

# NEW WORLDS SCIENCE FICTION

**No. 78**

**VOLUME 26**

**2/-**

*Great New Serial*  
**A MAN CALLED  
DESTINY**

*Part One*  
**Lan Wright**

**SIGNORA PORFIRIA**  
**John W. Ashton**

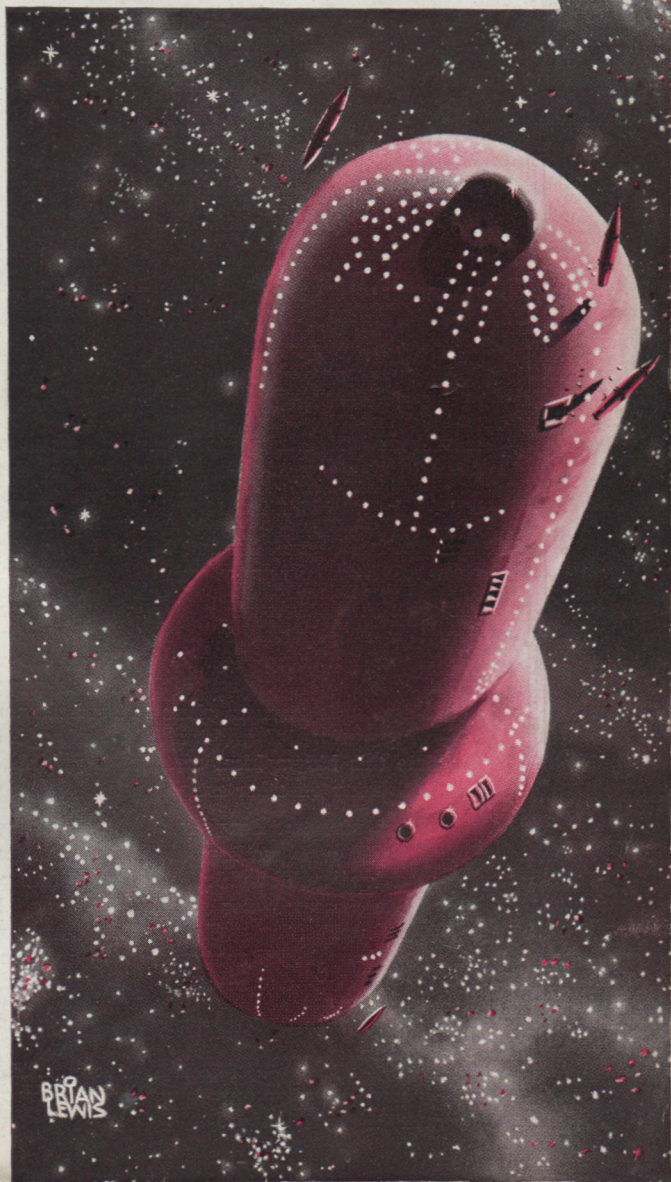
**INCENTIVE**  
**Brian W. Aldiss**

**ANOTHER WORD FOR  
MAN**  
**Robert Presslie**

**THE STILL WATERS**  
**Lester del Rey**

*Features*

**13th Year  
of Publication**



# NEW WORLDS

— PROFILES —

## John W. Ashton

**Brussels, Belgium**



Thirty-seven years old John W. Ashton is without a doubt our most cosmopolitan contributor. Having had an English mother and an Hungarian father, his education was administered in five countries—England, France, Germany, Holland and Hungary, resulting in five languages to his credit. He saw service with the U.S. 7th Army C.I.C. and War Crimes Investigation Teams, but not before he spent part of the war as a P.O.W. in Germany.

Since then he became a correspondent for a number of American newspapers and agencies and freelanced as a contributor to Canadian, French and West German newspapers. More recently he took up Public Relations work, opening his own company in Brussels where he has been permanently active at the International Exposition there during 1958. However, by the time this biographical material is published he will be in Rome working on other assignments.

Married, with two daughters, his favourite pastimes are outdoor sports and reading. His first science fiction story, "Companion," published in *New Worlds* in April this year has now been accepted for French, German, Norwegian and American publication. Concerning future stories he says, "Don't be surprised if next year's crop are sometimes datelined from the oddest places—I expect my movements to become rather hectic."



# NEW WORLDS SCIENCE FICTION

DECEMBER 1958

VOLUME 26

No. 78

MONTHLY

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Editor : JOHN CARNELL

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## TWO SHILLINGS

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## Survey . . . .

Early in 1955 we ran a questionnaire in this magazine to find out more about the people who read science fiction—their schooling, salary groups, hobbies, occupation, marital status, likes and dislikes, and various other questions designed to give us a picture of the type of average reader who makes up the vast bulk of our sales.

With very little prodding on our part the response was overwhelming and in July of that year we published the results of the *Survey* as they applied to readers in the British Isles. There were many surprises—most pleasant of all was the fact that we found the average age of our readership to be 31.7 years, a fact we had suspected but been unable to prove.

Since that time the breakdown of our report has been used in countless newspaper and magazine articles—as recently as September this year in the austere London daily *The Times*—been quoted by a learned Cambridge professor in a quarterly journal published exclusively for the teaching profession, been quoted on several radio programmes, and formed the basis of innumerable talks and discussions on science fiction. What started out to be merely a private enquiry for our own benefit and that of potential advertisers, eventually became a major yardstick upon which British science fiction has been measured.

Since that time four years ago, however, great changes have been taking place in the world about us : science has made many great strides in innumerable directions ; the first space satellites have been launched and the first shots made at the Moon ; an atomic powered submarine has travelled under the North Pole ; the International Geophysical Year commenced and nearly run its course ; standards of living have risen and wages likewise ; children born at the end of World War II are now in their teens and a new generation has grown up accustomed to the thought of space travel as a possibility within their lifetime.

Our 1955 *Survey* is more than out of date.

In view of the recent out-dated *Times* report we felt it was time we ran another *Survey* to record the changing pattern of our readership and on page 128 of this issue you will find a questionnaire to be filled in and sent to us as soon as possible.



# ... 1958

Because of the time lag and the fact that overseas standards are so different to our own we are only requesting readers in the British Isles to participate, but I feel sure that every one of you will support our request wholeheartedly. Not only will we publish the statistics of your replies early next year but we will show the comparisons between the 1955 figures.

Ten minutes of your time and a 3d. stamp. Will you do this for me—right now? And my thanks in advance.

## Big News About S.F. Adventures

News from America concerning the magazines published there is about the most depressing I can ever remember, with details of more magazines ceasing publication and a number dropping from monthly to bi-monthly appearance. Most of the trouble seems to stem from distribution difficulties rather than lack of interest on the part of the readers but among the many casualties is *Science Fiction Adventures* which was edited by Larry Shaw, and which we commenced reprinting in Britain early this year with immediate success.

Because of that success, however, we have made arrangements to continue our own edition *with new material* and there are some magnificent stories already lined up for future issues. The changeover takes place with the next issue, No. 6 published early in December, which will contain long stories by Arthur Sellings, Nelson Sherwood, and Australian author Wynne Whiteford. British, American, and Australian writers have already contributed to later issues, but one of the most outstanding stories to watch for will be James White's "Occupation : Warrior" in No. 7 (February)—a great idea by one of our most popular British writers.

You will find the new *Science Fiction Adventures* one of the most interesting action-adventure magazines in the science fiction field. If you aren't already a reader, try it for a few issues—and insist that your newsdealer obtains a copy regularly for you.

John Carnell

*Although Lan Wright's new serial is set against the galactic backdrop of space the fundamental principles of the story are rooted in the psi powers, which we have not touched deeply upon since Wilson Tucker's outstanding serial "Wild Talent" in 1954. More than telepathy is involved this time, however—telekinesis, pyrotics, precognition . . . and something else !*

# A MAN CALLED DESTINY

By LAN WRIGHT

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Part One of Three Parts

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## I

Jones' Planet wasn't the best place in the Galaxy on which to be stranded with a broken drive unit. Argyle found that out for himself before the ship had been there two days. It was an off-beat world as undistinguished as the man after whom it was named ; a small, out of the way planet which circled its lonely path around a minor sun a few light years to the Galactic north of Rigel.

Four weeks ! Argyle swore to himself as he left the space field for his evening jaunt into the small town of Jonesville. Well, at least he had the consolation of knowing that two of those weeks had gone already. The ship that had landed a



few hours earlier from Rigel Five had brought the replacement unit. Tomorrow it would be off loaded, and the engine room staff—including Argyle—would set about the job of installing it. Chief Engineer Gracchi thought that it would take about ten days Terran time, but the captain had threatened him with every fate listed in the space manual if they didn't get away from Jones in half that time.

Argyle agreed with the captain, even if it did mean that he would have to work the clock round to get it done. The fact that this might be his last evening ashore didn't worry him in the least.

His tall, heavy form headed out of the open, unguarded entrance to the field and turned right towards the dim lights of Jonesville about a mile distant. The road from the field to the town was the only good road on the planet, but even so there was no traffic at that time of night. The day's work had ended for the few thousand Terrans who formed the planet's only intelligent population, and all of them would now be performing the nightly ritual of gathering in the bars and saloons to drink and argue and fight. Later on, early in the morning, they would weave their separate ways to their beds and dream that their five year contract was up, and that they were ship-bound for Earth.

It was a hell of a life. Five years with a small fortune in cash at the end of it ; but before then there was a vista of long days in mines, no women, no entertainment outside of canned music and films ; rotgut local brewed liquor because it was too expensive to bring beer or whisky all the way from Earth. There wasn't even a teepee to call for help if anything serious went wrong. The only contact was a monthly supply ship. Teepees were far too important to waste their talents on a planet like Jones.

It was lack of a resident telepath that had meant the delay when Argyle's ship had made a hasty and unscheduled landing. They had to wait for the supply ship to call before news of their plight could be sent to Rigel Five ; thus the two weeks delay in starting repairs.

Argyle realised gloomily that he must be in a bad way if he was looking forward to getting drunk on the mixtures that were to be had in Jonesville. The cumulative effect of two weeks stagnation and the prospect of almost a week of unremitting hard work combined to lower his spirits. An evening in Jonesville became almost a pleasure.

The one-storied buildings loomed out of the darkness towards him, and the lights grew brighter illuminating the streets and the houses, the offices and the shops. Here and there a garish sign above an open door proclaimed a bar or gambling room, and from inside the door raucous music blared two-year-old Terran hit tunes above the jumbled drone of human voices.

Argyle went into the first saloon he came to, simply because he wouldn't have so far to crawl back to the ship when he was thrown out. Already the atmosphere was heavy and stale with synthetic tobacco, and half a dozen card games were in progress at various tables. He crossed to the bar and ordered a large bottle labelled Jones' Whisky, though heaven and the barman only knew what it really contained. He found a table tucked away in a corner, and settled down to spend an evening in lonely, moody isolation. Most of the faces around him were familiar, and some of them nodded or shouted greetings at him as he was recognised.

Some were unfamiliar. They belonged to men who were more neatly dressed and better groomed than the majority. They kept to themselves in small groups of three or four; they drank slowly and chatted quietly without the uninhibited freedom of the locals. Rightly, Argyle took them to be crewmen from the ship that had brought the new drive unit—there were no other strangers on Jones. Argyle grinned to himself. Before the evening was over most of them would be looking far from neat and smart. There was nothing the local Hafnium miners liked better than picking a quarrel with strangers, it helped to relieve their feelings, gave them an opportunity of letting off steam on someone other than their own kind. Argyle and his shipmates had found out the first evening they graced Jonesville with their presence. Argyle's own sterling performance on that occasion was the reason for his own dubious popularity with the miners. A good fighter bought their respect as no one else could.

The short, chubby man in the too well cut grey suit, didn't register on Argyle until he stood directly in his line of vision, bowed slightly, and enquired gravely, "Mister Argyle?"

Argyle swivelled his eyes to study the speaker. He was a stranger, an out-of-place stranger for a planet like Jones. He was smooth, well dressed, well groomed; neat as no other person was on Jones.



"Richard Argyle?" insisted the man.

"Yes, that's right. What can I do for you?"

The man pulled up a chair and sat down. "My name is Spiros, though I doubt if that means anything to you."

Argyle said nothing. Beneath the urbane exterior and the smoothness of Spiros was something he didn't like, which was quite ridiculous since he'd only seen him for the first time half a minute ago. There was nothing he could lay a finger on, except the odd circumstance of a stranger greeting him by name on a backwater world like Jones.

Spiros smiled easily, not apparently put out by the lack of response. "I travelled here from Rigel Five, Mister Argyle, as soon as I heard that you were—ah—marooned here for a spell."

"You came on this afternoon's ship?"

"Yes." Spiros nodded. "I have been trying to make contact with you for some weeks, but you have always just left the last place I landed. The fact that your ship was damaged has given me the opportunity of catching up with you."

Argyle stirred restlessly. People didn't go chasing all over the Galaxy just to catch up with the second engineer of a scrubby cargo vessel. The story didn't ring true, but he could hardly call the man a liar on such short acquaintance.

He took a long drink from the glass before him—and remained silent.

Spiros' face lost some of its composure. The smile was less unctuous, the eyes colder than ever.

"I do not seem to be making myself clear, Mister Argyle."

"That's right," agreed Argyle. "Not at all clear."

"I believe," Spiros shifted his gaze downwards to the top of the table, "that you have not seen your wife since she left you eight years ago. Am I any clearer now?"

A coldness filtered through Argyle's body, and he felt his muscles tense under the unexpectedness of the shock. Suddenly, after eight years, a door had opened that he had believed was locked forever, and something he had thought dead was returning to life.

"I am sorry if I was too blunt, but I needed to obtain your interest in me and my mission," said Spiros.

Argyle shivered slightly and lifted his eyes to look at the man in a different light. "All right. So you've got my interest. Now what?"

"I am employed by the Company Dellora, the same company that employed your wife during the last six years of her life—"

"What?"

"I beg your pardon—I—" Spiros shrank in his chair in terror as Argyle stood up and reached across to grasp the front of his jacket in a grip of iron.

"What did you say?" Argyle's voice was soft and terrible, and the blazing fury in his eyes made Spiros shrink even more.

"I said I—I was employed—"

"Not that. My wife. You said the last six years—dammit, man are you saying she's dead?"

"I thought you knew. Yes, that's why I have been trying to find you. I felt sure the—the news would have reached you—I—I'm sorry—"

His voice trailed away as Argyle relaxed his grip and sank back into his seat. The door had closed again, and this time it was for good. In less than five minutes his whole life had been altered. Hope had been reborn, and had died again under the words of a plump, unpleasant stranger who meant nothing to him. For the first time in over seven years he realised that he had carried with him the hope that somewhere, sometime, he would find Angela and their lives together would resume at the point where they had parted. He took a long pull at his glass and tried to relax, to pull his shocked brain back to the present—to the yammering chatter of the room around him.

"How—how did she die?" he asked, his voice husky and shaken.

"I do not know. I know only that she was a personal assistant of Pietro Dellora himself. She was a very important person to him, so much so that he asked me to tell you, when we met, that he will be forever in her debt. Her death was a great loss to the Company Dellora."

Argyle nodded dully. "And Pietro Dellora sent you half across the Galaxy to tell me that?"

"No." Spiros shook his head. "He sent me to find you and to invite you to visit him. He hopes you may accept a position with the Company Dellora. In this way he hopes to repay a small part of the great debt he owes to your wife."



There was a long pause while Argyle digested the information. Dulled by shock though his senses were, there was still something that didn't ring true. His natural caution probed and pulled at the strangeness of the situation, but there was nothing concrete that he could pin down.

He asked, "Why should Dellora do this?"

"I have told you. It is my mission and I have fulfilled it. Your wife loved you very much, Mister Argyle, even to her death—"

"That's why she left me," broke in Argyle angrily. "Talk sense, Spiros, or don't talk at all."

"I only know what Mister Dellora told me himself," persisted the man. "Her last wish was that you be told of her love, and that in repayment for her services the Company Dellora offer you a permanent position."

Since Angela had left him Argyle had carried the unanswered question within him—Why? He had never any doubt of her love for him all through their brief two years together. Then, while he was away on a trip to Arcturus, she had vanished as completely as if she had never existed. No one knew where she had gone, or why; nothing he had done had produced an answer; no enquiries had given the slightest clue to her whereabouts. The Universe was wide and space was deep, and she might have been on any of a thousand planets in any of a hundred star systems: Now, she was dead, and a fat, unpleasant stranger was telling him that she had spent the last six years of her life as an assistant of Pietro Dellora, owner of the Company Dellora, the largest Trader company in the Galaxy.

Argyle stirred, aware that the silence between them had lasted too long.

"I don't know," he began uncertainly.

"Please." Spiros held up a pudgy hand. "I fear that too much has happened these past few minutes for you to think clearly about the matter. I shall be returning to Rigel Five tomorrow on the ship which brought your new drive unit, and I believe you will be going there in a week or two when your repairs are completed."

"So?"

"I shall be staying at the Hotel Galactica. On your arrival I should be glad if you would contact me and let me know what you decide so that I can communicate with Mister Dellora."

## II

Rigel Five lay on one of the main Galactic trades routes between Earth and the populous Galactic centre. Its position made it one of the richest and busiest worlds in the Terran Empire, and it hummed with cosmopolitan life from many worlds. It was a planet-city whose only function was to cope with the pleasures and needs of interstellar traders and travellers. Its production of raw materials was nil, and its natural resources unworthy of even the slightest attempt at exploitation.

As a communication centre it was second to none ; as a trade market only Earth herself was richer. The native population was devoted entirely to the comfort of the passengers and crews from the great Galactic liners which landed in their thousands every year on the twenty-seven huge space fields. In the midst of their Terran-dominated world the natives still retained their identity even after five centuries of Terran rule. It was a rule which they accepted as logical because Terrans were so much better at everything than they were. Terrans brought work and trade and pleasure, things which the Regellians had never known before. The slim, slight race, with their wide mouths and pupil-less eyes, lived for today—ambition was a word they did not comprehend. They were happy with simple things, and they were loyal to those who could satisfy their needs.

Argyle looked on Rigel Five as a second home. The high buildings and the wide streets, the glittering lights and the well-kept gardens were too much like those of Earth. Each visit brought a pang at first, for Earth was far away—almost two months by even the fastest ship—forty light years across the deeps of space. For all its Earthlike appearance, few Terrans were to be seen in the ordinary life of the planet. They held the power behind the gleaming glass and plastic facade of the planet-city. They owned the theatres and the shops, the night clubs and the hotels, the company offices and the trade markets. Their hands could be seen in everything and behind everything, but the work was done by the natives. Only one in fifty of the planet's permanent population was Terran.

Argyle was lucky since his ship, the *Lady Dawn*, landed at a space field only a few miles from the Hotel Galactica. For over three weeks he had brooded over the odd visit from



Spiros. The sense of loss he felt at Angela's death dulled gradually into tame acceptance of an unpleasant fact. There was a gap in his life which could never be filled, and there was a question in his mind that he couldn't answer. Much as he tried he couldn't reconcile the Angela he had known with the valuable personal assistant to a tycoon like Pietro Dellora. She'd had little or no business sense that he could remember, though she always gave the impression of potential brilliance. She'd had an elfin charm, and, at times, an almost eerie prescience. "My ancestors were gypsies centuries ago," she used to say with a laugh.

Because of his pre-occupation the trip passed quickly for Argyle, but it wasn't until the day before they were due to land that he decided definitely to look up Spiros and find out more about the whole business. Even then it wasn't the dangled attraction of a job with the Company Dellora that decided him; such jobs weren't easy to get, but it wasn't enough of an attraction in itself. There was the more important desire to find out more about Angela and her life after she left him that made Argyle follow up his former meeting with Spiros. There was in him an inarticulate thought that he might be able to fill the aching gap in his being if he knew more about her life—and her death.

It was midday local time when he found himself in the giant foyer of the fifty storied Hotel Galactica. Everywhere were soft carpets, uniformed porters and commissionaires. The furnishings were the last word in sybaritic luxury, and the overall characteristic was sophisticated opulence.

Argyle went straight to one of the reception desks and beckoned to one of the native clerks. The native crossed to him, bowed slightly, and his thin, wide mouth spread in a smile of service and welcome which vanished suddenly as Argyle said, "I wish to see Mister Spiros. Which is his suite?"

"Mister Spiros?" The voice was high and softly sibilant.

"That's right." Argyle was puzzled by the native's reaction.

"Sir, I regret, Mister Spiros is—is not available. If you will please to wait one moment." The Rigellian bowed and disappeared to the rear of the reception desk. He was gone several minutes and Argyle's puzzlement grew momentarily greater. When he returned the clerk appeared through a large door at the side of the reception desk.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting, sir. If you will please step this way." He stood aside and bowed as Argyle crossed to him and moved uncertainly into the room that lay beyond.

It was a large private office. The walls were lined with filing cabinets and book shelves, and a large, ornate desk was the main piece of furniture. From behind it a lean-faced Terran rose to greet him as he crossed the thick pile carpet.

"I understand you were enquiring for Mister Spiros?"

"That's right."

"Are you a friend of his, Mister—?"

"Argyle." He shook his head. "No, he's not a friend. I met him on Jones' Planet a few weeks back and he asked me to call and see him here when I landed. Would I be rude in asking who you are?"

The man smiled and inclined his head. "Sorry," he replied apologetically. "My name is Montresi. I am the manager here."

"I'm a little puzzled, Mister Montresi," remarked Argyle. "All I want is to see Mister Spiros."

"That will be a little difficult."

"Indeed! Why?"

Montresi dropped his dark eyes to the desk top before him, and fiddled uncertainly with a stylopen. "Mister Spiros was killed three days ago."

"What!" Argyle's jaw dropped in incredulous horror. "But—"

"Please." Montresi raised a hand. "It was something of a mystery, and the Law Squads are still investigating the matter. I have called the officer in charge of the case—"

"What the devil for?"

"Because I was asked to notify him if anyone enquired after the dead man." Montresi smiled wryly. "Please forgive me, Mister Argyle, but I am not in a position to do other than ask you to wait for a short while. I may say that when he made the request, the officer didn't think it very likely that anyone would be calling because Spiros was an outworlder."

"Yes, he was from Dellora Planet."

"So I believe."

Argyle sat and fumed, regretting the impulse which had made him follow up Spiros' offer. The last thing he wanted was to get mixed up in a murder case. Murder? Montresi



hadn't said anything about murder. He cocked a questioning eye at the manager.

"How did he die?" he asked abruptly.

"That is part of the mystery," Montresi replied. He hesitated, then, "I do not think I had better say more before—"

"Before the law arrives." Argyle nodded bitterly.

"I'm sorry—"

"Forget it, it isn't your fault." Argyle relaxed into a moody silence that lasted uncomfortably until the desk clerk came in a few minutes later.

"Lawman Swarder, sir," he announced.

Swarder was a short, thickset man in his early forties, a tough, professional crime-chaser who would have stood out in any company as a man with both brain and muscle power. His wide, blue eyes were penetrating and his jaw line firm and uncompromising. Clearly, he was a man to be respected. He was quietly and soberly dressed, and the only mark of distinction was a gold star at his breast with the red letters L and M across it.

"This is Mister Argyle, Lawman," said Montresi by way of introduction.

"Space officer, eh?" Swarder's hand clasp was brief and hard.

Argyle nodded. "Second Engineer of the XQ342, *Lady Dawn* in from Jones' Planet today."

"Jones!" Swarder pulled a chair nearer to the desk and waved Argyle back to his seat. "Not the best of worlds to visit."

"You know it?"

"By reputation only."

"You're lucky. It stinks," replied Argyle with a grimace.

Swarder chuckled, and turned to the manager. "If you wouldn't mind, Montresi—?"

"Of course, Lawman, of course." Montresi beat a hasty retreat, closing the door behind him as he went.

"You knew Spiros," stated Swarder flatly.

"I met him for the first time a few weeks back."

"Where?"

"On Jones."

"What was he doing there?"

"He came to see me."

"I thought you'd never met before?"

"We hadn't."

"Then—?"

"Look," interrupted Argyle. "Let me tell you the story from the beginning. That way you might make sense out of it."

Sworder nodded. "All right. Go ahead."

Argyle kept it short. He told of the broken drive unit that had stranded the *Lady Dawn*, and he told of the delay because of the lack of a teepee on Jones. He detailed the unexpected interview he'd had with Spiros in the seamy saloon in Jonesville. He told how Spiros had managed to catch up with him because of the delay, and he brought a frown of surprise to Sworder's brow as he told about the offer from Dellora. Privately, Argyle didn't blame the Lawman for his scepticism; as he spoke of it he wasn't entirely convinced himself.

"And that's all," he ended. "I was to think about it and let him have an answer when he got in here from Jones. That's where you come in. You know as much as I do—probably more."

"More?" queried Sworder.

"You know how Spiros died."

Sworder nodded, but made no reply. He was obviously disappointed at the lack of help he'd got from Argyle.

"How did Spiros die?" insisted Argyle. "Or is it a secret?"

"No, it's no secret." Sworder pursed his lips. "He was shot with his own needle gun in a locked room."

"Suicide?"

"No. The gun was lying fifteen feet away from the body on the other side of the room—and it didn't have any of Spiros' fingerprints on it."

Argyle digested the information in silence. At last he said, "If I didn't know better, I'd say it was impossible."

Sworder's eyes flickered with mocking humour. "Don't I know it? To make matters worse Spiros had to be a teepee."

"What?" Argyle looked up quickly at the Lawman, surprise plain on his face.

"You didn't know?"

"A telepath? No, he didn't wear his badge when I saw him on Jones. He never let on."

"Odd, don't you think?"

More and more Argyle felt the tangled web of surprise and intrigue wind thicker round him. All telepaths were bound by law to wear a Teepee badge. They were too few and too



valuable to be incognito in the community at large. A man wearing a Teepee badge was respected wherever he went, and by the badge he wore he told of his gifts and his use to the human race. Teepees numbered only a few thousand throughout the Galaxy, and it was to preserve their powers and to safeguard their future development that efforts to protect them took such stringent forms. A crime endangering the life of of teepee was a crime against the future of the whole human race, for on their shoulders rested the responsibility of interstellar communication. Only one teepee could talk with another across the vast oceans between the stars.

"But why didn't he let me know?" insisted Argyle.

Sworder shrugged. "He had his motives no doubt. The question now is to find the murderer."

"And how do you do that?"

Sworder sighed. "I wish I knew. I've had experts go over that room with a fine tooth comb, and they could draw only one conclusion. Whoever was in there with Spiros could not get out—it was an utter physical impossibility. There were people—four of them—in the corridor when Spiros was heard to scream. They were outside his door within five seconds. They heard his body hit the floor, they heard the thud as the murderer dropped the gun. They heard half a dozen footsteps, and then—nothing. When the door was forced open two minutes later the suite was empty."

"Windows?"

"Unopened and unopenable. Air conditioned rooms. Besides," Sworder grinned, "it's on the thirty-ninth story."

"So?"

"There was no physical way out of that suite, of that I'm quite certain."

There was a long pause while Argyle pondered the information. He was intrigued and fearful at the same time. Intrigued both by the problem and Sworder's willingness to talk about it; fearful of being mixed up in it in some inexplicable way. He stirred after several moments, uneasy at something in Sworder's tone.

"You said—no physical way out?" He cocked a questioning eye at the Lawman, and Sworder pursed his lips in a wry smile.

