# NEW WORLDS SCIENCE FICTION

No. 108
VOLUME 36

2/6

J. G. BALLARD

The Overloaded Man

**JOHN RACKHAM** 

The Trouble With Honey

D. D. STEWART

Junior Partner

JOHN BRUNNER

Put Down This Earth
Part Two



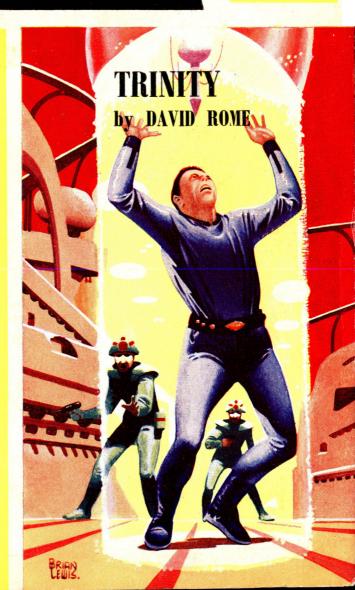
**Features** 



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## **NEW WORLDS**

PROFILES

## David Rome

Derbyshire



Hardened s-f readers view with suspicion every new name which appears in our pages, assuming that they are pseudonyms for regular contributors; this is seldom the case. Many of our new contributors do not wish to appear in a "Profile" section for personal reasons. This month we are therefore happy to explode another conjecture, for David Rome is a genuine person.

"Born 22 years ago," he states, "parents terrestrial. Managed to visit inner-planets and most of the galaxy at an early age, via Bradbury, Bloch and Brown. First began writing at school after family emigrated to Australia, circulating a handwritten magazine which eventually failed when competitors produced

a typewritten publication.

"Continued to read anything and everything s-f after leaving school, falling heavily under the influence of Asimov and Pohl. Joined a Sydney newspaper in 1954 as first step toward writing for a living. Worked as messenger boy, clipper, and filing clerk, but was finally offered a printing-trade apprenticeship. Three years of technical school, plus intense dislike of routine, drove pen to paper once again.

"Was rejected by almost every Australian publisher until 1958, when first fiction was accepted. Wrote articles and stories under different names through '59 and early '60, and in the middle of the year, when employment position was doubtful,

finally took the plunge into full-time free-lancing.

"Wrote some s-f during this period—mostly near-future shorts—but didn't begin to specialise until early this year, after returning to England. Still have a sneaking affection for the BEM, and like to use him in a mild way, now and then. Working routine is simple. Nine-to-four, six days a week. Always fascinated by the psi powers, and once spent a week working out a game that could bring telekinetic minds into comnetition.

"Now married to small Australian wife and living in Pennine foothills. Enjoy walking and working outdoors, but dislike gardening. Hobbies are reading aloud, and coveting the style of s-f masters. Have no theories, except that writing should

entertain. Have tried to do this in 'Trinity.'"

# NEW WORLDS SCIENCE FICTION-

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#### CONTENTS

Novelette : Trinity	David Rome	 	4
Short Stories : The Overloaded Man Junior Partner The Trouble With Honey	J. G. Ballard D. D. Stewart John Rackham	 	28 41 59
Serial: Put Down This Earth Part Two of Three Parts	John Brunner	 	81
Features: Editorial The Literary Line-Up Postmortem	John Carnell The Readers	 	2 80 121

Editor: JOHN CARNELL

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#### TWO SHILLINGS AND SIXPENCE

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## Science Fiction . . .

With all the publicity accorded to Major Gagarin's epic hop into space and back again, Commander Shepard's quick flip up to 100 miles and safe return on behalf of America, and with the speculations on how soon and when a Man round the Moon (or on it) there have been a lot of queries about how science fiction minded the Russians are. The two do not necessarily go together—astronautics and s-f—although they are closely allied, s-f being the medium of the visionary while astronautics remains the realm of the technician.

Little information has been available from Russia until recently on their general approach to science fiction although it was known that they produced no specialised magazine devoted to the field. However, odd items of information have trickled through from time to time showing that there are markets for the short story and even the occasional novel. In fact, the roots of Russian s-f go back to the turn of the century when Tsiolkovsky started writing his *Beyond The Planet Earth*, finally published in 1920 (recently published here by Permagon Press) which lays some claim to the author being the pioneer of astronautics itself.

Since the middle 1950's science fiction has found its way into many Russian national magazines and papers, mainly by their own writers but a few translations of American stories are known. More particularly, the Russians have a Foreign Languages Publishing House in Moscow which translates and prints into the English language and among recent publications I have received *The Heart Of The Serpent*, a collection of five s-f stories which have seen publication in various Russian

journals.

The longest is the title story (some 46,000 words) and is by Professor Ivan Yefremov, author of another earlier epic novel, Andromeda, which I can only liken to the Skylark Of Space series by Doc Smith. "Serpent" has one of the most brilliant human-meets-alien ideas I have ever come across and I was greatly tempted to try and acquire the rights for use as a two-part serial but there were long passages of very "heavy going" which detracted from the smooth flow of the narrative by our standards. In fact, the meticulousness of all the writers in this book for scientific authenticity reminded me of American s-f in the early 30's, when pages of explanations were often included

EDITORIAL 3

### . . . In Russia

as a means of validating the word "science" in the title connotation.

The four short stories making up the remainder of the volume are interesting and diverse in their plot mechanics. "Siema" by Anatoly Dnieprov is a cybernetics story—a favourite topic of the author, who is a physicist working at the USSR Academy of Sciences. Journalist Victor Saparin, who is editor of a geographic magazine entitled Around The World, has a microbiology story, "The Trial Of Tantalus," and one woman writer, Valentina Zhuravleva, is represented with "Stone From The Stars" a story of bio-automation which she wrote in 1959. Miss Zhuravleva happens to be a recent graduate of the Azerbaijan Medical Institute and (the book says) "was probably prompted to try her hand at scientific fiction by the almost fantastic possibilities offered in the field of medicine."

The final story, "The Six Matches," is more of a fantasy and written by two brothers in collaboration—Arkady and Boris Strugatsky. Both are regular contributors to Russian scientific journals, Boris being an astronomer at the Polkovo Observatory and Arkady a linguist and translator special-

ising in Japanese.

