, but the familiarity of the simple act of eating held some comfort. The food did me good, too. It gave me strength, and I felt better able to resist. Then suddenly, I became aware of silence . . .

Looking out of the window again, I saw that the flare of the rocket-tube had vanished. There was nothing but blackness and the stars. All sound had ceased, and left such a silence as was never known on Earth. Nor was it just that, not just the negative absence of sound ; the silence was hard, positive, a quality of eternity itself. It rang in one's ears until they sought relief by hearing sounds that did not exist ; murmurings, far off bells, sighs not so far off, tickings, whispers, faint ululations . . .

A bit of verse that my grandfather used to quote came into my mind :

. . . . for all the night
I heard their thin gnat-voices cry
Star to faint star across the sky.

and I seemed to hear them, too : they had no words, they were on the threshold of sound, but they encouraged me . . .

And, God knows, I needed encouragement, crouched there in my flimsy dome . . .

The voices cry—but the elemental terrors prowl. We need numbers to sustain us ; in numbers we can dispel the terrors ; alone, we are weak, mutilated. Taken from our pool of corporate strength we gasp, we wriggle defencelessly while the terrors circle round, slowly closing in . . .

Perhaps the voices are just sirens—but I think not. I think they are the calls of destiny, leading, not luring, onward and outward. I think we shall, we must, follow them—but not like this ! Never again like this ! Not, oh, God—alone . . .!

The little sun rode over the horizon like a delivering knight. I almost knelt in worship of him as he drove the lingering terrors from my side—not away, but further off, giving me the room, and the courage, to move.

I had meant to eat again, but I could not wait for that. I craved only for the security of the ship. I put my helmet on with shaking hands, packed the dome aboard the platform, lifted to a few feet, and sped across the sand towards the *Figurao* as fast as I could.

Two of the tripod legs were twisted and bent, and the third torn off, but the hull was surprisingly little damaged. I had to clear a lot of sand to get at the airlock as the ship now lay. Much of it I managed to blow away with the platform's jets, but the rest I had to scrape out.

The lock worked perfectly. Inside the ship there was far less damage than I had expected—expect to poor Camilo.

I take some pride in having been able to force myself outside again to bury him, as I had buried Raul. I knew that it must be done at once if I were to be able to face it at all so, somehow I did it. And then hurried back . . .

It was after that that the gap comes—a long gap, according to the calendar-clock. It looks as if I spent some part of it trying to repair the radio transmitter ; for some reason I seem to have rigged up a light to shine out of each port ; the platform is still outside, but not quite as I left it when I first came in . . . Probably there are other things . . . I don't know . . . I can't remember . . .

Perhaps someone will come . . .

I have food enough for nearly three years . . .

Food enough—but not, I fear, spirit enough . . .

There is a letter here for my dear Isabella. Give it to her, please . . .

John Wyndham

The final story in this series, " Space Is A Province Of Brazil," will appear in the September issue.

THE SHADOW PEOPLE

Arthur Sellings returns to our pages after a long absence from writing, with the type of story he can so competently produce — strong characterisation centred around an interesting theme of 'other-worldiness'.

By Arthur Sellings

They came to our house one evening in October. I opened the front door to their ring. It was a dark, squally night; the lighting in our street isn't all it could be, and I hadn't got around to fixing a porch lamp; so that the way they looked to me then was no different from the way any ordinary couple would have looked—as dim shadows against the darkness.

"You . . . let rooms?" said the man. His voice was quiet, precise.

"We do have one room to let," I told him. "Come inside, won't you?"

It was then, when they stepped into the hall, that I felt the oddness of them. It wasn't just the shy way they entered. Nor the fact that they were both dressed in clothes so new, I noticed, they still had store creases in them. Perhaps it was the way they stood there. Perhaps there's a set of attitudes we all unconsciously choose from, so that if somebody doesn't it looks stranger than such a little detail should.