"What are you going to do now that Spiros is dead, Mister Argyle?"

"You haven't answered my question."

"You answer mine first."

"Well—" Argyle was lost for an answer. The question hadn't crossed his mind until Sworder brought it up. He could head back aboard the *Lady Dawn* and forget he'd ever heard of Spiros or of Pietro Dellora. If he did that he would never be able to wipe from his mind the death of Angela. Some time, sooner or later, he would start wondering about her. How had she lived? How had she died? And the only person who could tell him would be Pietro Dellora or someone close to him. The fact that Dellora might offer him a job was of secondary consideration. True, there would be no more flitting around the Galaxy in a third rate cargo vessel as second engineer, calling every planet a rest place but none of them home. There might even be a comfortable position as a trading representative on Dellora's staff on Earth. He might—but there he stopped thinking. The prospects were becoming too bright, and the original spaceman's motto was the one about counting chickens. The main portion of his immediate ambitions lay in finding out about Angela.

"I think," he said carefully, "I might look up Pietro Dellora and see if his offer of a job still stands."

"That the only reason?" asked Sworder softly.

Argyle looked at the Lawman with slight surprise. The insight of the man was clear and surprising.

"No," he replied. "I think I'd like to know more about my wife and how she died."

"You think it will help to know?"

Argyle shrugged. "I don't know whether it will or not. But something doesn't ring true." He waved a hand vaguely. "Don't ask me to name it. I just can't see Angela as a leading light in the empire of a tycoon like Pietro Dellora. There's another thing, too."

"What?"

"People just don't die these days at her age unless—unless—"

"Unless something is very wrong."

Argyle nodded. "And now that Spiros is dead, too." He realised with a shock that he was putting the two facts together, and the answer he got wasn't pleasant to contemplate.

"A hunch?"



"Maybe. I think I'll sign off the *Lady Dawn* and go see Pietro Dellora." He looked up at Sworder. "Okay? That's your question answered. Now, how about mine?"

Sworder looked at the floor between his feet. "There was one way out of the room . . . just one."

"But you said—"

"I said no physical way." Sworder smiled grimly and nodded, then he remarked conversationally, "We've never had a teleport in the Galaxy before."

### III

With the development of inter-Galactic trade a new class of tycoon was born. Terran laws became more fragile as distances from the home world increased, and in the far-spread outer reaches of the Galaxy—outside the grip of the law and the jurisdiction of the courts—there grew up empires of trade and commerce such as the race of man had never dreamed possible. Hard, strong men with quick brains and the ambition of power carved their own kingdoms on the tiny, unwanted planets that circled lonely stars. They made their own laws and lived by their own standards. They built up great fleets of cargo ships that plied the great trade routes between Earth and the stars; they controlled commodity markets, twisted prices to suit their own needs, created shortages and gluts alike.

Before Earth realised the true position the trading barons had a stranglehold on Galactic trade which nothing, short of armed force, could break. In the beginning armed force had been tried—once. It was used against one, Vicente Dellora, and it wasn't successful because everyone of Dellora's fellow tycoons withdrew their ships and their money and their trade. They sat, each on his own world, and watched while Earth and her satellite worlds struggled futilely in a web of their own making—and in the end Earth had to give way. The Traders came back bigger and more powerful than ever.

And the most powerful of all had been Vicente Dellora.

Argyle signed off the *Lady Dawn* and took ship for the Planet Dellora where Vicente's descendants reigned in his stead. It was a long trip, five weeks in a pokey cargo vessel with no facilities for passengers. It was as well for Argyle that he

had come up the hard way, and was well used to such conditions.

From the great trade routes governed by the laws of Earth they filtered through the minor channels out into the areas where the law of Earth was replaced by the law of Dellora. The trade routes fell behind, and out of the starlit depths of the Galactic rim floated the tiny G-type sun around which the single planet Dellora swam in lonely splendour. Argyle watched the green orb of Dellora Planet loom larger, and wondered what answers awaited him below on the tiny world where his wife had died. How had she come, in so short a time, to be so valuable to such a man as Pietro Dellora? The normal sheltered life of the average Terran, be he wanderer or not, allowed no great knowledge of the Traders or their ways. One heard of them, saw their names on the gleaming hulls of their ships; knew, without wonder, that on them depended the luxuries and the necessities which made life more pleasant. And beyond that? Nothing!

Argyle learned more of the Traders and their worlds during his five weeks voyage than he had learned in all his previous five years of space wandering. The black-bearded captain and his crew were in constant touch with one or other of the Trader Companies. Their ship was an independent which gained a lucrative but precarious living by taking small or awkward cargoes on out of the way routes. The large Trader ships would have been quite uneconomical for such tasks, but the small, scrubby ship with its rough, tough crew, could and did make a living at it.

"Be landing in two hours," the ship's captain told him from the autolog. "Guess you'll not be sorry, eh?"

Argyle stirred from his reverie and stretched his tall, heavy frame. "I've travelled worse," he answered.

The black bearded Terran laughed hoarsely. "It'll be a worse one when we leave here, if I know Dellora. He'll have a cargo for us as wide-spread as the Milky Way."

"Then why take it?"

"If we don't we'll never lift ship from Dellora," was the grim reply. He cocked an eye at Argyle. "You'll learn Trader ways on Dellora, Argyle. Take my tip and watch out."

Argyle nodded and said nothing.

"Will you ship with us on the return?"

"I don't know. How long will you be here?"



"Ten days. We'll probably lift about the twentieth, Galactic Time."

"All right. I'll know when to come."

The skipper waved a horny finger at him. "Dellora's ships charge high, Mister—even if they'll take you. There ain't many independents like me come through here."

Argyle grinned. "Okay. I'll remember."

They came in to a landing on the giant space field outside Dellora City, the one large centre of population on the planet, and at once Argyle felt the power of Dellora. The field was wide and smooth, and around it, as they came in, he could make out the gleaming hulls of twenty or thirty great vessels as they lay in repair berths or stood by loading bays taking on or discharging their cargoes. Argyle knew, too, that he had left Terran law a long, long way behind.

Hard-faced men in steel-grey uniforms with red facings, littered the space port. Each of them carried side arms that were not merely ornamental. Like all the Traders Dellora had his own private army to see that things were done one way and one way only—Dellora's way.

Everyone on the ship from the captain down to the cook had to register at the Personnel Office, and everyone was issued with an identity disc which was strapped tightly to the left wrist. The discs were tuned electronically to a central plotter and computer, and by a quick check through the machine, Dellora's law officers could tell exactly where anyone was at any given moment. It could not be abandoned because the pulse of the wearer kept it static, and as soon as the pulse beat ceased—either through the removal or through death—the central computer registered the fact and gave the alarm.

Dellora's men were nothing if not efficient.

"A hell of a world, Argyle," the ship captain told him gloomily. "Watch it, mister, or I won't be able to give you a passage out, even if I wanted to."

As a visitor Argyle had to suffer an interrogation by a Public Security Officer before he was allowed to leave the space port. He was shown into a large, bare office, furnished with two chairs and a table, and there he was left for half an hour before his interrogator appeared.

The officer who came at last was a plump, bored man with a bald head and wispy moustache. Argyle took an instant

dislike to the cold, piggy eyes as he was waved carelessly to one of the chairs.

The officer produced a file and a stylpen. "Name?" he asked.

"Richard Argyle."

"Age?"

"Thirty-four."

"Occupation?"

"Second Engineer, Terran Space Commission."

The cold eyes flickered at him. "You're a hell of a way from home, mister?"

Argyle shifted angrily in his chair. "So?" he queried harshly.

"So—why are you a long way from home?" the other rasped back.

"It's none of your business."

The officer eyed him bleakly, and then laid the pen precisely and slowly on the desk before him. He folded his hands and his gaze wandered ironically over Argyle's seated figure.

"You're not on Earth now, Argyle, you're on Dellora Planet. There is no Terran authority within twenty light years, and if you upset us too much we can make things very nasty for you. While you're here you'll do and act and live just as we tell you. Otherwise—" he shrugged expressively and picked up the pen. "Now, we'll try it again. What are you doing here?"

Argyle fought down a desire to punch the man's chubby nose. He'd heard rumours of the demagogic way in which the Traders ran their own affairs, but he hadn't believed them—until now.

"I want to see Pietro Dellora," he stated bluntly.

The man grunted in surprise. "Well, you don't do things by halves, do you, Argyle? Maybe you'd like a million credits as well?"

Argyle ignored the sarcasm.

"Why do you want to see Mister Dellora?"

"I don't want to see him," replied Argyle, changing his tack. "He wants to see me."

"Oh, sure. And of course you've got a written invitation?"

Argyle's temper flared and he slammed his fist on to the top of the table before him.

"Look, I didn't ask to come to this pest hole of a planet for my health. Dellora sent one of his men to find me—a man named Spiros—a teepee."



"Spiros?"

"That's right."

"Where is Spiros now? Why isn't he with you?"

Argyle grinned coldly and with unholy delight. "Because he's dead."

The silence which followed could have been cut with a knife, and it lasted several long seconds while the officer digested the news. Then he closed his file carefully and grimly.

"You'll go into town, Mister Argyle, and register at the Hotel Dellora. You'll stay there until someone gets in touch with you. And remember, we'll know every move you make as soon as you leave this office. Don't try to go too far away. We hate having to bring people back."

"What if I don't like the hotel?"

"Then you'll register in our jail, and no one will get in touch with you for a long time. We've got long arms and short memories, mister, and our tempers are shorter than our memories." He turned abruptly and left the office.

True to the warning he'd been given Argyle didn't stray far from the hotel. He visited a stereo show when things got boring; he watched the local tridi-vision until the banalness of the shows drove him to his room; and he consumed large quantities of liquor in the hotel bar. That apart he could do nothing but wait, and after three days the waiting became tedious.

Late on the evening of the third day, just as he was preparing for bed, they came for him. There were two of them in the now familiar grey uniforms; one of them was tall and lean and strong, the other was shorter, just as wiry, and just as strong. As Argyle opened the door in answer to their knock they walked past him into the room as if they owned it, and the tall one remarked casually, "Mister Dellora has sent for you."

Argyle eyed him incredulously. "Now?" he queried. "Dammit, it's after ten-thirty!"

The shorter man grinned humourlessly. "Time doesn't mean very much to Mister Dellora," he replied softly. "Come on."

Argyle shrugged and slid into his uniform jacket. Clearly, it wasn't any good arguing with them—which only went to show, he thought wryly, how much his thinking had changed in just three short days.

"Shall I need anything?" he asked.

"I doubt it. If you do just ask for it when you get there."

They left the hotel in a low ground car which drove them the short distance to the space field, and as they drove under the high-arched entrance to the field Argyle felt his nerves tingle with apprehension and bewilderment. He opened his mouth to ask the inevitable question—and shut it again—the question unasked. He doubted that he would get a reply anyway.

A small, fast vessel of an interplanetary class not known to him, was their destination in the car, and they went quickly through the airlock into the small passenger cabin. As they strapped themselves into their seats it was all that Argyle could do to stop himself asking at least one question. Dellora was a lone planet! In theory, at any rate, an interplanet ship was useless—there was nowhere for it to go. He settled himself back in the seat and felt the gentle surge of takeoff push him back into the plastic foam padding. He glanced sideways and met the sardonic gaze of the guard who sat beside him.

"No questions?" the man asked.

Argyle shook his head. "The answers will come soon enough." He looked away and relaxed, closing his eyes as the whine of the drive unit rose higher and then settled into a steady monotonous beat. The guard chuckled softly beside him.

He tried to sleep but it was no good; the minutes ticked by on leaden wings until the drive note changed down again and the thrust forward of deceleration pulled at his body. He opened his eyes, the small clock on the instrument panel beside the pilot showed that it was just half an hour since takeoff, and a glance through the viewport showed that they were in deep space. At least, he thought, the answers would not be long in coming.

#### IV

A faint muffled clang echoed through the cabin, and the tiny ship shuddered slightly. Both the sound and the motion were things which Argyle had experienced before but under entirely different circumstances. He had never known an oxygen-cycle planet to have a space station before. There was no need for it. A space station was only necessary when the environment of the world below was entirely hostile to



mankind. Even an airless world like the Moon had no need of an artificial satellite; ships could land upon its surface and men could walk there, if they wore protective suiting. Space stations served as a base for operations against a world whose treacherous elements made ship landing entirely impracticable—and that could not be said of Dellora Planet. The clang and shudder were the results of a magnetically coupled airlock joining the ship to the station.

The two guards unfastened their belts, and Argyle did the same. The faint hiss of equalising pressures reached his ears as they crossed the cabin towards the airlock, and one of the guards pulled at his arm, halting his progress.

“Watch yourself as you cross over, mister.”

Argyle looked at him questioningly, but no further information was forthcoming. He stepped from the ship through the lock and into the entrance to the station, and as he did so his stomach heaved and his head spun dizzily. He reached for a handhold to steady himself, and added another query to the already long list in his mind.

The gravity of the station was less than one quarter Earth normal. Either the gravity unit wasn't functioning properly, or—more disturbing still—the gravity was normal for the station.

The tall guard chuckled. “Gets you doesn't it?”

“Is it always like this?”

“Sure.”

“What the devil for?”

The man laughed again. “You'll learn, mister.”

A wide corridor led away from the airlock, and as they went along it large doors—larger than normal—were set at intervals in the metal walls. Through one of them, swinging open, Argyle could see wide, high rooms that were three or four times bigger than the usual fifteen foot square cabin that was usual in a space station. The fittings were ornate and the furnishings luxurious, that much he could see at a quick glance.

Quite obviously the whole structure of the station was radically different from the usually accepted principles. It was built like a palace with sybaritic luxury becoming more apparent the deeper they moved towards the hub. Carpets of astonishing beauty appeared on the floor beneath their feet, and soft lighting glowed from hidden fittings restfully and in ever changing colours. Oil paintings and tridi colourscares decorated the walls, and the whole effect was that of some

great mansion on Earth which was the home of someone with infinite wealth and perfect taste.

Argyle wondered why Pietro Dellora should choose to live this way.

His senses quickly attuned themselves to the light gravity, though there were momentary spells of dizziness and a slight feeling that he was falling if he happened to lift his feet from the floor too quickly.

They passed several people, uniformed guards, liveried servants, and three women. They were young, exquisitely gowned and of a beauty which was startling even to Argyle's worldly eyes. His earlier opinion of Dellora's taste was confirmed.

The wide, main corridor ended at the hub. It opened out into a giant, vaulted room with curved walls and a high, domed ceiling. The circular shape gave Argyle the clue that the room was, in fact, the hub of the station, and he wondered at the feat of engineering which allowed the machinery of the station to be placed elsewhere and leave the hub available for occupation. The overall impression of the vast room confirmed the earlier ideas he'd had in the corridors. Nothing that Argyle had ever seen or dreamed of in his life before could approach the staggering panorama that lay before his eyes.

"Wait here." The voice of the taller guard broke his wonder, and as he turned he saw the backs of the two men disappearing along the corridor.

He walked forward slowly and carefully, fearful, almost, to let his booted feet touch the smooth delicacy of the carpet. His eyes ranged the walls, flitting like a bee among a myriad brilliant blooms, over the kaleidoscopic colours. He had seen such pictures before. They could be bought—at a price—anywhere in the Galaxy, but none that he had ever seen before could approach the fantastic beauty and perfection that he saw now. Every one was a window on a different world, or the frozen image, captured and immortal, of a different person. He looked and he wondered.

"Good evening, Mister Argyle."

The voice boomed at him, deep and sonorous, from a far corner of the fantastic room, and he turned abruptly, startled out of his wonderment.

"I am Pietro Dellora."



The man who spoke had entered from another corridor on the other side of the great room, and as his eyes rested on the owner of the voice Argyle knew with a mixture of horror and pity why the station gravity was so low. The figure that stood before him on the far side of the room was a mountain of human flesh, an obscene, puffy caricature of the human form; a bloated, bulbous body topped by a white-haired head that rested, neckless, upon the obesity beneath. The arms and legs were half hidden from view by a white, toga-like garment that floated about the figure, but the white, pudgy hands with their sausage fingers bore witness to the remainder of the hidden limbs.

Only the eyes were compelling without being repellant.

They were black, luminous orbs that gazed steadily out upon the world through unhealthy rolls of fleshy fat, and they alone gave notice of the being that lay imprisoned beneath the obscene facade of flesh that was Pietro Dellora.

The overlong silence was broken by a soft, wry laugh that sprang from Dellora's lips and rippled his puffy cheeks.

"Not all my power, Argyle," he said in answer to the unspoken question. "I hold the Galaxy in the palm of my hand, but I cannot control the outrage of my own body."

Argyle licked his lips and strove to speak. He could not.

"Sit down, sit down." Dellora floated, rather than walked, across the room towards him, and waved him to a divan set back against one curved wall. "The gravity is sufficient for that." He relaxed his own great body against another divan, oddly shaped and with an arrangement of sloping cushions that puzzled Argyle, until he realised, with mounting horror, that Dellora was too fat even to sit down.

"I—I—" he stammered, and stopped, horrified by his sudden inability to utter even one coherent word.

"I know—I know. You pity but you cannot speak of it. Well," Dellora waved a hand to the room around, "at least I have the means to alleviate my discomfort. Were I a poor man I should have been dead these twenty years past."

Argyle made a visible effort to pull himself together. No useful purpose could be served by allowing himself be overcome either by horror or by pity.

"You wanted to see me," he stated abruptly.

"Ah, yes," Dellora nodded. "Tell me, how did Spiros die?"

"He was murdered."

Dellora said nothing. The dark eyes held steady upon Argyle's face for a long minute as if seeking complicity in the crime. Argyle went on speaking slowly and deliberately, telling of the events which led up to the mysterious death of the teepee.

"And so," he ended, "we have a teleport somewhere in the Galaxy."

A shadow passed over Dellora's face. He sighed. "It had to come."

"You believe the Lawman's explanation?"

"Of course. If teepees and pyrotics can exist and increase, why should not other powers grow into the human race?" He chuckled slightly. "I am somewhat gifted myself." He waved to a table at the side of the divan on which Argyle was seated, and from it an ornamental vase rose, wavering, into the air and floated across the room to rest in Dellora's hand. "Do not be too impressed, my friend," Dellora told him, "there is little gravity here to hinder me. Under Terran conditions I would only be able to slide it from the table so that it shattered on the floor."

"A kineticist," Argyle had seen such men before, chiefly in night clubs or theatres that specialised in human entertainment.

Dellora nodded. "But you didn't come here to talk about me. My gift is small and my troubles are great." He paused. "Your wife loved you until her death. Believe me, I know."

"She is—dead, then?" Numbly, as he spoke, Argyle realised that he had been nursing an absurd hope that Spiros had been wrong with his information, and now that hope was slipping away.

Dellora nodded, and the hope was gone for good.

"Angela was a great and gifted woman," he said, "just how gifted you never knew for she never told you."

Argyle sat quiet, torn with curiosity and grief. There was little he could say and nothing he could do but wait for Dellora to continue.

"Your wife had a gift, too, Argyle. She could foretell the future."

Argyle looked dazedly at the old man. "What?"

Dellora smiled thinly. "Witchcraft? Magic? No, don't look so incredulous. She had a mind that could sift and sort information with far greater accuracy than any computer ever



designed. Even she didn't know how she did it. From the overall picture of a given sequence of facts and figures she could extrapolate the probable end result of a certain course of action with about ninety-eight percent accuracy. That was something which no mere machine could ever do. I should know, Argyle, for she worked for me for six years. Those six years were the most profitable and successful the Company Dellora has ever known."

Argyle sat stunned and bewildered. This was his wife? The lovely girl with the naivety of a child, whom he had married because he fell in love with her simplicity? This—fortuneteller!

Only when Dellora snapped, "No, not that, Argyle. She had a gift and she used it," did he realise that he had been speaking out loud.

He lifted his eyes from the gyrations of the fabulous carpet.

"Was that why she—she left me? Why she disappeared without trace?"

Dellora paused as if considering the point, then shook his head. "I do not know. She did not speak of it. She saw something in the future of your lives together that drove her from you even though she loved you. She came here and I employed her, but to me she was more than just a means to greater power. She was my friend and I respected her. I trusted her judgment, and she was seldom wrong. She spoke of you often, and in every word she uttered she showed that her love for you was as great as ever."

Argyle sat silent. He could not doubt the truth of every word that Dellora spoke. There was a sincerity which could not be denied.

"Then why did she leave me?" he asked suddenly.

"If she did not tell you it is hardly likely that she would tell me."

Argyle nodded wordlessly. The fact was slowly sinking into his brain that Spiros had not been wrong.

"Do you know how—how she died?"

"No, I don't. She went on a business trip for me to the planet Calgon. She never arrived there and she never returned. The wreck of the ship in which she was travelling was found months later. There was no one on board still alive."

That, it seemed, was the end; the final nail driven solidly home. They sat in silence for long minutes while Argyle tried to absorb all that Dellora had told him.

At last he moved uncertainly in his seat. He felt out of his depths. He wondered vaguely what he was doing here in this fantastic, man-made world, with an obscene, almost alien freak who could live only under semi-alien conditions. His mouth twisted in bitter resentment, and Dellora saw it, recognised it for what it was, and acted to break the spell that Argyle's mood was building.

"And now," he said softly, "the subject is you."

"Me?" The spell was broken as Argyle raised his eyes in surprise.

"Do you think Angela did not foresee her own end?" Dellora nodded slowly. "She did. She saw it all too clearly months before it came, though the manner and timing she could not foretell. She asked a dozen times that, if she died, I find you and tell you of her love. That I have done. My debt to her is paid by doing that and by offering you employment with the Company Dellora." He lifted a pudgy hand as Argyle made to speak. "It is not charity. A few months ago it might have been, but, in searching for you I have learned a great deal about you. All of it confirmed that what Angela told me was right and not just the ideas of a woman in love." He leaned forward as much as his gross bulk would allow. "I learned enough to think it worth while offering you a position because good space engineers are not easy to find. You would earn your keep—if you choose to accept."

Argyle didn't answer. The offer could be the best chance he'd ever had. Jobs with any of the great trading companies weren't easy to get. They had their pick of the cream that was available, and the rest had to fight for work on independent ships, old, slow vessels like the one on which he'd travelled to Dellora Planet. There was the other side to be considered. A job with Dellora meant a contract—and one that couldn't be broken easily. It would mean discipline on fast, new, clean passenger ships whose routes traversed the Galaxy. He would go where he was told on a ship to which he had been allocated; he wouldn't be able to jump off at any port which took his fancy. The long years of aimless wandering would be over. They were over. He knew that all the years that had passed since Angela had gone had been spent with one end in view—to find her and win her back. Now, that hope was dead, and there was no need of further wandering. There was nothing to find.

"Why should you do this for me?" he asked suddenly.



"I think you would be good for the Company," retorted Dellora.

Argyle shook his head. "No, I don't think that's the reason," he said thoughtfully. "Why should Angela have foreseen her own death, Dellora? What was she doing for you that made her dangerous to someone else?"

The dark eyes regarded Argyle with sombre respect as Dellora weighed his words. "You have a sharp mind, Argyle—too sharp. I told you that the years she worked for the Company were the richest and most successful in its history. The Company Dellora is bigger and more powerful than ever it was, and, naturally, someone had to suffer for that growth. Our gain was someone else's loss." He waved a hand in vague dismissal of an unpleasant fact. "It happens all the time. While there is competition there will be intrigue, and this time the intrigue went as far as murder."

Argyle went cold inside as the shock of Dellora's words hit him.

"I did not mean to tell you that, but I think you have a mind quick enough to work it out for yourself eventually. I cannot bring Angela back to you, but I can try and make up, in some small measure, for her loss to both of us. You don't have to decide now. Think about it for a while, and come and see me again."

He touched a button at the side of the divan on which he lay, and in seconds the two escorting guards were standing in the entrance to the giant room.

"Take Mister Argyle back to his hotel. When he wishes to see me again you will bring him to me."

Argyle found himself out in the long, luxurious corridor with the guards on either side of him. He walked in silence for several dozen yards, and then halted as a thought struck him.

"Wait here," he ordered abruptly. "I want to see Mister Dellora again."

He turned before they could object and went quickly back to the giant hub room of the station. He reached it in time to see Dellora's massive form disappearing through the far exit.

"Mister Dellora," he called sharply.

The figure halted and turned back towards him.

"So soon?" The voice was slightly mocking.

Argyle shook his head. "No, not that. I wanted—look, do you have any idea who—who—"

"Who killed Angela?" Dellora gazed sadly across the room. "No, I cannot tell you that, Argyle. I only wish I could. I'm sorry."

Argyle turned back into the corridor. Even that knowledge was denied him. He was punching pillows trying to pin the blame on any one person or group. He rejoined the guards who eyed him curiously as he reached them, and together they went towards the rim and to the waiting ferry.

## V

It was after two in the morning when Argyle arrived back at the Hotel Dellora. He went to his room and sat down on the bed. Reaction was setting in, bringing with it an ache to the limbs and somnolence to the mind. He undressed slowly, leaving his clothes in an untidy heap on the chair beside his bed, and lay down. A light sheet was all the covering that was necessary; the air conditioning was unnoticeable but effective. He snapped off the light switch, and the colours glowed dimly around him, fading slowly, until darkness shrouded the room.

His limbs ached and he stretched his legs and arms to try and relieve the tension. He felt too tired ever to sleep, and his mind still whirled with a score of questions that he must remember when next he met Pietro Dellora. Bodily weariness overcame his mental turmoil at last, and he slept without knowing that he did so. Even in sleep his mind would not rest, as dream phantoms chased unending paths through the deep labyrinths of his subconscious. The murdered Spiros—Angela—Sworder—the bloated, nightmare figure of Pietro Dellora . . .

Argyle awoke to a sound he could not place, and to a flash of light that seemed without reality. The sweat of nightmare lay wet on his face, and his body was tense and rigid beneath the light sheet. His heart pounded as if he'd run a dozen miles, and his eyes probed wide into the darkness around him without seeing anything but the expected black of night.

He lay still and tried to calm his pounding nerves, to convince his waking senses that a nightmare, and not a sound, had wakened him.

And then a voice said, "Put on the light, Argyle. I can't fumble for a switch in this damned darkness."



Argyle's heart leapt ; he hesitated, then, slowly, reached to press the switch beside his bed. The lights flowed softly to full brightness, and through slitted lids Argyle made out the form of a man who crossed from the door to a chair beside his bed.

He was a slim, fair-haired figure, not above forty, with a pallid face and large luminous eyes. The lower lip was full and gave his red mouth a petulant twist. His face was pinched and ascetic, and his whole air that of a dilettante. It was the eyes, though, that held Argyle. They were too familiar to be ignored. He wondered where else he had seen such eyes.

"That's better." The man eased himself into the soft chair, and smiled with engaging candour at the half reclining figure of Argyle. "Tell me, Argyle, how is Preacher Judd?"

So casual was the question, and so ridiculous the words, that for a moment Argyle wondered if this whole scene was not of the stuff of nightmares.

"Preacher Judd?" he queried. "Who the devil's Preacher Judd?"

The other sighed. "Ah, well. I suppose I could hardly expect you to admit acquaintance. However—"

"What the hell is all this?" demanded Argyle angrily. "Is this one of Dellora's little jokes?"

"How little you know old Pietro." The man smiled sardonically. "But perhaps that's just as well. To get back to Preacher Judd—"

"Dammit, I've never heard of the man," exploded Argyle. "The only name I'm interested in right now is yours."