Summarising the collection as a whole there is no doubt that the emphasis lies on science, which is rather heavy in parts, but good characterisation saves them completely from being dull in western eyes. Most of the plots are old by our standards, even the approach to the themes are rather elementary, yet great care and skill have gone into them to make them presentable to the general public. This is obviously the natural approach to science fiction in the Soviet and I would think that it is extremely unlikely they will ever have magazines dealing solely with the genre.

I have just learned that the Italian publisher Feltrinelli has recently published a translation of a new collection of Russian short stories. This new collection will obviously be translated and printed into an English edition by Moscow and I shall look forward with great interest to reading it and giving you another report. Specifically, I would like to publish a Russian s-f story. I already have an eye on the possibility of a Polish

also.

David Rome looks like staying the course as a new British science fiction writer. Apart from his debut with "Time Of Arrival" in No, 105, and the current story herewith, he also has a long novelette coming up in Science Fiction Adventures soon.

# TRINITY by DAVID ROME

The ship dropped out the hazy blue sky, and off to the east were the Area buildings, white spots of brightness in the desert. Below, was the city itself, abandoned by order of Earth when the deepspace-drive scientists had moved in. The wooden shack buildings were beginning to crumble, scattering their bones across empty streets. The colonists were gone now, and only the Port had retained its pride, rising to meet us as the Earth ship came down on its energy beams.

A tubecar was waiting for us when we landed. We eased our bags into the shuttle-delivery and got into the car, breathing the warm, assimilable air. We fastened our safety belts and the slide door closed gently. The tubecar moved forward,

gathering speed as we rose on the monorail.

For a time we passed over the shell of the city, the homes lying open beneath us. Then the scrub area flickered past, far below, and ahead now were the domes, rising out of the desert, and the black-and-white warning signs marking the rim of the Field.

We loosened our safety belts for the slow, winding passage through the Gap, watching the guard stations rolling by. Men with weapons in their hands studied us silently as we passed. Searchrays probed—and let us go on.

When we cleared the Field the tubecar accelerated and our safety straps tightened. We lifted on the monorail again, going high over the domes until the globe of the Area port came shimmering out of the distance ahead. Then we were decelerating, descending, and swooping finally into the vast silence of the port.

Guards closed in as the tubecar stopped. I stepped out of the 'car, hands held high. Fingers probed into my suit, brought out my identity papers. Eyes scanned the papers, fingers shuffled them, returned them to me and beckoned me forward. I passed through the hissing invisibility of a search-ray—felt the tingling pain of it—and finally stepped clear. The other passengers from the 'car were behind me now—project workers returning to duty—and they broke away like the fingers of a hand, going toward their accommodation as I went forward to meet Commander Hallstrom.

He was a small man, easily recognizable from 3-Ds I had seen of him at Earth Security Force's headquarters. Two humanoids were standing behind him—one man, one girl. The girl was pale, faintly Geshtian. The man was an Earther, lean

and quick-eyed.

Hallstrom took my hand perfunctorily. His dark eyes were dulled by fatigue, shadowing his face. He said, "A good trip, Belloc?" and when I nodded, he turned to indicate the two at his back. "Uul Taisnan"—he gestured at the girl—" and

Ed Woodsterl."

Woodsterl's grip was quick and firm. He matched his 3-Ds all right. Second-in-Command, his eyes were cool, detached. One side of his face had been remoulded, and it showed. He was, I knew, one of the half-dozen Outer Planet settlers who had survived the Jeepson Maleffect.

He said, "What's ticking at ESF, Belloc?"

I said, "Commander Foot was on Manat, the time of the Maleffect. We lost him. We've got Thompson now—a good man."

"Hell, yes," Woodsterl said. "I've heard about Thompson," and I turned to the girl then. She was young, couldn't have been more than twenty-six, and her hair was golden even in the shadows of the dome. She didn't say anything. Her eyes touched mine, briefly. I nodded and smiled, then turned back to Hallstrom.

<sup>&</sup>quot; My accommodation ?" I said.

He showed me to it himself, gesturing impatiently at guards who closed in to escort me. "Security," he growled. "God knows, Price and Bahtlost had reason enough to get out."

I said, "It needles the men?"

"Badly," he said. "Our psychs get a dozen a day. Shaken nerves all the way up to restraint cases. Maybe there's one man on this project who wouldn't skip the planet if he got the chance—"

"You?" I said.

Hallstrom shook his head. "Woodsterl. Quiet man, never says much, but does plenty. He'll get my job one day." He bobbed into an accommodation tube as he spoke, almost losing me. I followed him through the tube, saying nothing now. When I looked back there was a guard behind us. Hallstrom depressed a button, a door opened. We stepped into my rooms and the door closed silently at our backs.

Hallstrom gestured at my transit bag. "Clean up," he said, "then come down to my office. I'll have Price and Bahtlost ready for you."

"Where are they now?"

"On the job"—he spread his hands slightly. "We're short of men, Belloc. We need a good reason to take a man out of his department."

I said quietly, "Two men go missing for a day—and deny they ever went. What the hell do you call a good reason,

Commander ?"

Hallstrom's eyes flashed angrily.

"Ten minutes," he said. "I'll have them waiting for you," and I nodded and didn't say anything. When he had gone, and the door of the tube had closed again silently, I opened my bag and took out his microdes and his mimeographs. There was a psychologist's report at the foot of the final page, flashed to Earth a day before I had left. Hallstrom was all right, but he wouldn't be for long. Work and pressure were wearing him down—the project was taking his heart out.

I shuffled the mimeographs, found Bahtlost's and Price's, and put Hallstrom's back into my bag. I dry-showered and prepared the interview in my mind while the tonebelts were finishing their job. Then I locked my bag, put it away, and

went out to find Hallstrom's office.

Price was an Earther, Bahtlost a Geshtian. They sat apart, each in a straight-backed chair facing Hallstrom's desk. entered the office, passing between the two guards at the door. The floor was thickly carpeted, the room noiseless. Taisnan sat at a smaller table, a notebook in her hands and a recording machine before her. The door closed behind me, and Price and Bahtlost turned.

Hallstrom stood up, introducing me. I didn't look at him. He had prepared a snugchair for me, but I didn't sit down. I studied the two men in the straight-backed chairs. They were fresh from their departments, white-coveralled and shining

with effort.

I said, "You know why I'm here."

Neither of them spoke. They were both young, built well. Bahtlost had the Geshtian's typical paleness. He was sullen

now, eyes turned down.

