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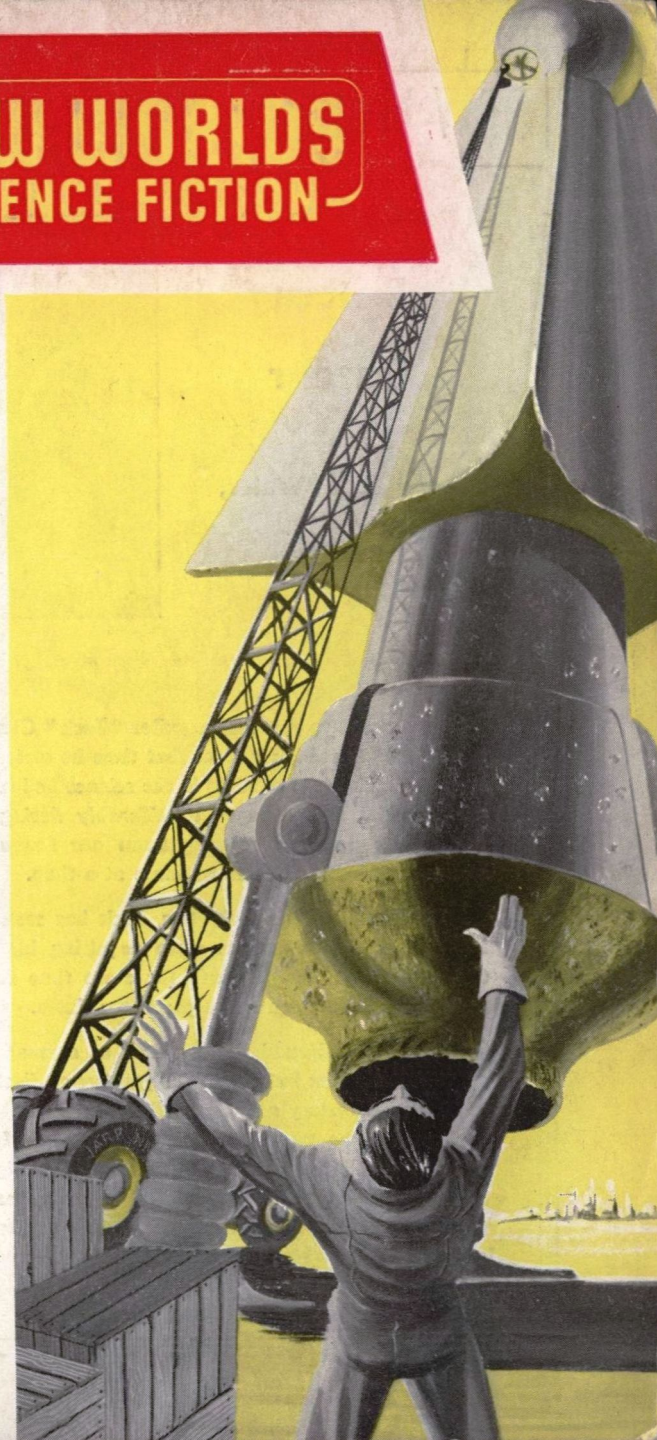

Bertram Chandler

New South Wales, Australia

It is almost two years since sailor "Jack" Chandler appeared in this *Profile* section and at that time he stated that his main snag was a shortage of ideas in the science fiction field. Happily that situation has changed considerably during the past year and stories are now arriving from our favourite Australian author in packets of three or more at a time.

Still "coasting" on freighters, Jack has seen a lot of New Zealand in recent months since acquiring his Chief Officer's ticket and says that he finds far more time for writing now than when he was on cargo-passenger liners.

"Lost Thing Found" is the first of several stories already on hand from him but one of his greatest attributes, particularly in his interplanetary and interstellar stories, is the continuity of backgrounds he works into separate stories. Inventor of the Mannschenn Drive and Ehrenhart faster-than-light drive (both in fiction) he is gradually building up an authentic picture of his own colonisation of the Rim Worlds at the fringe of our known Galaxy, where anything can happen—and usually does.

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CONTENTS

Editor : JOHN CARNELL

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TWO SHILLINGS AND SIXPENCE

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Credit . . .

Two American reviewers whose diagnoses I thoroughly enjoy are Damon Knight (*F and SF*) and P. Schuyler Miller (*Analog*) ; the former for his pungent literary comments, the latter for his absorbing articles on the wide background accorded science fiction against the general field of literature. When either or both of them review a book written by an English author and published in America my interest is even greater, in view of the competition our writers have to face outside British Commonwealth territory.

Damon Knight's annual summary of the American s-f market for 1959 has just been published, wherein he lists his ten best novels for the year. Some you may already have read, others may never appear in Britain, but for the record they are : *Vanguard From Alpha*, Brian W. Aldiss ; *After The Rain*, John Bowen ; *Seed Of Light*, Edmund Cooper ; *First To The Stars*, Rex Gordon ; *The Haunting Of Hill House*, Shirley Jackson ; *Wolfbane*, Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth ; *The Fourth 'R,'* George O. Smith ; *The Sirens Of Titan*, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.; and *The Outward Urge*, John Wyndham and Lucas Parkes. Of interest is the fact that five of them are by British writers—Aldiss, Bowen, Cooper, Gordon, and the Wyndham/Parkes duo.

Knight also lists Brian Aldiss's short story collection *No Time Like Tomorrow* (Signet) as one of the two best of the individual author collections for the year—the other being C. M. Kornbluth's *The Marching Morons* (Ballantine).

Meanwhile, in Schuy Miller's column this month he waxes enthusiastic over John Brunner's *The 100th Millenium*, one half of an Ace Double Novel, which he likens to some of the early Dunsany stories and to the poetic style of Arthur C. Clarke in his *Childhood's End* and *The City And The Stars*.

I am in complete accord (naturally) with both these reviewers over the works of the British writers they have included for commendation but their inclusion triggered off some illuminating thoughts on circumstances in International Copyright Law which apparently precludes credit lines appearing for the original publisher when books are published in a country other than that of their origin.

On the surface both Damon Knight and P. Schuyler Miller rightly credit the American publishers responsible for pro-

. . . Lines

ducing the titles in North America ; on some of those editions credit lines appear for the original British *book* publisher, where applicable. On neither American or British book editions does there ever appear a credit line for the original magazine publication of such stories which first appeared in print in magazine form. American Copyright Law apparently rules that first copyrighting must be credited on any subsequent publication ; in Britain it appears to be entirely a courtesy gesture if such credits appear in the book edition (and usually they do not). In particular *New Worlds Science Fiction* and *Science Fantasy* have suffered greatly over the years from this unintentional exclusion act.

New Worlds can claim original credit for two of Damon Knight's top ten. *Vanguard From Alpha* by Aldiss was specially written as a serial for this magazine and appeared under its original title of *Equator* nearly one year before it saw US publication. The title change only adding to the confusion.

Most interesting of all, however, are the circumstances surrounding the Wyndham/Parkes novel *The Outward Urge*, which doubtless you now have recognised as the four "Troon" novelettes which appeared in this magazine a year before any book publication. It is no trade secret that " Lucas Parkes " is an alter ego of John Wyndham's, but under his own name the novel—being so different from his earlier classics—found little or no immediate favour until announced as forthcoming in *New Worlds* (under his own name). Within a week of our announcement several American publishing houses were pressing for further information and reading copies and subsequently the series appeared in America in both magazine and book form and Wyndham's British book publisher decided that an alter ego might be worth trying out.

More interesting (and complex) factors lay behind the Aldiss collection *No Time Like Tomorrow* which appeared here from Faber and Faber under the title of *Space, Time And Nathaniel*. Six of the twelve stories originally appeared in one or another of the Nova magazines. But there is no mention of the fact anywhere.

Continued on page 124

This is author John Rackham's first published story in New Worlds *although he has appeared regularly in* Science Fantasy *for several years with a number of fine shorts. Herewith, then, an alien environment where crops mature in fifteen days and the gestation period of the local 'inhabitants' is only nine days!*

THE BRIGHT ONES

by JOHN RACKHAM

Ben Ford cut the motor, and the hauler coasted to a stop inside the compound. Sweat dried on his face as he climbed from the oven-heat of the cab into the furnace-glare of the alien sun, and stalked round to the end of his truck-train. There, on a pile of bulging potato sacks, the 'bright' gazed down at him with dull eyes.

"Down!" Ben said, not unkindly, gesturing his meaning. "I'm selling you into slavery, chum, but I doubt if you care, one way or the other." He eased his back away from his sticky shirt as he watched the bright blue man-thing scramble clumsily down. Five-foot-nothing, it was, and Ben towered over it, looking down broodingly. It looked up, made a facial contortion that he believed was meant to be a smile, and he smiled, with an effort, in return. Then he turned away. Try as he would, he couldn't come to like that slack-jawed grimace, showing the grey, saw-edged jawbones and thick tongue, nor the dead look in those slate-blue eyes under the domed brow-ridges.

" Come on," he said, gruffly, and stalked off to the commissariat-hut. The head storekeeper met him in the doorway, patting his visored sun-cap into place.

" Hello, Ben," he said, briskly. " Let's see what you've got, this time." He made small talk as he jabbed quick notes on to a pad. Ben watched closely, but said little. What was there to say ? The crop was always the same, always lush, and always on time. Every fifteen days. But Charlie Denby liked to talk.

" Never knew stuff to grow so fast," he chattered, counting the sacks. Ben curled a lip. These towney-bred technicians fancied the stuff just grew, and they could afford to marvel at the bumper crops, and the tremendous quantities of fertilizer mix he trucked out, every trip. But it was Ben Ford who had to spray, and scatter, and dig in, who had to calculate the exact quantities of potash, phosphates, nitrates and trace-elements needed. That was work, and more. It was something you had to be born with. You had to be a farmer.

" Count the ' bright," " he said, keeping his mind on business. Denby nodded.

" Double bonus," he said, making the all-important tick. He eyed the blue man-thing keenly. Like a man buying a pig, Ben thought. " Funny thing, them bright blue ones," Denby pushed his cap back to scratch his head. " One of these days, somebody is going to find out about them. I remember, when we first found this planet . . . I was with that first expedition, you know . . ." Ben did know. He stifled a groan, and squirmed away from his hot shirt again.

" Everybody thought the little dark blue things were intelligent, you know, because they look just like people. But they don't talk, don't use tools, don't wear clothes. Nothing to go on. We called them Indigos, because that's what colour they are, but the big-brains lost interest when they found the ruins of the City. Now it's nothing but dig and photograph, all the time. I bet the professors don't even know that there are bright blue ones, like this, as well as the little dark ones. But you mark my words, they'll have to do something about them, soon. I mean, are they people, or animals, or what ?"

" Who cares ?" Ben growled. " Look, while you're getting those trucks unloaded, I'm going to see if there are any letters for me. Saw the ship coming down. Should be sorted by now."

" Right !" Denby squared off his cap, then, " Here . . . just a minute. Knew there was something. The Director wants to see you."

" The Director ?" Ben stopped in mid-step and turned back. " Me ? Are you sure ? I mean, I'm not on the staff. Nothing to do with him. What would he want to see me for ?"

"I could guess," Denby grinned, with spite under the surface. " Half-an-hour after the ship lands, Hugh Miller sends for you. Sounds as if you're being sent back home, Ben." The malice in Denby's voice killed the hot retort on Ben's lips. He spun away and stalked across the hot compound to the offices on the far side, his thoughts in a turmoil.

He knew that his affairs were common gossip among the rest of the work personnel ; how he was a tight man with cash, hoarding every bonus, every month's wages, against his eventual return to Earth. That put him apart from the rest even more than did his solitary job, up there on the side of the hill. It could be that Denby's guess was just wishful thinking.

Just the same, here he was, going back across the compound for the first time since he'd come here a year ago. It had been a long year, a year of thirty-hour days, of fifteen hours glaring, stinging sunlight, fifteen hours bitterly cold darkness, regular and monotonous. Now he was going back. He caught the phrase, rejecting it. What did Denby and his kind know about it, anyway ? Their job was to keep the egg-heads fed, housed and powered, just as it was Ben's job to keep the supply of fresh vegetables coming in. Director Hugh Miller was a remote figure, the chief among those superior beings who dug, and sifted, and scraped, and theorised, among the ruins of that mysterious City, over there. What did Denby know about any of that ?

On the other hand, he thought, as he entered the air-conditioned coolness of the office block, this farming job was strictly a luxury item. Perhaps somebody back home had wondered what an agronomist was doing on an archaeological research team. And yet, he argued with himself, expense wasn't a rational objection, anyway. He was getting a specialist salary, true, but wages were a flea-bite out of the cost of throwing material and services across the eleven light-years to Tau Ceti, to maintain a research-unit. And he didn't cost anything more than his wages. Baffled and angry, he reached the Director's door and rapped on it, bracing himself to be stubborn.

Hugh Miller was a big man who had managed to remain pink and bland despite the arid climate. Ben spared him a quick

glance, then his eyes were wide and unbelieving at sight of the rest of the group in the office. There was a clatter of little feet, and a yell.

" Daddy . . . Daddy . . . ! Surprise ! Surprise !" He crouched, awkwardly, to meet the onslaught of his ten-year-old daughter, wide-armed and wriggling with delight. He put an arm round her.

" Sarah !" he said, helplessly. " What are you doing here ?" He looked at her fresh young face, seeing the new freckles. She'd grown. He touched her glossy gold hair, divided into two dancing pony-tails. " What are you doing here ?" he repeated, roughly.

" Aren't you pleased to see me ?"

" Of course I am," he said, as kindly as he could. He stood up, catching his sister's eye, and the harsh words boiled up to his tongue, but he bit them back. This wasn't the place. He looked to Miller.

" You wanted to see me ?"

" Yes, Ford, but it can wait a moment. I'm sure you have a lot to say to your wife and child . . ." My *wife*, Ben gasped, inwardly. " Why not take them outside a moment, and gossip, while I discuss a few things with Doctor Stanford ?" Ben shut the door, carefully, and stooped to Sarah.

" If you go along there, just a little way," he said, gently, " you'll see a little room where they have chairs and tables, and things to eat and drink. You trot off and see what they've got. I'll be along in a little while." He watched her out of sight, then swung on his sister, grimly.

" Now then, what the devil are you playing at ?" he demanded. " Passing yourself off as my wife, and dragging Sally all the way out here . . ."

" I knew you'd be angry," Janet Ford replied, stiff-lipped. " It would never occur to you that I might have a good reason."

" I'm waiting to hear it," he struggled to keep his voice low. " I've been flogging my guts out for a year, now, to save money. It must have cost almost all my savings to drag you two out here. It had better be a good reason."

" Money and pride," she sneered, " that's all you ever think of. Never had much time for brains, did you ? You scoffed, I remember, because the clever ones had to get a farmer to help them out. And you were going to make a lot of money, and

buy a farm back home, and give Sally a good start in life. And off you went, leaving me to stay home and care for her . . ."

" You're getting paid for it."

" That's it. Money. You'll pay for it. That's your way. But what about me. Do you think I want to spend the rest of my life in a secretarial pool ?" She jammed her plump hands on generous hips, and Ben groaned, inwardly, recognising the signs. Janet was plump, pretty, and, as a rule, passive, but once roused, there was no stopping her.

" I've got myself a job," she told him, emphatically. " I'm secretary to that Doctor Russell Stanford, in there, who is busy, this minute, telling your chief where to get off, see ? And this trip didn't cost you a penny, see ? I'm on the staff, I am. I'm making more money than you . . ." and she named a figure that was nearly twice Ben's salary. " What's more," she twisted the knife in the wound, " It's all going into a joint account, yours and mine. That's why I had to pretend to be your wife. And what have you got to say to that, eh ?"

Ben groped for something to bite on. Money was important, truly, but there was more to this than just savings. Janet had meant well. He allowed her that much. But she didn't know what she was letting herself in for. And Sarah ranked above anything else, in his mind. He struggled for words that would change her mind, but they wouldn't come.

" All right," he growled. " You've got it all worked out, haven't you ? I'm not going to argue with you. You just go and join Sarah. And don't unpack. I'm going to have a word with this Stanford chap, and you're going right back where you came from. You'll see," and he turned from her, rapped on the door, and went in, heedless of whether they were ready for him or not.

He looked more keenly, now, at Russell Stanford, and saw that he was of medium height, red-faced and with bright blue eyes. And soft. There was spare meat on his neck and waistline. Ben judged him to be a desk-man. Stanford's first words corrected that.

" I'm intrigued by the speed at which your crops grow, Mr. Ford," he said, with a trace of Suffolk in his accent. " A full crop every fifteen days ?"

" That's right," Ben said, guardedly. " It grows so fast you can see it."

" It sounds incredible, and exciting. I've been looking at the plan," he nodded to the wall-diagram by Miller's desk. " I see you have six strips, of one acre each. Not much, to supply the whole settlement ?"

" That's true," Ben nodded, stiffly. " I meant that as a trial area. It was a hell of a job to clear it of cactus. It's the only thing that will grow here, natural. It wants some shifting. Then, when I found how fast our stuff came up, I didn't bother to clear any more. I'd want machinery, for a bigger area ."

" You've no machinery ?"

" Only my hauler, for general purposes. Spray-equipment and tanks we made up out of spares. The Indigos do all the work."

" Yes, I've heard about the Indigos," Stanford shafted a bright blue eye on the Director. " Why no agricultural machinery, Miller ?"

" Well," the Director smiled, carefully. " You must understand that Mr. Ford is really a luxury. He is borne on the books as an agronomist, of course, but we could never indent for full-scale farming equipment. It wouldn't be entertained. We have a full supply of synthetics, you see.

" Our fusion-power unit provides us with far more distilled water than we can use, and it is no trouble at all to reclaim the salts that are evaporated out, and process them into fertiliser. We'd only have to throw them away, otherwise. So you see, our fresh food, our green stuff, costs us nothing over Mr. Ford's salary. And well worth it."

" The Indigos are not paid, then ?"

" Could you pay a horse, or a cow ?" Ben demanded, and Stanford rocked on his feet, thoughtfully.

" I see. They help themselves to the crop, I suppose ?"

" That they don't. They can't stomach it. They try, once in a while, but it comes back on them. Makes them sick."

" Amazing !" Stanford rubbed his hands. " So many factors to consider. I won't waste any more of your time, Miller. I'll go along with Mr. Ford, and have him show me the best place to set up a test-area . . ."

His quiet enthusiasm carried Ben out of the office and along the passage, to where they could see the lunch-room. That sight shocked Ben back to his own problems. He caught Stanford's arm.

" Here," he said. " Must you have Janet to work for you ?"

" Quite definitely. Wouldn't be without her. She doesn't understand a thing about my work, you know, but she's absolutely indispensable at getting it all down and arranged. Very accurate. A treasure. Why ?"

" She's not my wife," Ben blurted, and Stanford smiled.

" I know. I was party to the harmless deception. You can rely on my discretion, Mr. Ford."

" Damn your discretion !" Ben's anger burst through his control. " I want her away out of it, with Sarah. Sarah is my daughter, no fake about that, and I don't want her here. This is no place for a girl of ten."

" But what harm can there be ?" Stanford frowned. " The climate is a bit extreme, I know, but not dangerously so. There are no environmental hazards, I'm told. And she is in good hands. If you're worried about her schooling, well, I am a teacher, you know."

" It's not that," Ben said, flatly, and Stanford sighed.

" Look here. I feel I'm responsible, so I'll make you a fair promise. I need Janet. I also need your co-operation. We farmers must stick together, you know. And I'm very fond of Sarah. So, if there is the slightest sign that she is unhappy, or in any kind of danger, I'll do everything I can to get her away. Does that satisfy you ?"

" No !" Ben said, savagely. " But I suppose I'll have to put up with it. I warn you, mister. If anything happens to her . . ."

" You mustn't threaten me, you know," Stanford said, quietly, but there was that in his tone which made Ben pause. This Stanford, whoever he was, and whatever he wanted, was a ' somebody,' big enough to make Hugh Miller go out of his way to be pleasant. Ben curbed his rage, but it was not forgotten.

Half-an-hour later the hauler was rolling out of the compound and into the narrow trail through the shoulder-high cactus, up the gentle slope to Ben's clearing. The first truck was stacked with the packaged components of a new, two-berth, thermo-proofed cabin-unit, that Stanford had signed for with careless ease. Requisitions of any kind were grudgingly rationed on this project, and the fact that Stanford could get stuff like this, just for the asking, bore out the guess that he was a very big ' somebody ' indeed. Ben was glad of his caution.

Over his shoulder he could hear Sarah's excited chatter, and Janet's rather forced agreements. Fool of a woman, he thought. He'd told her a thousand times that he didn't want Sarah to know anything about farming, in any shape or form, and now here she was, right in the middle of it. With his eyes on the track, he turned his thoughts to Stanford, by his side, and wondered what the flabby intellectual was making of all this. How would he have gone about clearing this track, for instance ? Ben curled his lip at the thought. That cactus was as dry as bone, tough as teak, and spined with blades like scalpels. It had fought every inch of the way. It had taken a flame-pistol, devised by the power-plant gang, and throwing a fifteen-foot oxy-ally flame, to make it retreat. Then he had dusted every inch of the scorched earth with weed-killer. And the cactus had withdrawn, but it was still hungry to break through, as if resenting this infringement on its absolute monopoly.

" The Indigos," Stanford murmured. " I'm curious. If they work for you, you must reward them in some way ?"

" I feed 'em," Ben explained. " See the cactus ? Only thing that grows, here. When ripe, it makes a little puff-ball fruit, a button. Like these," and he got out a bag from the dash-board pocket. Stanford looked, handled, and sniffed at the grey-white globes, about the size of golf-balls.

" But, if they eat these, and it grows everywhere . . .?"

" Ah, but it don't, you see. The wild stuff doesn't get as far as flowering, most of the time, let alone fruit. It's degenerate. Overgrows itself. When I cleared my first strip, shoots came up all over the place. I left one or two, just to get some idea of the life-cycle. Soon as they tasted water, they shot up, and fruited. And the Indigos came. Somehow, they knew. It didn't take long to find what they were after. So I put them to work. They're good, too. I didn't need to teach them anything. You'll see. We're nearly there."

He swung the wheel to follow a slow bend in the track. Stanford sniffed.

" Good Lord !" he said, chokingly, and Ben grinned, maliciously.

" Should have warned you about the smell," he said. They had reached the corner of a clearing. In front of them stood a gleaming chrome pylon, thirty feet high, with a squat tank sitting on the top. A thick pipe climbed one leg, and slimmer pipes looped away, over the cleared strip.

" Six strips like this," Ben explained. " You saw the map. Twenty yards wide, two hundred and fifty yards long, up the hill. I spray all the time it's daylight." He gestured, briefly, where rainbows danced as the pierced pipes let out a fine mist every six inches. "Air and soil are so dry, here, that they'd be like dust in a couple of hours, if I didn't spray."

" You're adding ammonia ?"

" That's what you can smell. Later today I'll drill in about a thousand pounds of mix to each strip, then plant, and then spray with starter."

" A thousand pounds per acre . . . for *pre-planting* ?"

" That's what I said. I shall put in about three tons of mix, over the fifteen days. This soil needs it. Barren, otherwise."

" And what auxins do you use ? Or giberllins ?"

" Know a thing or two, don't you ?" Ben grunted. " Well, believe it or not, I don't use any stimulators at all. Not necessary."

" But . . ." Stanford was shrill in his amazement, " there must be *some* sort of growth-hormone at work, here ?"

" Well, I couldn't find it. I did some soil-sampling, when I started . . ." he was interrupted by a shrill scream from the back seat. Sarah had been gasping in delight at the rainbows, but now she had seen something else.

" Daddy !" she called, imperatively. " Why are those little blue men all standing in the rain ? Why haven't they got clothes on ? Why are they blue ?"

Stanford, too, had seen, and goggled, for a moment. Now he put a hand on Ben's arm, restrainingly.

" Allow me," he said. " One acquires a certain skill in handling the enquiring mind, you know." Ben shrugged, gently. Let the clever one try, by all means, he thought, and good luck to him. Stanford raised his voice.

" Sarah ! May I correct you, my dear. They are not men, although they look like it. They are working in the fields, to help the crops to grow. They probably like the rain." He smiled at Ben, listening for reaction.

" What are they, then, if they're not men ?"

" That's a hard question, but you could say they are a kind of clever animal, something like a monkey."

" Can I have one for a pet ? A bright blue one, can I ?"

" Over my dead body," Janet said, quietly, but with emphasis, and Stanford sighed, threw up his hands.

" I begin to see what you mean," he murmured to Ben. " But I had no idea they were quite so humanoid, you know."

Ben shrugged, grimly. He guessed that the Indigos had been something of an eye-opener for Janet, too. Fool of a woman. Perhaps, now, she would realise what he had meant about this not being a fit place for a young girl.

It was late evening, with Tau Ceti low in the purple sky, before he could get a private word with his sister. Sarah had long since gone to bed. Stanford had been all over the little farm, asking innumerable questions, and had gone back to the Settlement, full of plans for the morrow. Ben sat, wearily, to the meal his sister had insisted on preparing.

" Now," he said, " perhaps you'll see what I mean. I told you, in letters . . ."

" But how was I to know they were so human ? You never said anything like that, And female ones, too !"

" Six with child," he nodded, " Counted 'em, last time round."

" How can you tell ?"

" Easy. They turn black, soon as ever they're pregnant. Carry the child about eight or nine days."

" Is that all ?" Janet's eyes were wide. Ben hid a sneer. Typical city-bred ignorance, he thought. Country people learn to accept the raw facts of life.

" Everything's quick, here," he explained. " They carry for nine days, then away for three. Then the mother's back, with the young 'un, just walking. By five or six days it's ready to help with the work. Full grown in thirty days. Dying of old old age just under a year." He could see that she was suitably shocked, and eager to hear more. He pushed back his plate. In a way, it was a relief to talk about it, after all this time.

" The ' brights ' are different," he said, musingly. " They're bigger, and bright blue. They live longer, they're a sight more intelligent, and they're always male. You can always tell. If you see a bright blue female, it means she's pregnant with a ' bright.' They're worth a bit, to me. I have one in charge of each field, and any extras that turn up I take in to the Settlement. They pay me a bonus, and use them in the diggings."

" If they're so intelligent," she asked, " Why don't they grow their own food ?"

" I dunno," he admitted. " They won't touch the buttons in the fields, even, until I let 'em. Not that they understand

anything I say, and they don't talk. But they don't touch anything until I show up and wave them on. There's no real understanding them. You just have to learn their ways, that's all. I don't even know where they live. They turn up, just after sunrise, out of the bushes."

" Doctor Stanford will find out," she declared. " He likes that kind of thing. Problems and curiosities, I mean !"

" Does he, now. Well, he can start on one thing, right away. You tell him to keep young Sarah away from my fields, and my work, understand ?" Then, having come perilously near his own secret phobia, he went out, to get on with those chores which would not wait, on him or any other farmer.

His hand shook as he fitted a new power-cell into the hauler. The image of his dead wife, Helen, rose before his eyes, and he groaned, softly. Sarah was ten. Ten years ago, Helen had died, giving birth to Sarah. The doctors had listed a number of unfortunate, but quite unavoidable reasons why she had died, but Ben knew otherwise. He had killed her. He had insisted, pig-headedly, on his right to be a farmer, like his father, and all his ancestors. He had taken Helen from the city that was her home, and made her a farmer's wife, and it had killed her. No matter what anyone else might say, Ben knew that to be true, and it was a guilt he could never lose. All he could do, and was determined to do, was to see that Sarah never wanted for anything—and that she never, never, knew anything about farming or farmers.

In the three months which followed, each day a carbon copy of the one before, Ben's fears shrivelled a little. He had, now, a breakfast and supper cooked for him, and someone to talk to, occasionally. In that much, he was better off than before. But his fears merely moved back, they did not die.

This particular morning, as he rolled out of his bunk and into freshly laundered overalls, his mind was occupied with trivia, with the need to keep warm, to pull zippers, to grab notebooks, keys and small tool-kit, to wonder what he was going to need today. Agricultural college training and natural born farming instinct were fused into an efficient whole, in his ways. Out in the bitterly cold grey-dark, he shivered in the cab of the hauler, while the motor ran up into heat. A crazy planet, this. Bitter during the dark, but just as soon as that orange-yellow sun got over the horizon . . . bang ! . . . it was hot, and it stayed hot. No cloud cover, no atmospheric

humidity, that was the trouble. Three small seas, not much more than a couple of thousand square miles of water-surface, for a planet as big as Earth, so what could you expect ? But it made life hard.