I met their eyes, and was abruptly conscious that I must be staring. "If—if you'll just come this way," I said, and led them to the living-room to meet Kay, my wife. I realised now that the oddest thing about them was their faces. Not the shape of them, but the colour. Both were dead white—white

with a hint of underlying grey, so that the lights and shadows alike were blurred, giving them a strangely negative expression.

But Kay seemed not to notice. "People for the room," I told her. "Mr. and —"

"Mr. and Mrs. Smith," the man filled in for me.

Kay, who is much more practical with people than I am, gave me a meaningful look. To the couple she said, in a hard-boiled manner that was slightly out of character, "The room is two guineas a week, in advance."

The couple nodded, and Kay showed them upstairs. I followed behind.

Well, the couple's reaction to the room was strange, too. They went from one piece of furniture to another, poking here, lifting a cover there. Over one piece, an old leather armchair, the woman lingered with something like wonder. I began to feel uneasy.

"Of course," I said, "this is only provisional. It's the first time we've let a room. Things being as they are, we thought—" I felt Kay glaring at me and finished, "Well, if there's anything else you need, just let me—"

"There's no linen, of course," said Kay.

"No . . . linen?" said the woman. It seemed to trouble her.

"We've got spare linen," I said quickly. "Haven't we, dear?"

"Linen," said Kay firmly, "would be five shillings a week extra."

The couple looked at each other with something like relief. The man drew out a bundle of notes. "We'd like to move in right away if we may."

"You may," Kay told him, taking the money. "What about your baggage?"

"Baggage?" the man said. He exchanged glances with the woman again. "Is that—necessary?"

I had to turn away at the sight of Kay's face. She must have recovered quickly, for I heard her saying, "Why no, it's not necessary, but—" The hardboiled manner faltered. "Oh —you mean it's coming on?"

"Ah, yes—it's coming on." Mr. Smith sounded grateful.

"You're from out of town then?" I said.

"Yes—we're from out of town."

I didn't pursue it. If Mr. Smith wanted to be as uncommunicative as that, that was his business. Or so I thought then.

Kay got them the linen and we went downstairs. Back in the living-room, Kay leaned against the door—and drooped.

"Oh, Paul, have I done the wrong thing, letting the room to them?"

I roared. "There's my big tough landlady! Hard as nails and—" I stopped. "Why, darling, what's wrong? Surely not that Mr-and-Mrs-Smith business? Perhaps their name really is Smith."

Kay jerked her head crossly. "Of course not. It's just that—" She broke off.

"Just what?" I said. I wasn't going to be drawn. Perhaps she could put a finger on it.

"Well, didn't you notice?" ..

I gave in. "All right—" I ticked off on my fingers. "So they haven't got any baggage. So they're both wearing brand-new clothes. So they speak English with the funniest kind of accent because there's no accent there at all. So they look as if they've lived under a stone for years. So—"

I stopped, waiting for Kay to add to the list.

But she evidently couldn't. "But they're so *strange*," she said. "Oh, Paul, they might be crooks, spies, anything."

I sighed heavily. "So crooks, spies, make themselves look as odd as they can? Just so people can play cops and robbers" But the worried look didn't leave her face. I took her in my arms. "Look, Kay, I'm sorry enough people don't like my paintings for us to buy a new house. I'm sorry you're going to have a baby—no, you know I don't mean that—I mean I'm sorry we have to let rooms to meet the expense. But if you say the word, I'll take their money straight back up there and tell them to leave."

I was being more than somewhat crafty, I realised. But Kay smiled wanly. "It's all right, I'm just being silly. I'll get used to having strangers about the house."

"That's my girl. Hey! I've got it. They're D.P.'s from Europe. They've been cooped up in some camp, that's why they look so pale. They've been learning English for years because all that time they've been dreaming about getting here. And now the dream's come true. The new clothes were given to them when they arrived, by some charity. They say their name's Smith—well, because the real one is Sashamako-lovitch, and—"

Kay was laughing now. "All right, all right. So I'm a silly idiot. Don't rub it in."

The next morning I went into town to make a round of the junkshops for frames. Kay seemed to have recovered her usual placidness. Neither of us mentioned the new tenants.