The lower lip protruded more petulantly, and the liquid eyes lost their softness. The whole picture was that of a spoilt child who has had a favourite toy removed from its avaricious hands.

"My identity will do you no good, and it may do me some harm if you learn it now. I have no means to force your knowledge of Preacher Judd, Argyle, but I will give you a warning which you will do well to accept. I don't know why you came here—except that Pietro sent for you—I can only guess at the message which Spiros gave you. I only know that you have come and that your presence is not necessary here. Get out of here with just as much speed as you came." He stood up abruptly. "Meddle in my affairs any more, Argyle, and you'll wish you'd never been born."

He crossed to the door and unlocked it, then he looked back at the astounded and bemused Argyle.

"One other thing, give Preacher Judd that self-same advice when next you see him. I doubt if he will take it, but at least he will know that I am not ignoring him completely."

He was gone through the door before Argyle could gather his scattered wits. It was seconds before he slid from under the sheet and in four swift strides crossed to the door. He slid it open and stepped into the corridor which stretched away in a gentle curve for several yards on either side of his door. It was empty.

Slowly, Argyle turned back into the room and closed the door behind him. For an instant he considered raising an alarm, but he hesitated as the oddness of the encounter made him think twice. A glance at the wall clock told him that it was just after four and he had slept less than two hours. He could picture what sort of an idiot he would look trying to explain an occurrence for which there was no justification. He hadn't been robbed or assaulted—only threatened, and threatened with what?

There was no semblance of a reason to bring him comfort as the question pounded in his brain. He could have assumed mistaken identity but he was known by name, and his protestations of innocence had been dismissed as lies. There was a cold knot in the pit of his stomach as he wondered with sudden panic just what he had wandered into. First Angela, murdered (so Dellora said) because the Company Dellora was growing too powerful. Then Spiros, killed for no other apparent reason than that he, too, was employed by Pietro Dellora, and was looking for Argyle. Hitherto the great trading companies had been merely names in the shipping lists and the trading journals. Names like Dellora, Vanderlinden, Yosaka, Tabori, Forester and the rest. Behind the names were nebulous figures who ruled their own giant empires of power from the far corners of the Galaxy. Suddenly there was a sinister ring to the names and titles. As they sifted through his brain Argyle felt an aura of mystery and power greater than his previous assessments of such power. There was a great octopus, many tentacled, that spread itself across the Universe, and each of its extremities bore a different name—Dellora—Vanderlinden—

He shook himself and shivered slightly, trying to throw off the feeling of blinding insignificance, and moved towards the divan. There was nothing he could do now. As he sat on



the edge of the bed a minute gleam of brightness caught his eye, shining against the background of the pillow. He leaned closer and probed at it with his fingers. Panic ran through him, fear greater than he had ever known before, as he drew from the tiny hole that ran deep into the plastic foam of the pillow, the slender three inch dart of a needle gun. His mind flashed back to the sound which had wakened him, and to the half-forgotten glimmer of light that had mingled with his nightmare. The sound had been the sibilant hiss of a needle gun, and the light had, for a brief moment, illumined his sleeping form for the marksman.

The needle had missed him by bare inches.

He looked at it more closely, and the hair at the back of his neck prickled with fear as he saw the telltale brown stain which marred the needle point. Even a scratch would have been fatal. Carefully, he crossed the room and deposited the needle down the waste chute, feeling a little better with the knowledge that it no longer shared the room with him. He sat down again, trembling a little from reaction, and thanked whatever stars were responsible for the luck or bad marksmanship that had saved his life.

Saved his life?

But why hadn't the stranger tried again? He'd had only an unarmed and sleepy victim to deal with—one who, by his reactions, had shown that the first attempt had passed unnoticed, or at least unrecognised. The very fact that such an attempt had been made showed that his visitor regarded him as dangerous, and that was reinforced by the short, one-sided conversation that had followed. But why dangerous? Question piled on question in Argyle's reeling brain. Why had Angela been dangerous? Or Spiros? Of a sudden, he felt sick with fear. The ordered regularity of his life had been shattered by events which made no sense, and all of them could be traced back to a dirty, smoke-filled bar on an off-beat planet named Jones, only heard of by fools and spacemen.

The death of Spiros had fallen into an irregular place in the centre of a puzzle whose edges were shrouded in mystery. Spiros had died in an attempt to prevent him from contacting Argyle—that much was clear. The murder had come too late. But Spiros had died, and he had known Spiros. Angela had died, and she had been his wife. Therefore, he had to be eliminated as well.

At last he lay on the bed, fear still plucking at his nerves, and he slept after a fashion through sheer, nervous exhaustion.

Waking, later, was a natural process. His sleep had been deep and he lay in semi-wakefulness with the light of day streaming across the room. His tongue moved uncertainly in his dry, furred mouth, and his eyelids were gummy with sleep as he pried them open. Then he realised that someone was knocking on the door of his room.

They knocked again, louder and more insistently. Argyle slid out of bed and padded across to the door. He slipped the lock, shouted, "Come in," and padded back to the bed. As he sat down the door opened and three officers in the grey uniforms of Dellora's private army came grimly into the room.

Argyle gazed at them in blank surprise, and then remarked, "Well, this is a pleasure," in a voice which indicated that it was anything but. "What can I do for you?"

One of the officers, a tall, thin man with an odd chin-beard and moustache, produced a metal case from an inner pocket. He opened it and held it out flat for Argyle to see the contents.

"Mister Argyle, have you ever seen that before?"

Argyle looked closer and his stomach jerked a trifle as he saw within the case the slim, deadly form of the dart which he had sent down the waste chute bare hours earlier.

"Yes, sure. I—I put it down the waste chute myself during the night."

"Why?"

"Well, I—I guess I just didn't feel safe with it in the room. How did you get it anyway?"

"One of the hotel staff noticed it this morning and passed it on to us. Its position in the chute, together with other factors led us to believe that you placed it there."

"Well, so I put it there. You see—"

"It's an odd thing for a man to have in his hotel room?"

"Someone tried to kill me last night," broke in Argyle desperately as he tried to quell the panic rising in his being. "See, there's the hole in the pillow." He stretched it between two fingers.

"Why didn't you report it?"

"I didn't notice it till after he'd gone. He—he sat down there and threatened me, and then after he'd gone I saw the needle in the pillow, and—"

"He was a stranger to you, this man?" asked the officer bleakly.

"Yes, I never saw him before in my life."

There was a sardonic gleam in the officer's icy, grey eyes.



"So this man breaks into your room, tries to kill you, fails in the attempt, and then sits down to have a chat before leaving. Is that right?"

Argyle sat silent and white faced. He didn't need to be told how unconvincing the story sounded.

"Search the room," ordered the bearded officer.

Argyle gasped in sheer disbelief as the other two men went about their appointed task with an efficiency born of long practice.

"What the hell is all this? What am I supposed to have done?"

"In good time, Mister Argyle. I believe you visited Mister Dellora last night? At what hour did you leave him?"

"I don't know—must have been about twelve thirty, I think. I was back in my room soon after two."

The officer nodded. "At least you have told the truth on that point. Although there wasn't much point in lying when you knew there were two escorts to check you, was there?"

A dull, red flush flowed over Argyle's face. "Now, look—" he began.

"Is this it?" He was interrupted by the return of one of the other officers from the toilet room. The man handed over something to his superior which Argyle couldn't see because his vision was blocked by the man's body. In silence they examined whatever it was for long seconds, and then the bearded one asked, "Where did you find it?"

"Wrapped in that cloth at the back of the toilet cupboard."

"Do you recognise this, Argyle?" The beard turned towards him, hand outstretched, and Argyle's stomach turned to water as he saw in the proffered palm the gleaming, slender body of a needle gun. He felt himself sag under the shock, and he made a visible effort to pull himself together as he heard the man say in a far off voice, "This will require a great deal of explaining, Mister Argyle."

"I never saw it before. I—I've never owned such a thing. It—this whole thing's ridiculous. What the devil's it all about?" The utter bewilderment of the night before returned to sweep over him. In desperation he summoned all the authority he could muster to his voice, and said steadily, "I want to see Pietro Dellora. He will listen to my story—"

"I doubt if he will, Mister Argyle," interrupted the officer mildly. "Pietro Dellora was murdered during the night—shot by a poisoned dart from a needle gun such as this."

## VI

Argyle's brain reeled under the shock. He slumped mentally and physically. His mouth opened, but no words came. There was a distant roaring in his head as of a great wind rushing down to envelop him, and through it he heard the officer say,

"I believe you went back alone, to see Mister Dellora, after you had been escorted from his presence. Why was that?"

"What? Oh—that." Dimly, Argyle made sense out of the sounds that struck his ears. "I—I wanted to ask him a question—"

"That would be about half-past twelve?"

"Yes. Yes, it would."

"Mister Dellora was found dead by his man servant early this morning. He was lying in the entrance to his private suite, and he had been shot shortly after midnight last night."

"I had nothing to do with it."

"That remains to be proved." The officer turned towards the door. "You will remain on Dellora Planet until the arrival of Mister Dellora's son. Alfredo Dellora will arrive in a few days. He has already been summoned. There is no sense in trying to leave the planet, and you are forbidden to go outside the limits of Dellora City. A suitable adjustment has been made on the Central Computer, and we shall know every move you make."

"Why not just lock me up and have done with it?" demanded Argyle bitterly.

"You may have accomplices," replied the officer easily. "And, although I don't think you would be stupid enough to try and contact them, they may be desperate enough to try and contact you." He smiled thinly. "Do not do anything foolish, Argyle, it might turn out to be fatal."

Argyle hardly heard the door close as they left him. He sat dazed and stunned by the latest in the series of nerve-shattering blows which had been dealt him. His brain seemed not to function as a thinking, intelligent entity; it was, instead, a whirlpool of primeval panic wherein logic and thought and hope could find no resting place.

Dellora dead!

The fact pounded in his brain with hammering insistence. He had no doubt whatever that his visitor of the night before was the murderer, and that in some way he was being set up



to take the rap. Gradually, his nerves calmed themselves and he began to think with more clarity. The stranger had warned him off, and then had taken steps to see that he stayed off. Dellora's death was clearly a welcome factor to some person or group represented by the brown-eyed stranger with the petulant mouth. What better way of accomplishing both ends than by murdering the greater—Dellora, and then pinning the murder on the lesser—Argyle?

The needle shot into his pillow had been meant to miss him. It had been planted on purpose to be found later by the security officers who would search diligently for clues as to the death of their employer. Argyle realised that he had made things even worse for himself by finding the needle and trying to get rid of it. The security men would assume that he'd used the pillow as a target, either to test the murder gun before using it on Dellora, or to unload the poisoned missile afterwards and in safety without having to probe for it within the body of the gun.

But how had the gun got into his toilet room?

It didn't seem likely that the killer would return to Argyle's room a second time to plant the weapon. He wouldn't be able to guarantee that Argyle would remain asleep—if, indeed, he slept at all after that first visit. He might have put it there before—but, if so, he wouldn't have been able to fire the shot into the pillow which had wakened Argyle.

Unless—!

He sat up straight with sudden shock as another thought struck him. How was the murderer able to get to the space station and back without being spotted? Dellora was as well protected in his man-made world as anyone could be. And, now that he thought about it, Argyle had seen the stranger unlock the door as he left his hotel room; he remembered all too well that he had locked the door before he retired to sleep. There had been no way into the room short of breaking the door down, or using a duplicate key.

No physical way!

The words of the Lawman, Sworder, echoed in his mind...

"We've never had a teleport in the Galaxy before."

Over the years telepaths had grown in stature from variety theatre entertainers with a limited range, to a group of people whose importance to the Galactic community could not be measured in terms of mere physical wealth. On them had

been placed the responsibility of maintaining rapid interstellar communication, for the bridge between the stars was impassable without their special gifts. Others had come to join them; kineticists like Pietro Dellora ; prognosticators, like Angela ; pyrotics, levitators and a dozen others. As mankind spread through the Galaxy his mind expanded and gave forth its power. The process was slow ; so slow that almost no one noticed it except the scientists who probed and picked at the reasons behind the development. To the ordinary person throughout the Galaxy the power was there, but the wonder was not.

And now there was a teleport.

It wasn't so much the fact of a teleport that disturbed Argyle ; it was the more important detail that the teleport had homicidal tendencies. If a man could teleport himself from one room to another it would have been classed as just another piece of evidence that Mankind was growing up. Teepees had developed from just such lowly beginnings, the first of them had been glad to span a mile in distance. Today they spanned the Galaxy. But here, suddenly and without prior warning, was a man who by his very movements could span the distance between the Planet Dellora and the space station.

What could be accomplished once could be accomplished twice—a hundred times if need be. The pattern of the killing fell into place alongside the death of Spiros, and Argyle knew all too well how the needle gun had been planted in his room, and how Pietro Dellora had been murdered.

The stranger was the first known teleport in the Galaxy—and he had fixed Argyle good !

Later, when he had calmed himself, Argyle washed and dressed. He left his room, and went tentatively to the hotel restaurant for a late breakfast, expecting at any moment to be jumped on by one of the grey-uniformed security men. No one bothered him.

He ate slowly and with little appetite, while his mind wrestled with the problems that confronted him. For all the apparent freedom of movement granted to him, he was as much a prisoner as if he'd been locked in gaol—and he knew it. The slight, ever-present pressure of the metal disc chained to his wrist was more efficient than any human with human failings.



After breakfast he left the hotel and strolled aimlessly along the wide streets of Dellora City. The alien sun cast brilliant light on the white buildings, and Argyle reflected how odd it was that the giant globe which dominated the sky was only a minor star, almost unnoticed so far as it from the great, populous hub of the Galaxy. Even the planet had not been worth colonising until a distant ancestor of Pietro Dellora had taken it as his base of operations, and as headquarters for his ever-growing trading company. Now, it was the centre of the largest single empire within the Universe. In terms of power and wealth and strength, not even Earth herself could match the riches of the Company Dellora.

Soon Alfredo Dellora would come to claim his inheritance and another in the unending line of trading barons would take his place in the halls of the mighty. Argyle wondered just how different from his father would Alfredo be? Physically, he doubted if they even resembled one another, and their mode of living would be very different. Alfredo wouldn't need to shut himself away in a metal world to stay alive. How much more powerful would the Company Dellora have been now if Pietro had been able to travel the Galaxy instead of delegating responsibility to subordinates? Argyle hoped, for his own sake, that Alfredo was as tolerant and as friendly as his father had been. In that hope lay his own salvation, for, the more he thought about it, the less convincing was the evidence against him, and he wondered why he had been so prone to panic earlier.

Argyle felt better as he turned away from the main thoroughfare and through the wide ornamental gardens that decorated the City centre. He sat down on one of the public seats and rested for a while, basking in the warmth of the sun and revelling in the clean freshness of the open air. It took a spaceman to appreciate the clean freedom of the outdoors.

When he left the park almost an hour later he was as consciously at peace with himself as he had been in weeks. It seemed as if he'd managed, by some unpredictable alchemy, to rationalise the events of the past hours and place them in their proper perspective. Sure, he was in trouble, but in the cold, clear light of day, trouble seemed to be cut down to size.

His step was almost jaunty as he made his way back towards the hotel. The thought of midday lunch made him realise that his appetite had returned. His light breakfast wasn't

coping too well with his bodily mechanism. The street around him was busy with people, workers taking lunch, shoppers touring the automarts, young couples enjoying the sunshine. It was so much like Earth.

The mood shattered against an illuminated sign beneath a black shrouded tridiscscope which announced :

*"PIETRO DELLORA IS DEAD."*

At once he was back on the metal world with the bloated mass of human flesh that had held the tortured soul of Pietro Dellora. Death had not come easily to old Pietro any more than had his life. Argyle found it hard to believe that, had he known it was coming, Dellora would not have welcomed his end.

He looked up again at the sign and as he looked it wavered and faded. The wording changed to announce that,

*"ALFREDO DELLORA ARRIVES IN TWELVE DAYS."*

Above the words the fading picture of Pietro was replaced by another, this time of a younger man with a thin face and a full-lipped mouth ; the eyes were . . .

Argyle's heart lurched and his stomach turned over. Suddenly he was back in the middle of a nightmare as he looked into the familiar eyes of Alfredo Dellora. With sudden horror and a sense of overwhelming dismay, he knew who the stranger was who had disturbed his sleep and tried to frame him for murder.

The teleport was Alfredo Dellora !

How he got back to his hotel Argyle never knew, neither did he care. All thought of hunger and food were snatched away as if they had never been ; there was only sickness and terror deep within where earlier there had been confidence. There dawned the awful realisation that, if it was left to Alfredo Dellora, Richard Argyle was going to pay for the murder of his father. He shut the door of his room behind him and sank on to the bed still dazed by shock. The horror was back with him more strongly than ever, and this time, he knew, it was here to stay. He had to remain on Dellora Planet until Alfredo Dellora arrived, and then . . .

Grimly he knew that he could have no illusions as to the fate he would suffer. He was back to the original proposition that he was dangerous to someone ; that someone had coalesced into the person of Alfredo Dellora. In turn, Alfredo had wanted his father out of the way, and he had taken a single cold blooded step to accomplish both ends at once.



He lay back on his bed for a long time stupified by the turn of events, dazed by the shock of realisation. His tumbling thoughts sought desperately for an answer, a way out, an escape of some sort, any sort. Dully, hours later, he knew that there was one way and one way only.

He had, somehow, to leave Dellora Planet and lose himself somewhere in the vastness of the Galaxy.

## VII

During the next two days Argyle kept to his hotel as much as he could. He left his room only to visit the restaurant for such meals as he could force down his unwilling throat, and he visited the automart next to the hotel for such necessities as he required. The rest of the time he lay on his bed and smoked innumerable cigarettes while he considered ways and means of accomplishing his removal from the Planet Dellora.

At first sight the position seemed to be as near hopeless as it could be. He was on a strange world without friends or even acquaintances. It was controlled by a security force which had its own rules, its own responsibilities, and more important, its own methods of running things. Every move he made and every step he took was recorded on the Central Computer at the Security Force H.Q. If he made an attempt to leave the planet he would be picked up within minutes of his first suspicious move. He could not doubt either that since the murder of Pietro Dellora, all strangers on the planet were the subject of a special watch. The watch would not be a personal one, but some adjustment to the Central Computer would most certainly have been made in his case so that anything he did that was in the least suspicious could be quickly noted and followed up.

All his ideas about leaving the planet finally boiled down to one possibility—and one only. The independent freighter on which he had travelled to Dellora was still at the field. It would be there for another four days—longer if the Security Police decided so. And they would most certainly decide so if he tried to get aboard.

Everything came back to the metal disc strapped tightly to his wrist.

The flaw in the Security Forces method of supervision hit him suddenly and without a great deal of prior thought. He

left his hotel room one morning and spent a couple of hours walking round the city. He went to places where local inhabitants congregated, to big automarts, to cafes, to entertainment arcades. And everywhere he went he looked carefully at the left wrist of all the people he could.

Not one in a hundred had a metal disc strapped to it.

Therefore, only strangers to Dellora Planet were supervised at H.Q. Probably there were special cases ; for instance, he found that all the grey-uniformed police wore a disc, and so did local government officials, but the greater mass of the local population were bound by no such limitations. And that, when Argyle thought about it, was a reasonable supposition. The total population of Dellora City was probably in the region of sixty or seventy thousand, the total for the planet was as a whole nearer to the quarter million mark. It would be an almost impossible job for the security forces to maintain a constant watch on such a large number of people, even with the aid of a computer. Therefore, they had to be selective.

Once that fact had been uncovered, Argyle quickly moved on to the next factor involved. While he wore the disc he was under supervision. Once he got rid of the disc the security police had to find him in order to re-establish supervision. Without the disc he was a free man ; with it he was a prisoner for they could pick him up wherever and whenever they liked.

Eagerly now he pursued his line of reasoning, always with one end in view—he had to get aboard the freighter, and once aboard, he had to escape detection. It was certain that the security police would search every ship taking off from Dellora Planet.

During the day that followed he laid his plans carefully, and made his preparations as inconspicuously as he could. He bought, in small quantities, enough vitamin tablets to last him for several days—a week if necessary. He bought two plastic containers of pocket size which held between them just over half a pint of water, and finally a strong metal stylopen. He drew from memory, as much of the general layout of the freighter as he could recall, and here his training as a space engineer helped him. He knew of a score, a hundred odd corners that were not normally open to the light of day, but his requirements were governed by several factors. There had to be room for him to get inside, there had to be access to the ship's airplant—or he wouldn't last two hours ; and, finally,



he had to be able to attract attention when he was sure it was safe to come out.

For some reason which he knew was probably psychological, he decided that any attempt he made had to be at night. Most of the ship's crews would be hitting the high spots in Dellora City, and the staff at the field would be the minimum required. Ships did not usually land or takeoff during the night hours on any planet.

Argyle left his hotel after a heavy evening meal during which he stuffed himself with as much food as he could manage. He knew that personal discomfort would be the result if his plans materialised, but everything in his mind was now secondary to the prime need—he had to get off Dellora Planet before Alfredo Dellora arrived to nail the lid on his coffin.

Argyle gave a lot of thought to the teleport even while he was making his plans. He came to several conclusions which he knew he could not justify, but which seemed reasonable nevertheless. It was clear that Alfredo kept his secret supernatural powers to himself, and keeping them secret probably meant considerable trouble. He could not keep disappearing under odd circumstances or someone would be bound to notice sooner or later. Thus, Argyle didn't feel that he was in any immediate personal danger. Dellora was probably content to leave matters in the hands of the security police until he arrived by ship some time in the near future.

On due consideration Argyle felt that Dellora would give him no further trouble—at least in the immediate future.

He went back to his room from the hotel restaurant and filled his pockets with the vitamin tablets and the water flasks. He could not take anything too bulky in the nature of food, and he knew that his digestion would suffer for a few days by virtue of his intentional reliance on non-bulky food to keep him alive. But that couldn't be helped. His personal belongings he had to leave behind. It was an inconvenience but a temporary one. The prime consideration after food was money in case he had to bribe the freighter captain against turning him over to the security police if he was discovered too soon.

It was after ten o'clock when he left the hotel for the last time, ostensibly for a late night stroll around the amusement arcades. He wandered aimlessly for a while watching the crowds grow less and the streets become more deserted as the people went home. The cafes began to close and the lights

over the tridi-theatres winked out. Soon there were only the late night strollers like himself, the lovers in pairs haunting the shadows and the security police maintaining their beats.

Argyle was more interested in the security police than the ordinary public since at least one of them figured prominently in his plans. He got as far away from the space field as he could, and the spot he chose was also out of direct line from it through the Security H.Q. to the spacefield. For his needs all the central places of importance had to be well scattered. Finally, in an off-beat corner of Dellora City, he knew the time had come, that this was as good a place as he could wish for, and that now he had to start moving—and moving fast.

The street on which he stood was well lit but deserted, a minor residential road with no other buildings but blocks of flats and large houses obviously occupied by the richer members of Dellora's private community. Most important, a security guard was patrolling in lonely solitude about half-way along it. Argyle walked along the road quite openly and normally, and as he came abreast of the guard he crossed over and called,

"Excuse me, Officer."

The man stopped and turned to look at him, but recognition was the least of Argyle's worries.

"I'm looking for the Avenida Dellora. I seem to have taken the wrong turning."

The man eyed him speculatively. "You should have turned left a block back. It's about half a mile along."

"Thank's a lot."

"Right."

They turned away from each other and Argyle took only two steps while making sure that the man resumed his beat. Then, quickly and silently, with every muscle tensed for the effort, he turned back and hammered his right fist hard into the unprotected nape of the guard's neck. The man never had a chance. He went down like a log and stayed down; quite clearly he wouldn't move for a long time. Argyle hoped fervently that he hadn't killed him for the fact would be registered at the Security H.Q., and their forces would be along in double-quick time. He felt the man's wrist and found a steady pulse.

He looked hurriedly up and down the road. It was deserted and no one seemed to have remarked the incident. To one side a large entrance opened into the private garden of a



house, and Argyle dragged the unconscious man through and into the shadow of the low wall with its backing of neat hedge. Working swiftly he stripped the man of his uniform and bound him securely with strips of his underclothing. He took off his own clothes and donned the uniform, thanking his stars that they didn't fit too badly. Most of the security men were well-built and muscular which suited him admirably. He transferred the contents of his own pockets to those of the uniform he was now wearing and made sure that the unconscious man was tightly bound and unlikely to be able to raise an alarm for some time.

He drew a deep breath and tried to steady his pounding nerves for now came the moment he dreaded more than anything. He pulled up his left sleeve and bared the chained disc. It was a strong but neat chain joined quite safely to the disc with little chance that it would come loose accidentally. From his pocket he took the metal stylo-pen and inserted it under the chain between it and his wrist. He twisted the pen slowly so that the chain began to tighten around his wrist and he increased the leverage as his hand got a firm grip on the pen. Pain lanced through his arm as the pressure increased and the flesh on his wrist plumped and turned red as the chain bit hard into it. Sweat stood out on his forehead as he strove to increase the strain he was putting on the chain, and he noticed with sudden horror that the pen was bending a little. He gritted his teeth and twisted hard, feeling his hand go numb as the pain at his wrist increased—and then, suddenly, it broke. The chain parted and his wrist was free of the disc which shackled him by invisible bonds to the Security H.Q.

Hurriedly he threw the disc from him into the shadow of the bushes and started off down the road at a jog trot. He turned left after a hundred yards and then right again, moving out of the direct line from the Security H.Q. and the scene of his crimes. The space-field lay ahead of him about a mile distant and he estimated he might have five minutes in which to reach it before the alarm was raised and the hunt was up. All the while, as he ran, he kept his ears open for signs of an alarm. None came. Twice he had to slow down as late strollers came into view, but he kept mainly to the side streets and avoided the still well-lit main thoroughfares.

The main entrance to the field came into view and still there was no sound of an alarm. He walked through quite openly,

and no one took any notice of him in his grey uniform. He turned left making towards the guard room where he had been interrogated when first he arrived, and then, once safely in the shadows away from plain sight of the main space field buildings he sprinted towards the field perimeter where he knew the freighter to be.

And still all was quiet.

He paused on the rim of the perimeter and could make out ahead of him the looming hulls of several large ships, the dim blackness of their shapes blotting out a small portion of the starlit heavens above. His eyes became accustomed to the darkness and soon he could pick out one ship from another. Nearest to him, the sleek, slim lines of a small interplanetary craft, like the one that had taken him to his fateful interview with Dellora, lay silent and dark. Two trim atmosphere vessels with short stubby wings lay just beyond, and there, a hundred yards or more out, he could see the stubby, blunt shape of the freighter.

There were lights in the hull showing that some of the view-ports were uncovered, and telling him, too, that some portion of the crew kept harbour watch as they were in a strange port. He made for the freighter, moving softly and keeping to the shadows. The night was a vast, silent cloak around him, the stillness could almost be felt—he prayed hard that it stayed that way for another half hour.

The ramp leading up to the freighter's airlock was unlit and unguarded. He moved up it stealthily, every muscle tensed to slide over the edge and lose himself in the gloom should it be necessary. The bright entrance of the lock loomed before him, and from the inside of the vessel only silence radiated with almost ominous oppressiveness. He wished illogically that some sound would break the spell and relieve the tension, but he pushed the thought from him and moved, cat-like, through the open lock. The brilliantly lit lateral corridor ran away to the right and left. To the right lay the forward control bridge, the officers cabins and the crew quarters. To the left lay the power plant, the engine room and the cargo holds.