He rolled the hauler along to the far-corner pylon, got out, stiffly, and went up the rungs. From the top, looking down that way, he could just make out the big purple blot of shadow that was the great ruin, stretching for five miles along the edge of that salty sea. They must have been a queer lot, he mused. By the rumours which filtered back from the scientist-diggers, they had been a well-advanced civilization. By Ben's standards they had been stupid. He had never seen a soil so savagely gutted of nourishment. Barren, it was.

He busied himself with spanner and valve-wheels, checking from his book, adjusting injectors, drip-feeds, milk-of-lime additives and water-flow. The hot rays of Tau Ceti were biting into his shoulder by the time he had finished, and the tang of ammonia came to his nostrils as he looked down through the rainbows. Another day. And, as usual, the Indigos were waiting. Down the rungs again, he stalked over to where they waited for him. Nine dwarfed, spindly, bony, flat-footed, dark blue glum goblins. The tenth, as always, was a ' bright.'

" Morning . . ." Ben grunted, reaching into his back pocket for a plastic bag which he shook unfolded. " Go and get 'em, then," and he nodded to the centre of the field. The ' bright ' went off at a rapid shamble, heedless of the rain, to the cactus which stood all alone, loaded with white buttons. Ben turned his keen eye on the field, noting two or three places where the wild cactus was getting ambitious again. He'd be back later, with flame-gun and weed-killer, to take care of those.

Fancy stuff, that weed-killer, he mused. According to what he had been taught, all it did was to make things grow about ten time faster than normal, and inhibit their feeding, so that they just starved to death. Perhaps that was what was wrong with the whole crazy planet, he thought. Things grew so fast they never had time to eat properly. The ' bright ' came back, dripping. Ben took the bag, went along the line, doling out a button to each, and two to the ' bright.' Ten pairs of jaws began to chomp, slowly. He waved to the field.

" All right, lads. Let's make a start, then . . ." and they shambled out into the ammoniacal mist, to get down on their knees and crawl along the lanes of plants, finger-tilling the soil, snapping off dead leaves, smoothing and patting. Ben

watched a moment, then went on to the next strip, and the next, and so-on, until he had attended to all six.

The sun had been up two hours, and his stomach was telling him it was empty, by the time he got back to the cabin-area. He passed the new cabin at a fast walk, giving a hefty bang on the panel to let them know it was time to roll out. He went straight to the shower-room, there to empty his pockets, sling the sweat-stained overall into the laundromat, and step, thankfully, under a tepid shower. Soon, he could hear voices, and smell cooking.

This was the good time of the day. Fresh and cool from the shower, in a clean, dry pair of overalls, to sit down to breakfast with young Sarah and see her bright face, glowing and tanned, to hear her chatter going on and on, about anything and everything. It made a difference, having women about the place. Janet was settling in very well, and she could certainly cook. He wondered if Stanford had ideas about Janet. Be a fool if he didn't. She was efficient, and pretty, too, if you liked them plump.

" Daddy !" his small daughter greeted him, from the table, " What's a polysaccharide ?"

" Steady on !" he protested. " That's a big word, for this time of morning. Where'd you hear it ?"

" Doctor Stanford was saying it, the other day . . . an' I thought it was a name . . . an' I asked who she was . . . an' he laughed and said it wasn't a ' she ' at all, just a big word. What's it mean ?"

" Well," Ben said, cautiously, " it's a kind of sugar. That's what the saccharide part means. And ' poly ' means it has a lot of ways of joining on to other things. There are lots of different kinds of sugars. There's the kind I get from sugar-beets, the kind you have in your blood, the kind you get from honey, and sugar-cane, and milk . . ."

" Sugar in my blood ?" her bright blue eyes were wide.

" Certainly. Your body needs a lot of sugar, for energy, and the blood carries it round. To your brain, especially. If you didn't get enough sugar there, you'd be dull and stupid."

" Like the Indigos ?"

Janet, coming into the room in time to hear this, snorted gently.

" Not stupid, dear." She sat and began reaching for things. " I've told you before. They are not stupid. They are just like that, naturally."

" But Doctor Stanford say they aren't. He says they could be clever, like us, if they could eat good food, like us. He says it's something wrong with their works, their met . . . metabolism !"

" That's his opinion," Ben grunted. " But they can't eat our food, anyway, so let's not hear any more about it."

" But they can !" Sarah announced, excitedly. " I've seen them. He feeds them. That's when I heard him talking about polysaccharides. He gives them whisky to drink, too !"

" Sarah !" Janet's voice crackled. " You mustn't say such things."

" But it's true. He's going to change them all into ' brights.' He told me so. It's just because they don't eat the right food, he says."

" That will do !" Janet said, firmly. " You just finish off your breakfast, and off you go and get ready." She was hardly out of the room when Ben turned a bleak eye on his sister.

" What was all that about ?" he demanded. " And don't try to tell me she invented it, either."

" I don't know anything about it," Janet snapped. " I just take down his dictation. I do know that he tries experimental diets on the poor things."

" Feeding them whisky ?"

" That's ridiculous. Russell wouldn't do such a thing. Sarah must be mistaken. There is one queer thing, though . . ." she hesitated.

" What's that ?" Ben came half out of his chair, urgently, " What ?"

" Well, you know he started with fifteen Indigos ?"

" I'm not likely to forget. Fifteen of my hands. I was short, all day. Just as well the extra hands turned up, next day. Well ?"

" Just that he still has fifteen, but they're all ' brights,' now."

" What ?" He sank back in his seat, stunned. " Fifteen ' brights '?" Then, on a sudden thought, he began to laugh. " You mean Stanford thinks he's changing them into ' brights,' by feeding them ?"

" What's so funny about that ?" she snapped, and he changed his laugh into a pitying sneer. So Janet was ' that way ' about Stanford, and touchy if he was criticised, eh ? That fat fool.

" Never mind," he growled. " Let him go on kidding himself. All the same, I'm going to have a word with him. Mucking about with the Indigos, is he ? I can't have that. Anything happens to them and my job's gone."

" Your job !" she snapped. " That's all you ever think about. You don't like Russell, just because he has brains. You farmer !"

" You just listen to me," he got to his feet, grimly. " You tell Stanford to quit experimenting with the Indigos. If they go wrong, so does the fresh vegetable supply to the Settlrment, and Hugh Miller will ask some hard questions. If he should ask me, which he will, he'll get some funny answers, too. You just tell Stanford what I said, all right ?" and he stalked out, angrily.

Suppose she did tell Stanford, and he made an issue of it, what then ? What could Ben Ford hope to gain ? Who would take his side ? The question chilled him. He went about his work, mechanically, but his mind seethed. There might be a mild protest from the Settlement, if the vegetables failed, but it wouldn't amount to much. He was a luxury. Miller had said as much, himself.

Damn Stanford, and his experiments, anyway. What was the man up to ? In the three months he had been operating his field-tests, Ben had learned very little about him. He was no farmer, that was certain. Didn't talk like a farmer. But he did know about soil, and growth factors, and chemical aids. A desk-man, no doubt, riding a theory. But what was he looking for ?

As for creating ' brights ' with a diet, Ben could still get a grin out of that idea. Stanford would never see the obvious, that he had cooked up a diet the Indigos could swallow, and that the word had gone round. The ' brights ' were clever, just clever enough to see that there was something good going. So, they must have come out of hiding and replaced Ben's original Indigos. That's all. Stanford couldn't tell one from the other, that was certain. Ben had been working with them for a year now, and he couldn't tell them apart.

He squinted at the sun, which agreed with his aching back and hollow stomach in saying that it was getting close to midday siesta time. He gave a last tug on the spanner, to secure a new tank of mix, and glanced down into the field, at the Indigos.

At what Indigos ! He stared, rubbed his eyes, and stared again. The rainbows danced and glittered. The green shoots sprouted urgently upwards. But there were no little blue man-things to be seen. He stretched up on tip-toe, to look out over the other strips. Nothing !

Spurring his aching muscles to reckless effort, he went hand over hand down the rungs, jumping the last six feet, heavily. He ran, unsteadily, into the field, over the damp earth, heedless of the spray-sting in his eyes. Not a sign of the Indigos, anywhere. He stood, soaking, and tried to think. Nothing like this had ever happened before. Damn it, why would they run off ? It was their feeding time. He tramped, soggily, to the cactus, already rich with buttons. He groped for a bag, and put out a hand to pick the grey-white balls, with some idiot idea in his mind that he might lure them back to work with a promise of food.

Spines stung his fingers, cruelly, and the shock jerked him back to sanity. A name shouted itself aloud in his mind. Stanford ! This was his doing. It must be something to do with his damned experiments. He threw down the bag, and ran, cursing, to the hauler. Scrambling aboard, he raced the motor and drove, furiously, to the cabin-area. There, he flung himself out of the cab, across the hard earth and indoors to the radio-phone. He had hardly reached the instrument when it rang.

" Ben ?" It was Janet's voice, frightened. " Have you any news ?"

" I've got news !" he raged. " Get Stanford on the other end of this thing. I want to talk to him."

" I can't," she retorted, " He's busy. Oh dear, if only she'd said she . . ."

" She ? What the devil are you babbling about ?"

" Sarah, of course !" her voice was ragged. " I've been trying to call you for more than an hour, since I first missed her. I thought perhaps she'd gone off to see you, but she's never done anything like that before. Ben, I'm worried."

" She's not here," he said, and his jaw felt stiff, so that he could hardly make the words. " Why the hell did you let her run off alone ? What's Stanford doing about it ?"

" I haven't told him," she said, crossly. " He's busy, I told you. Are you sure she's not there, or on the way, perhaps ?"

He tried to see, in his mind, the narrow, cactus-lined track between his place and Stanford's, to imagine Sarah there,

trotting along, her pony-tails all dancing, her print dress all bright in the sun. And he knew it was wrong. He knew, with a sick certainty, what had happened. His voice was flat as he spoke.

" I'm coming over. Get Stanford out of whatever he's doing, and ready to see me. Do it ! And tell him that my blasted Indigos have run off . . . and they have taken Sally with them. Tell him that !" and he switched off the phone on a gasp of horror from Janet.

Suddenly, his mind was icy clear, razor-edged with purpose. A charge for the flame-pistol. A new power-cell for the hauler. And lights. They must have gone to ground somewhere. They must have some sort of gathering place, and no aircraft had ever been able to spot it, so it was almost certainly underground. Lights, then. Even as he reasoned, his body was busy. Within a precious two minutes, he was ready, and roaring along the track to Stanford's place. He crouched over the wheel, sharp-eyed just in case he did meet Sarah, but there was no real hope in his heart. He was not surprised to reach the experimental station without meeting her. Braking to a stop by the steps which led up to Stanford's laboratory-hut, he saw the man himself, pink-faced and puzzled, standing there waiting. Ben leaped from the cab, and up the steps, to confront Stanford.

" I'll deal with you," he said, harshly, " in due course. First thing is to get Sally back. Then you !" He spun on his heel as Janet came out, white-faced, clutching a heavy, metal-bound folder. He bit back all the savage things he wanted to say. " Where did you see her last, and when, and how many ' brights ' were there with her ?" he demanded.

" You should call them Indigos, Mr. Ford," Stanford corrected, primly, " They are all the same, you know." Ben turned, reached out a long arm, and took the pink-faced man by the slack of his shirt-front. A twist and a lift, and Stanford came up on his toes, squeaking.

" Shut up !" Ben whispered. " You've done enough damage already, with your talk. When I want your opinion, I'll ask," and he turned back to his sister, not letting go that grip. " Go on, tell me," he invited, grimly.

" About an hour ago," she said, hastily. " She was playing schools with five or six of them, in the cool house. Drawing pictures. Playing ' teacher.' She likes that. Then, when I

looked again, they were all gone. But she left her sketch-book lying there."

" Over an hour," Ben muttered, " and no idea where they might have gone." He let go his grip, and Stanford got his voice back.

" Now see here, Mr. Ford," he said. " There's no need to get upset . . ." Ben turned and grabbed again, with both hands, this time, and the pink face went red under the pressure.

" You call it upset ? All right, then I'm upset. And so will you be, when I'm done with you. Feeding whisky to dumb animals, you bloody maniac. You'll get what's coming to you, later,"

" So Sarah told you that, did she ?" Stanford squeaked, trying a laugh that came out more like a scream.

" She told me. And I'll tell the rest of your friends, when they ask why the Indigos ran off with my child. And that will take the damn stupid grin off your face, won't it ?" He shook Stanford like a rag-doll.

" You don't understand," Stanford gasped for breath. " It's not what you're thinking, at all."

" Stop it, Ben !" Janet seized his arm. " This isn't the way to get anything done. Let Russell speak, for heaven's sake !" Ben let go, and Stanford massaged his throat, still trying to smile.

" I don't blame you," he said, shakily, " but it's quite all right, I assure you. Sarah's not in any danger. You see, the Indigos have a village, or something like that, where they go at night. Up there, on the hill-side."

" How do you know ?"

" From the Indigos themselves."

" You mean they told you ?"

" Not me. No." Stanford got his smile working better, now. " But Sarah can talk to them. She's even managed to teach them English, enough so that they can understand and communicate with her. Their vocal range, you see, is much higher than ours, not audible to us. But a child can hear their low notes, and they can hear her. Sarah was not playing school, really. She was teaching them. The sketch-book was my idea, to help her make herself understood."

" All right," Ben grated. " So she can talk to them, and draw pictures . . . and now they've run off with her. So your

going to scratch your fat behind and get down there, in that hauler, with me, and bring her back."

" Bring her back ? But we mustn't do that, you know. You don't understand. It would ruin the whole thing, destroy their confidence . . ."

" Get down those steps !"

" Certainly not ! I wouldn't dream . . ." Stanford's indignant protest cut off as Ben hit him, just once, with a work-toughened fist, backed with two hundred pounds of anger and agony. Stanford fell back, and round, grunted, reached blindly for the porch-post, missed it, and went head-first down the steps, into the dirt. Ben stalked slowly down after him, icy cold.

" Get on your feet," he ordered. " Get into that cab . . ." and his universe burst into red fire as pain erupted from the back of his skull. He sagged forward on to his knees, shook the bells out of his head, and squinted back and up. Janet stood militant, gripping the heavy note-folder.

" You made me do that," she cried. " You just won't listen to reason. You had no business to hit him like that." He got to his feet, slowly, rubbing his head. Then, suddenly, he sprang up the steps, snatched the folder from her hand with a lightning grab, and sent it spinning. She cringed at the look on his face.

" That's your last chance," he said, quietly. " I've never hit a woman in my life, and I don't want to, but understand this. Those little blue devils have run off with Sarah. Your fat friend here is going to help me get her back, if I have to flog him every inch of the way. And you had better pray that we find her safe. It was your idea, bringing her here, in the first place. If anything has happened to her, I'll wring your neck."

" Don't you talk to me like that," she flared, and he took her wrist with one hand. Her face went chalk-white as the bones grated under his grip.

" If anything has happened to Sally," he said, " that'll be round your neck." He went down to where Stanford was picking himself up from the ground, his fat face a mess of blood, dirt and tears. " Get in," he ordered. Stanford shook his head.

" No good," he mumbled. " I don't know where. Sarah knew . . ." Ben glared, then he swung on Janet again.

" You," he barked. " The sketch-book. Get it. Run !" She ran, heavily. He snatched it from her hand, jabbed it at Stanford, who wiped the filth from his face and peered. Drops of bright red dripped from his nose.

" This may be it," he muttered. " Here. She's drawn an archway. Top right hand corner of my tobacco-patch."

" All right. Now, get in, and pray that you're right. You . . ." to Janet, " you ring the Settlement, get them busy on it." He climbed up after Stanford, got the hauler moving, and blanked his mind to everything except the very next move. He was afraid to think too far ahead. The hauler bounced into the track and began to climb. Stanford dabbed at his face, and sniffed. By sheer habit, Ben cast his eye over the field, and sneered.

" Call yourself a farmer. Tobacco, eh ? You've got a calcium shortage, there. Can't you see the notched leaves ?"

" I'm not the kind of farmer, not like you. You're an atavism."

" I know what that word means, mister. A throwback. So, it's old-fashioned, is it, to be a father, to have fatherly feelings?"

" No. I'm sorry. I do understand, really I do. You're right, in your way to be worried about Sarah. But you're wrong, too, about the Indigos. Ford, I'm not a farmer, at all. I'm a bio-chemist. I came here to find out why your crops grow so quickly. And I've found out, and that has led me to something much more important."

" Chat away," Ben growled, keeping his eye on the track. " It won't make any difference. All I'm worried about is Sarah."

" Of course. But the cactus is the real guilty party. You know, don't you, that your weed-killer works by making things grow quickly, and inhibiting feeding ? Well, the cactus secretes a similar substance. It has driven everything else into extinction. It rules the planet. The only other living things are the Indigos, and only because they can eat the cactus."

" Well ?" Ben grunted, bringing the hauler to a stop.

" Don't you see ? That's what happened to that great civilization, down there. Those people just starved to death."

" That's possible." Ben completed the assembly of the flame-pistol, checked the buckles of the harness holding the tanks, and climbed out. " Come on. Show me the spot where it says on that sketch." Stanford got down, excitedly.

"You don't understand," he was almost pleading. "There's a lot to be found out, yet, things that the Indigos alone can know. I need their confidence. If we burst in on them, now, with violence . . ."

" Right now, with violence," Ben said, savagely. " Just show me where." The bio-chemist shrugged, despairingly, studied the sketch, and moved a step or two. Close to the ground there was a gap, like a rabbit-run. He pointed.

" That could be it." Ben aimed the pistol. There was a fizz, and fifteen feet of white-hot oxy-ally flame spat out, slicing the dark green stems. For a few minutes there was nothing but swirling, acrid smoke. A darker area grew visible. The smoke cleared, showing a fair-sized tunnel into darkness.

" Hand-lamp, under the dashboard," Ben snapped, and Stanford got it, shone the beam into the hole, peered over it.

" It seems to be a drift, into the hillside," he said. Ben gave him an ungentle nudge forward.

" Lead on," he ordered, and Stanford sighed.

" Oh, very well. If you insist !" All at once, Ben felt his control slip. He aimed the snout of the flame-pistol at Stanford's midriff.

" March !" he said. " Or fry. I don't give a damn which !"

The drift went straight in for five yards, then swung in a slow right-hand curve, sloping slowly down. The floor became tiles, and there was no longer any need to urge Stanford. The chubby bio-chemist was flashing the light on the walls and muttering, excitedly, to himself. Ben realised they were not in a tunnel any longer, but were passing through large rooms or chambers of some kind. He caught glimpses of wall-paintings and frescoes, in bright colours. Curiosity overcame his anxiety, for a moment.

" Here !" he said. " Let's have a look." He stood by Stanford, to peer at a painting. " That's a ' bright,' isn't it ?" he muttered. " Bigger than ours, and healthier, too. Looks just like a man. Wearing clothes. There's another." But Stanford had seen something else. The circle of light shifted.

" It's the cactus," he mumbled. " A stylised version. As if they reverenced it. And these blue people are as human as we are. Lord ! I've got it, now. I know what it is. I must have been blind not to see it before."

" What the hell are you babbling about now ?" Ben demanded, in alarm. " Come on, talk as we go. Let's get on!"

" Plain as a pikestaff," Stanford cried. " Look here !" and in his excitement he dropped the lamp. It went rolling, tossing weird shadows about the strange chamber. He groped after it, apologetically. " Look . . ." he went on, " think of a diabetic. He needs sugar, but his body can't use it, for some reason. So, we give him insulin, and then his body *can* use sugar, quite normally. Now, I've tested the Indigos. Their metabolism is exactly the same as ours, yet the can't use carbo-hydrates, however much they may need them, and they do. The whisky was a guess, but it worked on them just like insulin to a diabetic."

" So you did feed 'em whisky ?"

" Of course. Don't be so narrow-minded, man. It was an experiment, and it worked. Plus alcohol, they can absorb and digest our food. They do. They thrive on it. And they become bright blue. And I never guessed why, until now. Lord, where were my wits ?"

" You mean . . . you actually did turn them into 'brights ?"

" Of course. I told you The whole thing turns on anthocyanin. It's a blue pigment, associated with sugar, and affected by phosphates. Because they couldn't use the sugar, and the carbo-hydrates, the pigment accumulated in their skin, made them dark. With alcohol to help their processes, the pigment thinned out to normal, and they became bright blue. Quite simple. And all because of that damnable cactus."

" But why would they go on eating it, if it's so bad ?"

" Why do people drink spirits, or take tranquilizers ? Why do primitive people worship mushrooms, or peyote ? Did you ever see someone under the influence of mescalin, or hashish, of marihuana ? It makes them feel good, gives them big and beautiful visions, and they become slaves to the drug. That is what has been happening here, only the cactus is more than just a drug. It effectively stops them from eating anything else. It's frightening, when you think of it. ' Thou shalt have no other gods but me ' sort of thing. But, can you see it ? There isn't any mystery now, about what happened to that mighty race who built the city. They're still here, sunk in drug addiction and withered away. Pray God, we may be able to do something about that. Hugh Miller will have fits, when he hears. Come on, I want to see what Sarah has found." His short legs were pumping so quickly that Ben had to stretch his stride to keep up. And they came to the top of a huge flight of stairs, leading down into a giant bowl-shaped cavern.

A single spear of sunlight fell on a great white disc of stone, set in the tiled floor. The chamber was half lit by the reflected beams. Ben saw that it was an amphitheatre, circled with terraces of tiled seats. He saw, also, that for thirty rows back from the centre, the seats were filled with silent Indigos. On a second look, he corrected that. They were almost all ' brights.' At a guess, he thought there must be all of five hundred sitting there. And those in the front, unbelievably, were wearing cloaks. As he watched, one stepped forward into the sunbeam, and the light set off a spray of glints from his ornate robe. He began to talk. At least, that's what it looked like.

" I can't hear anything," Ben said, stupidly.

" Of course not," Stanford explained, patiently. " You're adult. You can't hear up into their range. Neither can I." Ben looked, and felt foolish. He sneaked a side glance at Stanford, and saw that the little bio-chemist's face was radiant ; even under the dirt, and dried blood, he looked ecstatic. Ben felt ashamed. The lone speaker finished what he had been saying, and there was a chorus of reaction from the audience. Ben heard that.

" Like a lot of whistles, not blowing right," he mumbled. Then he caught his breath, as, from a shadowy knot of figures, Sarah stepped out, mounted the plinth and stood in the full light of that sunbeam. It struck gold from her hair, and red fire from the ribbons that held it. It cascaded down over the bright plastic print of her dress. The silence was absolute, then Ben caught the distant tramp of hurrying feet, behind, coming nearer.

" That must be the Settlement crowd," Stanford muttered. " What a row they are making. I'll go to meet them." Ben, left alone, felt a sudden deflation. He dared not look round, but could hear Stanford's guarded tones.

" Here you are, Miller. Quietly, now. What do you make of all this, eh ? Isn't it tremendous ? Here's your lost culture, after all . . ."

" We heard you were in some sort of trouble, Stanford. Had a call from Mrs. Ford. Good lord, man, what happened to your face ?"

"An accident. Nothing to worry about. What do you think of the chambers, and the murals ? Aren't they wonderful ?"

" What about the child ?"

" She's quite all right. Come and see !" Ben felt shoulders nudging his, and smothered gasps of wonder and appreciation. He shifted, restlessly.

" Quiet, can't you ?" he mumbled. " I want to hear what she says."

" She's actually talking to them ?" an incredulous voice demanded, and then was silent. They heard a cheerful, shrill voice, pitched very high, but clear.

" I am pleased to see you, to say ' Hello ' to all of you. I want to tell you that you will soon be able to eat all the good food you want . . ."

There was a burst of whistling from the crowd that made Ben's ears ache. He heard Miller's voice, querying.

" Do they really understand what she's saying, Stanford ?"

" I think so, yes. They're very intelligent, you know, apart from their drugged stupor. She has been able to talk to them for some time, now."

" There will be plenty of food for everybody," the shrill voice went one, confidently. " I shall ask my Daddy to grow it for you. He knows all about growing food, because he's a farmer."

" Hmm ! That's going to change your status a bit, Ford," Miller said, with a thoughtful smile. " We shall have to get a full-scale agricultural project under way, to cope with this, and you're the expert on the spot. Think you can handle it satisfactorily ?" Ben swallowed, painfully, and looked across to meet a big grin on Stanford's face.

" I'll do my bit," he said, awkwardly. " If Doctor Stanford will come in on the technical side. He knows better than me what sort of stuff they want. But, so far as growing the stuff is concerned, it looks as if I've got to," and he looked down at his small daughter with a new sense of pride. " I can't let her down, can I ?"

John Rackham

Telling the truth all the time would be a fine asset providing you were born and bred to such an environment—but drop several Earthmen into such a culture, inhibit them with the same tendency and they would soon be at a disadvantage.

THE WINDS OF TRUTH

by DONALD MALCOLM

His eyes hooded against the glare of the low, bright, star, Jonathan Bates, the team leader, weighed up the native standing submissively before him. It was not the attitude of fear, but of guilt discovered and admitted.

The native was essentially humanoid, the main differences being due to the almost unvarying temperature of the planet, a result of the distance of the star, .9 A.U., a very small orbital eccentricity and an axial tilt to the perpendicular of only ten degrees. The higher percentage of radiation received from the G-type star had caused pigmentation changes. The native was lightly dressed and Bates could see plenty of his deep brown colouring. Hair was merely a sparse, tough dark stubble, on the top of the head only.

Night vision was very poor. True night was known for a few days around the winter solstice, when the star was at its greatest declination south, ten degrees. The rest of the time varying twilight distinguished night from day.

The native's height was average, about five feet, which gave the three Terrans, especially Bates, considerable advantage. They were too well-balanced to feel superior about this.

Bates asked, in his slow, measured drawl, " Do you always tell the truth, Araak ?" The other, who stood accused of theft from the team stores, replied with efficient English. They had a natural aptitude for languages. " Yes, Mr. Bates, always."

The leader considered this. " Does this apply to everyone?"

The alien nodded mutely, waiting.

The legal system here must be a dolly, Bates thought. If a crime was committed, you simply went around asking each person if they did it, until someone answered " yes." Bates looked at the blindingly yellow stretches of T'ippies flowers, after which the planet was named, and sighed. Something had been annoying his nostrils for days, now, and the irritation returned. He rubbed his nose vigorously.

" Why bother stealing, or committing any crime, for that matter, if you can be found out as easily as that ?"

Araak sketched a shrug with this thin shoulders. " Most of our crimes are thefts. To keep the wealth distributed, we are allowed, by law, to steal. If I, for instance, can evade The Question for a certain time, I am allowed to retain what I have stolen. The crime does not lie in the theft but in being found out. These laws have been handed down since the dawn of time. Great prestige attaches to the successful thief."

" So *that's* why this place is such a target. Hmmmm. On the basis of what you've told me, Araak, your social status reflects your ability to practice larceny ?"

The native agreed.

" Did you manage to evade The Question for the stipulated time ?"

Araak nodded. Nodding was a habit with them, Bates had noticed. " Our peoples are nomadic and that helps considerably."

" Now, look, Araak," Bates reproved sternly, although he was having difficulty in suppressing a smile, " you can keep what you stole *this* time. However, we aren't bound by your" —he almost said ' crazy '—" laws, yet. The next one of your people who pilfers from here will receive a stun bolt where it hurts his dignity most when I catch up with him. And I'm telling the truth !"

Araak looked pained. The irritation attacked Bates' rather big nose again as he finished his warning. He twitched it with an exaggerated movement.

" Very well, Mr. Bates. I shall relate what you have told me to my people." He turned and left the area.

Was that a twinkle in his eyes ? Bates couldn't be sure. The light breeze stiffened, ruffling the huge carpets of flowers. The wind blew all the time here. The inside of his nose felt raw and stinging, although it wasn't particularly painful. He twitched it and started walking slowly back towards the main tent, a quarter of a mile off.

Tippy's planet, as the name had been corrupted, was a beautiful world, he thought. Unfortunately, some factor on it caused Terran colonists to tell the plain, unvarnished, unpalatable truth, all the time. That was unnatural, as psychiatrists, called at the special inquiry, were at pains to point out. The average human being was incapable of telling the truth all the time without severe repercussions to his nervous system and to his psychology.