"I've come a long way to see you," I said. "You've caused a stir that has got back to Earth." I was aware of Hallstrom's eyes on me. He wanted me to put the fear of death into them -that's the reputation ESF got in the old days-but he couldn't say anything now.

"Bahtlost," I said abruptly. "Where the hell did you go?" Hallstrom interrupted. "They've denied going anywhere, Belloc." His voice was crackling. I didn't move my eyes from Bahtlost. "What's your department?" I said.

Bahtlost said slowly, "Telekinetics." He shrugged slightly.

"It's concentration, that's all."

"The hell it is. It's a specialized field. You men will be giving us the push when we most need it." I looked at Price. And you?" I said.

Price said, "You've seen my records."

"Yeah," I said. "But I want to hear it from you."

The recording machine was whirring softly on Uul Taisnan's table. Price looked at it quickly, then said, "Physics-Aetheric Physics."

"You volunteered? Both of you?"
Hallstrom said impatiently, "All our men are volunteers, Belloc. You know that." Again I didn't look in his direction. "Price," I said, "what's your kick against the project?" And when he began to shake his head, "Don't tell me that you haven't got one. Everybody's got one." "Okay," he said. "We volunteered, sure. We were ready to come here. But now we're stuck with it. A month's leave every twelve. A lifetime, maybe, on the project."

"That's why you skipped for a day?"

His eyes took hold of mine. "Listen," he said. "I didn't skip. It's hell, yes. But we've got to get that deepspace drive. Jeepson wrecked the inner universe, so now we have to move out. I don't skip a project like this. Not with the Lipps breathing down our necks."

"All right," I said. "You didn't leave the project-"

"How the hell could I?" Price said. "There's only one way in or out of here—that's through the Gap. And no one goes without authority in triplicate."

"So where were you?" I said quietly. "Here—in the Area. Working."

" Aetheric Physics ?"

"Yes..." He hesitated. "Except around four. I got an order to go down to Load Centre for some material."

"An order from who?"

"It was posted." He hesitated again, looked at the recording machine, then said quickly, "Hell, sir, security's so tough here, a man can't walk into another department—not even to give an order. Aetheric Physics isn't any different. If the Commander has an order for us, it's communicated to an Aeth man and posted on our board."

"Hallstrom sent you to Load Centre?"

"Yes."

"Now just a moment—" Hallstrom began. I cut him short. "And after that, Price?"

"I went to the Messdrome. I had my evening meal."

Hallstrom said tightly, "You were picked up going into the Messdrome, Price. You'd been missing all day."

"No, sir. I didn't go anywhere." I said evenly, "You, Bahtlost?"

The Geshtian shrugged. "I worked all day," he said.

"Normal routine?"

"Yes."

Hallstrom said angrily, "You walked in to Telekinetics like a damned innocent. When security picked you up you'd been missing all day."

"No, sir," Bahtlost said. "I wouldn't skip the project. The deepspace drive is our hope of survival—Gesht's and Earth's. If the Lipps develop the drive before us, we're finished."

I gestured at the recording machine. "Turn it off," I said to Uul Taisnan. She did. The room was very quiet. "Listen," I said to Bahtlost and Price. And now I could feel Hallstrom's eyes boring into my back. "Something's very wrong here—and I want to know what it is." They were watching me now, warily. Price's hard fists were curling and uncurling steadily. "You both say you were on the job—in the Area, anyway during a period when security here reported you missing. We can rule out fatigue blackouts. Psychology has cleared you on that. So what happened to you?"

Bahtlost was looking at the recorder.

"It's off for a purpose," I said. "Not a word of what is said now will be recorded. It's between you and me-and it's unofficial. I give you the word of ESF that neither of you will be indicted for anything that is said during the next few minutes. You understand that ?"

Bahtlost and Price nodded.

"Well?" I said. "Where were you?"
Bahtlost hesitated. Then he said, "Working."

"And so," Price said, "was I."

Edward Woodsterl, as Hallstrom had said, was a quiet man. After we had eaten an uneasy meal in the commander's quarters, I got away as quickly as I could and walked with Woodsterl toward Telekinetics. He had an order from Hallstrom to be posted.

"Damned inconvenient," I said. "This closed department business, I mean." Then, when he didn't answer me, "What

do you think about it?"

"Good security," he said.

"Yes," I said. "But is it necessary?"

I struck home then. This was his kind of meat. For an instant he half turned on me, and I thought he was going to stop. Then he walked on. "Look," he said, "security up here is everything. You know that. Every day we get Lipps in the Field, or kill them in the Gap. They're behind us in their development of a drive. They want to stop us."

"Granted," I said. "But restricting top men-"

"Is essential." Woodsterl's eyes snapped. "The restrictions guard against total destruction of the project." He gestured at me with his chin. "Suppose you were a Lipp spy —and a worker on the space-drive. You only have access to your own department—and to non-key areas like the Messdrome, and Load Centre. There's no possible way you could blow out any other part of the Area . . ."

We walked on in silence. Then I said, "You get Lipps in the Field every day. Isn't there any way they can get through?"

" Meaning?"

"Price and Bahtlost . . . Before I know why they skipped out, I want to know how. Security didn't find them in the Area—that means they weren't here. Is there a way through the Field? Any way at all?"

" No."

"All right," I said. "How did they do it?"

Woodsterl shook his head and said nothing. We reached Telekinetics, and he presented the orders for posting. Behind the massive doors I heard heavy objects sliding. Twice there

was a burst of thunder that shook the dome.

"Psi powers," Woodsterl said. "The Geshtians are rich in them." We were turning away. I said, "How rich?" Then I said, "Could a man move himself?" And when Woodsterl looked at me quickly, "Cause a breakdown of structure, maybe—then transport, and reform."

"Impossible," Woodsterl said.

"They got out somehow," I said. "Bahtlost's a Geshtian. Maybe he telekineticised both of them home."

"Nonsense," Woodsterl said.

I let it drop.

"Look," I said, "I'd like to see the Lipps."

"Which Lipps?"

"The ones you take in the Field."

For the first time, Woodsterl smiled. "Have you ever seen a man caught in the Field...?" He gestured with his hands. "The Lipps send spies to the planet. The Field deals with them." He shook his head. "Nothing's left that you could look at."

" And in the Gap?"

Woodsterl looked at me. "We hold them until identification is certain—then they're destroyed."

"But you're notified when one has been taken?"