But in town I heard something that sent me scurrying back home.

I must have been breathless when I got back. I burst into the living-room and Kay looked at me as if I was crazy. I told her what I'd heard :

" Last night a couple walked into Mendl's, the pawnbrokers, and sold him a diamond for several hundred pounds. Mendl took the diamond home to show his wife—and lost it. The couple sound like our Mr. and Mrs. Smith."

Kay looked at me in puzzlement. " You mean—they're wanted for questioning ?"

" No, nothing like that. Old Mendl is pretty sore at himself, but the diamond wasn't stolen. Somewhere between the shop and his home it disappeared from his pocket. He can't explain it—losing a diamond isn't exactly a habit of his. But—"

" Then what's all the fuss about ? Who's being silly now ? Look." She took my arm and steered me to the window. The Smiths were in the big untidy back garden. The man seemed to be examining the plants. The woman was gathering a bunch of chrysanthemums.

" So ?" I said.

" They're all right, Paul," Kay said. " A few minutes ago there was a timid knock on the door. It was Mrs. Smith, wanting to know if she could buy some flowers out of the garden. Imagine ! When I told her she could have a bunch free if she wanted, she didn't seem to catch on. She said something about she thought it was the system."

" Your hard-headed landlady act last night might have had something to do with that," I said. " But—this business about the diamond. Ordinary people don't have diamonds worth several hundreds. Shouldn't I at least ask them a few questions about themselves ? Surely that's only a landlord's right ?"

Kay surprised me by flaring up. " Diamonds ! There was only *one*, wasn't there ? Perhaps they *are* D.P.'s. Perhaps the diamond was all they had left. Refugees put their money into something small and negotiable like that. I've read about it."

" But all the same—"

" Oh, Paul, you'll make me mad in a minute ! You're always talking about individualism and people being free to live their own lives. You claim it for yourself. Now you want to deny it to somebody else."

I was beginning to get annoyed now. " Well, at least other people can see what my standpoint is."

" But you've got a standpoint because you've got roots. These people haven't. Wherever they've come from, it's obvious that they're unsettled yet. It's also obvious they don't want to be reminded about their previous life. So leave them alone."

Kay's brown eyes looked straight into mine, then she turned to look out of the window again. She plainly felt strongly about the matter. I wondered if there might be something more to it—whether she might be concealing a fear that she didn't want to voice. Was she, with the baby coming, instinctively shutting out any perplexity ? Or simply that, with that dream unfolding within her, nothing else was important enough to worry over for long ?

I followed her gaze. The Smiths were coming in from the garden now. The chill October sun slanting down at their faces made them look even more pale—immaterial even. It was as if the light of day somehow went *round* them without striking any response. The only colour was in the woman's face, reflected from the bronze and gold flowers she held to her breast. But even they could strike no life in lips as grey as ash.

For the first time I felt the *sadness* of them, an aura of loss that seemed to cling to them. As they passed out of sight the straggling garden seemed to grow more bright, as if a shadow had passed over and lifted . . .

Many times in the weeks that followed I told myself that I was being irrational. Mr. and Mrs. Smith were model tenants; quiet, unobtrusive, making no demands. With sales of pictures continuing at their usual unsensational rate, I should have been grateful for the money they brought down every Friday. But something rankled.

Kay's rebuke about intolerance hadn't helped. Hell, a man's got to know what he's being tolerant *of*. So I tried to find excuses to get closer to them. Like calling to ask if they'd like me to fix up the big cupboard on the landing as a kitchenette. Or whether they wouldn't like the dressing table painted.

But they met me each time with polite evasions. Oh, it was very good of me and they were grateful to be offered but no, it was all right, really. I was getting to the point once of *insisting* that I rigged up some lighting points, but Kay came on the scene and gave me a queer look. I covered up and retreated.

I don't know whether Kay guessed what was going on. If she did, she didn't mention it., Perhaps she realised by now that I was obeying a male impulse to do the worrying for her. Which was slightly comical, because she seemed not to be worrying one bit—as if what she had told me that first morning had been the truth of her attitude. But still I tried.