In their everyday lives, people continually told lies, the vast majority of them harmless. Lies were buffers between people as they really were and the people they would like to be. Lying, one medical witness proclaimed, was essential to the smooth running of society at any level. The higher the social level, the more important the need for the subterfuge of lying.

It was shown that having to tell the truth always, especially under compulsion, would have unpredictable and violent results. Events on the fourth planet, including one murder, were evidence enough of that.

The alien world became unique, being classified as AAAX and a highly specialised team, comprising Bates and two others, Borsen and Rawlins, had been assigned the task of ferreting out the ' X ' factor.

The team had arrived just before the start of the official spring. Little difference would have been noticed had they touched down in any of the other seasons. Vegetation didn't stop growing at the onset of autumn ; trees were always in leaf ; flowers blossomed all the year round ; fruit could be picked in the dead of winter.

So far, the team was having no success. His discovery concerning the natives was the first blink of light. He reached the tent. Borsen and Rawlins glanced up as he entered. The former was small and round, like an animated ball, and just as bouncy. He looked after the chemical-physical side of the team's work.

Rawlins was tall, thin and retiring, never obtrusive. He looked anything but the type to be travelling halfway across the Galaxy solving problems. His field was planetary biology, bacteriology and the whole range of micro-organisms. Jonathan, the leader, dealt with geology, meteorology and a few other other -ologies.

Bates took a seat. " I've been talking to our latest culprit. Did you know they tell the truth all the time ?"

" Without exception ?" Borsen drew his bright eyes away from the microscope.

" That's right."

" We didn't know that before."

Bates answered Rawlins. " We can't find out everything, Bob."

Borsen left his instrument and rolled over. " And yet, on the face of things, it seems obvious."

" I disagree," Jonathan averred, his nose twitching again. " After all, everyone was looking for something that affected Terrans, not natives. In the dealings our people have had with them, there was no reason to suspect that *they* told the truth always."

He found Borsen staring at him, or rather, at his nose, which had twitched again, like an inquisitive rat's.

" That's a most annoying twitch you have there," he remarked without inflection.

A chill silence fell suddenly and Rawlins stared at him, too. Then the biologist hastily brought them back to the topic, with, " Couldn't the same thing be the cause ?"

" It may be." Bates' reply was snappish. His mind wasn't on his answer. " But how could it ? The natives have always told the truth and it obviously has no effect on them."

" Because they're used to it," Rawlins persisted in his weak voice. " You're not thinking scientifically."

Borsen had stopped staring and all three were studiously avoiding each other's eyes.

Bates replied abruptly : " We'll discuss it later. I have important things to attend to." He strode towards the flap. Rawlins' plaintive cry followed him, " But *this* is the most important thing—"

The closing flap of the tent effectively prevented further argument.

He walked a few paces, then stood still. He could hear upraised voices in the tent behind him, but he didn't care what they were saying. Drawing in deep lungfuls of the hot air, he tried to calm himself. His stomach felt tight and his throat dry with the first nibblings of fear and apprehension. Alarm bells were ringing steadily in his head.

Bates strolled slowly towards his own tent. Apart from the fretful stirring of the wind, nothing else moved. The heat of the afternoon lay like a great weight over everything.

Bates admitted to himself that he was worried. And with good reason.

Borsen had passed a remark that was both offensive and *true*. Never, in all their years of friendship, had Bates known the bouncy little man to comment on anyone's personal habits, however annoying.

Then there was his own barely concealed irritation with Rawlins, who would not normally say " boo " to a goose.

The three men had been chosen for this particular assignment because tolerance was one of their strong points. Tests had revealed that they could stand almost anything in the way of upsetting personal traits.

Being human, they each had habits of which they were unaware and of which no one reminded them ; until now.

Bates made a decision and hurried to the Weapons Store. This was a strong cabinet in the ship itself. He opened up the ship with the special punched code and waited for the ladder to run down.

Once in the ship, he opened the cabinet and checked the stun guns. He arranged them so that he would be able to tell if they had been tampered with. Whatever had affected the previous settlers was beginning to affect them, he felt sure, although he doubted if either of the others realised the fact. When trouble broke out, the weapons had to be out of harm's way.

The evening meal, usually a happy affair, was strained and tense. Bates was sniffing frequently, hard as he was fighting to curb it. This was making him irritated and he snapped once or twice at the others, especially Rawlins, whose self-effacing pose was honing itself on his nerves. Borsen maintained a sullen silence and kept his eyes on his food. Only when spoken to directly did he respond. To make matters worse, both Borsen and Rawlins were beginning to sniff and

this increased their own sense of confusion. They were annoyed at Bates' sniff and now they were similarly afflicted.

The spring winds blew and the great masses of yellow flowers flowed and swayed with an almost sentient movement.

Suddenly Bates pushed his seat back and stood up. " Look," he began, an exasperated tone in his voice, " both of you must realise by now that something is happening to us, don't you ?" He didn't wait for an answer, but went on, " We're beginning to feel confused because our personal habits are irritating us, when before, they didn't bother us."

Rawlins, his whole demeanour subtly changed, asked, " What do you suggest we do ? Leave, before we start cutting each other's throats ?" His eyes were cold and shrewd.

Bates applied mental brakes. He honestly didn't know what to make of the question. Was Rawlins serious ? Or was the question a revelation of a previously hidden facet of Rawlins' character, that of a sarcastic baiter ? He decided to answer calmly and reasonably.

" You know we can't leave, Bob. We have a job to do and we're going to see it through."

Borsen interjected, " We've already re-run every test our predecessors did and made quite a few they never dreamed of. I agree with Bob. I think we should up ship and leave this place."

His eyes were speculative as he added, looking at Bates' throat, " Before we *do* cut each other's throats."

The leader realised he would have to take a grip of the situation before it slipped away from him.

" I don't agree," he replied in a loud voice, seeking to shout them down if necessary. He could see they didn't like it and knew instinctively that they had never liked his overbearing attitude but had, in the interests of friendship, been tolerant. That was one of the snags of leadership ; you had to be prepared to crack the whip when it was required, irrespective of whom it flicked.

He repeated his contention in a quieter tone. " A short time ago, Bob, you suggested that both Terrans and natives told the truth for the same reason."

Both men were watching him carefully, not sure of the fluid aspect his character was assuming. One minute, stubborn the next minute, conciliatory.

" Look, I was bull-headed because I was worried—and I still am. Even scientists have emotions. Anyway, I think you have something. I hope you'll forgive me ?"

He waited tensely as Rawlins hesitated. Then the biologist said, " Of course, Jonathan ; I suppose this thing has thrown us all." With this remark, he artfully included Borsen and headed off further trouble.

" Good !" Bates responded heartily, careful not to appear too grateful. " I suggest we have our evening meal and we can discuss a plan of action." It would be his plan, for he had already decided what he was going to do.

The continued meal was still something of an ordeal. Rawlins, who had resumed his mantle of self-effacement, annoyed Bates and Borsen, not with noisy eating, but with his efforts to suppress the sounds. Neither of the men had consciously thought about it before and now they found the effort of restraining some comment overpowering.

This is what must have happened to the others, Bates reflected morosely. Small habits and actions would be magnified out of all proportion until they seemed the most important things in the universe. Someone would reach flash-point and . . .

" So that's agreed, then ?" he pressed, pushing his plate away. " I'll go and see the Headman in the morning ?"

The others nodded assent, not quite sure how the decision had been arrived at.

" Well," Bates said, rising, " I'll clear up, then have a walk before bedtime."

His companions said goodnight and left as he started the task.

Things were working out well. Sometime during the next hour, the two men would examine the arms. He kept his fingers crossed that one or the other would not remove a weapon. This was strictly against Regulations and he banked on their adhering to them—for a short time, anyway.

He finished up and, leaving the tent, walked away from the ship. The sky was still bright with twilight. The night, at best, was only a fitful one, a mere punctuation mark between the long phrases of the days. A fairly strong, warm westerly wind was blowing and he could see the great oceans of flowers moving with turgid ghostliness.

His nose twitched almost uncontrollably, then the irritation began to disappear.

He reflected on the problem. What they were seeking was perhaps incapable of being detected and measured by scientific

methods. Cases had been known before. Here, he felt like sticking a piece of grass between his teeth, lying back and letting nature take her course. Perhaps a talk with the local chief would help. He hoped so. He considered that, if this situation was allowed to develop much more, he would never be the same person again. And he doubted if he was amenable to change.

When he judged that a suitable time had elapsed, he went back to the ship. Entering, he made for the cabinet. A brief inspection satisfied him that someone had examined the weapons, maybe intending to secrete one after he had turned in for the night.

He did something that carried with it instant dismissal from the Service and trial by court-martial. After checking that every item was there, he took the arms from the ship and dumped them. At least he wouldn't end up stunned to death. Then he rendered the ship inoperable, except by himself.

He slept fitfully amid dreams in which yellow flowers were stripping his soul of all its protective layers, exposing the tiny, bright kernel of truth that lay deep within every man. He wakened briefly, sure he had cried out, but immediately fell back into a deep, dreamless slumber. Flowers, flowers, flowers . . .

The next day was much like any other. The star wouldn't climb higher than a few degrees above the horizon. Already, the wind was persistent, if light. There was always a wind.

Breakfast was full of idle chatter. And either Borsen or Rawlins—or both of them in unison?—had checked the weapons. After he had gone to the township, someone would look again, if they hadn't last night, only to find that they had disappeared.

The township was about one and a half miles off; the day was pleasant and he decided to walk. On the way, he passed three groups of natives moving on to new territory, carrying their belongings on the curiously cow-like animals of burden. They acknowledged each other gravely.

He was greeted at the entrance to the township by Araak who had an air of smugness about him. Bates guessed that the native's stock had risen since his successful raid on the team stores. He grinned.

"You are welcome, Mr. Bates," he said, leading the way. The place was well laid out with good sewerage arrangements,

one of the corner stones of any civilisation. The houses were low, constructed of mud built round a structure of branches and well ventilated.

" I've come to see the current Headman, Araak, if he's available."

" Bro-Kra will see you ; Trelk has gone west."

" You're looking pleased with yourself," Bates remarked as they strolled through the township. The natives were engaged in a variety of tasks ; turning out very passable bowls and pitchers ; repairing huts ; preparing food ; attending to children ; in the plots of ground dotted everywhere, planting new crops. " No one managed to relieve you of your spoils, yet ?"

Araak shook his head. " I am now Deputy Headman. When Bro-Kra either moves on or I acquire some of his goods, I shall be Headman."

They stopped outside the Headman's house. " Well, don't try to ' acquire ' anything during my stay. I don't wish to be accused of aiding and abetting."

Bates knew Bro-Kra slightly. At first, it had been difficult to distinguish one native from the next one, but, after a time, their differences became apparent.

After Bates had made a number of gifts to Bro-Kra, he said, "I've come to you for help, Headman, as you are the present repository of knowledge in the area."

The alien inclined his head in acceptance of Bates' remarks.

" Frankly, we are having trouble at the camp. We find ourselves under a compulsion to tell the truth at all times and we are not pyschologically suited for it. One of the team suggested that the cause may be the same as that which affects you. Araak says everyone speaks only the truth. Has it always been so ?"

Bro-Kra pushed a bowl of pungent, orange-coloured fruit across to him and he took one and bit into it, the juice making his features want to twist.

" Ever since time began, the truth has been told. The winds of truth, sent by the Gods to keep the planet untainted, ensure this."

Bates stopped chewing. " The winds ? Do you mean *they* are the cause of the truth ?"

Bro-Kra shook his head in what might have passed for exasperation. " No ; something carried *in* the winds."

Bates said suddenly, " In your language, what does 'T'ippies' mean ?"

" The flower of truth. The planet bears the name and the winds, E'siin T'ippies, are literally ' the carriers of truth '."

" So it must be microscopic spores from the flowers, windborne around the planet," Bates mused, forgetting his host.

Abruptly, he excused himself and headed back to the camp. He turned the problem over in his mind. These spores, when inhaled in quantity, must have the effect of inducing people to tell the truth. Then the spores must each contain traces of sulpha pentothal or some of the other truth drugs. Surely traces would show in a person's system under examination ? Maybe the evidence disappeared when they left the planet as did the compulsion to be truthful. He chased these various queries around.

He reached the camp. The place was very still.

He called, " Borsen ! Rawlins ! I have news." There was no reply. He stopped, all his senses tingling and alert. His head moved from side to side, like that of a lion just emerged from the bush.

There was no one in the first or second tents. The third one was occupied by a very bloody and unconscious Rawlins. Bates knelt beside him, but didn't touch him. Then, straightening up, he fetched some water and a towel and cleaned Rawlins up. The damage wasn't nearly so serious as he had feared ; he did a temporary repair job.

Propping him up, he asked Rawlins, " What happened ?"

The injured man explored gingerly and came in contact with the bandage. He looked utterly miserable. " Borsen up and clouted me with something," he explained.

" I can *see* that," Bates interrupted impatiently, " but *why*, that's what I want to know."

Rawlins shifted his position. " Jonathan—since we came here, I've discovered a lot about myself. Or rather, I should say, I've had to face up to facets of my character that I've always refused to acknowledge when I had the safe veneer of civilisation to protect me. I don't blame Theodore. Does that explain things ?"

" It does. This place affects everyone. It makes yourself hard enough to live with, let alone anyone else. Can you look after yourself for a few minutes ? I'll have to rout him out."

" You know where he is ?" Rawlins was surprised.

" In the ship. That's where I would have gone in the same circumstances. By now, he'll have discovered he can't lift ship."

He went outside and walked to the ship and shouted up.

A head poked out of the airlock and Borsen demanded in a tone that might have been used by an Admiral of the Fleet, " What the hell have you done to this ship ?"

" Made sure that no one could fly away with it."

" You think of everything, don't you ?"

" I try." Bates felt as if he were talking from the bottom of a well. " Come on down. Bob isn't dead or anything like that. I realise that while we're on this planet, we can't suffer each other, but I thought you'd want to know why. The yellow flowers have the equivalent of a truth drug in their microscopic spores which are carried about by the winds. When we have inhaled a sufficient quantity, they have the same effect as the drug."

" Why weren't traces of this drug found in anyone's body ?"

" It must have disappeared by the time they left the planet. Look—I'm getting a crick in the neck. *Please* come down."

" You're sure Rawlins is all right ?" Just then, he staggered groggily from the tent and Borsen decided to come down.

Later, when they were back in space and the effect of the truth flowers had worn off, Bates said, " They'll have to send a sizeable chunk of the Central Laboratory staff to pin down proof of the drug theory. Some sort of breathing apparatus will have to be used until physical and psychological adjustment techniques can be perfected for settlers."

Borsen broke in with a howl. " Jonathan ! The weapons ; we left them behind. What're we going to do about that?"

Bates was thoughtful for a minute, then a grin spread slowly over his face.

" I guess," he replied, laughing, " we'll just have to tell a lie !"

Donald Malcolm

The most fascinating aspect of interplanetary (or inter-stellar) travel will be the great archaeological possibilities—investigating the ruins of lost alien civilisations. But to which purpose should any scientific discoveries be put—peace or war ?

OZYMANDIAS

by ROBERT SILVERBERG

The planet had been dead about a million years. That was our first impression, as our ship orbited down to its sere brown surface, and as it happened our first impression turned out to be right. There had been a civilization here *once*—but Earth had swung around Sol ten-to-the-sixth times since the last living being of this world had drawn breath.

"A dead planet," Colonel Mattern exclaimed bitterly. "Nothing here that's of any use. We might as well pack up and move on."

It was hardly surprising that Mattern would feel that way. In urging a quick departure and an immediate removal to some world of greater utilitarian value, Mattern was, after all, only serving the best interests of his employers. His employers were the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the United States of America. They expected Mattern and his half of the crew to produce results, and by way of results they meant new weapons and sources of strategic materials. They hadn't tossed in seventy per cent of the budget for this trip just to sponsor a lot of archaeological putterings.

But luckily for *our* half of the outfit—the archaeological putterers' half—Mattern did not have an absolute voice in the affairs of the outfit. Perhaps the General Staff had kicked in for seventy percent of our budget, but the cautious men of the military's Public Liaison branch had seen to it that *we* had at least some rights.

Dr. Leopold, head of the non-military segment of the expedition, said brusquely, " Sorry, Mattern, but I'll have to apply the limiting clause here."

Mattern started to sputter. " But—"

" But nothing, Mattern. We're here. We've spent a good chunk of American cash in getting here. I insist that we spend the minimum time allotted for scientific research, as long as we *are* here."

Mattern scowled, looking down at the table, supporting his chin in his thumbs and digging the rest of his fingers in hard back of his jawbone. He was annoyed, but he was smart enough to know he didn't have much of a case to make against Leopold.

The rest of us—four archaeologists and seven military men ; they outnumbered us a trifle—watched eagerly as our superiors battled. My eyes strayed through the porthole and I looked at the dry windblown plain, marked here and there with the stumps of what might have been massive monuments millenia ago.

Mattern said bleakly, " The world is of utterly no strategic consequence. Why, it's so old that even the vestiges of civilization have turned to dust !"

" Nevertheless, I reserve the right granted to me to explore any world we land on, for a period of at least one hundred and sixty-eight hours," Leopold returned implacably.

Exasperated, Mattern burst out, " Dammit, *why* ? Just to spite me ? Just to prove the innate intellectual superiority of the scientist to the man of war ?"

" Mattern, I'm not injecting personalities into this."

" I'd like to know what you are doing, then ? Here we are on a world that's obviously useless to me and probably just as useless to you. Yet you stick me on a technicality and force me to waste a week here. Why, if not out of spite ?"

" We made only the most superficial reconnaissance so far," Leopold said. " For all we know this place may be the answer

to many questions of galactic history. It may even be a treasure-trove of superbombs, for all—"

" Pretty damned likely !" Mattern exploded. He glared around the conference room, fixing each of the scientific members of the committee with a baleful stare. He was making it quite clear that he was trapped into a wasteful expense of time by our foggy-eyed desire for Knowledge.

Useless knowledge. Not good hard practical knowledge of the kind *he* valued.

" All right," he said finally. " I've protested and I've lost, Leopold. You're within your rights in insisting on remaining here one week. But you'd damned well better be ready to blast off when your time's up !"

It had been for gone all along, of course. The charter of our expedition was explicit on the matter. We had been sent out to comb a stretch of worlds near the Galactic Rim that had already been brushed over hastily by a survey mission.

The surveyors had been looking simply for signs of life, and, finding none (of course), they had moved on. We were entrusted with the task of investigating in detail. Some of the planets in the group had been inhabited once, the surveyors had reported. None bore present life. None of the planets we had ever visited had been found to hold intelligent life, though many had in the past.

Our job was to comb through the assigned worlds with diligence. Leopold, leading our group, had the task of doing pure archaeological research on the dead civilizations ; Mattern and his men had the more immediately practical job of looking for fissionable material, leftover alien weapons, possible sources of lithium or tritium for fusion, and other such militarily useful things. You might argue that in a strictly pragmatic sense our segment of the group was just dead weight, carted along for the ride at great expense, and you would be right.

But the public temper over the last few hundred years in America has frowned on purely military expeditions. And so, as a sop to the nation's conscience, five archaeologists of little empirical consequence so far as national security mattered were tacked onto the expedition.

Us.

Mattern made it quite clear at the outset that *his* boys were the Really Important members of the expedition, and

that we were simply ballast. In a way, we had to agree. Tension was mounting once again on our sadly disunited planet ; there was no telling when the Other Hemisphere would rouse from its quiescence of a hundred years and decide to plunge once more into space. If anything of military value lay out here, we knew we had to find it before They did.

The good old armaments race. Hi-ho ! The old space stories used to talk about expeditions from Earth. Well, we *were* from Earth, abstractly speaking—but in actuality we were from America, period. Global unity was as much of a pipe-dream as it had been three hundred years earlier, in the remote and primitive chemical-rocket era of space travel. Amen. End of sermon. We got to work.

The planet had no name, and we didn't give it one ; a special commission of what was laughably termed the United Nations Organization was working on the problem of assigning names to the hundreds of worlds of the galaxy, using the old idea of borrowing from ancient Terran mythologies in analogy to the Mercury-Venus-Mars nomenclature of our own system.

Probably they would end up saddling this world with something like Thoth or Bel-Marduk or perhaps Avalokitesvara. We knew it simply as Planet Four of the system belonging to a yellow-white F5 IV Procyonoid sun Revised HD Catalog No. 170861.

It was roughly Earthtype, with a diameter of 6100 miles, a gravity index of .93, a mean temperature of 45 degrees F. with a daily fluctuation range of about ten degrees, and a thin, nasty atmosphere composed mostly of carbon dioxide with wisps of helium and nitrogen and the barest smidgeon of oxygen. Quite possibly the air had been breathable by humanoid life a million years ago—but that was a million years ago. We took good care to practice our breathing-mask drills before we ventured out of the ship.

The sun, as noted, was an F5 IV and fairly hot, but Planet Four was a hundred and eighty-five million miles away from it at perihelion and a good deal farther when it was at the other swing of its rather eccentric orbit ; the good old Keplerian ellipse took quite a bit of punishment in this system. Planet Four reminded me in many ways of Mars—except that Mars, of course, had never known intelligent life of any kind, at least none that had troubled to leave a hint of its existence,

while this planet had obviously had a flourishing civilization at a time when Pithecanthropus was Earth's noblest being.

In any event, once we had thrashed out the matter of whether or not we were going to stay here or pull up and head for the next planet on our schedule, the five of us set to work. We knew we had only a week—Mattern would never grant us an extension unless we came up with something good enough to change his mind, which was improbable—and we wanted to get as much done in that week as possible. With the sky as full of worlds as it is, this planet might never be visited by Earth scientists again.

Mattern and his men served notice right away that they were going to help us, but reluctantly and minimally. We unlimbered the three small halftracks carried aboard ship and got them into functioning order. We stowed our gear—cameras, pick and shovels, camel's-hair brushes—and donned our breathing-masks, and Mattern's men helped us get the halftracks out of the ship and pointed in the right direction.

Then they stood back and waited for us to shove off.

" Don't any of you plan to accompany us ?" Leopold asked. The halftracks each held up to four men.

Mattern shook his head. " You fellows go out by yourselves today and let us know what you find. We can make better use of the time, filing and catching up on back log entries."

I saw Leopold start to scowl. Mattern was being openly contemptuous ; the least he could do was have his men make a token search for fissionable or fusionable matter ! But Leopold swallowed down his anger.

" Okay," he said. " You do that. If we come across any raw veins of plutonium I'll radio back."

" Sure," Mattern said. " Thanks for the favour. Let me know if you find a brass mine, too." He laughed harshly. " Raw plutonium ! I half believe you're serious !"

We had worked out a rough sketch of the area, and we split up into three units. Leopold, alone, headed straight due west, toward the dry riverbed we had spotted from the air. He intended to check alluvial deposits, I guess.

Marshall and Webster, sharing one halftrack, struck out to the hilly country southeast of our landing point. A substantial city appeared to be buried under the sand there. Gerhardt and I, in the other vehicle, made off to the north, where we

hoped to find remnants of yet another city. It was a bleak, windy day ; the endless sand that covered this world mounted into little dunes before us, and the wind picked up handfuls and tossed it against the plastite dome that covered our truck. Underneath the steel cleats of our tractor-belt, there was a steady crunch-crunch of metal coming down on sand that hadn't been disturbed in millenia.

Neither of us spoke for a while. Then Gerhardt said, " I hope the ship's still there when we get back to the base."

Frowning, I turned to look at him as I drove. Gerhardt had always been an enigma : a small scrunchy guy with untidy brown hair flapping in his eyes, eyes that were set a little too close together. He had a degree from the University of Kansas and had put in some time on their field staff with distinction, or so his references said.

I said, " What the hell do you mean ?"

" I don't trust Mattern. He hates us."

" He doesn't. Mattern's no villain—just a fellow who wants to do his job and go home. But what do you mean, the ship not being there ?"

" He'll blast off without us. You see the way he sent us all out into the desert, and kept his own men back. I tell you, he'll strand us here !"

I snorted. " Don't be a paranoid. Mattern won't do anything of the sort."

" He thinks we're dead weight on the expedition," Gerhardt insisted. " What better way to get rid of us ?"

The halftrack breasted a hump in the desert. I kept wishing a vulture would squeal somewhere, but there was not even that. Life had left this world ages ago. I said, " Mattern doesn't have much use for *us*, sure. But would he blast off and leave three perfectly good halftracks behind ? Would he?"

It was a good point. Gerhardt grunted agreement after a while. Mattern would *never* toss equipment away, though he might not have such scruples about five surplus archaeologists.

We rode along silently for a while longer. By now we had covered twenty miles through this utterly barren land. As far as I could see, we might just as well have stayed at the ship. At least there we had a surface lie of building foundations.

But another ten miles and we came across our city. It seemed to be of linear form, no more than half a mile wide and stretching out as far as we could see—maybe six or seven

hundred miles ; if we had time, we would check the dimensions from the air.

Of course it wasn't much of a city. The sand had pretty well covered everything, but we could see foundations jutting up here and there, weathered lumps of structural concrete and reinforced metal. We got out and unpacked the power-shovel.

An hour later, we were sticky with sweat under our thin spacesuits and we had succeeded in transferring a few thousand cubic yards of soil from the ground to an area a dozen yards away. We had dug one devil of a big hole in the ground.

And we had nothing.

Nothing. Not an artifact, not a skull, not a yellowed tooth. No spoons, no knives, no baby-rattles.

Nothing.

The foundations of some of the buildings had endured, though whittled down to stumps by a million years of sand and wind and rain. But nothing else of this civilization had survived. Mattern, in his scorn, had been right, I admitted ruefully : this planet was as useless to us as it was to them. Weathered foundations could tell us little except that there had once been a civilization here. An imaginative paleontologist can reconstruct a dinosaur from a fragment of a thigh-bone, can sketch out a presentable saurian with only a fossilized ischium to guide him. But could we extrapolate a culture, a code of laws, a technology, a philosophy, from bare weathered building foundations ?

Not very likely.

We moved on and dug somewhere else half a mile away, hoping at least to unearth one tangible remnant of the civilization that had been. But time had done its work ; we were lucky to have the building foundations. All else was gone.

" *Boundless and bare, the lone and level sands stretched far away,*" I muttered.

Gerhardt looked up from his digging. " Eh ? What's that ?" he demanded.

" Shelley," I told him.

" Oh. Him."

He went back to digging.

Late in the afternoon we finally decided to call it quits and head back to the base. We had been in the field for seven hours, and had nothing to show for it except a few hundred feet of tridim films of building foundations.

The sun was beginning to set ; Planet Four had a thirty-five hour day, and it was coming to its end. The sky always sombre, was darkening now. There was no moon to be still as bright. Planet Four had no satellites. It seemed a bit unfair ; Three and Five of the system each had four moons, while around the massive gas giant that was Eight a cluster of thirteen moonlets whirled.

We wheeled round and headed back, taking an alternate route three miles east of the one we had used on the way out, in case we might spot something. It was a forlorn hope, though.

Six miles along our journey, the truck radio came to life. The dry, testy voice of Dr. Leopold reached us :

" Calling Trucks Two and Three. Two and Three, do you read me ? Come in, Two and Three."

Gerhardt was driving. I reached across his knee to key in the response channel and said, " Anderson and Gerhardt in Number Three, sir. We read you."

A moment later, somewhat more faintly, came the sound of Number Two keying into the threeway channel, and I heard Marshall saying, " Marshall and Webster in Two, Dr. Leopold. Is something wrong ?"

" I've found something," Leopold said.

From the way Marshall exclaimed " *Really* !" I knew that Truck Number Two had had no better luck than we. I said, " That makes one of us, then."

" You've had no luck, Anderson ?"

" Not a scrap. Not a potsherd."

" How about you, Marshall ?"

" Check. Scattered signs of a city, but nothing of archaeological value, sir."

I heard Leopold chuckle before he said, " Well, I've found something. It's a little too heavy for me to manage by myself. I want both outfits to come out here and take a look at it."

" What is it, sir ?" Marshall and I asked simultaneously, in just about the same words.

But Leopold was fond of playing the Man of Mystery. He said, " You'll see when you get here. Take down my co-ordinates and get a move on. I want to be back at the base by nightfall."

Shrugging, we changed course to head for Leopold's location. He was about seventeen miles southwest of us, it

seemed. Marshall and Webster had an equally long trip to make ; they were sharply southeast of Leopold's position.

The sky was fairly dark when we arrived at what Leopold had computed as his co-ordinates. The headlamps of the halftrack lit up the desert for nearly a mile, and at first there was no sign of anyone or anything. Then I spotted Leopold's halftrack parked off to the east, and from the south Gerhardt saw the lights of the third truck rolling toward us.

