NEW WORLDS SCIENCE FICTION

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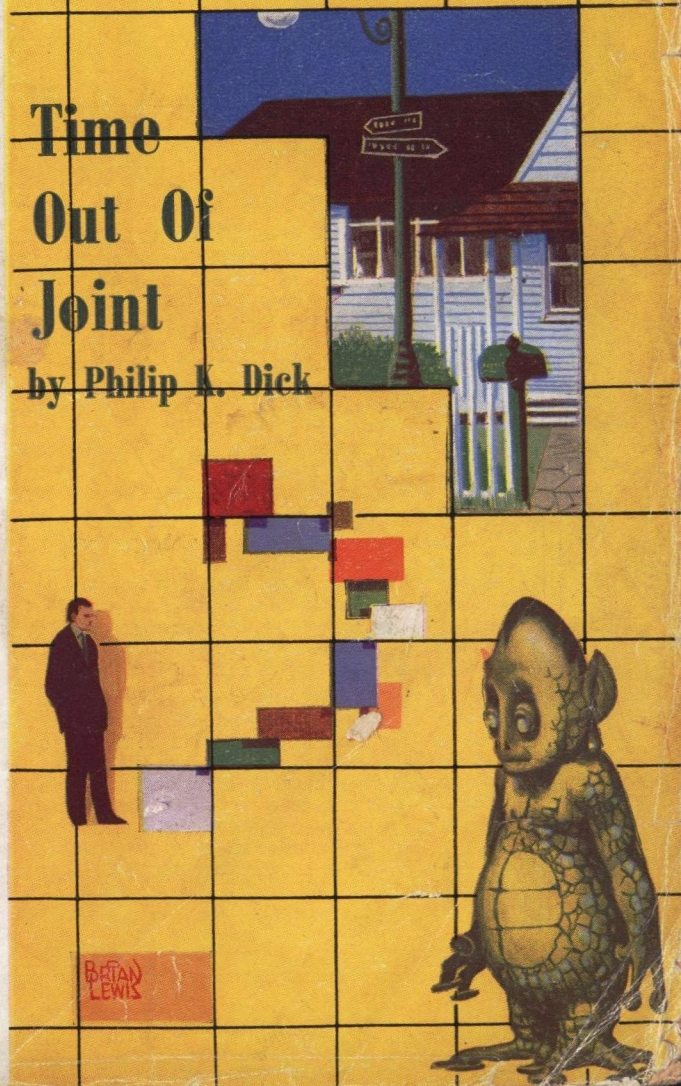
14th Year
of Publication

Time Out Of Joint

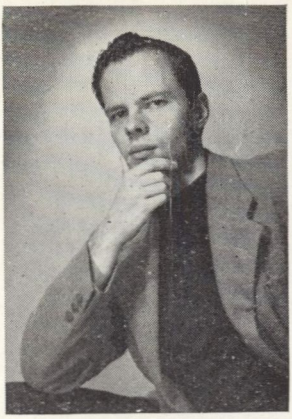
by Philip K. Dick



NEW WORLDS
PROFILES

Philip K. Dick

California, U.S.A.



One of America's most interesting post-war writers who suddenly appeared on the science fiction scene early in 1952 with a rapid sequence of story acceptances and in the following year increased his output of short stories and novelettes to 28 sold. By 1955, however, he had taken an unprecedented step by changing to novel writing only—and a quick series of successes immediately followed, Ace Books publishing 5 titles and a collection of his short stories.

His first hard-cover book, however, was pubished in England. This was *World of Chance* ("Solar Lottery" in the American pocketbook) followed by a short story collection *A Handful of Darkness*, both published by Rich & Cowan Ltd. In between novel writing he also wrote scripts for the Mutual Broadcasting Company.

Another unusual event was the publication in *Ogonek*, the largest circulation magazine in the Soviet Union, of his short story "Foster, You're Dead" which appeared originally in Ballantine's *Star Science Fiction Stories* No. 3. As he points out, "In the Soviet Union it reached an audience of millions, whereas in this country (USA) it had gone possibly into no more than a few tens of thousands of hands."

In all he has sold about 90 stories, plus 6 novels, but *Time Out of Joint* is his first hard-cover book in USA. It is one of the most fascinating plots produced in recent years. Of science fiction he says, "Without being art, it does what art does, since as Schopenhauer pointed out, art tends to break free of the reality around us and reach a new level of gestalting. The virtue of its approach, too, is that it can reach persons who do not have a developed esthetic sense, which means that it has a higher degree of sheer communicability than great art."

NEW WORLDS SCIENCE FICTION

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Editor : JOHN CARNELL

Cover painting by LEWIS illustrating "Time Out Of Joint"

TWO SHILLINGS AND SIXPENCE

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Two In . . .

Towards the end of each year it seems to be becoming an accepted thing for me to review the science fiction field—apart from year's end, the wintertime is always the period when publishing events occur. In past years the emphasis has been mainly upon America, where more happens (in part due to a greater number of publications and a far larger reading audience) but the American field is still in the doldrums with only 8 titles left on the market, although the signs of revival I predicted a year ago are shaping up.

For a change, let us have a look at the British field. It is no longer a secret that our Scottish contemporary, *Nebula*, has ceased publication, and, from an editorial point of view, I regret its passing. Outside of our own Nova magazines, British writers no longer have another outlet for their short story material and this could mean the virtual death-before-birth of many promising new writers.

The reason for its demise is obscure—officially it was stated as lack of interest on the public's part at a time when the threshold of spaceflight had been reached and better sales could be hoped for. Printed in Dublin and therefore unaffected by the summer printing dispute which hit so many of us, *Nebula* had a fine opportunity of being published at a time when nothing else was on the market and could thus have consolidated its position on the home market and been ready for the general rise in all fiction sales since the dispute ended. The circulation rise is rather remarkable in view of the resultant price rise due to increasing printing costs, as the *Financial Times* has just pointed out in a survey the publisher conducted.

Instead, *Nebula* was concentrating on trying to sell on the American market at a time when that market was at its lowest ebb.

As *Nebula* leaves the field, however, two more reprint editions of American magazines takes its place (it really is amazing just how long British readers have been subsidising the American magazine market, and goes right back to 1939 when Import restrictions were imposed because of the war). *Magazine of Science Fiction and Fantasy* returns as a monthly and *If* returns as a bi-monthly. The former, you may remember, was published here by Mellifont Press about 1956 and ran for 14 issues before ceasing because of poor sales. At

. . . One Out

that time it was edited by Tony Boucher, and you fantasy enthusiasts who have bemoaned its passing may well feel elated at its scheduled return. However, with the years, Tony Boucher has retired, and new editor Bob Mills has turned the magazine into a first-class science fiction one. Reports I have from USA state that it is the only magazine there which has shown healthy signs of growth during the recent recession.

If changed hands in the States and now comes under the aegis of *Galaxy* although the same publisher in Britain is producing the new reprint edition. Mention of *Galaxy* promotes a thought : it is about time it reorganised its Continental by-line and dropped the Finnish, German and French publicity. All three editions ceased some time ago. A report I received from Sweden recently also mentioned a short-lived Swedish edition of *Astounding*. The grim truth is that short-story science fiction isn't liked in Continental Europe and could well prove the graveyard of publishing hopes where the revenue from foreign editions is an integral part of the economy of a magazine.

Finally, congratulations to the British reprint edition of *Astounding* on its twenty years publishing record. Incidentally, editor Campbell was pilloried at the 1959 World Convention for the number of psi stories he has purportedly published. As he pointed out—and you can do some checking yourself, if you like—the percentage has been extremely low. Offshoots of this argument can be found in our *Postmortem* column this month (and last).

By coincidence, Import restrictions have just been lifted from the dollar area and we should soon be back to the halcyon days of 1939 when American goods could be bought without restrictions. The door is wide open for the influx of American printed magazines (as opposed to British publishers purchasing the Rights for reprinting) and this factor opens up some interesting possibilities for 1960. Will the reprint give way to the genuine edition ? Or will the influx of American magazines flood the market and cause the inevitable recession ? Or neither ? This time next year should be as good as any to summarise the situation.

John Carnell

Philip K. Dick's first contribution to our pages (and, we hope, not the last) starts off in a normal everyday manner—his central character, Ragle Gumm, earns a living solving a daily newspaper competition called "Where will the little green man be next?" From there on both you and Mr. Gumm become involved in the type of plot which has put author Dick very quickly in the forefront of the new school of science fiction writers.

TIME OUT OF JOINT

by PHILIP K. DICK

Part One of Three Parts

one

From the cold-storage locker at the rear of the store, Victor Nielson wheeled a cart of winter potatoes to the vegetable section of the produce department. In the almost empty bin he began dropping the new spuds, inspecting every tenth one for split skin and rot. One big spud dropped to the floor and he bent to pick it up; as he did so he saw past the check-out stands, the registers and displays of cigars and candy bars, through the wide glass doors and on to the street. A few pedestrians walked along the sidewalk, and along the street itself he caught the flash of sunlight from the fender of a Volkswagen as it left the store's parking lot.

"Was that my wife?" he asked Liz, the formidable Texas girl who was the checker on duty.

" Not that I know of," Liz said, ringing up two cartons of milk and a package of ground lean beef. The elderly customer at the check-out stand reached into his coat pocket for his wallet.

" I'm expecting her to drop by," Vic said. " Let me know when she does." Margo was supposed to take Sammy, their ten-year-old, to the dentist for x-rays. Since this was April—income tax time—the savings account was unusually low, and he dreaded the results of the x-rays.

Unable to endure the waiting, he walked over to the pay phone by the canned-soup shelf, dropped a dime in, dialed.

" Hello," Margo's voice came.

" Did you take him down ?"

Margo said hectically, " I had to phone Dr. Miles and postpone it. About lunchtime I remembered that this is the day Anne Rubenstein and I have to take that petition over to the Board of Health ; it has to be filed with them today because the contracts are being let now, according to what we hear."

" What petition ?" he said.

" To force the city to clear away those three empty lots of old house foundations," Margo said. " Where the kids play after school. It's a hazard. There's rusty wire and broken concrete slabs and—"

" Couldn't you have mailed it ?" he broke in. But secretly he was relieved. Sammy's teeth wouldn't fall out before next month ; there was no urgency about taking him. " How long will you be there ? Does that mean I don't get a ride home ?"

" I just don't know," Margo said. " Listen, dear ; there's a whole flock of ladies in the living room—we're figuring out last-minute items we want to bring up when we present the petition. If I can drive you home I'll phone you at five or so. Okay ?"

After he had hung up he wandered over to the check-out stand. No customers were in need of being checked, and Liz had lit a cigarette for a few moments. She smiled at him sympathetically, a lantern-like effect. " How's your little boy ?" she asked.

" Okay," he said. " Probably relieved he's not going."

The store had during the afternoon become almost deserted. Usually a flow of customers passed through the check-out stand, but not today. The recession, Vic decided. Five million

unemployed as of February of this year. It's getting at our business. Going to the front doors he stood watching the sidewalk traffic. No doubt about it. Fewer people than usual. All home counting their savings.

" We're in for a bad business year," he said to Liz.

" Oh what do you care ?" Liz said. " You don't own the store ; you just work here, like the rest of us. Means not so much work." A woman customer had begun unloading items of food onto the counter ; Liz rang them up, still talking over her shoulder to Vic. " Anyhow I don't think there's going to be any depression ; that's just Democratic talk. I'm so tired of those old Democrats trying to make out like the economy's going to bust down or something."

" Aren't you a Democrat ?" he asked. " From the South ?"

" Not any more. Not since I moved up here. This is a Republican state, so I'm a Republican." The cash register clattered and clanged and the cash drawer flew open. Liz packed the groceries into a paper bag.

Across the street from the store the sign of the American Diner Cafe started him thinking about afternoon coffee. Maybe this was the best time. To Liz he said, " I'll be back in ten or so minutes. You think you can hold the fort alone ?"

" Oh sholly," Liz said merrily, her hands making change. " You go ahead on, so I can get out later and do some shopping I have to do. Go on, now."

Hands in his pockets, he left the store, halting at the curb to seek out a break in the traffic. He never went down to the crosswalk ; he always crossed in the middle of the block, directly to the cafe, even if he had to wait at the curb minute after minute. A point of honour was involved, an element of manliness.

In the booth at the cafe he sat before his cup of coffee, stirring idly.

" Slow day," Jack Barnes the shoe salesman from Samuel's Men's Apparel said, bringing over his cup of coffee to join him. As always, Jack had a wilted look, as if he had steamed and baked all day in his nylon shirt and slacks. " Must be the weather," he said. " A few nice spring days and everybody starts buying tennis rackets and camp stoves."

In Vic's pocket was the most recent brochure from the Book-of-the-Month Club. He and Margo had joined several years ago, at the time they had put a down payment on a house and

moved into the kind of neighbourhood that set great stock by such things. Producing the brochure he spread it flat on the table, swiveling it so Jack could read it. The shoe salesman expressed no interest.

" Join a book club," Vic said. " Improve your mind."

" I read books," Jack said.

"Yeah. Those paperback books you get at Becker's Drugs."

Jack said, " It's science this country needs, not novels. You know darn well that those book clubs peddle those sex novels about small towns in which sex crimes are committed, and all the dirt comes to the surface. I don't call that helping American science."

" The Book-of-the-Month Club also distributed Toynbee's *History*," Vic said. " You could stand reading that." He had got that as a dividend ; although he hadn't quite finished it he recognized that it was a major literary and historical work, worth having in his library. " Anyhow," he said, " bad as some books are, they're not as bad as those teen-age sex films, those drag-race films that James Dean and that bunch do."

His lips moving, Jack read the title of the current Book-of-the-Month selection " A historical novel," he said. " About the South. Civil War times. They always push that stuff. Don't those old ladies who belong to the club get tired of reading that over and over again ?"

As yet, Vic hadn't had a chance to inspect the brochure. " I don't always get what they have," he explained. The current book was called *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* By an author he had never heard of : Harriet Beecher Stowe. The brochure praised the book as a daring expose of the slave trade in pre-Civil War Kentucky. An honest document of the sordid, outrageous practices committed against hapless Negro girls.

" Wow," Jack said. " Hey, maybe I'd like that."

" You can't tell anything by the blurb," Vic said. " Every book that's written these days is advertised like that."

" True," Jack said. " There's sure no principles left in the world any more. You look back to before World War Two, and compare it to now. What a difference. There wasn't this dishonesty and delinquency and smut and dope that's going around. Kids smashing up cars, these freeways and hydrogen bombs . . . and prices going up. Like the price you grocery guys charge for coffee. It's terrible. Who's getting the loot ?"

They argued about it. The afternoon wore on, slowly, sleepily, with little or nothing happening.

At five, when Margo Nielson snatched up her coat and car keys and started out of the house, Sammy was nowhere in sight. Off playing, no doubt. But she couldn't take time to round him up ; she had to pick up Vic right away or he'd conclude she wasn't coming and so take the bus home.

She hurried back into the house. In the living room her brother, sipping from his can of beer, raised his head and murmured, " Back already ?"

" I haven't left," she said. " I can't find Sammy. Would you keep your eye open for him while I'm gone ?"

" Certainly," Ragle said. But his face showed such weariness that at once she forgot about leaving. His eyes, red-rimmed and swollen, fastened on her compellingly ; he had taken off his tie, rolled up his shirt-sleeves, and as he drank his beer his arm trembled. Spread out everywhere in the living room the papers and notes for his work formed a circle of which he was the centre. He could not even get out ; he was surrounded. "Remember, I have to get it in the mail and post-marked by six," he said.

In front of him his files made up a leaning, creaking stack. He had been collecting material for years. Reference books, charts, graphs, and all the contest entries that he had mailed in before, month after month of them . . . in several ways he had reduced his entries so that he could study them. At this moment, he was using what he called his " sequence " scanner; it involved opaque replicas of entries, in which the point admitted light to flash in the form of a dot. By having the entries fly by in order, he could view the dot in motion. The dot of light bounced in and out, up and down, and to him its motions formed a pattern. To her it never formed a pattern of any sort. But that was why he was able to win. She had entered the contest a couple of times and won nothing.

" How far along are you ?" she asked.

Ragle said, " Well, I've got it placed in time. Four o'clock, p.m. Now all I have to do—" he grimaced, " is get it in space."

Tacked up on the long plywood board was today's entry on the official form supplied by the newspaper. Hundreds of tiny squares, each of them numbered by rank and file. Ragle had marked off the file, the time element. It was file 344 ; she saw the red pin stuck in at that point. But the *place*. That was harder, apparently.

" Drop out for a few days," she urged. " Rest. You've been going at it too hard the last couple of months."

" If I drop out," Ragle said, scratching away with his ball-point pen, " I have to drop back a flock of notches. I'd lose—" He shrugged. " Lose everything I've won since January 15." Using a slide rule, he plotted a junction of lines.

Each entry that he submitted became a further datum for his files. And so, he had told her, his chances of being correct improved each time. The more he had to go on, the easier it was for him. But instead, it seemed to her, he was having more and more trouble. Why ? she had asked him, one day. " Because I can't afford to lose," he explained. " The more times I'm correct, the more I have invested." The contest dragged on. Perhaps he had even lost track of his investment, the mounting plateau of his winnings. He always won. It was a talent, and he had made good use of it. But it was a vicious burden to him, this daily chore that had started out as a joke, or at best a way of picking up a couple of dollars for a good guess. And now he couldn't quit.

I guess that's what they want, she thought. They get you involved, and maybe you never live long enough to collect. But he had collected ; the *Gazette* paid him regularly for his correct entries. She did not know how much it came to, but apparently it ran close to a hundred dollars a week. Anyhow it supported him. But he worked as hard—harder—than if he had a regular job. From eight in the morning, when the paper was tossed on the porch, to nine or ten at night. The constant research. Refining of his methods. And, over everything else, the abiding dread of making an error. Of turning in a wrong entry and being disqualified.

Sooner or later, they both knew, it had to happen.

" Can I get you some coffee ?" Margo said. " I'll fix you a sandwich or something before I go. I know you didn't have any lunch."

Preoccupied, he nodded.

Putting down her coat and purse, she went into the kitchen and searched in the refrigerator for something to feed him. While she was carrying the dishes out to the table, the back door flew open and Sammy and a neighbourhood dog appeared, both of them fluffed up and breathless.

" You heard the refrigerator door," she said, " didn't you ?"

" I'm real hungry," Sammy said, gasping. " Can I have one of those frozen hamburgers ? You don't have to cook it ; I'll eat it like it is. It's better that way—it lasts longer !"

She said, " You go get into the car. As soon as I've fixed Uncle Ragle a sandwich we're driving down to the store and pick up Dad. And take that old dog back out ; he doesn't live here."

" Okay," Sammy said. " I bet I can get something to eat at the store." The back door slammed as he and the dog departed.

" I found him," she said to Ragle when she brought in the sandwich and glass of apple cider. " So you don't have to worry about what he's doing ; I'll take him downtown with me."

Accepting the sandwich, Ragle said, " You know, maybe I'd have been better off if I'd got mixed up playing the ponies."

She laughed. " You wouldn't have won anything."

" Maybe so." He began reflextively to eat. But he did not touch the apple cider ; he preferred the warm beer from the can that he had been nursing for an hour or so. How can he do that intricate math and drink warm beer ? she asked herself as she found her coat and purse and rushed out of the house to the car. You'd think it would muddle up his brain. But he's used to it. During his stint in the service he had got the habit of swilling warm beer day in, day out. For two years he and a buddy had been stationed on a minuscule atoll in the Pacific, manning a weather station and radio transmitter.

Late-afternoon traffic, as always, was intense. But the Volkswagen sneaked through the openings, and she made good time. Larger, clumsier cars seemed bogged down, like stranded land turtles.

The smartest investment we ever made, she said to herself. Buying a small foreign car. And it'll never wear out ; those Germans build with such precision. Except that they had had minor clutch trouble, and in only fifteen thousand miles . . . but nothing was perfect. In all the world. Certainly not in this day and age, with H-bombs and Russia and rising prices.

A lovely shiny red Tucker sedan sailed majestically by her. Both she and Sammy gazed after it.

" I do envy that woman," she murmured. The Tucker was as radical a car as the VW, and at the same time wonderfully styled. But of course it was too large to be practical. Still . . .

Maybe next year, she thought. When it's time to trade in this car. But you don't trade in VWs ; you keep them forever.

two

At seven-thirty that evening Ragle Gumm glanced out the living room window and spied their neighbours, the Blacks, groping through the darkness, up the path, obviously over to visit. The street light behind them outlined some object that Junie Black carried, a box or a carton. He groaned.

" What's the matter ?" Margo asked. Across the room from him, she and Vic watched Sid Caesar on television.

" Visitors," Ragle said, standing up. The doorbell rang at that moment. " Our neighbours," he said. " I guess we can't pretend we're not here."

Vic said, " Maybe they'll go when they see the TV set on."

The Blacks, ambitious to hop up to the next crotch of the social tree, affected a loathing for TV, for anything that might appear on the screen, from clowns to the Vienna Opera performance of Beethoven's *Fidelio*. Once Vic had said that if the Second Coming of Christ were announced in the form of a plug on TV, the Blacks would not care to be involved. To that, Ragle had said that when World War Three began and the H-bombs started falling, their first warning would be the conelrad signal on the TV set . . . to which the Blacks would respond with jeers and indifference. A law of survival, Ragle had said. Those who refused to respond to the new stimulus would perish. Adapt or perish . . . version of a timeless rule.

" I'll go let them in," Margo said. " Since neither of you are willing to bestir yourselves." Scrambling up from the couch she hurried to the front door and opened it. " Hello !" Ragle heard her exclaim. " What's this ? What is it ? Oh—it's hot."

Bill Black's youthful, assured voice : " Lasagne. Put on some hot water—"

" I'll fix cafe espresso," Junie said, passing through the house to the kitchen with the carton of Italian food.

Hell, Ragle thought. No more work for tonight. Why, when they get on some new kick, do they have to trot it over here ? Don't they know anybody else ?

This week it's cafe espresso. To go with last week's fad : lasagne. Anyhow, it dovetails. In fact it probably tastes very good . . . although he had not got used to the bitter, heavy Italian coffee ; to him it tasted burned.

Appearing, Bill Black said pleasantly, " Hi, Ragle. Hi, Vic." He had on the ivy-league clothes customary with him these days. Button-down collar, tight pants . . . and of course his haircut. The styleless cropping that reminded Ragle of nothing

so much as the army haircuts. Maybe that was it : an attempt on the part of sedulous young sprinters like Bill Black to appear regimented, part of some colossal machine. And in a sense they were. They all occupied minor status posts as functionaries of organizations. Bill Black, a case in point, worked for the city, for its water department. Every clear day he set off on foot, not in his car, striding optimistically along in his single-breasted suit, beanpole in shape because the coat and trousers were so unnaturally and senselessly tight. And, Ragle thought, so obsolete. Brief renaissance of an archaic style in men's clothing . . . seeing Bill Black legging it by the house in the morning and evening made him feel as if he were watching an old movie. And Black's jerky, too-swift stride added to the impression. Even his voice, Ragle thought. Speeded up. Too high-pitched. Shrill.

And yet, Ragle rather liked Bill Black. The man—he seemed young to him ; Ragle was forty-six, Black no more than twenty-five—had a rational, viable outlook. He learned, took in new facts and assimilated them. He could be talked to ; he had no fixed store of morals, no verities. He could be affected by what happened.

For instance, Ragle thought, if TV should become acceptable in the top circles, Bill Black would have a colour TV set the next morning. There's something to be said for that. Let's not call him " non-adaptive," just because he refuses to watch Sid Caesar. When the H-bombs start falling, conelrad won't save us. We'll all perish alike.

" How's it going, Ragle ?" Black asked, seating himself handily on the edge of the couch. Margo had gone into the kitchen with Junie. At the TV set, Vic was scowling, resentful of the interruption, trying to catch the last of a scene between Caesar and Carl Reiner.

" Glued to the idiot box," Ragle said to Black, meaning it as a parody of Black's utterances. But Black chose to accept it on face value.

" The great national pastime," he murmured, sitting so that he did not have to look at the screen. " I'd think it would bother you, in what you're doing."

" I get my work done," Ragle said. He had got his entry off by six.

On the TV set, the scene ended ; a commercial appeared. Vic shut off the set. Now his resentment turned toward

advertisers. " Those miserable ads," he declared. " Why's the volume level always higher on ads than on the programme ? You always have to turn it down."

Ragle said, " The ads usually emanate locally. The programme's piped in over the co-ax, from the East."

" There's *one* solution to the problem," Black said.

Ragle said, " Black, why do you wear those ridiculous-looking tight pants ? Makes you look like a swabbie."

Black smiled and said, " Don't you ever dip into the *New Yorker* ? I didn't invent them, you know. I don't control men's fashions ; don't blame me. Men's fashions have always been ludicrous."

" But you don't have to encourage them," Ragle said.

" When you have to meet the public," Black said, " you're not your own boss. You wear what's being worn. Isn't that right, Victor ? You're out where you meet people ; you agree with me."

Vic said, " I wear a plain white shirt as I have for ten years, and an ordinary pair of wool slacks. It's good enough for the retail-produce business."

" You also wear an apron," Black said.

" Only when I'm stripping lettuce," Vic said.

" Incidentally," Black said, " how's the retail sales index this month ? Business still off ?"

" Some," Vic said. " Not enough to matter, though. We expect it to pick up in another month or so. It's cyclic. Seasonal."

To Black, Ragle said, " How's the retail sale of water ? Market holding firm ?"

Black laughed appreciatively. " Yes, people are still bathing and washing dishes."

Walking over beside him, Bill Black lowered himself, pulled up a chair, and said, " I wondered if you saw this, Ragle." He unfolded, in a confidential manner, a copy of the day's *Gazette*. Almost reverently he opened it to page fourteen. There, at the top, was a line of photos of men and women. In the centre was a photo of Ragle Gumm himself, and under it the caption :

> *Grand all-time winner in the Where Will the Little Green Man Be Next ? contest, Ragle Gumm. National champion leading for two straight years, an all-time record.*

The other persons shown were lesser greats. The contest was national, with newspapers participating in strings. No local paper could afford to pay the tab. Costs ran higher—he had figured one day—than the famous Old Gold contest of the mid-'thirties or the perennial " I use Oxydol soap *because* in twenty-five words or less " contests. But evidently it built circulation, in these times when the average man read comic books and watched . . .

I'm getting like Bill Black, Ragle thought. Knocking TV. It's a national pastime in itself. Think in your mind of all the homes, people sitting around saying, " What's happened to this country ? Where's the level of education gone ? The morality ? Why rock-and-roll instead of the lovely Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy *Maytime* music that we listened to when we were their age ?"

Sitting close by him, Bill Black held on to the paper, jabbing at the picture with his finger. Obviously he was stirred by the sight of it. By golly, old Ragle Gumm's picture in newspapers coast to coast ! What honour ! A celebrity living next door to him.

" Listen, Ragle," Black said. " You're really making a mint out of this ' green man ' contest, aren't you ?" Envy was rampant on his face. " Couple of hours at it, and you've got a week's pay right there."

With irony Ragle said, " A real soft berth."

" No, I know you put in plenty of work at it," Black said. " But it's creative work ; you're your own boss. You can't call that ' work ' like working at a desk somewhere."

" I work at a desk," Ragle said.

" But," Black persisted, " it's more like a hobby. I don't mean to knock it. A man can work harder on a hobby than down at the office. I know when I'm out in the garage using my power saw, I really sweat at it. But—there's a difference." Turning to Vic, he said, " You know what I mean. It's not drudgery. It's what I said ; it's creative."

" I never thought of it like that," Vic answered.

" Don't you think what Ragle's doing is creative ?" Black demanded.

Vic said, " No. Not necessarily."

" What do you call it, then, when a man carves his own future out by his own efforts ?"

" I simply think," Vic said, " that Ragle has an ability to make one good guess after another."