He turned left, still watchful and alert. Whatever harbour watch was being maintained would almost certainly be on the bridge and the remainder of the watch aboard would be in the crew quarters reading and playing any one of a dozen games utilised by spacemen to pass away the long hours. The



corridor was long and well lit, and he went along it hurriedly and quietly, every sense alert for the sound of any other moving being.

All he could hear was the steady hum of the generators providing lights and power for the ship's needs as she lay quiet and at rest. The silence was broken by a distant, high whine—a siren sound that echoed across the space-field and through the open hatch to penetrate the interior of the ship. As he heard it Argyle's heart went cold; it was too familiar a sound to be ignored. The emergency alarm for the space field had been set off and all round the field, he knew, great barrages of lights were springing up to illuminate the whole scene.

There was only one explanation. The Security Forces had come into action because of his sudden disappearance, and they had taken the most obvious course. They realised he must be trying to get off the planet, and they knew the space-field was the only way.

He had little enough time left now. The ship would be awakening around him as the duty watch would take up their emergency positions as prescribed by the field regulations once the alarm had been set off. He ran the remaining length of the corridor and peered in through the half open hatch which led into the engine room. Here, too, was desertion, but it couldn't stay that way for long; the duty engineer would be along grumbling about his disturbed night's sleep—but he would come.

Argyle crossed the engine room moving between the great bulk of the twin units that supplied power for the stardrive. At the back of them the lesser bulks of the ordinary generators lay squat against the polished steel deck. The ship might be an old one, but Argyle recognised the pride and orderliness which the engineer staff brought to their domain. He had to move even more quickly now. At the rear of the generators, behind protective shielding lay the atomic capsules that fed the power lines, and below them again lay the fuel tanks which fed the supplementary rockets for emergency landing and takeoff.

Flush against the deck in front of the protective shielding, was an inspection hatch and it was to this that Argyle turned all his attention. Feverishly, but carefully, his strong fingers worked at the large bolts which held the hatch in place. There

were six of them and they gave one by one. Every moment he expected the engine room hatch to open and the figure of the duty engineer find him at his task—but no one came.

He levered the hatch up and slid down into the cavity exposed. It wasn't large, but there was just enough room for his body to get in. He reached up and pulled the hatch over him, then, with fingers which fumbled in the dark, he pulled the bolt ends through the respective holes and screwed them as tight as his insecure grip would allow. He tested the hatch at last and it seemed reasonably tight, sufficient, at any rate, to escape detection. Then he slid lower into the cramped chamber and wormed his way sideways in the darkness between looping clusters of cables and flexible pipes.

His position was anything but comfortable and the thought that he would have to endure it for upwards of two days brought panic to his mind. He quelled it instantly, and listened for signs of movement above. It was several minutes before the deck plates rang slightly to the clump of footsteps and the echoing sound of voices boomed at him in the confined space, too muted and muffled to be understood. He settled himself as comfortably as he could, and composed his mind against the long, torturous wait that he knew was before him.

Later, he slept.

How long he slept Argyle didn't know, but he awoke cramped and uncomfortable with several nagging pains shooting through his cramped muscles. The noise which had woken him was still there and it was louder now. The heavy clang of several pairs of boots echoed on the deck above his head, and there was a lot of banging and knocking, interspersed with muffled voices. Argyle didn't need to be told that the security forces were carrying out a search.

He edged further into the safe shelter of the pipes and cables, pressing himself as far away from the inspection chamber as he could. The noise got nearer and the footsteps stopped. There was a banging and scraping just above his head, and light penetrated dimly as the inspection hatch was dragged aside. The beam of a torch shone down probing the darkness of the confined space and making his eyes blink and water by its reflection.

**To be continued**



*There are many ways in which to write a Time-travel story but few such stories remain memorable because the authors bog down on the mechanics of explanation. John Ashton's approach is of the type expressed by John Wyndham and other leading writers—what happens to the people involved is more important than how they managed to do it.*

# **SIGNORA PORFIRIA**

**By JOHN W. ASHTON**

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I still find it difficult to imagine that the Signora Porfiria was anything but a kindly old lady, somewhat voluble and given to certain idiosyncrasies which, as I came to know her better, should have confirmed rather than rejected the suspicions of the townspeople of Rualdino. There was that disturbing fixity about her eyes when she looked at you as though she could almost read your inmost thoughts ; there was that surprising smoothness of skin and brow, the complete lack of physical deterioration in one who laughingly claimed herself " over five hundred years old " despite a slight stoop and white hair. But the overall picture remained that of an elderly lady full of gossip, a charming chatterbox against the confusing background of oddities, candy and cigarettes that made up her small shop on the seafront.

I had to come to Rualdino, a small, out-of-the-world fishing village precariously clinging to a steep hill, with one cube-shaped modern monstrosity of hotel, a well equipped bar and a romantic quayside cafeteria where you could wile away the warm, scented Adriatic evenings without a thought for the world in general and advertising in particular, wonderful and crazy as it may be. With the blessings of boss and staff, the

budding genius of Lowett and Associates (the associates being myself) had taken a plane to Milano. There, after lengthy squabbles in a virtually incomprehensible jargon, I succeeded in hiring a worn-out Fiat for six weeks and assumed my hardy role pioneering the wonderland of vacation.

It was pure luck that I came across Rualdino. Driving carefully down the winding coastal road from Pescara I had rounded another of those sudden curves when I saw it, a pirate's lair hidden amongst olive groves and vineyards. Like jewels scattered amongst the rocks were the pink and white houses, the wild profusion of flowers, the small boats swaying gently at their moorings in the microscopic harbour. The sight convinced me that I had found what I was looking for.

And when my engine spluttered and finally gave up the ghost on the twisting downward run I did not even swear. I braked to a groaning halt in front of Antonio's gas-station on the small cobbled piazza, and just could not have cared less. Grizzled and ebullient as some veteran mechanics come, Antonio promised to have the car ready in one, two—maybe five days. I waved him away. *Manana, manana por manana*, as the Spanish say. There was no hurry, no hurry at all any more.

Having booked my room at the hotel Antonio proudly recommended I strolled through the village, feeling the warmth of the afternoon sun seep into my body and fill me with a sense of airy detachment as though I, an outsider, had become the very ruler of this small paradise. Tiny it was indeed, for in roughly ten minutes I had covered most of the ground and little remained to be seen. The weather-beaten, sun-baked small church dating back to the 12th century stood at the southernmost tip of the village where a promontory of rock and sand jutted into the clear blue waters. The ancient cemetery, peaches ripening against its dark tumbling wall, was the border of my domain. Retracing my steps I again passed the hotel with its small group of kids playing in the dust. I passed a few stores, slightly decrepit and still shuttered against the sun, listening to the lazy sounds of the people inside awakening from their siesta and preparing for late afternoon business. And I walked past yet another small shop, facing the sea and the dazzling reflection of sunlight, its door invitingly open on a dark passage of cool shade.

I had no idea she was there at first.



Inside, the coolness settled around me like a cloak. Only slowly could I distinguish the contours of table, chairs and counter, the details of tinned foods, candy jars, and row upon row of cigarette packets and other odds and ends upon the wooden shelves. Then, as her voice, astonishingly young, came to me out of the shadows, I realized I was not alone.

"Signore?" she said.

I must have looked taken aback, for she laughed softly and continued in fluent English.

"I hope I did not scare you? What can I do for you?"

"You speak English?" I asked inanely.

She laughed again.

"Of course I do, signore. What is so surprising about that?"

She stepped out of the pool of shadow behind the counter. Somehow I had been picturing her as a young girl with that light music in her voice. Now however I saw her clearly, a small and elderly lady with still beautiful regular features crowned by white hair. Her eyes were fixed on mine and, as I looked into them, suddenly oblivious of all else, I felt I was abandoning myself to a dark but limpid pool of infinite depth. Vaguely, somehow, I sensed the understanding and knowledge, great knowledge and still greater power behind those eyes that were scanning me and probing the farthest corners of my mind. Mentally tearing myself away, I said:

"I'd like a pack of cigarettes."

Without a word she turned back to the shelf behind her and handed me a packet of my favorite brand. For a second I stared. How on earth could you know? I wanted to say. For some obscure reason I said nothing.

"That will be two hundred liras, signore," she said.

I paid, muttered a hasty good-bye and walked out of the little shop, out into the clear fresh sunlight with the scented tang of the sea and the shrill shouts of the children further down the street. But not before I had heard her voice close behind me, filled with the mocking laughter:

"A riverderci, signore!"

And I began to wonder what fascination an old woman in a God-forsaken but beautiful fishing village could exert upon me, and upon others as I was to discover that same evening at the hotel.

The owner had queried me as to my first impressions of the village. When I told him of my experience his slightly bulging

eyes grew larger still and, wiping his perspiring forehead with a colourless rag, he muttered, half under his breath :

"She's a witch, signor Hume !"

A witch ?

With both feet rooted deep in the more materialistic side of advertising, and my brain mostly fully anchored in my favorite hobby, electronics—a heritage from university days—I had never had time to indulge in superstition. A witch ? I thought as the owner bawled out to his wife in the kitchen at the back : "She's a witch, that Porfiria, isn't she, Mama ?" and his wife assented shrilly that "the padre said she had the evil eye !"—no, hardly a witch, but an exceptionally intelligent woman adrift, somehow, amidst a crowd of simple country folk. Obscurely I felt there was a reason for her presence here. In my mind I again heard the amazing youthfulness of her voice.

"A witch," I interrupted the owner's incoherent babble. "No—not a witch, but a very interesting person."

So interesting, in fact, that much of my time was spent at the small narrow shop on the piazza, overlooking the port with its expanse of blue water and the delicate lacework of fishing nets drying on poles and twisting the sky into strange patterns.

The signora was, as I soon discovered, a widely travelled woman. She spoke half a dozen languages and, chatting with her during the first week at Rualdino, I suddenly realized how very young I was in comparison. And yet, something rang false about the signora Porfiria. Though I could not resist the temptation of entering her shop every afternoon before my cocktail-hour swim—I kept up the pretense of buying cigarettes—an unknown tension was building up inside me.

Her figure and features and voice were those of a young woman. Charm, grace, beauty and intelligence were allied to perfect the fleeting vision I had imagined to perceive the first day, when she came towards me out of the shadows. Only her eyes were wrong. They were neither young or old. Ageless, a thousand years of knowledge and pain and something I could not define passed and mingled and haunted me at night, making me toss sleepless on my bed.

But the eyes were not the only unusual thing about her. There were other small examples of what the villagers might have dubbed "witchcraft." Some of them were insignificant, others troubling ; one in particular made a deep impression upon me.



Five years ago I had almost obtained a degree in advanced electronics when, with my father's death and the resulting financial tangle, I found myself obliged to seek an immediate solution to my mother's, and my own problems. I found it at Lowett and Associates. Equipped with an able pen and an even better mind for psychological persuasion, I soon rose in rank and became junior partner in the firm. Now that I had the means, and some leisure, I completed my studies on my own and experimented with various electronic devices in the basement of my suburban home. A working knowledge of nuclear physics helped me in building secretly a small generator capable of accelerating protons and developing some 20 GeV within the limits of a narrow magnetic band I had set up around it. I was not quite sure myself of what to do with the enormous power confined in so small a place although I had no doubt there could be industrial applications for it. On the other hand I also knew I was not the first nor the last to make use of magnetic fields as the sole means of controlling the intolerable temperatures and power developed.

My idea was to concentrate and transform this power into a single beam. By crossing two such beams electronically I hoped to achieve inversion of matter.

What really worried me was the intensity of the small field the crossed beams would set up. For some time already I had tried, with the help of the computer, to calculate the exact output of power and radiation, but some basic data was missing which I could not feed to the machine. So, on that particular afternoon, I was only lending half an ear to the signora's gossip. In my mind the equations were forming slowly, and I was just about to ask :

"Could I have a piece of paper . . . ?" when her voice stopped.

For one fleeting instant a searing pain passed through my head. Then, clear and undeniable in its cold logic, as clear as though it had been written on a blackboard before me, I saw the missing data. The equations, broken down in every detail, and the final answer with what immediate implications I could draw from it, were totally different from what I had been working on. And once you had the missing link they were devilishly simple.

Without apparent interruption her voice continued. But I hardly heard her any more. As long as I live those equations

will remain branded on my inner vision. Impatiently I turned and said :

" Please forgive me, signora, but I have work to do."

" I know," she said quietly, and turned away.

My mind in a turmoil I first contemplated returning to London without delay. But I calmed down, saying to myself, " Why interrupt a perfect holiday," and remembered that, after all I could now complete my experiments at leisure having gained many years, if not a lifetime, of fruitless research. So I sauntered down to the terrace of the cafeteria, with its clinging vine and view of the port. I seated myself in one of the easy chairs. Life had never been more wonderful, I thought to myself as I sat sipping one of those fragrant espressos only Italians make so well. The sun was setting behind the village and the hills, suffusing the sea with colour. I must have laughed aloud in my joy, for the waitress stared at me in surprise. To think that, in a way, I owed all this to the signora Porfiria ! I grinned again.

Then my smile faded.

The swift solution that had burst upon me—no, that had been set out for me, all cut and dried ! I jerked upright. Gone were the soft skies and romantic little port, forgotten the ancient square and the lingering, comforting warmth of the vanishing day. The light touch of a breeze suddenly fanned my hot face. Of course ! Somehow the answer had been planted right there where I wanted it, impressed upon my subconscious mind by someone who had been following the evolution of my thoughts. But who ? Who could have known that, a simple tourist on vacation, was mentally engulfed in a mathematical problem of stupendous proportions and possibilities. Only someone, I was beginning to realise, who could read my mind. And that someone would have to be a trained mathematician, a telepath with scientific knowledge far in advance of anything I could claim. It just couldn't be ! This was magic, witchcraft—witchcraft—?

No !

Strange as she might be, oddly haunting as was the mystery surrounding her—it could never be that fragile, chattering old lady, the signora Porfiria ! And yet—slowly, insidiously, a cold fear was coming over me. I remembered the nights I had lain awake, nights filled with the dark eyes looking into me and searching the farthest recesses of my soul. I remembered



things I had lazily dismissed at the time. The odd apparition of cigarettes on the counter though I could have sworn she never reached for them ; the way I was always drawn back to that shop and how every street seemed to lead there although I was often firmly resolved not to go there. The way in which she sometimes anticipated my words or action.

I passed my hand over my brow and drew it away wet with perspiration. My logic still struggled against the ever-growing certainty. Even if it were true—even if she possessed supernatural powers : that did not make her a scientist ! And why not, an inner voice repeated. Why not ? Could that be the mystery ? Or was there something else ?

Cold, clammy fear mixed with mounting curiosity and an irking sense of frustration swept over me in great waves. Automatically my hand went to my pocket. I got out my cigarettes and struck a match, watching closely. My hand did not tremble but the fear remained.

Then a shadow fell across my hand and the flame of the match spluttered faintly and died. Even as I glanced up I knew she was there.

Slowly I stood up and faced her. The fact that I was considerably taller and could look down on her did little to eliminate the feeling of inferiority I felt. I stood face to face with a woman I had never known. Around us, between us, a gulf widened and tension built up a perceptible aura. The woman I stared at was still the signora Porfiria, but she was also another person. It was as though the varnish was breaking off in bits, as though a thin shell had shattered and another being was coming through. Then her soft smile was back and my fears vanished.

"It's such wonderful weather," she said almost apologetically, "that I felt like taking a walk for once. Also, I'd like to show you something I'm sure will interest you."

"Of course," I said. "A very good idea."

"Then we'll walk down the beach," she said. "There's a small cove beyond the promontory where we'll be quite comfortable and where we can talk. It isn't too far away."

"Won't you have a drink first ?" I ventured.

"No thank you."

I drank down the coffee, called the waitress and paid. Then we crossed the piazza and walked down the five steps to the beach. On our left was the sea, darkening fast. On our right

the hillside loomed with velvet shadows, its small scattered houses merging with the fading colours of flowers and foliage.

We were alone on that beach, and the sand was still warm from the day's sun. As we walked towards the promontory now darkly silhouetted against the skyline, I felt supremely conscious of her mind probing mine. Again there was that swift, blinding touch of pain and I had to exert all my will-power to blot out my thoughts and leave my mind completely blank. Glancing sideways at my companion I could see her lips set in a thin line but she held her silence.

"How did you know?" I asked suddenly.

"I know," she replied.

Even her voice was subtly different now, younger than it had been before. We had reached the promontory and stopped. For a long moment neither of us spoke. "How did you know?" I insisted, staring out at the empty sea and the suddenly hostile sky.

The voice that answered me was no longer that of the elderly, so eminently gay and respectable signora Porfiria. It was cold and determined.

"Richard Hume," it said. "I shall kill you tonight!"

I swivelled round to face her. Gone was the slightly bowed and familiar figure. In its stead, three feet away, still dressed in the flaring black peasant skirt and simple white blouse, stood a young woman, almost a girl, slim, straight and proudly beautiful. Signora Porfiria—twenty, thirty years younger at least, with full red lips and delicate features and strange grim eyes. Even as I stared she seemed to grow taller. Then I saw the small, wicked-looking rod that glowed with a faint pale blue light in her hand and that held me motionless with only my thoughts racing.

"I shall kill you because I have to, not because I enjoy killing," she was saying. "But before you die I think you have a right to know why we passed judgment upon you. I have been waiting for you, and for you alone, here in Rualdino for the past five years. I've had to live amongst these primitives," she laughed disdainfully, "because we could not be sure of the exact date and dared not miss you."

"But why—?" I began through dry lips.

"I gave you a foretaste of our power when I planted the answer to your problem in your mind. I toyed with these people and could have toyed with your world. I played tricks with



their minds, and with yours, and they thought me a witch. And all the while I remained the staid but gossiping signora, the woman with a mysterious but surely trivial past. And I was waiting for you."

She paused briefly.

"I haven't much time. You have of course never heard of the Hume Effect—of course not, but you invented it. With your crazy, amateurish bungling you hit upon one of the greatest inventions of all time. And I gave you the key to the riddle," her eyes flashed at me. "Oh, you would have found it yourself within the next ten years or so but we hadn't the time to wait."

"We?" I asked. My fear was gone now and I felt wonderfully calm.

"We," she nodded. "The government of this Earth five hundred years into the future. They thought I was mad when I once jokingly mentioned being over five hundred years old. I am older than that, from a temporal viewpoint, but younger than you in actual years. When we decided to erase your presence in time the government gave me the assignment—the only undercover agent with experience in your era."

"But why?" I said. "What is the Hume Effect, and where do I come in?"

"The Hume Effect is the result of the crossing of two highly accelerated charged beams passing through a certain number of negatively charged filters. Your protonic beam is only the first step but with the equations you now possess you would soon pass on to the next. However, the result is not, as you imagine, inversion of matter but the creation of a spatio-temporal field. The displacement of this field in Time is a matter of adjusting the duration of the projections."

Her voice dropped.

"The result of this has been the curse of my age. The Hume Effect as it has been named for the past five hundred years, was in due course perfected until standard equipment consisted of a generator no larger than a matchbox and two projectors placed under the armpits. The field wholly encloses the person who uses it.

"But it remained top-secret government property. Then—how they did it we never found out—a private firm put a popular version on the market. When we stepped in it was too late. Millions of people who had good or selfish or merely

imaginary reasons to escape our world and time, had bought one and just faded away. Conditions in my age, where the government had quite rightly regulated every minute of the individual's life, became chaotic. We did all we could to get deserters back.

"We tracked down quite a number as far as the late Middle Ages, living foolish and empty lives with outdated conceptions such as "family" and "human rights." A few escaped, the others we eliminated. But the mass exodus continues.

"Many we never even found. They fled into the future, a hundred years or more beyond us and had perfected defenses against us. We failed to break through."

"Maybe they were right," I said. "Maybe they were just sick and tired of living like automatons, as I imagine your society to be. So when they had the chance they jumped at it—becoming free men and women again."

"Close your eyes," she said, "and I'll show you how wonderful our world is."

I obeyed. The picture burst upon my vision—a vast, rolling plain of grass, a wide road that glittered and gleamed as though made of some unknown metal, a city of towering, daring architectural beauty.

"That's where I live, on Government Centre," I heard her say. A tapering edifice reaching towards the stars, a terrace, green plants, wide windows and, clearly visible inside on the wall, an old oil painting by some long-forgotten Flemish master. A peaceful river scene, with a barge drifting past an ancient windmill and a glowing autumn sky.

There were few people on the thoroughways that criss-crossed the city at various levels. Their faces were expressionless, their eyes devoid of laughter or sadness, just empty, and their mouths tightly closed. They walked about as though life could give them nothing any more.

Then the picture faded and I opened my eyes.

"How right they were to get away," I said, taking a deep breath. "The chap who put it on the market was a saviour. I suppose only government people are allowed some liberty or emotions?"

She flushed at that.

"No," she said. "One mind—one people. The Hume Effect permitted us to learn the mistakes of the past and build a true welfare state. And now, enough of all this. I have been ordered to eliminate the direct cause of desertion that is



threatening our existence. And that is why I have to kill you before the opposition, or the people who went into the future, can stop me !”

“So you are afraid of those who escaped?” I said mockingly.

“Yes.” she admitted, but not without pride. Never was she more beautiful than at that moment, and I opened wide my mind in the hope she could catch my thoughts. She probably did, for a faint blush appeared on her cheeks.

Then she got a firm grip on herself. The cold, emotionless fighter, government trained, state educated, part of the mass mind, faced me again.

“And you hope to save your world by killing me. Right ?” I said.

“Right. With you out of the way the Effect will never even exist.” She raised the curiously luminous rod. “Goodbye, Richard Hume,” she said slowly, “under other circumstances perhaps—”

The evening shadows around her glowed and trembled and broke away in the riotous brilliance as a tiny sun, born at the tip of the rod, blossomed out in blinding, lethal beauty towards me. The sun flashed and flickered and faded again into the blue haze, and then only the soft summer evening remained. My skin tingled, my eyes smarted, but I was no longer paralysed.

I could hear her breathing, quickly, painfully.

“I can’t do it—I just can’t do it, Dick !” she sobbed.

My heart went out to her and I felt the sudden warmth of our emotions mingle fiercely but tenderly.

“I’ve failed,” her voice murmured. “I’ve failed. Somehow I knew I would. I felt I couldn’t kill you. They should have chosen someone else. All this time, all those five long years, I’ve been waiting for the Hume I’d been trained to hate. And now—!”

I stepped forward.

“My dear,” I said softly, “I’ve felt it since the moment we met, Porfiria, and you, the same and yet so different. I suspected something . . . and then, anyway, it doesn’t matter any more. Nothing matters. I love you, darling, and . . .”

“Dick !” She interrupted. “I’ve got to go back first. I’ll have to report you never turned up, that something may have gone wrong with the computers—you’ll gain six months, maybe

more, before they try again. But you'll have to hurry if you want to make it."

"I'll make it," I said, "with you."

"No," she cried out. "Please understand. I *must* go back. All I can do, Dick, will be to wait for you over in my time."

"It's a date," I said. We were very close now. Her eyes, deep and dark, looked into mine and all I knew was that I wanted to take her in my arms and hold her there, forever.

She drew back.

"Not now, Dick. We have a date to keep, remember?" Her voice held a strange urgency. "When we meet again things will be different. I know we shall because, you see, the files said you met your future wife during your first test-run into the future, into my time. I never gave much thought to it until the second when I was about to kill you. And then, all of a sudden, I knew the truth."

She was turning away from me.

"Don't move, Dick," she warned softly.

Shock and pain as I realised what she was about to do washed over me. I sprang forward.

"Wait! Wait!" I shouted.

Too late! Her outline faded and blurred. The lights of Rualdino and the first faint stars began to form an intricate pattern that mingled with the growing transparency of her body. A moment later she was gone.

The air still trembled as though a sudden surge of wind had come in from beyond the sea. Dark and desolate the shore spread before me. From somewhere across the bay came the muted echo of a man's voice, singing. The night was heavy with the strong scent of flowers.

I was alone. As I turned back towards Rualdino and the familiar port I saw the waves lapping at our footprints in the moist sand, effacing them.

John W. Ashton





# ANOTHER WORD FOR MAN

By ROBERT PRESSLIE

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*Alien stories make up a considerable proportion of science fiction themes these days—which is not surprising now that homo sapiens is on the threshold of space flight—but it is more with the exploitation of the alien in contact with Man that we are interested. As usual, Robert Presslie has the simple but extremely dynamic approach.*

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It had been a good season. The weather had been kind, not a prayer had gone unheard, every omen had been favourable—and Father St. Emilion or no Father St. Emilion, there is not a single fisherman in the Gaspe Peninsula who does not like the omens to be right when he sets his sails for the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Pierre Medoc discovered the alien in the first place. Pierre had grown fat on the season's fishing, almost as fat as his wife. He was a big man with a big white-toothed smile. He was singing as he took his boat out to the lobster pots. And with the sun making the fish scales on his black jersey shine like sequins, he looked more than ever like a jovial clown.

Behind the smile and the song, his mind was tallying like Dubois who owned the Chandler's store. Pot after pot came up and never a one was empty. Pierre dumped the lobsters behind him and his mind ticked off a pair of shoes for young Marie, dresses for the twins, a learning book for little Yves who was the clever one.

A man with six children has to budget carefully. He had earmarked francs and sous for everyone, he had allocated a

few more coins to the stone jar that would be their bank against the coming winter. And he promised himself that the proceeds of the last dozen lobster pots would go towards new equipment for the boat.

His song became louder. It was indeed a day to remember. The original words of the song were substituted by running totals of sous and francs—even if Pierre had to pay for everything in Canadian dollars, it was his habit to think in the money of the old country ; in this he was no different to anyone else in the peninsula.

The last pot of all was exceedingly heavy and seemed to resist his efforts to pull it up. *Merde*, he thought, and looked over his shoulder as if expecting the frown of Father St. Emilion. Was his luck to run out now ? Was he to lose a perfectly good pot to some marauding eel ?

Pierre strained until the boat dipped. But he won. Hand by hand he took in the rope.

He nearly let go when he saw the thing that clung to it, the thing that had tried to pull against him.

However, new pots cost money and in the best of seasons no man can afford to be extravagant. So Pierre grimly continued to haul until the pot and its parasite were aboard.

All during the interview with Father St. Emilion—Pierre nursed a suspicion that the old man was foxed for the first time in his life.

It had been unthinkable to do anything else except go to the priest with his catch and his story. The old man liked to know everything that went on in his parish in Lagosta. And whatever he had been confronted with in the past, he had always been able to delegate it to its proper place in the pattern of things. But at the end of Pierre's story he was silent.

The silence made Pierre afraid. He wished he knew what the Father was thinking and wondered if he had done right in bringing his catch ashore.

"Tell me again," the old man said. "After you detached it from the pot—what happened?"

Pierre groaned. The cross-examination was not over yet.

"It was a good pot, you understand, Father ? I didn't mean to take this thing out of the sea, but it was a good pot—"

"Yes, yes. I'm not blaming you. Tell me what happened next."