We reached Leopold at about the same time. He was not alone. There was an—object—with him.

" Greetings, gentlemen." He had a smug grin on his whiskery face. " I seem to have made a find."

He stepped back and, as if drawing an imaginary curtain, let us take a peek at his find. I frowned in surprise and puzzlement. Standing in the sand behind Leopold's halftrack was something that looked very much like a robot.

It was tall, seven feet or more, and vaguely humanoid : that is, it had arms extending from its shoulders, a head on those shoulders, and legs. The head was furnished with receptor plates where eyes, ears, and mouth would be on humans. There were no other openings. The robot's body was massive and squarish, with sloping shoulders, and its dark metal skin was pitted and corroded as by the workings of the elements over uncountable centuries.

It was buried up to its knees in sand. Leopold, still grinning smugly (and understandably proud of his find) said, " Say something to us, robot."

From the mouth-receptors came a clanking sound, the gnashing of—what ? gears ?—and a voice came forth, oddly high-pitched but audible. The words were alien and were spoken in a slippery singsong kind of inflection. I felt a chill go quivering down my back. The Age of Space Exploration was three centuries old—and for the first time human ears were hearing the sounds of a language that had not been spawned on Earth.

" It understands what you say ?" Gerhardt questioned.

" I don't think so," Leopold said. " Not yet, anyway. But when I address it directly it starts spouting. I think it's a kind of—well, guide to the ruins, so to speak. Built by the ancients to provide information to passersby ; only it seems to have survived the ancients and their monuments as well."

I studied the thing. It *did* look incredibly old—and sturdy ; it was so massively solid that it might indeed have outlasted every other vestige of civilization on this planet. It had stopped talking, now, and was simply staring ahead. Suddenly it wheeled ponderously on its base, swung an arm up to take in the landscape nearby, and started speaking again.

I could almost put the words in its mouth : "*—and over here we have the ruins of the Parthenon, chief temple of Athena on the Acropolis. Completed in the year* 438 *B.C., it was partially destroyed by an explosion in* 1687 *while in use as a powder magazine by the Turks—*"

" It *does* seem to be a sort of a guide," Webster remarked. " I get the definite feeling that we're being given an historical narration now, all about the wondrous monuments that must have been on this site once."

" If only we could understand what it's saying !" Marshall exclaimed.

" We can try to decipher the language somehow," Leopold said. " Anyway, it's a magnificent find, isn't it ? And—"

I began to laugh suddenly. Leopold, offended, glared at me and said, " May I ask what's so funny, Dr. Anderson ?"

" Ozymandias !" I said, when I had subsided a bit. " It's a natural ! Ozymandias !"

" I'm afraid I don't—"

" Listen to him," I said. " It's as if he was built and put here for those who follow after, to explain to us the glories of the race that built the cities. Only the cities are gone, and the robot is still here ! Doesn't he seem to be saying, '*Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair* !' "

" *Nothing besides remains,*" Webster quoted. " It's apt. Builders and cities all gone, but the poor robot doesn't know it, and delivers his spiel nonetheless. Yes. We ought to call him Ozymandias !"

Gerhardt said, " What shall we do with it ?"

" You say you couldn't budge it ?" Webster asked Leopold.

" It weighs five or six hundred pounds. It can move of its own volition, but I couldn't move it myself."

" Maybe the five of us—" Webster suggested.

" No," Leopold said. An odd smile crossed his face. "We will leave it here."

" What ? "

" Only temporarily," he added. " We'll save it—as a sort of surprise for Mattern. We'll spring it on him the final day,

letting him think all along that this planet was worthless. He can rib us all he wants—but when it's time to go, we'll produce our prize !"

" You think it's safe to leave it out here ?" Gerhardt asked.

" Nobody's going to steal it," Marshall said.

" And it won't melt in the rain," Webster added.

" But—suppose it walks away ?" Gerhardt demanded. " It can do that, can it not ?"

Leopold said, " Of course. But where would it go ? It will remain where it is, I think. If it moves, we can always trace it with the radar. Back to the base, now ; it grows late."

We climbed back into our halftracks. The robot, silent once again, planted knee-deep in the sand, outlined against the darkening sky, swivelled to face us and lifted one thick arm in a kind of salute.

" Remember," Leopold warned us as we left. " Not one word about this to Mattern !"

At the base that night, Colonel Mattern and his seven aides were remarkably curious about our day's activities. They tried to make it seem as if they were taking a sincere interest in our work, but it was perfectly obvious to us that they were simply goading us into telling them what they had anticipated —that we had found absolutely nothing. This was the response they got, since Leopold forbade mentioning Ozymandias. Aside from the robot, the truth was that we *had* found nothing, and when they learned of this they smiled knowingly, as if saying that had we listened to them in the first place we would all be back on Earth seven days earlier, with no loss.

The following morning after breakfast Mattern announced that he was sending out a squad to look for fusionable materials unless we objected.

" We'll only need one of the halftracks," he said. " That leaves two for you. You don't mind, do you ?"

" We can get along with two," Leopold replied a little sourly. " Just so you keep out of our territory."

" Which is ?"

Instead of telling him, Leopold merely said, " We've adequately examined the area to the southeast of here, and found nothing of note. It won't matter to us if your geological equipment chews the place up."

Mattern nodded, eyeing Leopold curiously as if the obvious concealment of our place of operations had aroused suspicions. I wondered whether it was wise to conceal information from Mattern. Well, Leopold wanted to play his little game, I thought ; and one way to keep Mattern from seeing Ozymandias was not to tell him where we would be working.

" I thought you said this planet was useless from your viewpoint, Colonel," I remarked.

Mattern stared at me. " I'm sure of it. But it would be idiotic of me not to have a look, wouldn't it—as long as we're spending the time here anyway ?"

I had to admit that he was right. " Do you expect to find anything, though ?"

He shrugged. " No fissionables, certainly. It's a safe bet that everything radioactive on *this* planet has long since decomposed. But there's always the possibility of lithium, you know."

" Or pure tritium," Leopold said acidly. Mattern merely laughed, and made no reply.

Half an hour later we were bound westward again to the point where we had left Ozymandias. Gerhardt, Webster and I rode together in one halftrack, and Leopold and Marshall occupied the other. The third, with two of Mattern's men and the prospecting equipment, ventured off to the southeast toward the area Marshall and Webster had fruitlessly combed the day before.

Ozymandias was where we had left him, with the sun coming up behind him and glowing round his sides. I wondered how many sunrises he had seen. Billions, perhaps.

We parked the halftracks not far from the robot and approached, Webster filming him in the bright light of morning. A wind was whistling down from the north, kicking up eddies in the sand.

" Ozymandias have remain here," the robot said as we drew near.

In English.

For a moment we didn't realize what had happened, but what followed afterward was a five-man quadruple-take. While we gabbled in confusion the robot said, " Ozymandias decipher the language somehow. Seem to be a sort of guide."

" Why—he's parroting fragments from our conversation yesterday," Marshall said.

" I don't think he's parroting," I said. " The words form coherent concepts. He's *talking* to us !"

" Built by the ancients to provide information to passersby," Ozymandias said.

" Ozymandias !" Leopold said. " Do you speak English ?"

The response was a clicking noise, followed moments later by, " Ozymandias understand. Not have words enough. Talk more."

The five of us trembled with common excitement. It was apparent now what had happened, and the happening was nothing short of incredible. Ozymandias had listened patiently to everything we had said the night before ; then, after we had gone, it had applied its million-year-old mind to the problem of organizing our sounds into sense and somehow had succeeded. Now it was merely a matter of feeding vocabulary to the creature and letting it assimilate the new words. We had a walking and talking Rosetta Stone !

Two hours flew by so rapidly we hardly noticed their passing. We tossed words at Ozymandias as fast as we could, defining them when possible to aid him in relating them to the others already engraved on his mind.

By the end of that time he could hold a passable conversation with us. He ripped his legs free of the sand that had bound them for centuries—and, serving the function for which he had been built millenia ago, he took us on a guided tour of the civilization that had been and had built him.

Ozymandias was a fabulous storehouse of archaeological data. We could mine him for years.

His people, he told us, had called themselves the Thaiquens (or so it sounded)—they had lived and thrived for three hundred thousand years, and in the declining days of their history had built him, as an indestructible guide to their indestructible cities. But the cities had crumbled, and Ozymandias alone remained—bearing with him memories of what had been.

" This was the city of Durab. In its day it held eight million people. Where I stand now was the Temple of Decamon, sixteen hundred feet of your measurement high. It faced the Street of the Winds—"

" The Eleventh Dynasty was begun by the accession to the Presidium of Chonnigar IV, in the eighteen thousandth year of the city. It was in the reign of this dynasty that the neighbouring planets first were reached—"

" The Library of Durab was on this spot. It boasted fourteen million volumes. None exist today. Long after the builders had gone, I spent time reading the books of the Library and they are memorized within me—"

" The Plague struck down nine thousand a day for more than a year, in that time—"

It went on and on, a cyclopean newsreel, growing in detail as Ozymandias absorbed our comments and added new words to his vocabulary. We followed the robot as it wheeled its way through the desert, our recorders gobbling in each word, our minds numbed and dazed by the magnitude of our find. In this single robot lay waiting to be tapped the totality of a culture that had lasted three hundred thousand years ! We could mine Ozymandias the rest of our lives, and still not exhaust the fund of data implanted in his all-encompassing mind.

When, finally, we ripped ourselves away and, leaving Ozymandias in the desert, returned to the base, we were full to bursting. Never in the history of our science had such a find been vouchsafed : a complete record, accessible and translated for us.

We agreed to conceal our find from Mattern once again. But, like small boys newly given a toy of great value, we found it hard to hide our feelings. Although we said nothing explicit, our overexcited manner certainly must have hinted to Mattern that we had not had as fruitless a day as we had claimed.

That, and Leopold's refusal to tell him exactly where we had been working during the day, must have aroused Mattern's suspicions. In any event, during the night as we lay in bed I heard the sound of halftracks rumbling off into the desert ; and the following morning, when we entered the messhall for breakfast, Mattern and his men, unshaven and untidy, turned to look at us with peculiar vindictive gleams in their eyes.

Mattern said, " Good morning, gentlemen. We've been waiting for some time for you to arise."

" It's not later than usual, is it ?" Leopold asked.

" Not at all. But my men and I have been up all night. We—ah—did a bit of archaeological prospecting while you slept." The Colonel leaned forward, fingering his rumpled lapels, and said, " Dr. Leopold, for what reason did you choose

to conceal from me the fact that you had discovered an object of extreme strategic importance ?"

" What do you mean ?" Leopold demanded—with a quiver taking the authority out of his voice.

" I mean," said Mattern quietly, " the robot you named Ozymandias. Just why did you decide not to tell me about it ?"

" I had every intention of doing so before our departure," Leopold said.

Mattern shrugged. " Be that as it may. You concealed the existence of your find. But your manner last night led us to investigate the area—and since the detectors showed a metal object some twenty miles to the west, we headed that way. Ozymandias was quite surprised to learn that there were other Earthmen here."

There was a moment of crackling silence. Then Leopold said, " I'll have to ask you not to meddle with that robot, Colonel Mattern. I apologize for having neglected to tell you of it—I didn't think you were quite so interested in our work—but now I must insist you and your men keep away from it."

" Oh ?" Mattern said crisply. " Why ?"

" Because it's an archaeological treasure-trove, Colonel. I can't begin to stress its value to us. Your men might perform some casual experiment with it and shortcircuit its memory channels, or something like that. And so I'll have to invoke the rights of the archaeological group of this expedition. I'll have to declare Ozymandias part of our preserve, and off bounds for you."

Mattern's voice suddenly hardened. " Sorry, Dr. Leopold. You can't invoke that now."

" Why not ?"

" Because Ozymandias is part of *our* preserve. And off bounds for you, Doctor."

I thought Leopold would have an apoplectic fit right there in the messhall. He stiffened and went white and strode awkwardly across the room toward Mattern. He choked out a question, inaudible to me.

Mattern replied, " Security, Doctor. Ozymandias is of military use. Accordingly we've brought him to the ship and placed him in sealed quarters, under top-level wraps. With the power entrusted to me for such emergencies. I'm declaring

this expedition ended. We return to Earth at once with Ozymandias."

Leopold's eyes bugged. He looked at us for support, but we said nothing. Finally, incredulously, he said, "He's—of military use?"

"Of course. He's a storehouse of data on the ancient Thaiquen weapons. We've already learned things from him that are unbelievable in their scope. Why do you think this planet is bare of life, Dr. Leopold? Not even a blade of grass? A million years won't do that. But a superweapon *will*. The Thaiquens developed that weapon. And others, too. Weapons that can make your hair curl. And Ozymandias knows every detail of them. Do you think we can waste time letting you people fool with that robot, when he's loaded with military information that can make America totally impregnable? Sorry, Doctor. Ozymandias is your find, but he belongs to us. And we're taking him back to Earth."

Again the room was silent. Leopold looked at me, at Webster, at Marshall, at Gerhardt. There was nothing that could be said.

This was basically a militaristic mission. Sure, a few anthropologists had been tacked onto the crew, but fundamentally it was Mattern's men and not Leopold's who were important. We weren't out here so much to increase the fund of general knowledge as to find new weapons and new sources of strategic materials for possible use against the Other Hemisphere.

And new weapons had been found. New, undreamed-of weapons, product of a science that had endured for three hundred thousand years. All locked up in Ozymandias' imperishable skull.

In a harsh voice Leopold said, "Very well, Colonel. I can't stop you, I suppose."

He turned and shuffled out without touching his food, a broken, beaten, suddenly very old man.

I felt sick.

Mattern had insisted the planet was useless and that stopping here was a waste of time; Leopold had disagreed, and Leopold had turned out to be right. We had found something of great value.

We had found a machine that could spew forth new and awesome recipes for death. We held in our hands the sum and essence of the Thaiquen science—the science that had

culminated in magnificent weapons, weapons so superb they had succeeded in destroying all life on this world. And now we had access to those weapons. Dead by their own hand, the Thaiquens had thoughtfully left us a heritage of death.

Greyfaced, I rose from the table and went to my cabin. I wasn't hungry now.

"We'll be blasting off in an hour," Mattern said behind me as I left. "Get your things in order."

I hardly heard him. I was thinking of the deadly cargo we carried, the robot so eager to disgorge its fund of data. I was thinking what would happen when our scientists back on Earth began learning from Ozymandias.

The works of the Thaiquens now were ours. I thought of the poet's lines : "*Look on my works, ye mighty—and despair.*"

Robert Silverberg

THE LITERARY LINE-UP

James White's "Sector General" hospital series is one of the most popular we have ever published and quite a few authors (including several Americans) have stated that they wished they had thought of the idea first. Because of plot developments on the varied assortment of aliens residing in the hospital these stories only lend themselves to the long novelette and usually appear in between serials. So, next month, we have an opportunity of presenting "Out-Patient," a long story of Dr. Conway's efforts to revive an alien who had no wish to live.

There will also be a fine off-trail novelette by J. G. Ballard entitled "Chronopolis"—a city without clocks or watches (try existing without some form of time piece). Plus short stories by Brian W. Aldiss, Philip E. High and newcomer Larry Maddock.

Story ratings for No. 90 were :

1. Time Out Of Joint (Part Two) - - Philip K. Dick
2. O'Mara's Orphan - - - - - - - James White
3. Under An English Heaven - - - Brian W. Aldiss
   Mumbo-Jumbo Man - - - - - Philip E. High

In recent years a number of disastrous earthquakes have taken place on the African and North American continents, the most serious being the recent one at Agadir in Morocco where over 12,000 people died. If Kenneth Johns' assumptions in this article are correct, there is every possibility of more to follow in the same areas during the next centuries.

THE DEEPS

by KENNETH JOHNS

Parallel to the exploration of space, man is exploring the depths of the ocean. As his radar waves reach out to Venus, so his asdic impulses pry down into the dark unknown depths of the seas ; as bigger and more sophisticated satellites orbit the Earth, so more and more unmanned scientific gadgets are dropped into the deeps to float far beneath the surface or sink to the bottom mud and telemeter back information on the unknown seventy per cent of the Earth.

Whilst men are planning to ride their rockets into space other men are planning to ride their bathyscaphes down seven miles into as alien a world as any we may find beyond the Earth.

Although it is becoming trite to say that we know more about the visible surface of the Moon than our own sea beds, it still remains true, particularly now that we have actually placed a man-made object on the Moon and peered around the corner at the hidden side. Anyone can buy a detailed

map of the Moon's surface that we can see from Earth. Only two percent of the sea bed is mapped. Not so well known, too, is the fact that ninety per cent of Earth's water is deep sea water at approximately 40°F, cold, dark, remote, mysterious ; but the habitat of a teeming, terrestrial life.

In " The Challenge of the Sea " in *New Worlds* No. 74 a number of the methods that could be chosen to augment our food and material supplies were discussed, and the importance of the sea in any planning of coherent value was emphasised. Before these schemes can be put into operation, a great deal more must be known about the seas, the ocean beds, the currents and the living creatures that spawn there.

Oceanography has, until recently, been a Cinderella of the sciences of Earth. What work has been carried out has been on a shoestring budget by enthusiastic pioneers, usually in cramped and unsuitable conditions and in ships jury-rigged for the work. Much of the early pioneer work was carried out by Britain, Darwin's results as exemplified in his theories on evolution tend to overshadow the fact that HMS *Challenger* was engaged primarily on oceanographical work. But the position is now changing, partly because of the commercial potentialities and partly because of the military interest in the deep ranges.

This military aspect is the more obvious one. Much of the same sort of reasoning obtains in this sphere as in the sphere of space research ; the terrible fear of the US and the USSR of falling behind the other in any outward facet of world-power. The cold war has nearly given way to the prestige war but the details of the pieces on the board are themselves the details of hot war. Thus nuclear submarines armed with H-tipped ballistic missiles which can creep unopposed to any coastline and destroy on an arc 1500 miles inland have two parts to play ; one is the counter in the international game of bluff and prestige and the other their function in time of war.

The seas are no longer a barrier, they are wide and deep highways where the wars of the future may be fought and lost, whilst the missiles and counter-missiles hunt each other and their land-based launching areas. The seas are a no-man's land of menace.

These mobile, elusive, submerged launching bases are not just dreams for a nightmare tomorrow. Already the first

nuclear submarine, *Nautilus*, is old-fashioned and obsolete. *George Washington*, a 5,600 ton nuclear submarine to be armed with sixteen Polaris missiles was launched in June, 1959. She is a £40 million ship—and there will be seventy-four other such United States missile submarines at sea by 1967. Each of their solid fuel Polaris missiles has a potential 1,500 mile range carrying an H-bomb.

Russia has at least 450 submarines ; but it is not known how many of these are nuclear driven or missile armed.

The commanders of submarines and of the destroyers that hunt them work closely with the oceanographer. It is true to say that many US submarines were saved during the war by their skippers' knowledge of the seas around them gained from oceanographers ; but we will never know the other side of the question. The German and Japanese navies had little contact with their oceanographers.

Since basic knowledge of the deep ranges of the seas is so scanty, the USA is planning to boost undersea exploration as fast as possible. Detailed knowledge of the sea-bed terrain and all the possible hazards and structures under the sea is a must for future submarine commanders, both to avoid accidents and to take advantage of every scrap of cover.

In the wide oceans between the surface and the bottom this notion of cover may seem odd. But the seas are not just large pools of water, they are complexes of dynamic layers differing in temperature and salinity. Vast rivers course through them, often running in the opposite direction to surface streams. The oceans are the sources of climate and weather control, heat engines that store and help to distribute the Sun's heat.

Great mountain peaks and ranges rise from the sea bed, many of them uncharted. Only recently, a 1,000 mile long undersea mountain range was discovered in the Pacific, whilst the majority of the deep trenches, the sea canyons, have yet to be plotted, let alone explored.

Although closed circuit television is used to examine and photograph the solid surface several miles down, light is too easily absorbed by the sea to be of great use. So Man has developed asdic to replace his useless eyes when deep underwater.

Asdic uses a beam of ultrasonic sound and, since water is an excellent conductor of sound, can survey through miles of water. But a ship using an echo sounder can only plot a

two-dimensional profile of the sea bottom, and very many interacting courses must be steered before a three-dimensional picture of the bed can be obtained. The deep cold waters will carry the sound of an explosion, even that of a small grenade, thousands of miles so that the explosion point can be accurately fixed. It has been said that no ocean in the world is large enough to lose the sound that a pistol-shot might make. Asdic is the radar of the deeps and as many variations in asdic methods should eventually be possible as with radar.

This picture of the deep seas gives the submarine hunter through water conductivity a tremendous advantage—only when resting on the floor is a submarine really quiet. The large nuclear submarines are noisy, the sound of their many motors, their screws and passage through the water making them as obvious to listening microphones as a pneumatic drill in a library.

So the sub must look for cover. Knowledge of temperature gradients from bathythermograph instruments allows a noisy submarine to hide. Where warm water conjoins cold water and the resultant difference in temperature extends as a layer or a vertical plane, is where the submarine commander can find cover. Asdic beams are bent as they pass from the low density warm water to higher density cold water. The safety of his ship and the lives of his crew will depend on a submarine commander's knowledge of oceanographical material. This is true alike in peace as in war, and as submarines probe ever deeper the knowledge must keep pace with them.

America has a fleet of twelve oceanographic vessels as against Russia's fourteen, generally larger and better equipped, ships ; but American sea scientists are asking for seventy new ships and grants of £20 million for 1960 to enable them to expand their research as fast as space exploration.

Eighteen new US research vessels are to be built in five years, and under a ten year programme US oceanographic research facilities are to be doubled.

One problem with asdic sound wave detection is the delicacy of the echoes and the interference from background noise. The old problem of propagating radio waves for underwater communications has been solved by the US Navy. They are building a £21 million transmitter operating at 2 million watts, three times stronger than the largest military transmitters

known to exist, to go into operation in January, 1961. There are two main antenna masts, at 980 foot high a bare 4 feet lower than the Eiffel Tower, surrounded by their twelve smaller masts.

To lick the underwater problem, very low frequency bands will be used, probably 14 to 30 kilocycles. This transmitting system should be able to send orders direct to submarines beneath the surface without the need for betraying aerials on the surface. At present, the estimated guess is a penetration value of one hundred foot—and at that depth a submarine will still be virtually safe from random detection.

But—this new breakthrough of underwater radio may well herald the development of underwater radar, which would be quicker and more positive than sound apparatus, even though sound apparatus for submarine detection is being worked on to pinpoint every submarine under the oceans of the world.

This development might well prove the king-pin in both the cold and prestige war and prevent the occurrence of a hot war.

The desire to know more about the oceans in order to adequately brief future submarine commanders is only one aspect of the present burst of interest in exploring the seas of our planet. But, so far, submarines can only penetrate the outer layer of the oceans ; one fifth of a mile is usually taken as their diving limit. Man, to explore personally the lower depths, must dive into the cold and darkness in specially designed ships suitable for conditions found nowhere else.

In the mid-30's, the bathysphere made the headlines. This was a globe of thick steel with portholes and searchlights, slung over the side on steel cable and lowered to depths that, up till that time, had never been seen by men. Much of the pioneer work of Beebe and Piccard is still perfectly valid today. The bathysphere was inherently limited, however, and in this day and age a refinement was sure to come along.

That refinement took the shape of a ship unlike any other ship afloat—or asink. Instead of a ship floating in water, upheld by virtue of the air within her hull, the new-type ship is a Zeppelin of the oceans, a dirigible of the sea. Called a bathyscape, the most famous is the *Trieste* designed by Jacques Piccard, son of the famous balloonist, Professor August Piccard. The French Navy has a bathyscape, the

FNRS3, which has descended to a depth of two and a half miles.

The bathyscapes are simple yet ingenious 'balloons' of petrol, beneath which is suspended a steel globe containing the crew of two. The petrol, being lighter than water, counterbalances the mass of the thin balloon hull—which in the French ship has an oddly yacht-like silhouette—and the thickly walled gondola and the ballast.

After a series of over twenty test dives in the Mediterranean, the US Office of Naval Research bought the Italian-built *Trieste* for £60,000. They improved the ship, which contains 28,000 gallons of petrol, and whose 11-ton gondola is constructed of three and a half inch steel, and, in November, 1959, used her to descend three and a half miles into the Marianas Trench in the Pacific near the island of Guam.

The bathyscapes are equipped with engines and a screw, positioned high on the balloon, so that they are free to manoeuvre beneath the sea. The French are building a sister ship to the FNRS3 which will have gondola walls of six-inch steel and is planned to reach the maximum depth of seven miles.

Prospecting of the ocean floor down to a depth of three miles is planned by the Reynolds Metals' aluminium submarine, the *Aluminaut*. Carrying three men, this vessel may pave the way for other relatively-deep water craft, and, as about sixty percent of the ocean floor could be covered, the bathyscape may be used only for deep-down exploration of the trenches and fissures.

Interest in the ocean floor is not solely scientific, a certain economic interest has been shown by several nations in peculiar nodules of manganese ore that litter the ocean beds. They are almost certainly formed by micro-organisms depositing a manganese-rich coating on any handy solid object—a scrap of shell, a shark's tooth, even bits and pieces of human wrecks. Yet these orange-sized nodules amount to between 500 and 1,000 million tons of rich manganese ore just waiting to be picked up a fifth of a mile and more down under the sea.

Oceanography received a tremendous fillip from the International Oceanographic Congress held at UN HQ in New York in September, 1959. Over 1,000 delegates arrived to

read and hear 500 papers and to discuss ways of multiplying manyfold the present meagre interest and appropriations. The last does not hold true with Russia, who sent her magnificent *Mikhail Lomonosov*, a 5,960 tons survey ship with lavish equipment and a scientific staff of seventy-one.

The American National Academy of Science called for an international oceanographic organisation to become later a unit of the United Nations, and produced a plan for forty ships to carry out a ten year survey of the oceans costing £220 million, the USA providing a third of the ships and men. Probably incidental knowledge gained of the migration habits of fish would more than cover most of the cost.

Amongst the many interesting points raised at the Congress was a resurgence of Alfred Wegener's idea of the drifting apart of the continents. A single glance at a map of the world shows that the old and new worlds could be fitted together with little discrepancy of contour. The discovery that the great ridges down the middle of the oceans have a central crack running along their lengths—as if they had been pulled apart—was tied in with the fact that the ridges are the centre of geological activity and the heat flow through the Earth's crust is high along them, as if there are strong convection currents of hot fluid upwelling under them. One ocean which has no such ridges, the North Pacific, has instead a large number of fracture lines running through its bed.

One theory advanced—which incidentally accounts for the formation of the Atlantic Ocean—was that a rift forms in the sea bed, and, over the millions of years, other rifts form beneath the first, so that the whole cleft gradually widens out, with avalanches eroding and filling the sides. Thus, eventually, the walls of the cleft pull apart sufficiently to form the sides of an ocean with a new ridge-cleft system running down the centre. If this theory is true, Africa and the US are each due to split up and become four continents instead of two.

A newly discovered sub-surface current in the Pacific was reported. It is known as the Cromwell current and runs in the opposite direction to the surface current. It is a river 180 miles wide, 900 feet thick, 150 feet below the surface and is cold water rich in minerals and hence in life. It runs directly under the Equator, and its existence was traced to the coriolis effect from the Earth's spin. Fluids tend to spin

anticlockwise north of the equator, clockwise south of it and not at all along it—so the overall effect is that the north and south spins, like rollers, create this straight river through their mutual movement, like the blanket going through the rollers.

Since it is richer in life than the surrounding ocean, the Cromwell current has built up a long mound of organic detritus 900 feet thick and 360 miles wide beneath itself.

Yet, if the Equator had always been in its present position since life became plentiful on Earth, scientists calculated that the mound of debris should be five times its present thickness. Discovery of other ocean mounds of a similar character would point to prehistoric positions of the Equator, whilst cores recovered from this one should determine the age of its underlying sections.

Other recent under-ocean discoveries not only bring brand-new knowledge on hitherto unknown portions of the seas before us, they also revalue and correct some of the ideas we have held for many years.

The Gulf Stream is not a majestic river of warm water flowing smoothly from west to east. Rather, the latest research shows, it is a jet that eddies and curls and sometimes even retracks its path, lashing from side to side. Beneath it a countercurrent, one and a half miles down, moves cold water at a third of a knot.