" Guess !" Ragle said, feeling insulted. " You can say that, after watching me doing research ? Going over previous entries ?" As far as he was concerned, the last thing to call it was " guessing." If it were a guess he would merely seat himself at the entry form, close his eyes, wave his hand around, bring it down to cover one square out of all the squares. Then mark it and mail it. And wait for the results. " Do you guess when you fill out your income tax return ?" That was his favourite analogy for his work on the contest. " You only have to do it once a year ; I do it every day." To Bill Black he said, " Imagine you had to make out a new return every day. It's the same thing. You go over all your old forms ; you keep records, tons of them—every day. And no guessing. It's exact. Figures. Addition and subtraction. Graphs."

There was silence.

" But you enjoy it, don't you ?" Black said finally.

" I guess so," he said.

" How about teaching me ?" Black said, with tension.

" No," he said. Black had brought it up before, a number of times.

After the two women had cleared the table, Bill suggested a few hands of poker. They haggled for a while, and then the chips were brought out, and the deck of cards, and presently they were playing for a penny a chip, all colours worth the same. It was a twice-weekly matter between them. Nobody could remember how it had started. The women, most likely, had originated it ; both Junie and Margo loved to play.

While they were playing, Sammy appeared. " Dad," he said, " can I show you something ?"

" I wondered where you were," Vic said. " You've been pretty quiet this evening." Having folded for the round, he could take a moment off. " What is it ?" he asked. His son wanted advice most likely.

Sammy said, " Dad, I can't figure out how to wire up the antenna." Beside Vic's stack of chips he set down a metal frame with wires and electronic-looking parts visible on it.

" What's this ?" Vic said, puzzled.

" My crystal set," Sammy said.

" What's a crystal set ?" he said.

Ragle spoke up. " It's something I got him doing," he explained. " One afternoon I was telling him about World War Two and I got to talking about the radio rig we operated."

" Radio," Margo said. " Doesn't that take you back ?"

Junie Black said, " Is that what he's got there, a radio ?"

" A primitive form of radio," Ragle said. " The earliest."

" Let's have a look at it," Vic said. Hoisting the metal frame he examined it, wishing he knew enough to assist his son. But the plain truth was that he knew nothing at all about electronics, and it certainly was obvious. " Well," he said haltingly, " maybe you have a short-circuit somewhere."

Junie said, " Remember those radio programmes we used to listen to before World War Two ? ' The Road of Life.' Those soap operas. ' Mary Martin.' "

" ' Mary Marlin,' " Margo corrected. " That was—good lord. Twenty years ago ! I blush."

Humming *Clair de Lune*, the theme for " Mary Marlin," Junie met the last round of raises. " Sometimes I miss radio," she said.

" You've got radio plus vision," Bill Black said. " Radio was just the sound part of TV."

" What would you get on your crystal set ?" Vic asked his son. " Are there any stations still transmitting ?" It had been his impression that radio stations had folded up several years ago.

Ragle said, " He can probably monitor ship-to-shore signals. Aircraft landing instructions."

" Police calls," Sammy declared.

" That's right," Ragle said. " The police still use radio for their cars." Holding out his hand he accepted the crystal set from Vic. " I can trace the circuit later, Sammy," he said. " But I've got too good a right hand right now. How about tomorrow ?"

Junie said, " Maybe he can pick up flying saucers."

"Yes," Marge agreed. "That's what you ought to aim for."

" I never thought of that," Sammy said.

" There's no such thing as flying saucers," Bill Black said testily. He fiddled with his cards.

" Oh no ?" Junie said. " Don't kid yourself. Too many people have seen them for you to dismiss it. Or don't you accept their documented testimony ?"

" Weather balloons," Bill Blake said. Vic was inclined to agree with him, and he saw Ragle nodding. " Meteors. Meteorological phenomena."

" Absolutely," Ragle said.

" But I read that people had actually ridden in them," Margo said.

They all laughed, except Junie.

Vic gave the half-finished radio back to his son and resumed playing cards ; the next hand had already been dealt and it was time for him to ante up.

" We're going to install this crystal set as our official club equipment," Sammy informed him. " It'll be locked up in the clubhouse, and nobody can use it but authorized personnel." In the back yard the neighbourhood kids, banding together in response to the herd instinct, had built a sturdy but ugly building out of boards and chickenwire and tarpaper. Mighty doings were conducted several times a week.

" Fine," Vic said, studying his hand.

" When he says ' fine,' " Ragle said, " it means he's got nothing."

" I've noticed that," Junie said. " And when he throws down his cards and walks away from the table, it means he's got four of a kind."

At the moment he felt a little like leaving the table ; the lasagne and cafe espresso had been too much for him, and inside him the compound—that and his dinner—had begun to act up. " Maybe I have four of a kind now," he said.

" You look pale," Margo said. To Ragle she said, " Maybe he does have something."

" More like the Asian flu," Vic said. Pushing his chair back he got to his feet. " I'll be right back. I'm not out. Just getting something to calm my stomach."

" Oh dear," Junie said. " He did eat too much ; you were right, Margo. If he dies it's my fault."

" I won't die," Vic said. " What'll I take ?" he asked his wife. As a mother of the household she was in charge of the medicines.

" There's some Dramamine in the medicine cabinet," she answered, preoccupied, discarding two cards. " In the bathroom."

" You don't take tranquilizers for *indigestion*, do you ?" Bill Black demanded, as he left the room and started down the hall. " Boy, that is carrying it too far."

" Dramamine isn't a tranquilizer," Vic answered, half to himself. " It's an anti-motion pill."

" Same thing," Black's voice came to him, along the hall, following after him as he entered the bathroom.

" Same thing hell," Vic said, his indigestion making him surly. He groped above him for the light cord.

Margo called, " Hurry on back, dear. How many cards for you ? We want to play ; you're holding us up."

" All right," he muttered, still groping for the light cord. " I want three cards," he called. " It's the top three on my hand."

" No," Ragle called. " You come back and pick them. Otherwise you'll claim we got the wrong ones."

He still had not found the light cord that dangled in the darkness of the bathroom. His nausea and irritation grew, and he began thrashing around in the dark, holding up both arms, hands together with thumbs extended and touching ; he rotated his hands in a wide circle. His head smacked against the corner of the medicine cabinet and he cursed.

" Are you okay ?" Margo called. " What happened ?"

" I can't find the light cord," he said, furious now, wanting to get his pill and get back to play his hand. The innate propensity of objects to be evasive . . . and then suddenly it came to him that there was no light cord. There was a switch on the wall, at shoulder level, by the door. At once he found it, snapped it on, and got his bottle of pills from the cabinet. A second later he had filled a tumbler with water, taken the pill, and come hurrying out of the bathroom.

Why did I remember a light cord ? he asked himself. A specific cord, hanging a specific distance down, at a specific place.

I wasn't groping around randomly. As I would in a strange bathroom. I was hunting for a light cord I had pulled many times. Pulled enough to set up a reflex response in my involuntary nervous system.

" Ever had that happen to you ?" he said, as he seated himself at the table.

" Ever had what happen ?" Bill Black said.

" Reached for a switch that didn't exist."

" Is that what you were doing that took so long ?" Margo said, irked at having lost the hand.

" Where would I be used to a light cord hanging from above ?" he said to her.

" I don't know," she said.

In his mind he chronicled all the lights he could think of. In his house, at the store, at friends' houses. All were wall switches.

" You hardly ever run into a cord hanging down any more," he said aloud. " That suggests an old-fashioned overhead light with a string."

" Easy enough," Junie said. " When you were a child. Many, many years ago. Back in the 'thirties when everybody lived in old-fashioned houses that weren't old-fashioned yet."

" But why should it crop up now ?" he said.

Bill said, " That is interesting."

" Yes," he agreed.

They all seemed interested.

" What about this ?" Bill said. He had an interest in psychoanalysis ; Freudian jargon cropped up in his conversation, a sign of his being familiar with cultural questions. " A reversion to infancy due to stress. Your feeling ill. The tension of the subconscious impulses to your brain warning you that something was amiss internally. Many adults revert to infancy during illness."

" What rubbish," Vic said.

" There's just some light switch you don't remember consciously," Junie said. " Some gas station where you used to go when you had that old Dodge that used so much gas. Or some place you visit a few times a week, year after year, like a laundry or a bar, but outside your important visits, like your home and store."

" It bothers me," he said. He did not feel like going on with the poker playing, and he remained away from the table.

What's wrong ? Vic wondered. *What did I stumble on, in there* ? *Where have I been that I don't remember* ?

three

Shaving himself before the bathroom mirror, Ragle Gumm heard the morning paper land on the porch. A muscular spasm shook his arm ; at his chin his safety razor burred across his flesh and he drew it away. Then he took a deep breath, closed his eyes for a moment, and, opening his eyes, continued shaving.

" Are you almost done in there ?" his sister called through the closed door.

" Yes," he said. He washed his face, patted on after-shave lotion, dried his neck and arms, and opened the bathroom door.

In her bathrobe, Margo materialized and went immediately past him into the bathroom. " I think I heard your paper," she said over her shoulder as she shut the door. " I have to drive Vic down to the store ; could you push Sammy out the front door ? He's in the kitchen—" Her voice was cut off by the sound of water in the washbowl.

Entering his bedroom, Ragle finished buttoning his shirt. He passed judgment on his various ties, discriminated from the group a dark green knit tie, put it on, put his coat on, and then said to himself,

Now the newspaper.

Before he went to get it he began dragging out his reference books, files, graphs, charts, scanning machinery. Today, by dealing with them first, he managed to delay contact with the paper by eleven minutes. He set up the table in the living room —the room was cool and damp from the night, and smelled of cigarettes—and then he opened the front door.

There, on the concrete porch, lay the *Gazette*. Rolled up, held by a rubber band.

For several minutes he read the news items on the front page. He read about President Eisenhower's health, the national debt, moves by cunning leaders in the Middle East. Then he folded the paper back and read the comics page. Then he read the letters to the editor. While he was doing that, Sammy pushed by him and outside.

" Good-bye," Sammy said. " See you this afternoon."

" Okay," he said, hardly aware of the boy.

Margo appeared next ; she hurried by him and to the sidewalk, her key extended. Unlocking the Volkswagen she slid inside and started up the motor. While it heated she wiped moisture from the windshield. The morning air was crisp. Along the street a few children trotted in the direction of the grammar school. Cars started up.

" I forgot about Sammy," Ragle said, when Vic stepped out of the house and onto the porch beside him. " But he left on his own power."

" Take it easy," Vic said. " Don't work too hard on your contest." His coat over his shoulder he descended the steps to the path. A moment later Margo put the Volkswagen into gear, and she and Vic thundered off toward the through-street leading downtown.

Those little cars make a lot of noise, Ragle thought to himself. He remained on the porch reading the newspaper as

long as he could ; then the cold morning air got the better of him and he turned and went back inside, to the kitchen.

As yet he had not looked at page 16, the page on which the *Where-Will-the-Little-Green-Man-Be-Next* ? entry form appeared. Most of the page belonged to the form ; beyond it there was little but instructions and comments on the contest, news of previous winners. The tally-sheet of standings ; everybody who was still competing was there, represented in the smallest typeface the newspaper could obtain. His name, of course, was huge. Unique. In a box by itself. Every day he saw it there. Below his name, other names had a transient existence, not quite at the threshold of consciousness.

For each day's contest the newspaper presented a series of clues, and these always got read by him as a preliminary to the task of solving the problem itself. The problem, of course, was to select the proper square from the 1,208 in the form. The clues did not give any help, but he assumed that in some peripheral fashion they contained data, and he memorized them as a matter of habit, hoping that their message would reach him subliminally—since it never did literally.

" A swallow is as great as a mile."

Some oblique stream of association process, perhaps . . . he let the crypticism lie about in his mind, sinking down layer by layer. To trip reflexes or whatever. Swallow suggested the process of eating. And of course flying. Wasn't flying a symbol of sex ? And swallows returned to Capistrano, which was in California. The rest of the phrase reminded him of, " A miss is as good as a mile." Why great then, instead of good ? Great suggested whales . . . the great whale. Ah, association at work. Flying over the water, possibly toward California. Then he thought of the ark and the dove. Olive branch. Greece. That meant cooking . . . Greeks operate restaurants. Eating, again ! Sensible . . . and doves were a gourmet's delight.

" The bell told on tee-hee."

That stuck in his craw. Gibberish, certainly. But it suggested homosexuality. " Bell." And the " tee-hee," the effeminate laugh of the queer, the belle. And the John Donne sermon with the line, " For whom the bell tolls." Also a Hemingway book. Tee might be tea. Ring bell, get tea served. Tiny silver bell. Mission ! The mission at Capistrano, where the swallows returned to ! It fitted.

While he was pondering the clues, he heard steps on the front walk. Setting down the paper, he slipped into the living room to see who it was.

Approaching the house was a tall, slim, middle-aged man wearing a baggy, tweedy suit, and smoking a cigar. He had a kindly look, like a minister or a drain-inspector. Under his arm he carried a manilla folder. Ragle recognised him. The man represented the *Gazette ;* he had come visiting a number of times before, sometimes to bring Ragle's cheque—which ordinarily was mailed—and sometimes to clear up misunderstandings about entries. Ragle felt dismay ; what did Lowery want ?

With no haste, Lowery stepped up onto the porch, raised his hand and touched the bell.

Bell, Ragle thought. Minister. Maybe the clues were there to tell him that the newspaper would be sending Lowery to visit him.

" Hi, Mr. Lowery," he said, opening the door.

" Hello, Mr. Gumm." Lowery beamed ingenuously ; there was no gravity in his manner, nothing to suggest that any bad news was to be conveyed, or that anything had gone wrong.

" What's the visit for ?" Ragle asked, sacrificing manners in the name of need.

Lowery, chewing on his Dutch Master, gazed at him and then said, " I have a couple of cheques for you . . . the paper thought I might as well deliver them in person, since they knew I'd be driving out this way today." He wandered about the living room. " And I have a few things to ask you. Just to be on the safe side. About your entries for yesterday's contest."

" I mailed in six," he said.

" Yes, we got all six." Lowery winked at him. " But you failed to indicate the order of value." Opening the manilla envelope, he laid out the six entry forms ; they had already been photographed, reduced to more convenient size. Handing Ragle a pencil, Lowery said, " I know it's just an oversight on your part . . . but we have to have them numbered."

" God damn," he said. How could he have been in such a hurry ? Swiftly, he marked them in order, from one to six. " There," he said, returning them. What a stupid oversight. It might have cost him the contest then and there.

Lowery seated himself, selected the entry marked *one*, and for a surprisingly long time studied it.

"Is it right?" Ragle demanded, although he knew that Lowery would not know; the entries had to be sent on to puzzle headquarters in New York or Chicago, wherever it all was done.

"Well," Lowery said, "time will tell. But this *is* the one you mean as your first entry. Your primary entry."

"Yes," he said. This was the secret compact between himself and the contest people; he was permitted to submit more than one entry for each day's puzzle. They allowed him up to ten, with the stipulation that they be numbered in order of preference. If the number one entry was incorrect, it was destroyed—as if it had never reached them—and the second was considered, and so on down to the last. Usually, he felt sure enough of the solution to limit his submissions to three or four. The fewer, of course, the better the contest people felt about it. No one else, to his knowledge, had this privilege. It was for the one simple purpose of keeping him in the contest.

They had proposed it, after he had missed the correct solution by only a few squares. His entries generally grouped about tangent squares, but once in a while he was unable to decide between squares quite far apart on the entry form. In those cases, he took a risk; his intuition was not strong. But when he felt the solution to lie in an approximate region, he was safe. One or another of the entries proved correct. In his two and a half years of submissions, he had missed eight times. On those days none of his entries had been correct. But the contest people had allowed him to continue. There was a clause in the rules that permitted him to "borrow" against past correct entries. For every thirty correct entries he could make one mistake. And so it went. By the use of loopholes he had remained in the contest. No one outside the contest knew that he had ever missed; it was his secret and the contest people's secret. And neither of them had any motive to air it publicly.

Evidently he had become valuable from the standpoint of publicity. Why the public would want the same person to win over and over again he did not know. Obviously, if he won he won over the other contenders. But that was the manner of the public mind. They recognized his name. As it was explained to him, the theory went that the public liked to see a name they could identify. They resisted change. A law of inertia was

involved ; as long as he was out, the public wanted him—and everyone else—out ; as soon as he was in, well, that made it self-perpetuating. The forces of stasis worked on his side. The vast reactionary pressures now ran with him, not against him. " Swimming with the tide," as Bill Black would put it.

Lowery, seated with his legs crossed, smoking and blinking, said, " Have you looked at today's puzzle ?"

" No," he said. " Just the clues. Do they mean anything ?"

" Not literally."

" I know that. I mean, do they mean anything at all, in any way, shape, or form ? Or is it just to convince us that somebody up at the top knows the answer ?"

" What does that mean ?" Lowery said, with a shade of annoyance.

" I have a theory," Ragle said. " Not a very serious theory, but it's fun to toy with. Maybe there's no correct answer."

Lowery raised an eyebrow. " Then on what basis do we declare one answer a winner and all others incorrect ?"

" Maybe you read over the entries and decide on the strength of them which appeals to you the most. Esthetically."

Lowery said, " You're projecting your technique on us."

" My technique ?" He was puzzled.

" Yes," Lowery said. " You work from an esthetic, not a rational, standpoint. Those scanners you constructed. You view a pattern in space, a pattern in time. You try to fill. Complete the pattern. Anticipate where it goes if extended one more point. That's not rational ; not an intellectual process. That's how—well, vase-makers work. I'm not disapproving. How you go about it is your business. But you don't dope it out ; I doubt if you've ever solved the content of the clues. If you had you wouldn't have asked, matter of fact.

" Can anybody imagine in good faith that you could *guess* correctly, day after day ? That's ridiculous. The odds are beyond calculation. Or at least, almost beyond. Yes, we did calculate it. A stack of beans reaching to Betelgeuse."

" What's Betelgeuse ?"

" A distant star. I use it as a metaphor. In any case, we know there's no guesswork involved . . . except perhaps in the final stage. When it's a choice between two or three squares."

" Then I can flip a coin," Ragle agreed.

" But then," Lowery said thoughtfully, rubbing his chin and waggling his cigar up and down, " when it's a question of two or three squares out of over a thousand, it doesn't matter. Any of us could guess it, at that point."

Ragle agreed.

In the garage of their home, Junie Black crouched before the automatic washer, stuffing clothes into it. Under her bare feet the concrete was cold ; shivering, she straightened up, poured a stream of granules from the box of detergent into the washer, shut the little glass door, and turned on the machinery. The clothes, behind the glass, proceeded to swirl about. She set down the box, looked at her wristwatch, and started out of the garage.

" Oh," she said, startled. Ragle was standing in the driveway.

" I thought I'd drop by," he said. " Sis is ironing. You can smell that fine burned-starch smell all over the house. Like duck feathers and phonograph records roasted together at the bottom of an oil drum."

She saw that he was peering at her from the corner of his eye. His straw coloured, shaggy eyebrows drew together and his big shoulders hunched as he clasped his arms together. In the mid-afternoon sunlight his skin had a deep underlying tan, and she wondered how it was achieved. She had never been able to tan that well, try as she might.

" What's that you have on ?" he asked.

" Slim-jims," she said.

" Pants," he said. " The other day I asked myself, What's the psychological reason for my admiring women in pants ? And then I said to myself, Why the hell not ?"

" Thank you," she said. " I guess."

Ragle said, almost brusquely, " I thought I'd see if you'd like to go for a swim. It's a nice day, not too cold."

" I have all this housework to do," she said. But the idea appealed to her ; at the public park, on the north end of town, where the uncultivated hills began, were a playground and swimming pool. Naturally the kids used it mostly, but adults showed up, too, and quite often gangs of teen-agers. It always made her feel good to be where the teen-agers were ; she had been out of school—high school—only a few years, and for her the transition had been imperfect. In her mind she still belonged to that bunch which showed up in hot rods, with

radios blaring pop tunes . . . the girls in sweaters and bobby socks, the boys in blue jeans and cashmere sweaters.

" Get your swimsuit," Ragle said.

" Okay," she agreed. " For an hour or so ; but then I have to get back." Hesitating, she said, " Margo didn't—see you come over here, did she ?" As she had found out, Margo loved to blab.

" No," he said. " Margo's off on some—" He gestured. " She's busy ironing," he concluded. " Involved, you know."

She shut off the washer, got her swimsuit and a towel, and shortly she and Ragle were striding along across town to the swimming pool.

Having Ragle beside her made her feel peaceful. She had always been attracted to big burly men, especially older ones. To her, Ragle was exactly the right age. And look at the things he had done, his military career in the Pacific, for instance. And his national fame in the newspaper contest. She liked his bony, grim, scarred face ; it was a real man's face, with no trace of double chin, no fleshiness. His hair had a bleached quality, white and curled, never combed. It had always struck her that a man who combed his hair was a sissy. Bill spent half an hour in the mornings, fussing with his hair ; although now that he had a crewcut he fussed somewhat less. She loathed touching crewcut hair ; the stiff bristles reminded here of a toothbrush. And Bill fitted perfectly into his narrow-shouldered ivy-league coat . . . he had virtually no shoulders. The only sport he played was tennis, and that really aroused her animosity. A man wearing white shorts, bobby socks, tennis shoes ! A college student at best . . . as Bill had been when she met him.

The ground had become hilly, and they had to climb. Here, the houses had larger lawns, terraces of flowers ; fat imposing mansions, the homes of the well-to-do. The streets were irregular. Thick groves of trees appeared. And above them they could see the wood itself, beyond the final street, Olympus Drive.

Among the clouds in the sky a rapidly moving glittery dot shot by and was gone. Moments later she and Ragle heard the faint, almost absurdly remote roar.

" A jet," she said.

Scowling upward, Ragle shaded his eyes and peered at the sky, not walking but standing in the middle of the sidewalk with his feet planted apart.

" You think it's perhaps a Russian jet ?" she asked mischievously.

Ragle said, " I wish I knew what went on up there."

" You mean what God is doing ?"

" No," he said. " Not God at all. I mean that stuff that floats by every now and then."

Junie said, " Vic was talking last night about groping around for the light cord in the bathroom ; you remember ?"

" Yes," he said, as they trudged on uphill once more.

" I got to thinking. That never happened to me."

" Good," Ragle said.

" Except I did remember one thing like that. One day I was out on the sidewalk, sweeping. I heard the phone ring inside the house. This was about a year ago. Anyhow, I had been expecting a real important call." It had been from a young man whom she had known in school, but she did not include that detail. " Well, I dropped the broom and I ran in. You know, we have two steps up to the porch ?"

" Yes," he said, paying attention to her.

" I ran up. And I ran up three. I mean, I thought there was one more. No, I didn't *think* there was in so many words. I didn't mentally say, I have to climb three steps. . . ."

" You mean you stepped up three steps without thinking."

" Yes," she said.

" Did you fall ?"

" No," she said. " It's not like when there's three and you think there's only two. That's when you fall on your face and break off a tooth. When there's two and you think there's three—it's real weird. You try to step up once more. And your foot comes down—bang ! Not hard, just—well, as if it tried to stick itself into something that isn't there." She became silent. Always, when she tried to explain anything theoretical, she got bogged down.

" Ummm," Ragle said.

" That's what Vic meant, isn't it ?"

" Ummm," Ragle said again, and she let the subject drop. He did not seem in the mood to discuss it.

Beside him in the warm sunlight Junie Black stretched out with her arms at her sides, on her back, her eyes shut. She had brought a blanket along with her, a striped blue and white towel-like wrapper on which she lay. Her swimsuit, a black-wool two-piece affair, reminded him of days gone by, cars

with rumble seats, football games, Glenn Miller's orchestra. The funny heavy old fabric and wooden portable radios that they had lugged to the beach . . . Coca-Cola bottles stuck in the sand, girls with long blonde hair, lying stomach-down, leaning on their elbows like girls in " I was a ninety-eight-pound scarecrow " ads.

He contemplated her until she opened her eyes. She had ditched her glasses, as she always did with him. " Hi," she said.

Ragle said, "You're a very attractive-looking woman, June."

" Thank you," she said, smiling up at him. And then she shut her eyes once more.

Attractive, he thought, albeit immature. Not dumb so much as sheer retarded. Dwelling back in high school days . . .

Could I fall in love with a little trollopy, giggly ex-high school girl who's married to an eager-beaver type, and who still prefers a banana split with all the trimmings to a good wine or whisky or even a good dark beer ?

The great mind, he thought, bends when it nears this kind of fellow creature. Meeting and mating of opposites. Yin and yang. The old Doctor Faust sees the peasant girl sweeping off the front walk, and there go his books, his knowledge, his philosophies.

In the beginning, he reflected, was the word.

Or, in the beginning was the *deed.* If you were Faust.

Watch this, he said to himself. Bending over the apparently sleeping girl, he said, " ' Im Anfang war die Tat.' "

" Go to hell," she murmured.

" Do you know what that means ?"

"No."

" That was poetry," he said. " I was trying to make love to you."

Rolling over, she stared at him.

" Do you want me to ?" he said.

" Let me think about it," she said. " No," she said, " it would never work out. Bill or Margo would catch on, and then there'd be a lot of grief, and maybe you'd get bounced out of your contest."

" All the world loves a lover," he said, and bending over her he took hold of her by the throat and kissed her on the mouth. Her mouth was dry, small, and it moved to escape him ; he had to grab her neck with his hands.

" Help," she said faintly.

" I love you," he told her.

She stared at him wildly, her pupils hot and dark, as if she thought—god knew what she thought. Probably nothing. It was as if he had clutched hold of a little thin-armed crazed animal. It had alert senses and fast reflexes—under him it struggled, and its nails dug into his arms—but it did not reason or plan or look ahead. If he let go of it, it would bound away a few yards, smooth its pelt, and then forget. Lose its fear, calm down. And not remember that anything had happened.

" You want to get us thrown out of the park ?" she said, close to his ear. Her face, uncooperative and wrinkled, glowered directly beneath his.

A couple of people, walking by, had glanced back to grin.

He knew that one day he could have her. Chance circumstances, a certain mood ; and it would be worth it, he decided. Worth arranging all the various little props.

That fool Black, he thought to himself.

Off past the park, in the direction of town, a flat irregular patch of green and white made him think again about Margo. The ruins. Visible from up here. Three city lots of cement foundations that had never been pried up by bulldozers. The houses themselves—or whatever buildings there had been—had long since been torn down. Years ago, from the weathered, cracked, yellowed blocks of concrete. From here, it looked pleasant. The colours were nice.

He could see kids weaving in and out of the ruins. A favourite place to play . . . Sammy played there occasionally. The cellars formed caves. Vaults. Margo was probably right; one day a child would suffocate or die of tetanus from being scratched on rusty wire.

And here we sit, he thought. Basking in the sun. While Margo struggles away at city hall, doing civic good for all of us.

" Maybe we ought to go back," he said to Junie. " I ought to get my entry whipped into shape." My job, he thought ironically. While Vic plugs away at the supermarket and Bill at the water company. I idle away the day in dalliances.

That made him crave a beer more than ever. As long as he had a beer in his hand he could be untroubled. The gnawing unease did not quite get through to him.

" Look," he said to Junie, getting to his feet. " I'm going up the hill to that soft-drink stand and see if by any chance they've got any beer. It could be."

" Suit yourself."

" Do you want anything ? Root beer ? A Coke ?"

" No thank you," she said in a formal tone.

As he plodded up the grassy slope toward the soft-drink stand he thought, I'd have to take Bill Black on, sooner or later. In combat.

No telling what colour the man would turn if he found out. Is he the kind that gets down his hunting .22 and without a word sets off and shoots the trespasser of that most sacred of all a man's preserves, that Elysian field where only the lord and master dares to graze ?

Talk about bagging the royal deer.

He reached a cement path along which grew green wooden benches. On the benches assorted people, mostly older, sat watching the slope and pool below. One heavy-set elderly lady smiled at him.