"Yes."

"All right," I said. "Next one you get, I want to see it." It wasn't a request this time. I didn't like Woodsterl. I put all the power of ESF—real and imagined—behind it.

All Woodsterl said was, "You'll see it."

I left him then, went back to my quarters and picked out Bahtlost's mimeographs again. Then I went back to Telekinetics and told them I wanted to see Bahtlost.

He came out within five minutes. "I want to talk to you," I said. Inside the pocket of my suit my fingers tightened on a tiny tube recorder.

tiny tube-recorder.

"Okay," Bahtlost said. "That's fine with me." He was sweating faintly from his work in the dome. I got the feeling

that he was glad to take a breather.

"I want every detail of that day," I said. "You say you worked your normal shift—never altered your routine. Security says you did. Maybe a retrospect check will help us

straighten it out."

We walked, and Bahtlost talked, and the tube-recorder got it down. When it was over, Bahtlost said quietly, "I want you to believe me, sir—" He hesitated. When I didn't respond he went on with a rush, "I told you the truth in the Commander's office . . . I didn't leave the Area!"

When I got back to my quarters I recharged the recorder and got Price's mimeographs out. I read them through, then took them with me to the Aetheric Physics department. I had to wait fifteen minutes for Price. When he came out his face was hard and belligerent.

"Listen," he said, "I skipped the project. I went home to

my girl and lived it up. You want me to confess ?"

"Take it easy," I said.

"Sure," he said. "I'm a liar, or crazy."

I clicked the recorder on. "I want you to tell me what happened that last day. The day they say you went. I want to know every detail of what you did, why you did it—where you had to go to do it."

I left myself open on that one. He worked his way through the routine of Aetheric Physics to the inevitable bodily functions. I cut him short and switched off the recorder.

"Right," I said. "That's all."

I took the recorder to my quarters then, rewound, connected it to the supply points and sat in a snugchair to listen. I played it through fourteen times, listening to both conversations and taking notes. Finally I disconnected the recorder and filed the microtape.

I had something to work with now.

When I got down to Hallstrom's office with my notes, Woodsterl was with him. I said, without preamble, "Who posted the order for Price to go down to Load Centre?"

Hallstrom was rising behind his desk, black eyes snapping. "This is a project conference, Belloc . . ." Then he saw the

notebook in my hand. "You've got something?"

"Just one thing," I said. "One consistency in a crazy puzzle." I sat on the arm of a snugchair and studied him. "Price said you posted the order."

"I didn't," Hallstrom said. "It had your signature on it."

Woodsterl said, "Who told you that?"

"Price," I said.

Hallstrom said slowly, "Price is lying. I tried to tell you that the first time you interviewed him." He sat down again, his fingers closing and unclosing. "What have you found out ?"

I said, "There was a link between Bahtlost's activities and Price's on the days they disappeared. One place—only one where they both went while they were on the job."

Woodsterl said, "A link?" "Yes," I said. "Load Centre."

Hallstrom said quickly, "Bahtlost would naturally be down there now and again. Telekinetics have a great deal of heavy

stuff brought in." He hesitated. "Price . . ."

"Shouldn't have been there," I said. Then, when Woodsterl tried to cut in, "Sure, it wasn't closed to him. Load Centre isn't a restricted area. But the fact remains, he shouldn't have been there—wouldn't have been there if that order hadn't been posted."

Hallstrom said edgily, "What's the inference?"

"I told you," I said. "It's a consistency. Maybe—probably —it means nothing. But whoever had that order posted . . ."
Woodsterl said, "Where is this order?"
"I don't know. Probably destroyed."

"But you believe Price? You believe it existed?"

I said quietly, "I know when a man is speaking the truth." Then I looked at Hallstrom. "I want authority to go through Load Centre from floor to ceiling. If there's anything there. I'll find it."

Woodsterl said, "A magic carpet, maybe?"

"Yes," I said slowly. "You might just be right."

Hallstrom had opened a visiphone circuit. He spoke into it now, connected with Load Centre. 'When he put it down he

nodded and said, "You've got the authority, Belloc."

I started for the door, but didn't reach it. Somewhere over my head a buzzer sounded harshly. It just kept on going. Hallstrom was coming around his desk fast. Woodsterl was out of his chair.

"What the hell . . .?" I began.

Woodsterl reached me and got a hand on my arm. The door opened in front of us. "You wanted to see it, Belloc," he said harshly. "Okay, you will. They've got a Lipp, down at the Gap."

The sound of the buzzer ceased as we ran down the passagetube and out into the dying sunlight. The Geshtian secretary, Uul Taisnan, was running toward us from the direction of Load Centre. An aircar was already swinging into position,

Hallstrom's driver opening the doors for us.

We got in, and the girl caught up with us before we could move off. She opened the door herself and slipped in beside us. Woodsterl made room for her angrily, shooting a look at Hallstrom. But the Commander didn't say anything. The door closed again, and we accelerated. I was sitting opposite the girl, my knees touching hers.

We rode on in silence. Then Woodsterl said, "What the hell is your theory on Load Centre, Belloc?" He smiled without humour. "You really think the Lipps are involved?"

"Theory?" I said. I glanced at Hallstrom, then at the partition between the driver and ourselves. Hallstrom said, "Absolutely sound-proofed. You can talk." And when I looked obliquely at Uul Taisnan he nodded impatiently.

"That's all right. Go ahead."
I said slowly, "Bahtlost was the starting point. He's a Telekinetic. He's got a mind that can push things around. All right. So our experiments with DTR got us nowhere, back in the forties. But maybe that's what we're dealing with here— Dissolution-Transportation-Reformation." I looked at Woodsterl. "You might not agree," I said tightly. "But one thing you've got to admit—Bahtlost and Price went through an impenetrable Field. If it wasn't DTR, what the hell was it?"

I was looking at Hallstrom. "I don't believe Bahtlost or Price can give us the answer. I believe it was done—call it crazy if you like—without their knowledge. They were DTR'd -we don't know why-returned, and didn't even know they'd been away." Then I said, "And the order that sent them to Load Centre had something to do with it."

Hallstrom said, "I've told you, Belloc. The order was none of my doing." Then he said, limply, "DTR was disproved

years ago."

"For God's sake," I said. Then I said slowly, "Look. Either this is a fantastic case of absence without leave—and I don't believe it is-or it's the deadliest spy scheme ever evolved."