"I shook the pot. But the thing was clinging tightly. Never have I seen such a creature—and Heaven knows I have taken many a strange fish out of the gulf. I put the pot behind me, thinking that by the time I made the shore it would be dead, not being able to breathe out of water."

"And after that?"

"It must have loosed itself from the pot. I felt a movement at my side. It was there. I asked the blessing of Our—"

Pierre broke off and hung his head. He mumbled something which he had omitted to mention in his first report.

"Speak up, man!"

"I—I went to the other end of the boat. I was afraid, Father. This was a thing from the Devil's kingdom, I thought. How else could the slits that were gills have closed and tubes grown out of its head? And when it spoke—!"

"Ah!" The priest leaned forward and Pierre guessed this was the part which had made the old man unsure.

"More tubes grew," Pierre said. "Tubes which made sounds, fluting sounds and deep organpipe sounds, sounds that made no sense.. Yet they were sounds with a beauty to them and I thought of the stories of fishermen being lured by the Black One. Suddenly the sounds became words."

"In English?"

"No, Father. I had a feeling of—of intrusion?" He wondered if that was the correct word. "As if someone was listening inside my head. Then the thing talked to me. In French. At first it was difficult to understand, but gradually it got its pronunciation better and told me who it was. What it was, I mean."

Father St. Emilion rose from his leather covered chair. He crossed to a corner of his study. Quite unafraid, he picked up the pot which Pierre had brought, the pot with the strange animal now inside it.

"Pierre," the old man said. "Why is it so silent now? If it said so much to you, why does it say nothing to me?"

The accusation was plain. Pierre groped for a valid defense, concrete proof that he had not lied, had not been drinking, or had not imagined the whole incident.

"It is alive, Father!" he said, triumphantly. "It came from the sea, hours ago, yet it still lives! Perhaps it has been listening all this time. You think?"

The priest hummed noncommittally. He turned the pot to view its contents from all angles. The thing was shaped like a bell. Its colour was exactly the pink of dental plastic. Pierre had said it moved about on one leg. But at the moment the unipod clapper of the bell was invisible as the creature sat immobile in the lobster pot.

"Pierre—" From the solemn tone, Pierre knew that Father St. Emilion was about to pass judgement.

"Go home, Pierre. Go home to Madame Medoc and forget this thing. Put it out of your mind. And say nothing. I will make a pronouncement in church calling for silence from everyone. Ours is a small community. I do not wish it to be destroyed. The outside world must stay outside. The news of abnormalities attracts abnormal people. We shall continue to live as if nothing had happened."

The fisherman backed awkwardly to the door, glad to be released, yet curious to know what would happen to his catch.

"And H'rola?" he asked.

Father St. Emilion refused to use the name which Pierre had said the thing had told him. "This creature has intimated to you, I believe you said, that it came from another world and that it is a specialist in Medicine. Very well, I shall place it in the custody of Doctors Meursalt and Chablis."

Nobody else called them Dr. Meursalt and Dr. Chablis. When you went to the small six-bed clinic that passed for a hospital, you asked for Old Doc or Young Doc, according to your preference. Mostly you asked for Old Doc.

Meursalt was somewhat like Father St. Emilion. They were of an age and both channelled their lives into a rigid pattern from which they seldom deviated. Meursalt was a good doctor; perhaps inclined to be old-fashioned, but when you have been treated for all your ailments by the same man right from your cradle days it gets so his very presence is usually enough to set you on the road to recovery.

Not that Dr. Chablis was disliked. Lots of folk, unable to get Old Doc because he could only treat so many patients at a time, had discovered that Chablis had a bright and cheerful manner—a little citified as might be expected these days—but they had stuck to Young Doc because they had also discovered that his modern methods go them back on their feet quicker than Old Doc's bedside manner.



Their different attitudes to H'rola were typical of the men. Like the priest, Meursalt wanted to ignore the alien, to pretend it had never happened. Chablis, on the other hand, spent hours of his leisure time getting acquainted with the bell-shaped creature.

He learned that H'rola came from a planet which he called Fronal ; with much discussion and the aid of star-maps, Chablis established Fronal as being a planet of the star Mirfak in Perseus.

From H'rola's revelations, it appeared that the Fronals were great space travellers, forever seeking new worlds, partly for the kick they got out of pure discovery, partly because of their insatiable thirst for fresh knowledge.

H'rola had spent a dismal two weeks on Earth before Pierre Medoc dragged him out of the sea. He had been on the point of returning to his ship, convinced that Earth had no really intelligent life.

His mistake had been a natural one. Earth had more ocean than land ; the obvious place to look for the dominant species was in the ocean. And if he had not stumbled across Pierre's lobster pots, he might have gone away disappointed.

When they were past the introductory stage, they got around to discussing Young Doc's work. Without knowing it, Father St. Emilion could not have sent H'rola to anyone better. H'rola was intensely interested in Earth medicine ; and while Old Doc could not conceive the alien as any kind of doctor and refused to have him near when treating a patient, Chablis differed and saw no reason for excluding the alien. He allowed him to sit in a corner while he treated ambulatory patients and after surgical cases were under anaesthesia he permitted the alien to squat on a table to watch the proceedings.

But in spite of H'rola's frequent requests to be allowed to participate, he drew the line there and would not have it. Meursalt was the senior doctor and he could imagine what would happen if the old man ever found him letting the alien handle a patient.

Yet he listened to any advice that H'rola offered. In no time at all the little alien had mastered the intricacies of human anatomy. He made a habit of doing his own diagnosis which he would then compare with Chablis' conclusions. Mostly they agreed. And when they differed, it always turned out that H'rola had made the better diagnosis. Then, if the alien's

diagnosis called for surgical treatment, he backed off and sulked.

H'rola had a horror of surgery. He said it was unnecessary. But he could not give Chablis any alternative advice, not practical advice, that is.

"When you cut," he droned in his vox humana tones, "you cut a little bit of life away."

"If I didn't," Chablis defended, "I would be condemning the patient to death. What am I supposed to do? Leave a swollen appendix to burst? Let my patient die of peritonitis?"

"We doctors are givers of life, we do not take it away."

Chablis had heard this deceptively simple statement more than once. "So you keep telling me. But we have to use the best means at our disposal. I don't rightly understand your methods beyond the fact that they entail morphosis—your ability to change shape, to grow protuberances as required."

H'rola gave another patient explanation. "We extend these protuberances into the sick one, deep into the site of his sickness, so deep that doctor and invalid are one. Then we give life and withdraw. If you would only permit me to show—"

"You know I can't."

H'rola's voice organ droned a sigh. "It is so difficult with words. To demonstrate would answer your questions, and it would give me so much pleasure. Since the moment I proved I was capable of being a doctor—this is a test of one's metamorphic abilities—I have been yearning to give life to someone."

"You mean you've never actually treated a patient?"

"Isn't that obvious?"

"But all those diagnoses you've made while you've been here—?"

"A result of my training. What you would call theory training. But I have never had the opportunity to effect a cure, to give life to a sick one. You understand now why I am so anxious for you to give me such a chance?"

Chablis understood only that he had been very lucky. The little alien had pestered him so much of late that he had been tempted to let him try something simple, like a tonsilectomy. He was glad he had heeded old Meursalt's warning. He hadn't realised that H'rola was a mere beginner.

Nature has a way of evening things out. The winter that followed was one of the worst in memory. Maybe it is unfair



to blame nature. Maybe the law of averages is responsible ; the east coast of Canada is entitled to so many hours of sunshine and a certain mean temperature ; from Spring to Autumn the sun had shone too diligently and a cold hard winter was only to be expected.

Old Doc, Young Doc and Father St. Emilion had a busy time. Nature—we might as well say it was her doing—was determined to keep the annual averages neat and tidy. All winter long the weak and the aged were weeded out so that the remaining human stock should be the fittest and the strongest. The doctors worked like trojans to keep down the mortality figures of the pleurisies and the pneumonias. But they were fighting a force stronger than they and so Father St. Emilion was kept equally busy with the rites and the burials.

The doctors, young and old alike, prayed there would be no surgical cases demanding more and better equipment than they had at the clinic. They knew that if any poor soul required specialist attention, they might as well send for Father St. Emilion right away, for the seas were ice-blocked; the roads were snowbound and the telegraph wires were down most of the time.

But they coped. As the winter wore on they got greyer and gaunter but they coped.

It was St. Emilion who gave them most concern. He was working twenty hours a day, trudging through deep snow drifts, sitting at bedsides in warm steamy rooms, officiating bareheaded by black gaping holes in the peaceful white of the graveyard.

Yet while he got greyer he got no thinner.

Chablis was surprised therefore when the priest showed up at the clinic for a check-up. In the comparatively short time that Chablis had practised in Lagosta, this was the first occasion on which the old man had enquired about the state of his own health.

Meursalt was out on the rounds and Chablis ushered the priest into the consulting room.

“Where is Dr. Meursalt?”

“He won’t be available until afternoon. What can I do for you, Father? Is there someone sick and we haven’t heard?”

“The first thing you can do is remove that creature—”

Chablis wondered if the request was due to the priest’s continued prejudice against H’rola or whether he merely wanted to talk in complete privacy. He motioned for H’rola to leave.

"I think perhaps I need some of your pills, Dr. Chablis, or a bottle of one of your brews. Pills would be preferable. I would find it inconvenient to—"

Chablis smiled. This was the same old Father St. Emilion. If he wasn't careful, the old man would be making his own diagnosis and writing his own prescription.

"You've been overdoing it, Father. You want to take better care of yourself. A good tonic wouldn't do any harm."

"I did not come for a tonic," the voice was biting and haughty as ever. "I have a pain." The last few words were said with reluctance and defiance; they were accompanied by a self-inflicted thump on the chest.

Chablis became brisk and professional. "You'll have to remove some of your clothes . . . How long have you had this pain?"

"About three years."

"Three years! And you waited all this time before coming to the clinic!"

"I have my work to do. My people need me."

"Better they should do without you for a few weeks than lose you altogether. What made you suddenly change your mind? Why did you finally decide to call?"

"It's been getting worse. With the aid of prayer and self-control I have been able to push it into the background. But it's getting too much."

Chablis ran a stethoscope over him. He rebuked, "Even God needs a little help sometimes."

"There is no necessity for blasphemy—"

"None was intended. Breathe in . . . And out . . . Hmm."

"I thought perhaps I had caught a cold."

"A three-year cold? Come over here, stand in front of this screen." Chablis steadied the priest against the X-ray screen. "I can't hear anything wrong with your lungs. You've got a slight tachycardia—rapid heartbeat—but that's to be expected of a man of your age and weight. Quite still, now . . . thank you. You can get dressed again."

"What do you suspect?"

"Nothing as yet. It might still be a lung condition, the stethoscope doesn't always tell. The plate will help in diagnosis. Let me see—I should have it developed by tomorrow. Can you call about the same time?"



"I don't know. I have my duties—"

"Damn your duties, Father! Your first duty is to yourself. Be here tomorrow afternoon. That's an order!"

Whatever the nature of the unknown ailment, it was having its effect on the old man. He took Young Doc's outburst without protest. He didn't even tick him off about swearing.

The developed plate horrified Chablis. He took it, still dripping wet, to his partner. The first quick glance made Meursalt breathe, "*Mon Dieu!*" And when he had had time examine the plate more closely, he said, "*Mon Dieu!*" once again in a shuddering tone that embodied a heartfelt prayer and pity for Father St. Emilion.

"Prepare the theatre," he said. "We must operate immediately.

"We'll never get him to agree. You know how he is."

"Leave that to me. He'll listen to reason from me."

Chablis thought, *you hope*. And as he expected, the priest put up a tremendous resistance. He begged when he asked who was going to look after the souls of the villagers during his convalescence. He thundered when he accused the doctors of plotting to make him take an enforced rest.

Meursalt put a hand on his shoulder. "I wish it were so, Father. I wish it were so."

Chablis could see Old Doc steeling himself for the delivery of his ultimatum. He felt sorry for Meursalt. They had their differences but he could almost feel the same pain the old man was feeling as he reluctantly parted with the truth which must hurt his lifelong friend.

"Father, this has to be. And it has to be immediate. Perhaps it is already too late."

"It is pneumonia?"

"God help you, Father, no."

Old Doc choked as he went on. "Young Chablis gave you an X-ray examination yesterday in the hope—yes, the hope—of detecting a lung condition. But there is none. Your lungs are perfectly sound." He tried to joke: "Heaven knows you use them, eh!" The joke fell flat.

He switched on the lamp of the viewer and pointed to the plate on the screen. "This shadow—see how extensive, how dark it is . . ."

Chablis spared him the final agony. In the coldest, most clinical voice he could summon, he said, "You have a malig-

nant growth, Father. It will kill you unless we operate at once to remove it."

St. Emilion bent forward to examine the plate closely. His voice was steady as he asked, "And what if I refuse?"

"Today, tomorrow, any time now . . . Pfft!"

"How long would I be out of commission if you operate?"

Knowing that his partner could never say it, Chablis revealed, "If we operate, your chances of survival are almost as low as if we didn't. If we could get you to Quebec, where the facilities are better, if we could even ask their advice by phone—but, it is a bad time of year."

Father St. Emilion nodded. "Thank you for your honesty, Chablis. It would seem that whether or not you operate the end result will be the same. This would suggest that I might as well attempt to carry on as I am for as long as I am spared. Perhaps I could struggle on until spring and the arrival of my successor."

He stood up and loosened his robe. "However, I know such a decision would make you both unhappy by depriving you of the chance to try to save my life—"

He gave a tired smile. "I am prepared to put my trust in your hands and my life in God's. The theatre is this way, I believe."

Since the largest team Old Doc and his partner could muster consisted of themselves and two nurses, they decided to use intravenous anaesthesia in favour of the more complicated respiratory method.

Fifteen minutes after mounting the operating table, Father St. Emilion should have been unconscious with 3c.c. of five percent thiopentone coursing through his bloodstream. He had also been injected with atropine to prevent laryngospasm due to excess salivation and chlororomazine to promote tranquility and to prevent vomiting. Yet for all this cocktail of drugs, the old priest was still alert and vocal.

"I hope I have made the right decision. You should at least have given me time to summon another priest."

Chablis was checking his blood pressure which was dropping steadily. "Stop talking, please. Relax."

"My mouth is so dry I find it difficult to talk."

Chablis thought, well the atropine is working anyhow. He picked up the thiopentone syringe, ready to give the old man a further dose that would send him completely under when he



noticed that the blood pressure had started to rise again ; the first dose was finally having its effect.

With his breathing getting shallower, Father St. Emilion made a last effort to defy the drugs.

"And keep that monstrosity out of the theatre," he said. "It is bad enough I have to suffer men cutting me up. I will not have my body touched by—"

To the great relief of Chablis and Meursalt, his head flopped back and he was out cold.

Germaine, the elder of the two nurses, was primarily the village midwife. It was only on special occasions that she was called to help in the theatre. To her was given the job of standing by with vials of cardiac and respiratory stimulants in case Father St. Emilion showed signs of collapse. Annette, a niece of the same Pierre Medoc who had found H'rola, was the more experienced theatre nurse ; she had charge of the instruments.

Annete was young in years but she had seen many operations. She was not unaccustomed to grisly sights. Yet when the upper abdomen had been incised and the triangular flaps laid back to reveal the malignant growth, she screamed.

She fought gamely to overcome her nausea, gripping the edge of the table in a desperate clutch. Meursalt glared at her over his mask, yet behind his anger there was something else in his eyes—despair, defeat and pity for the priest.

He exchanged glances with Chablis. Young Doc's sense of helplessness was also in his eyes.

Meursalt made a quick decision. He dismissed the nurses. Alone with Chablis, he brought the despair and defeat and helplessness into the open.

"We can do nothing. Close the incision, Cablis. Mon Dieu ! That growth !"

Young Doc vented his feelings with more vehemence and less reverence. "Christ ! He must have had it for years. It's all through him. Every major organ is displaced and most of them are embroidered with carcinomic fibres. To cut out every piece of malignant tissue we would have to cut him into ribbons. God, when I think of the money they spend on weapon research compared to the pennies they grudgingly allocate for cancer ! If only we had some fine tool that could be inserted into the growth, a flexible tool that would thread its way into every fibre . . ."

He halted his outburst. He snapped his fingers. A gleam lit his eyes.

"What is it?" Old Doc asked.

"H'rola."

"That monster—"

"H'rola could do it. Just like the fine flexible tool I was talking about. That's how these alien doctors work. They extend protruberances, as fine as they wish. He could do it, Meursalt."

Old Doc's mind was in a turmoil. He protested, but not too convincingly. "You said yourself he was a novice. We can't entrust a job like this to—"

"We're supposed to save lives, aren't we? We took an oath."

"You heard what Father St. Emilion said."

"I did. And I don't think he is in a position to be the best judge. He has a private quarrel with H'rola. H'rola told me about it. Away back when they first met, they had an argument. About religion. That was the main reason for the Father dismissing H'rola as an animal. He wouldn't reconcile himself to the fact that there can be more than one religion—you know how dogmatic he is. H'rola argued that there was more than one door into Heaven and what difference did it make which door you took. That made him a heathen and a blasphemer in St. Emilion's eyes."

"We can't allow it," Meursalt said. "We can't put a human life in the hands of a—"

"All right!" Chablis was angry. "Go ahead. Sew him up. And then try living with yourself because you know there was one thing you didn't try!"

"What if he died under H'rola's treatment?"

"What if he did? He's going to die anyhow, as sure as—"

Meursalt waved a hand. "Let me think," he pleaded. He paced the theatre and Chablis used the time to check the priest's anaesthetic condition.

"You'd better make up your mind quickly. Another fifteen minutes and he'll be awake."

Meursalt crossed to the pathetic black pile that was the priest's clothing. He picked up the Cross and held it for five of the remaining fifteen minutes. He looked ten years older when he turned to face his partner again.

"You're right of course. We are in the position of doctors who have been given a new drug, a new instrument, or a new



technique. To refuse to avail ourselves of such a thing would be contrary to the Hippocratic oath. Ask Doctor H'rola to come in."

H'rola piped like a calliope steam organ when Chablis called him into the theatre and explained the situation. He humped his bell-like body on its unipod clapper from one doctor to the other, thanking them profusely and musically for the honour they had done him.

"All my life," he droned, "all my life has been mere preparation for this moment."

Chablis told him, "Take it easy, H'rola. I'll be frank with you. We didn't intend this to be any honour. It's simply a case of using the last resort—which is you."

"Intended or not, the honour is there and I thank you for it. Now at last I can do what destiny shaped me for, now I can truly be a giver of life."

"Do you think you can do it? Being frank again, we can't."

"The giving of life is easy. It is accepting it that is difficult. Have I not heard some of your people say they wish they had never been born. However, since the godservant is asleep, his acceptance will be involuntary."

Meursalt was keeping out of it and Chablis had to do all the liaison work. He asked if H'rola wanted the patient to have a further injection.

"No, my friend. As soon as life begins to come to him, he will cease to be sick. He will *want* to be alive and alert. It is a pity you started to butcher him—"

"Time is passing, H'rola. Let's save the arguments till later."

The alien made a strange gurgle and said, "Of course, of course. And at least your work will permit an easy entry."

He expanded his unipod until his body was level with the top of the operating table. Suddenly, he seemed to sprout white fur—but the fur was a million fine protruberances which he had extended and which now waved as if driven by a mild breeze in the direction of Father St. Emilion's parasitic growth.

All but one of his vocal tubes had withdrawn. He turned this last tube in the direction of the doctors.

"I am sorry but I shall not be able to speak to you any more. The task you have set is a great one, thereby making the honour

of life-giving more splendid, you understand, and I shall need all my protoplasm. I must withdraw this speaking tube. Good-bye, my friends. And thank you."

The tube divided into two, and divided again—and again and again until it was a mass of cilia.

H'rola heaved his body across until it covered the incised area. He withdrew his unipod. Underneath the carapace, Chablis guessed, the leg too was probably already a mass of threads, each probing its way into the cancer.

Then, with Meursalt, he had to stand by helplessly, not knowing what was going on. As the minutes passed, all they could see was that H'rola's body grew smaller. The outer skin of the bell became wrinkled, too large for its contents. Chablis checked his watch. The anaesthetic was due to wear off shortly. He hoped H'rola would have finished and got out of the way before Father St. Emilion recovered consciousness.

From the utterly flaccid and shrunken appearance of his outer skin, it seemed that there was more of H'rola fibrillated throughout the growth than remained outside. As far as the doctors could see there was no movement going on whatsoever; H'rola might have been as unconscious as the priest.

Chablis gnawed his lower lip. The anaesthetic effect of the thiopentone should now be over. He picked up the appropriate syringe. Another shot would be necessary, if only to permit the incision to be sown up. But something happened which nearly made him drop the syringe.

H'rola began to withdraw from the patient. Far more rapidly than he had shrunk, he ballooned back to his normal size. And continued to swell until his new bulk equalled the sum of his own and all the wild cells which had constituted the parastic growth. When he stopped swelling, he fell aside and dropped off the table to the floor with a sickening squelch.

And Father St. Emilion's body was whole again. Only faint pink lines showed where the incision had been.

In further testimony of his renewal, the priest awoke, sat up and swung his legs over the side of the table. He very nearly put his feet to the floor, but stopped when he saw what lay there.

"You went against my wishes," he said. There was nothing but wonder in his voice. "And I am well. I don't need a clinical examination to prove it. I know I am well."

Chablis hesitatingly told him why they had made the decision to use H'rola.



"No need for apologies. I was a foolish blind old man. You did me a greater service than saving my life. You opened my shuttered mind to truths which I refused to accept. Truths which *he* accepted." He pointed to H'rola.

"He said there was more than one door into Heaven. He has entered by the door of his choice—oh, yes, he knew he would die to save me. He was literally a giver of life."

As he got dressed, he went on, "A foolish blind old man. I feel very humble now."

He looked directly at Young Doc and Old Doc. "I, of all people should have been less blind. You are familiar, of course with the passage in the Scriptures which commences, 'Greater love hath no man—' And to think that I spent years in Quebec, learning my profession at the university, reading the Scriptures in Latin and Greek and Hebrew. Yet it has taken me all this time to realise how we have mistranslated one simple ancient Hebrew word. Because we are proud we have said the word meant Man. But it means so much more. The most literal translation would be Son. Yet even this is inadequate. It does not include people like H'rola."

Father St. Emilion set his hat firmly on his head.

He left the theatre saying, "Greater love hath no creature of Mine . . ."

Robert Presslie

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## Young Ideas For Christmas

Rathbone Books of London have always been noted for their outstanding productions in children's books, and this year they have surpassed themselves with Walt Disney's beautiful book *World Of Nature*, aptly sub-titled 'A Treasury of True-Life Adventures.' Based on the Disney series of true-life adventure films, it contains 273 colour photographs of animal life inhabiting the seven major areas of the world and has a magnificent text by Rutherford Platt. 25/- but worth every penny.

Children's space games have always been rather expensive, but this year Theydon Games are marketing *Satellite Shoot* at 10/6d, a new board game for two players based on the old children's game of 'Battleships.' The beautifully designed playing board has plot-tables for opponents to work out their own moves and that of their protagonist, numerous space satellites of different denominations to 'shoot' at and an ingenious system for keeping a check on shots fired.

You may remember a letter by Roger Critchley in the September issue suggesting an occasional article dealing with specific aspects of the mind and about the men who have done so much to advance our knowledge in this fascinating field. We therefore invited Mr. Critchley to contribute an article himself—inadvertently it is the key to Colin Kapp's novelette "Life Plan" which appeared last month. Read in conjunction the two make a perfect collaboration.

## YEAR 102 A.F.

By ROGER CRITCHLEY

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'*Psycho-analysis*,' '*unconscious mind*,' '*repression*,' '*neurotic*': these words, and the concepts which they represent are a familiar part of everyone's vocabulary. Like every other section of technical vocabulary which has found its way into popular use, they are subject to misuse and misinterpretation. They represent an advance in basic human knowledge which is equivalent, in its own field, to the achievement of industrial nuclear power. They belong to the most important field of knowledge—Man's knowledge of himself.

Their originator and populariser, Sigmund Freud, who was born 102 years ago, was a Viennese professor of neurology. He brought about to a great extent the general recognition of mental illness as something no more despicable, degrading, nor less worthy of pity and sympathy, than any other kind of illness, and requiring the same care and attention. Before him, the history of the treatment of the mentally ill stretches back in a procession of the greatest cruelty and inhumanity



broken only by the examples of a few dedicated men and women.

In 1885 Freud went on a travelling fellowship to study under the eminent neurologist Charcot at the Salpetriere Hospital in Paris. Charcot was experimenting in Hypnosis as a means of treating hysteria. Freud was much impressed, and on his return to Vienna began what was to be his life work: treatment of the mentally ill. Until his death, he divided his time between research and the formulation of theories, treatment of patients, and lecturing.

His discovery of the great extent of unconscious mental activity and the influence which it has on conscious thought and action, might be compared to the demonstration of the circulation of the blood by Harvey. It has led to a vast expansion of the body of information about the mind, and has made itself felt in widely different applications besides the care of the mentally ill. Modern psychology applies itself equally to normal and abnormal mental states. It was Freud who first saw that abnormal mental states are essentially similar to the normal, differing only in degree of intensity. Thus neurosis is simply a state of constant and heightened anxiety.

Freud's theories have often been abused, misquoted, and misunderstood. He himself warned against applying psycho-analytical concepts as a touch-stone to everything. He was essentially a scientist, devoted to the care of sick humanity. His lifelong motto was "Die Wissenschaft und der Arbeiter" (Science and the working man). On his death in London in 1939, aged eighty-three, he left psychology a connected, scientific whole. When he came to it, it had been an undeveloped territory between philosophy and medicine. His views on religion, and his own philosophy are not irreproachable, and their main interest for the reader is in revealing the personality of the man. However, they do not detract from the importance of his main work.

After studying under Charcot, Freud, impressed by the success of hypnosis in the treatment of hysteria adopted this procedure himself. This was in spite of the hostility of his more orthodox colleagues. He found that under hypnosis patients could recall things of which they had no conscious memory. This discovery led him to formulate the concept of the *unconscious* mind as it is generally accepted today.

But he abandoned the use of hypnosis, since although it was a satisfactory method for the recall of unconscious material, he found that only roughly one person in five is a suitable subject for hypnosis (it is an interesting fact that suggestibility, the prime requirement in a subject for hypnotism, is correlated to intelligence by linear coefficient: generally speaking, the higher the intelligence of the subject, the more suitable he is likely to be).

Freud had seen that the importance of the use of hypnosis in treatment was the subject's ability to recall experiences and emotions which were totally lost to the conscious mind. *Psycho-analysis*, the method which he developed to replace hypnosis, achieves similar results by the technique of *free-association*.

Free-association of the continuous type, as used by Freud, consists in the patient relaxing on the familiar couch (the object of the couch is merely to enable the patient to relax completely, and to avoid his distraction by anything less prosaic than a blank ceiling); he is then encouraged to say completely without selection or prejudice whatever comes into his mind following the trains of thought and involuntary association of ideas. That the technique is effective is due partly to the fact that when the mind is relaxed, *repressed* material returns more easily to the consciousness, as the vigilance of the  *censor* is decreased. By this means the unpleasant experiences and emotions responsible for the neurosis are brought to light and accepted by the patient.