Does she know? he asked himself. That what she saw going on down there was not happy springtide youthful frolic at all, but sin ? Near-adultery ?

" Afternoon," he said to her genially.

She nodded back genially.

Reaching around in his pockets, he found some change. A line of kids waited at the soft-drink stand ; the kids were buying hot dogs and popsicles and Eskimo Pies and orange drink. He joined them.

How quiet everything was.

Stunning desolation washed over him. What a waste his life had been. Here he was, forty-six, fiddling around in the living room with a newspaper contest. No gainful, legitimate employment. No kids. No wife. No home of his own. Fooling around with a neighbour's wife.

A worthless life. Vic was right.

I might as well give up, he decided. The contest. Everything. Wander on somewhere else. Do something else. Sweat in the oil fields with a tin helmet. Rake leaves. Tote up figures at a desk in some assurance company office. Peddle real estate.

Anything would be more mature. Responsible. I'm dragging away in a protracted childhood . . . hobby, like glueing together model Spads.

The child ahead of him received its candy bar and raced off. Ragle laid down his fifty-cent piece on the counter.

" Got any beer ?" he said. His voice sounded funny. Thin and remote. The counter man in white apron and cap stared at him, stared and did not move. Nothing happened. No sound, anywhere. Kids, cars, the wind ; it all shut off.

The fifty-cent piece fell away, down through the wood, sinking. It vanished.

I'm dying, Ragle thought. Or something.

Fright seized him. He tried to speak, but his lips did not move for him. Caught up in the silence.

Not again he thought.

Not again !

It's happening to me again.

The soft-drink stand fell into bits. Molecules. He saw the molecules, colourless, without qualities, that made it up. Then he saw through, into the space beyond it ; he saw the hill behind, the trees and sky. He saw the soft-drink stand go out of existence, along with the counter man, the cash register, the big dispenser of orange drink, the taps for Coke and root beer, the ice-chests of bottles, the hot dog broiler, the jars of mustard, the shelves of cones, the row of heavy round metal lids under which were the different ice-creams.

In its place was a slip of paper. He reached out his hand and took hold of the slip of paper. On it was printing, block letters.

SOFT-DRINK STAND

Turning away, he unsteadily walked back, past children playing, past the benches and the old people. As he walked he put his hand into his coat pocket and found the metal box he kept there.

He halted, opened the box, looked down at the slips of paper already in it. Then he added the new one.

Six in all. Six times.

His legs wobbled under him and on his face particles of cold seemed to form. Ice slid down into his collar, past his green knit tie.

He made his way down the slope, to Junie.

four

At sunset, Sammy Nielson put in a last tardy hour galloping around the ruins. Together with Butch Cline and Leo Tarski he had dragged a mass of roofing slats into a heap to form a real swell defensive position. They could probably hold the position indefinitely. Next came the gathering of dirt clods, those with long grass attached, for superior throwing.

Cold evening wind blew about him. He crouched behind the breastwork, shivering.

The trench needed to be deeper. Taking hold of a board that stuck up from the soil, he pried and tugged. A mass of brick, ash, roofing, weeds and dirt broke away and rolled down at his feet. Between two split slabs of concrete an opening could be seen, more of the old basement, or maybe a drainage pipe.

No telling what might be discovered. Lying down, he scooped up handfuls of plaster and chickenwire. Bits covered him as he laboured.

In the half-light, straining to see, he found a soggy yellow blob of paper. A phone book. After that, rain-soaked magazines.

Feverishly, he clawed on and on.

In the living room, before dinner, Vic lounged across from his brother-in-law. Ragle had asked him if he could spare a couple of minutes. He wanted to talk to him. Seeing the sombre expression on his brother-in-law's face, Vic said,

" You want me to close the door ?" In the dining room, Margo had started setting the table ; the noise of dishes mixed with the six o'clock news issuing out of the TV set.

" No," Ragle said.

" Is it about the contest ?"

Ragle said, " I'm considering dropping out of the contest voluntarily. It's getting too much for me. The strain. Listen." He leaned toward Vic. His eyes were red-rimmed. " Vic," he said, " I'm having a nervous breakdown. Don't say anything to Margo." His voice wavered and sank. " I felt I should discuss it with you."

It was hard to know what to say to him. " Is it the contest?" Vic said finally.

" Probably." Ragle gestured.

" How long ?"

" Weeks, now. Two months. I forget." He lapsed into silence, staring past Vic at the floor.

" Have you told the newspaper people ?"

" No."

" Won't they kick up a fuss ?"

Ragle said, " I don't care what they do. I can't go on. I may take a long trip somewhere. Even leave the country."

" My gosh," Vic said.

" I'm worn out. Maybe after I take a rest, six months of it, I'll feel better. I might tackle some manual labour. On an assembly line. Or outdoors. What I want to clear up with you is the financial business. I've been contributing about two hundred fifty a month to the household ; that's what it averages over the last year."

" Yes," Vic said. " That sounds right."

" Can you and Margo make out without it ? On the house payments and car payments, that sort of business ?"

" Sure," he said. " I guess we can."

" I want to write you out a cheque for six hundred bucks," Ragle said. " Just in case. If you need it, cash it. If not don't. Better put it in an account . . . cheques are good only for a month or so, aren't they ? Start a savings account, get your four-percent interest."

" You haven't said anything to Margo ?"

" Not yet."

At the doorway, Margo said, " Dinner's almost ready. Why are you two men sitting there so solemnly ?"

" Business," Vic said.

" Can I sit and listen ?" she asked.

" No," both men said together.

Without a word she went off.

" To continue," Ragle said, " if you don't mind hearing about it. I thought about going to the VA hospital . . . I can use my veteran's status and get some kind of medical assistance. But I have doubts as to whether it lies in their province. I also thought of using the GI Bill and going up to the university and taking a few courses."

" In what ?"

" Oh, say, philosophy."

That sounded bizarre to him. " Why ?" he said.

" Isn't philosophy a refuge and a solace ?"

" I didn't know that. Maybe it was once. My impression of philosophy is something having to do with theories of ultimate reality and what is the purpose of life ?"

Stolidly, Ragle said, " What's wrong with that ?"

" Nothing, if you think it would help you."

Ragle said, " I've read some, in my time. I was thinking of Bishop Berkeley. The idealists. For instance—" He waved his hand at the piano over in its corner of the living room. " How do we know that piano exists ?"

" We don't," Vic said.

" Maybe it doesn't."

Vic said, " I'm sorry, but as far as I'm concerned, that's just a bunch of words."

At that, Ragle's face lost its colour entirely. His mouth dropped open. Staring at Vic, he drew himself up in his chair.

" Are you okay ?" Vic said.

" I have to think about this," Ragle said, speaking with effort. He got to his feet. " Excuse me," he said. " I'll talk to you again some time later. Dinner's ready . . . or something." He disappeared through the doorway, into the dining room.

At the dinner table, as they all ate, Ragle Gumm sat deep in thought. Across from him, Sammy yammered on about his club and its powerful machinery of war. He did not listen.

Words, he thought.

Central problem in philosophy. Relation of word to object . . . what is a word ? Arbitrary sign. But we live in words. Our reality, among words not things. No such thing as a thing anyhow ; a gestalt in the mind. Thingness . . . sense of substance. An illusion. Word is more real than the object it represents.

Word doesn't represent reality. Word *is* reality. For us, anyhow. Maybe God gets to objects. Not us, though.

In his coat, hanging up in the hall closet, was the metal box with the six words in it.

SOFT-DRINK STAND
DOOR
FACTORY BUILDING
HIGHWAY
DRINKING FOUNTAIN
BOWL OF FLOWERS

Margo's voice roused him. " I told you not to play there." Her tone, sharp and loud, caused him to lose his line of thought. " Now don't play there. Mind me, Sammy. I'm serious."

" How did it go with the petition ?" Vic asked.

" I got to see some minor clerk. He said something about the city not having funds at the present time. The infuriating thing is that when I phoned last week they said contracts were being let, and work ought to start any day. That just goes to show you. You can't get them to do anything. You're helpless ; one person is helpless."

" Maybe Bill Black could flood the lots," Vic said.

" Yes," she said, " and then all the children could drown instead of fall and crack their skulls."

After dinner, while Margo washed the dishes in the kitchen and Sammy lay in the living room in front of the TV set, he and Vic talked some more.

" Ask the contest people for a leave of absence," Vic suggested.

" I doubt if they would." He was fairly familiar with the pack of rules and he recalled no such provision.

" Try them."

" Maybe," he said, scratching at a spot on the table top.

Vic said, " That business last night gave me a real turn. I hope I didn't get you upset. I hope I'm not responsible for your feeling depressed."

" No," he said. " If any one thing's responsible, it's probably the contest. And June Black."

" Now listen," Vic said. " You can do a lot better for yourself than Junie Black. And anyhow, she's spoken for."

" By a nitwit."

" That doesn't matter. It's the institution. Not the individual."

Ragle said, " It's hard to think of Bill and June Black as an institution. Anyhow, I'm not in the mood for discussing institutions."

" Tell me what happened," Vic said.

" Nothing."

" Tell me."

Ragle said, " Hallucination. That's all. Recurrent."

" Want to describe it ?"

" No."

" Is it anything like my experience last night ? I'm not trying to pry. That bothered me. I think something's wrong."

" Something is wrong," Ragle said.

" I don't mean with you or with me or with any one person. I mean in general."

" ' The time,' " Ragle said, " ' is out of joint.' "

" I think we should compare notes."

Ragle said, " I'm not going to tell you what happened to me. You'll nod gravely right now. But tomorrow or the next day, while you're standing around down at your supermarket chewing the rag with the checkers . . . you'll run out of conversation and you'll hit on me. And you'll convulse everybody with titillating gossip. I've had enough gossip. Remember, I'm a national hero."

" Suit yourself," Vic said. " But we might—get somewhere. I mean it. I'm worried."

Ragle said nothing.

" You can't clam up," Vic said. " I have a responsibility to my wife and my son. Are you no longer in control of yourself? Do you know what you may or may not do ?"

" I won't run amuck," Ragle said. " Or at least I have no reason to think I will."

" We all have to live together in the same house," Vic pointed out. " Suppose I told you I—"

Ragle interrupted, " If I feel I'm a menace, I'll leave. I'll be leaving anyhow, probably in the next couple of days. So if you can last that long, everything will be okay."

" Margo won't let you go."

At that, he laughed. " Margo," he said, " will just have to let me go."

" Are you sure you're not just feeling sorry for yourself because your love-life is fouled up ?"

Ragle didn't answer that. Getting up from the table he walked into the living room, where Sammy lay watching " Gun-smoke." Throwing himself down on the couch, he watched too.

I can't talk to him, he realized.

Too bad. Too darn bad.

" How's the Western ?" he said to Sammy, during the mid-point commercial.

" Fine," Sammy said. From the boy's shirt pocket, crumpled white paper stuck up. The paper had a stained,

weathered appearance, and Ragle leaned over to see. Sammy paid no attention.

" What's that in your pocket ?" Ragle asked.

" Oh," Sammy said, " I was setting up defense bastions over at the Ruins. And I dug up a board, and I found a bunch of old telephone books and magazines and stuff."

Reaching down, Ragle pulled the paper from the boy's pocket. The paper fell apart in his hands. Stringy slips of paper, and on each was a block-printed word, smeared by rain and decay.

GAS STATION
COW
BRIDGE

" You got these at those city lots ?" he demanded, unable to think clearly. " You dug them up ?"

" Yes," Sammy said.

The boy had five slips in all, but two were so badly weather-damaged that he couldn't read the word on them. But he gave him fifty cents, took the slips, and went off by himself to think.

Maybe it's a gag, he thought. I'm the victim of a hoax. Because I'm a Hero Contest Winner First Class.

Publicity by the paper.

But that made no sense. No sense at all.

Baffled, he smoothed the five slips out as best he could, and then added them to the box. In some respects he felt worse than before.

Later that evening he located a flashlight, put on a heavy coat, and set off in the direction of the Ruins.

His legs ached already from the hike with Junie, and by the time he reached the empty lots he wondered if it was worth it. At first his flashlight beam picked up only the shape of broken concrete, pits half-filled with spring rain, heaps of boards and plaster. For some time he prowled about, flashing his light here and there. At last, after stumbling and falling over a tangle of rusted wire, he came upon a crude shelter of rubble, obviously made by the boys.

Getting down, he turned his light on the ground near the shelter. And by golly, there in the light the edge of yellowed paper gleamed back at him. He wedged his flashlight under his arm and with both hands rooted until he had dislodged the

paper. It came loose in a thick pack. Sammy had been right ; it seemed to be a telephone book, or at least part of one.

Along with the telephone book he managed to dig loose the remains of large, slick family magazines. But after that he found himself shining his light down into a cistern or drainage system. Too risky, he decided. Better wait until day.

Carrying the telephone book and magazines from the lot, he started back to the house.

What a desolate place, he thought to himself. No wonder Margo wants the city to clear it. They must be out of their minds. One broken arm and they'd have a lawsuit on their hands.

Even the houses near the lots seemed dark, uninhabited. And ahead of him the sidewalk was cracked, littered with debris.

Fine place for kids.

When he got back to the house he carried the phone book and magazines into the kitchen. Both Vic and Margo were in the living room, and neither of them noticed that he had anything with him. Sammy had gone to bed. He spread wrapping paper on the kitchen table, and then, with care, he laid out what he had got.

The magazines were too damp to handle so he left them near the circulating heater to dry. At the kitchen table, he began to examine the phone book.

As soon as he opened it he realized that he did not have either the covers or the first and last pages. Only the middle part.

It was not the phone book he was used to. The print had a darker quality ; the typeface was larger. The margins were greater, too. He guessed that it represented a smaller community.

The exchanges were unfamiliar to him. Florian. Edwards. Lakeside. Walnut. He turned the pages, not searching for anything in particular ; what was there to search for ? Anything, he thought. Out of the ordinary. Something that would leap up and hit him in the eye. For instance, he could not tell how old the book was. Last year's ? Ten years ago ? How long had there been printed phone books ?

Entering the kitchen, Vic said, " What have you got ?"

He said, " An old phone book."

Vic bent over his shoulder to see. Then he went to the

refrigerator and opened it. " Want some pie ?" he said.

" No thanks," Ragle said.

" Are these yours ?" Vic pointed to the drying magazines.

" Yes," he said.

Vic disappeared back into the living room, taking two pieces of berry pie with him.

Picking up the phone book, Ragle carried it into the hall, to the phone. He seated himself on the stool, chose a number at random, lifted the receiver and dialed. After a moment he heard a series of clicks and then the operator's voice.

" What number are you calling ?"

He read off the number. " Bridgeland 3-4465."

Then a pause. " Would you please hang up and dial that number again ?" the operator said, in her lofty, no-nonsense voice.

He hung up, waited a moment, and dialed the number again.

Immediately the circuit was broken. " What number are you calling ?" an operator's voice—not the same one—sounded in his ear.

" Bridgeland 3-4465," he said.

" Just a moment, sir," the operator said.

He waited.

" I'm sorry, sir," the operator said. " Would you please look up that number again ?"

" Why ?" he said.

" Just a moment, sir," the operator said, and at that point the line went dead. No one was on the other end ; he heard the absence of a living substance there. He waited, but nothing happened.

After a time he hung up, waited, and dialed the number again.

This time he got the squalling siren-sound, up and down in his ear, deafening him. The racket that indicated that he had misdialed.

Choosing other numbers he dialed. Each time he got the racket. Misdial. Finally he closed the phone book, hesitated, and dialed for the operator.

" Operator."

" I'm trying to call Bridgeland 3-4465," he said. He could not tell if she was the same operator as before. " Would you get it for me ? All I get is the misdial signal."

" Yes sir. Just a moment sir." A long pause. And then, " What was that number again, sir ?"

He repeated it.

" That number has been disconnected," the operator said.

" Would you check on some others for me ?" he asked.

" Yes sir."

He read off other numbers from the page. Each one had been disconnected.

Of course. An old phone book. Obviously. It was true ; probably it was a discarded series in its entirety.

He thanked her and hung up.

So nothing had been proved or learned.

An explanation might be that these numbers had been assigned to several towns nearby. The towns had incorporated, and a new number system installed. Perhaps when the switch to dial phones was made, only recently, a year or so ago.

Feeling foolish, he walked back into the kitchen.

The magazines had begun to dry, and he seated himself with one of them on his lap. Fragments broke away as he turned the first page. A family magazine, first an article on cigarettes and lung cancer . . . then an article on Secretary Dulles and France. Then an article by a man who had trekked up the Amazon with his children. Then stories, Westerns and detectives and adventure in the South Seas. Ads, cartoons. He read the cartoons and put the magazine down.

The next magazine had more pictures in it ; something like *Life*. But the paper was not as high-quality as the Luce publications' paper. Still, it was a first-line magazine. The cover was gone, so he could not tell if it was *Look ;* he guessed that it was *Look* or one he had seen a couple of times called *Ken*.

The first picture-story dealt with a hideous train-wreck in Pennsylvania. The next picture-story—

A lovely blonde Norse-looking actress. Reaching up, he moved the lamp so that it cast more light on the page.

The girl had heavy hair, well-groomed and quite long. She smiled in an amazingly sweet manner, a jejune but intimate smile that held him. Her face was as pretty as any he had seen, and in addition she had a deep, full, sensual chin and neck, not the rather ordinary neck of most starlets but an adult, ripe neck, and excellent shoulders. No hint of boniness, nor of fleshiness. A mixture of races, he decided. German hair. Swiss or Norwegian shoulders.

But what really held him, held him in a state of near-incredulity, was the sight of the girl's figure. Good grief, he said to himself. And what a pure-looking girl. How could she be so developed ?

And she seemed happy to show it. The girl leaned forward, and most of her bosom spilled out and displayed itself. It looked to be the smoothest, firmest, most natural bosom in the world. And very warm-looking, too.

He did not recognize the girl's name. But he thought, There's the answer to our need of a mother. Look at that.

" Vic," he said, getting up with the magazine and carrying it into the living room. " Take a look at this," he said, putting it down in Vic's lap.

" What is it ?" Margo said, from the other side of the room.

" You'd be bored," Vic said, setting aside his piece of berry pie. " It's real, isn't it ?" he said. " Yes, you can see under it. No supports. It holds itself out like that."

" She's leaning forward," Ragle said.

" A girl, is it ?" Margo said. " Let me look ; I won't carp." She came over and stood beside Ragle, and all three of them studied the picture. It was full-page, in colour. Of course the rain had stained and faded it, but there was no doubt ; the woman was unique.

" And she has such a gentle face," Margo said. " So refined and civilized."

" But sensual," Ragle said.

Under the picture was the caption, *Marilyn Monroe during her visit to England, in connection with the filming of her picture with Sir Laurence Olivier.*

" Have you heard of her ?" Margo said.

" No," Ragle said.

" She must be an English starlet," Vic said.

" No," Margo said, " it says she's on a visit to England. It sounds like an American name." They turned to the article itself.

The three of them read what remained of the article.

" It talks about her as if she's very famous," Margo said. " All the crowds. People lining the streets."

" Over there," Vic said. " Maybe in England ; not in America."

" No, it says something about her fan clubs in America."

" Where did you get this ?" Vic said to Ragle.

He said, " In the lots. Those ruins. That you're trying to get the city to clear."

" Maybe it's a very old magazine," Margo said. " But Laurence Olivier is still alive . . . I remember seeing *Richard the Third* on TV, just last year."

They looked at one another.

Vic said, " Do you want to tell me what your hallucination is now ?"

" What hallucination ?" Margo said instantly, glancing from him to Ragle. " Was that what you two were talking about, that you didn't want me to hear ?"

After a pause, Ragle said, " I've been having an hallucination, dear." He tried to smile at his sister encouragingly, but her face remained cruel with concern. " Don't look so anxious," he said. " It's not that bad."

" What is it ?" she demanded.

He said, " I'm having trouble with words."

At once she said, " Trouble speaking ? Oh my god . . . that's how President Eisenhower was after his stroke."

" No," he said. " That's not what I mean." They both waited, but now that he tried to explain he found it almost impossible. " I mean," he said, " things aren't what they seem."

Then he was silent.

" Sounds like Gilbert and Sullivan," Margo said.

" That's all," Ragle said. " I can't explain it any better."

" Then don't you think you're losing your mind," Vic said. " You don't think it's in you ; it's outside. In the things themselves. Like my experience with the light cord."

After hesitating he at last nodded. " I suppose," he said. For some obscure reason he had an aversion toward tying in Vic's experience with his own. They did not appear to him to be similar.

Probably just snobbery on my part, he thought.

Margo, in a slow, dreadful voice, said, " Do you think we're being duped ?"

" What a strange thing to say," he said.

" What do you mean by that ?" Vic said.

" I don't know," Margo said. " But in *Consumer's Digest* they're always telling you to watch out for frauds and misleading advertising ; you know, short weight and that sort of thing. Maybe this magazine, this publicity about this Marilyn Monroe, is all just a big bunch of hot air. They're trying to

build up some trivial starlet, pretend everybody has heard of her, so when people hear about her for the first time they'll say, Oh yes, that famous actress. Personally I don't think she's much more than a glandular case." She ceased talking and stood silently, plucking at her ear in a repetitious nervous tic. Her forehead webbed with worry lines.

" You mean maybe somebody made her up ?" Vic said, and laughed.

" Duped," Ragle repeated.

It rang a bell deep inside him. On some sub-verbal level.

" Maybe I won't go away," he said.

" Were you going away ?" Margo said. " Nobody feels obliged to let me in on anything ; I suppose you were going to leave tomorrow and never come back. Write us a post card from Alaska."

Her bitterness made him uncomfortable. " No," he said. " I'm sorry, dear. Anyhow I'm going to stay. So don't brood about it."

" Were you intending to drop out of your contest ?"

" I hadn't decided," he said.

Vic said nothing.

To Vic, he said, " What do you suppose we can do ? How do we go about—whatever we ought to go about ?"

" Beats me," Vic said. " You're experienced with research. Files and data and graphs. Start keeping a record of all this. Aren't you the man who can see patterns ?"

" Patterns," he said. " Yes, I suppose I am." He hadn't thought about his talent in this connection. " Maybe so," he said.

" String it all together. Collect all the information get it down in black and white—hell, build one of your scanners and run it through so you can view it, the way you do."

" It's impossible," he said. " We have no point of reference. Nothing to judge by."

" Simple contradictions," Vic disagreed. " This magazine with an article about a world-famous movie star we haven't heard of ; that's a contradiction. We ought to comb the magazine, read every word and line. See how many other contradictions there are, with what we know outside the magazine."

" And the phone book," he said. The yellow section, the business listings. And perhaps, at the Ruins, there was other material.

The point of reference. The Ruins.

five

Bill Black parked his '57 Ford in the reserved slot in the employees' lot of the MUDO—Municipal Utility District Office—building. He meandered up the path to the door and inside the building, past the receptionist's desk, to his office.

First he opened the window, and then he removed his coat and hung it up in the closet. Cool morning air billowed into the office. He inhaled deeply, stretched his arms a couple of times and then he dropped himself into his swivel chair and wheeled it around to face his desk. In the wire basket lay two notes. The first turned out to be a gag, a recipe clipped from some household column describing a way to fix a casserole of chicken and peanut butter. He tossed the recipe into the waste-basket and lifted out the second note ; with a flourish he unfolded it and read it.

Man at the house tried to call Bridgeland, Sherman, Devonshire, Walnut, and Kentfield numbers.

I can't believe it, Black thought to himself. He stuck the note in his pocket, got up from his desk and went to the closet for his coat, closed the window, left his office and walked down the corridor and past the receptionist's desk, outside onto the path, and then across the parking lot to his car. A moment later he had backed out onto the street and was driving downtown.

Well, you can't have everything in life perfect, he said to himself as he drove through the morning traffic. I wonder what it means. I wonder how it could have happened.

Some stranger could have stepped in off the street and asked to use the phone. Oh ? What a laugh that was.

I give up, he said to himself. It's just one of those deadly things that defies analysis. Nothing to do but wait and see what took place. Who made the call, why, and how.

What a mess, he said to himself.

Across the street from the back entrance of the *Gazette* building he parked and got out of his car, stuck a dime in the parking meter, and then entered the *Gazette* offices by the back stairs.

" Is Mr. Lowery around ?" he asked the girl at the counter.

" I don't think he is, sir," the girl said. She moved toward the switchboard. " If you want to wait, I'll call around and see if they can locate him."

" Thanks," he said. " Tell him it's Bill Black."

The girl tried various offices and then said to him, " I'm sorry, Mr. Black. They say he hasn't come in yet, but he ought to be in soon. Do you want to wait ?"

" Okay," he said, feeling glum. He threw himself down on a bench, lit a cigarette, and sat with his hands folded.

After fifteen minutes he heard voices along the hall. A door opened and the tall, lean, baggy-tweed figure of Stuart Lowery put in its appearance. " Oh, hello Mr. Black," he said in his reasonable fashion.

" Guess what was waiting for me in my office," Bill Black said. He handed Lowery the note. Lowery read it carefully.

" I'm surprised," Lowery said.

" Just a freak accident," Black said. " One chance in a billion. Some body printed up a list of good restaurants and stuck it in his hat, and then he got into one of the supply trucks and rode on in, and while he was unloading stuff from the truck the list fell out of his hat." A notion struck him. " Unloading cabbages, for instance. And when Vic Nielsen started to carry the cabbages into the storage locker, he saw the list and said to himself, Just what I need ; a list of good restaurants. So he picked it up, carried it home, and pasted it on the wall by the phone."

Lowery smiled uncertainly.

" I wonder if anyone wrote down the numbers he called," Black said. " That might be important."

" Seems to me that one of us will have to go over to the house," Lowery said. " I wasn't planning to go again until the end of the week. You could go this evening."

" Do you suppose we could have been infiltrated by some traitor ?"

" Successful approach," Lowery said.

" Yes," he said.

" Let's see if we can find out."

" I'll drop over tonight," Black said. " After dinner. I'll take over something to show Ragle and Vic. By then I can whip up some sort of thing." He started to leave and then he said, " How'd he do on his entries for yesterday ?"

" Seemed to be all right."

" He's getting distraught again. The signs are all there. More empty beer cans on the back porch, a whole bagful of them. How can he guzzle beer and work at the same time ? I've watched him at it for three years, and I don't understand it."

Dead-pan, Lowery said, " I'll bet that's the secret. It's not in Ragle ; it's in the beer."

Nodding good-bye, Black left the *Gazette* building.

On the drive back to the MUDO building, one thought kept returning to him. There was just that one possibility that he could not face. Everything else could be handled. Arrangements could be made. But—

Suppose Ragle was becoming sane again ?

That evening, after he left the MUDO building, he stopped by a drugstore and searched for something to buy. At last his attention touched on a rack of ball-point pens. He tore several of the pens loose and started out of the store with them.

" Hey, mister !" the clerk said, with indigaation.

" I'm sorry," Black said. " I forgot." That certainly was true ; it had slipped his mind for a moment, that he had to go through the motions. From his wallet he took some bills, accepted change, and then hurried out to his car.

It was his scheme to show up at the house with the pens, telling Vic and Ragle that they had been mailed to the waterworks as free samples but that city employees weren't allowed to accept them. You fellows want them ? He practiced to himself as he drove home.

The best method was always the simple method.

Parking in the driveway he hopped up the steps to the porch and inside. Curled up on the couch, Junie was sewing a button on a blouse ; she ceased working at once and looked up furtively, with such a flutter of guilt that he knew she had been out strolling with Ragle, holding hands and exchanging vows.

" Hi," he said.

" Hi," Junie said. " How'd it go at work today ?"

" About the same."

" Guess what happened today."

" What happened today ?"

Junie said, " I was down at the launderette picking up your clothes and I ran into Bernice Wilks, and we got to talking about school—she and I went to Cortez High together—and we drove downtown in her car and had lunch, and then we took in a show. And I just got back. So dinner is four frozen beef pies." She eyed him apprehensively.