The cold deep ocean water is not as immobile and placid as was once thought. This simple statement may cover a lot of grief for future generations if the radio-active waste now being dumped into the sea cannot find a stagnant pool on the bottom in which to settle and slowly decay away. Radio-actives dumped in the ocean sometimes appear on the surface in a few years and not centuries ahead. And no one seems prepared to give a straight answer to the question of what effect radio-active waste will have on fish in general, bearing in mind that the filthy stuff is being dumped in the very places from which comes their food.

Undersea cameras clearly show ripple marks in the ooze many miles down, similar to ripple marks on open beaches. This sure indication of movement deep below is being studied more closely in an attempt to untangle the maze of conflicting currents.

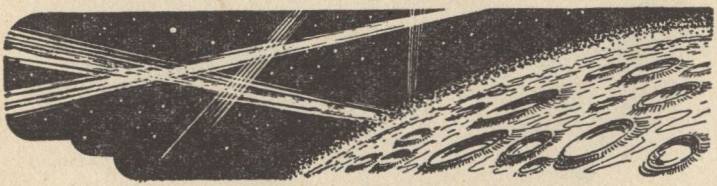
The clear, blue tropic sea is usually useless for fish ; they prefer the clouded, greener water where their food congregates.

If the cold deep water could be made to bring up its nutrient minerals and salts to the warmer sunnier levels, many more of the plankton animals would thrive and thus, the chain beginning with nutrients and sunlight, more fish would flourish than could eventually land on our dinner tables. One ingenious idea to fertilise the tropical seas, usually deficient in enough minerals to support all the life that photosynthesis is capable of, is to sink suitable nuclear reactors on the sea bed so that their controlled heat warms the cold, rich bottom water and bring it to the surface. Let us hope that no radio-active waste has been dumped around there beforehand, though.

Captain Cousteau, pioneer of the aqualung, who attended the Congress, arriving in New York aboard his research vessel *Calypso*, has suggested farming the seas for large worms that live on the bottom. This suggestion, paralleling the projected manganese operations, would quite easily demand special underwater gear of a nature that, to all purposes, would be permanent living quarters beneath the sea. The biggest fresh idea the oceanographers have is the idea of controlled development of the oceans. Man must pass from his hunting culture phase to the primitive aquiculture phase indicated by these suggestions.

After that, he will have to think seriously about using the seas not as a nuclear-war arena, nor a dumping ground for radio-actives, but as the major portion of the globe he lives on and the future larder of the human race.

Kenneth Johns



It has been some time since Bertram Chandler contributed his usual slick style to our pages—a circumstance caused mainly by 'tramping' the coastline of Australia and New Zealand in freighters. His latest story, however, has nothing to do with the sea, but with genes and chromosones

LOST THING FOUND

by BERTRAM CHANDLER

We were making a sweep of the Further Rim, surveying and charting, accumulating masses of data that would gather dust in the files of the Survey Service Headquarters until, at some time in the future, the working of ecological laws would initiate the next wave of expansion and colonisation. It was useful work, and it was interesting. As far as I was concerned its main beauty was that it took me a long way from that small corner of the Galaxy I had known as home.

Life we found in all its infinite variety—life-as-we-know-it and life that seemingly broke all the old established laws of biology and had our biologists hard at work formulating new ones. Intelligent life, however, we did not discover until our landing on Chancehaven.

Chancehaven was not the name that we gave the planet. In fact we had not given either the world or its sun names ; in our records the primary and its attendant family were accorded only letters and numbers. That is all that Chancehaven was, a group of coded symbols, until we approached

closely enough, the overcast having cleared conveniently, to see the lights on the night side, the lights that had to be of artificial origin, the lights that spelled out one word :— *Intelligence.*

I was the first one to see the lights. I was on watch at the time, making a routine approach to the planet under rocket power, with landing stations still some many hours in the future. I had the big mounted binoculars trained on the distant globe, on the slim crescent with the almost invisible darkness held between its horns. When I first saw the twinkling pin-points of luminosity I thought that it was eyestrain. I rested my eyes for five minutes, then looked again.

Then I called the Captain.

He was in the control room before I had replaced the telephone in its rest. " What is it, Murrow ?" he demanded.

" Lights," I told him. " Lights on the dark side, sir."

" I believe you're right," he said at last, not looking away from the eyepieces of the binoculars. " Call the Commander, will you ? And the Navigator."

I did so.

" There are lights," admitted the Navigator at last, " but they could be volcanic in origin . . ."

" Or they could be some sort of atmospheric phenomenon," said the Commander, taking his turn at the binoculars.

" What do *you* think, Murrow ?" asked the Old Man.

" City lights," I said.

" City lights ?" queried the Commander. He was my senior in rank but my junior in years and seemed always conscious of both facts, unpleasantly so. " City lights ? It's time you learned, Mr. Murrow, that there's no room for imagination in the Survey Service."

" Commander," I told him, " I may be a junior officer as far as this service is concerned, but I'm an experienced space-man. Furthermore, most of my time in Space has been spent running between colonised planets. I know what city lights look like from out and up—better perhaps, than you do."

" Murrow has a point there, Commander," the Old Man said mildly. " I suggest that you drag the communications boys out of their bunks and get them to searching the frequencies. If we can establish contact before we land, so much the better . . ."

" But even if there is intelligent life," protested the Commander, " and even if they do have radio, there's the language problem . . ."

" Have you never heard of the Lost Colonies ?" asked the Old Man.

" Have you heard of the Lost Colonies ?" he asked me.

I was off watch and was enjoying a smoke and a shared drink in his cabin.

" I have sir," I said. " The usual tall tales, more myth than fact. You must know more about them than a merchant spaceman—an ex-merchant spaceman—like myself . . ."

" I don't suppose you've ever seen a gaussjammer," he said, " although I believe there are a few still in service in odd corners of the Galaxy. In many ways the Ehrenhaft Drive was superior to the Mannschenn Drive, but it was tricky. Things could go wrong, things over which the ship's navigators and engineers had no control whatsoever. But it was so *simple* . . .

" You're familiar with the principle, of course. The huge gyroscope to keep the axis of the ship rock steady on any desired heading, the Ehrenhaft Generators turning out a veritable flood of magnetic particles, the ship herself becoming no more—and no less—than a huge magnetic particle of any desired ' colour,' or polarity. The slow lift through the atmosphere with like pole opposed to like, the selection of the right ' tramlines ' when clear of the atmosphere, then the almost instantaneous passage from one point to another along the lines of force that are a vast spider web throughout the entire Galaxy. But magnetic storms were—and still are—unpredictable. A magnetic storm tangles the lines of force. A magnetic storm would throw a gaussjammer light years off course, would drain her pile and burn out her instruments.

" The gaussjammers were equipped to deal with such emergencies—after a fashion. They carried internal combustion engines that could be used to drive both electrical and magnetic generators, while the ship's Bio-Chemist starved all hands so that every last ounce of hydro-carbons could be converted into fuel. If the ship was hopelessly lost, as so often was the case, she kept on going while the fuel held out, until a sun with a planetary system was reached, hoping that one of the planets would prove capable of supporting human life. Then she would land. Her people might survive, they might not. They might revert to savagery. They might build up a stable civilisation. In the early years of the Survey Service quite a few such colonies were discovered, but never one so far out as this."

" If it is a Lost Colony," I said.

" If it is a Lost Colony," he echoed. " If it is a Lost Colony they must have forgotten all they ever knew about radio. There's been never a squeak from the planet, and certainly no reply to any of our signals."

" We shall find out in a couple of days' time," I said.

" We shall," he agreed.

We did.

I was given the privilege of piloting the shuttle down to the surface of the planet, leaving *Magellan* in her orbit around the body. The Commander was one of my passengers, and the Senior Anthropologist (until now his job had been a sinecure), a Biologist, a Botanist and a couple of midshipmen. We had our orders from the Old Man. We were to make our landing close to a city that stood on the seashore, at the mouth of a long river. We were to make contact with the inhabitants. We were to get the hell out, with the minimum delay, if they proved hostile.

We knew rather more about them now. Our robot probe rockets had telemetered sufficient data for us to be certain that this was one of the Lost Colonies. We had watched, on *Magellan's* screens, men and women walking around the grounded rockets, examining them curiously. We had decided that they were members of a uniformly handsome race, peculiarly so, perhaps—but we knew that some human cultures take the art and science of genetics far more seriously than do others. We had seen the two beautiful girls who carried between them a banner, which they held so that the scanner would pick up and transmit the lettering on it. WELCOME TO CHANCEHAVEN, we read.

Even so, the Old Man was cautious. He was not going to risk the ship until he was sure that the natives were not hostile. Cases had been known, he told us, of the peoples of various Lost Colonies nursing over the years, the centuries, a hatred of the parent civilisation that had failed to come to their aid in their time of greatest need. There had been ugly incidents, massacres even.

The landing went off smoothly enough. Once well into the atmosphere I extended the wings of the shuttle, brought her down as an aircraft rather than a spacecraft. I spiralled over the city, picked out what looked like a level plain just to the east of it, coming in as slowly as the limitations of the craft

permitted. The landing area was almost as smooth as it had looked from above. We touched down without too much of a jolting, rolled a few yards through the standing grain, then stopped.

Bryan, the Anthropologist, said, " They'll not thank you for landing in the middle of their wheatfield, Murrow."

Carter, the Botanist, added, as he stared through the port, " Yes, it is wheat. Mutated, of course . . ."

" Couldn't you have found some better place to land. Mr. Murrow ?" asked Commander Purvis.

Couldn't you have pointed one out to me while we were on the way down ? I thought, but said nothing.

" It will be safe to open up, Commander," said Large, the Biologist. " All the telemetered data indicated . . ."

" I know, Mr. Large," snapped Purvis. " Open up, Mr. Murrow."

I pressed the stud that opened both valves of the little air-lock. The warm breeze eddied into the cabin. The feel of it and the smell of it were good.

Purvis unstrapped himself from his seat, unfolding his lanky body like a carpenter's rule. He patted his holstered pistols. He walked to the open door, dropped down to the ground. I told the midshipman in the co-pilot's chair to remain where he was, ready for an instant take-off, then followed the Commander. The others followed me.

It was pleasant out of the shuttle. The sun was warm and the air carried the scent of growing things and, in happy contrast, the smell of the sea. The tall grain rustled in the light breeze. And there was another rustling sound, regular, purposeful, that was coming from somewhere above us. We looked up and saw a ship ; a gleaming torpedo shape with another, smaller one suspended beneath it. It had no wings, no supporting rotors, and was approaching us slowly.

" So they have anti-gravity," said the Commander.

" You'd better read your history of aeronautics," Bryan told him. " That's an airship. Lighter than air. A gasbag filled with hydrogen, or helium . . ."

The ship was dropping slowly. I could see, now, the shimmering circle at one end of the smaller torpedo that must be an airscrew. I could see faces peering through the ports that ran the length of the structure. Abruptly lines snaked down, their weighted ends striking the ground with audible

thuds. We looked at them stupidly. It was Bryan who told us to get hold of them, to steady the descent of the airship as she valved gas. (We discovered afterwards that she contolled her buoyancy not by juggling gas and ballast but by compressing and decompressing the balloonettes). She was amazingly big as she hung ten feet over our heads. Then a door opened in the gondola, a rope ladder uncoiled itself as it fell, and two men and two women clambered speedily and gracefully to the ground.

One of the men said to me, " You can let the lines go now, sir."

His accent was strange but not hard to understand.

We let the lines go and the airship lifted slowly, then hovered, at an altitude of about a hundred feet, over the shuttle.

One of the men was middle-aged and one was young. Both the women were young. All four were splendid physical specimens, smoothly muscled, deeply tanned, the lightness and brightness of their scanty robes contrasting agreeably with their dark skins.

" Welcome, sir, to Chancehaven," said the middle-aged man to me.

The Commander glared at both of us, then said stiffly, " Thank you. I am Commander Purvis, second in command of the Survey Ship *Magellan* . . ."

The colonist looked from me to the Commander, seeming to note the greater quantity of gold braid on Purvis' epaulettes. He smiled slightly at me, said, " My apologies, Commander. But welcome to Chancehaven. My name is Malcolm, Peter Malcolm. I am the Controller of this planet. These are Jane Malcolm, Mary Malcolm and John Malcolm, Assistant Controllers . . ."

I saw the interest in Bryan's eyes—the interest and the puzzlement. The duplication of the surname more than merely hinted at close relationship—and yet the four Malcolms would hardly pass for cousins, let alone anything closer. The Controller, obviously, had been black haired before the onset of greyness, was of spare build and sharply featured. One of the girls—Jane—was blonde and inclined to plumpness ; the other was slim and darkly auburn. John Malcolm was heavily built, with sandy hair.

" Are the Malcolm's," asked Bryan, " the ruling family ?"

Peter Malcolm grinned. " You could say that. They are, also, the only family."

" Odd," grunted Bryan, almost inaudibly.

" But this," said Peter Malcolm, " is hardly the place for a conference. I would suggest, Commander, that you and your people come with me into the city. My airship will provide transportation."

" Thank you," said Purvis stiffly. " But all of us cannot come. Mr. Murrow, you will stay with the shuttle, keeping Midshipmen Hall and Kennedy with you. You will keep in touch both with the parent ship and with the party under my command. Leave both sets open."

John Malcolm was waving a coloured cloth. The airship was coming in again, circling, falling slowly. The mooring lines plummetted to the ground, followed by the ladder. Clumsily, Purvis clambered up it, then Bryan, not so clumsily, although he was encumbered by the portable transceiver. Carter and Large followed then three of the Malcolms.

I heard Purvis' voice from inside the gondola, " Mr. Malcolm, is it essential that one of your party remain here ?"

" I'm afraid that it is, Commander," came Malcolm's reply. " There is a limit to the buoyancy of this ship."

I looked at the girl. It was Mary Malcolm, the slim auburn one. I wasn't sorry that she was staying. Her company would be a change from that of the efficient, almost sexless women, technicians and scientists, aboard *Magellan.*

At a shouted command from above the four of us—the girl, the two midshipmen and myself—let go the lines and the airship lifted into the blue sky, vanished in the direction of the city.

I went back into the shuttle, the girl following me. She watched curiously as I checked both transceivers then sent a report on the one tuned to *Magellan's* working frequency. Leaving the midshipmen in charge of the sets I retired with her to the rear of the cabin where we sat down.

I said, " You're the one they call Mary, aren't you ? Mary Malcolm."

She replied, " Yes. And you're Sub-Lieutenant Murrow. It seems odd that you, with your greater age and experience should be junior to the Commander. That's what had Peter confused at first."

" Peter ? Oh, yes. The Controller."

I offered her a cigarette, which she accepted. She was obviously no stranger to the use of tobacco, although intrigued by the way in which the little cylinder was ignited. I lit one for myself. For a while we smoked in silence.

Watching her, I said, " You have tobacco here. Or something like it."

" We have tobacco," she told me, " just as we have many plants and animals of Terran origin. *Lode Ranger* was an emigrant ship and, in addition to her human freight, carried a large consignment of seeds and the fertilised ova of domestic animals."

" She must have carried a great number of people," I said.

" Why ?"

" From what I know of the gaussjammers, the landing of *Lode Ranger* on this planet cannot have been more than three hundred years ago, yet you have already a population large enough for at least half a dozen major cities, to say nothing of smaller townships and villages."

" There were only two survivors," she said.

" *What* ! Then there must have been intelligent life here before you came."

" No, there wasn't."

It seemed incredible, but I knew that she must be telling the truth. The pictures televised back to the ship by our probe rockets had depicted only human beings.

She went on, " There were only two survivors—James Malcolm, the ship's Bio-Chemist, and Elizabeth Malcolm, his cousin, who had been one of the assistant pursers. Also—luckily undamaged by the crash, there was all the equipment necessary for bringing the fertilised animal ova to term.

" The two original Malcolms used it—not only for the purpose for which it was intended but also for building up a human population in as short a time as possible."

" I get the idea. But, even so, even with artificial aids, a woman is not a queen bee."

" There is no theoretical limit to the number of times a fertilised ovum can divide by fission."

" I see." I paused. " But I'm still not convinced. With such a set-up as you've described, the planet should be populated by people all of whom bear great physical semblance one to the other. But I've seen the three who came with you. You share the same surname, but there the resemblance ends. You'd not even pass for cousins."

" James Malcolm," she said patiently, " was a very skillful biological technician. He was able not only to accelerate the processes of growth but to manipulate chromosomes and genes. He wanted to people this world with tall people and short people, with dark people and fair people, with stolid plodders and with those capable of bursts of brilliance. He did just that. He did more than build just a family, a clan. He and Elizabeth were the parents of a race."

Inadequately I said, " It was a remarkable achievement."

" It was—and is."

For a little while we smoked in silence, which she broke, saying, " Tell me about yourself. We have been cut off from the rest of the Galaxy for so long. So much must have happened since *Lode Ranger* was flung out here by the magnetic storm . . ."

" So much has. There was the war with the Shaara Empire and the Cluster Revolt—I think they both came after *Lode Ranger's* time. There was the replacement of the Ehrenhaft Drive by the Mannschenn Drive—which means that there will be no more Lost Colonies . . ."

She said, " Tell me about yourself. From your personal experiences I can form some sort of picture of the civilisation from which you come."

I looked forward to where the two midshipmen were sitting by the radio gear. Their backs were eloquent of elaborate disinterest, but I could almost see their ears flapping.

" Shall we go outside ?" I asked. " If you don't mind, I'd like to stretch my legs."

" As you please," she answered.

We walked through the tall, ripening grain until we were out of earshot of the ship but still in sight from the forward ports. The ground between the rows of stalks was covered with a sort of moss, indigenous to the planet, I later learned, springy underfoot and, as I discovered, pleasant to sit upon. We sat down.

She said, " You aren't happy."

I said, " Unhappiness seems to be the common lot of Mankind."

" Not on this world," she told me earnestly. She paused, then went on, " We take such problems seriously here. Before I was made an Assistant Controller, I was head of one of the Advice Bureaux. I have the necessary . . . qualifications."

" Which are ?"

She smiled suddenly. " You don't think that Peter's story about the buoyancy was altogether true, do you ? The airship could have been lightened without too much inconvenience. I'll be frank. I'm a telepath, and I'm keeping in touch with the other telepaths in the city . . ."

" So you can read my thoughts ?" My voice was, perhaps, unnecessarily harsh. She was both beautiful and attractive, but I resented any violation of my privacy.

" To a limited extent, and only when you are talking to me. For example, at the moment you are very hostile. You have been wondering if I could, just possibly, replace *her*. You wonder that about all women you meet. You are hating yourself for your disloyalty to *her*, and you are hating me for having discovered that much about you . . ."

" Yes."

" But telling somebody about things is part of the therapy. When that somebody is a telepath so much is told that a cure is possible."

" A cure for unhappiness ?"

" Why not ?" She produced cigarettes of her own in a flat silver case, lit one for each of us with a little device that produced flame at the touch of a finger. She went on, " You are unhappy. You are lonely, and you resent being a junior officer although you have both experience and high qualifications . . ."

I said, " I used to be with the Interstellar Transport Commission. I resigned from their service, went into a smaller concern called Cluster Lines. I was living on a world called Ariadne, and I was serving in a ship based on that planet, and I was never away from home for more than a few weeks. Then . . ."

" Do go on."

" Why ?" I asked tiredly. " You *know*."

" Yes. Then after it happened you wanted to get away from everything, and you knew that the Survey Service would take you, even though you were over age, and so you're still running away from her, and from yourself. And you're afraid, aren't you ? There's a verse of poetry in your mind, that's always running through your mind . . .

" ' *I never could a lost thing find*
Or a broken thing mend ;
And I fear I shall be all alone
When I get towards the end.' "

I said, " I'd rather not talk about it. And I'll thank you to keep out of my mind."

" I'm trying to help," she told me.

" Nobody can help," I muttered. " Least of all a telepathic voyeur from a hick planet."

She flushed angrily. " If that's the way you feel about it . . ."

" That is the way I feel about it."

She told me, " The airship is on its way back. Your Commander and the scientists are quite happy about us, and are going to recommend that the big ship lands."

Before she had finished speaking one of the midshipmen called to me from the shuttle, telling me that Purvis wanted to speak to me on the radio telephone. The Commander told me what the girl had already told me, thus dispelling any lingering doubts in my mind as to her telepathic abilities.

But I knew that she couldn't help me.

Magellan dropped to the field that had been cleared for her, her rocket exhausts starting a fire in the dry grass that was, however, swiftly dealt with by the fire fighting equipment that had been improvised by Purvis and the Controllers. Very little work was done by anybody for at least two weeks after her landing. This was an occasion for feasting and merry-making, the reunion of long separated branches of the human family.

Inevitably, as one of the ship's executive staff, I saw much of the Controllers, especially since the Captain preferred my company to that of most of my seniors in rank. Inevitably I saw much of the girl Mary Malcolm. She was still eager to help me, but I shied away from every offer of assistance.

But she was persistent.

One night—it was after a banquet in the Controller's palace—she asked me to take her out on to one of the wide terraces. We walked up and down for a while in silence, smoking, under the black sky that was almost empty of stars.

She said abruptly, " I've been giving thought to your case."

" I wish that you wouldn't," I told her.

" Suppose you could find your lost thing," she went on.

" That," I said, " is impossible."

" Have you," she asked, " anything with you that she has ever worn ?"

" Yes. There's a sweater that she bought me but that she liked to borrow sometimes. But what . . . ?"

" It should do," she said. " There must still be microscopic particles of her skin adhering to the fabric. Then there will be solidographs of her, and your own memories of her that you will surrender to me under hypnosis . . ."

" I'll have nothing of this, Mary."

She grasped my arm tightly. " You don't know what we can do. We still have the machines, the techniques . . ."

" What machines ? What techniques ?"

" The machines and the techniques with which we colonised this planet. We use them quite frequently still, in cases of unbearable loss."

" No loss is unbearable."

" Perhaps not. But if I assured you that *she* could be duplicated, in every detail, in a matter of weeks . . ."

" I'd not believe you," I said.

" But you do believe me. I know that. You're afraid again."

" All right," I said. " When do we start ?"

" Tomorrow," she said.

It was fantastic, but it wasn't unbelievable. There was the fertilised ovum, female, from the plasm bank, and there was the incubator, like a glass coffin, and the pumps for nutrient solutions and the projectors for the different kinds of radiation that were the sculptor's tools used by the bio-technicians. There were the long sessions with Mary Malcolm and her colleagues, during which it seemed that I was drained dry of all my memories of the past—but the memories were still there when they had finished with me.

There was the long wait—although it wasn't long in actuality years of biological time being run through in a matter of weeks. There was, at last, the day that Mary Malcolm came out to the ship in her ground car and told me that the job was done, that I was to come with her to the Biological Institute.

She knew—as she could not help but know—how I was feeling and so kept silence during the ride. She stopped the vehicle outside the wide doorway of the Institute, remained seated while I jumped out, almost ran up the steps and into the building.

I had been there before, of course, and knew where to go. I hurried through the long corridors to the office of the

Director who, in person, had handled the case. I sat in one of his armchairs, smoking a nervous cigarette while I waited.

Then she came in.

She was as I remembered her—tall, graceful, fine bone structure under the golden flesh. She was dressed as she had been when I last saw her, sleekly sophisticated in a deceptive simplicity of line and colour.

Her voice was the same, and her smile.

She said, " Alan . . ."

I said, " I'm sorry. You're not Robin. You never can be."

She made no attempt to hide her bewilderment. " But I *am* Robin Murrow, just as you are Alan Murrow . . ."

But she wasn't Robin.

She had Robin's body, and Robin's mind, even—but she was too . . . *new*. She had no memory of the good times, or the bad times. The lost thing found she could have been, but she was not the broken thing to mend.

I knew then what I had to do. I had to go back to what I had run away from ; I had to try to mend the wreckage that Robin and I had made of our lives. It would take a long time, perhaps it was foredoomed to failure, but it was the real Robin I wanted, not this too perfect copy.

Outside Mary was waiting for me.

" So you're doing it the hard way," she said.

" Yes."

" It's the only way," she told me.

Bertram Chandler

The machinations of Par Chavorlem in his corruption of Earth have finally driven Earthmen Gary Towler into a corner. Now, to expose Chav, he is forced to kill Synvoret the visiting nal signatory who is there to expose the corruption.

X FOR EXPLOITATION

by BRIAN W. ALDISS

Conclusion

foreword

A colossal and dangerous game of bluff is being played out on Earth. After a thousand years as a colonial planet in the Empire of Partussy, Earth has fallen under the corrupt commissionership of PAR-CHAVORLEM. He and his right-hand man, Arm Marshall TEREKOMY, both members of the tripedal master race, exploit and kill the bipeds in their charge.

Rumour of this reaches Partussy itself, and an incorruptible and powerful signatory, Armajo SYNVORET, takes it upon himself to bring an Investigation Team to Earth to investigate. His chief adviser on the Team is a Psyche-Watch Branch nal, Gazer ROIFULLERY. Their journey half across the galaxy to Earth takes two years objective time, which gives Par-Chavorlem his opportunity to stage things and deceive the signatory into thinking all is well.

To this end, he evacuates and conceals his old City, the size and elaborate spy system of which infringe regulations, and moves into a new City. Terekomy illegally shanghais five thousand armed Starjjans (bipeds much like humans) and sets them down in Channel Valley to fight RIVARS, the terrestrial patriot leader, thus staging a ' civil war ' for Synvoret's benefit.

GARY TOWLER is appointed interpreter to the Investigation Team. As such, he is particularly exposed to the tensions about him. Par-Chavorlem offers him his freedom if he will act as censor to all the interpreting he has to do. Towler falls in with this, because he is a secret agent of Rivars' and awaits a piece of evidence which Rivars has promised to smuggle into Commission City. This evidence—as yet unspecified—will bring about Par-Chavorlem's downfall when passed to Synvoret. Towler has also been tackled direct by Synvoret about the truth of the situation ; because Towler is covering up for Rivars, he says nothing : but on the evening of the next day he must meet Synvoret again.

All this makes Towler appear to be playing the nal's game, and all hands are against him. When he is innocently involved in the death of two other City interpreters, CHETTLE and WEDMAN, he is sent to coventry. Even PETER LARDENING, another younger interpreter, is against him. Towler's only ally, apart from his underground contacts which he dare not approach is ELIZABETH FALLODON.

But Elizabeth has mysteriously disappeared. While Towler is searching frantically for her, his butcher presents him with a parcel of meat. He believes it to be the evidence from Rivars. Opening it in his flat, Towler finds a bloody foot, severed neatly at the ankle.

eleven

Gary Towler did not touch the foot. Shocked disappointment seized him. A dark tide of cascading pictures poured through his mind, so that he shut his eyes and grasped the table. Momentarily he seemed to be outside the enveloping pudding of the City, riding on a black mare through detaining bushes towards freedom. Or he was his own self, but translated into that peculiar self he felt himself to be when he was using the cold unmetaphorical tongue of Partussy. His blood recreated again the stamping of the nal mating dance as he had heard it in the Jarmboree.

Slowly this peculiar whirl of emotion left him. Weakly, he wondered at it. After all, this was only a message from Rivars, and why should Rivars mean so much to him?

Shocked disappointment was playing tricks in his mind.

He put the canvas back over the foot.

He went slowly into the living room, still wearing his air suit, and lay back in the solitary armchair. The whole situation needed to be reviewed and analysed—yet before he made that mental effort he thought distastefully of life itself, the daily drip of consciousness onto the cold slab of memory. Though its taste was sweet, it washed down too many ghastly things . . . Why need he face this voiceless, heavy foot . . . or all that it implied.

For it implied surely either that he had been betrayed by Rivars—or that Rivars himself had been betrayed.

Suppose the former. Rivars, no longer willing to entrust Towler with the real evidence against Par-Chavorlem, sent him instead this gruesome token that relationships were severed between them.

Suppose the latter. Rivars had been betrayed by . . . well, the butcher seemed a likely guess. If the butcher had accepted a nal bribe, who but he would be more likely to have a bloody foot at his disposal? And Towler by accepting the package from him had demonstrated his own complicity. If all this were so, it would not be long before Arm Marshall Terekomy's nals were at Towler's door.

Perhaps they would simply shoot down the air lock, so that he died gasping his lungs out in their beastly air. Or more likely they would take him to one of those buildings innocent men never entered, where he would die more slowly.

He stood up.

He must act while there was the chance for action.

Clamping up his face plate, Towler hurried down to the street. Clearly his immediate line of approach lay through the butcher. He had to discover whether the fellow was still his ally or his enemy.