I even told myself that I was being moved by a worthier impulse than mere curiosity; that it would be a good thing for the Smiths if I managed to bring them out, to convince them that their barrier of reserve wasn't really necessary. Just how hypocritical can a person get !

Anyway, whenever I got the chance, I'd throw out a line. Like, " I suppose this is a whole lot different from where you come from ?" All I got from that one was a polite smile and a non-commital shrug.

Neither of them got a job—although once, when I was in their room on some excuse or other, I noticed papers open at the Jobs Vacant pages, and somebody had been busy with a pencil. I managed to get in a query to Mr. Smith about the work he did.

He hesitated for a moment then, with a faint smile, said, " I'm a mnemonic integrator."

" Really ?" I said, annoyed at being brushed off with double-talk.

It must have shown, for he added, " That is, I was. But there aren't any openings here for that."

I felt like asking where exactly it was that he used to practice mnemonic integration, but one glance at that blank face of his stopped me. I had a feeling that he had an answer all ready in the same kind of uncommunicative English.

So my efforts got me nowhere. All I learned was what was obvious. That they seldom went out. That they lived pretty meagerly. Their only extravagance was flowers. They seemed to love flowers; they always had some in their room.

And then, a week or so before Christmas, a break came in the barrier. I was going out to my studio. It had originally

been an old-fashioned conservatory, but the changes I'd made had cut it off from the house, so that I had to go round by way of the garden.

It was snowing hard, had been all the day and night before, so that my footsteps must have been muffled to silence. Anyway, Mrs. Smith didn't notice my approach. She was standing there in the snow, her head tilted back.

My first thought—of her craziness in standing there, coatless as she was—was pushed to one side as I took in the expression on her face. It wasn't a simple one, nor was my reaction to it.

For on her face was all the ecstatic wonder of a child watching snow; watching and dreaming of the wonders that snow is to children—Mother Carey's chickens being plucked, or flowers from some faery region fluttering down. There was, too, a look of unutterable sadness, of pure hopeless longing.

What made my reaction really complicated was the realisation that this woman was *beautiful.* I wondered how it was that I hadn't noticed before—and knew why. Because I hadn't looked closely enough at the faces of either of them, or when I had, had looked them straight in the eye—the two ways I suppose most people treat somebody whose face is odd or mutilated. Another reason was that I hadn't seen it before in such a light as this.

For under the double illumination, the yellowish light filtering down from the whirling sky and the white glare thrown up from the snow, her features gained life at last. The delicate lines of her nose, of the arch of her brows, were thrown into relief. Snow frosted her silver-blonde hair. I knew then what I had to do. *Had* to ; it isn't often as urgent as that.

I stepped forward, feeling clumsy as a bear beside such delicacy. She started as she saw me. Her eyes jerked back from the sky. The expression vanished abruptly, as if some inner guardian had snatched it away.

" I'm sorry to intrude," I blurted. " But I'd . . . like to paint you."

She seemed not to know what to say.

" The way you were standing there," I said. " The look on your face. It's something I must get onto canvas."

She seemed almost frightened.

" I can remember the look," I said. " I'd only want you to pose for the likeness, the memory. In my studio the light

will fall the same way." I took her by the arm when she still didn't answer. "*Please.* I must do it. I'll pay you a fee for the sitting. I can't afford a lot, but—"

I wasn't sure whether that last part was the right thing to say. But it seemed to have an effect.

"I'd—I'd have to talk it over with my husband," she said.

"All right. But make it quick, will you? In case the light changes. I'll be in my studio there, waiting."

I didn't have to wait long. Five minutes later a timid knock came on the door.

I worked quickly, excitedly, in tempera, a medium I rarely used, but one that I felt instinctively was right for this. Under my brush the colours spread thin and clear and luminous.

I was too busy to talk much, or to worry at all about the enigma of the Smiths. I was painting, wrestling with appearances now, not reasons. And I felt that I was creating something important. For three days I worked in a blaze of energy, and when it was finished, I knew I was right. I'm usually too self-critical for that to be a common feeling—but I felt it now.