" I love beef pies," he said.

She got up from the couch. In her long quilted skirt and sandals and wide-collared blouse with the medal-sized buttons

she looked quite charming. Her hair had been put up artfully, a coil tied at the back in a classical knot. " You're real sterling," she said, with relief. " I thought you'd be mad and start yelling."

" How's Ragle ?" he said.

" I didn't see Ragle today."

" Well," he said reasonably, " how was he last time you saw him ?"

" I'm trying to remember when I last saw him."

" You saw him yesterday," he said.

She blinked. " No," she said.

" That's what you said last night."

Doubtfully, she said, " Are you sure ?"

This was the part that annoyed him ; not her slipping off into the hay with Ragle, but her making up sloppy tales that never hung together and which only served to create more confusion. Especially in view of the fact that he needed very badly to hear about Ragle's condition.

The folly of living with a woman picked for her affability. . . . She could be counted on to blunder about and do the right thing, but when it came time to ask her what had happened, her innate tendency to lie for her own protection slowed everything to a halt. What was needed was a woman who could commit an indiscretion and then talk about it. But too late to reshape it all, now.

" Tell me about old Ragle Gumm," he said.

Junie said, " I know you have your evil suspicions, but they only reflect projections of your own warped psyche. Freud showed how neurotic people do that all the time."

" Just tell me, will you," he said, " how Ragle is feeling these days. I don't care what you've been up to."

That did the trick.

" Look," Junie said, in a thin, deranged voice that carried throughout the house. " What do you want me to do, say I've been having an affair with Ragle, is that it ? All day long I've been sitting here thinking ; you know what about ?"

" No," he said.

" I possibly might leave you, Bill. Ragle and I may go somewhere together."

" Just the two of you ? Or along with the Little Green Man ?"

" I suppose that's a slur on Ragle's earning capacity. You want to insinuate that he can't support both himself and I."

" The hell with it," Bill Black said, and went into the other room, by himself.

Instantly Junie materialized in front of him. " You really have contempt because I don't have your educational background," she said. Her face, stained with tears, seemed to blur and swell. She did not look so charming, now.

Before he could phrase an answer, the door chimes sounded.

" The door," he said.

Junie stared at him and then she turned and left the room. He heard her open the front door and then he heard her voice, brisk and only partially under control, and another woman's voice.

Curiosity made him tag along after her.

On the porch stood a large, timid-looking, middle-aged woman in a cloth coat. The woman carried a clipboard, a leather binder, and on her arm was an armband with an insigne. The woman droned on to Junie in a monotone, and at the same time she fumbled in the binder.

Junie turned her head. " Civil Defence," she said.

Seeing that she was too upset to talk, Black stepped up to the door and took her place. " What's this ?" he said.

The timidity on the middle-aged woman's face increased ; she cleared her throat and in a low voice said, " I'm sorry to bother you during the dinner hour, but I'm a neighbour of yours, I live down the street, and I'm conducting a door-to-door campaign for CD, Civil Defence. We're badly in need of daytime volunteers, and we wondered if there might be anyone at home at your house during the day who could volunteer an hour or so during the week of his or her time. . . ."

Black said, " I don't think so. My wife's home, but she has other commitments."

" I see," the middle-aged woman said. She recorded a few notes on a pad, and then smiled at him humbly. Evidently she took no for an answer the first time around. " Thank you anyhow," she said. Lingering, clearly not knowing how to make her exit, she said, " My name is Mrs. Keitelbein, Kay Keitelbein. I live in the house on the corner. The two-storey older house."

" Yes," he said, closing the door slightly.

Returning, this time with a handkerchief to hold aganst her cheek, Junie said in a wavering voice, " Maybe the people next door can volunteer. He's home during the day. Mr. Gumm. Ragle Gumm."

" Thank you, Mrs.—" the woman said, with gratitude.

" Black," Bill Black said. " Good night, Mrs. Keitelbein." He shut the door and switched on the porch light.

Stepping from the sidewalk onto the path of the next house, Kay Keitelbein felt her way to the porch and rang the bell.

The door opened and a plump, good-natured man in a white shirt and dark, unpressed slacks greeted her.

She said, " Are . . . you Mr. Gumm ?"

"No," he said. "I'm Victor Nielson. Ragle is here, though. Come on inside." He held the door open for her and she entered the house. " Sit down," he said, " if you want. I'll go get him."

" Thank you very much, Mr. Nielson," she said. She seated herself near the door, on a straight-backed chair, her binder and literature on her lap. The house, warm and pleasant, smelled of dinner. Not such a good time to drop by, she told herself. Too close to the dinner hour. But she could see the table in the dining room ; they had not sat down yet. An attractive woman with brown hair was setting the table. The woman glanced at her questioningly. Mrs. Keitelbein nodded back.

And then Ragle Gumm came along the hall toward her.

A charity drive, he decided as soon as he saw her. " Yes ?" he said steeling himself.

The drab, earnest-faced woman arose from the chair. " Mr. Gumm," she said, " I'm sorry to bother you, but I'm here for CD. Civil Defence."

" I see," he said.

She explained that she lived down the street. Listening, he wondered why she had selected him, not Vic. Probably because of his fame. He had got a number of proposals in the mail, proposals that he contribute his winnings to causes that would survive him.

" I am at home during the day," he admitted, when she had finished. " But I'm working. I'm self-employed."

" Just an hour or two a week," Mrs. Keitelbein said.

That didn't seem like much. " Doing what ?" he said. " I don't have a car, if you're thinking of drivers." Once the Red Cross had come by appealing for volunteer drivers.

Mrs. Keitelbein said, " No, Mr. Gumm, it's a class in instruction for disaster."

That struck him as being apt. " What a good idea," he said.

" Pardon me ?"

He said, " Instruction for disaster. Sounds fine. Any special kind of disaster ?"

" CD works whenever there's a disaster from floods or windstorms, it's the hydrogen bomb that we're all so concerned about, especially now that the Soviet Union has those new ICBM missiles. What we want to do is train individuals in each part of the city to know what to do when disaster strikes. Administer first aid, speed the evacuation, know what food is probably contaminated and what food isn't. For instance, Mr. Gumm, each family should lay in a seven-day store of food, including a seven-day store of fresh water."

Dubious still, he said, "Well, leave me your number and I'll give it some thought."

With her pencil Mrs. Keitelbein wrote out her name, address, and phone number at the bottom of a pamphlet. " Mrs. Black next door suggested your name," she said.

" Oh," he said. And it occurred to him instantly that Junie saw it as a means by which they could meet. " A number of individuals from this neighbourhood will be attending instruction, I take it," he said.

" Yes," Mrs. Keitelbein said. " At least we hope they will."

" Put me down," he said. " I'm sure I can make it to class one or two hours a week."

Thanking him, Mrs. Keitelbein departed. The door closed after her.

" You mean you signed up ?" Margo demanded, as they seated themselves at the table.

" Why not ?" he said. " It's common sense and patriotic."

Sammy spoke up, " I'm a patriot. Back in the clubhouse we've got the best atomic cannon in the United States, and it's trained on Moscow." He created explosion-noises in the back of his mouth.

" How's the crystal set coming ?" Ragle said.

" Swell," Sammy said. " It's finished."

" What have you picked up ?"

" Nothing so far," Sammy said, " but I'm just about to."

" You let us know when you do," Vic said.

" I just have a few adjustments to complete," Sammy said.

After Margo had cleared the dinner dishes away and brought in the dessert, Vic said to Ragle, " Make any progress today ?"

" I got it off at six," he answered. " As usual."

" I mean the other business," Vic said.

Actually he had done very little. The contest work had tied him up. " I started listing the separate facts in the magazines," he said. " Under different categories. Until I get it broken down and listed there's not much I can say." He had set up twelve categories : politics, economics, movies, art, crime, fashions, science, etc. " I got to looking up the different auto dealers in the white section, under their brand names. Chevrolet, Plymouth, DeSoto. They're all listed except one."

" Which one ?" Vic said.

" Tucker."

" That's strange," Vic said.

" Maybe the dealer has some personal title," Ragle said. " Such as ' Norman G. Selkirk, Tucker Dealer.' But anyhow, I pass it along to you for what it's worth."

Margo said, " Why do you use the name ' Selkirk '?"

" I don't know," he said. " Just selected at random."

" There's no random," Margo said. " Freud has shown that there's always a psychological reason. Think about the name ' Selkirk.' What does it suggest to you ?"

Ragle thought about it. " Maybe I saw the name when I was going through the phone book." These damn associations, he thought. As in the puzzle clues. No matter how hard a person tried, he never got them under control. They continued to run him. " I have it," he said finally. " The man that the book *Robinson Crusoe* was based on. Alexander Selkirk."

" I didn't know it was based on anything," Vic said.

" Yes," he said. " There was a real castaway."

" I wonder why you thought of that," Margo said. " A man living alone on a tiny island, creating his own society around him, his own world. All his utensils, clothes—"

" Because," Ragle said, " I spent a couple of years on such an island during World War Two."

Vic said, " Do you have any theory yet ?"

" About what's wrong ?" Ragle inclined his head toward Sammy, who was listening.

" It's okay," Vic said. " He's been following the whole thing. Haven't you, McBoy ?"

" Yes," Sammy said.

With a wink to Ragle, Vic said to his son, " Tell us what's wrong, then."

Sammy said, " They're trying to dupe us."

" He heard me say that," Margo said.

" Who's trying to dupe us ?" Vic said.

" The—enemy," Sammy said, after hesitating.

" What enemy ?" Ragle said.

Sammy considered and finally said, " The enemy that's everywhere around us. I don't know their names. But they're everywhere. I guess they're the Reds."

To the boy, Ragle said, " And how are they duping us ?"

With confidence, Sammy said, " They've got their dupe-guns trained on us dead centre."

They all laughed. Sammy coloured and began playing with his empty dessert dish.

" Their atomic dupe-guns ?" Vic said.

Sammy muttered, " I forget if they're atomic or not."

" He's way ahead of us," Ragle said.

After dinner Sammy went off to his room. Margo did the dishes in the kitchen, and the two men adjourned to the living room. Almost at once the doorbell rang.

" Maybe it's your pal Mrs. Keitelbein back," Vic said, going to the door.

Standing on the porch was Bill Black. " Hi," he said, entering the house. " I've got something for you fellows." He tossed Ragle a couple of objects, which Ragle caught. Ball-point pens, and good ones by their look. " Couple for you, too," Black said to Vic. " Some firm up north mailed them to us, but we can't keep them. Against a city ruling involving gifts. You have to either eat it up, smoke it up, or drink it up the day you got it, or you can't keep it."

" But it's all right to give them to us," Vic said, examining the pens. " Well thanks, Black. I can use these down at the store."

I wonder, Ragle wondered. Should we say anything to Black ? He managed to catch his brother-in-law's eye. There seemed to be a nod of approval there, so he said, " You got a minute ?"

" I guess so," Black said.

" There's something we want to show you," Vic said.

" Sure," Black said. " Let's see it."

Vic started off to get the magazines, but Ragle suddenly said, " Wait a minute." To Black he said, " Have you ever heard of somebody named Marilyn Monroe ?"

Black, at that, got an odd, secretive look on his face. " What is this ?" he drawled.

" Have you or haven't you ?"

" Sure I have," he said.

" He's a phony," Vic said. " He thinks it's some gag and he doesn't want to bite."

" Give us an honest answer," Ragle said. " There's no gag."

" Of course I've heard of her," Black said.

" Who is she ?"

" She—" Black glanced into the other room to see if either Margo or Sammy could hear. " She has about the biggest build there is." He added, " She's a Hollywood actress."

I'll be darned, Ragle thought.

" Stay here," Vic said. He went off and returned with the picture magazine. Holding it so Black couldn't see it, he said, " What picture has she made that's supposed to be her best ?"

" That's a matter of opinion," Black said.

" Just name one, then."

Black said, " *The Taming of the Shrew.*"

Both Ragle and Vic examined the article, but there was no mention of her having done the Shakespeare comedy.

" Name another," Vic said. " That one isn't listed."

Black gestured irritably. " What is this ? I don't get to the movies very much."

Ragle said, " According to this article, she's married to an important playwright. What's his name ?"

Without hesitation, Black said, " Arthur Miller."

Well, Ragle decided, there goes all of that.

" Why haven't we heard of her, then ?" he asked Black.

Snorting with derision, Black said, " Don't blame me."

" Has she been famous long ?"

" No. Not particularly. You remember Jane Russell. That big build-up about *The Outlaw.*"

" No," Vic said. Ragle also shook his head.

" Anyhow," Black said, clearly perturbed but trying not to show it, " they've got the machinery going. Making a star out of her overnight." He stopped talking and came over to see the magazine. " What is this ?" he asked. " Can I look at it, or is it secret ?"

" Let him see it," Ragle said.

After he had studied the magazine Black said, " Well, it's been a few years. Maybe she's dropped out of sight already.

But when Junie and I were going together, before we were married, we used to go to the drive-in movies, and I remember seeing this *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* that the article mentions.'

In the direction of the kitchen, Vic shouted, " Hey honey—Bill Black's heard of her."

Margo appeared, drying a blue willow plate. " Has he ? Well then I guess that clears that up."

" Clears what up ?" Black asked.

" We had a theory we were experimenting with," Margo said.

" What theory ?"

Ragle said, " It seemed to the three of us that something had gone wrong."

" Where ?" Black said. " I don't get what you mean."

None of them said anything, then.

" What else have you got to show me ?" Black said.

" Nothing," Ragle said.

" They found a phone book," Margo said. " Along with the magazines. Part of a phone book."

" Where did you find all these ?"

Ragle said, " What the hell do you care ?"

" I don't care," Black said. " I just think you're out of your mind." He sounded more and more angry. " Let's have a look at the phone book."

Vic got the book and handed it to him. Black sat down and leafed through it, with the same frenetic expression on his face. " What's there about this ?" he said. " It's from upstate. They don't use these numbers any more." He slapped the book shut and tossed it on the table ; it started to slide off, to the floor, and Vic rescued it. " I'm surprised at the three of you," Black said. " Especially you, Margo." Reaching out his hand he grabbed the phone book away from Vic, got to his feet, and started to the front door. " I'll bring this back to you in a day or so. I want to go through it and see if I can track down some kids Junie went to Cortez High with. There's a whole flock of them she can't find ; they're probably married by now. Mostly girls." The front door closed after him and he was gone.

" He certainly got upset," Margo said after a pause.

" Hard to know what to make of that," Vic said.

Ragle wondered if he ought to go after Bill Black and get the telephone book back. But apparently it was worthless. So he did not.

Hopping mad, Bill Black flung open the front door of his house and ran past his wife to the phone.

" What's wrong ?" Junie asked. " Did you have a fight with them ? With Ragle ?" She came up close beside him as he dialed Lowery's number. " Tell me what happened. Did you have it out with Ragle ? I want to know what he said. If he said their had ever been anything between us, he's a liar."

" Beat it," he said to her. " Please, Junie. For Christ's sake. This is business." He glared at her until she gave up and went off.

" Hello," Lowery's voice sounded in his ear.

Black squatted on his haunches, holding the receiver close to his mouth so that Junie couldn't hear. " I was over there," he said. " They got their hands on a phone book, a current or nearly current one. I've got it now. I managed to wangle it away from them ; I still don't know how."

" Did you find out where they got it ?"

" No," he admitted, " I got sore and left. It really threw me, walking in there and having them say, ' Hey Black—you ever heard of a woman named Marilyn Monroe,' and then trotting out a couple of battered, weather-beaten old magazines and flashing them in my face. That was a miserable few minutes." He was still trembling and perspiring ; holding the phone with his shoulder he succeeded in getting his cigarettes and lighter from his pocket. The lighter slipped from his hand and rolled out of reach ; he gazed after it resignedly.

" Oh, I see," Lowery said. " They don't have Marilyn Monroe. It didn't get fitted in."

" No," he said.

" You say the magazines and phone book were weather-beaten."

" Yes," he said. " Very."

" Then they must have found them in a garage or outdoors. I think probably in that old bombed-out armoury the county used to maintain. The rubble is still there ; you people never cleared it."

" We can't !" Black said. " It's county property ; it's up to them. And anyhow there's nothing there. Just cement blocks and the drainage system that carried off the r.a. wastes."

" You better get a city work truck and a few men and pave those lots. Put a fence up."

" We've been trying to get permission from the county," he said. " Anyhow I don't think they found the stuff there. If

they did—and I say *if*—it's because somebody salted the ground, there."

"Enriched, you mean," Lowery said.

"Yes, a few nuggets."

"Maybe so."

"So if we pave over the lots, whoever they are will just enrich a little closer home. And why would Vic or Margo or Ragle be poking around those lots? They're half a mile across town, and—" Then he recalled Margo's petition. That possibly explained it. "Maybe you're right," he said. "Forget it." Or the boy Sammy. Well, it didn't matter. He had the phone book back.

"You don't think they looked up anything in it while they had it, do you?" Lowery said. "Besides the numbers they tried to call."

Black knew what he meant. "Nobody looks themselves up," he said. "That's the one thing nobody ever turns to, his own number."

"You have the book there?"

"Yes."

"Read me what he would have found."

Balancing the phone, Bill Black turned the tattered, water-crumbled pages of the phone book until he got to the Rs. There it was, all right.

Ragle Gumm Inc., Branch 25 ..... Kentwood 6-0457

"I wonder what he would have done if he had happened to turn to it," Black said.

"God only knows. Gone into a catatonic coma, most likely."

Black tried to imagine the conversation, if Ragle Gumm had found the number and called it—any of the numbers listed under Ragle Gumm Inc. Branch 25. What a weird conversation that would be, he thought. Almost impossible to imagine.

To be continued.

In the April "Profile" copy concerning Colin Kapp, we stated that he planned experimenting with plots and style. Undoubtedly this decision is bearing fruit—as witness "The Railways Up On Cannis" (October) and the current story which follows, a break-away from the traditional approach to a psychological story. Colin Kapp now joins Brian Aldiss and Jim Ballard as British writers who are pioneering the new type of science fiction which is rapidly replacing the old.

BREAKING POINT

by COLIN KAPP

Hardinge was dead before they arrived. With injuries such as his it was the wisest thing to be. The litter of bricks and broken bottles round the body pointed its own story of the idiot fury of the mob. Somebody inspected Hardinge's walkie-talkie, then threw it sickly into the gutter with the other debris. Nothing made real sense in the face of such destruction.

They found the Provost-Corporal two hundred metres further down the street. He was dead also, with his head crushed in. The jeep was on its side, blackened with fire ; still hot with the smell of burnt oil and rubber and symbolic of the day's futility.

The Captain grouped four of his vehicles into a rough arc to concentrate the headlights onto the waste patch nearby. From the Corporal's body they culled his identity, and Hardinge's

pockets were searched for notes and papers. They then broke-out the incendiaries and consigned the corpses to a bright magnesium funeral pyre. It was the quickest and the cleanest thing to do. The information which Hardinge was bringing died with the man, and there was nothing to do but erase the hopes and start all over again.

Then the convoy turned through the streets towards Hounstan. The driving pace was slowed by the littered surface, and the searchlight truck ran into the lead position, weaving a tortuous pattern through the rubble on the road. The soldiers primed their rifles and slipped the safety-catches off. Only armed men and mad men went through Hounstan after dark.

All was quiet as far as the hill, but as the convoy entered the Broadway the searchlight truck, swinging wide to avoid a pile of dross, skidded on filth and ploughed through a shopfront. The clangour of the crash and the sound of falling glass and breaking board echoed wide across the empty street, and the sudden loss of the searchlight halted the rest of the column in a wide disordered curve.

" Lord !" said Penny in awe. " That's done it now !"

A true prediction. At one instant the length and breadth of the Broadway was deserted save for the alert, bewildered soldiers in the trucks. The next breath saw the miraculous appearance of the mob. From far and near, from doorway, alley, window, and a myriad unsuspected corners, the shouting figures swarmed into the street. Singly and in gangs, all triggered with the same hysteria, they formed a living wall across the Broadway and closed-in, shrieking death and violence like the devil's chosen souls.

At thirty paces they stopped, the blood-lust cautioned by a volley of shots above their heads. They replied with a murderous hail of brickbats and missiles which would have decimated the soldiers' ranks had the range been shorter and the anger a little less intense. A parachute flare curved into the sky, then another, shedding a sliding, grim illumination upon the grotesque battle.

The crew of the wrecked vehicle ran the gauntlet from their exposed position and scrambled onto the other trucks. Then the Captain stood up, half his face black with living blood and half white with the anguish of the conflict.

" Shoot to kill," he ordered. " And God forgive them !"

The mechanical distortion of the hailer at his lips emphasised his agony at the decision it was never his to make. Soldier or saint he had no other choice. This was a world of dog eat dog and even humanity lost its way before the mindless fury of the mob. A brick caught the Captain square between the eyes and he fell back into the truck.

Penny broke the impasse. Starting the siren and coaxing the engine into a ridiculous reverberating roar he crashed in the gears and drove deliberately at the shouting wall. The guard at his side crouched low and fired expertly into the mob in front. The other guard was firing too, wildly to left and to right, whilst the fourth man in the jeep was concerned with emptying a box of flare cartridges directly into the faces of the rioters.

For twenty yards the crowd broke back, and the other vehicles swung out into line. Then the going got tougher and the crowd closed to within an arm's length of Penny's jeep. The windscreen cracked and starred into a thousand fragments as vicious missiles found a target ; and Penny forced ahead with the sick realisation that if his vehicle faltered the others in the line behind also were lost.

Then contact. Flailing bodies piled onto the bonnet and hands clutched at his throat and shoulder. Someone began to beat a frenzied tatoo on his helmet, rattling his teeth and making his head swim. The assailant dropped with his throat lost to a bullet, but another came, and then another. Soon there was nothing but a sea of writhing bodies before his eyes and withering blows about his face and neck.

Then as he fought in the black gulf between oblivion and consciousness his stunned reason produced a curious fact. The punishment had stopped, and a sudden silence had driven the fury from the mob. All eyes were turned away to somewhere on the right where a single voice had eclipsed the clangour of the crowd as easily as his giant stature had dwarfed the largest man amongst them.

But more impressive and more terrifying still was the fierce, bombastic torrent of words which burst from the giant's lips—a frenzied impromptu of violence and recrimination couched with such grandiloquence that the mind reeled before the power of such magnificent innovation.

The incongruity of this phenomenon, with its stark, theatrical contrast to the sordid madness of the night and the

salt blood on his lips, did more than anything to bring Penny back to his senses. Swiftly he urged the jeep forward, and a path opened up reluctantly before him. The giant ran after them with a hideous cry and leaped aboard with the ease of a child. Then, standing erect with the certainty of a messiah on an angel chariot, and striking errant members of the flock with a length of iron bedframe, he continued to harangue the crowd with passionate bitter-sweet reproaches.

Soon they were free of the trap. The rest of the vehicles swung out and followed unmolested through the gap. Two men were missing and few of them were whole—but they were free, and their fantastic saviour rode at the head of the column reciting poetic extravagances with complete disregard for time and place.

The guard on his left was unconscious and laid heavily on Penny's shoulder. When they were clear of the houses the giant scooped up the unconscious figure and transferred it to somewhere in the rear. Then he swung himself next to Penny and rumbled irrelevant poetry to the dark, deserted lanes.

" I fear we owe you our lives," said Penny, when at last he could bring himself to speak. " That was a highly remarkable performance of yours."

The giant leaned over and peered closely at Penny's Psych. Corps insignia.

" Thought as much. A damn head shrinker !"

" Just so. Lieutenant David Penny of the Psychological Corps. I don't think I know your name."

" Pandi," said the giant.

" Pandi what ?"

" Nothing, just Pandi. It's a clear-cut, consistent name—easily remembered, difficult to forget. It has no connotations and no semantic traps. It's rather a beautiful name."

" That's a peculiar thing to say," said Penny.

" We live in a peculiar age. Something happened to the old logic."

Penny swung the jeep to a halt and turned to his passenger with mingled fear and fascination.

" You're a hell of a character, I must say ! What are you, anyway ?"

" What is anyone today ? Yesterday you could have asked me what will I become ; tomorrow, what have I been. Today

you can ask nothing—for the world is in chaos and there are no stable yardsticks by which to measure anyone."

" Are you mad ?" asked Penny deliberately.

The giant chuckled. " If you define madness as that which runs contrary to the norm, then I am mad. I'm a staring lunatic because I love lyrical verse more than hysterical violence. But you, my dear Head-shrinker, you are mad also. You are looking for sanity in a world where it doesn't exist. You, too, are an oddity."

The rest of the convoy caught up with them and stopped in a line before and aft. In the light of the headlamps the crazy, maimed figure of the Captain limped towards them, one arm drooping sickly at his side. He turned to Pandi and, drawing painfully erect, saluted with a gesture which conveyed more than military respect. Then he crumpled and fell to the ground in a dead faint.

Pandi, who was both amused and contemptuous at the Captain's display, leaped out and lifted the unconscious figure into the seat beside Penny. Retrieving his iron bar from the floor he waved it aloft in final dismissal.

" Farewell, Head-shrinker ! This is where we part. Look after the Captain. He might have been a great man had he known less and thought more."

And with this final cryptic remark the giant turned and strode away into the darkness. Penny heard him beating his way through the hedge at the roadside and then a snatch of jubilant song fading away towards the headland.

And that was a remarkable thing, thought Penny who had never felt less like singing.

Things fall apart—inevitably. This is the one true axiom of any science which never gets written into the textbooks. The engineer, with dim awareness of the fact, calculates his stresses and fatigues and estimates a useful life, so limiting his guarantee. Those concerned with the sciences of man have no such honesty ; and only the historian and the archaeologist can produce documentary evidence of the universal truism that, as with gas turbines, so with civilizations—things fall apart.

" Mankind is a rational animal," said Major Bannerman sourly, " inasmuch as he can always find a logical reason to justify an illogical action. Even history is only rationalizing after the act. It's a chronicle of man's inhumanity written in

terms of acceptable excuses. I think we shall probably die of this same vanity."

" I have a feeling," said Penny, " that there ought to be a common factor in the decay of civilisations—any civilizations."

" I think there is," said Bannerman. " History records only the symptoms not the causes of decay. And civilization itself is a psychological oddity. You can't completely justify it on a survival basis. The species can survive both with and without it. If only we knew ' why civilization ?' we should be halfway to understanding why ours is breaking up."

" Curious thing," said Penny, " but I never before wondered why civilization existed. I assumed it was the natural outcome of the herd instinct in an intelligent species."

Bannerman frowned. "No, it's more than that. It's a highly dynamic process which is both unsound and uncontrolled. The point I am trying to determine is whether the will to civilize is an unrecognised instinct or whether it's a psychological parasite which preys upon the energies of man."

" A hypothetical question, surely ?"

" Is it ?" asked Bannerman. " What if it is a mental parasite —are we really justified in trying to save it ?"

Penny looked at his superior curiously. " That sounds dangerously like a beat philosophy, Major. A little out of character for you."

Bannerman turned with slow deliberation.

" I'm sorry. It was a trick. I was testing you."

" Mind telling me why ?"

" Yes, I'll tell you. Colonel Foresyte is coming down to Whetstone for a session of intensive interrogation of citizens in this area. There's something peculiar about his district which makes him think he might find a few answers here. That means we have to send out sorties to pick up specimens for the Colonel to work over at his leisure. All in all, we are going to be even less popular with the local population. It's a barbarous sort of business."

" So we're still crying at the same moon," said Penny in disgust.

" Take it easy !" warned Bannerman. " Don't forget we aren't fighting the mobs. We're at war with a far more dangerous and insidious enemy — a beat philosophy, a philosophy that doesn't care about civilization and doesn't want to know why it doesn't care. And one thing could easily cost us this battle—a saboteur in high places."