Woodsterl said succinctly, "Take your pick."

The aircar was slowing down now, and beginning to turn. We had entered the Gap, and guard towers had rolled by. Now there was a tight knot of men ahead, Trent weapons in their hands. As the aircar approached they came toward us. Hallstrom opened the commcircuit and spoke to his driver. We glided to a halt. When the doors opened, Hallstrom got out first.

A security officer stepped forward deferentially.

holding him in Tower Two, sir."

Hallstrom strode forward, guards ranging on either side. As we strode along he said to the security officer, "How did he get past Tower One ?"

"Humanoid form, sir. Tower One is External search. Two

is Internal."

"Saboteur?"

"We don't think so. Nothing on him at all."
"All right," Hallstrom said. "We'll take a look at him, then you can Euth." He turned quickly to Uul Taisnan. "You're sure you want to see this?"

She nodded.

When we got to Tower Two the guards were circling it. We passed through them with the security officer at our head, passed between the chemical-rocket tubes that were trained on the tubecar line, and entered the tower. We rode to a lower level, where fluorescent lamps burned incessantly, and the security officer depressed a button. We were standing before a row of steel boxes, designed to be extremely uncomfortable for a man-or an alien-of average size. When the officer pressed the button, there was a smooth, metallic click! and an oval opened suddenly in the side of one of the steel prisons.

Uul Taisnan stepped forward, looked. Turned away. Hallstrom and Woodsterl studied the Lipp for a full minute, then stepped aside. I saw undulating, diaphanous flesh and glittering eyes. I gestured with one hand, and the security officer closed the oval again. When he took his gloved finger off the button, he said softly, "Hard to believe, sir, that he came past Tower One as a humanoid."

I said, "How do they do it?"

"Skin grafts," he said. "Synthetic surgery."

"He wasn't armed?" Hallstrom said.
"No. Just looking around, I'd say, sir."

I said, "How good is their duplication? Would it be possible—faintly possible—for a Lipp to simulate the appearance of one particular humanoid? Take on his mannerisms, his way of speaking . . .?"

The security officer shook his head. "They're brilliant surgeons, sir, but they're not wizards. Biggest trouble they give us is when they come through with Nick bombs."

Woodsterl said impatiently, "When will you Euth?"

"It's being done now, sir," the officer said.

I said, "Nick bombs?"

"Yes, sir. That's the name we gave them. You pick these babies up, and the first thing you look for is a scar—any kind of scar. If there isn't one, you X-ray. You've got to look under the skin, you understand. Nick bombs are small, but they're powerful."

Woodsterl said, "The Euthing-"

I cut him short. "Hallstrom!" I said, and his eyes snapped toward me when he caught the tone of my voice. "The psych treatment for Bahtlost and Price—did it include X-rays?"

He was flustered. "Whatever was necessary, was done ..."

"Were they X-rayed, man?"

He said, "The psychological aspect seemed-"

"They weren't?"

" No."

I was already moving. Woodsterl and the girl were between me and the door. I pushed them aside and rode to ground level. I ran out into the evening light, went through the ring of guards and reached the waiting aircars. As I got in, Uul Taisnan ran out of the Tower, Hallstrom and Woodsterl behind her. I said, "Medical Dome—quick," but I'd forgotten the sound-proofed partition. By the time I had opened the commeircuit, Woodsterl had jerked the door open.

"What the hell are you doing?" he demanded.

I got my hand under his arm and jerked him into the 'car. Hallstrom and Uul Taisnan followed. "Medical Dome," I told the driver.

I shut down the commcircuit as we moved forward and began to pick up speed. Then I said to Hallstrom, "I want Bahtlost and Price X-rayed, as soon as we can get hold of them."
Hallstrom said, "There's no evidence—"

I swore softly, viciously. "You heard the damn officer," I said. "Nick bombs are small, but they're powerful." I leaned forward suddenly, eyes taking his. "Good God, can't you see it? Load Centre has been activated. Somehow—with a man working here, on the project—they got hold of Bahtlost and Price. They were DTR'd right out of Load Centre . . ."

Hallstrom said unsteadily, "It isn't possible."

"How the hell do we know what's possible for the Lipps? Bahtlost and Price disappeared. Now they're back! We've got two walking bombs—unconscious carriers—in the middle of the Area !"

Uul Taisnan said, "Why use Bahtlost and Price? If the Lipps know the secret of DTR, why don't they transmit their own saboteurs? Why don't they materialize inside the domes ?"

Woodsterl laughed softly. "Why don't they fly away with us?" His eyes caught mine. "You're talking nonsense. Belloc."

I said, "Load Centre is an open yard. Maybe their activation beam can't penetrate the domes."

"For God's sake," Woodsterl said.

I checked my anger. The aircar was stopping outside the Medical Dome. I got the door open before the airstream had lowered us. I sprang out and Hallstrom came after me. I said, "I want Bahtlost and Price brought up here," and he turned then, pale face nodding to Woodsterl. I heard Woodsterl bark a command to the driver, and the aircar swung away, door snapping shut. We went on into the dome, hurrying now.

The two guards at the entrance turned and followed us in, and Hallstrom didn't even glance at them. "The medical reports," I said, and he spoke an order. We waited for thirty seconds, and then I had the reports in my hands. I scanned them quickly, recognizing much of the material I already had

on the mimeographs. Then I ran my finger down a short list of minor scars that Hallstrom had omitted. Maybe they meant

something—maybe not.

I said to Hallstrom, "Have the X-ray equipment set up." And he didn't argue. He gave the order, and the medics began to bustle. Woodsterl came into the dome then, walking quickly. Price was with him.

" Bahtlost ?" I said.

"He wasn't in Telekinetics," Woodsterl said. thought he went down to Load Centre-"

I said, "You looked there?"

"I couldn't see him."

Price was looking at the report in my hands now, and at the white-coated medics in the background, wheeling out the gleaming equipment. The bluster had gone out of him.

What's going on?" he said.

I said, "You're going to be X-rayed. Nothing to sweat about." I could see the apprehension in his eyes. I turned to Hallstrom. "I want to be here when it's done," I said. " Hold off for a while, if necessary."

"Where are you going?" he said.

"Bahtlost has to be found. I want to do it without fuss. Woodsterl and I will go back down to Load Centre. He'll be

there somewhere—or back in his department."