I stood back from it. "Look," I said to its subject.

She came forward shyly. I watched her face as she looked at it. And suddenly the face on the canvas seemed to be looking into a mirror, for that same indescribable expression came back into it.

"It's lovely," she breathed at last. "It—"

I was signing it now. I looked up as I heard her take in her breath.

"*Davy*?" she said. "But——your name is Nash, isn't it?"

"Davy's my brush-name," I explained. "There's already been one Paul Nash, so to avoid confusion I—"

But she seemed not to be listening. Her pale eyes widened. Her hand flew to her face and something between a sob and a cry broke from her lips. Then she turned and rushed out of the studio.

I stood there, gaping at the open door, at the snowflakes whirling in. All my puzzlement about her and her husband came flooding back. What had made her act like that? And why had my name seemed so important?

I went after her, determined to find out. To find out that —and more. I was in the reckless mood I'm always in after finishing something worthwhile. As if I've just justified myself to the gods for whatever talent I've been given.

An excited conversation was going on behind their door. It stopped abruptly as I knocked and went in.

The Smiths were standing together in the middle of the room. Now that I was here I didn't know how to begin.

It was the woman who said, finally, " I'm sorry I burst out like that." Her voice was calm now.

" But *why* ?" I said. " What did I do ?"

They looked at each other. The man said quietly, " You painted a fine picture."

I looked at him blankly. " But you haven't seen it."

" Ah, but I have." I must have looked stupid, for he added, " Sit down. I'll explain. Firstly, I should mention that I've noticed your curiosity. It's only natural, though I'm rather disappointed that we couldn't fit in without rousing it."

" But what's this got to do with the picture ?" I said, cursing myself the next moment for interrupting.

" Only that that was a climax, something that threw our position into relief. Although we're neither of us well acquainted with the arts—our world is highly specialized—we have both seen your picture before. You see, we come from a future time."

" *What* ! "

Mr. Smith smiled. " It was just as much a shock to us to learn that my wife is the subject of a painting that in our time hangs in a museum. *Study by Snowlight*, I believe you will call it."

I knew then that he was speaking the truth. That was the title I'd already thought of giving it—and I hadn't mentioned it to anybody. No other explanation of his knowing could be less fantastic.

" That was something we weren't prepared for," he went on. " We tried to learn up everything. I don't think we made a bad job of it. But fitting-in isn't just a matter of passing muster. It's a matter of surviving too. That's why I agreed to my wife sitting for you—the money was important. We tried to get jobs, but— " he shrugged— " people probably sensed our oddness. Anyway, there wasn't much we could have handled. Our nerves are finer, for one thing."

I was beginning to recover. " But surely you've got special skills—skills that we haven't got at all ?"

" Indeed. That's the crux of it. You have skills—pardon my putting it like this—that a caveman hasn't. Would that

make it easier for you to survive in *his* world? Could you out-hunt him? Out-fight him with his own weapons?"

"With *his* weapons, no. But if I took a rifle—"

"But say you couldn't? I told you that ours is a highly-specialized world. Could a man of your time, no matter how expert at using a rifle, *build* one—with no tools, and with the raw materials still in the ground?" He spread his hands. "Similarly with us. We could bring nothing. Time travel requires not only enormous energy but purposiveness, an act of will, on the part of the thing transmitted. Any material object that one takes along, and one can take little, stays only a short time—then drifts off into some limbo of space-time."

An obvious question came into my mind. How then had they got money? But the answer to that one came on its heels—*the diamond.* But I didn't mention it. Old Mendl could stand the loss. They would have had to resort to some such deception. I didn't blame them, and I didn't want to embarrass them.

But I had to ask other questions. I had to get this crazy situation straight. "From what year did you come?"

"From 2149."

That shook me. "But your comparing our level with a caveman's, I thought—"

"That we had come from some remoter future? No, the rate of change has accelerated enormously. It had started even before this time, hadn't it?"