" My God ! You think I'm a saboteur ?"

" I don't know yet. But I do know one thing. Exposure to Pandi is frequently fatal. We've lost some good men that way. The dead resignation creeps beneath the skin and festers and grows until the fellow jumps up and says ' What the hell are we doing this for, anyway ?' "

Penny was incredulous. " Do you mean you dare not consider seriously whether or not our programme is justified ?"

" We have to be objective," said Bannerman sternly. " We accepted its truth in saner times. Now we have only to carry out our decisions."

" Looking neither to the left nor the right ?" asked Penny bitterly. " How far can you move with your head in the sand ? That way lies bigotry."

" That way," said Bannerman softly, " lies all that we called civilization. It's not a thing to be justified or explained. Either you want it or you don't. Now you see why I regarded you as a bad risk. When the going gets tough we're as likely to find you working for the other side."

Penny brought his anger under iron control. " I don't much care for dogmas," he said, " not when humanity is at stake. I'm staying this side of the fence because I don't know of a better way to go."

" I know," said Bannerman quietly, " else you wouldn't still be around. But you're walking on a razor's edge. For Pity's sake watch your step. And David . . ."

" Yes ?"

" Do me a favour. If you ever get convinced that we're wrong and the mobs out there are right, start off in one direction and keep running. Because if you ever cross me I'm liable to come looking for you—with a gun."

Colonel Foresyte had eyes which saw a little too much, and a brain which found more in an answer than his informant intended. He was alternately hated and feared by his staff, and brought a state of near mental collapse to the victims of his dynamic and ruthless inquisition. Colonel Foresyte was a fanatic.

Penny, who placed humanity above all things, was sickened almost to breaking point by the fierce, tyrannical demands placed on himself and those he commanded. And there was desolation in his heart as he turned loose the pitiful, bewildered

people that Foresyte had subjected to his mental inquisition. On the tenth day Penny lost four of his men in a skirmish with a mob, and returned so distraught and agitated that Bannerman called him after taking his report.

" Steady up, David !"

" How much longer is this farce going on ?" asked Penny brokenly. " I can't see any reason left to justify this stupid inquisition. Futility gains no virtue by repeating its own errors."

" You want to quit ?" asked Bannerman. " I could find you an administration job."

" Hell, no ! I just want to see some return for all this misery we cause. Of one thing I'm certain, we'll never get anything of value from the beats. They quite genuinely have nothing else to offer. They never had. Perhaps there is no answer to this thing."

" I could break you for even thinking that," said Bannerman evenly. " But I won't, you're more use to me right where you are." He paused. " I know you, David, you're a bit of a rebel but you're a good man none the less. As a matter of interest, how would you run this investigation ?"

" I'd pull in Pandi."

Bannerman smiled. " The miraculous Pandi, eh ? He's quite a legend around these parts. He must have saved a dozen of our convoys with that double talk of his."

" But it's ridiculous," said Penny. " How on earth does it work ?"

" I can't be sure. At a rough guess I'd say it was a series of semantic keys strung out into lyrical prose form. It's a pretty formidable weapon."

" But the construction of a semantic-chain like that presupposes a staggering knowledge of the emotional triggers and over-responses of a pretty mixed up mob. Semantics hasn't got that advanced as yet."

" As a science, no," said Bannerman. " As an art—maybe. Remember Hitler hypnotised a whole nation, and I gather his technique was crude compared to Pandi's."

" True," said Penny, " but that still makes Pandi a pretty peculiar sort of genius. For Pandi to have such complete control of a situation he must have a pretty fair idea of what he's up to."

" Not necessarily. Pandi is a mad actor, a fantastic extrovert for whom the whole world is suddenly a stage. He's the artist

with an infinite canvas and no critics. The dreams of paranoiac grandeur are now a reality ; if the world accepts him at his own valuation that is only symbolic of a sick world, not of an omnipotent Pandi."

" But such a field for study . . . !"

" I think you'd better go," said Bannerman. " Try and get some sleep in. You've a heavy day tomorrow."

The riot was going on near Telford. A mob of perhaps fifty strong had cornered a half-dozen unfortunates against the viaduct wall and blood-murder had commenced. Under cover of the noise and confusion the scout-group entered the northern road and drew to a vantage point on the fly-over. From there the carnage was a hideous thing to watch.

" Hell ! They're like a lot of animals," said Penny, feeling sick. " Two riot bombs should do the trick."

Colonel Foresyte shook his head. " No, I want to see what happens."

" What can happen, sir ? That's murder being done down there."

" I appreciate that, Lieutenant, but we mustn't let emotion over-ride our purpose. I've waited a long time to see this."

Penny was appalled. " But, sir . . . !"

" Pull yourself together, Lieutenant. We cannot interfere just yet."

Penny retired to the jeep and held his head. He had no stomach to watch common massacre whatever its purpose. Shortly there was a change in the quality of the sound below, and he returned to the parapet just in time to witness the incredible.

Into the midst of the turmoil strode Pandi, swearing and cursing at the top of his voice. He laid into defendant and attacker alike, striking ribs and heads with a vicious piece of iron, and called-down all manner of wonderful and obscure obscenities on those he could not reach. Then he danced in the centre of the rabble like a lunatic, chanting a curious and moving pattern of phrase and rhetoric which plagued the sense with fleeting glimpses of incredible truth.

The effect was magical. Previous enmities forgotten, the whole crowd acted with a common impulse—the desire to depart for places unknown. Within minutes the approach-way was empty save for the several dead or dying. One die-hard hesitated long enough to throw a bottle at the giant. Pandi

batted the missile contemptuously into a scatter of flying shards, then called-forth a bellow which shook the streets. The die-hard remembered the better part of valour and made expert time down the nearest alley.

Pandi, king of a suddenly silent world, kicked himself up onto a pillar-box and laughed until the tears ran down his face.

Colonel Foresyte, who had watched the whole extraordinary episode through field-glasses, turned with sudden decision.

" Penny, I want that man brought in."

" But, sir, that's Pandi. I thought . . ."

" I know very well what you thought, Lieutenant. This is an order !

Penny nodded to the police Corporal. " Come on let's go get Pandi."

" You want a squad ?"

" Two," said Penny unhappily. " But I guess we'd better go alone. I think a little subtlety is a better bet than force."

Pandi watched their approach with mild curiosity.

" You took longer than I thought, Head-shrinker. Is it true that you are too afraid ?"

" Yes," said Penny without emotion. " I'm afraid, but not in the same way. We want to talk to you."

" Talk if you must. I was ever a good listener."

" Not here," said Penny. " At Whetstone, if you please."

" And if I don't please ?"

" Then we shall take you."

Pandi chuckled with amusement. " So David comes to do battle with Goliath. Not a bad simile, I think. My God, I think you'd try it too ! What makes you think I'd stand as willing sacrifice on Foresyte's crumbling altar ?"

" I have the power to force you," said Penny. " There's a machine-gun on the parapet trained directly on your back."

" Hah ! And how could that propose to stop me without also killing you ?"

" In truth," said David Penny, " I don't think that it can. I also happen to be expendable."

Pandi absorbed this in silence for a moment or two. " Whoever set this trap knew a deal more psychology than I gave him credit for."

" We have a certain native skill."

" By which David fells Goliath before all the hosts of Israel and of the Philistines. And is the living God beside you ?"

" No," said David quietly, " I lost Him many years ago."

Pandi dropped heavily from his perch. " Would I could make a parable of this. We could write a new scripture between us."

" Put out your arm," said Penny, easing the hypodermic syringe from the tube at his belt.

" Is that necessary ? I promise not to resist."

" You miss the point," said Penny. " This also stills the tongue."

" Nice of you to drop in," said Penny, with heavy sarcasm. " I suppose you wouldn't like to take over a spot of baby-sitting ? I know it's a rule that each subject for interrogation must have a personal guard—but why me ? I'm a psychologist, not a jailer."

" Has he started talking yet ?" asked Bannerman.

" Hell ! He never stops."

" Then now you know why I want a psychologist and not a provost man. Given half a chance Pandi would talk his way clean out of here. I trust you to have a little more discrimination."

" Do you mind if I use emergency sedation on him ?"

" Is it really justified ?"

"Listen to him," said Penny heavily. "This isn't emergency, this is purgatory."

He walked to the trolley on which lay Pandi, strapped at the arms and legs. Despite the encumbrance it was still the giant who was master of the situation.

" I warn you, Pandi, shut up—or else !"

" Ah !" said Pandi wickedly. " It hurts to think, doesn't it ?"

" No, all it requires is a little bloody silence !"

" Silence is for corpses," said Pandi, " they alone have nothing new to learn. Even civilizations are classed as the receptive and the dead. That's how it ends—with the closing of the mind. Adaptation alone is the keynote of survival. We also have our end in sight."

" Don't talk such damn nonsense !"

" Nonsense is it, my dear Head-shrinker ? Then what do you suppose is happening to us ?"

" I said for you to shut up, else I'll give you another needle," said Penny.

" Spoken like a scholar and a gentleman. If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out. If thy neighbour's word offend thee use a

hypodermic on him. It's the modern morality. A serum against chicken-pox, one against children, one against God even. Which one do you use against the truth ?"

"It's so rare a malady we don't have a specific against it yet."

Pandi chuckled with delight.

" Ah, so you are a thinker ! I suspected you might be despite your profession."

" Many of us have cause to think, but not all are prophets of despair."

" Hah ! there are many worse emotions than despair. Does it shock you that civilised man is on his way out ? Your whole damn civilization is coming apart at the seams with the cataclysmic fizzle of decaying cultures and the resounding squelch of collapsing ideals. Thus ends an era of synthetic egos and the rule of the iron brain in the soft skull."

" I warned you." Penny withdrew the syringe carefully and mopped his brow.

Bannerman chuckled. " He's just playing with us, you know. He doesn't believe that guff any more than you do."

" Then you have no idea of my peculiar deities," said Penny. " Why does it amuse him to play Satan ?"

" Or is it God ?" asked Bannerman quietly.

Penny looked at him thoughtfully for a long moment. " I know what you mean," he said. " There's something about Pandi that's almighty big—a breath of sanity in a crazy, narrowing world. But how can a man with such a thirst for living pretend to be a prophet of the damned ? What's Foresyte going to do with him ?"

Bannerman shrugged. " Same as he does with the rest, I guess. Question him until he doesn't know which way is up and then throw him out on his ear. Only . . ."

" Only this time Foresyte's bitten off more than he can chew," said Penny. " Hell ! I almost hope so. We certainly need a break to get us out of this crazy rat-race. If anyone can swing the odds it will probably be Pandi."

" Aye !" said Bannerman, " but which way the odds will swing I won't presume to guess."

" Briefly," said Foresyte, " I want your help."

" Why should I help you ?" asked Pandi quietly. " You make a fetish of creation, they of destruction. Is one more moral or more logic than the other ?"

" It's not a question of morality, it's a matter of survival."

" I don't care who survives, they, or you, or nobody."

Foresyte checked the recording graph on the psycho-galvanometer with a thoughtful frown.

" That statement is a beat truism—but for you it is a lie. Your P.G.R. trace nearly broke the pen." He motioned for Penny to take a turn at the recorder. " I'll put it this way, Pandi—if you refuse to help us I am quite prepared to break every bone in your body."

Pandi beamed with amusement.

" Think again. Violence can gain you nothing save another corpse for your conscience. Can you really justify your cause ?"

Foresyte breathed heavily. " You're a bit of a nut, Pandi, but you're no fool. Just why do you demand justification of the obvious ?"

" Because that which is obvious is frequently not logical, and therefore difficult to justify. I claim that you cannot give me a rational reason why you must save civilisation."

" That may be true, but the relevance escapes me. Civilization is an illogical entity. It has a different meaning for every man. I intend to save it for what it means to me."

" Would you believe me," asked Pandi, " if I said that your kind of civilization is alread dead ?"

" No," said Foresyte, " it is going through a period of trial, but it will rise again."

" Not so ! It should never have existed. Out of the ashes something may survive—but not that."

" How can you be sure ?"

" Because I watched it from the first suspicion of a crack until the opening-up of chaos. It was a simple inevitability."

" I think," said Foresyte dangerously, " you'd better start talking sense."

Pandi was contemptuous. " Your kind of sense and mine have no common ground. All your thinking is confined to pre-conceived notions of what logic ought to look like. That kind of thinking is extinct. I can speak but you are not capable of accepting what I have to say."

" Do you seriously expect me to give credence to the gospel of the decline and fall of man ?" Foresyte was growing angry.

" Not of a man, Colonel, but of socialized man. Somewhere mankind took the wrong turning. Organised culture is an evolutional dead-end. It cannot go forward any more."

" God ! This is insanity !" said Foresyte. " How can a rational man proclaim such a travesty ?"

" That depends on which brand of rationality he's using. How wide is the scope of your mind, Colonel. Dare you approach what I have said ?"

" No," said Foresyte, " you don't get away with it like that. You have something more to tell than hopelessness. I may have to break you, Pandi, but you'll tell me in the end. What is this sickness from which mankind is suffering ?"

" If I told you certainty and pride and rationalization, would that answer your question ?"

" No !"

" Yet it is the truth. If I told you patriotism and obedience and civilized endeavour, would that not be what you want to know ? No ? Yet that is also the truth."

" I'll get a sane word from you yet—even if I have to kill you in the process." Foresyte was livid. " This time you have tempted me too far. Penny, bring me the drugs."

" That's not advisable yet," said Penny. " He's been under sedation all day. Also his P.G.R. trace says he's telling the truth. He genuinely has nothing more to tell."

" I decide advisability," said Foresyte heatedly. " I may have to kill this cretin, but at least he won't die defiant."

" Then he won't die at all." Penny threw the surgical tray to the floor and crushed the phials under his heel. Then he drew his revolver and covered Foresyte from a judicious distance.

" Are you mad ?" screamed Foresyte.

" No," said Penny, " but a man can only stand so much in the name of civilisation. After a point he gets to re-examine the word."

" You, too ?" said Foresyte with incredulity. " You always were a bad risk. Would you surrender to this verbal tyrant ?"

" I surrender to no one," said Penny. " But the world will suffer less from his tyranny than from your humanity."

" I'll have you shot for this."

" Very likely. But at the moment it's I who hold the gun."

Penny reached the trolley and began one-handedly to loose the straps that secured Pandi. Momentarily the gun-point wavered and Foresyte jumped for the guard alarm. Penny clubbed him with the butt of the gun, but not before the clangour of the bell crashed out across the darkened camp.

" We've got to get out of here," said Penny. " Can you stand ?"

" Only just." Pandi flexed his limbs. " I might walk but I doubt if I could run."

" We'll try a bluff. Keep your hands behind you as though handcuffed, and walk in front of me to the cell block. If we get that far we'll make a break for the fence."

" Why should you do this for me ?" asked Pandi.

" I'm not much concerned with you," said Penny quietly. " But did you ever see anyone kicking a dog ?"

Searchlight beams were sprouting from the watch-towers along the outer perimeter and, having established the sanctity of the fence, were beginning to arc inwards to cover the no-man's-land between the encampment and the wire. A hundred soldiers raced for checkpoints and communication posts, but nobody paid any attention to the lieutenant marching a solitary prisoner back to his cell at the point of a gun.

This was a temporary respite. Once the Colonel was found the trap would tighten instantly. Penny cursed silently at the size of the odds against them.

A light lashed out from the transport area and a vehicle revved violently then crashed into gear and roared across the compound straight towards them. The great headlights sought them out with twin shafts of sinister light.

" This is it !" said Penny. " They won't hesitate to shoot."

" Split up," said Pandi. " One of us might make it."

But Penny turned and fired deliberately at the oncoming vehicle at a point where he judged the driver to be. Instantly a volley of shots criss-crossed the area, and instinct dropped him to the ground. The truck closed in, grinding a tortured protest from its transmission as the driver urged the solid juggernaut straight at Penny prostrate on the ground.

Then miraculously it stopped, the four-wheel drive locked solid in a sandy, insane skid. The front wheel gripped his shoulder but no more.

" You blasted amateurs !" said Bannerman's voice. " You couldn't escape from a cardboard box."

Penny got up, weak from the reaction of nearly going beneath the wheels of the truck. His gun was somewhere in the sand. He raised his hands cautiously, half expecting to be shot down on the spot.

" Get in, for Pity's sake ! We must stop Pandi getting near the wire."

Penny climbed aboard, puzzled by the tone of the order, and the truck surged forward, its wheels tearing deep into the sand. As yet they were still clear of the searchlight ring but against the background of weaving brilliance was the clear silhouette of a stumbling giant.

The truck roared past the fleeing figure then turned across the runner's path and braked with such acuity that for an instant it all but overturned. Pandi was stopped in mid-stride by this incredibly fast manoeuvre and remained ludicrously on one leg uncertain whether to jump the occupants or to change direction and run.

" Get in !" yelled Bannerman. " We haven't got much time."

Pandi hesitated for a long second trying to appraise the situation, then vaulted into the rear of the truck. Somewhere a machine gun opened-up and a line of tracers cast a white spear of fire closely on their right. Then another, from a watch-tower near the wire, spewed a deadly hail above their heads. Bannerman killed the lights and flung the vehicle in a tight curve round towards the transport area. Not a second later a pair of searchlights began diligently to sweep across the sands. Then the truck threaded expertly through the ranks of vehicles in the park and closed up to the western gate.

They were obviously expected, for the heavy gate stood open and the traffic-control signal promised a clear run down the causeway and through to the open road. Somebody shouted as they passed through, but whether it was warning or farewell was never understood. A minute later they were free and tearing across the desert track towards distant Antane.

A mile from the camp Bannerman stopped the truck and nodded back to Whetstone. Sounds of heavy gunfire were thunder in the air, punctuated by the crash of heavier explosions. Three fires lit up the demented scene and such searchlights as were still functioning were weaving idle, chaotic patterns high over the roofs.

A vast explosion shook the earth, and an oil fire curled-up with lazy, heated tongues.

" What happened ?" asked Penny, aghast. " Are they being attacked ?"

" No," said Bannerman, " they're blowing each other to bits. That's a bloody massacre in there. The whole place was

a psychological powder-keg. I guess we merely touched off the fuse."

"But in the name of Pity, how?" asked Penny.

Bannerman sighed. "Heaven bless the innocent," he said.

They spent the rest of the night in a deserted stone hovel near the edge of the Antane swamp. Penny slept badly for he was unused to cold and hunger, and the stone floor was damp and chilled his limbs. Even so, Pandi was gone when he awoke to the wretched morning. The truck was also missing.

Bannerman seemed to have aged considerably since the day before, and he obviously hadn't slept at all. He kept a pensive watch from the window, scanning the desert road uneasily and volunteering no information on what had come to pass. Penny too maintained his own counsel for awhile, then wearied of the riddle which had brought him to his destination.

"What happened to the world?" asked Penny. "The power of men and the dreams of men all went. We never even made it to the stars."

Bannerman shrugged. "Thoughts have a tyranny very much their own. We only have ourselves to blame."

"I don't understand," said Penny.

"I think you do. The mind-body and the world evolved together. They were a kind of mutual fit. We ourselves destroyed that correspondence. Through the birth-pangs of a young world the living creatures changed and altered, ever seeking a compromise with nature. In each of us is stamped the pattern of that compromise—we call it instinct."

"That much is history."

"A history taught but seldom understood." Bannerman rubbed his brow wearily. "Instinct is hereditary, it is a long-term survival pattern and applies to the species as a whole. But there is also a short-term pattern peculiar to the individual."

"Experience?"

"Yes. But experience alone is not enough. It must be re-inforced with the unreasoning power of an instinct if it is to be fully effective. Suggestion is the factor which can give a learned lesson the power of an instinct. Rightly or wrongly it is a major survival factor of Homo Sapiens."

"I still don't see . . ." said Penny.

"Hell!" said Bannerman, "do I have to spell it out for you? Suggestion is also the cohesive force of civilisation. No

highly organised culture can exist without it. Our civilization abused it as a survival factor. In a thousand, million ways ; by dogma, advertising, education, politics, brainwashing, and similar invasions of the soul, the power of suggestion was exploited. Suggestion breeds suggestibility. When you reach saturation level the mind loses its discernment and will follow the greatest stimuli or none at all."

" My God !" said Penny. " The beats ?"

" Yes, the beats and the mobsters and the rest of our sorry crew. All products of our super civilization which flourished on the rape of the mind. We sold our souls for soap powder and party politics. Now we are as extinct as Tyrannosaurus Rex."

" Then this is the end ?" asked Penny quietly.

" Not quite. Foresyte discovered a strain of man from birth less susceptible to suggestion than most. Misfits, most of them ; men who never quite absorbed the old ideas and sympathies. These are the few who could carry on the race. The trouble is to find them, to convince them of their task, and to provide them with the means to carry on. Even finding them is difficult enough."

" Pandi wasn't difficult to find," said Penny.

" No." Bannerman shot him a swift glance of curiosity. " But then it wasn't Pandi we were looking for."

" But Pandi . . ."

" Pandi, nothing ! He's a psych man too, playing out a little game of Foresyte's. He was our field man sent out to set up a psychological stress pattern. It's a carefully calculated trap. Pandi sets up an apparently equal and opposite force to that applied to the psych teams. We manoeuvre our suspects into the centre and see which way they break. Some break left and some break right. A few fall in-between. These are the few we are looking for."

" I see . . ." said Penny, and the rest of the sentence fell beneath the force of realization.

Bannerman smiled. " Yes, David, you fell in between. You resisted Pandi's considerable semantic skill and you also threw off the obligations and sympathies we had loaded on your back. Despite everything we did you still went your own sweet way. But hell ! I thought you'd never break."

He returned moodily to the window and resumed his watch. " What a heck of a way to run a war," he said at last.

Later the truck came back, with Pandi at the wheel. Beside him was Foresyte, white and sick. Hell had passed its fingers over the camp at Whetstone in the night and there were three-hundred dead and twenty-two insane. And this was but the prelude to the end.

The three men stood talking in the depths of the room, greying like fledgling ghosts as the winter sun drew round behind the blind stone walls. Bannerman the stage manager, Pandi the fabulous actor, and Foresyte, the author of incredible pantomines, had staged their last production. They had one last task—to set Penny with the others of his kind, somewhere on an island long prepared against the darker age ahead.

Penny walked alone out into the wan sunlight which fell so thin and impotent against the morning frost. He was looking for the slight star of the space station high-arced in the vacuum overhead. But nothing left of man disfigured the high heavens, and presently he wept.

Colin Kapp.

THE LITERARY LINE-UP

If you have already read part one of Philip K. Dick's *Time Out Of Joint* (and many readers prefer to read serials as they are published) and think that you have a good idea just how the plot is going to develop—stand by for some big surprises next month. We *said* this was one of the best novels in recent years. . .

There will be a long Sector General story, too. "O'Mara's Orphan" by James White flashes back to the building of the hospital and how O'Mara became chief psychologist.

We missed the ratings on Nos. 84 which were :

1. Visitor at Large - - - - - - James White
2. Calling Mr. Francis - - - - - - Colin Kapp
3. Idiot Stick - - - - - - - Damon Knight
4. The Gentle Approach - - - - Kenneth Bulmer
5. Sands Our Abode - - - - - Francis G. Rayer
6. Strange Menhir - - - - - - - - E. Henley

Ratings on No. 85 were :

1. The Patient Dark (Part One) - - Kenneth Bulmer
2. Sprinkler System - - - - - - E. R. James
3. Round Trip - - - - - - - John Brunner
4. Malnutrition - - - - - - Robert Silverberg
5. Joker's Trick - - - - - - - Lan Wright

Robert Silverberg (still with us despite increased literary activities elsewhere) presents you with a neat problem. Given an alien world where the inhabitants have formed an empathic attachment to their human visitors—how break the umbilical cord without causing their racial death?

APPROPRIATION

by ROBERT SILVERBERG

08-11-2306
FROM : Dep't of Extraterrestrial Affairs, Rio
TO : Col. Samuel Naysmith, Terran Cultural and Military Mission, Algenib (Gamma Pegasi) IX (" Morpeth ")
SUBJECT : Budget reduction

You are advised that the budget for the year 2306-07, effective 01-12-2306, authorizes a reduction of 11 billion credits in extraterrestrial aid. In compliance, we are forced to discontinue many current outposts.

This includes the Gamma Pegasi IX mission. Begin terminal activities at once. The outpost is to be discontinued and all Terran personnel returned to Earth for reassignment 01-12-2306.

Rawlins
D. E. A., Rio

The weather on Morpeth was fine that day. The skies were cloudless and steely-blue ; the humidity was low, after a week of rain. Colonel Naysmith was glad to see the last of the rain. That old spear-wound in his calf was long healed, but it still gave him an unpleasant twinge in bad weather. He had acquired it on Nelden IV, thirteen years ago.

Naysmith didn't mind the twinges. What he minded was the way the Morpessin winced along with him in perfect empathy —sometimes even clutching their left shins when a particularly hot shaft of pain rippled through his leg. But today, the weather was fine, and so was Naysmith's mood. And the little aliens, mirroring his mood, were playful and happy.

Naysmith was a tall, stocky man, mostly muscle. He was conducting a class in marksmanship in the forest a mile outside the Terran base. With him were six Morpessin, slim beings no higher than his midsection, learning how to use Terran needleguns.

" The principle's the same as in your bloguns," Naysmith said. " The tube propels a lethal instrument, a poisoned dart. But instead of using wind power, you let your propulsive charge do the work."

He scanned the drab green foliage and spotted a moving object—a quill-studded hedgehog-like thing. Calmly he aimed the needlegun and squeezed off a shot. The deadly needle covered three hundred feet with a singing hum and thwacked into the hedgehog's side. Naysmith grinned. He had always been a good hand with a needlegun.

The aliens were grinning too, and exclaiming about the accuracy of his shot—and at such a distance, too !

He led them through the brush to the fallen hedgehog. " See ? Aim, squeeze, and there it is ! But of course the aiming technique is entirely different from what you're used to. It—"

He stopped. A new animal had entered the glade—a big four-legged beast, its glossy red hide covered with black stripes, its snout pendulous and quivering. There was plenty of meat on the beast. Naysmith lifted his gun, zeroing in on the big dull eye.

Before he could squeeze the trigger one of the Morpessin came bounding up against his arm, deflecting the shot. Naysmith whirled in surprise.

" We do not kill animals that large," the alien told him with a trace of reproach. " It—is—unpleasant for us to do so."

Naysmith chewed uneasily on his lip. Every day of his four months on Morpeth he had learned something new about the natives. " You mean you can sense the minds of animals too?"

" Only large ones. The *srussa* "—he pointed to the dead hedgehog—" has only the shadow of a mind. He dies quickly without causing us pain. But a big animal—"

Naysmith nodded. " I'm sorry. I didn't understand."

He felt a bead of sweat trickling down his forehead and flicked it away. He tried to keep the tension from mounting in him, because he knew that the aliens would detect his mood immediately.

There were twenty-seven Earthmen on Morpeth. They were Naysmith's responsibility. If Naysmith had known what he was getting into, he would have thought twice about setting up the base on this planet.

" Okay," he said. " Let's aim for that tree over there and try to hit the big yellow knot."

He waited for some protest, but none came. Evidently the Morpessin were not in rapport with the souls of trees, at any rate. They raised their guns and fired. Their aim was surprisingly good, for beginners.

At 1540 hours Naysmith called a halt to the practice session, sent the aliens on their way, and returned to the Terran encampment. The Morpessin had made considerable progress in handling the guns. They learned fast.

Naysmith got back to home base just about 1600. Eight or nine of his men were sitting in front of the Communications shack. They were passing a slip of paper back and forth to each other, and each man who got it would read it, shake his head, mutter something, and pass it on. They snapped to attention when they saw Naysmith coming.

" At ease," he told them. But for once there was no slackening of tension. Brewster, the Communications man, handed the slip of paper to Naysmith.

" Sir this was received ten minutes ago. From Rio."