Hallstrom nodded quickly then, and I led Woodsterl out of the dome. We got into the aircar and I ordered the driver to turn toward Load Centre. Woodsterl looked at me quickly, but didn't say anything. He was needled because I hadn't taken his word for it that Bahtlost wasn't in the Centre. But by the tone of voice he had used when he'd told us, it was obvious that he hadn't tried too hard to find him.

When the 'car swung to a halt at the entrance to the yard, I got out fast. The floodlights were on now, drowning the darkness, but Load Centre was silent, deserted. This was the brief moment of inactivity between day- and night-shift.

We left the 'car at the entrance, and Woodsterl and I went on in. Guards turned in after us, but Load Centre wasn't a restricted area, and I waved them back. "Maybe he is a carrier," I said to Woodsterl. "We don't want to lose men . . ."

The freight tubes were standing under the floods, motionless on their monorails. The platforms and load belts were shining under the lights. Dark pools of shadow hung beneath the waiting freights. There was no sign of Bahtlost. There was an open tubecar, with freight half up half down a belt—and Bahtlost might have been working there, but he wasn't there now.

Then, close beside me, Woodsterl said, "I see him."

He was pointing, and when I turned I saw a shadow more solid than the rest, humped in gloom at the rear of the open 'car. There was a loaded Servo swinging slowly overhead, its jaws locked now, until the materials it held were needed.

I went forward quickly. When I got around the load belt and sprang on to the platform beside the tubecar, I saw that the

shadow was the figure of a man lying over the rail.

And when I sprang down to the rail, went on to my knees and turned the man over, I saw that it was Bahtlost, and that he was dead.

I straightened slowly—then quickly, suddenly aware of danger. Overhead, I heard the soft click of steel jaws beginning to open. I snapped my eyes upward . . . and suddenly there was panic hot in my mind.

The Servo was dropping its load.

It fell slowly, slowly, and when I couldn't get out of the way, there should have been pain. But there was no pain—only darkness, and falling. I was going down a shaft and my body was tingling and there was no bottom to the shaft—and then I struck the bottom, and was suddenly, instantly, conscious . . .

And among the Lipps.

There were four of them standing, looking down at me. Another squatted beside me, shapelessly. I lay perfectly still, my mind racing. I remembered Load Centre, and finding Bahtlost's body, and the Servo releasing its load. And now I

was among Lipps . . .

I turned my head slowly. I was in a chamber that seemed to pulse continuously, soothingly, like a giant heart. Somehow the motion sickened me, brought a desire for unconsciousness welling up in my mind. I fought the sensation, and was aware of the Lipp beside me touching my forehead. There was no actual contact, merely a knowing, a certainty, that he was doing so. I put my hand to my face, and felt the firm flesh and the bone and the curve of the cheeks and the nose and the projection of the chin . . .

I was ESF man, Jon Belloc! I remembered Load Centre, and finding Bahtlost's body. I remembered Load Centre, and Load Centre . . .?"

Again I was aware of the hand on my forehead.

Load Centre? Bahtlost? Bahtlost . . . Bahtlost . . . The hand was stroking my forehead, and somewhere a voice, gently insistent as the pulsing chamber itself said again and

again, "No X-rays . . . No X-rays . . . "

I raised my head sharply. Instantly, the Lipps bent to me, holding me down. For a moment the voice in my mind ceased, and I could think clearly again. X-rays had to be taken! The memory surged into my mind. Bahtlost and Price were carrying Nick bombs!

I reared to a sitting position, and the Lipps strained to hold The voice came into my mind again, but I ejected it savagely. The chamber began to pulse more violently, but I was able to get to my feet. The Lipps were impotent. I fought

them, and broke free. The chamber stopped pulsing.

And suddenly I knew where I was. Bahtlost and Price had gone through this. Lipp psychs had blacked out their minds.

Ahead of me now, a section of the chamber wall was expanding. I stared. The wall seemed glutinous—and as I watched, a globule broke free, drifted, and burst. Through the opening in the wall I glimpsed bodies and eyes that sent me back, for an instant, to the Lipp I'd observed in Tower Two.

Then a thread, a fine and delicate thread, drifted toward me from the opening. It touched my hand, and for a moment I wasn't even aware of it. Then I noticed the slight, so slight and

gentle, pull, pull, at my hand.

I brushed my palm against my suit—and realized for the first time that I was naked to the waist. Then there was pain. The thread was tightening.

I whirled. The five Lipp psychs were grouped at my back. I grasped the silken thread with my free hand and jerked at it in an effort to snap it. Both my hands were caught then—and now I was being drawn forward . . .

ESF training took over. Already there were more threads floating toward me. I was caught by my hands. Soon it would

be my face, my neck-my naked shoulders and arms.

I jerked back convulsively. The thread was tight: it stretched, but didn't break. Instead, twin strips of skin tore off my hands, and I stumbled backward, the pain burning up my arms. But I was free. The pain underlined the need for action—now!

I turned quickly, ducked under a rapidly settling thread. The psychs were in front of me now, but unarmed. I went past them in a rushing, battering run, and they couldn't hold me. The chamber began to pulse again, violently, throwing me off balance. And now, at my back, the break in the wall was choked with fine threads, floating toward me.

I ran forward quickly. I struck the trembling wall of the chamber with my shoulder, felt it stretch—then give. I fell forward, tumbling. I fell to my knees, stumbled forward,

and got to my feet.

I was in a corridor. The walls, ceiling and floor were of the same resilient material as the chamber I had just left. When I began to run, the floor stretched beneath my feet, and I fell.

I was lying face down—aware, for some reason, of a peculiar pressure in my chest—when a door at the far end of the cor-

ridor, and Edward Woodsterl stepped through . . .

He was smiling. That was the first thing I noticed—the wide, wide, half-moony smile. And he walked easily, striding long and smoothly over the elastic floor. His lean face seemed strangely elongated from my position on the floor. I pushed myself to my knees, and the pressure in my chest stopped.

I noticed it then. I looked down and saw that there was a grey hump sticking to my chest. I looked at it and my mind was—fuzzed. I plucked at it fumblingly, but it wouldn't come

off.

Woodsterl was saying, "Nothing to worry about . . ."
I was confused. My mind was jumbled. How long had I

I was confused. My mind was jumbled. How long had I spent? How long had I spent with the psychs? I said, "Woodsterl?" And now, as he moved closer, I realized why I had thought he was smiling. The lower half of his face—nostrils and mouth—was covered by a transparent mask that shone faintly under the corridor lights, giving him a clownish air.