I stumbled over the next question I wanted to ask him. The reason for their sadness, their strange pallor. "But—are you typical of your time? I mean—"

He smiled sadly. "You mean in the way we look? We *were* typical. But not as you see us. You see, the—the complete creature can't get across. In a way we are little more than shadows. Oh, we're solid enough. We see the visible world and can act upon it. But there's a—a dilution, of impact, of sensibility, of—" He broke off, as if explaining the measure of that loss was beyond him—or beyond my understanding.

"But when you return you'll revert to normal?" I said.

He looked at me for a long moment. "There is no return." He exhaled sharply. "But now that I have told you this we must go."

"Go? But where?"

"I don't know. Somewhere to try again, to settle in if we can without—" he smiled sadly—"without rousing curiosity." The sudden remorse I felt then must have showed, for he waved a pale hand. "You mustn't blame yourself. It was only natural. And we may have learned from it."

"You can forget you ever told me," I said quickly. "I'll tell nobody else. I'm too grateful for what you've given me—the picture, I mean—to let you go. And I won't ask you any more questions, I swear."

"That isn't the only reason we must go," he said. "There are too many reminders here, in this house, of what we have left behind us."

"How do you mean?"

"You and your wife are young. You have love and—and its promise."

I stared at him as something of the measure of their sacrifice dawned upon me. Now I understood their near-reverence for flowers—because they were *alive*, however humbly, in a way these two could never be again. Or was it that in cut flowers, severed from their source to wither, they saw some cruel but companionable symbol of themselves? I didn't pursue that one. I was more closely involved; I knew now just what I had painted into that picture—and it made me feel guilty.

I was conscious that the woman had started to pack.

"*No*!" I protested wildly. "We'll work something out. We'll—"

The man was shaking his heads lowly. It wasn't that which brought me up short, but the realisation that there was still one question I hadn't asked—the question I had wanted the answer to from the beginning. Now, after what he had told me, I *had* to ask it.

"But *why*?" I said. "If it meant such sacrifice?"

"You said you would ask no more questions," he said. "But, because you need an answer, I will tell you. We . . . were wanted by the police."

"You're lying," I told him.

He shrugged. "I told you our world was highly-specialized. Lying was not my speciality. Can't you see why we cannot stay? Because, however kind you are, your curiosity would never be satisfied."

" But it would be," I said urgently. " I just have to understand, that's all. Then everything will be all right. You can stay on here. I'll find work for you. You'll see you're being too complicated about it."

" Will I ?" he said. " Very well, I'll tell you. But you won't thank me. We came—to avoid the end of the world."

I suddenly felt like bursting out laughing. I managed to restrain it, but said, " Hell ! so what's that ? People have wondered it's held together as long as it has. It's a *relief* to know it's still got nearly another two hundred years."

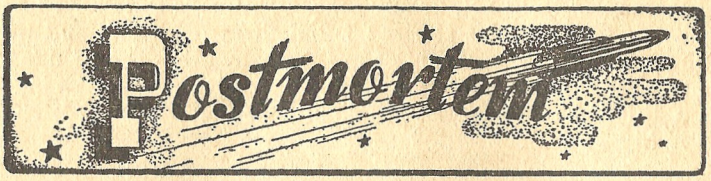
The woman had finished packing. All their possessions were in one pitiful small case that she held in her hand. She was standing by the man's side now. Neither of them answered me.

I answered myself. It was true, wasn't it ? After all, I lived my life—painted and loved and begot children—because I had to. For today, not tomorrow. It was gratifying to know that posterity was going to be pleased with at least one of my activities. So why should I mind knowing that posterity finished at 2149 sharp ?

Then, looking into their eyes, I knew. That there was a difference between fearing something and knowing it. And between knowing it and being reminded of it every day. It would be like a condemned man having the executioner, masked and gloved, as a lodger in his cell. Not that these gentle people were executioners—but they might as well have been.

They must have read it clearly enough in my face, for they turned and left the room. I made no move to stop them. I heard their footsteps descending the stairs, then the front door closing behind them with a sound like the shutting of a tomb.