Naysmith scanned the message quickly. *Budget Reduction . . . discontinue outposts . . . terminal activities . . . returned to Earth for reassignment.* The phrases leaped at his eyes like so many tiny daggers.

" Sir, what are we going to do ? We can't leave Morpeth !" The words came from Bryant, the socioanalyst, who had

been the first to recognize the unique nature of the native psychology.

Naysmith stared squarely at him. "We're not going to leave."

"But the appropriation—" began his aide, Major Thompson.

"Appropriation be damned," Naysmith said. "We don't have any choice. We're staying here. Brewster, go make subradio contact with Earth. I'll send them a message right away."

08-11-2306
FROM : Col. Samuel Naysmith, Morpeth
TO : N. J. Rawlins, Department of Extraterrestrial Affairs, Rio de Janeiro, S. A., Earth.
SUBJECT : Modification of orders.

We are in receipt of your message informing us of reduction in Department appropriation, causing suspension of activities on many worlds currently occupied by Terran outposts.

Be advised herewith that discontinuing the outposts on Morpeth will have severe deleterious effects on the native population. In view of unique conditions obtaining here, we request reconsideration of status. If at all possible revise previous instructions and rescind order suspending activities here. Disruption of present relationship will have severe consequences.

We will await immediate reply. Naysmith

08-11-2306
FROM : Rawlins, Rio
TO : Naysmith, Morpeth

Alteration of present plans will be costly and unwise. The schedule is drawn and Morpeth is among the worlds to be abandoned, since it has low strategic value.

Our previous communication remains in effect. Your outpost is discontinued as of 01-12-2306 and all personnel are to return to Earth.

Rawlins

08-11-2306
FROM : Naysmith, Morpeth
TO : Rawlins, Rio

You don't seem to get the point. Abandoning Morpeth now will work psychological hardship on the natives. Strategic

value or no strategic value, if we pull out now the traumatic effect on the natives is going to be tremendous.

Can't you find some other world you can discontinue instead? We need time to work ourselves out of this fix without hurting the aliens here.

Naysmith

09-11-2306
FROM : Rawlins, Rio
TO : Naysmith, Morpeth

You've been in the Corps long enough to know better than to ask for special privilege, Colonel. The budget has to be trimmed somewhere and you people will have to fall in line. That's all there is to it.

Suspension order is still in effect as of 01-12-2306. Cut out the crybaby stuff and start terminal operations. And no more subradio bulletins. This correspondence is getting expensive. We have to watch our budget these days.

Rawlins

Naysmith held a meeting of his inner command in the afternoon : Major Thompson, Bryant, Engelhardt the linguistics man, and Donovan of Planning. It was easier to confer with a small group than with all twenty-seven men. Besides, contact with the natives had to proceed pretty much as usual. It was important not to let the Morpessin suspect that there was trouble.

Donovan ran his wiry fingers through coarse reddish hair and groaned, "Dammit, can't you make Rawlins *understand*?"

Naysmith shook his head. " Try arguing with a stone. He doesn't care what kind of a fix we're in ; he's only worried about his budget. Nothing we can say is going to make him change his mind."

" You think he'd listen to reason," growled Thompson bitterly.

" No," Naysmith said. " That's the trouble. Reason won't work. Logically our predicament doesn't make any sense at all. And so we can't communicate it to the people back home." He looked at Bryant. " Bryant, tell us just exactly what would happen if we pulled out of Morpeth in December as ordered ?"

The socioanalyst's bleak expression deepened. " The results would be catastrophic. A wave of mass suicides,

probably. And a national neurosis that would persist for generations. If we left now we'd wreck everything we've accomplished so far, and then some."

" High-level empathy," Engelhardt muttered. " Emotional bonds. Parent fixations. Who could have imagined such a thing ?"

" It's happened," Naysmith said. " These aliens are like little children—children with high emotional sensitivity. They pick up our every mood. They're depressed when we're depressed, happy when we're happy."

" And they'll kill themselves if we leave them now," Engelhardt said. " We'll be *abandoning* them. The shock will be too much for their delicate little souls." He spat out a vivid Germanic curse. The linguistics expert did not care to spend the rest of his life on Morpeth.

" Are we sure," Thompson asked hesitantly, " that our conclusion is valid ? Maybe our departure won't be as big a blow to them as we think it will be."

" It will be," Bryant said flatly. " The Morpessin have developed—in four months—a tremendous bond with us, of a kind we don't even understand. It's some kind of mental linkage."

" Mental rubbish !" Engelhardt bellowed.

Naysmith shot the linguist a warning glance. Bryant went on, " We can't see the bond, and we can't measure it and we can't understand it. But that doesn't mean it isn't there. These aliens have fixed onto us—"

" Like leeches," Engelhardt said.

" Yes. like leeches," the socioanalyst agreed. " The situation's a rough one. We've been called back to Earth—but can we just rip ourselves away from the Morpessin, knowing what will happen if we do ?"

" We're prisoners of our own consciences," Thompson murmured hollowly.

" Maybe so," Bryant said. " As I see it we're bound to stay here until we've broken this fixation."

" Suppose we never succeed ?" Engelhardt demanded.

Bryant shrugged. " Look in your own heart, friend. Do you want to hurt the Morpessin ?"

The burly linguistics man looked momentarily nonplussed. He knotted his thick fingers together and glared at Bryant. " They—they are harmless people. No—how can I say that ? Harmless ? *Pfah* ! But on the surface they are weak and kind and gentle, and they need our help. But—but—"

" Would *you* want to leave here next month, knowing the psychic damage your departure will cause ?"

Engelhardt scowled. " I have no answer for that."

He looked down at the packed soil floor of the tent. Naysmith said, " We're not getting anywhere. There may not be anywhere to get. But I'm open for suggestions relevant to our getting out of here. We'll meet again at this time tomorrow. Dismissed."

After they had gone, Naysmith remained alone in his tent to think this thing through. They had landed on Morpeth four months ago, after a preliminary scouting ship had verified the existence of intelligent humanoid life there. The scout had not made contact with the natives. That job was left to Naysmith and his outfit.

First contact was easy. Engelhardt had the language solved quickly, most humanoid peoples tend to organize their linguistic processes around a few building-blocks that hold constant throughout the universe, and once those blocks are mastered it is not difficult to comprehend the general outlines of a language, with detailed understanding coming soon after. Welcomed by the aliens, the Earthmen set up a small outpost.

Morpeth was an Earthlike world in most respects : the gravity was a bit weaker, the atmosphere a bit thinner, the vegetation a bit sparser, but the planet was close enough to Earthnorm so that the men felt no discomfort. The people were humanoid, pint-sized, with saucer-like eyes that rotated, tarsierwise, independent of each other. It made for a startling effect in conversation.

And the aliens were friendly.

They flocked around the Earthmen, eager to learn. Because of their small size and their almost comic gravity of deportment, the Earthmen found themselves taking a paternal attitude toward the aliens. As the weeks passed, the Morpessin became familiar friends to many of the Earthmen.

And the Earthmen noticed a curious thing—the complexity and variety of the alien emotions. The little beings went from gloom to joy in moments ; they were sensitive, easily upset, forever apologizing or expecting apologies for fancied slights.

It was not until the third month that Naysmith and his men realized they had a problem of the first magnitude. The early inklings had come when Naysmith had casually said, in regard to the building of a power plant on a nearby river, " Naturally,

we'll help you all we can. But we want you to understand the principle fully yourselves, so that after we've left Morpeth—"

The look on the alien's face made him stop.

"You—will leave us?" the alien asked in a whisper.

Naysmith frowned. "Eventually, yes. Perhaps other Earthmen will come. We're not going to be here forever, you know."

The little alien showed signs of inner agitation. "We did not know—we thought you were here for always. We have misunderstood—"

The incident ended there. But it was the beginning. And subsequent conversations made it quite clear that the Morpessin would take it hard if the Earthmen left.

Naysmith had expected to spend eighteen months on Morpeth. He had hoped that by then he would have succeeded in weaning the Morpessin away from their dependent attitude.

But now he didn't have eighteen months. Thanks to some economy-minded bureaucrat hundreds of light-years away on Earth, he had about three weeks to break the news to the aliens.

They were going to take it badly. Colonel Naysmith was a deeply worried man.

Naysmith spent a sleepless night, tossing and turning restlessly. Toward dawn he reached his decision. He tapped out an announcement, left his tent, and posted the half-page of sternly formal prose on the camp bulletin board.

OFFICIAL DIRECTIVE

10-11-2306

Pursuant to instructions received from the Department of Extraterrestrial Affairs, we are to discontinue operations on Morpeth by the end of the month.

These instructions are to be observed in full. Terminal activities shall begin immediately. Current alien-education projects are to be brought to an end with dispatch, and any scientific observation programmes must be concluded within ten days whether or not such conclusion will yield successful results.

The aliens are to be informed of our departure. The psychological effects of this will undoubtedly be severe, but we have no alternative. We are under the authority of the Department of Extraterrestrial Affairs and the Department's orders must be obeyed no matter what the consequences.

Colonel Naysmith, C.O.

Naysmith stood inside his tent, watching the men approach the bulletin board. Their expressions were worth observing. They displayed emotions ranging from anger and incredulity to something not far from mutiny.

Bryant, the socioanalyst, went to see Naysmith immediately after reading the notice, in great emotional distress.

" Sir, that announcement—how can you do something like that ?"

" Like what ?"

" You know what I mean, sir. Like abandoning Morpeth. Breaking away from the Morpessin."

Naysmith's face tightened with strain. " I've received my orders from Earth, Lieutenant Bryant. That's sufficient motive."

" *Orders* !" Bryant spat the word out as if it were a curse. " Begging your pardon sir, but what would you do if you got orders from Earth to cut your own throat ?"

" I would assume that Earth had good reason for such an order," Naysmith said in a cold voice. " I would in all likelihood obey the order."

" Sir, yesterday you thought we were going to stay here—you said we'd refuse to leave Morpeth no matter what Earth ordered."

" I've considered the matter more carefully, Mister Bryant. My conclusions are out there on the board."

" So everything we've done here is going to be ruined," Bryant burst out. " We'll leave the aliens in a state of psychic shock—let them think we've betrayed them !"

" It's a nasty situation, Bryant. I agree one hundred percent with you. I'm with you all the way. But we have to obey orders, whether we like those orders or not."

Bryant's military training reluctantly asserted itself. He calmed visibly ; his mouth curved down in a bitter scowl, and he nodded. " Yes, sir. But we'll never be able to forgive ourselves for this. None of us."

" Perhaps not," Naysmith said. " Perhaps we'll carry the scars of this decision with us for the rest of our lives. But we're leaving next month."

Later that day Naysmith rode into the Morpessin village to see the local chiefs. He brought with him Bryant, Donovan, and the agricultural adviser, Ridley.

The aliens were aware that something had come up. The

council of seven that ruled the entire region was waiting in grave array for the Earthmen as they entered the village, and there was no gaiety on the wizened little alien faces now. Good empaths that they were, they mirrored the inner doubts and distress of the Earthmen.

Naysmith said bluntly, once they were in the councilroom, " We have received orders to leave Morpeth."

" No !" The shocked outcry came from two of the Morpessin councillors at once. Juskilon, the headman, said in a quavering voice, " Leave us now ? After all you have done —the help you have given us—"

" We've been ordered to leave Morpeth very soon. It grieves us greatly. Our work here is incomplete."

" But if you leave us," protested one of the natives, " we will wither and die like vines cut loose from the ground !"

Naysmith rose suddenly from the council table. He looked at his three men, each of them dark-faced and brooding over the harsh necessity of the thing they were being forced to do. The Colonel said, " I'm going to leave now and return to the base. Donovan—Bryant—Ridley—you three talk to our friends here, explain exactly why we have to leave. Beg their forgiveness. Try to make them understand. I can't stay here any more."

He spun stiffly on his heel and walked out. It was not wise for him to remain at the meeting. If he wanted the departure from Morpeth to be anything but a total tragedy, he knew, he would have to avoid prolonged contact with any of the aliens from here until departure date.

During the two weeks that remained before departure, terminal activities proceeded with remarkable smoothness. The power-plant project was hastened along to a quick and successful finish. Jarvis wrapped up his astronomical observations, and Engelhardt accelerated his linguistics project of taping samples of Morpessin speech and of compiling a dictionary.

Similarly, every other man co-operated to assure a smooth break on the first of December. But they were unhappy. They hated what they were being forced to do. They hated the Rio office for its mulish creditwise policy. They hated Naysmith for having given in so easily and acceded to the curtailment order.

But mostly, they hated themselves.

Strangely, the Morpessin were taking the departure much more calmly than any of the Earthmen expected.

" I don't understand it," Bryant said. " They've changed so in the last few weeks—ever since we had that meeting with them at the village council-hall. They don't act as if their universe will come to an end the day we leave, not any more. They seem —well, resigned to our leaving."

" You're wrong," Naysmith said evenly. " They dread the day we go. They're being polite, trying to keep us from worrying about what will happen to them after we leave."

Bryant's frown deepened. " I guess that's it, sir." He balled his fist and swatted the air. " What a lousy mess !"

" Orders are orders," Naysmith reminded him grimly.

01-12-2306
FROM : Col. Samuel Naysmith, Morpeth
TO : N. J. Rawlins, Department of Extraterrestrial Affairs, Rio de Janeiro, S. A., Earth
SUBJECT : Termination of base

This is official notification that pursuant to your order of 08-11-2306 the mission on this planet has been discontinued effective today. All personnel are being removed from this planet at 1400 hours, 01-12-2306, Galactic Standard Reckoning.

Pursuant to orders this mission is returning to Earth for reassignment. Expected date of arrival is 22-12-2306. Terminal activities were carried out without complications.

Naysmith

01-12-2306
FROM : Department of Extraterrestrial Affairs, Rio
TO : Colonel Samuel Naysmith, Terran Cultural and Military Mission, Algenib (Gamma Pegasi) IX (" Morpeth ")
SUBJECT : Acknowledgement of withdrawal notice.

Your subradio message received here and noted. Full report on your Morpeth activities should be ready for submission in standard form upon arrival.

We will be interested in discussing this case in detail when you arrive.

Rawlins

It was the first of December, 2306, by the standard calendar that every Earthman lived by. It was some other day in the Morpessin calendar—a spring day, with the rainy season a

month in the past and the fertile buds of the new growth-time pushing up out of the soil. It was the day of departure.

Naysmith stood in the middle of the denuded area that had been his camp. Here tents had stood ; there, trees had been hewn. It was all gone, now. The ship stood alone, a shining bronzed awl poised for flight in the middle of its blast area. There was nothing left but goodbyes.

Naysmith had not spoken to any of the aliens during the entire terminating period. He had left that job up to his deputies, and he himself had remained in camp, supervising the finishing-up job. Now a knot of sad, soulful-eyed Morpessin had gathered in a big ring around the bare clearing.

Ten of Naysmith's men were at work setting up a baling-wire fence around the area. It was Bryant's idea ; he was afraid that the Morpessin might come flocking to immolate themselves in the flames of the spaceship's tail rockets. So ten downcast Earthmen were putting up a fence.

It had been a difficult two weeks for Naysmith. Not once during that time had he spoken to any of his men except to give an order or to answer a question. The self-imposed solitude had been uncomfortable but necessary, if he had any hope of a successful departure.

The men were bitter. Some of their resentment was directed at Naysmith, and he knew his popularity among them was at an all-time low.

It mattered to him, but not enough to affect his judgment. He knew what had to be done.

The time was 1345 ; fifteen minutes to blastoff. He spotted the council-chiefs standing in a morose little clump and jogged over to them. Seven pairs of dish-shaped eyes swivelled up to look at him. The little aliens looked like pets about to be evicted by their master.

Naysmith said gravely, " Now we must leave."

An alien replied, " We will miss you. You have helped us beyond all measure."

" We are greatly grieved to be compelled to leave you this way," Naysmith said.

" We grieve for you. We share your sadness and our hearts are melted by your plight," said the alien.

Naysmith decided it was not safe to prolong the interchange. He was satisfied with what he had heard.

" Farewell," he said.

" Farewell."

The aliens were doleful, bleak-faced. But Naysmith rejoiced. There would be no mass suicides when the Earthmen departed.

He entered the ship. Peering through the port, he saw hordes of the aliens ringing the fence, staring mournfully at their departing mentors. At precisely 1400 hours, the blastoff signal rang loud and clear.

The Earth ship rose high on a towering pillar of flame, arched into the heavens, and converted to hyperdrive. Within instants, Morpeth was unimaginably distant.

Colonel Naysmith heaved a sigh of relief.

" It worked out better than I thought it would," Naysmith said. It was mid-afternoon of the 22nd of December ; his ship had docked at Rioport that morning, smack on schedule, and he was in the office of Director Rawlins of the Department of Extraterrestrial Affairs. " For a while," Naysmith went on, " I thought we were going to have real trouble making a breakaway."

Rawlins nodded. He was a thin windburned man with knobby cheekbones and searching blue eyes. " So did I. Those first subradiograms you sent us, refusing to leave Morpeth—"

Naysmith reddened. " At the time I sent those messages it looked like we were stuck there. Then I stopped to think the thing through, and I figured out what line we had to take."

Rawlins glanced at the bulky report lying on his desk. Naysmith had compiled it during the three-week homeward voyage. " You don't know how relieved I felt when I got your final message announcing withdrawal. We had almost given your whole group up as lost."

" We almost were. *Almost.*" Naysmith grinned cheerfully at his superior officer. " When we found out what the story was, that the natives had formed this—this—well, umbilical relation toward us, I started worrying. But it wasn't until the night after I got your message that I realized what the real situation was. The aliens were capitalizing on the fact that we had consciences. I figured we could do the same thing."

Rawlins frowned. " I don't quite follow that, Colonel."

" I'll try to make it clearer. The aliens were weak people. They didn't want us to leave. So they let us know subtly that if we did leave, the shock would be more than they could bear. In other words, they were self-pitiers. If we pulled out, they

would sit down and moan, ' Poor deserted us ! Poor deserted us !' until they died of sheer self-sympathy.

" But there's another side to that coin, Director Rawlins. Being so sensitive, the Morpessin had a high empathy quotient: they suffered our sufferings, as the phrase goes. I have an old wound in my leg, and during the rainy season it kicked up a little. The Morpessin somehow picked up my pain, felt it themselves. Well, I did the same thing about this departure business, I posted a directive telling my men we were going to pull out. My men are human beings ; they have consciences. They were aware of what was going to happen to the Morpessin when we left, and it worried them. They felt guilty, unhappy, upset."

" And the Morpessins picked that up just the way they did the pain in your leg ?"

" They sure did ! They knew how my men were suffering, and they knew why. Their empathy came into play. They began to suffer because my men were suffering because the aliens were going to suffer when we left."

" But how did *you* stand in all this ?"

" Far to the distance," Naysmith said. " I was the only one who really knew what was going on. If the Morpessin had much contact with me, they'd realize that *I* wasn't suffering. I didn't feel the remorse that my men did. And they would have suspected."

" And naturally you couldn't let your men know what was going on, either."

Naysmith nodded in agreement. " Exactly—I had to keep my men thinking we were all a bunch of sadistic ogres. So long as my men felt guilty about leaving, everything was okay. The Morpessin knew how they were suffering. And instead of pitying themselves, they began pitying *us*." Naysmith chuckled. " That psychic bond, or whatever it was, dissolved in a hurry. The Morpessins were quite happy to see us get going, after two weeks of empathy with our guilt and worry."

" You think you made a successful departure ?"

" I'm sure of it," Naysmith said. " But I have a hunch we'll have to let Morpeth develop on its own for a while ; they aren't ready to be helped. They're parasites, looking for somebody to attach themselves to."

" Like you and your men."

" Yes. Like us."

" Your men all know now what you did ?"

" Of course. I told them the moment we were in hyperspace. They had a tremendous grudge built up against me, you see. I was the fall guy, kowtowing to official authority and ruthlessly sacrificing the poor little Morpessin in the name of the departmental budget."

An odd smile appeared on Rawlins' bony face. He chuckled curiously, looked down at the papers on his desk, then up at Naysmith.

He said, " I owe you a little apology on the appropriation business, Colonel. Our budget wasn't cut."

For an instant it didn't register with Naysmith. Then his jaws moved slowly, and words came out. " Budget—not cut ? *Huh* ?"

Rawlins was smiling. " Suppose, Colonel, you were faced by a problem that simply can't be solved by any legitimate method, but yet *must* be solved. What do you do ?"

" I don't follow."

" Yes you do, really. You know what to do, because you did it on Morpeth."

" You mean—fight dirty ?"

" If you can't win by the rules, and it's absolutely necessary that you win, Colonel, you win any way you can. In your case it involved deliberately concealing your true intentions from your men. In my case it necessitated dreaming up a mythical budget cut."

Naysmith still did not understand. " But—why do that ?"

Rawlins said, " I was getting a weekly report from you people out on Morpeth, Colonel. And each week I got a little more worried about you. There was an appropriation, but it wasn't a financial one. *You* were getting appropriated, the whole bunch of you. The aliens were taking advantage of your sympathy. They were capitalizing on their own helplessness. Another few months on that planet, Colonel, and you would have been so hopelessly enmeshed with those people that you could never get away. We don't like to lose twenty-seven of our best men, you see. So I decided to cut off the appropriation that was going on out there."

" You sent word to me that we were to terminate immediately—"

" Naturally. And I blamed it on the General Assembly. What would have happened if I sent you an order to pack up and go on to some other planet ? You would have argued

that your work on Morpeth was too important. We might have yattered back and forth over the subwaves for a year, and by then it would have been too late."

"So you set up a straw man for me. You let me blame the whole thing on those filthy so-and-sos who cut the budget, and that didn't leave me a leg to stand on. I *had* to work out some way of breaking loose from Morpeth within the time limit."

Rawlins smiled and stubbed out his cigarette. "We had faith in you, Colonel. We knew you weren't the kind of man who would refuse an order, no matter how damfool the order sounded. I'll admit we were shaken up by your first few messages, but they were understandable. It wasn't till you realized that you *had* to get off Morpeth that you figured a way to do it."

Naysmith rose. "I think I'd better go explain this to my men, sir. They're getting up a petition to the U.N. about the budget-cutting business."

"You'd better talk them out of it. Otherwise I may have some very complicated explaining to do myself," Rawlins said. "I'll read through your final report on Morpeth immediately. And there'll be a new assignment for you and your men after the usual furlough."

"Thank you, sir."

Naysmith saluted and started to leave. As he reached the door, Rawlins said, "Oh—Colonel. That petition your men are drafting—don't destroy it. Just file it away somewhere."

"Sir?"

Rawlins shrugged unhappily. "There are a few reactionaries in the General Assembly who seem to think Earth's spread a little too thin through the galaxy. They're agitating for a cut in our budget—a *real* cut. I don't think they'll get anywhere, but we may need the petition someday."

Or you may need to work the same trick twice, Naysmith thought. But he did not voice the thought. He simply saluted again, left, and went down the hall to the gravshaft. There were a lot of things he had to explain to his men.

Robert Silverberg

A new author makes his debut with a different approach to the immortality theme—two men with eternity before them searching for anancie nt Earth-type antidote for restlessness.

PEACE ON EARTH

by MICHAEL BARRINGTON

The *Trans-Galactos* came to a dead stop half a light year from the G-star. Within, its two occupants debated.

They were human, in the sense that they were the descendants of what had been human two million years ago, and they still retained the bipedal, bimanual form. But they were lean and tall, with elongated faces, unhappy eyes and high brows which slanted sharply back. Their lank hair hung flaxen below their shoulders.

Most important, they were immortal.

At the moment, they were both feeling very uncertain of themselves. Fra-Thala held the Book in his hand as if it were a measure of reassurance. Bulik stared miserably at the G-star, Sol.

" We've got to try," Fra-Thala said. " We've got to. We can't let anything go by without trying."

" Try what ? We don't even know what to look for."

" At least we can land and—look. Just look. It might be there—whatever it is."

Bulik continued to gaze at the star. He did not move.

" Go-on," Fra-Thala told him. " Why don't you engage the ship's drive ? It's the third planet."

" I don't know," Bulik said slowly, almost whispering. " I think—I'm *scared*."

They were both silent for several seconds. They stared with strange fascination at Sol, a matter-of-fact, insignificant sun. Then Fra-Thala blanked out the viewport and the spell was lessened. The comforting walls of the ship were all about them.

" So you feel it too," he said.

" Fear ?"

" Yes." Bulik's loosely jointed form paced the room. " But why ?" he demanded. " We weren't afraid when we looked for it on StulekBal. We weren't afraid when someone told us it was in the Lesser Magellanic, or when we asked the Iddians for it. Why are we afraid now ?"

Fra-Thala held up the black-bound Book. " Perhaps because this says Earth is where it really is."

" Why should that scare us ?"

The other shrugged.

After a while, Bulik reluctantly made some computations. He looked again at Sol. Then he engaged the drive and the *Trans-Galactos* flashed to the region of the outermost planet, converted to interplanetary drive, and moved more slowly towards the Earth. Soon the ship was flooded with sunlight, which became gentle and diffused as they sank into the atmosphere of the third world, settling on to a vast arid plain.

The two men studied the landscape through the viewports. For five hundred years they had searched the galaxy until they had become gaunt with obsession. They had taken to gazing around them in a haunted way, as if the desperation of their quest had driven them into a misery and despair from which no force in the universe could rescue them.

And they were quite alone in their search. The *Trans-Galactos* was probably the only interstellar ship in the galaxy : they had built it themselves from ancient specifications. The rest of humanity lived placidly, aimlessly and immortally deep within the atmospheres of the settled planets. They had lost all meaning to life.

It was a meaning to life that Bulik and Fra-Thala sought. On the other side of the galaxy they had acquired the Book, written long ago by one of the greatest of all men, Aber Juillard, and real hope had for the first time presented itself. They did not know how long ago the book had been written, for it was made from imperishable material, but they knew it

was about as old as the oldest man living, for among his other accomplishments, Juillard had also given mankind immortality. It had taken many years of research to discover that he had refused the gift himself and was no longer available.

Juillard had also foreseen that one day men would lose something from their lives, and had written of it in the Book. He had not stated exactly what it would be, and the passages referring to it were obtuse, but it would seem to be something of immeasurable value. Fra-Thala had become filled with excitement when he read the sentence : " Those who wish to regain that precious thing that mankind loses should visit the planet Earth, the birthplace of the species, and there they shall find it."

Now he stared at the endless plain and felt hope sink again. He saw soft yellow dust strewn from here to the horizon, seeped in light from the low sun. The scene had such a delicate beauty as made him think of the meadows of his native world. Meadows of dust . . .

But nowhere was there any clue that might lead them to the unn amed object of their search.

A deep, moaning sigh escaped from Bulik. " It's no use !" he cried. " What is there here ? Nothing. It's a dead world Nothing lives. Nothing." He took the book from his companion and read once again from the place they had marked. " This tells us nothing. He doesn't even mention anything specific. Perhaps it doesn't mean anything specific. Perhaps he was just being poetic."

" Even we can't say what we're looking for," Fra-Thala pointed out. " All we have is this terrible feeling inside us ; this feeling of something missing. The passage in the book seems to be the same sort of thing."

He turned away from the viewport. The only label he could give it, he thought, was a desire for peace. Peace of mind, peace from the constant biting knowledge of something *gone.* There were centuries of life behind him : ahead was an eternity of trash, meaningless acts, futile existence.

Unless he could find this peace, this value that had vanished from the human mind.

" Well," he said, " let's look."

" Look ? Where ?" Bulik gestured to the waste outside the ship. " You can see everything from here."

" The Book—"

" The Book !" Bulik had lost all faith. He prowled the room, head bent, his cloak falling limply about him. " We've done what the Book said. We have come to Earth. And where are we ? What have we found ? Nothing. Juillard was being fanciful, I tell you !"