Not that I cared. I was happy . . . just . . . drifting. "Relax," Woodsterl was saying. "Take it easy . . ."

I could feel shadows slipping in under my eyes. Somehow I couldn't understand why Woodsterl. Why the hell was Woodsterl here? Why the hell was Woodsterl here . . .?"

Behind Woodsterl now, were vague, Lippian shapes. I began to fall forward, as though from a great height—slowly,

slowly, from a great height—and as I fell my hands fumbled with the grey lump on my chest, but it wouldn't come away. And all the time I was falling I could hear Woodsterl saying,

" Nothing, nothing, nothing . . ."

Then I struck the floor of the corridor and bounced. I wasn't unconscious. It was as though I were dreaming. Woodsterl bent over me in his ridiculous mask. Then the Lipps lifted me and I was floating. We went down the corridor and Woodsterl was close beside me, and I could hear the zip. zip, of his feet as he walked. The Lipps didn't make any sound. We branched to the left, floated higher, and the sound of Woodsterl's feet told me that we were riding upward on a rippling stairway.

By the time we reached the top of the stairway, my mind was clearing. I heard Woodsterl growl something that sounded like, "Hurry it up," and I was carried along more quickly then. I didn't resist. I was fitting out-of-focus pictures together in my mind, and they were beginning to make sense. Woodsterl -somehow Woodsterl-had got Bahtlost and Price, and now me, out through the Field. Two bombs in the middle of the project—and they needed three. And I was going to be it . . .

Woodsterl said sharply, "Put him down!" I felt myself being lowered. Then I felt a soft tightness all around my body

and my legs, from the waist down.

I struggled, and couldn't move. I was in a sitting position and Woodsterl was in front of me. Lipps were all around.

Woodsterl had taken his mask off now.

"No thezane," he said, when I looked at it. "No gas now—no need for it." Then he said, "ESF breeds tough minds, Belloc. The psychs have probed, but we can't spare the time for a blackout . . ."
Then he said, "Now!"

For an instant, pain was my only sensation. It was as though my head had been enclosed inside a giant, squeezing hand. Then as suddenly as it had come the pain ceased.

My mind was left startlingly clear.

I looked down at the grey bump on my chest, and now I knew what it was—and why it was there. And adhesion bomb. Three men were needed—Bahtlost in Telekinetics; Price in Aetheric Physics: Belloc in the Medical Dome. Wham! The deepspace drive was finished.

Woodsterl said, "Stand up."

And I got to my feet. God knew why, but I did. And I had recognized a Lippian adhesion bomb—but I'd never seen one before!

I shook my head desperately. It was as though I were part of Woodsterl—was thinking with his mind as well as my own. I said, "What the hell have you done to me?"

Woodsterl was facing me. "A semi-transference," he said.

"Temporary, but effective."

"What the hell does that mean?"

He smiled without humour. "We're going back to Load Centre, Belloc. Back to the Medical Dome. You'll forget about X-rays—you'll send Price and Bahtlost back to their jobs."

"Bahtlost is dead," I said.

Woodsterl shook his head. "An injection of fluid thezane, effective for a short time. Just long enough to put you in the projectbeam." Then he said simply, "Come with me . . ." And I stepped toward him, and as he turned to go out into the corridor, I followed. There was nothing I could do about it. I couldn't help myself. I could think, could reason, but I couldn't resist.

As we walked, I said, "You'll blow up with us."

Woodsterl laughed softly. "My job was to send the key men, not to commit suicide. The Lipps activated Load Centre with their projectbeam, I caused the transmissions. A simple shock, like the Servo releasing its load, was enough. Brain cells, muscles, nerves, leap to counteract the danger—and DTR becomes possible."

" And you ?"

Woodsterl said slowly, "I was trained for DTR a long time ago, before the deepspace drive was more than a seed. The Lipps paid me well, Belloc." And now his face was thrusting close to mine. "There are pleasures you can only dream about. Sensations . . ."

We had reached the end of the corridor. Woodsterl stroked the softly rippling wall, as though still prepossessed by the obscenity of his thoughts. A cavity opened before us. As we stepped inside, he said, "When Bahtlost and Price go back to their jobs, you'll stay in the Medical Dome. I'll be returning through the beam. I'll close the circuit from this end . . ."

I didn't say anything. I could feel the words in my mind, and the slow pumping pressure of fear in my chest, but there was nothing I could do about it. The cavity we were in closed, then plummeted downward. When we stopped, the door dilated and Woodsterl stepped through. I followed. I had no more control over my own movement than Woodsterl's white hands. When he thought me into action, I acted.

And now we were in the gently pulsing chamber again, or one like it. Woodsterl held out his hand, and I saw that he had the upper part of my suit in his fingers. I put it on as he directed, aware of the adhesion bomb on my chest—unable to

remove it.

Then we crossed the undulating floor of the chamber, and again a globule broke free of the wall and we were able to pass

through. There were no signs of the glutinous threads.

"Merely a method of restraint," Woodsterl said, catching the thought. "When you avoided them, the thezane was used." We were in a corridor again and the chamber had closed at our backs. Ahead was an open door, leading into a smaller chamber. The walls here were hard as steel, cold to the touch. The door closed, shutting off the light.

When the floor dropped away, fear cut into my mind like a

knife—and quite suddenly I was back in Load Centre.

We were standing in the shadow of the tubecar, and humanoids—Geshtians and Earthers—were working in the brightly lit areas around us.

"Move out slowly," Woodsterl warned. "You're Jon

Belloc-you're looking for Bahtlost. Nothing more."

I stepped out of the shadows, and Woodsterl followed. Faces turned in our direction, and deep in my mind, a voice screamed. Warn them! But I walked on silently, across the floodlit open spaces, out of the Load Centre and into the night.

The aircar was still waiting, the driver's white face blurring toward us as he spotted us. When we got in and the doors had closed, I opened the commoircuit. The driver spoke first.

"Is everything all right, sir?"

"Perfectly," Woodsterl—I—said. I looked at my watch. Exactly twenty-three minutes had passed since we had entered Load Centre. I nodded to the driver through the partition. "Medical Dome . . ."