Psycho-analysis requires a lengthy period of these sessions, of anything up to four or five a week for between two and four years. Obviously time is the limiting factor for this method, and some later analysts seeking quicker results have reverted to the use of hypnosis. Others have adopted the use of such drugs as amphetamine, sodium pentothal, nitrous oxide, and various barbiturates as means to a quicker (and more complete) release of unconscious material by the patient.

It is interesting to note that there is a certain similarity between 'brain-washing' procedures used by police states, and psycho-analytical method: both make use of the same psychological mechanism, achieved by the gradual breaking down of the subject by interrogation (possibly accelerated by fatigue and the use of drugs), which results in a release of purgative emotion which 'wipes the subject clean.' An important part of this psychological mechanism is the process of *transference*.



Transference is the term describing a sudden emotional attitude of the subject towards the analyst or interrogator. This can be either *positive*—affection, love, or dependence ; or *negative*—hate, jealousy, or rejection. Transference is brought about when painful emotions emerge into consciousness before the subject can understand or accept them, and hence he will *project* them on to the analyst. To be successful either of these two conversion methods must bring about transference, and require the purgative emotional release resulting in negative transference. It is also transference which enables the subject to observe his emotions, and hence to understand and acknowledge them.

The basic method of psycho-analysis remains in use unchanged today.

From the insight into the nature of the unconscious which hypnosis afforded him, Freud built up a theory of the structure of the mind and its mechanisms which confirmed his method of analysis. Besides the conscious mind, which he called the *ego*, dealing with our actions in, and our awareness of the world around us, he placed the unconscious which contains all material not in the consciousness, and which is not normally available for recall by the conscious. But there is an area of mind which contains memories and facts which we can bring to mind at will, although they are not in our sphere of consciousness at all until recalled.

There is a simple way of illustrating this : at the moment, your attention is fixed on these words, and you will also be more or less aware of what is happening in your immediate surroundings, and so on. Now if you think for a moment of the name of the magazine in which this article appears, of the day of the week, or of any of the innumerable facts surrounding your life, these will immediately appear in your consciousness, although they were not present a moment ago. It is apparent that there is a great deal more information available in our minds than is in our area of conscious attention at any given moment. This is stored in the *pre-conscious*.

The conscience Freud called the *super-ego* because of the implications of judgments of absolute right and wrong inherent in the former word, whereas he held that the super-ego derives its values mainly from what the child believes to be the attitude of its parents, and this is carried over into adult life. The function of the super-ego is to restrain primitive impulses

which might harm the individual. Its mode of operation is to saturate the mind with anxiety whenever the ego may be about to give way to such an impulse. If the super-ego is defied it will react with further feelings of anxiety and guilt. Memories of these unpleasant feelings of anxiety reinforce the super-ego when another conflict of the same type arises.

He accounted for the normal conscious unavailability of material in the unconscious by the hypothesis of a censor mechanism, which prevented painful and unpleasant motives and experiences from rising into the conscious sphere. However, the basic drives of the human personality originate in the unconscious, and the area from which they come he called the *id*. At first Freud thought that these drives could all be accounted for under the heading of pleasure-seeking impulses, manifested chiefly through sex.

His theories were based on an exhaustive observation of many cases, among which were a number of children. It is upon his observations on the psychological development of children that the well-known and inaccurate criticism "Freud attributes everything to sex !" rests.

In fact, his early theory attributed all motivation of the personality to gratification of the pleasure-seeking impulses. He also attributed all neuroses to a repression of sexual drives (in general, anxiety neuroses result from the repression and fear of those impulses of which the discovery would result in real or imaginary danger).

Later on, he qualified the basic impulses of the pleasure principle, or *libido*, with an addition—the *death wish*. The death wish in itself is one aspect of the *aggressive impulses*, the urge to injure, conquer, kill, or destroy—turned inwards upon the self.

These motivating forces of the personality (libido and aggressive impulses), at first without form in the unconscious, take on shape and size by being related to people and things in the child's environment. If wishes arising from this situation are unacceptable to the individual, they may be consciously rejected, and thus lose their emotional charge ; or they may be repressed into the unconscious area again, still retaining their emotional charge, in which case the repressed material will strive to emerge once more.

This will make itself felt by causing abnormal actions and attitudes of mind, which are the symptoms of neurosis. In



order to resolve the neurosis, these conflicting desires and emotions must be brought to light, accepted by the patient, and thus deprived of their emotional charge.

Two of Freud's most important contributions to psychological knowledge are closely connected with the abnormalities to which these repressed desires give rise.

First : the importance of slips of the tongue and the pen, and minor accidents of everyday life. These Freud held to be entirely unaccidental, and to reveal unconscious wishes.

Second : the concept of dreams as having function and purpose. Their function is symbolic, in order to evade the censor. Their purpose is twofold : to draw the dreamer's attention to an unpleasant problem ; and as a *wish-fulfilment* (invariably erotic).

It will be seen that Freud put forward a workable system of psychodynamics—that is, a system which explained the structure, working, and motivation of the mind. However, it is important to remember that Freud never intended his division of the mind into id, censor, super-ego, pre-conscious and conscious, to be taken too literally. They all merge indistinguishably. But by looking at the mind in this way, it has been possible to learn a great deal about it, in the same way that we may visualise a material object as composed of atomic particles, for the same purpose.

I would like to summarise Freud's most enduring achievements :

- \*1. The understanding and treatment of neuroses.
2. The development of the psycho-analytical method.
3. The recognition of the importance of unconscious factors.
4. The giving of its due importance and position to sexuality in mental life.

Nowhere have Freud's theories been more readily used than in literature, and above all in science fiction. Perhaps the most complete application is in Alfred Bester's *The Demolished Man*, where telepathy is the only psychological concept not descended, directly or indirectly, from Freud.

This is representative of the mature science fiction which has emerged in increasing quantity and quality since the war. The new literature is just as interested in the workings and develop-

\* The numerical order is arbitrary and does not denote a judgment of relative values

ment of the mind and personality of Man, both as an individual and as a social entity, as in the workings and development of his artifacts. It shows how new problems of environment and technology affect the individual in much the same way that our present problems affect us.

In connection with this, Freud made an important observation : that the progress of civilisation must be paid for by an increasing number of neuroses. (He also indicated that the attitude of the child towards the father conditions the attitude of the adult towards the State). He reached this conclusion by observing that the first demand which civilisation makes of the individual is to limit and channel his aggressive drive. But often the individual cannot achieve a satisfactory sublimation or channeling of his aggressive drive. It can then only be limited by repression. When the aggressive drive is repressed into the unconscious, it creates neurosis. The greater the structural complexity of civilisation, the greater the demands on the individual will be to limit and channel these drives, leading inevitably to a greater number of neuroses.

Freud has shown the *cure* by putting the treatment of neuroses on a scientific basis. The *prevention* lies in the adjustment of the individual to the changing demands of society. One way in which this can be done lies in the fitting of each individual into the job to which he is most suited. This is a field in which psychology plays an important part. In industry and the Forces especially, the selection and training of personnel is on a more efficient basis than hitherto.

The highly specialised personnel requirements of spaceflight, and the problems which will face the first extra-terrestrial travellers are already under study at such institutions as the USAF Department of Space Medicine, and the Royal Aircraft Establishment (and doubtless in Russia as well). Thanks to the original discoveries of the Viennese neurologist, some of these problems are on the way to being solved before they arise.

Roger Critchley



# INCENTIVE

Once again Brian Aldiss produces a plot considerably different to the usual run of stories. Basing his premise on the blind instinct of the lemmings' annual flight to the sea, he converts the meaning to paraphrase Man's urge to conquer the stars.

**By BRIAN W. ALDISS**

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*The ocean seemed to be breathing shallowly, like a child asleep, when the first lemmings reached it. In all the wide sea, no hint of menace existed. Yet the first lemmings paused daintily on the very verge of the water, peering out to sea and looking about as though in indecision. Unavoidably, the pressure of the marching column behind pushed them into the tiny wavelets. When their paws became wet, it was as if they resigned themselves to what was to come. Swimming strongly, the leaders of the column set off from the shore. All the other lemmings followed, only their heads showing above water. A human observer would have said they swam bravely; and unavoidably he would have asked himself: to what goal did the lemmings imagine they were headed? For what grand illusion were they prepared to throw away their lives?*

All down the waterway, craft moved. Farrow Westerby stood at the forward port of his aquataxi, staring ahead and ignoring the water traffic moving by him. His two fellow Isolationists stood slightly apart, not speaking. Farrow's eye was on the rising structure on the left bank ahead. When the aquataxi moored as near to this structure as possible Farrow stepped ashore; glancing back rather impatiently, he waited for one of his companions to pay the fare.

"Wonderful, isn't it?" the taxi man said, nodding towards the strange building as he cast off. "I can't ever see us putting up anything like it."

"No," Farrow said flatly, walking away ahead of his friends.

They had disembarked in that sector of the capital called Horby Clive Island. Located in the governmental centre of New Union, most of it had been ceded to the Galactics a year ago. In that brief time, using Earth labour for the rough work, they had transformed the place. Six of their large, irregular buildings were already completed. The seventh was now going up, creating a new wonder for the world.

"We will wait here for you, Farrow," one of the two men said, extending his hand formally. "Good luck with the Galactic Minister. As the only Isolationist with an extensive knowledge of the Galactic tongue, Galingua, you represent, as you know, our best chance of putting our case for Earth's remaining outside the Multi-Planet Federation."

As Farrow thanked him and accepted the proffered hand, the other man, a stooping septagenarian with a pale voice, gripped Farrow's arm.

"And the case is clear enough," he said. "These aliens pretend they offer us Federation out of altruism. Most people swallow that, because they believe Earth ingenuity must be a valuable asset anywhere in the galaxy. So it may be, but we Isolationists claim there must be some ulterior motive for a superior race's wanting to welcome in a junior one as they appear to welcome us. If you can get a hint from this Minister Jandanagger as to what that motive is, you'll have done more than well."

"Thank you; I think I have the situation pretty clear," Farrow said sharply, regretting his tone of voice at once. But the other two were wise enough to make allowance for nervousness in times of stress. When he left them to make his way towards the Galactic buildings, their faces held only sincere smiles of farewell.



As Farrow pushed through the crowds of sightseers who stood here all day watching the new building develop, he listened with interest and some contempt to their comments. Many of them were discussing the current announcement on Federation.

"I think their goodness of heart is proved by the way they've let us join. It's nothing but a friendly gesture."

"It shows what respect they must have for Earth."

"You can't help seeing the future's going to be wonderful, now we can export goods all over the galaxy. I tell you, we're in for a boom all round."

"Which goes to prove that however advanced the race, they can't do without the good old Earth know-how. Give the Galactics the credit for spotting that!"

The seventh building round which so many idle spectators clustered was nearing completion. It grew organically, like some vast succulent plant, springing from a flat metal matrix, thrusting along curved girders, encompassing them. Its colour was a natural russet which seemed to take its tones from the tones of the sky overhead.

Grouped round the base of this extraordinary structure were distilleries, sprays, excavators, and other machines, the function of which was unknown to Farrow. They provided the raw material from which the building drew its bulk.

To one side of these seven well-designed eccentricities lay the space field. There, too, was another minor mystery. Earth governments had ceded—willingly when they sniffed the prizes to be won from Federation!—five such centres as the Horby Clive centre in various parts of the globe. Each centre was being equipped as a space port and educational unit, in which terrestrials would learn to understand the antiphonal complexities of Galingua and to behave as citizens of a well-populated galaxy.

Even granting vast alien resources, it was a formidable project. According to latest estimates, at least eight thousand Galactics were at present working on Earth. Yet on the space field sat only one craft, an unlikely-looking polyhedron with Arcturan symbols on its hull. The Galactics, in short, seemed to have remarkably few space ships.

That was a point he would like to investigate, Farrow thought, speculatively eyeing the inert beacons round the perimeter of the field.

He skirted them, avoiding the crowds as far as possible, and arrived at the entrance of one of the other six Galactic buildings quite as eccentric in shape as its unfinished brother. As he walked in, an Earthman in a dark grey livery came deferentially forward.

"I have an appointment with Galactic Minister Jandanagger Laterobinson," Farrow announced, pronouncing the strange name awkwardly. "I am Farrow Westerby, Special Deputy of the Isolationist League."

Directly he heard the phrase 'Isolationist League,' the receptionist's manner chilled. Setting his lips, he beckoned Farrow over to a small side apartment, the doors of which closed as Farrow entered. The apartment, the Galactic equivalent of a lift, began to move through the building, travelling upwards on what Farrow judged to be an elliptical path. It delivered him into Jandanagger Laterobinson's room.

Standing up, the Galactic Minister greeted Farrow with amiable reserve, giving the latter an opportunity to sum up his opponent. Laterobinson was unmistakeably humanoid; he might, indeed, have passed for an Earthman, were it not for the strangeness of his eyes, set widely apart in his face and half-hidden by the peculiar configuration of an epicanthic fold of skin. This minor variation of feature nevertheless gave Jandanagger what all his race seemed to possess: a watchful, tensely withdrawn air.

"You know the reason for my visit, Minister," Farrow said, when he had introduced himself. He spoke carefully in Galingua, the language he had spent so many months so painfully learning; initially, its wide variation in form from any terrestrial tongue had all but baffled him.

"Putting it briefly, you represent a body of people who fear contact with the other races in the Galaxy—unlike most of your fellows on Earth," Jandanagger said easily. Expressed like that, the idea sounded absurd.

"I would rather claim to represent a body of people who have thought more deeply about the present situation than perhaps their fellows have done."

"Since your views are already known to me through the newly established Terrestrial-Galactic Council, I take it you wish us to discuss this matter personally?"

"That is so."

Jandanagger returned to his chair, gesturing Farrow into another.



"My role on Earth is simply to talk and to listen," he said, not without irony. "So do please feel free to talk."

"Minister, I represent ten per cent of the people of Earth. If this sounds a small number, I would point out that that percentage contains some of the most eminent men in the world. Our position is relatively simple. You first visited Earth over a year ago ; after investigation, you decided we were sufficiently advanced to become probationary members of the Galactic Federation. As a result, certain advantages and disadvantages will naturally accrue ; although both sides will reap advantages, we shall suffer all the disadvantages—and they may well prove fatal to us."

Pausing, he scrutinised Jandanagger, but nothing was to be learnt from the Minister's continued look of friendly watchfulness. He continued speaking.

"Let me briefly outline these advantages and disadvantages. To begin with, the advantages to you. You will have here a convenient base, dock and administrative seat in a region of space you say you have yet to explore and develop. Also, it is possible that when arrangements are worked out between us, terrestrials may be engaged to help colonise the new worlds you expect to find in this region. We shall be a cheap manufacturing area for you. We shall produce such items as plastics, clothes, foodstuffs, and simple tools which it will be easier for you to buy from us than transport from your distant home planets. Is this correct ?"

"As you point out, Mr. Westerby, Earth occupies a key position in the Federation's present thousand-year plan for expansion. Although at present you can only regard yourselves as a frontier world, at the end of that period you may well be a key world. At the end of ten thousand years—well, your peoples are full of confidence ; the omens are good."

"In short, there is promotion ahead if we behave ourselves?"

The acid note in Farrow's voice merely brought a slight smile to Jandanagger's lips.

"One is not made head prefect in one's first few days at school."

"Let me then enumerate the advantages, as opposed to the promises, which Earth will enjoy from entering the Federation. In the first place, we shall enjoy material benefits : new machines, new toys, new gadgets and some new techniques, like your vibro-molecular system of building—which produces, if I may say so, some excruciatingly ugly structures."

"One's tastes, Mr. Westerby, have to be trained to appreciate anything of aesthetic worth."

"Quite. Or to regard the hideous as normal. However, that brings us to the non-material assets inherent in belonging to your Federation. You plan to revolutionise our educational systems. From nursery school to university, you will inculcate more, matters and methods foreign to us; Earth will be invaded not by soldiers but by teachers—which is the surest way of gaining a bloodless victory."

The wide eyes regarded him calmly, but still as if from behind a barricade.

"How else are we to help you to become citizens of a complex civilisation? For a start, it is essential your peoples learn Galingua. Education is a science and an art towards which you have not yet begun to formulate the rules. The whole question is enormously complicated, and quite beyond brief explanation—not that I could explain it, for I am not an educational specialist; those specialists will arrive here when my work is done, and the formal membership charters signed. But to take just one simple point. Your children first go to school at, say, five years old. They go into a class with other children and are quite separate from their homes; learning becomes at once an isolated part of life, something done in certain hours. And their first lesson is to obey the teacher. Thus, if their education is rated a success, it is because, to whatever extent, they have learnt obedience and forfeited independence of mind; and they are probably set at permanent odds with their home environment.

"Our methods differ radically. We allow no children to enter our schools before the age of ten—but by that time, thanks to certain instructive toys and devices they have been familiar with for years, they will come knowing at least as much as your child of school-leaving age. And not only knowing. Behaving, Feeling, Understanding."

Farrow was at a disadvantage.

"I feel like a heathen being told by a missionary that I should be wearing clothes."

The other man smiled, got up, and came over to him.

"Be consoled that that's a false analogy," he said. "You are *demanding* the clothes. And when you wear them, you are certain to admire the cut."



All of which, Farrow reflected, made the two of them no less heathen and missionary.

"Don't look so disconcerted, Mr. Westerby. You have a perfect right to be distressed at the thought of your planet being depersonalised. But that is something we would not dream of doing. Depersonalised, you are nothing to yourselves or us. We need worlds capable of making their best personal contribution. If you would care to come with me, I should like to give you perhaps a better idea of how the civilised galaxy functions."

Farrow rose to his feet. It consoled him that he was slightly taller than the Minister. Jandanagger stood courteously aside, ushered his guest through a door. As they walked down a silent corridor, Farrow found his tongue again.

"I haven't fully explained why I think that Federation would be such a bad thing for Earth. We are progressing on our own. Eventually, we should develop our own method of space travel, and come to join you on a more equal footing."

"Space travel—travel between different star systems—is not just a matter of being able to build starships. Any post-nuclear culture can stumble on that trick. Space travel is a state of mind. The journey's always hell, and you never find a planet, however lovely, that suits you as well as the one you were born on. You need an incentive."

"What sort of an incentive?"

"Have you any idea?"

"I take it you are not referring to interstellar trading or conquest?"

"Correct."

"I'm afraid I don't know what sort of an incentive you mean."

The Minister gave something like a chuckle and said, "I'll try and show you presently. You were going to tell me why Federation would be a bad thing for Earth."

"No doubt it has been to your purpose to learn something of our history. It is full of dark things. Blood ; war ; lost causes, forgotten hopes ; ages in chaos and days when even desperation died. It is no history to be proud of. Though many men individually seek good, collectively they lose it as soon as it is found. Yet we have one quality which always

gives cause for hope that tomorrow may be better: initiative. Initiative has never faded, even when we crawled from what seemed the last ditch.

"But if we know that there exists a collective culture of several hundred worlds which we can never hope to emulate, what is to prevent us sinking back into despair for ever?"

"An incentive, of course."

As he spoke, Jandanagger led the way into a small, boomerang-shaped room with wide windows. They sank onto a low couch, and at once the room moved. The dizzy view from the window shifted and rolled beneath them. The room was airborne.

"This is our nearest equivalent to your trains. It runs on a nucleonically bonded track. We are only going as far as the next building; there is some equipment there I would like you to inspect."

No reply seemed to be required; Farrow sat silent. He had known an electric moment of fear when the room first moved. In no more than ten seconds they swooped to the branch of another Galactic building, becoming part of it.

Once more leading the way, Jandanagger escorted him to a lift, which took them down into a basement room. They had arrived. The equipment of which Jandanagger had spoken was not particularly impressive to look at. Before a row of padded seats ran a counter, above which a line of respirator-like masks hung, with several cables trailing from them into the wall.

The Galactic Minister seated himself, motioning Farrow into the adjoining seat.

"What is this?" Farrow asked, unable to keep a slight tinge of anxiety from his tone.

"It is a type of wave-synthesiser. In effect, it renders down many of the wavelengths which man cannot detect by himself, translating them into paraphrased terms which he can. At the same time it feeds in objective and subjective impressions of the universe. That is to say, you will experience—when you fit the mask and I switch on—instrumental recordings of the universe (visual and aural and so on) as well as human impressions of it.

"I should warn you that owing to your lack of training, you may unfortunately gather a rather confused impression from the synthesiser. All the same, I fancy that it will give



you a better rough idea of what the galaxy is like than you would get from a long star journey."

"Let's go," Farrow said.

*Now the entire column of lemmings had embarked into the still water. They swam smoothly and silently, their communal wake soon dissolving into the grandly gentle motion of the sea. Gradually the column attenuated, as the stronger animals drew further ahead and the weaker ones dropped behind. One by one, inevitably, these weaker animals drowned; yet until their sleek heads finally disappeared below the surface, they still pressed forward with bulging eyes fixed upon the far and empty horizon.*

*No human spectator, however devoid of anthropomorphic feeling, could have failed to ask himself: what might be the nature of that goal that prompted such a sacrifice?*

The inside of the mask was cold. It fitted loosely over his face, covering his ears and leaving only the back of his head free. Again a touch of unreasoning fear shot through him.

"The switch is by your hand," the Minister said. "Press it."

Farrow pressed the switch. Darkness submerged him.

"I am with you," the Minister said. "I have a mask on too, and can see and feel what you do."

A spiral was curling out into the darkness, boring its way through nothing: an opaque, smothering nothing as warm as flesh. Materialising from the spiral issued a growing cluster of bubbles, dark as polyhedral grapes, multiplying and multiplying as if breathed from an inexhaustible bubble pipe. The lights on their surfaces, glittering, changing, spun a misty web which gradually veiled the operation.

"Cells are being formed, beaten out in endless duplication on the microscopic anvils of creation. You witness the beginning of a new life," Jandanagger said, his voice sounding distant.

Like a curtain by an open window, the cells trembled behind their veil, awaiting life. And the moment of its coming was not perceptible. Only now the veil had something to conceal within itself; its translucence dimmed, its surface patterned, a kind of blind purpose shaped it into more definite outline. No longer was it beautiful.

Consciousness simmered inside it, a pinpoint of instinct-plus without love or knowledge, an eye trying to see through a lid of skin. It was not inert ; instead, it struggled on the verge of terror, undergoing the trauma of coming-into-being, fighting, scrabbling, lest it fell back again into the gulf of not-being.

“ Here is the Afterlife your religions tell of,” Jandanagger’s voice said. “ This is the purgatory everyone of us must undergo. Only it comes not after but before life. The spirit that will become us has to tread the billion years of the past before it reaches the present it can be born into. One might almost say there was something it had to expiate.”

The foetus was all Farrow’s universe ; it filled the mask, filled him. He suffered with it, for it obviously suffered. Pressures wracked it, the irremediable pressures of time and biochemistry, the pain of which it strove to lessen by changing shape. It writhed from worm- to slug-hood, it grew gills and a tail. Fishlike, and then no longer fishlike, it toiled up the steep slope of evolution, mouselike, piglike, apelike, babylike.

“ This is the truth the wisest man forgets : that he has done all this.”

Now the environment changed. The foetus, exerting itself, had become a baby, and the baby could only become a man by the proddings of a thousand new stimuli. And all these stimuli, animal, vegetable, or mineral, lived too, in their different way. They competed. They inflicted constant challenges on the man creature ; some of them, semi-sentient, invaded his flesh and bred there, creating their own life cycles ; others, non-sentient, were like waves that passed unceasingly through his mind and his body. He seemed hardly an entity, merely a focal point of forces, constantly threatened with dissolution.

So complete was the identification between the image and the receiver, that Farrow felt he was the man. He recognised that everything happening to the man happened to him ; he sweated and writhed like the foetus, conscious of the salt water in his blood, the unstoppable rays in the marrow of his bones. Yet the mind was freer than it had been in the foetus stage ; during the wrenching moment of fear when environments had changed the eye of consciousness had opened its lids.

“ And now the man changes environments again, to venture away from his own planet,” the Galactic Minister said.



But space was not space as Farrow had reckoned it. It struck his eyes like slate : not a simple nothingness, but an unfathomable web of forces, a creeping blend of stresses and fields in which stars and planets hung like dew amid spiders' webs. No life was here, only the same interaction of planes and pressures that had attended the man all along. Nonetheless, his perceptions reached a new stage, the light of consciousness burnt more steadily.

Again he was reaching out, swimming towards the confines of his galaxy. About him, proportions changed, slid, dwindled. In the beginning, the womb had been everywhere, equipped with all the menace and coercion of a full-scale universe ; now the galaxy was revealed as smaller than the womb—a pint-sized goldfish bowl in which a tiddler swam, unaware of the difference between air and water. For there was no spanning the gulfs between galaxies : there was nothing. And the man had never met nothing before. Freedom was not a condition he knew.

As he swam up to the surface, something stirred beyond the yellow rim of the galaxy. The something could hardly be seen; but it was there, wakeful and clawed, a creature with senses though insensate. It registered half as sight, half as noise : a smouldering and delayed series of pops, like the sound of bursting arteries. It was big. Farrow screamed into the blackness of his mask.

The creature was waiting for the man. Stretching, it stretched right round the galaxy, round the goldfish bowl, its supernatant bat's wings groping for purchase.

Farrow screamed again.

"I'm sorry," he said weakly, as he felt the Minister removing his mask for him. "I'm sorry."

The Minister patted his shoulder. Shuddering, Farrow buried his face in his hands, trying to erase the now loathesome contact of the mask. That thing beyond the galaxy—it seemed to have entered and found a permanent place in his mind.

At last, gathering himself together, he stood up. Weakness floated in every layer of him. Moistening his lips, he spoke.

"So you inveigle us into the Federation to face that !"

Jandanagger took his arm.

"Come back to my room. There is a point I can now make clear to you which I could not before : Earth has not been

inveigled into the Federation. With your Earth-bound eyes, I know how you see the situation. You fancy that despite the evidence before your eyes of Galactic superiority, there must be some vital point on which Earth can offer something unbeatable. You fancy there must be some factor for which we need terrestrial help—a factor it does not yet suit us to reveal ; isn't that so ?”

Farrow avoided the other's wide eyes as they ascended in the lift to the top of the building.

“There are other things beside the material ones,” he said evasively. “Think for instance of the great heritage of literature in the world ; to a truly civilised race, that might appear invaluable.”

“That depends upon what you mean by civilised. The senior races of the Galaxy, having lost the taste for the spectacle of mental suffering, would be unlikely to find much attraction in your literatures.”

This gently administered rebuke silenced Farrow. After a pause, the Galactic Minister continued, “No, you have no secret virtues, alas, for which we are gulling you into the Federation. The boot is on the other foot. We are taking you in as a duty, because you need looking after. I apologise for putting the matter so bluntly ; but such may be the best way.”

Stopping gently, the lift released them into the boomerang-shaped room. In a minute, they were speeding back to the building Farrow had first entered, with the crowded Horby Clive sector below them. Farrow closed his eyes, still feeling sick and shattered. The implications of what Jandanagger had said were momentarily beyond his comprehension.

“I understand nothing,” he said. “I don't understand why it should be your duty to look after Earth.”

“Then already you do begin to understand,” Jandanagger said, and for the first time personal warmth tempered his voice. “For not only are our sciences beyond yours, so are our philosophies and thought disciplines. All our mental abilities have been keyed semantically into the language in which you have learnt to converse with me, Galingua.”

The flying room was re-absorbed ; they became again merely one leaf tip of the giant building growing towards the grey clouds.