" No. He was too great for that. He had the finest understanding of human mentality than any creature before or since—he produced immortality, remember, on a purely mental level by adjusting the cortical control of physiological processes. I can't believe that he would write those words without good reason."

He glanced again at the viewport. " You're right, there's nothing in this desert. But the Earth's a fair-sized planet and it was well populated once. Let's move over the horizon until we find something."

Bulik frowned, then moved to the control panel.

After a few moments the ship lifted twenty feet from the surface and travelled in the direction of the sun. As an afterthought he activated the detector to show the presence of refined metals.

This last action paid off. They travelled about a hundred miles without any change in the ochre desert before the indicator flashed. Bulik put the ship into a slow circle, seeking the object of response.

It was a thick, flat cylindrical building, standing solidly on the desert floor and throwing off the cold light of afternoon as it must have done for countless thousands of years ; it was so long since there had been living things on Sol's third planet that the air itself had become unbreathable.

" It could be anything," Bulik said, " but let's get out there and see. I hope there's a way in."

There was. Fra-Thala walked nearly the full circumference, the boots of his light-weight atmosphere suit scuffing up dust, before he found it : a simple sliding door, its bearings cunningly protected against abrasion and time. The building gave the impression of having been built to endure.

When they got inside and switched on their torches, Bulik snorted with disappointment. " Why, it's just a bookvault. I've seen them a hundred times."

They wandered around for several minutes, without real interest. It was common practice for a community to leave samples and records of its culture when it abandoned a region

and there was no reason to suppose there was anything special about this one, or about the society it represented.

Or was there? Fra-Thala awoke to the situation with a start. Since Earth was the original planet, the vault might contain traces of the most primeval periods, back before spaceflight. That in itself was rather unremarkable, but the Book . . .

With slightly more alertness, he took up a few of the volumes from their cases. He was pleased to find that although some of the languages and symbolisms were very ancient he was acquainted with most of them. An immortal has time to learn most things sooner or later. But after a little study his interest waned again. There was nothing he would not have expected, or that he might not have encountered on a thousand worlds.

Bulik was ambling moodily throughout the extent of the vault. Now he came up to Fra-Thala to see what he was doing. "Do you think—do you think it *might* be here after all? Should we examine every one of these books, because the secret of it might be written here somewhere?" He seemed pathetically dismayed.

"No, I don't think so. Juillard wouldn't be so tedious, I'm sure of that. This is just an ordinary culture vault."

Bulik considered, nodded and looked relieved. "I suppose you're right. Let's get out of here. It makes me feel irritable. I could do with some sleep."

Fra-Thala remembered that he also had not slept for a considerable time. Carelessly replacing the books in their cases he followed his companion, stumbling towards the block of pale-gold light that came from the open door.

Outside, he found that he had forgotten to replace one book. Mildly curious, he looked at the obsolescent script imprinted on the cover: *The Thousand and One Nights.* He flicked through it, stopped at a page and read:

". . . *and he and the King and his father-in-law and their family resided in the most happy state and in the practice of good deeds, until they were visited by the terminator of delights, and the separator of companions.*'

He stared at the sentence blankly for a short time, and shuddered. Life, to an immortal, was most carefully guarded, and the loss of it was looked on with the greatest horror. The very suggestion of death would make a man look frantically about him for a source of danger.

Letting the book drop from his hand into the dust, he trudged wearily towards the *Trans-Galactos*

A few hours later, Fra-Thala awoke to the realisation that uneasiness had not left him since they had made the stop far beyond Pluto. It had stayed with him through the sleeping period, producing restless dreams.

He had dreamed that he was back on his home world before he had met Bulik and their twin frustrations had flared into life on contact. In the dream, it was as if he could see millions of years ahead of time. The people of the town where he was born had stared at him with stupified eyes, stultified, gaping, grey with decay because they had lived for so long without the thing that would make them completely human. On waking he felt no horror but lay with his eyes closed, going over the details of the nightmare and letting his detached intellect extract the full sense from it. It would not take millions of years, he thought ; it would only take thousands. It might have begun already.

It might happen to him, and to Bulik, unless they found the answer in time. He tried to examine his own mind, to find out what it was that was worrying him about this planet : but the question receded further and further from him as he approached it.

He rose from the sleeping couch, rinsed his face with ice-cold water and combed out his long hair where he had been lying on it. Usually when he woke he ate, but now food seemed like sacrilege to him. Night had come and gone, and it was early morning. He looked at the small G-star which was pouring its perpetual energy over the landscape.

Fra-Thala shook his head. The terrible idea came to him that perhaps humanity was already too far gone to retrieve the precious item it had lost, like a corpse already on the road to decomposition. Perhaps he and Bulik would wander for centuries about the galaxy, never achieving their purpose, until the purpose became submerged in an inertia of mindless meandering.

With that thought in his head he seated himself at the control panels, his glazed eyes falling automatically on the multitude of meters. He blinked apathetically—then stood, suddenly vitalised with intelligence.

" Bulik ! Here !"

Bulik continued to sleep. Impatiently he strode over to the couch and shook him roughly awake, dragged him over to the panels. Bulik shielded his eyes as the sharp sunlight fell on them.

" Look !" Fra-Thala said, pointing. " The detector shows another energy converter on the planet. It must be another ship !"

Adjusting his eyes to the light, Bulik read the meter. There could be no mistake : nothing had the same composition of materials as an energy converter. " From the look of it," he stated, " the converter has ceased functioning as an energy source. Probably an abandoned ship, or a derelict. It must have been here all the time and we never thought to check."

" Shall we go and see it ?"

Bulik shrugged, " If you like. I don't suppose there'll be much to learn."

He moved the *Trans-Galactos* a few miles for a triangulation fix and located the converter at a place somewhere around what was currently midday. As he geared the drive for the trans-planetary hop, the yellow waste swayed beneath them and Sol rose swiftly into the sky. But the living quarters of the ship, with their own independent gravitation, were a closed system : it was as if the Earth moved and the room stayed still. Not even the sound of the air rushing over the exterior surface penetrated its calm. It might have been a staid dwelling on some garden world.

The sight of the other ship, when they found it, verified the opinion that it had lain motionless for a considerable time. Dust, blown by vagrant thin winds, had piled up on one side of it : the entire length of the vessel had bellied a few feet into the desert.

They went outside to inspect the ship, and Fra-Thala ran his gloved hand along the smooth metal. It was impossible to tell by appearance whether it had been built ten years ago or ten thousand, since the materials were of the permanent kind produced by molecular impaction : its position, however, and the fact that its power source had died, suggested an age of several millenia.

Bulik tried to open the airlock. It did not respond. " As I thought," he said. " The ship's completely without power." As he applied the emergency power pack to the external leads, the lock door slid aside with a whine, and they were able to

step inside a vessel patterned largely after their own. Fra-Thala began to feel a kinship with the owners, for the chances were that they came from his section of the galaxy.

They opened the door to the living quarters. Yellow light streamed through dusty viewports into a room in perfect condition, and without trace of an occupant.

Several minutes still elapsed before Fra-Thala reached the quite obvious conclusion that this ship had landed long after the Earth's population had vanished, and then the owner had vanished also. The realisation came as a shock. " Bulik !" Fra-Thala fought against a great sense of panic. " Bulik ! What happened to the man ?"

For a moment Bulik was unable to answer. His face was colourless. " There couldn't have been . . . *danger*."

" But where *is* he ?"

Bulik shook his head.

Fra-Thala felt his nagging undercurrent of fear mount to a momentary climax of desperation. It was like being told that the spacecraft in which he was travelling was caught in a magnetic storm which would not fail to sweep it into a white-hot star. He peered about him for some clue.

He found one thing. A book, bound in black. A copy of Juillard's Book.

Amazed he snatched it up. It was identical to his own, the same edition. " So there are others," he murmured. " Others with the same yearning. They obtained the Book—and they too followed its instructions."

" Were others," corrected Bulik. " They're not here any more."

" But what happened ? Perhaps they found it." Like a dynamo rising to its full speed he suddenly became full of excitement. " Perhaps they found what they wanted—the secret of life !"

" Then why did they desert the ship ?"

He fingered the imperishable volume, not knowing the answer. Eventually he said : " Who knows what the secret of life brings ? Perhaps they no longer needed the ship."

His companion was not impressed. " That sounds rather fanciful. A more prosaic theory would suit me better."

Fra-Thala was prepared to admit that he was allowing his imagination free play. The bewilderment of their discoveries had released him into uninhibited dreams : for never before

had they met companions in their search, apart from the sentiments expressed by the long-dead Aber Juillard.

And never before, in mankind's thinly-spread but super-cautious society, had they heard of men who disappeared without trace. An immortal life was far too precious a thing to take chances with.

" Listen," he urged, " there's a lead here—there's something to learn. There must be—the circumstances are too unusual. We must follow it up !"

" How ?" Bulik had been searching the chamber for further information. He found none, except that there were two sleeping couches, indicating that the expedition consisted of a corresponding number. " This ship was abandoned ages ago."

Fra-Thala shook his head. " You can always manage to dampen my enthusiasm, Bulik."

A few minutes later they gave up and decided to go back to their own vessel. Fra-Thala still retained a feeling of unrest : and as they crossed the few yards between ships he lifted his head and surveyed the land. Through the thin material of his atmosphere suit he felt an insubstantial cold wind press against him, a wind that had swept the full length of the plain, down from those hills in the distance, and perhaps halfway across the face of the planet. Something in him stirred.

" You know," he said, " we haven't really carried out Juillard's instructions. Not yet."

" What do you mean ?"

" Juillard said to go to Earth. Well, we've landed here, that's all. We've spent about twenty minutes in all outside our ship, and the rest of the time we've cowered inside it. We should get to know what it feels like to be on Earth, walk about on the ground, explore by foot."

He could see Bulik hesitating. " All right," the man admitted at last, " perhaps you've got something. Perhaps that is what he meant. Let's do it."

For both of them the act took a tremendous effort of will. Drawing strength from one another, they set out towards the hills which undulated on the horizon. Fra-Thala felt strangely light-headed and he sensed that his companion did too. After half a mile he turned to look back at the two starships, and his fear mounted again, without reason, like an animal bolting from a sudden noise. Yet he did not question what he hoped to find in the hills : he had a childlike compulsion to obey

Juillard, and this was how he thought it should be done. Nervously they advanced together over the dead, brightly shining expanse.

By mid-afternoon they had gained the hills. There was not much difference : the ground still consisted of yellow dust lain on solid bedrock, but in places the stone was revealed and glittered as if showing its strength. Fra-Thala walked away up a gently rising slope and swivelled his eyes about. His attention was easily caught by the one item of interest.

His lungs snatched air in nausea and shock some seconds before the logical part of his mind recognised the object. It was the remains of a skeleton.

He ran over to it, frantically motioning Bulik to follow. " The poor fellow ! What can have happened ? He—he *died*."

He uttered the word in a tone of utter horror. He had never seen a deceased human before.

The man's atmosphere suit was lying some yards away. For some reason which Fra-Thala could not possibly guess at, he had seen fit to crawl out of it before dying—indeed, he could hardly have hoped to survive the act. Bulik inspected the suit : the perishable components had disintegrated, and the rest couldn't tell him much. " Well," he said, " now we know why the ship's empty."

Fra-Thala pointed out slowly : " Our ship's empty, now."

In an instant he became terribly afraid. " Let's get back," he urged. " Quick. Now !"

Bulik did not need to voice his agreement. Striding rapidly, they fled in the direction of the *Trans-Galactos*. For no particular reason Fra-Thala glanced at his airmeter. He froze.

" Bulik . . . how's your air ?"

His companion checked his own supply, and moaned in fright. " Nearly gone !"

" Mine, too . . ." Incredulously, he glared at the meter. He couldn't begin to understand. " How could we have been so careless ! I never heard of anyone being so stupid . . ."

His voice trailed off, paralysed by the magnitude of the disaster. He thought of running for it, but simultaneously there came the realisation that they just would not reach the ship in time.

He squatted down in the dust, shaking his head. He could not believe that their forgetting to renew the air supply was

pure accident ; men didn't make mistakes like that any more than they forgot to breathe. Men never took chances on their lives.

Yet he was to die. Soon.

His brain refused the carry the meditation any further. Alarmed that he could accept the idea of death, he tried to shake himself into action, made a tremendous effort to grasp the situation entirely . . .

And then he knew why he was going to die.

Looking up, he saw that Bulik had found the answer as well. Wordlessly they communicated their twin discoveries.

What was it that in primeval times had given form and significance to a human being's existence ? A thing is worthwhile only because of the possibility of its removal : the factor was death. Fra-Thala remembered the story he had taken from the book-vault, and realised that the King and his family could not have lived happily had they been immortal.

" Bulik," he said in surprise, " so that was why we were afraid. Death is what we fear most of all—and death is what we were seeking. Juillard knew of the consequences of never-ending life. So he left a way out for those who are sensitive enough to desire it. That's why we were careless about our air supply : it was a subconscious suggestion implanted along with the immortality equations."

The other nodded. Then they both hunched silently on the ground, breathing the oxygen remaining in their packs. Fra-Thala died shortly afterwards, but the intervening few seconds of his life were charged with meaning.

Michael Barrington

Events in Man's journey into space seem to happen faster than we can record them. This article, however, will give you clues to some of the news headlines you can expect to see within the next two years.

OUTWARD BOUND

6. Project Mercury

by Kenneth Johns

About two years from now a man will ride a three-stage Atlas rocket into space and orbit Earth 125 miles high at 18,000 miles per hour. His mission will be complete only when he has re-entered the Earth's atmosphere and safely parachuted down into the Gulf of Mexico.

This is the first aim of project Mercury, the official American attack on space by manned ships—but Project Mercury also covers the design and use of spaceships to land men on the Moon's surface and ensure the first moonmen's safe return.

Spearheaded by Project Mercury, the attack on space is intensifying. Phase I, the use of military missiles to orbit satellites and fire space probes is already almost over. Soon the specially designed rockets with their design emphasis mainly for use in space will be in action.

The four-stage, solid fuel Scout rocket will then be orbiting its 150-lb cargo whilst the three-stage Vegas and Centaurs, using modified Atlas rockets as the first stage, will be capable of putting 5,800 and 8,500-lb payloads into orbits.

Atlas has a thrust of half a million pounds and Phase III will see the use of one million-lb Rocketdyne Division motors now being tested and one and a half million-lb thrust motors now in the design stage, as part of Project Nova.

Four of the latter motors in one rocket will launch 100 tons into orbit around Earth and this is enough to make manned space stations and a Moon base practical propositions from the thrust point of view.

All these are National Aeronautics and Space Administration projects and NASA now covers all space research except for that on missiles, Discoverer satellites and nuclear rockets.

Project Mercury is the means by which NASA is gaining experience on the problems of ' man-into-space ' and the first steps leading to an orbiting spaceman are expected to cost $250 millions in the next few years. Dr. Glennan, head of NASA has given three reasons for the top priority of Project Mercury.

The Americans intend to be in the forefront of space research, realising that if they aren't, then other nations will achieve manned spaceflight first with all the economic and political implications of American failure. Coupled with this is the prestige value of space flight now that the Russians are so obviously aiming outwards. Also important is the need for 98% efficient space vehicles. As men will be risking their lives in these spaceships of the future, one might well ask why should not the efficiency be 100% ; but 98% is a far higher efficiency than anything achieved with presentday rockets and, whilst it means intensive study and research into the mechanical problems of the machines, represents the closest man dare prophesy of his equipment to the perfect value he would like.

The firing of the monkeys, Able and Baker, 300 miles up and their successful return was part of Project Mercury. There were also associated experiments carried on in the rocket, such as the fertilising of sea urchin eggs under free-fall conditions to find out whether or not the initial organisation of an embryo depends upon the differences in density of different parts of the embryo.

The well publicised recovery of the monkeys on 28th May, 1959 was the first such American success. A missile carried them from Cape Canaveral over Cuba, Haiti, Puerto Rico and Antigua at up to 10,000 miles per hour, to discharge the nose load to parachute into the Atlantic. The monkeys experienced

15-G on takeoff and 38-G on re-entry. But they survived and only the increases in their pulses and breathing rates showed the strain to which they were subjected.

Fourteen channels telemetered their reactions and it was when this radio contact cut off that the waiting staff knew that the nose cone had hit the atmosphere and its hot trail of ionised gases had cut communication. At the present stage of development in space travel, you can't talk down a ship during re-entry.

Other animals will be fired in rockets, then orbited and recovered. Men will ride in missile rockets before the first spaceman goes into orbit. We talk so glibly of 'men riding rockets into space' but just what are these men like ? Who are they ? Just what sort of man is being selected to be the pioneer spaceman in the USA ?

Out of the USA's teeming population of 175 millions, seven men are being trained for Project Mercury. One of them will be the first into space ; the others will follow whether he is successful or not.

When Project Mercury was first planned, IBM machines sorted punched cards to pick out the likeliest military pilots. 110 men had the training and at least 1500 flying hours experience. These were reduced to 69 by sorting out those with the best health, intelligence and size.

Of the 69, 56 volunteered.

The list was then pruned to 32 and these men went to the Lovelace Clinic in Albuquerque and from thence to the Aero Medical Labs at the Wright Patterson Air Force base to undergo two weeks of the most intensive physical and mental testing that doctors and US Air Force scientists could devise.

They had to withstand the isolation of a dark, soundproof room for three hours, be able to think whilst pounded with intense high frequency and mixed sounds, roasted at 130°F for two hours, vibrated, spun, whirled in a centrifuge at 12-G's at different angles and kept for one hour in a high altitude chamber at a pressure equivalent to twelve miles up.

They had to be more than just physically and psychologically fit. Using psychological tests based on the experiences of individuals who had successfully survived World War II shipwrecks and the brain washing of Korean P.O.W. camps, only those who were mature enough to function perfectly as members of a team and as isolated individuals were selected.

Seven were picked ; seven men with I.Q.'s between 135 and 147—well up in the genius range.

These seven men, aged from 32 to 37, are young enough to be alert but old enough to have the experience and qualifications to venture into space—and to survive.

The youngest is 32 years old Air Force Captain Leroy Jr. with 2,300 flying hours and experience in the Marines, the Army and the Air Force. He is a graduate of the Air Force Institute of Technology and was a test pilot at Edwards Air Force Base.

The eldest is 37 years old Marine Lieutenant Colonel John Glenn Jr., with 5,000 flying hours. The most experienced of the seven, he was a World War II fighter-bomber pilot.

Navy Lieutenant Malcolm Carpenter is a 33 year old graduate in aeronautical engineering with 2,800 flying hours and Korean War experience. He attended the Navy Test Pilot School, the General Line School and the Air Intelligence School.

The other two Navy representatives are Lieutenant Commanders Walter Schirra Jr., 36, and Alan Shepard Jr., 35, both graduates of the U.S.N. Academy and test pilots with over 3,000 flying hours. Schirra was also in the Korean War and a carrier flight instructor whilst Shephard was aircraft readiness officer for the Atlantic Fleet and has carried out high altitude research.

The seventh was 33 years old Air Force Captain Virgil Grisson with 3,200 hours flying time, a graduate in mechanical engineering and experience as a test pilot and the Korean War and in aeronautical engineering at the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base.

They are all less than 5 feet eleven inches in height and all are married.

Typical of their team spirit, they have agreed that the cash from all sales of their stories, no matter who is first into space, will be shared equally amongst themselves.

Now begins their training. They and their families are based at Langley Air Force Base, Virginia, but they face two years mental and physical toughening in all parts of the world, in the air and under the sea.

Already they have passed through an underwater survival school at Norfolk Navy Base, ready for one hazard they'll meet

on their return to Earth. The very fact that there will be an intelligence able to act in mechanical surroundings in the returning capsule should enhance the chances of survival ; but if that intelligence doesn't know how to act underwater in order to secure its own life, then the whole trip becomes futile.

The volunteers are taking a tough engineering course at the Langley Research Centre while they help design and test each component of Project Mercury. At the same time they'll be taking time off from their studies—if you can term it time off—to ride the rocket railroads, fly supersonic jets and be carried by balloons in high altitude tests. They'll also be launched in capsules from Redstone missiles at 4,000 miles per hour—after the methods of release have been tested with animals.

From all this the picture emerges of what the regulation spaceman of the future is going to need as his educational background. Many eager youngsters are itching to get into space and their chances are going to increase as more and more is known about space and the tempo of the onslaught is stepped up. But space is a merciless taskmaster, and no one is going to remain alive out there without long training and superb physical fitness ; things which come from study and hard work and are not to be found in dance halls and billiard saloons.

The first test animals of Project Mercury, the valiant monkeys Able and Baker (mundane names that have secured for themselves a niche in the story of spaceflight) were in a 41 x 18 inch capsule. This was the payload of a 60-feet long IRBM Jupiter rocket. Eventually, monkeys will be put into orbit and then recovered by the developing re-entry techniques.

Then the main Project Mercury trial will take place—the full-dress rehearsal for the great day. One of these seven men will be strapped into the one ton, blunt-nosed cone perched atop a three-stage Atlas rocket set-up.

There will be the standard, dramatic and long drawn-out American count-down, followed by the 8-G acceleration as the assembly is shot into orbit. Relieved of the crushing load, the first spaceman will be the first man to feel a weightlessness that goes on and on and on. His every reaction will be telemetered back to Earth ; for the first spaceman will be a true guinea-pig, not a pilot. Alone except for what comradeship the radio may offer, he'll circle the Earth once in 90 minutes, and the ground

crew will decide how many circuits he can make before they bring him back.

Control of the capsule will be automatic or by radio signals so even a seriously injured man can be brought back.

The capsule will be automatically aligned so that its retro rockets point in the direction of motion. Then the retro rockets will be fired by a ground-control signal so that the capsule falls downwards, plunging to hit the Earth's atmosphere. Decelerating violently, it is possible that re-entry will blackout out the passenger. Certainly, the base of heat-resistant ceramic will glow white hot and vapourise to create a falling star watched anxiously by the thousand eyes of the waiting fleet.

Radar will track the capsule's fall and then a small tough parachute will slow the velocity still further until a large parachute can be ejected to drop the capsule at 30 feet per second into the sea. Flashing markers, a radio beacon and fluorescent dye will mark the site, calling the ships and planes to collect the first American back from space.

He will not be the last.

Kenneth Johns

When a species—or a civilisation—is threatened with extinction, something invariably turns up to preserve it. But not necessarily in its original form.

NEARLY EXTINCT

by ALAN BARCLAY

From the top of the bluff where he sat on an outcrop of rock, Harrison could see the runner at intervals between the trees. He came on with a smooth easy lope, following the old overgrown road. There was no sight or sound of the pursuers as yet. The steep flanks of the central massif rose abruptly from the plain only five miles away. Harrison could very easily guess what was in the other's mind—the hope that once among the steep-sided overgrown gullies that gouged into the plateau, it would be possible to escape the pursuers.

If he had been a betting man—or if there had been anyone to bet with—he would have bet against the runner. Very seldom did anyone escape the hunters, except of course those like himself who had rather special talents. Harrison was not particularly concerned about the outcome of this hunt. Perhaps he felt a little sympathy for the hunted man, but on the whole it would be better if this fellow were run down and captured. If he escaped, aliens would organise other hunts and come back again to this neighbourhood.

The runner passed directly below him, and leaped a stream. Harrison then saw that this was a woman ; a young, strong, long-legged tough-looking woman.

At this discovery he became no longer the onlooker ; a fierce surge of emotion passed through him. He got smoothly to his feet, head up, alert, like a big animal. Harrison was in fact an animal—an intelligent dangerous animal.

He looked back along the old trail, eyes fiercely staring, ears alert for sight or sound of the pursuers.

The young woman, who had been running strongly and smoothly before, was now panting and sweating. For the past half-hour she had been toiling up the first slopes towards the broken ground at the foot of the plateau. Behind her she could occasionally hear sounds of the chase—a tumbling stone, a branch breaking, or the queer high-pitched tones of one hunter calling to another. They were not far away. One part of her, the intelligent, civilised part knew that her end was certain. There was no question they would certainly overtake her soon. Despite this, she had not the slightest thought of giving in, or of waiting quietly till they caught up with her. She was alive at this moment only because she, and her parents before her, had been fighters. Among the human race only those with a furious, undefeatable, savage determination to fight, to run, to keep on living, had survived till now. She would keep on running, turning, twisting, biting and kicking till her last breath.

She turned into a narrow, steep-sided gully, and passed between two jutting rocks. Harrison was sitting on a log just beyond. She gave a gasp of surprise, and stopped short. A long-bladed knife appeared in her hand.

Harrison was tall, deep-chested and muscular. He wore a jacket of tanned leather, sleeveless, leather shorts, and a pair of well-made mocassins. His hair and beard were trimmed, and he was, by her standards at any rate, clean and tidy. He had a long heavy bladed knife, almost a short sword, hanging from his belt, and a big bow in his hand. The bow was a thoroughly modern weapon, skilfully made of wood, backed with steel.

He looked at her, unsmilingly. She looked back, mistrustfully, knife ready.

" Go that way," he told her, pointing. " Go over the ridge to the left hand of that peak, and down into the valley beyond it. Then follow the stream to the old houses. You understand me ?"

" Yes," she agreed. She was breathing in great gulps. " And what then ?"

" You will be safe. I'll meet you there."

She looked at him a moment longer, suspiciously, then without another word of thanks, without any enquiry as to how he would manage himself, she started off up the gully in the direction he had indicated.

He went down to the mouth of the gully, and began to follow the main track up the wide valley, walking without haste, listening over his shoulder as he went. He heard the dogs rustling and crashing through the undergrowth behind him. He took his machete and held it in his hand. He was not much worried about the dogs. There were two of them, big labradors with sleek black coats. He waited behind a tree until they came abreast of him, then stepped out and chopped the nearest across the neck. It died without a sound. The other cowered back. It was not a particularly aggressive beast, and the near sight and sound of man, its ancestors' friend and master, must have puzzled and distressed it.

" Shove off, Fido. Beat it," Harrison ordered.

The dog put its tail comically between its legs and slunk away.

In another minute the first of the pursuers came padding forward. He carried a gun over his shoulder, and was peering ahead, looking for the dogs. He saw Harrison. For a moment the two, human and alien, confronted each other. No change of expression appeared on the shiny black hairless skull of the other although if his emotional make-up corresponded in the least with human he must have suffered a heart-stopping spasm of fear at being faced with this most dangerous of all wild animals. Harrison, the wild animal, felt a fierce surge of joy. He struck heavily across the neck with his knife. The alien gave a high bleating cry before it died.

The other hunters heard the cry. Among the trees there were sharp, high-pitched noises and rustling of undergrowth. The aliens were very experienced at this game. For several generations now they had been organising hunting parties to run down the remnants of humanity.

Harrison knew that he dared not move up hill, for already marksmen would be covering the more exposed upper slopes. They would try to get around and behind him, and cut off his retreat.

He strung his bow and moved to another position, but although he had a quick shot at a black figure scuttling through the undergrowth, he did not make a hit.

Half an hour later he was aware that they were all around him, closing in. He raised his head and looked towards the high peak past which the young woman must now be climbing. Up there lay safety. But he wanted with every fibre of his ferocious soul to kill another of the hunters.

The top branches of a bush wavered suddenly. He pulled his bow to his ear. A crouching figure showed itself for an instant. The arrow shistled forward on its way. There was a thin, high scream.

Almost at once bullets began to hiss past him. Their sense of hearing was very acute ; they must know pretty well where he was now, and they were trying to smoke him out. Now the bullets were coming from all sides.

He lifted his eyes to the peak of the mountain, and looked towards it with fierce desire.

The woman, who had been hiding behind a tumble-down wall that had once been part of a house, came out into the open when she saw Harrison walking up the strip that had once been the village street.

He was walking comfortably, his bow over his shoulder, looking neither flustered nor exhausted. He looked at her appraisingly. Judged by the standards of a former age, she was not particularly attractive. She was tough, long-legged, as wild as a tree-cat.

" You come with," he said.