The butcher was about to close, his shop was empty. He looked up startled as Towler came through the air lock.

"You should keep away," he said. He was wiping a chopper. "We never know when we're being watched. Nobody has better reason than you to keep that in mind."

"The parcel from Rivars—you know what was in it?"

The butcher looked curiously at Towler's pale face. He put down the chopper and came round from behind the counter.

" I had no business to look. That's entirely your affair. Besides, it had not been here for more than a few minutes when I saw you. The man who smuggled it into the City was delayed."

His expression was frightened ; he did not look like a guilty man.

" What's the matter ?" he asked, when Towler was silent. " What have you come here for ?"

" Something's gone wrong."

" Not as far as I know."

" You'd better come to my flat to see."

" I can't do that ! God, don't you realise how suspicious it would look. I can't be seen with you. I don't want to get myself more implicated than I am ! At this stage, we daren't risk—"

" You must come with me. Please, it's vital."

Both of them heard with surprise the note of pleading in Towler's voice. The butcher shrugged. Then he wiped his hands in his apron.

" Give me two minutes," he said.

He put up the shutters and closed the shop. Going into his rear room, he struggled into an air suit and let Towler out by the back door. Now Towler breathed more easily. In his own flat he could face this man ; if it came to a crisis, he would have his own knife and the butcher would not have his—yet by the very way the man complied with his wishes Towler was disarmed.

" What's the matter ?" the butcher asked, as they entered Towler's block of flats a moment later. " Don't you believe this package came from Rivars ?"

" See for yourself," Towler said, leading the way into his kitchen.

There on the table the package still lay. The butcher approched slowly, turning back the wrappings. The foot was revealed. Strands of black hair sprouted from the big toe.

Without comment, his face wooden, the butcher stared at it. Towler too looked more closely. The toes seemed abnormally long. Between them was some kind of greyish membrane. The butcher took hold of the foot, lifted it, spread out the toes. Between each of them ran strong membrane, linking them as the ribs of a fan are linked. When he released them, the toes

slowly came together once more, the membrane folding up until it was scarcely visible.

" What is it ?' Towler asked huskily, his mind swept blank.

" It's a Starjjan foot," the butcher said.

Not a human foot, a Starjjan foot . . .

" A Starjjan foot !" Towler echoed, and at once the situation became clear to him, billowing out through the reaches of his understanding like a spinnaker.

This foot had belonged to a member of that web-footed race, a few thousand of whom Arm Marshall Terekomy had illegally smuggled onto Earth to fight Rivars. No doubt the bloody bit of evidence had been obtained in the morning's fighting, and had been passed along the underground to Towler as speedily as possible. Rivars had fulfilled his promise ; certain this was indisputable proof that the present government exceeded its rights. Placed in the right hands, it would remove Par-Chavorlem once and for all, for an infringement of the Partussian galactic law that one subject species was forbidden on the planet of another subject species was invariably dealt with harshly.

By good fortune, Synvoret had served on the planet Starjj ; when shown the foot, he would recognise for what it was. He could instigate a general enquiry, Earth would have justive done . . .

Towler thought momentarily of Rivars, who had after all planned well. Now the responsibility had passed from him to Towler.

" Funny the way you got into such a panic when you first saw this foot," the butcher observed. " You've endangered the whole operation, the way you carried on. I keep asking myself why you carried on like that, coming running to me."

He was a short thickset man with greasy grey hair, his gaze short-sighted but perceptive. At the moment his manner was more curious than reproving. He peered up at Towler, who moved uneasily.

" I thought Rivars had failed me," said Towler almost in a whisper.

" ' Me ' or ' us ' do you mean ? Listen, I'm not in this stunt for the glory but for what I can make out of it. I'm not so ignorant as I look on the surface—what I chiefly go for is old books that I get smuggled in from the cities. That's my hobby, you could say. The old cities of Earth have still got books from the old days in them, you know. And so I study up

about human beings and what goes on in their minds, and do you know what I think ?"

Faintly embarrassed, Towler said he did not.

" I think that for some reason you may not even know yourself, you *wanted* Rivars to fail."

" That's nonsense, absolute nonsense !" Towler said.

The butcher merely smiled.

" Well, you wouldn't examine this foot properly for yourself, would you ? Something in your sub-conscious wanted me as a witness of what you took for Rivars' mistake."

" I needed your help."

" Ah, now you're rationalising."

Suddenly Towler was furiously angry. He scorned and resented this blunt man's probing. Growling, he grabbed him by the arm, but the butcher pulled away.

" Save it," he advised. " I'm not your adversary. Think over what I've said and do whatever you're supposed to do with that chunk of boot-filler. And I'd advise you to do it quick—before Chavorlem catches up with you. Now I'm off."

Alone again, almost against his will, Towler did think. Reluctantly ; he had to admit to himself that he had behaved badly and even irrationally. And what if he had ? He was under strain enough.

Wearily he got up. Let this thing be finished as soon as possible : tomorrow he would have no opportunity for speaking to Synvoret all day. A little resolution now might save him much trouble later.

Moving rapidly, Towler wrapped the foot again and stowed it away in the bottom of his deep-freeze. He would approach the Signatory this evening ; it was still not late. If he stressed the importance of the matter, no reason existed why Synvoret should not come with his escort straight away to look at the exhibit. Then he could tackle the problem of finding where Elizabeth had gone.

Clamping his face plate shut, Towler hurried back through the streets, showed his pass at the palace gate, and entered. Shooting up through the building by express lift, he emerged close by the signatorial suite.

As he approached it, the main door opened. Commissioner Par-Chavorlem emerged, his comb erect.

"If you're looking for the Signatory," he said, "I must tell you he is no longer here. I think you had better come with me, Towler something has just occurred about which I must speak to you."

twelve

Signatory Synvoret rang for Gazer Roifullery and his secretary. They appeared, flattening their combs respectfully.

" It looks as if we shall be allowed little chance of private discussion tomorrow," he said. " So this seems the best opportunity for us to pool our impressions of what we have seen. Half of our time on Earth is up ; let us weigh what evidence we have. Secretary, record the discussion, please."

Roifullery and the secretary lowered their bulks into chairs, the former asking as he did so, " What point would you like us to discuss first ?"

" Let us begin with this business of our interpreter. Something fishy there, I think you'll agree."

" I would like to, sir, but I confess I don't. That the creature has nothing to say means little or nothing."

"Indeed? My feeling is it means the biped has been bought —or threatened."

" My feeling is frankly that this interpreter is a fool," Roifullery said. " He cannot even answer questions. Even the amazingly generous offer of your Starjjan land seemed not to move him."

" That might be the response of someone already loaded with care. You don't know these bipeds as I do, Roifullery. My estimation is that he is heavily bribed by Chaverlem Par-Chavorlem."

" Two objections to that, sir," the P-WB man said briskly. " Firstly, if this Towler were really a pawn of the Commissioner's, the Commissioner is clever enough to pick a more polished actor. Secondly, and it's not quite the *ad hominen* argument it sounds, you have come here eager to find something amiss, consequently you find evidence where none exists."

" I am anxious only to find the truth . . . No, you may be right, Roifullery. When a nal says he wants only the truth, he is generally after a confirmatory truth."

" I am sure I am right, Signatory sir, with all respects. I am for instance quite prepared to take at its face value Towler's statement that he was not functioning properly at Ashkar because he was scared. I admit I was a little alarmed myself."

Synvoret raised his arms and sighed.

" Now *you* are finding evidence where none exists. You are being over-subtle, Roifullery."

" No sir, *you* are being over-subtle. I have discovered nothing on Earth yet but the need to deal firmly with the local population."

Neither of them were displeased with this exchange. The rules of formal dignatorial behaviour, which they never voluntarily transgressed, allowed them to be frank in passing opinions about each other without at the same time giving offence.

Synvoret rose, ignited a tapering sulphette, and strolled round the room, smoking and thinking aloud.

" We are becoming side-tracked. Let's think of this problem in historical terms. Subject races, whether conquered by arms or treaties, are not notoriously fond of their alien rulers. The tyranny they would accept by vote from their own kind without noticing seems deep oppression when imposed by foreigners.

" In theory, this sense of grievance should be aggravated when the foreigners are of different shape, size and constitution. In practice, it is lessened ; the philosophers of Partussy say that this is because subconscious sexual jealousy between conquered and conquerors is absent in such circumstances. However this may be, the Empire is established on this interesting fact.

" It enables us to impose peace on the one hand, and to enrich ourselves on the other. Intrinsically peaceful races accept our rule ; warlike ones take more time to knuckle under. This means that one way of solving our problem of what is really happening on Earth is to find out how warlike terrestrials actually are ; we have an equation in which the other unknown, our X quantity, is exploitation. Are terrestrials too unruly, or is Par-Chavorlem digging too much out of them on the side ?"

" On the surface," Gazer Roifullery said, " they appear warlike. Not only do they attack our bases—Ashkar, for example—but they indulge in civil wars. I should say that in the circumstances this shows a peculiar aptitude for trouble."

Synvoret nodded.

" That's their herd psychology possibly. Yet as individuals they seem peaceable, you must agree. There is no trouble here in the palace, or in the City. Towler, as we know, is all too quiet."

" You are thinking of them as victims, sir. I think of them as potentially vicious. Towler for instance *seems* quiet enough—"

" A pathetic little creature, Roifullery. Victim material."

" Maybe. So is a wasp. The fellow you spoke to on the street when you arrived : he sounded peaceable enough."

" I have thought about that conversation, Roifullery, and played it back several times on the recorder. It does not ring true. Even the way the creature suddenly appeared was odd. If, and I concede it looks like a big if, Par-Chavorlem is running a virtual dictatorship here, then this creature may have been a pawn of the secret police."

" Unlikely, sir. We have no evidence whatsoever of secret police activity here. As you know, your secretary has checked carefully for the usual evidences of such activity and found none."

" Maybe. Nevertheless, the possibility exists. We need more data, Roifullery. I want you to come out with me and be present when I speak to another biped. I wish you to observe for yourself, and see if your belief in the Commissioner's genial goodness is not shaken."

" Now, sir ? It's getting late."

" I trust you are not feeling tired, Gazer ?"

The Psyche-Watch nal rose. At Synvoret's suggestion, they both put on air suits. The Signatory, in one of his characteristic flashes of self-knowledge, thought, ' Here I go substituting action for thought. Perhaps the Supremo was right and I'm getting too old . . .'

Collecting Raggball the bodyguard, they went together unobserved, leaving the palace by a side gate as the Signatory had done before.

At this time of day, the streets of the Commission were comparatively crowded. Partussians were returning to their quarters from work or shopping, or else visiting cafes for refreshment. Terrestrials were similarly dispersing, or else returning in temporary work details to the outside world. Gaiety was noticeably absent from the atmosphere : but gaiety was not a quality the nals recognised.

By following some of the terrestrials who lived inside the city, the three Partussians arrived at the native quarter. No others of their species were in sight here. Confronted by these narrow streets, tiny shops and shrunken blocks of flats, all fitted with their half-blisters of airlocks, all three felt something of the excitement of tourists. Here was local colour, here was quaintness ! Here lived creatures who breathed diluted

oxygen, that curious gas with too many chemical affinities, as if it were as emotional as the creatures dependant on it. For a moment it was impossible to regard the bipeds as other than a peepshow, put on for the convenience and possible edification of Partussy's sons ! Indeed, what else could be the purpose behind the whole universe ? Did not the Trinity create nal in his /her /its own image ?

The Signatory sighed nostalgically, recalling his youth on Starjj.

Most of the terrestrials hustled inconspicuously away at sight of the aliens. One, however, walked towards them, nodding as he passed close by.

" Forgive me—do you speak Partussian ?" Synvoret asked.

" Naturally," the man replied. " I am an Under-Oiler at the Mercantile Export Stores ; such a position requires a Proficiency Standard in your language."

" Then perhaps we may speak with you ?"

" I am at your service, and pleased to be."

The Signatory and the P-WB nal exchanged glances. Here was another peace-loving terrestrial.

" We are travellers from Partussy with only a few days to pass on your world," Synvoret explained. " Naturally we would like a first-hand account of life here. Is there somewhere we can talk together comfortably ?"

The terrestrial hesitated.

" My room is near," he said. " It is only poor and small, but it could accommodate two of the three of you. Can we go there, since you have air suits on ?"

Agreeing, they followed him, snapping tight the domes of their suits as the airlock of a block of flats was reached. Raggball was left outside when his superiors entered.

The scale of the Earthian buildings was so small for the Partussians that they squeezed in only with difficulty. Inside, the flats were flimsy and depressing. The whole place was without decoration, while the need to conserve air had kept window space down to an absolute minimum. A barrack-like hall downstairs provided a sort of recreation room ; the rest of the building was given over to corridors, stairs and rooms. Negotiating the stairs with difficulty, while all bipeds fled at their approach, the ill-assorted party arrived at Room 388. The terrestrial produced a key and opened up.

Inside, the two Partussians had to sit on the floor, their combs almost touching the ceiling, while the Under-Oiler perched between them. His face had grown very pale ; sweat gathered on his forehead and ran down his cheeks.

" This is hospitable of you," Roifullery said, irritated by this manifestation of emotion. " I take it you feel some friendship for our race ?"

" Yes, indeed, nothing but respect," the man said, mopping his face. " When I was taken ill with a throat cancer a little while ago, your doctors saved my life. Yes, yes, nothing but respect—and affection."

" Yet you appear," Synvoret observed, " to be terrified of us. Or is it your recent illness which makes you perspire so freely ?"

The Under-Oiler gulped. He fished an aphrohale from his pocket, tweaking its end alight with nervous fingers to gain a moment's respite.

" You are very big," he said.

" Do you fancy we may harm you ?"

" I—I—I have not yet fully recovered from my illness."

" Should you then be smoking that thing ?" asked Synvoret, indicating the aphrohale.

The Under-Oiler looked about him almost desperately.

" Habit," he said. " A bad habit. I'm only a Third Grade worker . . ."

Roifullery took up the conversation.

" We all have our bad habits. Partussians, you know, inhale things called sulphettes. All intelligent life forms are much alike under their different shapes and skins. Yet you must be tired of our rule on Earth."

" No, sir, oh no, not at all. We bipeds appreciate the way your species has brought peace all over the galaxy."

" Ha !" Synvoret exclaimed. This fellow spoke as did the native he had first interrogated in the street. Again he asked himself, how could a humble member of an isolated 5C culture, a Third Grade worker at that, think of itself in such terms ? What should it know or care of peace in the galaxy ? The very phrase ' we bipeds ' violated the inborn egocentricity of such a culture. Again he felt a suspicion that this fellow had been planted on him. Only for a second did the Signatory hesitate.

" Strip off your clothes !" he said.

The terrestrial jumped up, backing to the door, almost the whole of which Synvoret immediately covered with one leg.

" Take off your clothes !" he commanded, sudden excitement taking hold of him.

" This we never do, sir," the wretched terrestrial stuttered. " Only for going to bed. Please sir . . ."

Synvoret reached out a broad, flapper-like arm. Inserting the tip of one digit inside the neck of the terrestrial's shirt, he tugged. The terrestrial was jerked forward. With a ripping sound, his jerkin, shirt and vest were torn in twain. He staggered away, and then Roifullery grabbed him from behind.

As he began to shout for mercy, Roifullery enveloped him in folds of arm, stilling his cries and struggles. The Gazer's comb had sharpened into a down-curving hook.

Synvoret pulled the tattered clothing away from the Under-Oiler's chest, bending an eye stalk forward to examine the naked torso. Retracting his eye stalk until it functioned as a powerful microscope, he traced from an unobtrusive lump under the biped's left ear a scar that ran to another lump just above his breast bone. From there another scar, invisible to normal eyesight, ran to a third and larger lump above the heart.

As a cat unsheathes its claws, Synvoret unsheathed from his arm a long blade-like claw, remnant of the days, millenia ago, when Partussians were minor predators on an unnamed planet. With this claw, he sliced under the flesh of the biped's breast.

A delicate double thread of wire was revealed, running from heart to throat.

" Let him go," Synvoret said. " That's all we wish to know. My case is proved, Roifullery. This is a typical spy device."

Bleeding and gasping, the biped staggered back as Roifullery released him. It seemed dazed. With ineffectual movements, it sought to pull its tattered clothing round its chest. Tears ran down its face. They glanced at it half fascinated by its display.

" I don't understand. What is this apparatus under its skin ?" Roifullery asked.

" Have you Psyche-Watch people no acquaintance with auricle-pumps ? This creature has a little transmitter grafted in, which is actually worked by the action of the heart. With leads to his throat and ear, he can communicate with a distant point without anyone else being aware of the fact."

" I've heard of them, but never seen one before," Roifullery admitted, adding with some reluctance, " I believe they are typical secret police tools, aren't they ?"

" Of course they are. Let's get back to the palace."

Ignoring the biped, who still whimpered from fright and pain, they pushed out of the room. Synvoret felt a certain shame—an unusual experience for a nal, whose behaviour was closely governed by the frigid situation-response selector it called conscience ; he was aware how much he and the Gazer had relished their power over the little biped. Thrusting the sensation behind him, clamping down his air dome, he led the way from the block of flats.

As he did so, Arm Marshall Terekomy, in a hidden room in Police HQ, snapped off a receiver.

Crossing at a run to a sound-proof booth, he was speaking to Par-Chavorlem within thirty seconds.

" Synvoret's out on another native hunt," he said. " He's just returning."

" I know. I've been to his suite and found him out. We agreed he should be free to do this."

" Of course we did. But listen, he's a crafty devil ! I put C 309 onto him. He took Synvoret and the P-WB nal up to his room and started to propagandise as instructed. Then Synvoret cut him up and found the auricle pump ! I heard every word over C 309's transmitter—it's taped, of course. How he guessed the biped was wired is beyond me—it repeated very careful everything we told it to say."

" What's happening now ?" Par-Chavorlem's voice asked. As ever, it was gentle and unhurried.

" They're both coming back to the palace, convinced they have all tabs on us. Huh—so they have ! Now they've definite grounds for suspicion, we'll never keep control—"

" Don't lose your comb, Terekomy. Here's what you must do immediately . . ."

Less than two minutes later, the first of a stream of ambulances began to roar round the streets of the City, its alarm note sounding.

* * *

thirteen

Before Terekomy's urgent interruption came, the Commissioner was speaking to Towler.

" I brought you hear to ask you some questions. See you answer them straightforwardly."

" I shall do my best," Towler said. All his nerves were tense. The friendly facade that Par-Chavorlem had tried to preserve for the last few days had vanished ; in its place was a formidable animal in a uniform, ten feet high, and of considerable strength and cunning. Not only that ; this particular animal had almost unlimited power over all the other creatures—like it or unlike—on this planet, except for one. And that one was Synvoret not Towler.

" Stand on that chair so that I can see your face levelly when you answer me," Par-Chavorlem ordered.

There was nothing for it but to obey. Towler climbed onto the big nal chair and faced his adversary.

" Better. Now, Interpreter, I'm getting a lot of trouble from your branch. It was Chettle and Wedman the other day. Now the woman interpreter, Fallodon, has disappeared. You know of this, of course ?"

" Of course."

" We can find no trace of her as yet."

One of the Commissioner's eye stalks extended telescopically, examining Towler from close range. Its end came to within a foot of Towler's air helmet, and a cold grey orb surveyed him.

" Unfortunately in this temporary City I am less in touch with what goes on than I should be," Par-Chavorlem continued. " But from visi-records from the old City I know that you have been increasingly intimate with Fallodon over the last two years. Is that correct ?"

" Yes."

" Then you know her well. Where has she gone ?"

Towler moistened his lips. He knew trouble was coming.

" I don't know, sir. I wish I did know."

" You should know. I make you Chief Interpreter ; you are in charge of her."

" I was with the Signatory when she disappeared."

" So ? Then where has she gone ? Is she dead ?"

" I hope not."

" You hope not ! Why do you hope not ?"

". . . I love her, sir."

At this the Commissioner let out a bellow of fury. One of his broad arms caught Towler and forced him back over the arm of the chair, pressing against his chest. Towler's helmet plate fogged over, and he was in a misty world of his own, although that angry unmetaphorical language still roared outside it.

" You speak to me of love, that whimsy madness no triped tolerates in his system ! This filthy planet ! How can it ever run or be run efficiently with imponderables like love in it ? I'll show you what Partussy thinks of such weakness. Get up. Hurry up, get up."

Towler had the knife under his tunic. He could not kill this great cylinder of hateful blubber, yet he might be able to slash off one of its eye stalks before he was dashed to the ground. Then he realised he could not draw the knife without letting into his suit the stinking poison of Partussian air. Gasping heavily, he rose and again faced his enemy who was now just visible through his clearing face plate. Par-Chavorlem's comb was compressed with rage.

" Find out about Fallodon. I give you till tomorrow night to discover details of what has happened to her."

" Your spies can do that better than I can."

" You think so ? Perhaps they don't have the personal interest you have. You find out what's happened to her. Now get out."

Choking with baffled anger, Towler made towards the door. When he had his hand on its latch, Par-Chavorlem called him back.

" You know why I'm interested in Fallodon, don't you, Towler ? Because I suspect that puny fool Rivars has an agent in the palace. She may be the agent. Fallodon would be amenable to my sort of questioning on the subject, I think."

" Miss Fallodon has not been out of the City since she was brought to it by force two years ago. It's nonsense to suppose she knows anything about Rivars."

" We'll see. I tell you this, Towler : nothing shall go wrong while Synvoret is here. If it does, you will die for one, and I swear I'll burn out or bring into captivity every single biped on the planet. Before I made you fair promises. Now I make you only threats. Get out, and come back here tomorrow with useful information."

As Towler left the study, Par-Chavorlem's emergency bell rang. It was his call from Terekomy. Blind to everything, even the sympathetic glances of other interpreters, Towler went home to sleep. All night long, dreams blew through his skull like newspaper down an empty street, waking him at last to a new day and a sharpened sense of doom.

Synvoret, on the other hand, woke from a jarm-induced slumber to a new sense of content. He believed he had at last gained an insight into the question of Earth. His work here, he felt, was almost done, and it was with an easy mind he entered into his host's arrangements for a day's hunting.

As they sped out from the City, along one of the great roads through a world still in darkness, owing to the different lengths of City and planetary day, Synvoret reflected on the events of the night before, after he and Roifullery had uncovered the Third Grade worker's auricle pump.

The had returned to the palace to find a certain amount of controlled excitement everywhere. Ignoring this at first, Synvoret had gone straight to Par-Chavorlem and spoken gravely.

" Commissioner, I must ask to see you alone."

" Certainly, Signatory, but first please allow me to settle some urgent business," the Commissioner said, flattening his comb. " I very much regret that a dangerous madman is loose in the native quarter. Our men are making every effort to track him down, and I must go over to the hospital and be of what assistance I can. Perhaps you would care to come ? No doubt you heard the ambulances in the street."

" I certainly heard ambulances," Synvoret said with reserve. He and Roifullery exchanged glances.

" They were collecting a poor Earthian, a harmless Third Grade Under-Oiler, who has been brutally attacked by an assailant or assailants unknown. He is in hospital now. I hold it my duty to go and see him. It is terrible this sort of thing should happen ; it merely shows how unstable these bipeds are."

And so Synvoret, with growing curiosity and uncertainty, had accompanied the Commissioner to hospital. There he found the man whose auricle pump he had exposed only a short while before, lying in a bed unconscious. Again he felt a rush a shame. A part of him whispered that it had been a pleasure to rip up this helpless creature, that there had been a

prurient joy in watching it so openly emote. Then he silenced this voice with the stern cry ' Duty !' After all, whatever he had felt, he had been doing his duty.

But the pause lost Synvoret the initiative. He hesitated, and thereby gave his opponent the chance of winning his bluff. He could not now admit that he was himself responsible for this injury.

" They are poor frail thing, bipeds," said Par-Chavorlem heavily.

" What's the matter with him ?" asked Synvoret.

Par-Chavorlem explained how this hospital was one of the most advanced in Sector Vermilion and how by adapting an abhorred secret police weapon for humanitarian ends they had produced a means of keeping in constant touch with their ailing patients. Unctiously, he described how this poor wretch had had a throat disease coupled with severe mental disorder ; and how he was responding to the new medical treatment, whereby such information as heart-beat rate and nervous activity was automatically registered in—and could be controlled by—the hospital wherever the sufferer might be.

It was a very convincing tale.

He then took the Signatory to another chamber in the building where medical nals and men bent over instruments, assimilating data on other out-patients as it came in.

That too was very convincing.

Par-Chavorlem and Terekomy had worked fast and well. Synvoret, if not entirely converted, was suitably deceived, accusing himself of too readily jumping to conclusions. Roifullery was right—he was too anxious to find something wrong and must re-adjust his mental attitude.

" What will happen to—this biped who was attacked ?" he inquired, when the charade was over and they had left the flickering dials and white coats behind.

" We hope he will recover ; unfortunately his nerves have undergone a grave shock. He was unconscious when discovered and has remained so. Even more unfortunately, our investigators have uncovered some evidence which tends to show that he was attacked by a Partussian, or rather two Partussians. My deepest regret is that this should happen while you are visiting us. I would like to assure you that when we catch these two dangerous tripeds they will be dealt with

with the full severity of the law. I take a very grave view of inter-species violence."

"Hm . . . Yes, I see," said Synvoret, feeling extremely uncomfortable. It was already too late and too complicated for him to try and explain.

He was not unsubtle. The thought did occur to him that Par-Chavorlem might be bluffing, although his story and the circumstantial evidence backing it was perfectly convincing; but if it were so, his silent acquiescence had now placed him in the Commissioners hands. Should he do other than silently acquiesce, then it was within Par-Chavorlem's power to see that the biped died and the names of his murderers were announced. From the distance of Partussy, the whole business would look sordid in the extreme, and he would die with his name under a cloud.

This was not a line of thought he pursued for long. The demonstration Par-Chavorlem and Terekomy had rigged for him at the hospital was too thorough.

"I have been unjust to Par-Chavorlem all along. I came here biased with a case to prove against him," the Signatory told himself as he bowled through the Earthly dawn. So ran his conscious reasoning. Below it, reinforcing it and unknown to him, was a growing sense of guilt about his treatment of terrestrials, which he could only suppress by regarding them as beyond rational compassion. Thus is the psychology of the oppressor tempered.

From then on his attitude hardened. Increasingly, he was Par-Chavorlem's gull.

They reached a hunting lodge in the Northern Administrative Division of Cumbland. This lodge was owned by the powerful family of Par-Junt, distant relations of Par-Chavorlem's. Their welcome was courteous and sincere, their attention to the Signatory hospitable and gentle. During the day the party between them shot over three hundred wild afrizzians.

When they returned to the City late that evening, Synvoret was full of pleasure. He retired early, forgetting he had wished to see Towler and hear any confidential revelations he might wish to make.

Par-Chavorlem had not forgotten his appointment with Towler.

After he had checked over the events of the day with Terekomy, he rang for the chief interpreter.

Towler was pale but defiant when he arrived.

" I have no news of Miss Falodon. She has disappeared completely. You'd better ask your Arm Marshall about her ; perhaps he has her in one of his secret cells."

Terekomy's comb folded sideways.

" Take care of your tongue, biped," he warned.

" So you cannot or will not help us," said Par-Chavorlem. He turned to a nal guard behind him. " Bring in the prisoner."

A rear door was thrown open. A nal bore in a human figure strapped to a pole, setting it upright so that the figure stood willy nilly. Through the face plate, Towler saw the frightened countenance of his butcher. At once his heart began to hammer with trepidation.

" You know who this is," Terekomy said to Towler. " He was seen with you going to your flat yesterday."

" He is a friend of mine," Towler said.

" A good friend, no doubt. Speak to him in your language, ask him about Fallodon."

Towler turned to the butcher, bitterness filling him. Changing from Partussian to his native tongue, he said, " I got you into this trouble by my own foolishness. I must have been mad ! What can I say ? What can I do ? I'd rather I was there than you."

" It's just luck. It's not your fault." He spoke painfully. " These horrors have ruined me, crushed my stomach in, I shouldn't wonder. You know their sort of questioning."

" You've told them everything ?"

" Not on your nelly ! You're in the clear . . ." He paused, sighed, then continued with obvious effort. " All I told 'em was a bit of hearsay, that a carter told me Elizabeth Fallodon had smuggled herself out of the City. Weak fool I was ! The carter and four others are dead by now, on account of my babbling tongue."