Arthur Sellings



Clacton-on-Sea,
Essex.

Dear John,

It would appear that letter columns are a source of constant controversy in promags these days. Although they are the first thing I read on receiving a magazine, I consider them of only subsidiary importance. I would much rather prefer a good fan department or a good Editorial.

In view of your recent development of a letter column surely you could expand slightly more and incorporate a fan column? Not only would it make your magazine more popular, it would also boost sales—perhaps to a considerable extent. I am sure it would be the cause of a veritable flood of interesting and controversial letters for your letter column. Everybody is saying that fandom requires more new blood, and what better way is there than such a column in a top-notch magazine like *New Worlds* to achieve this end?

I would like to comment fully on your issue No. 70, which is one of the best for a very long time, and small wonder! How you ever managed to obtain Eric Frank Russell's "Wasp" and John Wyndham's "For All The Night," will forever remain a mystery with me. If you can afford it I would very much like to see more writers of their calibre in future issues.

"Wasp" is undoubtedly the best serial you have ever had. I would say it was Eric Frank Russell's best. It is very difficult for me to explain just what makes it seem so likeable. I think perhaps it is the way the story is told. Very realistic and applicable to present day standards. A simple, easy-to-grasp plot with a myriad of unexplored avenues, which Eric Frank Russell explores with a marvellous touch of reality. The first and second parts were enjoyed equally and, although I am not superstitious, I have my fingers crossed in the hope that the ending lives up to the standard.

Backtracking I would just like to say that I enjoyed Brian Aldiss's "The Pit My Parish" from *New Worlds* 67, but few

others seem to like it, or any other of Aldiss's stories. I like all—or most—of his stories : I find them refreshing and off the beaten track, and cannot imagine why other people don't agree. For my own interest I would like to know your opinions on Brian Aldiss's stories with particular reference to " The Pit My Parish."

Barry P. Hall.

Grastorp,
Sweden.

Dear Sir,

I would like to take this opportunity of congratulating you on two excellent magazines. The last three serials in *New Worlds* were all outstanding, and I cannot possibly say which one I think the best. Those new abstract covers are much better than the ones you had before and I especially liked the one on *New Worlds* 71. Very pleasing to the eye indeed. Just compare it to the terrible cover of No. 65 and you will see what I mean !

That novelette of Brunner's " Earth Is But A Star " (*Science Fantasy* No. 29) was exactly as good as I expected it to be. In my opinion Brunner is your best writer, and with this novelette he has once more proved the fact.

Sven Hansson.

Bootle 20,
Lancs.

Dear Mr. Carnell,

Your new covers for *New Worlds* and *Science Fantasy* are settling nicely, and give the books that very necessary different look on the news-stands. I particularly like the latest *Science Fantasy* cover which I bought only today. Lewis is certainly a master of this type of cover and your cover for *New Worlds* 72 sounds well worth waiting for.

All the stories in No. 71 are excellent science fiction. Ashton in particular seems to be a real find. I liked Russell's serial, but then he always turns in a good yarn nowadays. White presented a neat point in his story and underlined clearly the utter stupidity of war. (This deserves to be anthologised by Conklin or Judith Merril—White hasn't had the recognition he deserves across the Atlantic). Although well behind the first three James and Chandler both turned in good stories to round off one of your best issues for a very long time.

I am now the proud owner of all but seven issues of *New Worlds* and I am not giving up hope of getting at least four of those from the back issues you suddenly announced out of the blue. It was fascinating to read some of those early issues, and I was amazed to find how little the stories have dated. One thing which interested me was a letter in a *Postmortem* section of No. 15 signed John Brunner. If this is *the* John Brunner, I wonder if he had any idea then of the heights he would reach within your pages. (Although "Threshold Of Eternity" was rather a disappointment I feel sure that Brunner will produce many master-pieces). I see no reason to alter my opinion that Clothier's painting for Number 9 is the best cover I have ever seen on a magazine. If only you could get covers like that today !