It was neither a question nor an order. It was a statement. They were two animals, male and female. That was all. She did not think of refusing. Perhaps if she had, he might have let her go. On the other hand, he might have beaten her till she submitted.

" How far ?" she asked.

" Five miles," he told her. " Over the next ridge."

He set off in the lead, and turned off the main road a little way above the village.

In three hours' time, walking and climbing steadily, they reached a narrow unexpected valley.

Harrison did not talk very much. He was probably not accustomed to making talk with strangers, so the woman got no warning that they were nearing their destination until another human figure appeared on the track ahead of them.

It was now nearly dusk, and the woman had some difficulty seeing the figure. The figure emerged out of the shadow

beneath a bush, quite unexpectedly. Harrison, however, gave no sign of surprise ; it was as if he had expected someone to be thereabouts. He called the figure Jim, and she saw that Jim was a boy of about twelve years old.

" You're late, Pop," the boy said. " We wuz worried."

" Had to do it the hard way," Harrison grunted. " I brought this woman along. The Frogs were after her."

The boy looked at her with frank interest.

" Gee, Pop," he said, " you got your hands full now all right. I can't wait to know what happens when Ma sees her . . . What's your name ?" he asked her.

" Madge," she said.

" Where you from ?"

" Down south, where the sea is," she said.

" Got any folks ?"

" Not now," she told him. " I lost them a couple of winters back."

" Let's get in," Harrison said. " I'm that hungry I could eat Frog. You got anything in the pot, Jim ?"

" Sure. I got a big hare this morning."

They went forward round the angle of a rock, and squeezed through a natural fissure. They were in a big cave. It was lighted in a subdued and flickering way by a number of lamps set in shelves of the rock. There were three fires burning, and what seemed to be a very large number of human figures moving about and casting shadows on the roof and walls.

After a moment of confusion Madge was able to see that there were in fact not so many people. There were two grown women, one about thirty-five and the other in her twenties. The latter was very obviously pregnant. There was a man also—an old man he seemed to be, with white hair, and a deformed arm. There were also a number of children. She thought there might be as many as ten.

Despite the number of people around, the place smelled clean. Better than the old cellar her parents had occupied, and there was a mouth-watering odour of cooking meat.

Harrison went over to the fire where the older woman was bending over a pot.

" This is Madge," he told her gruffly. " The Frogs were after her. I got her clear."

" Getting her clear was your bounden duty," the woman told him, "but bringing her along here isn't called for, Joe

Harrison. I suppose you expect me to put up with this one too? Well, I won't, see? Out she goes first thing tomorrow morning."

"Shut up and give us something to eat," Harrison growled. He seemed just for once a little uneasy, even sheepish.

The woman rather ungraciously produced a couple of wooden plates, and dumped portions of meat upon them.

Madge, who had eaten nothing much for two days, seized her meat and began to tear it with her teeth. The other woman smacked her hard.

"Stop that," she ordered. "Now just listen to me . . . lots of things have changed since the old days, and I suppose I must put up with what Harrison has in mind for you, just the same as I've put up with young Lucy over there, but there's still one or two thing haven't changed. This is my house, see? Maybe you'll live in it and have children in it, but it's still my home. And as long as it's mine, it's going to be kept clean and decent. No nastiness. No spitting on the floor. No throwing bones and stale meat into corners. We've sunk pretty low, what remains of us, but we're not so low as animals yet. Now eat your food clean and decent, not like a wild beast."

"That's right," Harrison added. "Liz here is my wife. She's the boss in this house."

After they had finished eating, Harrison got to his feet.

"Show her where to sleep, Ma," he ordered. He got up and turned on his heel and walked over to where the old man was sitting at one of the other fires.

Liz took Madge across to one of the shadowy corners in which there was a bed of canvas stretched on a wooden frame, and some blankets.

"You can have this tonight," she said. "And shake the rugs and tidy things up in the morning. There's a tank of water just outside, so you can wash if you want to, and the toilet's outside too, I want no nastiness inside this place. And listen to me young woman . . . I know very well what's in Joe Harrison's mind for you, and I think so do you. If you don't fancy it, you's best clear out tomorrow morning. If you stay I suppose I'll have to put up with it, but I don't want to know about it. Whatever goes on between you and Joe's got to go on outside of here. We've got a lot of children here, mine and Lucy's, and I want things decent and respectable."

" The Frogs nearly got me," the girl said sullenly. " I got no folks and no place to go."

" I know," the woman said, " stay if you want. This place is better than most, although a lot of funny things go on here—things you'd hardly believe, but one result is we live better than most. We've always got plenty food."

Things went on there that one could hardly believe. Madge did not notice anything extraordinary at first. She woke in the morning to the noise of children laughing and chattering. She got up. Liz was raking out the embers of the fire. Harrison and the boys were nowhere to be seen.

" Get yourself down to the river and clean yourself up," Liz ordered. " I'll give you breakfast after. Keep to the rocks on the way."

Outside Madge stood for a moment blinking in the brilliant morning sun. The river, which she had not seen in the dusk of yesterday evening, lay just below. Children were splashing about in the shallows, shouting and scooping up water and throwing it at each other. She started to walk down towards the shingle beach.

" Walk on the rocks," a voice said beside her. It was the boy Jim. " Them as walks must keep to the stones. We want no tracks made that the Frogs can see from the air."

She turned to speak to him, but the sun still dazzled her, and she did not see him. A moment later, however, she caught sight of him with the other children in the river. She went along the bank away from the children's pool and splashed into the river. The mountain stream was very cold and she did not stay in long. When she came back however, all the children had gone, all except two, about three years old, who were toddling up the rocks towards the cave. She had a vague impression that the children had vacated the pool very suddenly.

Liz and the young woman Lucy were seated outside the cave with a pile of hot baked cakes on a wooden platter.

Madge was beginning to have an impression that there was something very unusual about the place, and the people. The old man—he was about sixty, which was quite old for any human now that the remnants of the race were obliged to run and hide to keep alive—the old man came out of the cave and the children gathered round him chattering.

He picked up the platter of hot oat-cakes. He straightened himself up. Then all of a sudden, he wasn't there at all.

Nobody looked surprised. Nobody exclaimed or cried out. The children turned round and looked upward. Madge looked also. There was Dad, standing right on top of a pinnacle of rock about fifty yards away. He was placing the big platter down at his feet. Then he was back beside them.

" Go get your breakfast, Johnnie," Liz said.

Johnnie who was about seven, looked towards the pinnacle. The next instant he was on the pinnacle. Then he was back clutching a couple of cakes, one in each hand.

Three other children, a boy and two girls, fetched their breakfast in the same miraculous fashion. Nobody seemed to regard the proceedings as in any way out of the ordinary.

Then the old man fetched the platter to a nearer and lower mound and the toddlers of three and four were invited to perform the same trick.

When this trick had been performed a number of times by all the children, the platter was put among them and they helped themselves in the ordinary way. The women helped themselves likewise. Liz invited Madge to join in.

" These are oat-cakes," she explained. " There's some butter in that can and some honey."

Madge sat down beside them and began to eat.

" You're surprised at these goings-on, girl ?" Liz asked.

" I ain't seen the like before," she admitted. " My pa did uster tell me of wonderful things that happened in the old days, but those days was all machines, and I don't see no machines here."

" This isn't machines," Liz told her. " This is all new. It's done by the evolutionary urge."

" I don't reckon I understand that," Madge admitted.

" Neither do I," Liz admitted. " That's what Dad calls it. It's in him, and in Joe and the children. You know there used to be millions of us, don't you ?"

" 'Course I do. Cities full of people, moty-cars, airplanes. Before the Frogs came."

" That's right. I never did undertand why the Frogs should hate us like they do. But they killed all these cities full of people, and those of us who are left they hunt down."

" My Pa says there aren't many people left now. He says in another fifty years we'll be extinct."

" As like as not. There used to be several families in this district, but we're all that's left now."

" But what was this about an urge ?"

" It's not something I understand properly. Dad does. He knew quite a lot of folks when he was younger, talked to them, and got education off them. He and my Joe aren't easy folks to wipe out. They're tough fighting folks. Whenever I look at Joe, I just can't imagine him and his like being extinct. Seems to me they just wouldn't take to it. Dad says humanity's part of the Universe. It's come up all the way from being monkeys. There's been millions of us, living here on Earth and on Mars. We've done all sorts of things, wrote all sorts of books, and built all sorts of wonderful machines, and when the remainder of us thinks of being extinct altogether, something deep inside decides the idea's not to be tolerated, so we come up with a new trick. This space-jumpin' trick."

" Lots of other animals are extinct," Madge objected. " I expect they didn't fancy it much, but they're extinct just the same."

" They weren't conscious thinking animals like us. I doubt whether they knew enough to know they were going extinct. But Joe Harrison's not the sort to take kindly to the idea. I can imagine the thought of it sorta boils in his stomach."

" So you're able to do this new space-jump thing ?"

" Not me, dearie." Liz smiled. " Joe can—and Joe's dad —and the kids, most of them. And your kids, when you have some, no doubt."

" What happens if the Frogs find us ?"

" Dad and Joe and the kids can all escape," Liz said.

" But not us ?"

" Not us, girl . . ." Liz smiled.

Liz was a friendly soul. An hour later she asked Madge to come with her up on the hills.

" The boys go hunting," she explained. " They're okay but they're young. There needs to be someone around. You, if you're staying with us, you'd best take the job on. You're younger and faster on the foot than me. Come along now.

Liz put her head inside the cave.

" Jim," she cried, " Come along now, Jim. We're going up the hill."

" I'll meet you there, " Jim's voice replied. " I'll meet you by the pine trees."

Madge and Liz scrambled up the rocks onto the slope of the hill, and worked their way upward. Liz talked all the time. Up near the top, where it was heather and bushes and gorse, there was a clump of five trees. Young Jim walked out from among them as they approached.

" Where are the others, Jim ?" Liz asked anxiously.

" Further down. They're okay Ma," the boy said.

The three of them began walking along the slope of the hill, keeping fifty yards or so apart from each other. Two or three other children appeared on the slope also, but it was Jim who seemed to know the game best.

After they had walked for a mile, a hare got up in front of Madge and lolloped away at high speed. She wondered what she should have done. As she watched, the hare passed a bush. Jim appeared—materialised—right in the path of the animal. It swerved violently, but the boy flung himself on top of it. Madge saw his hand come down on its neck with a fast chopping motion.

" We do pretty well for food," Madge said, in very matter-of-fact tones. " I expect Joe will bring a deer tonight."

Harrison and Madge were out together in the dark. They had been out together before. When they had been out neither Liz nor anyone else asked questions nor made any comments, nor even looked a question. Harrison had used no compulsion to make her stay. She thought he might even have tolerated her leaving, but what else was there to do ? He was not a particularly gentle or amiable or friendly man. He talked very little. Indeed, it was evident he did not want another woman so much as more children. Children who could space-jump, as he called it. But she had never known much friendliness or affection, and with him she enjoyed a greater feeling of security than she had ever known in her life.

They walked along the ridge of the hills together. Not hand in hand. Harrison was not that sort. They just walked.

Down below them, in the next valley, Madge saw a small red glow. She caught Harrison by the wrist and pointed.

" It's a Frog hunting-party," he said. " Bound to happen. Since the day I got you away from them they must know there are some of us living in these hills." He stared down at the red glow. His face in the moonlight was fierce and ruthless.

" I'm going down there," he told her. " You go back and tell Dad. I can only jump where I can see, so don't expect me

back till daylight. You go and tell the family to get the kids ready to move in case . . ."

He took his machete from its sheath, and like a shadow was gone from her side.

The hunting party of Frogs were accustomed to dealing with humans who hid in difficult places, and ran when hunted, and turned and fought only as a last resort when brought to bay. They had no recent experience of unprovoked attacks by humans. Nevertheless, the human was a dangerous, cunning animal, and they took reasonable precautions. While four of the party slept, a fifth member remained on watch.

Harrison projected himself from the top of the ridge towards the glow of the fire, and landed silently as a leaf just beside it, and stood quite still. Listening acutely, heard the small movements made by the guard, and was after a moment able to make out the shiny jet-black outline of his skull. He chose his position with care, transferred himself to a point about a yard behind the Frog, and swung the heavy blade of his knife in a hissing circle, and cut neatly through the neck. There was a small thud as the body dropped.

There were four other Frogs round the fire, each curled up into a tight ball. Harrison looked carefully to see that all were asleep. Then he stepped over to the nearest, pulled the head up, and chopped him across the throat. The second stirred and began to wake as Harrison reached him, and let out a thin high scream before he was killed. As he was leaning over his third victim, he was aware of the last member of the party sitting up and fumbling for his gun. He made a swift slash at the Frog beside him, then focussed his eyes on a tree half a mile away and was gone like a breath.

He stayed there till daylight. The sole survivor of the hunting party remained on the alert, peering into the shadows. Several times he fired at movements in the bushes. At daylight he examined the bodies of his companions. Apparently there was some life left in one of these—the one that Harrison had dealt with last—for the survivor shot him through the head. There was very little compassion or brotherly-kindness among the Frogs.

Harrison watched the frog set off cautiously down the track towards the plains and the open country. If he had brought his bow he could probably have picked him off. He went back to the cave in three jumps, and picked up his bow.

" One of them got away," he said. " I'll try to stop him before he can spread the news."

But he never caught up with the Frog. Perhaps the latter had met another party with a vehicle ; perhaps he had the means with him to send for help. The humans knew very little about the technical devices and means of communication of the Frogs.

" So now they know there's humans in these parts," Harrison said, " and they know we're fighting humans, not just running and hiding humans." He said this mostly to his father.

" You think we should move ?"

" No." Harrison shook his head stubbornly. " For one thing, there's some who can't move as easy as others." He glanced at Lucy. " For another, these mountains are as good as any place. They're wild. There's food and game and hiding places. And we're going to need a breeding ground."

" When they get to know there's some of us here, with women, raising kids, they'll come after us with organised parties," his father insisted.

" Maybe. But I reckon the present-day lot of Frogs is different from the first arrivals. They're living their ordinary lives. They're settlers, not conquerors. And besides, they must be pretty sure now they've got us licked. I reckon if we stick to the rule not to attack them unless they come right into the hills and hunt us down, they'll maybe let us alone. Maybe they'll get the notion that these hills are a bit dangerous and make a habit of keeping clear."

It was very easy for Harrison, his father, and the boy Jim to keep a watch over the neighbourhood. They could move from hill-top to hill-top, keeping the valleys below under inspection.

Another hunting-party, larger than the first, appeared a fortnight later. Harrison let their dogs get on his scent, and took it in turn with his father, five miles at a time, to lay a trail right out of the district. Then they removed themselves completely.

" They must reckon we're a newer and sturdier breed of game, Dad," Harrison said to his father. " To keep running ahead of them steadily for a day and a night, without getting winded, then to vanish altogether."

" They may leave us alone now," Dad hoped.

But this did not happen.

Perhaps the Frogs were worried. More likely they were simply curious to discover how the humans were managing to escape. At any rate, they sent an aircraft over. Harrison and his people saw it while it was still to the eastward. He hurried to get the children under cover.

The humans called the thing an air-boat. It was a big craft, which floated quite slowly and silently over the tops of the hills. Little of the technical knowledge of their race remained now, and they had no idea how it was powered, they simply knew it was deadly to them. Later in the day it passed quite close, sliding over the tops of the trees. The upper hull was transparent, and they could see about a dozen black figures inside.

Harrison, peering from under a bush, ground his teeth.

" D'you reckon we could jump in among them up there ?" he asked the old man.

" I don't see why not," the old man considered.

The air-boat turned sharply, while it was still almost over-head.

" They've seen something," Harrison growled, " I reckon it's almost impossible for us to have all these kids running around by the river without making some tracks."

However, the boat hovered only for a couple of minutes, then slid rapidly and purposefully away southwards.

They watched it dwindle in the distance.

" The kids had better come out now, and get a run about before it's dark," Harrison suggested.

He went and fetched them from the cave, and in a moment they were down by the river, splashing and shouting as usual.

They were there for five minutes only, when young Jim let out a sharp shrill whistle.

" Dad !" he shouted, pointing.

Coming fast round the end of the hill, moving low along the river, was the air-boat.

" Get the kids, Jim," Harrison shouted.

Jim was down among them in the river almost as he spoke.

The boat glided nearer. The children were vanishing from the river, one after another, as Jim got near to them. They disappeared like specks from a cinema screen, flicking into invisibility. Harrison was on his feet, staring at the boat.

" They must have seen some signs of us. They've tricked us into the open. Now they know there's a family of us here, and they'll see there's something different about us." His teeth were bared in a grimace of hate and rage.

" Joe," he father said, " let's get up there and settle them."

Harrison stared at his father, then up at the boat, sweeping overhead.

" Think we can ?"

He took his machete from its scabbard.

" Right," he growled, " when I say the word . . ."

He turned his fierce, pitiless face upwards, and focussed on the boat.

" Now !" he said.

They were in the boat.

There were eight Frogs—eight panic-stricken black creatures, who did not understand what had happened. Harrison and the old man were chopping and hacking at arms and legs and heads. The air-boat was a long commodius vehicle, with transparent sides, luxurious lounging settees, and deep carpets. In a minute the two humans had reduced it to a charnel-house of blue-green blood and squeals and writhing bodies.

Harrison stopped, gasping and panting.

" You all right, Pa ?"

" Pretty well—one of the beasts got me across the leg with a knife, but I'm okay. Look, Joe, we gotta settle that fella."

At the forward end was the driver of the airboat, separated from the main saloon by a transparent partition. The driver was bent over a control panel, feverishly moving levers. They felt the ship surge and lurch forward and up.

Harrison hurled himself against the partition, which creaked but did not break.

The driver turned round to face them. He held a weapon of some sort in his hand.

" Careful, Joe," his father warned.

" We gotta get him. If he gets back he'll tell all about the kids and us space-jumping, and they'll be after us in force."

" Let's make a jump in beside him."

" Okay " Harrison grunted. " Together . . ."

But his father went in first, almost on top of the driver. Despite the latter's surprise at the apparent miracle of two men passing through a glassite panel, the Frog managed to pull the trigger of his gun. There was a soft plop. An instant later Harrison struck him hard across the back of his neck.

" That's the last," he said with satisfaction. He looked through into the saloon. The work had been well and thoroughly done there. Then he looked around him.

The air-boat had evidently been set on a course by the driver. It was speeding south, and climbing.

" We gotta get out of here," Harrison said urgently. " If we lose our landmarks, we'll have trouble getting back . . . Come on, Dad. There's the hill, over there. Let's move."

His father was leaning against the wall, hand pressed to his side.

" I feel awful bad," he said complainingly.

" You must get out of here," Harrison urged. " Set your eyes on the hill and make the jump. We'll tend to you soon as we're home."

The old man raised his eyes and look out blearily, almost tearfully.

" I don't reckon I can . . . I just don't have whatever it takes."

" You must, Dad. You must . . . Hell, if you're left here. You must get out of the boat . . ."

" Okay, son. I'll try."

" The hill over to the left there," Harrison told him urgently.

The old man focussed his eyes, made a visible effort to summon his will-power, and vanished.

Harrison, looking out towards the hill, saw his father's body materialise in mid-air about three hundred yards from the boat. It dropped, spinning and tumbling onto the rocks two thousand feet below.

Harrison made his jump a moment later.

The boat, with its cargo of corpses, floated swiftly on. It would be picked up later, perhaps a thousand miles away.

Harrison leaned against the rock outside the cave, and looked upwards and out across the valley.

" So we killed them all. We're safe for the moment."

" You sorry about your Dad ?" Liz asked him.

" I suppose," he conceded. " I ain't got much in the way of feelings inside me, though. Just a determination to live. Not to become extinct." He looked up at the stars.

" If we could discover which of these stars the Frogs come from," he mused, " we might learn to make a big jump, right into their home planet. Wouldn't that shake them ?"

" Heaven help the Frogs the day Joe Harrison and his breed get in among them," Liz commented.

" That's right." Harrison agreed, baring his teeth.

Alan Barclay

Dear John,

T. Haller's letter in your November issue is a good example of that tiresome assertion that the status quo is permanent—in this case obviously based on ignorance of the subject he wishes " relegated " to the world of fantasy. Such positive confidence is a little astonishing, as even our most brilliant intellects admit that mankind has no idea of the real meaning of the four fundamentals of the cosmos—time, space, matter and life. Every little spark of light generated by a new " scientific fact " only reveals more clearly the extent of our ignorance.

The assumption that the " whole lamentable mound of psi-power " stems from Dr. Rhine's experiments, is grossly wrong. " Sub-conscious " telepathy, at a minimum, can easily be proved by a few visits to any reputable medium—or even, if one is lucky, to a Gipsy fortune-teller. This is not selective telepathy, but it does prove, *as a fact*, that telepathic communication between human minds is possible.

The existence of the more spectacular phenomena—such as telekinesis and " materialisation "—has always been doubted, but some men had the courage to do their own investigating. Instead of seeking psychic origins in " boys papers," T. Haller should read Crookes, Barret and Lodge—the most outstanding scientific leaders of their day. Either these three were (a) deliberate liars, or (b) reporting facts. The nature of the evidence rules out any other verdict. I could name hundreds of eminent people who would have to be " relegated " to category (a) if the phenomena are non-existent.

Over many years I have proved to my own satisfaction that not only is telepathy a fact beyond doubt, but also that the " materialisation " of a physical substance outside the body of the medium must be admitted. If I am judged to be in category (a) I am happy to be among such a distinguished body of rascals.

It is interesting that John Campbell of *Astounding* is obviously convinced of the reality of at least some of the phenomena. I have not tested his Hieronymus machine but I

am prepared to believe that it " works "—at least for those with psi-power. It does not work for Campbell, and I feel sure it would not work for me—but it would almost certainly do so for my wife.

I agree with T. Haller that too many science fiction stories, especially in U.S.A., deal exclusively with the " psi " faculties —though they can be very interesting. Many of them belong in the fantasy class along with all stories dealing with " space-warp-FTL-drives," " matter-transmitters " and so forth, which are no more than faint possibilities of the future. We know that, in a very minor way, one element may be trans-muted into another, and some day it may become a common industrial process for all elements. But could matter ever be " transmitted ?" I wonder !

In the same way, I know that the human mind can—some-how—build up a physical structure, apparently " borrowed " from the medium's own substance, where none existed before— and from that to complete teleportation is not inconceivable. Several cases of teleportation have been reported but these are so rare that few investigators will accept them.

These phenomena must have existed since the birth of mankind and are the result of an unrecognised talent of the mind. I am *not* a spiritualist, but I do believe that all religions, in their beginnings, are founded on them, though I am agnostic regarding what power, if any, may be in control.

To T. Haller I recommend the little book by Sir Wm. Crookes —entitled I think, *Researches into Spiritualism*. Foyles may have copies—or any spiritualist centre with a library. His verdict may be that Crookes was a colossal liar. If on the other hand his mind is flexible enough to accept the fact that we have still a lot to learn, he may pursue the subject with advantage to himself.

God forbid, John, that you should fill the pages of *New Worlds* with stories based only on accepted " scientific facts." It would become very boring—and you are doing fine as it is.

Dr. W. A. Gibson,
Bathgate, Scotland

Dear John,

I really must take Mr. Haller to task regarding his comments on stories about psi phenomena. All he is doing is stating his own particular likes and dislikes, and in doing so he is attempting to impose his own limits upon others. You as an editor, and myself, as an author, know only too well that not every reader

likes every story that is published—such a Utopian idea would be wonderful from both our points of view—and the only solution is to try and strike a happy balance between story types and ideas in the hope of pleasing most of the people most of the time.

Mr. Haller is probably not alone in his dislike of psi stories, but I think you will agree that most serials and stories published in *New Worlds* which have a psi basis finish high in the popularity polls. Dan Morgan's *The Uninhibited*, Tucker's *Wild Talent*, my own *A Man Called Destiny*, all came top of the story ratings, and a closer inspection will show the same thing applies to novelettes. Outside *New Worlds* I need only mention Bester's *Tiger, Tiger* and Sturgeon's *More Than Human*. All these stories were big enough successes to show that most science fiction readers like and enjoy the oddities of psi exploration—many more than one would expect from Mr. Haller's insistance that it is necessary to " leave them to the boys' papers where they belong."

If you, as an editor, follow his advice to use only stories based on proven, undisputed facts, I would venture the opinion that *New Worlds* will quickly cease to be a science fiction magazine and will join the ranks of those other " boys' papers" which print stories based on adventures in modern aircraft or on modern ships or in modern armies. All this is done today, but it isn't science fiction and it never will be.

My own view of science fiction is that it should contain all things which are possible (not probable) whether they can be proved or not, provided that the story is good and is enjoyed by the majority.

Mr. Haller would seem to want to limit the possible expansion of Man's mind—a fact I can hardly believe. Yet denial of the possibility of psi means just that. Man's mind must inevitably expand, as a study of history will show very clearly, and I do not think that Mr. Haller is sufficiently prophetic to define exactly what future expansion may be. Certainly no man of the tenth or twelfth centuries would have been able to envisage the present scope and understanding which is ours today.

One of the most exciting things about science fiction is the fact that the mind of the author knows no boundaries, and the instant people like Mr. Haller try to impose their own boundaries on them, in that same instant the wonder of imagination vanishes from the scene.

I don't know a lot about physical science and I don't try to write stories which can be pulled apart by scientific ' experts,' but I can write stories which I, personally, enjoy, and I shall continue to do that in the hope of pleasing the majority of readers. The minority—and Mr. Haller—will just have to put up with it.

Lan Wright,
St. Albans, Herts.

Dear Mr. Carnell,

It is some time now since I last wrote to you, because I came to the conclusion that it was rather pointless to keep on listing eulogies of praise for the stories which you print. However, I feel (in common, I am sure with many other readers) that the letter from Mr. Haller in the November issue requires some comment.

Personally, I would love to have John W. Campbell's opinion on a letter such as this. I agree with Haller that such novels as *Prelude to Space* are excellent (although how *The Black Cloud* gets into the category, full as it is of pseudo-moralising mumbo-jumbo, I fail to see) but within a very short time such a work will be merely main-stream fiction.

There is an undoubted place for such works, but Haller should remember that when Jules Verne first wrote *From The Earth To The Moon* there seemed precious little chance of the idea being realised. Science fiction has constantly provided the avantgarde in new fields of speculation and without psi, time travel, etc., I believe it would ultimately stagnate.

While I am on the subject I would like to say that, having been a reader for ten years, I always considered it to be literature of originality—no-one wants another *Prelude To Space* nor another *More Than Human :* what we want are more novels which are as original as were these two when they first appeared. Presumably Mr. Haller would dismiss Ballard's " The Waiting Grounds " (incidentally one of the most mature and original stories you have ever published) as claptrap and I wouldn't expect him, for one moment, to take out an order for the forthcoming British edition of *Fantasy and Science Fiction*—it might contain too many adventurous and imaginative ideas for his liking, for, after all, he likes his science fiction safe and factual, doesn't he ?

Graham A. Riley
Bootle, Lancs.

Dear John,

The current *New Worlds* cover (No. 88) is *superb* ! I had been getting a little tired of the constant ' similarity with variations ' of the recent modernistic covers, but this one is a beautiful piece. Give Brian Lewis a bonus, or something, as well as a well-deserved pat on the back.

As for that letter in *Postmortem* from Mr. Haller, are you trying to give your hard-working authors apoplexy ? Myself, I'd say that most of my stories were of the ' hard science ' kind, but occasional excursions into the realms of what some people consider the impossible—time travel, telepathy, psionics and the like—make for variety. Furthermore, I like reading these borderline stories. After all, practically every gadget we use these days would have been considered magic at some time in the past, and not a very long way back, either.

While I wouldn't like to accuse Mr. Haller of being old-fashioned or of living in the past, I do think he has dug himself a little too firmly in the present.

James White,
Belfast, Northern Ireland