" Out of the City ! You mean she was trying to contact—"

" Yes, you know who ; your pal. So at least if she's safe—"

" All right !" Terekomy interrupted, setting himself between Towler and the butcher. " Don't jabber all day. What did he say about Fallodon, interpreter ?"

Towler hesitated.

" That she's got away from you. She's not dead, she's free, thank God."

Par-Chavorlem slammed an arm tip onto the desk top.

" And you didn't know that? You still pretend you had nothing to do with it? You—"

" No. No, I swear !"

" So much for love . . ." The Commissioner was suddenly quiet. Then he turned to the uniformed nal who held the butcher upright on his pole.

" Guard, smash that biped's face plate," he ordered.

" No !" Towler cried. He threw himself forward, but Terekomy seized him.

" Tell the truth," he said, " if you want your friend's life spared. You knew about Fallodon ; she's taking a message to Rivars for you, isn't she ?"

" No ! No !" Towler shouted again, so loudly he never heard the butcher's face plate cracked. Only the man's coughing silenced him, a broken cough that went on and on, stopping only to start again, until it was finally quietened forever in the thick Partussian atmosphere.

Par-Chavorlem was the first to speak. He had watched the dying man's gestures with interest.

" Towler, after this I am forced to believe you are not guilty of what we suspected. This pleases me, since very few terrestrials have your grasp of our beautiful and intricate language. However, you are to a certain extent implicated with terrestrials who are guilty. You are a fool if not a knave. So, you are demoted from the post of Chief Interpreter herewith. From tomorrow you will join the ordinary interpreter's pool. You will not speak to Signatory Synvoret again. Interpreter Peter Lardening will take over your post. Now get out and send Lardening in to me. Move."

Limply, Towler went. Shock and horror made him quake in every limb ; the butcher's groans still echoed in his ears. The only shred of comfort in the whole business was that Elizabeth had obviously got clear away. And her going was a proof of her love for him rather than the reverse ; she had gone before the Starjjan foot arrived, no doubt to fetch the evidence herself from Rivars.

One thing Towler promised himself. As soon as this crisis was over, and before Chav had them all back among the unfightable restrictions of the other City, he would break out and find Elizabeth. He needed her more than anything.

Meanwhile . . . Towler still had the Starjjan foot. But it would be harder now than ever to find an opportunity for presenting it to the visiting signatory.

fourteen

The next day was the fifth day of Synvoret's visit.

For Towler it passed fruitlessly. Confined to the interpreters' pool, translating numerous and irrelevant Vermilion bulletins into English, he hardly saw a nal all day.

At least it was a minor relief from tension to be accepted back from coventry by his old friends. Wearily, he briefed Peter Lardening for his new role as well as he could. That young man was also showing signs of strain ; Towler recalled his fondness for Elizabeth, and could only sympathise.

Synvoret, today with only Terekomy in attendance to show him the things he ought to see, investigated several subcommissions and visited, with a heavy guard, the curious old terrestrial city of London, where several thousands of bipeds and not a few nal archaeologists still lived.

Lardening reported on the trip in the off duty room that evening.

" The old fool's sold on the Empire way of life," he said. " There's not a chance of his seeing through Chav's bluff now. We were mad to expect he'd ever be any help to us."

" How was my dismissal explained to him ?" Towler asked. " Didn't he think that was curious ?"

" Not a bit of it. Chav had a tale, of course. He told Synvoret he had discovered you had not interpreted truthfully what the refugees said at Ashkar. According to him they were really saying how much they hated Rivars and his terrorists . . . And Synvoret believed it."

" We've got two and a half days left !" Towler cried in agony.

" What can you do ? Synvoret would no longer know the truth if he heard it."

" Something must be done. You're the one in contact with him now, Lardening. You'd better think of something."

As he spoke, Towler looked round at the other interpreters. There were half a dozen of them, Reonachi, Spadder, Johns, Eugene, Klee and Meller, anxiously gathered to see what was going on at a time of crisis. These were the men who had condemned his behaviour. Now their faces saddened Towler. They were helpless ; they were hopeless—or if they hoped, it was the spineless hope that someone else would do something. They were the end products of a thousand years of Partussian rule : a subject race.

It forced Towler to see himself in a new light. He had endured much, and that in constant apprehension. But at least he could and would endure. He had the one thing these men lacked—resolution.

Slapping Lardening reassuringly on the back, he left. The joy of accepting a challenge was in him.

Towler woke to the sixth day of Synvoret's visit with his new determination still in command.

He thought first of all of Rivars. According to latest reports, the leader was now engaged in a fierce battle with the Starjjan force among the desolate slopes of the Varne Heights. Nevertheless, Rivars would have time to worry about the delivery or otherwise of his evidence to Synvoret, which had now been in Towler's deep freeze for almost three days.

By night fall it must be in the Signatory's hands . . . But how?

Luck seemed to be with Towler.

As he finished breakfast, an urgent call came through for him. He lifted the receiver and replied (no glimpse-globes in this utility City !)

" Palace here, Gary. Come over fast, will you? Peter Lardening's been taken ill. Synvoret has asked for you back today, and he's due to leave for a sight of the battle line in twenty minutes."

" I'll be there."

He put the instrument down slowly. Curious ! Lardening had looked fit enough last evening. Ah well, it looked as if a chance to speak to Synvoret alone would be more easily come by than he had dared hope for. Squaring his shoulders, he started out for the palace—not without wishing that his dear Elizabeth could see him in his new role of hero !

Both Synvoret and Roifullery were amiable but silent, not relishing the prospect of a brief air journey. Stoically, like good nals, they climbed into a survey ship with Terekomy and Par-Chavorlem. The latter merely gave Towler an admonitory nod of his comb, as if to say ' Just dare try anything while I'm about . . .'

The ship took off, rose through the overhead lock and into Earth's atmosphere. Wheeling, it turned south east towards the contested Varne Heights.

Once at it objective, it hovered inside cumulus cloud, five thousand feet above ground. Through infra-vision, the

Partussians in the ship could watch the activity on the land below, where a large party of Starjjans were attempting to reach a smaller group of their kind who had been cut off along a hill ridge by patriot forces. Picked out by telescopes, the tiny figures crawled like lice over a rumpled counterpane, their actions interesting for a while but without significance.

To Synvoret, of course, they were merely terrestrials squabbling with terrestrials. He was taking the god-like view.

" Seeing this sort of barbarism makes me more than ever aware that we Partussians have a mission in the galaxy," he said.

" I wonder, Signatory, if you do not think me too lenient with the bipeds," Par-Chavorlem said smoothly. " I know my responsibility is to keep peace, yet it seems the greater wisdom to leave these creatures to sort out their own indistinguishable differences. It is the wisest way to avoid any possible animosity against ourselves."

Synvoret meditated only for a second.

" I think you maintain a fair rule," he said. " The more I see, the more I'm convinced of it."

Towler the only terrestrial sitting with these huge beings, sighed wretchedly. Hour by hour, Synvoret was becoming more confirmed in Par-Chavorlem's point of view. Already he believed the Commissioner's rule was just ; soon he would be capable of applauding injustice to the wretched bipeds.

Again Towler thought, ' I'm the one human who sees how things are shaping. I must keep if possible to Rivars ' plan—but is it any longer the best one ?' And once more he reviewed his doubts of Rivars' abilities. The whole business was becoming less rather than more manageable as time went on.

Looking at the featureless turret of the Partussian dignatory's head, Towler could not help wishing that the survey ship would suddenly fall from the cloud and crash, killing everyone it contained—including himself. It would solve his problems at least.

Synvoret soon grew tired of peering down at the storming of an insignificant hillside.

" Have we not seen enough of these squabbling bipeds ?" he asked. " Can we not turn for home ?"

" The men down there are fighting for their lives and their ideals !" Towler blurted out suddenly, moved to anger by the

contempt implicit in the other's words. " You don't understand !"

Par-Chavorlem and Terekomy stiffened at this out-burst, which Towler regretted at once. Synvoret possibly welcomed it ; he turned with renewed interest to the interpreter.

" What are these supposed ideals for which your fellows die so readily ?" he asked. " I should like to hear. Perhaps this is a subject on which you are prepared to be talkative ?"

Towler was on the point of blurting out the truth : that this was a fight between terrestrials and illegally imported Starjjans, a put-up job, a gross victimisation. To have done so would have been disaster. He would have been killed, expertly if not promptly ; and the Commissioner would have had little difficulty in branding his truth as a madman's lie. He was already to suspect for his words too carry weight.

Favouring discretion and the friction about a civil war, he said weakly, "Why don't you land and ask them for yourself?"

Synvoret was a conscientious man. Perhaps, too, he thought it might be well to demonstrate to this biped—and to Par-Chavorlem—that he was not afraid of the hazards of war ; his showing at Ashkar had not been particularly noble. He gave a sharp order. The ship sank rapidly towards the ground. He turned and raised one arm in a condescending smile to Towler.

Roifullery made faint protesting noises, but the Signatory was climbing into his air suit. Motioning to Raggball, his bodyguard, he said, " You and I will go out along with the Interpreter. Gazer Roifullery may remain in the ship if he so prefers. Get yourself ready and armed."

Raggball did not answer. He never answered ; he merely obeyed.

They crunched down on bracken beneath the low walls of a corrie, sheltered to the front by broken, wooded terrain. Towler knew his bosses well enough to realise they would now be grounded in a part held by native forces ; it would never do to have landed them among Starjjans, who might give the game away.

All the same, they were perilously near the line of conflict. Towler accompanied the two big Partussians out of the sheltering craft with some reluctance, wondering what was coming next.

Cannon fire sounded distantly. Nearer, a bird sang a few parched notes, discarding them over his territory like a torn-up

ticket. On the trees, leaves flickered in a light wind. Earth ! Towler cried inwardly, earth ! Here are all sweet and dear things. These stinking sulphur-breathers should be cleared from here for ever : they have no place in it, nor has it any place for them. He sucked in the good clean air exultantly.

Next second he was lying flat among stones and grass, his cheek pressed to the damp soil. The aliens, following his instinctive act, also threw themselves down. A nuclear repeater had fired twice, close at hand.

Raising his head cautiously, Towler looked about. The shots, echoing on the cliffs of the corrie, might have come from any direction. He squirmed forward, seeking better cover behind a tight mass of buckthorn.

Parting the branches before him, he peered ahead. A cottage stood within stone-tossing distance, parts of its walls still intact, its roof long since collapsed, one insignificant victim of the long decay slowly seizing all Earth. In the shell of the cottage was a man ; he wore the green and black flash of Rivars on his left arm.

The man had been hit. Groaning, he clutched his hip, propping himself against a broken beam. The slight noise he made was clearly audible from where Towler crouched.

Time seemed to solidify like jelly, to congeal, to turn concrete, as Towler stared across the intervening space at that white countenance grinning with pain. Everything was clear to him, as clear as a diagram. The shots which hit this man had been fired from his left where the hillside in which the corrie also lay ended in a welter of gravel and boulder. There a Starjjan sniper would be concealed ; the cottage was in his line of fire, although Towler was hidden from him by the decline of ground into the natural pit behind.

These two opponents, one born on a planet far beyond these horizons, played out their little drama on a scene set many years past. Geologically speaking only a short while ago, the sea had flowed over this ragged landscape, forming it, giving it its unmistakeable character. The Partussians had dammed the sea and drained the land. They represented a force quite as ruthless as the ocean ; their harsh effects would lie a long time indelible upon this whole globe, even after it was free of them.

" Over here !" Towler shouted to the man in the cottage.

He had forgotten the purpose for which he had come. His only thought was that if the wounded man could get to him, he could be carried back to the city and so to hospital.

Propping himself on one elbow, he waved across the gap. The soldier, without changing his fierce expression of pain, had seen him, was observing him, was calculating whether to make a dash for it. Another shot, plunging into the brickwork near him, made up his mind.

With an effort, he picked up his nuc-arm and started to cross the open space towards safety. He did not run ; he merely moved as rapidly as he could, dragging his injured leg behind him.

Towler and he stared each other in the face across the diminishing space, their two wills united in drawing the soldier to shelter.

The jarring boom of nuclear cannon made them both shake with unexpected anguish, but it came from over the hill, belonged to another world.

Now the diminishing space measured but a few feet, the bearded and pain-laden face of the soldier was clear in every detail. His skin shone with dust and sweat, his eyebrows were bunched together, his grey eyes wide and heavy-lidded. Suddenly the lids closed, the mouth opened in a silent cry. Two more shots from the nuclear repeater had sounded.

The soldier fell with his arms spread. Bundling forward, Towler seized him by the wrists, dragging him into the safety of the buckthorn bushes.

" Well done, interpreter ! Ask him first what his views on politics are."

The voice came from behind Towler. He had forgotten the Signatory. Now he could not speak for hatred. Instead, tugging at the wounded man, he drew him behind a spur of rock. Nursing his unkempt head, he looked down at him.

The grey eyes were closed now, but the man spoke.

The man said, " I never made it."

" Yes you did. You're safe now. We'll get you to hospital."

" I did my best."

" Ask him why he fights his own kind "—this in Partussian, from behind.

Towler crouched there, watching blood spread over the the man's trousers, engulfing them like fire. He knew that the soldier was already beyond the help of hospitals.

Suddenly the man's eyes were open, grey and clear.

" In the Spring—" he said painfully. " Next spring—" He could get no further. He choked, though his gaze remained fixed in anguish on Towler.

For him the distance between his face and Towler's was increasing again, increasing to infinity, increasing for ever . . .

After a frozen while, Towler got up and walked limply back to the survey ship, leaving the dead body where it was. Quiet now, a little disappointed, the two aliens followed him. Towler did not look at them ; he had decided already he must kill Synvoret ; no other action would release the burning hatred in his breast.

fifteen

They were back at the City in time for lunch. Towler, eating in the Terrestrial Staff Mess, had little appetite. Lardening did not appear, although Meller reported that he was better. The interpreters frequently went down with a twelve hour fever they called ' nal sickness,' brought on mainly by the restricted conditions under which they had to work.

The rest of the day passed in dull routine, as Towler followed the party of nals round City House.

Synvoret and Gazer Roifullery, with various Commission officials in attendance, spent much time investigating the governmental machinery, which consisted chiefly of an actual machine, the Recorder, in which all details of expenditure and income from the City, the sub-commissions, and other sources were stored. Since, as Towler suspected, the figures were rigged in the first place, the investigators learnt nothing untoward from them. Only Par-Chavorlem knew Earth's true profit and loss account. The inspection, indeed, grew more and more cursory. When one of the officials suggested drinks and sulphettes, Synvoret was happy to agree.

The party moved into a private room, leaving Towler to wait outside.

Waiting, he thought over his next move.

His new courage had something of desperation in it. Whatever he was going to do must be done very soon.

Rivars had indicated he had other terrestrials working for him secretly in the palace. By now, Rivars would know he (Towler) had not acted as instructed, had delayed three days, and would be growing impatient. He would probably presume that Towler had sold out to the highest bidder—Synvoret or

Par-Chavorlem. If he presumed that, his next move was predictable. He would instruct his other palace agents to exterminate Towler.

The idea made Towler's flesh crawl ; again he had the strange feeling that Rivars was enemy rather than ally. Well, he must act. At the same time, he must act for other reasons than self-preservation.

The main reason was simple. Ever since his meeting with Rivars, Towler had doubted the patriot leader's judgment ; now that doubt flared into active mistrust. Rivars was a soldier, one having no knowledge of the finesse of diplomacy, particularly such diplomacy as Partussy fostered. Rivars thought of the Signatory—as Towler himself had done at first —as a sort of Saviour figure : a man of knowledge and integrity who would find the truth and proclaim it. Synvoret fell ludicrously short of that estimate.

Now Towler asked himself : supposing he produced the webbed Starjjan foot for Synvoret—would that worthy be able, from the depths of his sophistry, to discount it ? Would he not dismiss it perhaps as the foot of a terrestrial freak, or believe that it had somehow been smuggled illegally into the planet to prove a case ?

No, Rivars' ingenious piece of evidence seemed no longer so effective as once it had done, now that Synvoret was virtually in Par-Chavorlem's pocket.

So.

It followed that anything offered to Synvoret might be rejected. How then to get the truth about Earth back to the Colony Worlds Council on the Queen World ?

One way only presented itself : by killing Synvoret.

Synvoret was an important member of the Council. His death on an almost unknown planet would create a furore. As soon as possible, another team of investigators—and this time probably military men—would arrive to investigate affairs both on Earth and its supervisory planet, Castacorze, Vermilion HQ. They would be definitely looking for trouble, and would find it ; indeed, they would probably want Par-Chavorlem for a scapegoat whether he was guilty or not.

It was clear : Synvoret could be of no help to Earth now unless he was dead. And Towler must kill him.

Two days ago this might have been unthinkable. Now, it was even pleasurable. All the same, killing one of these

giant tripeds, who had so few vulnerable areas, was a considerable task. Towler had only a knife and determination. He needed also a very favourable opportunity.

By the time the Partussian delegation emerged from their drinking party, Towler had a plan improvised.

Approaching the Signatory, he said, " In a room in the vaults of the palace are preserved some of the art treasures created by terrestrials before they became a subject race. May I show them to you if you have finished here ?"

Synvoret swivelled an eyestalk at him.

" Do you think your form of art is likely to appeal to me, interpreter ?" he asked.

" Our art took many forms. You have seen that we can be warlike. You ought also to see the fruits of peace."

" Possibly so," the Signatory agreed indifferently ; " While I am here I am willing to see anything."

They descended to the art room, only the silent Raggball accompanying them. This, however, was one too many for Towler ; if he was to have any chance of success, he must get Synvoret alone.

The store contained treasures from many ages and lands—ages and lands that there was now hardly anyone to record. Here, carefully preserved in the right atmosphere and temperature, were jade bowls from Ming China ; amphorae from early Greece ; stone heads from Teotihuacan ; masks from Borneo and Ashanti ; African statuettes ; totem poles, jewellery, gold plate, pottery, pewter ; Sivas of silver and Buddhas of sandalwood ; rugs, tapestries, musical instruments, toys, films, posters, clocks ; books, scrolls, early Arabic translations of the ' lost ' books of Aristotle ; and paintings from many sources, Hokusais, Giottos, Kadinskis, Shahns, Rembrandts, Durers, Bratbys, Holbeins, Dads, Dolkys, Tiepolos . . .

Most of it was illegally acquired and would be illegally disposed of. As long as the plundered and broken towns of Earth continued to yield up treasure, this room would not be empty. The whole heritage of Earth was gradually being dispersed to nearby worlds, the proceeds going to fill Par-Chavorlem's personal coffers.

Synvoret walked among all this tragic pomp without a word, pausing nowhere, hurrying nowhere, his eyestalks sweeping continuously from side to side. At last he come back to Towler.

" How can biped art mean anything to other beings ?" he asked gently. " It is all superficial—mere outward display, rationalised emotion. I can see nothing here to detain me—though this is not to denigrate its value to you."

" Nothing at all that interests you ?"

The Partussian hesitated, towering above the interpreter.

" One thing is interesting and curious," he said, and he led the way stolidly down among the cases and exhibits. He indicated a stiff and shining square of thick material ; it was covered with a simple repeated motif consisting of a three-armed whirl. The label on its exhibition case said ; ' Linoleum. XX Cent. French. (Paris ?)'

" You like this ?" Towler asked.

" It is likeable. It seems to me to bear a more exact relationship to the universe than the rest of the baubles I have examined here."

Towler licked his lips.

" It so happens I have a precisely similar pattern in my private room. The collection of such old treasures is my hobby. Would you come with me to collect it ? I feel I would like to present it to you as a gift, to show how much I have enjoyed my brief contact with you as your interpreter. It would be particularly pleasureable to me if this humble ceremony could take place in my room. I have never had a Partussian guest before."

Synvoret appeared to meditate.

" Yes, it might be pleasant." Momentarily he was seeing himself back on Partussy, saying to friends, ' The natives were hospitable in their feeble way ; they invited me to their wretched homes, loaded me with gifts . . .' " Yes, let us go," he said aloud. " It will be convenient for me now."

" My little home is so small that I fear there will be no room in it for Raggball."

" Raggball will wait outside. Come."

Stopping only to collect Partussian air suits, they started for the native quarter and an appointment with death. The stroll held for Towler an air of unreality ; he knew that, like an actor in a play, he walked upon a temporary set. This whole Commission had been hastily erected purely for Synvoret's benefit ; when—if !—he left, it would be abandoned, as Par-Chavorlem ordered everyone back to their old, more capacious city. The gaunt unpainted buildings were here only

for a moment, the backdrop to a drama of deceit upon the success of which depended the future of Earth.

At this time, it was no more than backdrop. They walked close by the fair in the Park, where a few cafes were beginning to open. Towler's perceptions were almost entirely wrapped about himself ; he noticed nothing. He had invited Synvoret to his flat only because there his chances of making a kill were increased. There, a rip in the other's air suit could be lethal ; once Synvoret's suit was punctured, he would have to concentrate not upon defence or attack, but upon survival—and then a well-aimed blow under the arms might kill him.

Leaving Raggball on guard in the street, they entered the air lock, the big Partussian having to squeeze in.

" I must make you feel like a pigmy," he grunted. Towler was too overwrought to manage a reply.

In the living room, Synvoret swivelled his eyestalks expectantly. At these close quarters, in this small room, he looked overwhelming.

Unlatching the front of his helmet, licking his lips, Towler said, " Stay here. The thing's in the kitchen."

Almost blindly, he hurried from the room. Panting, he pulled open a provision cupboard and pulled his knife from the back of it, where it had been hidden these last two days. Its handle was of solid wood, an antique ; the blade, eight inches long, was single edged, curving to a point. It had been Wedman's knife, and a serviceable weapon it was. It would do the job.

Thrusting it into his pocket, Towler vacillated again. When he returned to the other room, it was with the Starjjan foot. Though he had little faith in Rivars' orders, he would obey them. He would give the Signatory one last chance, judge his reactions. He set the foot on the table in its frosty wrappings.

" What is this ?" Synvoret asked sternly.

" Examine it, sir ! You told me once you were after the truth of the situation on Earth. Here's the truth. I brought you here to show it to you. Examine it ! Unwrap it !"

He held the knife ready in his pocket as Synvoret peeled back paper and canvas and pulled out the frozen foot.

" Remove this disgusting object at once, interpreter."

" You can see it's not a human foot, can't you ?"

" I have no idea what a human foot looks like, you fool. What are you playing at ? Raggball ! Raggball !"

As the Signatory shouted for his bodyguard, he swept the foot off the table with a broad arm.

Never for a moment had it occurred to Towler that the Signatory, despite his years on Starjj, might have no knowledge of the structure of a Starjjan foot. But whether he knew or not, he was unaware of the structure of a terrestrial's foot. It was a stupid and unforeseen slice of miscalculation. The unexpectedness of it woke Towler to action.

Bending as if to retrieve the severed foot, he drew his knife. The Partussian had taken fright, was bellowing still for Raggball. Towler had only a moment in which to act.

He stabbed from behind with all his might, dragging the sharp blade down the expanse of suit, seeing it wrinkle and part, smelling the reek of sulphuretted hydrogen as it escaped. Then a blow from Synvoret sent him flying. Stumbling head over heels, he dropped the knife and crashed into his bed, half-stunned.

He lay limply against the bed, staring helplessly across the room. Synvoret had moved to the wall, pressing himself against it so that the rip in his suit was at least partially sealed. The knife lay at his great feet. Towler began to crawl towards it, but Synvoret stood ready to lash out again. They glared at each other. It was deadlock until Raggball arrived : neither could harm the other.

They hated in silence, and then the door broke open and the bodyguard burst in.

" Stay here and guard him," Synvoret said. A tremor was apparent in his voice. " Stay here and guard him. I will send reinforcements."

He left hastily as Raggball lumbered over to Towler.

sixteen

From Synvoret's point of view—that is, by subjective time—it was eight weeks and two days later when the freighter *Geboraa* landed him and his party back on Partussy in the Queen City. Borne half way across the galaxy at a speed and in a para-universe where light was a sluggish solid, he had bypassed the two years and several weeks which had lapsed in the ordinary universe. Time contracted to carry him back to Partussy with his memories of Earth intact.

The Colony Worlds Council Hall was packed with signatories and semi-signatories. After the Trinity had been praised,

and Synvoret and two other travellers from distant parts of Empire had been welcomed back with a formal speech from the Tripos, the general business of the day began. This was an informal general session. The matters dealt with changed little from year to year : infringements of element monopolies, trans-sector disputations, ministerial peccadillos, the carthanaxian question, high level transgressions of galactic rights.

Synvoret was infinitely soothed to hear these familiar problems come up, one by one, only to be resolved in ethico-legal fashion by the signatories best equipped to deal with them. This, he reflected, was the place for him : a soft seat on his home planet. He was too old to go adventuring again. Relaxedly, he heard the Master Tripos calling the next item.

" Know this assembly that just returned to Partussy is one Wattol Forlie, dismissed from the post of a Commission Third Secretary on a Class 5C world in GAS Vermilion. This world, namely Earth in System 5417, is under the Commissionership of the High Hiscount Chaverlem Par-Chavorlem, against whom Wattol Forlie does bring the following grave charges. Firstly, highest treason ; in that the accused does set the fair name of Partussy into foul repute. Secondly, ordinary treason ; in that the accused does bring his own office into disrepute . . .'

Now Synvoret was no longer relaxed. He sat tensely listening as his personal secretary took notes beside him. He had not yet made his official report on Earth to the Supreme Councillor, whose private hearings were held only once a month. It was a coincidence merely that this issue should occur in ordinary council session. Wattol Forlie must have reached home at almost the same time as the Signatory.

" . . . Thirdly, corruption ; in that the accused does deploy his forces for his own personal gain. Fourthly, exploitation, in that the accused manoeuvres the subject race under him for his own personal gain . . ."

The list of charges increased ; there were nine in all. At length the Master Tripos looked up and said, in the traditional parlance of the council, " Let he who brings these charges show himself to the assembly and vouch that the intention is of his own, and Trinity and Empire not abused thereby."

A figure rose some distance from Synvoret and announced cockily, " Here I am, gentlemen, ladies, neuters. The intention is mine and I am pursuivant of it. And I'll tell you I'd never

have got here for years yet, if some good traveller on a filthy dump called Appelobetness III hadn't given me nine tens for a prize-winning lottery ticket. That bit of luck paid my way home."

" That is sufficient," cried the Tripos. " The charges can speak for themselves. So you are present, so you hold silence."

A mutter of amusement ran round the chamber, quickly hushed as the speaker continued. " Who shall sift these matters in preliminary or in toto ? Stand up and speak all signatories with special and relevant knowledge of the matters contained in these charges."

Only Synvoret rose.

" The staggering total of nine charges. This dismissed Third Secretary must have hired an able lawyer !"

These, his first words, brought a mutter of amusement from his fellows, in which a note of welcome revealed their pleasure in seeing a cherished face back among them. Though at present he was intellectually unprepared to make a statement, suddenly he was emotionally ready. He had done his state some service ; there remained one duty to perform. Unexpectedly, he found himself full of words.

" Signatories all," he began. " This matter touches very closely on the Investigation from which I have just returned. A full and proper report of it will go to the Supremo at the month's end. Meanwhile, I will briefly give you the gist of my judgments as they affect the charge. Most of you will not have heard of Earth. I have visited it. I have just come back from there. Grave allegations from this same source against one of our Commissioners, Par-Chavorlem, have already come to my attention ; I went to Earth with the express purpose of investigating them."

He made a noble figure standing there. He was well known and well liked. Nobody listening doubted his integrity ; Synvoret was one of the old guard, beyond self-interest and corruption. One glance at the ancient splendour of his coat told you that.

" Let me deal with the indictment charge by charge," he continued. " The first charge of highest treason. This charge, I suggest, cannot operate until the dismissed Third Secretary Forlie has produced corroborative charges from a higher source. Highest treason can only be committed against higher sources. Castacorze, Sector Vermilion HQ would be,

for instance, a higher source in Par-Chavorlem's case, but they have brought no such charge against him.

" The second charge of ordinary treason. To my personal knowledge, Par-Chavorlem does not bring his office into disrepute. I spoke during my stay to Partussian land-owners of the highest repute—the name of the Par-Junt family will be familiar to you—and these good people hold the Commissioner in the greatest esteem and affection. Even the bipeds regard him with affection. I was *there*, gentlemen, meeting these creatures face to face ; the bipeds of Earth wage civil wars, with brother killing brother. I went out onto their battlefields and spoke with them personally, uncensoredly. I well remember on one occasion going right into a forward area, a town called Ashkar where fighting had been going on for weeks, where we were constantly under nuclear bombardment. A stream of biped refugees—"

He was interrupted by a question from the Middle Phalanx.