"Your language is certainly comprehensive and complex," Farrow said. "but perhaps my knowledge of it is too elementary for me to recognise the extra significances of which you speak."

"That is only because you have still to be shown how Galingua is more than a language : it is a way of life, our means of space travel itself ! Concentrate on what I am telling you, Mr. Westerby."

Confusedly, Farrow shook his head as the other spoke ; blood seemed to be congesting at the base of his skull. The odd idea came to him that he was losing his character, his identity. Wisps of meaning, hints of a greater comprehension, blew through his brain like streamers in the draught of a fan. As he tried to settle them, keep them steady, his own language became less like the bedrock of his being ; his knowledge of Galingua, coupled with the experiences of the last hour, gradually assumed a dominant tone. With Jandanagger's grave eyes upon him, he began to think in the tongue of the galaxy.

For Jandanagger was talking, and with increasing rapidity. Although his meanings seemed clear, it felt to Farrow as if they were being comprehended only by a level below his conscious one. It was like partial drunkenness, when the grand simplicities of the world are revealed in wine and the mind skates over the thin ice of experience.

For Jandanagger was talking of many things at once, shifting things that could not be spoken of in terrestrial tongues, dissolving mental disciplines never formulated through terrestrial voices. Yet all these things balanced together in one sentence like jugglers' balls, enhancing each other.

For Jandanagger was talking of only one thing : the thrust of creation. He spoke of what the synthesiser had demonstrated : that man was never a separate entity, merely a solid within a solid—or better still, a flux within a flux. That he had only a subjective identity. That the wheeling matter of the galaxy was one with him.

And he spoke in the same breath of Galigua, which was merely a vocal representation of that flux, of whose cadences followed the great spiral of life within the flux. As he spoke it, he unlocked the inner secret of it to Farrow, so that what before had been a formal study became an orchestration, with every cell another note.

With a wild exultation, Farrow was answering now, merging with the spiral of talk. The new language was like a great immaterial *stupa*, its base broad, rooted in the ground of the ego, its spire high, whirling up into the sky. And by it, Farrow gradually ascended with Jandanagger : or rather, the proportions and perspectives about him changed, slid, dwindled, as they had done in the synthesiser. With no sense of alarm, he found himself high above the gaping crowds, shooting upwards on an etheric spiral.

Within him was a new understanding of the stresses permeating all space. He rode upwards through the planes of the universe, Jandanagger close by, sharing the revelation.

Now it was clear why the Galactics needed few spaceships : their big polygonal vessels carried only material ; man himself had found a safer way of travelling in the goldfish bowl of the galaxy.

Looking outwards, Farrow saw where the stars thinned. Out there was the thing with claws, popping silently like bursting blood vessels. Fear came to him again.

"The thing in the synthesiser . . ." he said to Jandanagger, "the thing that surrounds the galaxy—if man can ever get out, cannot it get in at us ?"

For a long minute Jandanagger was silent, searching for the key phrases of explanation.

"You have learnt as much as you have very rapidly," he said. "By not-understanding and then by well-understanding, you have made yourself one of the true citizens of the galaxy. But you have only taken leap X ; now you must take leap X<sup>10</sup>. Prepare yourself."

"I am prepared."

"All that you have learnt is true. Yet there is a far greater truth, a truer truth. Nothing exists in the ultimate sense : all is illusion, a two-dimensional shadow play on the mist of space-time."

"But the thing . . ."

"The thing is why we fare ever further forward into the illusion of space. It is real. Only the galaxy as you previously misinterpreted it is unreal, being but a configuration of mental forces. That monster, that thing you sensed is the residue of the slime of the evolutionary past still lingering—not outside you !—but in your own mind. It is from that we must escape. We must grow from it."



More explanation followed, but it was beyond Farrow. In a flash, he saw that Jandanagger, with an eagerness to experiment, had driven him too far and too fast. He could not make the last leap ; he was falling back, toppling into a not-being. Somewhere within him, the pop-thud-pop sound of bursting arteries began. Others would succeed where he had failed—but meanwhile, the angry claws were reaching from the heavens for him.

*And now the lemmings were scattered over a considerable area of sea. Few of the original column were left ; the remaining swimmers, isolated from each other, were growing tired. Yet they pressed forward as doggedly as ever towards the unseen goal.*

*Nothing was ahead of them. They had launched themselves into a vast—but not infinite—world without landmarks. The cruel incentive urged them always on. And if an invisible spectator had asked himself the agonised ‘ why ? ’ to it all, an answer might have occurred to him : that these creatures were not heading for some especial promise in their future, merely fleeing from some terrible fear in their past.*

Brian W. Aldiss

## THE LITERARY LINE-UP

December is an awkward publishing month this year and you will find *New Worlds* on sale on the 19th instead of the last Friday. This has also meant that the issue you are now reading had to be printed earlier than usual and because of this next month's issue has not yet been completely made up. There will be the second part of "A Man Called Destiny," of course (and the story really hums along, too), with short stories probably by Dan Morgan, Robert Silverberg, John Kippax and others.

Ratings, so far, for No. 74 are :

1.	The Ideal Captain	-	-	-	-	James White
2.	Slice of Life	-	-	-	-	Calvin M. Knox
3.	Stability	-	-	-	-	Lester del Rey
	Space Command	-	-	-	-	Kenneth Bulmer
4.	The Mules	-	-	-	-	Sydney J. Bounds
	Death On The Wheel	-	-	-	-	Clive Jackson

*Lester del Rey's contribution this month is in the true tradition of the space story although, as always, the emphasis is on the human aspect rather than the mechanical and the characterisation is all that we have come to expect from this extremely versatile American writer.*

# THE STILL WATERS

By LESTER DEL REY

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Zeke watched the red light on the panel fade, then listened to the chatter of the relays as the ship searched its way back to its course. The pip on the screen had disappeared into the background of snow that the anti-noise circuits could no longer blank, even this far from the sun. He dropped his eyes to his hands that lay on the board, staring bitterly at the knuckles that were swollen with arthritis and covered with coarse hairs that had begun to turn grey.

Behind him, he heard Mary sigh softly. "Those blamed blowtorches," she said, but her voice was as tired as he felt, and the old anger at the smaller, direct drive ships was almost automatic. "He might look where he's going."

"He looked," Zeke told her. "There wasn't any danger, Mary."

She smiled at him, as if to indicate there could be none with him at the controls. But he could feel no lift in response. There really had been no danger. The blowtorch must have spotted the huge bulk of the *Midas* well in advance ; its newer radar couldn't have missed.



He stared at his hands again. He'd known there was no need for an emergency blast and had been reaching for the controls when the automatics went on. But, like the screen, age had let too much noise creep into the messages along his nerves. His fingers had reacted too late, and had fumbled. Just as the *Midas* had fumbled in overblasting needlessly.

An old man he thought, in an old ship. But lately it seemed that he was growing old faster than even the ship. Once, he'd liked it best when they were furthest from the planets. Now he'd found the trip in from Tethys almost too long and wearying. He was actually looking forward to berthing at Callisto where there could be no alarms to wake him from what fitful sleep he could get.

He heard the control room door close softly and knew without thinking that Mary had gone to make tea for them. Their habits were as automatic as those of the ship, he thought. But he reached for his pipe and began filling it, unconsciously muttering the words that had become a symbol of their needs: "A good smoke and a pot of tea never hurt anyone."

If their boy had lived, things might have been different. Zeke sighed and got up, heading back for his regular tour of inspection before tea. He passed the three other empty seats in the control room. Bates had died on Venus, Levitchoffsky had sold out to join a blowtorch company, and Ngambu had gasped out his life from a sudden stroke only three years before, leaving the *Midas* entirely to Zeke. Somehow, it had been harder and harder to get younger men to replace the missing ones. Now he was resigned to doing everything himself. He'd had years enough in which to learn since he'd first been taken into the group as head engineer.

He went back through the empty crew quarters, past the equally empty passenger rooms, and through the holds with their small load of freight, until he came to the great engine that drove the *Midas*. There, for the first time that day, he relaxed. Elsewhere, the brightwork had long since dulled, but the huge fusion converter was the one thing he never neglected. It purred on smoothly, turning a trickle of the hydrogen in ordinary water into huge floods of power, and it gleamed under his approving glance. They weren't building engines like that any more—not since the blowtorches had taken over. A complete blowtorch weighed less than the seven thousand tons

of power equipment the *Midas* carried. It had been constructed when spaceships were so tremendously expensive that their engines were designed to last almost forever. The ship could fall to pieces around it, or he could be forgotten for generations before it began to fail.

Then the satisfaction passed. Even the engine had one weakness—it needed someone to feed it and to give it the minimum care. Once he was gone, the engine would die with him. With the blowtorches controlling the space lanes, nobody would be interested in an old ship, no matter how well the engine could convert hydrogen to power for the great ion blasters to hurl out in driving force.

Reluctantly, Zeke turned from the engine room and on back toward the complexities of the driving tubes. He moved slowly now, putting it off as long as he could. The blast that had been wasted in trying to avoid the blowtorch had been too strong; somewhere, some part of the controls had malfunctioned. Now . . .

It could have been worse. The drivers were still functioning, at least. But the imbalance that had been creeping up was worse. The strain of the needless correction had crippled them more than a year of normal use could have done.

Zeke moved about, avoiding enormous bus bars and giant electronic parts in the huge but crowded section out of old habit. He could make up for the damage to some extent, by inhibiting the less worn sections. But it was only a temporary expedient. The *Midas* was long since overdue for drydocking and repairs. It could no longer be delayed.

Mary had the tea ready when he finally went back to their cabin. She started to pour his, then stopped as she saw his face. "Bad?" she asked.

He nodded. He'd never been one to talk much, and with Mary it hadn't been necessary. "Shot!" he told her. "How much is left?"

She pulled the bankbook out and handed it to him. He added the figure to the freight he'd collect for at Callisto. There was some insurance he could borrow against. But he knew it wasn't enough.

"Maybe Mr. Williams will give us an advance against next year's contract," Mary suggested. "You've never asked before." She stared at him, the worry in her voice less for the ship than for him. "Zeke, why don't you lie down for an hour? It'll do more good than the tea."



He shook his head, picking up his cup. "Can't," he answered. "Too much figuring to do."

The *Midas* would need babying for its landing, with the drivers so badly out of condition, which would mean finding just the right landing orbit. And while he needed pampering too because of his own condition, that would have to wait.

There'd be time for that, maybe, after he talked to Williams.

It had been five years since Zeke had dropped into Callisto to discuss the last contract renewal with Williams, head of the Saturnus Mineral Corporation. Now, after resting from the long, cautious landing, he found Zeus City changed, without being able to say what the change was at first. Then it began to register; the city was the same, but for the first time, he walked down Main without meeting a single man who recognised him. And there was a new look to the faces—the old, wild expression of the spaceman had given place to a businesslike air he hadn't seen beyond Mars before.

At Saturnus, there were more changes. The receptionist was a young chit of a girl who kept him waiting for nearly half an hour before sending him into the President's office. And then it wasn't Burt Williams who greeted him. The man was a complete stranger!

"Mr. Williams died three years ago, Captain Vaughn," he said. He hesitated a second, then stood up and held out his hand. "I'm Julian Hathaway, used to be treasurer here, if you remember."

Zeke had a dim memory of a younger man, and he nodded. Hathaway wasn't exactly fat, but he'd added a solidity usually called respectable. Now he seemed vaguely uncomfortable.

"I suppose you came to collect what is still due on your contract, Captain Vaughn?" he asked.

Zeke nodded slowly. "And to discuss renewal," he said. He was still adjusting to the change. He'd never been close enough to Williams to be hit by the man's death, but all his figuring had been done in terms of the former president. He had no idea of how to broach an advance. Williams had always made it easy to talk to him, but . . .

Hathaway fidgetted uncomfortably, biting at the end of a cigar. Then he reached into a drawer of his desk and drew out what was obviously the former contract. He compared it with a sheet in front of him. Finally he shrugged and cleared his throat. "According to my figures, you have eighty-four

hundred dollars and thirty-one cents due you, plus three hundred dollars retainer to the end of this month. I've already had a cheque made out. And there's a separate cheque for five hundred, since Mr. Williams had you listed on the employee roll. That means you're entitled to that as automatic termination pay after fifteen years. Here."

He passed over an envelope. Zeke fingered it open, staring at the cheques. Then his eyes snapped back to Hathaway.

"Termination? But—"

Hathaway looked more uncomfortable, but he nodded. "Unfortunately, we can't renew the contract, Captain Vaughn."

"But Williams told me—"

"I know. And I'm sure he meant to keep you under contract as long as you were in business. I don't know whether he ever told you, but he served for a year on one of the old ion-drive passenger liners, and he was quite sentimental about all ion-drive ships. He had contracts with five, in fact, at one time—though the other four have all been retired. But he had a constant fight with the stockholders over it. As a new president of the company, Captain Vaughn, I don't have the authority that he had."

"I don't get it," Zeke said. The man was practically telling him he'd been a charity case. And that made no sense. "I charged less than the blowtorches! And freight rates went up last year, too."

Hathaway looked like a man caught beating a dog. His voice was unhappy, but there was no uncertainty in it. "That's part of the reason. When the rates went up, Hermes Freight offered us a contract at the old rate, in return for exclusive rights. And since that represents an annual saving of several million dollars to us, we couldn't turn it down. I'm sorry, Captain Vaughn, but it was out of my hands."

"Yeah." Zeke stood up slowly, putting the envelope with the cheques into his pocket. He held out his hand, trying to smile normally. "Thanks, Mr. Hathaway. I'll get the *Midas* off the Saturnus section of the docks as soon as I can."

"No need to do that. Until the end of the month, your ship's technically entitled to berth there, and I'll see there's no trouble. Good luck, sir." He shook Zeke's hand almost gratefully, and saw the older man out through the office and



to the entrance. He was still watching as Zeke turned a corner two blocks away.

He deposited the cheques and checked his balance, hoping that Mary's records had been wrong. But he knew better, without the words of the young teller. Then he headed back to the rocket field, avoiding the hotel where he and Mary were staying.

The *Midas* loomed up huge among the smaller blowtorches there. They had never succeeded in building a blowtorch drive larger than the original, and the problem of phasing more than one such drive had kept them from multiple drive. Originally, the small ships had contained less than half the cargo space of the *Midas*, though they'd stepped up the efficiency until it was now about the same.

When the direct conversion of a tiny, intermittent fusion blast to propulsive drive had been invented, the spacemen had laughed at the ships designed for it. They had seemed little more than toys. And the inability to increase their power beyond certain limits had already been recognised. Obviously, with a few more improvements in the reliable, proven ion-drive and fusion motors, the tiny blowtorches would never have a chance.

Spacemen, Zeke now knew, had been right in everything but their knowledge of economics. The big power generating motors and the ion-drive could have been improved, and ships far better than the maximum for the blowtorches could have been built. But they never were. A ship like the *Midas* had cost over twenty million dollars to build. The huge motor alone had cost sixty percent of that. And for the same money, forty of the direct-drive ships could be completed.

In every way except one, the ion-drive was more efficient. But that one way was the determinant. It wasn't economically efficient to tie up twenty million dollars and its interest when two blowtorches would yield the same return for a single million! The ship companies stopped contracting for ion-blast ships, and the progress that could have been made still remained only a possibility.

For a while, during the brief trouble between Mars and Earth, when it seemed interplanetary war might occur, Earth had suddenly grown interested in the big ships again. The government had bought them up, planning to arm them. Then the scare had blown over, and they were dumped onto the surplus market, since no freight company was still equipped

to use them. Bates and Levitchoffsky had scraped up the price of one, taking Zeke in as engineer and Ngambu as pilot with equal shares for their skills. A lot of spacemen had done the same.

But that had been forty years ago, and now apparently the *Midas* was the last of the old ships. Zeke had seen some of the others, scrapped on the outer planets, or blown up because the old engineers died or quit ; they weren't training men now to service the big motors properly.

He reached the ship finally and climbed up the ramp. Forty years ! He wondered how often he'd climbed it, and then tried to remember how it had felt when he was young enough, so that he didn't wheeze asthmatically before the last step, even on the light planets.

Callisto had been an outpost then, the point beyond which the big companies and the blowtorches didn't go. Zeke and men like him had built the outplanet colonies ; when the blowtorches quit, ships like the *Midas* had been the lifeline for all beyond Jupiter. Even now, there was a copy of a picture of the *Midas* on the planet seal of Neptune. And kids had wanted to grow up to handle such ships. They hadn't been able to land without a bunch of kids—and grown-up kids, too—streaming out to admire them, and to ask to go inside, to gasp in awe at the engines.

Now to greet him there was only the estimator from the repair company Zeke had consulted on landing. He was standing doubtfully in the main lock, and he swung quickly as Zeke came in.

"Oh, hi, Captain Vaughn. I was just coming to look you up. How soon would you want her rebuilt ?"

Zeke frowned. It was a foolish question, but it apparently wasn't meant for a joke. "As soon as possible, naturally. But—well, how much—"

"Impossible !" Now the estimator seemed to think Zeke was being foolish. He grinned doubtfully. "We don't keep stuff here to fabricate all this. In fact, you're lucky we've got a man who can handle the job. No other company this side of Earth would touch it. We'll have to send to Mars for scrap parts for some of it, and maybe get other parts specially tooled at Detroit. Look, you sure you want her drydocked ?"

"How much ?" Zeke asked again.



The man shrugged. "I haven't the foggiest notion. It'd take three months to get estimates on the parts. In round numbers, maybe a million dollars for parts, plus shipping and labour, if you want a complete overhaul. A quarter of that just to work on what you've got wrong with the drivers, if we disregard minor defects. Your engine looks sound. And you might get by a few more years on the controls. You sick?"

Zeke shook his hand off. He'd been foolish to think it could be done for what he had. With a bitter grin at himself, he took out his bank book and passed it over.

The estimator whistled.

"That's it," Zeke told him.

"Umm." The other stared at the older man, and then shrugged. "All right, I'll level with you, Captain Vaughn. I was padding it—I like a fat commission as well as the next. But I wasn't padding it that much. Not by a tenth!" He pulled at one ear lobe, staring about at the ship. Then he shrugged.

"Maybe there's something we can do, though," he suggested at last. "We've got a few old parts, and we can jury-rig a little more. For twenty-five thousand, we can retune those drivers enough for you to pass take-off inspection here. Hell, since I'm one of the inspectors, I'll guarantee that. Take us maybe two weeks. Then you can take the ship across to Venus. They're short of metal and paying top scrap prices. You could probably get enough for this outfit to pick up a fairly good used blowtorch, or to retire on. They jury-rigged a couple of scrapped ion blasters on Earth and crawled across with them recently, so there must be a good price there. How's it sound?"

Zeke brought a trembling hand up to a big wrench on the wall. "Get off!" His voice was thick in his ears. "Get off my ship, damn you!"

"What the heck gives?" The inspector took a backward step, more as if humouring Zeke than in fear. "Look, I'm trying to help you. You crazy, Captain?"

The brief anger ebbed back into the general dullness, and Zeke let his arm drop limply. He nodded. "I don't know. Maybe I am. I must be, landing on Callisto without finding out ahead of time they had take-off inspection now. All right, fix her up."

There was nothing else he could do, of course. It would leave him enough to buy supplies, at least. And fuel was no problem—he'd learned places to find frozen water years before, and the fuel tanks were nearly full.

But with the contract with Saturanus ended, getting freight enough to keep going was going to be tough. If the *Midas* had been in top condition, he could probably get a fat contract for the new mines on Pluto, since it was hard to get blowtorch pilots who would stick to the long haul so far from any recreation. But the mines wouldn't risk their ultra-precious ores without a full inspection of the ship. They'd turned him down five years ago. Now it was out of the question.

He headed back toward his hotel, trying to figure out what to tell Mary. She'd know he was lying, of course, but she'd feel better, somehow. Then he'd have to go looking for work. There had to be something.

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want," he quoted to himself, trying to believe it. Then he stopped. His mind found it too easy to twist what came next. Green pastures and still waters ! He might be old, but he wasn't ready to be turned out to pasture ; nor was the ship going to be becalmed in still waters, out of the current, to rot and decay uselessly !

The ship behaved slightly better on the take-off from Callisto. He'd been nervous about that, after watching the fumbling, sloppy work of the men. And Mary had her own worries, probably inspired by her contempt of anyone who would foul up the passageways without cleaning them. It had taken her hours, while he inspected the work, to restore the *Midas* to livable condition. But once beyond the planetary limits, they both breathed easier.

"I'll fix the tea, Zeke," she said. Then she smiled faintly. "He was such a nice young man."

Zeke knew she was thinking of Hathaway, and nodded. He had to admit she was right. Hathaway couldn't get the contract renewed, but he'd done all he could, as it turned out. He'd come to their hotel to tell them he'd got them a small job for another minerals company, carrying an emergency inspector to Ceres. The payment had been ridiculously low, but it was something, at least ; and Hathaway had suggested there might be work for them on Ceres for a few trips. With the last of their money gone, they'd needed it.



It had been their only chance, after Zeke had tried every office in Zeus City. There had been no other work for a wornout ion blaster.

Hathaway had been almost a different man, as if a big load had been lifted from his conscience. He'd been as nice as Mary thought. Too nice, Zeke reflected bitterly. They were carrying a passenger now and making enough to pay for the trip, but he knew it was only Hathaway's charity. He'd won the job only because the younger man had put on pressure to help him, not on his own merits. He wasn't used to that. Then he remembered that Williams had given him fifteen years of contracts, and that it had been almost charity on Williams' part !

He picked up his pipe and began filling it as he went on his routine tour of inspection. The door to the passenger cabin was closed, and he felt almost grateful, uncertain about how much the young engineer knew of the situation. He made his way back to the driver compartment, groaning again as he saw the shoddy workmanship that had been done. They hadn't even bothered removing the rust from salvaged parts. And he remembered that there had been no guarantee, beyond passing take-off inspection. Maybe the work would hold up for another year—beyond that, it would probably fail with complete finality. From ten feet away, he could detect heat still leaking from damaged insulation.

But there was nothing he could do. He'd been one of the best spaceship power engineers turned out in his day. He could control the big generator almost to perfection, and could have taught its operation at any school, or to any younger man who might have been willing to learn. But drivers were too complicated for one man to balance, and he had no repair parts.

He shrugged, and turned back toward the huge engine, where the smooth flow of unceasing power would soothe some of his worries. He was surprised to find Grundy, the engineer-passenger there, studying the bulk of the motor. The blonde young man looked almost embarrassed at being caught snooping.

"I had to take a look at her," he explained hastily. "I've never seen a fusion motor before. I meant to, while I was still on Earth, but it was always too much trouble getting into the sections where they are."

Zeke nodded. He'd heard that the projected fission motors for general use hadn't been built, since the solar-energy converters had been developed to near perfection. There were plenty of the fusion generators in existence, but they were confined to places where sunlight was unreliable. When a layer of solar-batteries could be sprayed on cheap cloth like paint, capable of extracting nearly a hundred percent of the energy of sunlight and when the new capacity storage cells could handle several days' accumulation of power, why should men bother with gigantic machinery? Of course, on the planets beyond Mars, sunlight was too weak. But there, the expense of freighting had made all but the biggest installations choose the much simpler and smaller uranium-fission power units; it was cheaper to pay for uranium than to pay interest on a fission motor.

"Glad to show her to you," he told Grundy.

The engineer shook his head. "No, thanks. I just wanted to take a look. I already know the general theory. Too bad these things couldn't be built smaller and cheaper. With uranium getting scarcer and more expensive, it's making it tough on some of the settlements."

"You a power engineer?" Zeke asked.

"No, mining," the younger man answered. He gestured to the ship in general around him. "This *Midas*—wasn't that the same ship Levitchoffsky was on when they found the uranium lode on that asteroid—the one where he got his start in building up Solar Freighting?"

Zeke nodded. It wasn't exactly the truth, but it was close enough. Levitchoffsky had bought the claim from a passenger to Saturn who'd given up trying to live off it. Then when he and the others on the *Midas* had stopped there to see what he had, they'd accidentally taken samples at just the right place. Levitchoffsky had promptly sold it to a speculating firm. It had been two years later, after he'd lost his profits in other worthless claims before he sold his interest in the *Midas* and joined Solar Freighting.

The engineer stood around a few minutes longer, and then wandered back to his own cabin, more impressed with the fact that Zeke had known Levitchoffsky than with the *Midas*.

Zeke started to follow him, and then stopped. Levitchoffsky! Zeke hadn't been in touch with him for years, but the other would still remember him. He might be president of Solar



Freighting and respectable now. But he wouldn't have forgotten. If he knew Zeke was in trouble, he'd do anything he could to help.

Zeke dropped onto the base of the huge motor, caressing it softly as he thought it over. There were still scrapped ion blasters on Earth, and men trained to work with almost anything of a technical nature. They could fix up the *Midas*—probably for a fraction of what it would cost on Callisto. Then, with a ship like new, there was almost certain work at good rates on the Pluto run. If Levitchoffsky would lend him the money, he could probably pay it back in five years—even paying some younger man a salary high enough to entice him to help.

It wasn't a thing he liked. It was trading on old friendship. But if he had to have help, he'd rather have it from Levitchoffsky than anyone. And it wouldn't really be charity. He was good for at least ten more years, with a repaired ship and some kind of help.

He was still considering this when the alarm sounded harshly. One look at the auxiliary control panel in the engine room sent him running painfully back toward the driver section.

But it was all over before he reached it. The insulation on the main steering driver section had finally blown. It must have been over within microseconds as the searing ions blasted out and then the lagging cut-off had deactivated that section. But the damage was beyond any hope of repair!

It was the section supposedly repaired on Callisto. Zeke couldn't tell whether it had blown because of defective work or because the greater relative strength of the newer parts had put too much strain on old sections. It didn't matter. Now he had only the emergency steering power left.

That was good for perhaps a couple of landings and take-offs, if he nursed it. After that, the *Midas* was through.

There was no longer any doubt. Once he reached Ceres, he'd have to cable Levitchoffsky. And now that it was settled beyond a doubt, he began to wonder. Thirty years is a long time. The young man he'd known would have done anything for him; but he'd seen others change with prosperity and time. He suddenly wondered whether Levitchoffsky would even accept the collect cable.

Zeke was lucky that the little planetoid had so low a gravity. He was able to conserve on his use of the auxiliaries, without

too rough a landing. He sat recovering from it and watching the engineer go hastily down the ramp ; the young man must have been angry at the jolting, from the way he walked. But if he'd known it, he was lucky to be in one piece.

The field looked bleak. Ceres had been a regular stopping place for the *Midas* once, but that was long ago. He had remembered it as a beehive of activity, bustling with the business of its great germanium mines. Now the field seemed deserted, and the great warehouses were dark in the faint light of the sun.

And it seemed even gloomier when Zeke stepped out of the *Midas* and headed toward the cable office. As he passed nearer the line of warehouses, he saw some activity, but nothing like what it had been. Behind them, the processing mills were busy, with the little trucks hard at work. But there was none of the gaiety he had associated with busy miners. And a glance at the loads they were carrying told the answer.

Low-grade ore ! Even the fabulous mines here were wearing out. He'd heard a rumour that they'd suddenly come to the end of the rich stuff, but he'd hardly believe it. Now he saw it was true. Ceres probably had enough low-grade to last for generations, but she'd been built on nearly pure ore, and this must be a starvation diet for her.