You have gone a very long way since those early issues, but nevertheless they remain something to be very proud of, and I wish you all success in the future.

Graham A. Riley.

Clacton-on-Sea,
Essex.

Dear Mr. Carnell,

There are several things I would like to say in relation to the magazine.

First of all the Eric Frank Russell story which I should like to praise you on. This *is* the best, or one of the best, stories you have ever published. On reading it I find I just cannot wait until the last instalment arrives. Mr. Russell always pleases me, and I am a great fan of his stories. He mixes subtle wit with a sincere story and holds the reader's interest fruitfully and one can't really put it down once started.

Then there is the John Wyndham story. This despite a great write-up in a previous *New Worlds* did not exactly appeal to me comparing it with the buildup you gave it. Although it was well written it was not entirely a new theme. The main point of interest in the story was the human side of things which came off quite well. On that side it came off but with the stale theme it had, I found nothing revolutionary in it, except for its reality.

The *Postmortem* section should in my opinion contain something other than descriptions of how good the magazine is and how such and such pleased me—I think a letter column should contain letters which are interesting and offer something which is argumentative or controversial. Arguments

pulling up authors for mistakes, and similar things which are related to s-f and the s-f scene, rather than letters on how good the magazine is.

I think Laurence Sandfield may have a good case. There are already too many magazines priced at 2/- or thereabouts, and if there was a magazine at about a shilling it would, I believe, make a great hit with people who have not the resources to buy the 2/- magazines. A youngster interested in the field is not often blessed with the money to buy the magazines which he fancies reading. A good idea would be to do as Mr. Sandfield suggests, turn out a pulp at about 1/-. Cut out one of the stories from *Science Fiction Adventures* leaving the best of three, thereby giving a magazine, although cheap and rough in outlook, which contains good stories, to those people who cannot afford 2/- magazines.

Bryan Welham.

Alost,
Belgium.

Dear Sir,

You may be happy to hear that the Atlas Corp., with whom I subscribed for one year to *Astounding Science Fiction*, warmly recommended your magazines.

I read with dismay that most American s-f magazines leave out entirely serials from their issues, owing to their readers' remarks and complaints. I sincerely hope that you will not follow the same policy. In my opinion most high class s-f occurs in novelette or book length stories and personally my first successful contact with s-f has been through a particular serial. Finally, I believe that a good serial guarantees to some extent a certain faithfulness from most readers.

Louis E. van Gastel.

Oakland 21,
California.

Dear Mr. Carnell,

I am afraid I was a little out of line about criticising the new cover art before it started. As the April issue of *New Worlds* was self explanatory—the space girl and the various components of space flight equipment tells anyone in a few seconds of Man's outward trip in the universe.

If all your future covers will be like the April *New Worlds* —I am a hundred percent for it.

" Wasp " was really intriguing—a beautifully written piece.

W. C. Brandt.

NEW WORLDS
PROFILES

Brian W. Aldiss

Oxford

Since December 1955, when newcomer Brian W. Aldiss first appeared in "Profiles," much has been happening to this typical English gentleman with the penchant for explosive mirth and gagsterisms. He is now the Literary Editor of the *Oxford Mail*, an erudite daily newspaper published within the shadows of the colleges, from which, doubtless, some of the "culture" strays along the cobblestones. Faber & Faber in London have published his first book-length science fiction novel *Non-Stop*, which received considerable notice from the Press, and he has been appearing with regularity in several of the leading American s-f magazines—notably Tony Boucher's *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. Two more novels (non s-f) are "in the works" and he has just completed a two-part serial for *New Worlds*.

Of "Segregation" he says, "The scientific ingredient consists of a few speculations which have grown out of an amazed, admiring, horrified, fascinated reading of books on parasitology, and parasites in relation to evolution. I could not help seeing how shallowly s-f has dipped into the range of scientific studies; parasitology, for instance, is a world of mindless monsters—but I want to do more fishing in these waters in future.

"A further factor was the pleasure of thinking up another species of weird but logical creatures—coupled with the pleasure of thinking up specimens of that weird and illogical species, men."