" Do we understand the Signatory to say that Commissioner Par-Chavorlem allowed him to enter a position of physical danger ? Surely that was very lax of him ?"

" He was helping me in my investigations. He quite understood that it was my duty to go everywhere and see everything. May I continue ? Refugees were streaming past us at this terrible place. I remember speaking to one poor old lady who had lost everything she had. Her relations had been killed, her home destroyed. She was turning naturally to the Commission as a place of friendliness and shelter in which she might live out the rest of her days. I remember her very words, ' The Commission's the only safe place for me, sir.' "

There was an interruption from a Dlotpodite, a triped species which had gradually climbed from the status of satellites to near-equal of Partussians.

" Do you personally speak the terrestrial language, Signatory ?"

" Naturally not, but—"

" Do you recall if Commissioner Par-Chavorlem does ?"

" Er—no, naturally he does not either ; you see, there is no terrestrial language, only a series of dialects with which no serious nal could trouble himself. These bipeds are very *primitive*, you understand ; they have had the benefit of only a thousand years of supervision. May I please continue ? On the third charge of corruption. Of this, I and the officer from Psyche-Watch who accompanied me, Gazer Roifullery, found

absolutely no evidence. The records were all faultlessly in order ; needless to say, we investigated them ourselves. And as a minor example of the Commissioner's punctiliousness, I can say that I examined a large chamber full of art treasures of Earth which Par-Chavorlem keeps under his care, no doubt against the day when the terrestrials develop enough responsibility to look after them themselves. If he was as currupt as this foolish charge claims, why did he not sell the treasures ?"

" The fourth charge of exploitation . . ."

Synvoret paused. This council—who would later investigate his investigatory team's findings when the Supremo had passed them—must be given the general picture as vividly as possible. How could he tell them most clearly about a world none of them would ever see—or wish to see ?

He thought back to his crowded days on Earth, recalling various incidents. One above all stayed in his mind.

" I went to Earth," he said, " with my usual sympathy for a subject race, determined that it should have fair treatment. I found an emotionally unstable species for whom violence is irresistable. Chavorlem is more lenient with it than it deserves. He does not exploit it enough ; driven harder it would fight less. Why, these bipeds are beyond reason !" Synvoret was gripping his desk now, his comb erect, speaking so compulsively from memory that the whole assembly hung on his words. They were carried along by the fervour with which he spoke. " There was one biped with whom I had actually been —as I imagined—fairly intimate. He was my interpreter. I even condescended to visit his room in Commission City. He promised to give me a farewell present, but when we were alone, with absolutely no provocation, he tried to murder me, to stab me ! It was a savage, cowardly attack. Only by using my wits did I escape death."

All round the vast council chamber sounded murmurs of horror and sympathy. The insistent voice of the Dlotpodite came again, " Why was Par-Chavorlem lax enough to allow a killer in the City ?" but momentarily it was drowned in an uproar of admiration as the massed signatories expressed their warmth for a nal who had ventured his life in the cause of justice.

This grand and eccentric old figure standing quietly in his ancient coat seemed to embody all that was best in Partussian tradition. Here were the factors that made the Empire great :

impartiality, bravery, disregard of self. The assembly burst into cheers.

Bowing slightly, fully solaced for the hell he had been through, Signatory Synvoret acknowledged their plaudits.

So, for a brief while, the name Earth was a familiar one among the rulers of Partussy. Then, inevitably interest in it drained away through sub-committee and under-council ; there were, after all, four million planets to be dealt with. Eventually, the end result of the whole matter, a blue directive labelled ' RESTRICTED—All Levels ' and signed by Supremo Graylix of the Colony Worlds Council was stamped by a bored clerk in the Inferior Systems Office (V) and sent to Earth by quickest means.

The day after this directive was received at Commission City, three men and a woman rode through forest not many miles away.

The woman sat her horse with grace ; resembling a portrait by Modigliani, she wore a blue blouse which matched the sapphire chips of her eyes. Her skin was brown, her hands slender on the rein, This, unmistakeably, was Elizabeth Fallodon.

The man by her also sat easily on his horse, for he had picked a docile black mare ; this discretion had turned riding, which he had once loathed, into one of his greatest pleasures. But there had been many changes in his way of living since Synvoret left, two years ago. These showed in his appearance. His deferential bearing had gone, the set of his shoulders was firmer. His expression, except when he turned to Elizabeth, had a certain fierceness in it, as if in his earlier years of self questioning he had come at last on an unexpected answer. Now the pallor which years of living in a City had stamped upon him was gone. His face was as brown as an old sail. This man was Gary Towler.

Towler and Elizabeth, together with the two men who rode behind as escort, emerged from the forest into a curious landscape of dune and pampas, gully and bracken.

" A mile more and we shall be at Eastbon," Towler said. " We've come a roundabout way, but the quietest. Can you see the line of the escarpment ahead, between the dunes ? There lies Eastbon. We are late. Peter Lardening will be there before us."

Looking at her with a smile he added, " It's two years and more since either of us saw him. You were fond of him once, Elizabeth, remember ?"

" And so I still am ; he saved your life."

Towler nodded to that and the implications behind it. He and his wife loved each other so strongly that there was room in their lives for a dozen other sorts of fondness. As they jogged along the winding track between tall grass, over ground that had once been sea bed, he fell to remembering those crowded events a couple of years ago in which Lardening had suddenly played an important part. The sun that burned on his shoulders became the smouldering heat of fear he had felt as he lay defenceless on the floor while the impregnable figure of Raggball bore down on him . . .

Willing his limbs into action, Towler jumped up. As the Partussian bodyguard, slightly handicapped by his air suit, swung out an arm, Towler ducked under it. He dived for the knife that had been Wedman's. Raggball without hesitation threw the table at him, knocking him against the wall. Bounding forward, the great creature seized him by the arm.

A man appeared from the kitchen, gripping an old-fashioned terrestrial explosive revolver in his hand. He fired twice.

The first shot shattered the glassite dome of Raggball's suit.

Suddenly on the defensive, the nal spun about. The second shot blasted off one of his eyestalks. Like a great battering ram, he charged with his full ton weight head first for the door, bursting through into the corridor.

Thrusting the gun into his pocket, Peter Lardening ran to Towler.

" Are you all right ? Explanations later. We've got to get out of here before Chav has the place surrounded."

" I'm right behind you," Towler said shakily. He picked up his knife and they ran from the ruined room. Raggball was dying an oxygen death in the corridor. Already he was beyond interfering with them.

Lardening led the way down the street. They doubled along two side alleys and into a vegetable store. An ally of Lardening's was there. Nodding, he led them into a rear room. Without turning a hair, he sewed them in separate potato sacks and concealed them among similar sacks.

Outside, hooters sounded.

In no time, all of Arm Marshall Terekomy's available nals were in the native quarter, with reinforcements continually

coming up. The whole quarter was surrounded and searched. But the Marshall was over-keen ; his police were so many they got in the way of each other. The store filled with them more than once, but the two interpreters were not discovered.

Par-Chavorlem himself arrived on the scene. Anxious to erase the violence which had been done to his honoured guest, he ordered the destruction of the entire native quarter. Demolition squads were formed, buildings were pulled down wholesale, while frightened refugees salvaged what belongings they could and fled from the area.

The result was chaos in the City. Unable to leave it, hundreds of homeless people camped in the streets, piling their luggage and possessions about them. In the confusion, Lardening and Towler contacted the refuse man who had taken the latter to Rivars previously, and they rode out of the City on the midnight disposal cart.

" We're well out of that," Lardening exclaimed, as the two of them made their way on foot towards Rivars' camp.

" We certainly stirred up a hornet's nest, but will the end result be for the better ? If only I had killed Synvoret . . ."

" Don't reproach yourself, Gary. You did well—don't forget I overheard everything from the kitchen."

" I never saw you there."

Lardening chuckled.

" When you came in, I was squeezed behind the door. Besides you were preoccupied, to say the least."

" What were you doing there ? I thought you were ill ?"

" The illness was a fake—to give you one more chance to speak to Synvoret, to give me a chance to search your place and retrieve the Starjjan foot. As you must have guessed by now, I too serve Rivars ; he told you about me without mentioning my name. As the days went by and we saw you had still not given the evidence to Synvoret, we naturally mistrusted you." He paused with a certain embarrassment.

" Sometimes I mistrusted myself," Towler said sharply. " Go on."

" Rivars ordered me to kill you."

Again Towler had the choking sensation that assailed him when he thought of Rivars. More and more he came to look on the leader as an enemy. Here was proof that even the unimaginative Rivars felt that enmity too.

" By feigning illness and giving you another chance, I was disobeying Rivars," Lardening said. " He has no understanding of our difficulties in the City. As luck had it, I was raiding your rooms when you brought Synvoret in."

Though in the City it would be little more than one in the morning, out here the sky was pale ahead of them with a new dawn. By its growing light, Towler surveyed the other.

" Your help was more than welcome ; you must know how grateful I am. If only you had declared yourself to me some days ago, you could have helped me even more."

" I know that. But then Rivars had not informed me you were also his agent. We could have worked in co-operation had he not been so secretive. However, whether we have succeeded or failed, at least we've done."

" Yes," said Towler. " For good or ill our work in the City's finished . . . We can be of little further use to Rivars now."

They walked on in silence. Twice Partussian ships roared overhead, and they hid themselves in bushes rather than risk discovery.

They had been travelling for less than half an hour when noises ahead brought them to a halt. Once again they concealed themselves. Listening carefully, they could make out that a considerable party of humans were coming in their direction. The party was keeping quiet and advancing with some haste. After a minute, heads were visible above the tangle of foliage to their front.

Towler stood up and said in a loud voice, "Friends are here."

He was surprised to find a column of men, most of them well armed but battle weary, ahead of him. From the leaders of the column Towler and Lardening learnt that they represented the survivors of a larger body of Rivars' men which had been cut off by the Starjjans. Now they were retreating from a nal patrol.

" What's been happening in the City ?" the column leader asked. " Is there a crisis on ? Recently the nals have been happy just to contain us. Now they're picking us off as fast as they can."

" Someone tried to bump off Chav's visiting signatory," Towler said. " As a result, he's turned nasty and is pulling the place to pieces. But you people are only heading into trouble. you've lost your bearings ; another half hour's march will bring you to the City itself."

"We've got the nals behind us ; we'll have to continue," the column leader replied, but he stood there indecisively. Towler's eyes ran over his troop. Several women were among them. One was stepping out of line now and coming towards him, a tall and willowy figure. It was Elizabeth.

Next minute they were pressed together, their arms round each other.

Half laughing, half weeping, she said, " I wanted to help you so much, Gary, my dearest ! Yet I've never reached Rivars at all. From this side, the Varne Heights are crawling with Starjjans. I met up with this isolated party and have been with them ever since. We don't even seem to know where we're heading."

Towler and Lardening explained the situation as they saw it. Wearily, the rest of the party sprawled in the grass, eating rations or lighting up aphrohales, too tired to be other than indifferent to the discussion going on at their head.

" So we're near the disposal dump, where we can get onto the main road," Elizabeth was saying reflectively. " What time would it be in the City now, Peter ?"

Lardening calculated.

" About two in the morning," he said.

" Three hours till their dawn . . . Time enough . . . Listen, I've got a plan ; it sounds crazy and perhaps you'll say it couldn't work, but . . . would you like to hear it ?"

They sat and listened to Elizabeth's plan in wondering silence. It had many of the elements of the mind that produced it ; it was not complex, yet it had wit and some recklessness ; and it managed to be, though obvious, unexpected.

" By God, we'll do it if we all get killed in the attempt !" Towler cried, jumping up. " Elizabeth, my dear, you're a genius ! Elizabeth, if this comes off we're—we're unbeatable!"

In a little more than an hour the party had marched back to the disposal plant and taken up defensive positions there. The plant was purely automatic, so that they were not disturbed as they piled cans of unconsumed rubbish across the great road. Their maximum fire power was then concentrated at two points, one group being concealed behind the wall of the plant where they could cover the road, the other actually in the road where the poled cans hid them from the view of anyone approaching from the City.

They ran a certain risk in being discovered by vehicles moving towards the City, but at this time of day traffic was always negligible.

Then came the wait. They crouched in their positions until the twenty-six hour schedule of the City brought another artificial dawn there. Time crept by.

" They will be along any minute now," Towler said in a low voice at last. He lay behind the low plant wall nursing a gun, Elizabeth and Lardening beside him with other members of the party. The column leader commanded the party behind the road block.

Five minutes later a meuron defence truck and three other nal vehicles appeared from the direction of the City, moving fast a foot above the ground. This was the daily dawn convoy taking orders and supplies to Par-Chavorlem's first, concealed City.

The vehicles nosed up to the block and stopped, sinking lightly to rest on the surface of the road as their compression died. Three nals jumped down out of each truck, hurrying forward to investigate.

The ambush parties opened fire.

Even a virtually unkillable Partussian cannot survive when his body is nearly blown to bits. When the barrage of fire finished, twelve bodies, bulky and heavy as whales, lay lifeless in the road. Cheering, the terrestrials surged forward.

The corpses were dragged away, the barrier of cans removed. Everyone worked as if inspired. The trucks were seized, their contents flung into the road. Armed men climbed aboard.

" Gary—a lot of us will have to stay here. I want to stay," Lardening said, taking Towler's sleeve as the ex-interpreter swung himself up into one of the cabs.

" No, Peter, you must come. We can't leave you here to be mopped up," Towler said. " Jump aboard."

" I won't be mopped up. There's a useful job I can do. I'll make it to Rivars on my own, to tell him what is happening, what you're doing. Then we will join you as soon as possible."

" You must come with us, Peter," Elizabeth said. " We'll get a message through to Rivars later."

He looked her straight in the eyes.

" You go on with Gary, Elizabeth," he said. " I think for a while I'll be better on my own."

Armed now with the infinitely superior nal weapons, the new owners of the trucks moved off under Towler's command. The

column leader was to follow up on foot with the remainder of the party. They gave a rousing cheer as the trucks surged forward, rising slightly above the vulcanised road as they gathered speed.

So the big City fell to Earth.

Unsuspecting nal guards let the convoy in through the main gates as usual before falling beneath its withering fire. In a few hours the whole skeleton staff of nals in the City had been wiped out. It involved surprisingly little in the way of actual fighting ; Towler simply seized the Atmosphere Plant and pumped oxygen in everywhere.

The City was impregnable, beyond retribution.

The column leader's party arrived at the gates later that day. News of Earth's great victory spread fast. In troops or singly, Earthmen filtered in to what had been a prison and was now a bastion.

Sure in his own power, Towler at once sent out offers of peace to the Starjjan leaders. Within three days an armistice had been signed. Starjjans too filtered into the big City. In little time it was garrisoned by a considerable fighting force.

The entire manoeuvre took Par-Chavorlem and Terekomy completely by surprise. But it was something other than shock that delayed their retaliation. They could not move effectively until Synvoret left. The big City was illegal, a gigantic material witness to their misrule ; whatever happened—and the very worst had happened—they could not risk letting the Signatory suspect its existence.

Twenty minutes after the *Geboraa* had blasted for Partussy with Synvoret and his party aboard, Par-Chavorlem's forces struck—and were repulsed. The big City was impregnable, as Par-Chavorlem had intended it to be.

" You're a miracle-worker," Elizabeth told Towler admiringly.

" So are you, my dearest. I told you we both had tigers in us."

All these thoughts and memories passed through Gary Towler's mind as he jogged on his mare towards Eastbon with his wife Elizabeth beside him.

He was a leader now, and Rivars was dead. Rivars had refused to come to the City ; Rivars feared the Cities, and knew only his outlaw life in the wilds. When most of his men had

deserted him for Towler, he roved the Channel Valley with a small guerilla band until the nal patrols shot him down. Peter Lardening, with him at the time, escaped. Lardening then remained in the area to keep open the tenuous and hazardous link with the spies inside Par-Chavorlem's City. It was Lardening who had gathered the news Towler now came personally to receive.

The party of four was climbing now. They picked their way up the old sea bed, through cobble piles crowned with nettles and brambles. Over a ruined promenade they climbed, and among the ruined buildings which stretched in a mile long cliff staring out across the broken land, sheltering land birds.

Into the centre of the town they rode. Men and women ran out to greet them, waving and calling. Human beings now lived more comfortably than before in the old towns. Though Par-Chavorlem's punitive expeditions were as recklessly frequent as ever, terrestrials were armed now with the stereo-sonic weapons stored in the big City. Their strength equalled Par-Chavorlem's ; their numbers grew daily larger.

Towler and Elizabeth rode into a fortified area in the middle of the town. An officer came up, saluted, and asked them to dismount. Willing hands took their horses to water them.

" Please come with me, sir," the officer said.

They followed him into a ruined arcade, their footsteps echoing against the derelict shops. From the far end came Peter Lardening, hurrying to meet them.

" Well met, Gary ! Well met, Elizabeth !—You look as lovely as ever, if Gary will allow me to say so. We meet after two years, and I have the best of news to greet you with."

They shook each other's hands, smiling and laughing. It was easier to smile than it had been during the last thousand years. Hope was alive again. Men were awake again. Soldiery was on the march, aspiration on the wing.

Greetings over, Lardening led them into one of the shattered shops which had been turned into a temporary office. They drank wine and toasted each other.

" Come on then, Peter," Elizabeth said. " What's the great news you have for us ? What verdict did Partussy pass on Synvoret's report ? I hope your spies have brought you a full statement ?"

Lardening smiled at them both, enjoying keeping them in suspense. He leant against the wall, thrusting his hands into his pockets with an air of assumed nonchalance.

" The Supremo of the Colony Worlds Council has dismissed Par-Chavorlem and his retinue from office . . ."

For a moment they let him get no further, shouting their exultation. When he finished the rest of what he had to say, they burst into incredulous laughter.

" It can't be !" Towler exclaimed. " Who knows of all this but you, Peter ?"

" Nobody of course. I saved it for you : it's far too good to squander !"

" Indeed it is. But we must share it, share it with everybody. Come on, Elizabeth ! Let's tell the crowd outside. This is the richest joke for thirty generations."

With the others behind him, he ran down the broken arcade, out into the sunshine.

His eyes gleaming, he climbed up onto a cart. When people saw who he was they came running even before he called to them. They flocked about the cart, a crowd who already scented excitement.

He looked down at them, a shaggy-headed lot who were destined to form virtually a new race. He looked round at the crumbling buildings, the dead shell of an old world, the wombing place of a new. He looked up at the sky, where the rulers of the galaxy were too far distant and no longer powerful enough to intervene in Earth's affairs. Then he looked down again at the faces raised to his.

" Friends, I have great news, the only news worth hearing ! Par-Chavorlem, our hated enemy and exploiter, is going. His bosses have booted him out before we managed it ! He and all his retinue have their orders to leave for Castacorze and thence to Partussy within the week."

The cheers came up and took him by the throat. He smiled at Elizabeth, so poised and complete, at Peter Lardening, so eager and courageous.

" Hear the rest of it and the best of it," he called, as the hubbub died down. " A new Commissioner is already on his way here. He is not a nal but a Dlotpodite, a species bound to look sympathetically on our struggle and to reach agreement with us."

The crowd interrupted him again, but he stilled them.

" We shall avoid bloodshed if possible—there's been too much of it on Earth. Fortunately, with the big City in our hands, we are in a position of power, and I do not doubt that we shall secure complete independence and the banishment of

every single Partussian from Earth. Then we shall see to it that Earth becomes like a guiding light to other subject worlds !"

Again the crowd began to interrupt, but he silenced them with a raised hand. Command came easily to him now.

" You may ask how it is that Par-Chavorlem has been recalled, when all our efforts to communicate the truth about him to Synvoret failed. The answer is that when Synvoret reported my attempt on his life to his superiors, they were very properly impressed. Our spies in the enemy HQ have sent us on the text of the message that dismisses Par-Chavorlem. So we know the reason why he has got the sack. We know that he is going because Partussy judges him to be altogether too lax to rule us . . ."

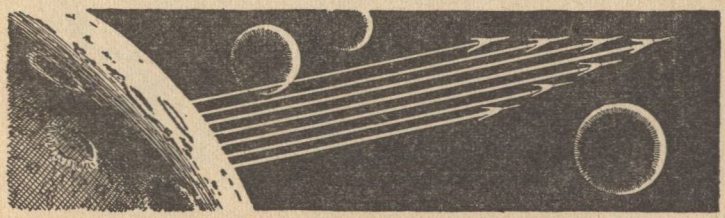
" Par-Chavorlem too lax . . . Too lax . . ." His words were repeated through the crowd with growing amusement.

Towler watched them. Then his face relaxed and he began to laugh, partly from the irony of it, partly from sheer lightheartedness. There was no word for how he felt, either in his own tongue or in Partussian.

The crowd was infected with his mirth. More people were pouring in, smiling even before they heard what the joke was. Elizabeth and Lardening were chuckling again. The laughter spread like floodwater, catching up men in other streets who knew not why they laughed. Even the soldiers at the barricades found their set features relaxing and their guard momentarily down. It was as if a great purgative merriment had seized the whole ancient town before sweeping out until its ripples reached the last corners of the globe.

In the bright sunlight, it was as if everyone was suddenly laughing.

Brian W. Aldiss



Editorial—continued from Page 3

Similarly, John Brunner's *The 100th Millenium* appeared in *Science Fantasy* under its original title of *Earth Is But A Star* long before American publication and change of title.

As far as we are concerned, this lack of credits is a particularly vicious circle. Naturally, in publishing as in any other business, we all thrive on publicity, and credit lines could well introduce new readers from the ranks of the book buyers. It also seems to me that without *New Worlds* and *Science Fantasy* as natural outlets for the original publication of short stories and some novel-length material many a hard cover collection or novel would never be born.

Looking back over past serial successes (which never received a credit line anywhere) *New Worlds* triggered off additional sales for such stories as Wilson Tucker's *Wild Talent*, Charles Dye's *The Prisoner In The Skull*, E. C. Tubb's *Star Ship* and Kenneth Bulmer's *Green Destiny*. Not forgetting Aldiss's original novelette *Non-Stop* in *Science Fantasy* which was developed into a full-length novel and has done tremendously well both here and in America.

Our greatest disappointment, however, comes from a somewhat different quarter. In January *New Worlds* appeared nationally on North American news-stands, printed and published as a monthly in New York by Great American Publications Inc. This reprinting of a British magazine was almost unprecedented in the annals of British magazine publishing, reversing the wartime exigencies of reprinting American magazines here as the only means of getting them into the country. But, as of the third issue just published, there is no indication whatsoever that the entire contents originated outside North America. In fact, there is even a different editor's name on the contents page !

There are, obviously, a number of logical reasons for this decision to present the magazine as a new American one rather than the reprint of a British one and we commend the American publisher for presenting it this way. To the vast majority of American readers the fact has no significance at all—as far as we are concerned, we would rather have sales than prestige.

Therefore, this editorial is not intended to be a complaining one against imaginary circumstantial injustices—I am merely telling you these facts *because it is very obvious that nobody else will* !

John Carnell

Hard Cover — British

Congratulations to Messrs Faber and Faber for maintaining, almost alone, a high standard of hard-cover science fiction publishing in this country and for their progressive presentation of one of the foremost writers in the genre today—James Blish. With **Galactic Cluster** (15/-) a first collection of some of his shorter stories, it is readily apparent that Blish is as adept a story-teller as in the longer medium, and the same bubbling invention of scientific speculation is backed by the everpresent and solid authority of an author who knows of what he is writing (a desirable trait which is not always present in most s-f writers).

This is a varied collection to suit all tastes, and my personal preference is for the time-communication theme " Beep," and as a music lover, the very fine " A Work Of Art." The magic of old-time microcosmic adventure is captured in " Nor Iron Bars," while " Common Time " and " To Pay The Piper " deal technically with some future problems of the space age. I did not care too much for the story which takes up almost half the book, " Beanstalk," detailing the problems of integration for a group of genetically-controlled giants, in which a good idea gets somewhat tarnished by a hackneyed plot development of egomaniac villain-framed hero-tables-turned-finale.

Equally prolofic Charles Eric Maine's latest action melodrama with s-f overtones is **Subterfuge** (Hodder and Stoughton, 12/6) wherein he reintroduces his brash newshound Mike Delaney with a steamy plot of zombie scientist, desperate fanatics, scheming authorities and really quite a lot of science towards the end, in addition to the slick and exciting ' private-eye ' type heroics which Maine does so well. The writing is better than usual, and it is altogether very readable.

Pocketbooks — British

Digit Books offer five vastly assorted titles at 2/- each. The reprints are Pohl and Kornbluth's slick, cynical and amusing novel of intrigue among the giant agencies and corporations of a future era, **The Space Merchants,** one of the best stories of recent years ; E. E. ' Doc ' Smith's first space-opera **The Skylark Of Space,** now 32 years old and slushily melodramatic but still a perennial favourite ; **Mission To The Stars** by A. E. van Vogt, which has all the expected attributes of the van Vogtian vastness of plot and action ; and, lastly, a strangely interesting novel by Desmond Leslie, **The Amazing Mr. Lutterworth,** which is an idealistic yearning for world salvation by almost metaphysical visitation, divulged after an absorbing first-person narrative by a man whose identity and purpose are unknown.

The new title is **Split World** by Tyrone C. Barr, a naive pot-boiler of the aftermath-survivors type, inept in style and plot.

Still pinning their faith to prominent authors or such s-f books which had hard cover prestige by leading British book publishers, Corgi's latest reprints are Harold Mead's **The Bright Phoenix,** a sombre novel in the **1984** tradition which was reviewed fully in *New Worlds* No. 35, and re-issues of the four Ray Bradbury classics—**The Silver Locusts, The Illustrated Man, Fahrenheit 451,** and **The Golden Apples Of The Sun,** all at 2/6 each. Incidentally, the former has a very fine cover by Richards who appears to do most of Corgi's s-f.

Pocketbooks — American

Continuing their policy of only publishing top s-f writers (Clarke, Heinlein, etc.) New American Library have now added our own Brian W. Aldiss to their list, having introduced him to a wide American public with his first Faber and Faber collection *Space, Time And Nathaniel,* which NAL re-titled **No Time Like Tomorrow** and made several changes in the story line-up. They have now followed this up with Aldiss's first novel **Starship,** which readers may recognise under its British title of *Non-Stop* (first as a novelette in *Science Fantasy* and later as a book also from Faber and Faber).

From Ballantine Books comes a new Chad Oliver novel **Unearthly Neighbours,** a novel with a plot right in Oliver's favourite field of anthropology. It deals with the investigation of an alien life-form—and presents quite an entertaining

Continued on page 128

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Keeping up their steady practice of publishing at least one s-f title a month, Ace Books of New York have a new 'double' title on sale (D-421) containing **Slavers Of Space** by our own John Brunner and **Dr. Futurity** by Philip K. Dick. Both are highly entertaining stories by quality writers although neither are up to the top standard expected of them.

By far the most outstanding contribution to the genre this month, however, is Ace Books' offering of **The Best From Fantasy And Science Fiction** (Third Series) edited by Anthony Boucher and J. Francis McComas, sixteen stories from the magazine of that name which were originally published some eight years back. That doesn't detract from the collection in any manner (the original book edition appeared in 1954 from Doubleday) and features some grand stories by Bester, Ward Moore, de Camp and Pratt, Idris Seabright, Farmer, Bretnor and many others. Rumour has it that Ace have acquired the rights on five more collections in this yearly series, if true a very worthy contribution to disseminating to the masses some of the best s-f short stories ever published.

Crest Books offer Louis Charbonneau's ex-Doubleday novel **No Place On Earth,** a rather heavy-going dictatorship novel of the 23rd Century. Permabooks have produced another Doubleday title **5 Galaxy Short Novels** originally from the magazine of that name, containing " Tangle Hold," F. L. Wallace ; " World Without Children," Damon Knight ; " Wherever You May Be," Gunn ; " Mind Alone," McIntosh; " Granny Won't Knit," Sturgeon.

Pyramid reproduce a Gnome Press title, **Space Prison** by Tom Godwin, a novel which appeared originally as *The Survivors*, and Avon have a Murray Leinster short story collection entitled **Twists In Time,** containing seven stories (although the cover says six and the Credit Lines list eight ; naturally, the cover title story is the missing one).

Leslie Flood