It seemed even worse than it should, however. Few lights were on, and he saw men in one of the stores wearing heavy clothes, as if they were conserving on heat. If there were a smiling face among the fifty thousand inhabitants of the world, Zeke couldn't find it.

Even the air in the plastic bubble that covered the town seemed old and weary. Zeke shivered, realising it was cold. But it was more than the coldness that increased the ache of his joints. Age had crept up on him and the *Midas* ; now it seemed to be pressing down on even the worlds he had known, as if the whole universe was running down into the stagnation of senility.

Age should be a period of peace and contentment—the still waters the Psalm mentioned, where everything was calm and serene. But here, as on board the *Midas*, the stillness was stagnation and decay, like a pool left behind the flood, when the current has ceased.

His steps lagged as he neared the cable office, partly from the general gloom around and partly from something else.



Damn it, it wasn't really charity he was asking of Levitchoffsky. He repeated it to himself, but he couldn't quite believe it.

Here and there he recognised a store, but he felt no desire to enter them. Even if the same men owned them, they would have changed too much since he'd known them, as Levitchoffsky might have changed.

Then a sudden call swung him slowly around.

"Zeke !" The man was grey and bearded. At first Zeke didn't recognise him. Then his memory turned up the face in younger form—doubtfully. Yet from the use of the first name, it must be Aaron Cowslick, who'd been Ceres' chief black-sheep and general hellraiser. They'd been on binges enough once, before Zeke had married and quieted down.

"Zeke !" The man caught his hand, and now he recognised the scar over one eye, and knew for sure it was Aaron. "I wondered, when the *Midas* dropped, whether you'd still be on her. Then Mary said you'd headed this way. I thought you'd died long ago. We missed you around here. How's tricks ?"

Zeke tried to shake off his gloom, cursing himself for not thinking to look Aaron up before the man searched him out. "Well enough," he lied, feeling sure the other knew better. "How come you're not in jail ?"

"Because I run the jail, Zeke. I'm mayor here !" At Zeke's expression, his grin widened. "Nothing stronger than coffee now, and the doc tells me to cut down on that. Speaking of which . . ."

He grabbed one of Zeke's arms and began leading him toward a little restaurant. Zeke felt almost grateful for the stop. And when the coffee arrived, it helped to cut through some of the cold. He sat sipping it, while Aaron ran through all the proper questions. He tried to answer them casually, but the truth must have been obvious. The mayor sighed, and pointed outside.

"It was a great time, when the *Midas* was still full of ginger and this town was booming." He stared out, his face losing all its expression. "Don't lie to me, Zeke, and I won't try to fool you. It's bad. Unless young Grundy sends back the right message to his company, we're in trouble."

"The mines ?" Zeke asked.

"The mines. One of our men thinks he's found what may be a formation that would lead to a rich lode. I wish I believed it. We've about reached the end of the rope. We can't cut down on power much more, and uranium is going higher and higher.

That last discovery on Neptune turned out to be a bust—just a freak pocket. Now they've raised the ante on U-235. We can't afford enough to keep going. And without sufficient power on a world like this, we can't do anything. Food, water, air—it's all U-235 to us. Besides, the processing plants need more power for low-grade stuff than for the high-quality ore. Even if we could afford the uranium, we'd still have to run our power plant too hot, and it wouldn't last forever. Looks like you might have some business if you're cheap enough."

"Resettlement?" Zeke asked.

The other nodded soberly. "Exactly. Vesta Metals says we can be split up among the Trojans—they've got booming mines there. If we can pay passage for ourselves and what we have to take, they've offered work and housing. We may have to take it, too."

"I can't take you," Zeke told him. He sucked at the last bit of coffee, then put the cup down heavily. "Steering drivers are shot, Aaron. Even your young Grundy is going to have to get back to Callisto on the first blowtorch that comes along. Until I get repairs, I can't risk carrying passengers or freight."

The mayor seemed almost relieved, though his voice was sympathetic. It must be hell to face breaking up a world and migrating in pieces. "I guessed it might be like that when I saw Mary," he said. "Well, it'll all work out somehow. We'll have to get together for dinner at my place. My wife's a swell cook."

"Bring her out to the *Midas* for a return engagement and let Mary show you she can still cook," Zeke suggested. "We've still got some Martian turkey in the freezer. Bring the whole family, if you've got kids."

Aaron grinned. "One—a girl. Teaches school here. Which reminds me, when she heard there was an ion blaster landing here, she got all set to descend on you with her class. She's never had a chance to show them a ship like that. Okay?"

"Sure," Zeke said automatically. "What time does the cable office close, Aaron?"

It turned out he had just time enough. He shook hands with the mayor again, almost relieved to drop back into his own thoughts. Normally, a chance to relive the old days would have been a gift from the blue, but right now he didn't want to be reminded of all the years that had passed.



Inside the cable office, a girl took his cable slip and frowned when she saw the check in the collect square. She glanced over it, came to his signature, and stopped to look up quickly.

"Captain Vaughn?"

He nodded.

"There's a message here for you. It came two days ago and we've been holding it. From Mr. Levitchoffsky! Maybe you'd better read it first."

Zeke stared at the envelope in blank amazement for a second, before the answer came. Mary, of course! She must have sent a cable to Levitchoffsky as soon as she knew the contract was ended—probably warning the man not to let Zeke know she'd cabled. She'd known them all, of course, and thought of him long before Zeke had.

He ripped it open with trembling fingers. It was a long cable, obviously sent with no regard to cost. Zeke skimmed over the cover-up for Mary on how Levitchoffsky had been trying to get in touch with him and had finally heard of his landing and trouble on Callisto. It was enough to know that the man was obviously filled with the same friendship he'd had so long ago, and that the words carried a genuine delight at being in touch again. Then he came to the important part.

"I'd like nothing better," the message went on, "than to put the old *Midas* back in shape. What a ship she was! But aside from getting a pig-headed man like you to let me do it, there seems to be no way. The only place where the necessary shops and skilled work can be found is right here on Earth. And since one of those taped-together scrap jobs broke up on the way to Venus, inspection here won't let another ion blaster land. I've tried getting them to wink at the law, but it's no dice.

"Anyhow, I'm sending my private blowtorch to Ceres on the double. Get back here where the money grows on the trees, Zeke. I've got a top job wide open beside me—needed a good engineer I could trust for years and couldn't find one. It's all yours, and I can't wait to see you and Mary again."

Zeke dropped the cable onto the desk and stood gazing at it without seeing it. The girl waited inquiringly.

"Will there be any answer?" she asked. "It's to go collect, unlimited."

He shook his head and started for the door. Then he changed his mind. He had to answer, of course.

But it was hard work inventing the words to explain about the repairs being good enough for him to get the job on Pluto.

Lying wasn't easy for him. And nothing could have stopped Levitchoffsky, obviously, if he'd known the truth.

Later he sat in the control room with Mary while she read and reread the message and his copy of the answer. At last she put it down.

"It's good, Zeke," she assured him. "I think he'll believe it."

He ran his hands over the controls, cutting on the panel lights that seemed too dim, as if the bulbs were about to fail. Under them, the hair on the back of his hands seemed more grizzled than ever as he filled his pipe.

"Maybe he did need an engineer," he said at last.

"Maybe," she agreed. Then she reached a hand out for his.

"It was a good cable you sent him, Zeke."

From below, there was the sound of Grundy getting his things. He'd been mad when Zeke had told him he couldn't carry him back, until Zeke had shown him the ruined drivers. Then he'd turned white and shut up. His steps started for the ladder to the control room, then hesitated.

Zeke went to the door. "Sorry, Mr. Grundy. Maybe you won't have to wait long. I hear there's a blowtorch coming here in a couple days. How were the mines?"

He'd meant to ask that before, but had forgotten.

Grundy grunted in disgust. "Rotten. The lode's completely shot. Not a thing there my company can make any advances against. Why?"

"Curious," Zeke answered. "Well, so long."

He shut the door and watched Grundy carrying his suitcase across the field, noticing that the pickup on the rear telescreen was growing weak. But that wouldn't matter now.

Forty years, he thought again. Forty years while he and the old *Midas* earned their way and helped to keep men moving out to new frontiers. Now they had grown old together, and some of those frontiers were old and ready to be abandoned.

"There's still Venus," he said slowly. "I guess we could retire on what she'd bring for scrap. And it wouldn't be charity."

Mary nodded, but said nothing. Then she shook her head, and he sighed in sudden relief.

Above them, the sky was the black of space, with the hot pinpoints of stars burning through it. Zeke had read stories long before about ships that would someday cross the immense



distance to those stars. But so far, nobody had found a drive that would make it possible during the span of one lifetime.

He'd even imagined that he might be on such a ship, when he was young and foolish. And now, maybe, he was old and foolish. Maybe a man began to get crazy notions when he was old. But what was crazy about it? There was nothing else.

"Mary," he told her quietly, not knowing how to discuss it, "you married a fool, I guess."

She followed his gaze upwards, and made a funny, choking sound in her throat. Then, surprisingly, he saw her smile. "As long as a couple of fools stick together, Zeke, I guess it *doesn't* much matter, does it?"

And somehow, it was settled. Zeke reached for the big power switch and cut it on. From below there was the instant soft murmur of the great engine, eager as always to go, unmindful of the weakness of the failing, aged drivers. He stretched out his hands toward the controls, and then stopped.

Below, on the field, the failing screen showed a group of people coming up under the big ship and heading for the ramp that he hadn't yet lifted. He couldn't take off with them in the path of the blast.

His legs trembled slightly as he stood up, but he reached the lock before they were up the ramp. In the light he cut on, he saw a young, rather pretty woman with a group of perhaps thirty boys and girls from eight to twelve following her. And behind them all came Mayor Aaron Cowslick.

The Mayor heaved his way up, puffing a little. "Meet my daughter Ruth," he introduced them. "You heard about the mines, Zeke?"

Zeke nodded. "I heard. Rotten luck, Aaron."

"Yeah. Toughest on the kids. Word leaked out, and they heard about it this afternoon. It's always tough on kids who've grown up on one world to find they've got to get out. Ruth thought they might be cheered up if she could promise them you'd let them go through a genuine ion blaster. They've been excited as hell all the way here."

"Bring them in," Zeke told him. It had been a long time since he'd been a kid, aching for a chance to get into a real ship. But he could remember some of it. In their case though, he supposed it was like going into the pages of a historical novel—like a chance to investigate a real pirate ship. "Mary's up topside, if you'd like to join us. And don't worry—they won't hurt anything."

"I'll show them around—I've read up on these ships," Ruth told her father and Zeke. "Dad, you don't have to come."

Aaron breathed an obvious sigh of relief and followed. But from below, there came the sound of yells of excitement that couldn't be stilled. Zeke had a picture of the young woman filling their heads with nonsense and misunderstanding. How could she answer their questions from books?

At last he stood up and went down again, leaving Aaron with Mary. Once, other kids had swarmed around the ship, when everything except the children was younger. If this had to be the last time, the old *Midas* was going to be handled justly!

And it had to be the last time. He'd been working it out as the minutes slipped by. They could risk one more landing and take-off, out on the wastes of Pluto. There was ice there that could be used to fill the fuel tanks and the cargo holds—enough to power the *Midas* for two years of steady drive, or a year with power left to operate her equipment indefinitely.

And on board was food enough for a long time, if they used the products of the air-replenishing hydroponics tanks to supplement it. Enough to keep two old people until death found them naturally.

It wouldn't be suicide, after all. They'd go further out than any man before, and after they died, the *Midas* would coast on forever, or until she reached some system out there that could trap her. She'd go on and on, and there was no known limit to the frontiers she could reach. Her steering drivers were shot, but the main drivers were all she'd need to build up an unthinkable speed.

There would be no still waters. Instead, there'd be what Tennyson had called "such a tide as moving seems asleep, too deep for sound and foam . . ."

He had almost reached the great engine compartment then and he stopped to collect himself, wondering what nonsense Ruth would be telling the children.

Then he blinked in surprise. Amazingly, she'd got her facts pretty much correct. She was trying to answer anything they asked, and doing a good job of it.

He stood listening, nodding with approval. Some of that hadn't come from books—it was almost his own words, as Aaron must have repeated them to her.

"As much power as a uranium plant?" one of her pupils interrupted her.



"More," she told the boy. "More than two plants like the one we have. And a lot bigger, as you can see. Why, one of the ships the spacemen call blowtorches couldn't even lift a power plant like this. It has to be powerful, just to lift its own weight."

"Boy !" It was a piping masculine voice, filled with awe. Zeke could see the boy, staring up at the huge motor, touching it with an almost reverent finger. "Boy, I wish they still used this kind of ship. Then I'd be an engineer. I'd sure like that !"

Zeke watched him touch the motor again, and the great power plant seemed to purr under his fingers, as Zeke had fancied it purred in response to his own ministrations.

He turned softly toward the control cabin, no longer worried about what Ruth would tell them.

Aaron and Mary were still sitting in the semi-darkness, but they turned as he came in. He walked to the control board and cut off the panel lamps, turning on the main dome light. He didn't need darkness now as he swung to face them.

"Aaron," he asked quietly, "if I landed this ship wherever you figure is handy, do you reckon your engineers could help me hook your power lines to that big engine I've got going to waste? And do you think maybe you could use a good engineer to teach some of your youngsters how to handle fusion engines?"

It was the only answer, of course. He had a motor that would work for a thousand years at least, at almost no cost for fuel; and Ceres had everything except the power such a motor could give. It was economically inefficient, of course, to consider using such motors today. But sometimes, age was more important than economics, whether on worlds, or motors, or men.

He saw surprise give place to slow understanding. Mary beamed at him through the tears that were suddenly coursing down her cheeks, and Aaron came to his feet with hope and life brightening his face.

The mayor choked, and his hand was reaching for Zeke's. "We'll always be able to find a use for good men, Zeke," he said.

They would be still waters, after all—settling into one place, on a quiet little world old enough to have lost its roughness. But not all waters had to be stagnant, once the current had passed.

*Lester del Rey*



# Postmortem

Dear John,

As you know I have been an admirer of American science fiction writers for a long time—in fact up until a couple of years ago it was my belief that apart from Eric Frank Russell there was not a British writer in the game worthy of serious consideration. The one thing I loathed above all was the typically British science fiction with its pages of ‘Lo and Behold!’ descriptive matter. I thought that the Americans with their understatement of this type of thing and their concentration on plot and complication, had the answer. Until I began to read an increasing number of stories in American mags which left me at the end with a feeling of: “Yes, very clever, but *so what?*”

I suppose this might be diagonalised as having something to do with the ‘Sense of Wonder’ business, but I think that it goes deeper than that. The thing that attracted me to science fiction in the first instance was the feeling that this was the fiction of Ideas, in which no holds were barred. The strange thing is that I now realise that this is not at all true—in point of fact the limitations of s-f are so great and rigid that they become a constant headache to any writer who approaches the medium at anything more than a hack level. There are so many human attitudes and motives which one just cannot treat with the attention they deserve in a s-f story. I say this in all humility as a writer, who although he likes the money, writes mainly for the satisfaction of expression.

In the past there has been an awful lot of loose talk about ‘Character’ in science fiction, most of which amounts in the long run to nothing more than pious mouthing by people who are themselves amongst the worst offenders. *Of course Character is important*—without Drama there is no such thing as Plot, and Drama can only be defined as ‘Character in Conflict.’ I find it impossible to take a story seriously in which a one-dimensional protagonist bashes through a lot of action



in such a manner that there is no time to find out what sort of a person he is and why he is doing these things—if these questions are not answered at least in part, the story has no meaning. Swift moving action is all very well, but it has no significance without Motivation, and you can't have Motivation without expanding a bit on the Characterisation side. Now and again you have to slow up and show your protagonist acting as a human being would act, and showing his own particular character traits which are important to the development of the story. If they aren't, then you've got the wrong protagonist—or if he hasn't got any particular character traits and is nothing more than a name on paper, well nobody is going to care a damn what happens to him anyway.

Which brings me to Suspense. This can only be obtained by playing on the emotional involvement of your reader, by really making him worry about what is going to happen to your protagonist. One main way of producing this is to keep hammering into the reader the possible consequences to your protagonist of the line of action he is taking—a line of action which has behind it the inevitability of motivation provided by his basic character traits as shown throughout the story. On the other hand, if these traits are *not shown*, I maintain that there can be no suspense. All the way along the line Character is the driving force that makes the story go.

What has all this got to do with the Americans? A great deal, I think. They are in the main writing in an efficiently professional manner for the pulp magazines of their own country, which require fiction catering for a semi-juvenile level of

Continued on Page 120

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intelligence (or perhaps I should say, comprehension). I have had the pleasure of meeting several of them and find that they have no illusions about the human values of their products. Science fiction is a product to them, something turned out to order with an eye mainly on the average rate of around £10 a thousand.

Good luck to them—although I suggest that if a British editor makes a practise of buying from them he might as well save himself a lot of work and just turn out another reprint edition. For my part, I am trying to produce something which gives me the satisfaction of feeling that I am communicating something of value to human beings about the proper study of mankind. I make no claim to literary merit, I am just trying to do the job in the best way I can with the mind and time at my disposal. It is my opinion that this is something I have in common with most other British science fiction writers—whether or not any of us are succeeding is a point which could no doubt be argued.

In all seriousness, I would urge you to consider some of the points suggested above. I am perfectly sure that we can never hope to see the genre regarded as serious, adult fiction unless we put our house in order by considering such questions.

Dan Morgan.

*Spalding, Lincs.*

Dear John,

I know that this business of dropping inside illustrations has met with a great deal of approval, but I wonder if this has come mainly from the "anything-for-a-change" type. Frankly, to me a magazine without illustrations is only half a magazine. It is true that most science fiction magazines use far too many and that was inclined to be a fault of yours. Of course, too many illustrations lead inevitably to low quality work, and to that extent there has been an improvement, the improvement being that low quality work is eliminated. This is not good enough, however; surely just two really well conceived, well drawn, and well paid for pictures would give the magazine a sparkle and finish which at present it lacks because page after page of the present type face is quite frankly tiring. The move is not altogether a mistake: far from it. But it is a qualified blessing and I would like to see a moderate return to internal art-work.



Now about these covers. They are very effective as posters and that is about all one can say about them. In their favour, anyway. I never could stand purely symbolic art, or yellow skies, either. Take it or leave it, the background of that recent one, which seemed to represent a scene on some other world could not have been other than a sky. And wherever one goes in the universe, skies will be blue. Other than vapour obscured ones, of course. So the glaring, Paul-like yellow of that cover rang terribly false. The odd purposeless looking buildings ? machinery ? that have appeared in the recent covers just do not convey anything. Just what use such peculiar structures could possible be on Luna, if the locale of this particular cover was indeed Luna, escapes me. They would all lose their internal heat quicker than when in shadow, and in full Lunar sunlight would heat up quickly to a dangerous degree. Of course, maybe the inhabitants if any, would like this sort of thing. One must, I suppose, avoid homocentricity. But warm-blooded centricity (new term for you) ? Always assuming its proto-plasmic, of course.

Laurence Sandfield,  
*London, W. 13.*

Continued on Page122

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(It wasn't our intention to produce posters as covers although posters are usually designed to sell goods—and we have a magazine to sell. However, as I explained in a recent Editorial, we were experimenting with cover ideas (that yellow one on No. 71 was a good seller, by the way) and from these came our new highly successful and different front cover layout. Future cover paintings will continue to be widely varied and, we hope, tempt potential new readers to pick up and buy the magazine.

—Ed).

Dear Mr. Carnell,

The exploits of the *Nautilus* together with responsible statements concerning the practicability of oil cargo submarines will recall to many readers' minds that most splendid of science fiction novels of recent years—Frank Herbert's *The Dragon In The Sea* or "Under Pressure" as it first appeared in *Astounding Science Fiction*.

That this novel has not been published in book form in this country, seems to me to be the most extraordinary thing—we have had *The Naked Sun* and *Three To Conquer* which appeared in *Astounding SF* before and after "Under Pressure," yet to my mind Frank Herbert's story is vastly superior to the other two, being not fantasy but founded upon fact and told with great tension and excitement.

It is sad to think that the publishers at large have so debauched and finally reduced the science fiction buying public to such numbers that we are not given this novel as a matter of course. It is maddening to know that that frantically lunatic story "Recruiting Station" has attained the dignity of hard covers while the "Dragon" has not. The science fiction boom is over say the publishers mournfully, shedding crocodile tears, and all we publish now must be half the length and twice the 'price.' It is, of course, just because "Recruiting Station" and the like were published that we cannot now have *The Dragon In The Sea*.

As nothing much can now be expected from the publishers, why does not the Science Fiction Book Club enlarge its horizons a little, particularly in the field of the anthology. The only worthwhile work being done on these at the present time is Mr. Crispin's 'Best s-f' series which are excellent but are containing fewer and fewer stories at bigger and bigger prices. How many readers are like myself, harbouring piles of loose sheets of stories cut from magazines and paperbacks and which



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look like never attaining hard covers ? Where for example can I find A. C. Clarke's "Rescue Party" in permanent form : this being the first story he ever wrote, why on Earth was it not included in his only collection to be published here ?

I would like to see the SFBC alter its policy and instead of re-issuing such unmitigated rubbish as *Moment Without Time* or *World of Chance*, set about compiling a set of anthologies of its own choice (leaving out those contained in the *Best s-f* series) and issuing them in a series of presentable volumes up to a few hundred stories.

F. Haller, *Derby*.

Dear Mr. Carnell,

I liked "The Star Game" best in *New Worlds* No. 72, and would put "The Wayward Ship" last. The middle group would pose a fairly hefty problem to any judge. You know there are still some stories I can remember from almost four years ago, when I started reading science fiction. I could turn to one of them today and read it with as much pleasure as a good new story. The trouble with your stories are, they are not *memorable*. All the stories in number 72 might almost have been written by the same person. To add to that there was little original scene-setting, and all the stories might have been placed in the same point in time. The issue comprised variation on the mutant theme, a couple of aliens, a scientific project and a time story. Alright, one cannot be absolutely original all the time, but all the characters of the stories were amorphous and sexless, except possibly for a moustache somewhere.

Something has gone wrong with science fiction, and I think I know what the trouble is. Authors are churning out stories to meet a deadline with various magazines—all the stories could have undergone a little revision. But the main trouble apart from lack of style (there is a highly professional sameness throughout) is that the majority of stories nowadays are too short. I am afraid modern science fiction has become "action-packed !" There are still writers who have style and originality, Brian Aldiss and E. C. Tubb for instance, then there are, of course, Eric Frank Russell and John Wyndham, when they spread themselves.

How about occasional humorous stories, and I just love stories about telekinetics, telepaths, teleports and the rest. A few new inventions would be interesting other than time-machines, matter transmitters and language converters.



You may ask why I bother to read s-f at all, well for a start I like the new two-colour paintings, and I think the 72nd cover was great ! To continue I think your last serial was back on target again ; after *Who Speaks of Conquest* you had a run of poor ones in between.

It seems I must finish now, but with this injunction—more stories by James White, get out of the rut and *New Worlds* is still worth ten times the price !—well at least sixpence more.

John N. William,  
London, N.W. 7.

(*Sorry, John, your diagnosis is incorrect—I don't know of any British authors writing to meet deadlines. Most of them are writing for pleasure rather than out of desperation (see Dan Morgan's letter in this issue), although it is true that many great stories have been written under duress with a wolf at the door. Meanwhile, the last few issues should have answered many of your story requests. Ed).*

Dear Mr. Carnell,

Unfortunately, I have to record my opinion that your high standard of science fiction has slipped over the past year. Your consistently good authors of the past, James White, Alan Barclay and Ian Wright, only occasionally appearing and the balance writing mainly "pot boilers" or immature works, but congratulations on obtaining Eric Frank Russell recently. His effort was always interesting if not of his highest standard. My opinion of serials may be judged by the fact that in glancing back over the past twelve issues I have only now discovered that I had not read Brunner's "Threshold of Eternity."

Probably the best story you have had was Brian Aldiss's "Segregation." More from him along these lines (*How about "Carrion Country" in the November issue?—Ed*). and he will join the aforementioned three stalwarts in my estimation. He has never impressed me with his style.

Robert Presslie seems to have improved on his efforts in the now-defunct *Authentic* and it is to be hoped may develop further. Which prompts the question : "What happened to that magazine's line-up of authors?" Some of them showed promise even though their forte was adventure almost exclusively, science fiction being negligible. A little more action would improve *New Worlds*, too.

Whilst agreeing that poor illustrations lower the standard, I would like to see one interior illustration per issue. The current covers by Lewis do not tie in with the stories in any very

recognisable manner (*they aren't supposed to, often being painted long before story contents are chosen—Ed*) and despite his vaunted qualifications, Terry easily outdoes him technically.

I seem to have practically torn the magazine asunder in the foregoing—but you will notice that I have renewed my subscription !

Roy J. Burgess,  
*Brisbane, Australia.*

Dear John,

I have just read John Brunner's "Earth Is But A Star" in *Science Fantasy* No. 29. Once or twice I have read a story in a magazine which has made me want to write a letter about it—but this is the first time I have ever got round to actually doing it. So the "Sense of Wonder" is dead? Not if you continue to print stories like *this* one !

John Brunner's stories, as far as I am concerned, come in two categories—those that I enjoy and understand, and those that leave me feeling bewildered and make me turn back through the story wondering where I lost the thread. The latter are usually stories of similar length to "Earth Is But A Star." I think that here John at last has reached a balance and I look forward to seeing more like it. Very few authors, to my knowledge, can draw such a convincing picture of Earth's distant future. Even less could keep it convincing all the way through.

Mike Moorcock,  
*London, S.W. 16.*

("Earth Is But A Star" is great science fiction. The only reason it appeared in *Science Fantasy* is because it was too long for *New Worlds*—it was 30,000 words in length. Copies are still available if any reader missed this out-standing short novel.—Ed).

Gentlemen,

I have been a reader of science fiction since 1922, when Gernsback publications started publishing stories in their *Science and Inventions* magazine. Finding it so popular—many youngsters were buying the magazine primarily for the fiction—they started *Amazing Stories*. Next came *Astounding Stories* and then a host of others. At the present time I subscribe to seven U.S. science fiction publications and two British. In all honesty, I must admit that the last few issues of *New Worlds* have been superior to all the rest, well edited and clearly printed in excellent type on rather good paper.

Lt. Col. O. R. Franklin, USAF.  
*Florida, USA.*



Dear Mr. Carnell,

I like *New Worlds* very much. As a matter of fact, it's among my favourite five science fiction magazines in the world.

Two gripes : The major one is lack of artwork. However, we've gone over that matter enough times. I can only say that I hope you will soon find the artists needed to return interior art to the pages of *New Worlds* and *Science Fantasy*. Second is the reprinting of American stories most of which I have already read. This works both ways, though, and I have often seen stories in American magazines reprinted from your magazines.

The gripes don't amount to very much, anyway.

Joe Sanders,  
Roachdale, Indiana, USA.

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Science fiction is read by every section of the community although our previous *Survey* showed that it was predominantly a masculine literature. So that we may record the changing conditions we would appreciate your co-operation on the following information, which will be tabulated and the results broken down statistically and published early in 1959. (See *Editorial*).

*This Survey is only for readers in the British Isles.*

Your name and address is not necessary but we do require your city or town. Use the form below or write your answers on a separate sheet of paper if you do not wish to mutilate the magazine.

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