When we began to pick up speed, Woodsterl ordered me to close the commcircuit. I did so. Then I said, "Maybe Bahtlost has turned up—"

I couldn't go on. Woodsterl had blocked the thought out of my mind. He said, "When we get to the Medical Dome, you'll countermand your order. No X-rays. Send Bahtlost and Price back to their departments."

I fought him! Struggled against the grip on my mind. I got my hand up high enough to touch the commcircuit between the

driver and ourselves.

"Leave it !" Woodsterl said.

My fingers tightened momentarily, then fell away. They brushed the circuit switch, and the driver's voice rang suddenly loud in the rear of the car.

"Change of direction, sir?"

"No!" Woodsterl barked. "Get us to the Medical Dome!" He snapped the circuit shut again. His fingers were tightening on my arm. "Before I leave, I'll be giving you an order. You will follow it exactly! You'll stall. You'll remain in the Medical Dome for exactly twelve minutes . . ."

"Exactly twelve minutes," I said.

Woodsterl nodded quickly and relaxed.

The aircar swung up to the entrance of the Medical Dome and stopped. Woodsterl got out unhurriedly, and I followed. My hands were at my sides now, dangling loosely. I was aware—and desperately afraid of—the adhesion bomb under my suit. But I went after Woodsterl, following him into the dome.

Warn Hallstrom! my mind said, but my feet click, clicked. on the polished floor, and when Hallstrom came quickly toward us, his dark eyes questioningly anxious, I didn't-

couldn't-say anything.

Woodsterl said briskly, "We got held up by securityoutside the Load Centre." He looked past Hallstrom, mock-anxiously. "We didn't find Bahtlost."

The apprehension had faded a little in Hallstrom's eyes. Uul Taisnan was coming toward us now, golden hair flashing. I caught her eyes—and Woodsterl forced me to look away.

"We found Bahtlost," Uul Taisnan said. "I had him brought here." She was looking sharply at Woodsterl. I

couldn't understand why.

"You found him?" Woodsterl said.

Hallstrom cut in. "The equipment is ready, Belloc. We can expose and rush the plates through."

Destroy Woodsterl! my mind said.

I said aloud, "I want to talk to Bahtlost."

Uul Taisnan looked at me. "The X-rays are of the utmost importance," she said. "We have no way of knowing when zero-time is."

My hands were trembling. I felt Woodsterl's mind transmit a flicker of his own fear. He tightened his grip on my own. Uul Taisnan said sharply, "Is anything wrong, Mr. Belloc?" I said slowly, "There—is no need for X-rays." And I was

I said slowly, "There—is no need for X-rays." And I was aware of Hallstrom's eyes on me now. Uul Taisnan took a sudden step forward. "Commander," she said, "something is very wrong here!"

I felt the fear strike Woodsterl's mind like a physical blow. And for an instant, a single flicker of time, he lost his control.

I said, "Lipps!" Then he restrained me-violently.

But now Uul Taisnan had stepped closer, and behind her I saw Price and Bahtlost coming enquiringly toward us. I—Woodsterl—said unsteadily, "You men may go back to your work . . . You ,Price! You, Bahtlost!"

Uul Taisnan's eyes flickered from Woodsterl to myself. And suddenly, deep in my mind, I felt a stir of power. It was as though a third mind was probing—was entering the dual

complexity of my own.

And Woodsterl's control wavered!

I felt the fluctuation, the tightening, failing, tightening. I got my right hand high enough to touch the adhesion bomb—and he brought it snapping down again. I flicked my eyes at him and saw that he was sweating faintly under the fluorescent lighting of the dome.

And then, quite softly, Uul Taisnan said:

"We've found him, Mr. Belloc."

And at the same time, power from that third source surged into my mind. A clearness—a freedom—burst outward, drowning Woodsterl's grip. I saw him stagger, then recover. But Uul Taisnan had already leapt forward—and I felt her mind rush out of my own. She got her hands around Woodsterl's waist, but he shook her off. He broke away, feet pounding on the floor of the dome. Hallstrom shouted an order, and guards sprang toward us from the entrance, trapping Woodsterl between them and ourselves.

But they didn't stop him. He had a Trent tube in his hand now, and he fired twice. The guards stumbled forward, and Woodsterl went on over their bodies. He broke out into the night, where Hallstrom's aircar was waiting. Guards closed in

hesitantly-Woodsterl was Second-in-Command.

"Take him!" Hallstrom shouted from the entrance. But Woodsterl was in the 'car now, his Trent weapon at the back of the driver's head. The car spun away, moving quickly toward Load Centre—toward the DTR beam.

"The trigger!" I shouted at Hallstrom. "If he gets through to the trigger..." My hands were up high, tearing futilely at the adhesion bomb. It wouldn't come away. "Get clear of me!" I shouted. "Get Bahtlost and Price into the open!"

Uul Taisnan was suddenly at my side. Her fingers touched the adhesion bomb, and suddenly, inexplicably, it loosened and came free. Geshtians-rich in psi powers! Then a second aircar was drawing up, and Hallstrom, Uul Taisnan and myself were throwing ourselves into it.

Guards were moving toward Load Centre now, and there was a siren sounding from somewhere in the centre.

security clamp was going into operation.

As the buildings blurred past us, I said to Hallstrom, "The guards at Load Centre? Will they stop him . . .?"

Hallstrom shook his head fearfully. "Perhaps not-"

I snapped the commcircuit open. "Go through into Load Centre," I said. "Don't stop for anyone." Then I looked at Hallstrom. "If they've let him through . . ."

They had. The aircar was stopped outside the Centre, but Woodsterl wasn't in it. There were guards ahead of us, waving us down. Woodsterl was through the clamp—we were caught in it.

I opened the commcircuit again. "Keep going," I said.

"Run them down if you have to."

A Trent weapon flashed at us out of the darkness. A bolt of fire rocked the 'car. We spun briefly-corrected. The

entrance to the yard was ahead.

I opened the door of the car, and the airstream plucked at my body. We burst into the floodlighting, and there were men working now. And off down the platform was the figure of Edward Woodsterl, running . . .

"A weapon!" I snapped. We didn't have one. "More

speed !" I told the driver.

We were closing the distance now—and Woodsterl had seen us. He looked over his shoulder twice, and fired his Trent weapon blindly. The bolt went high and we spun between two platforms and began to draw level.

Woodsterl was very close to the Servo now, the point where the area was activated. He sprang on to a loading belt, riding it up to the platform. Guards were around him now, closing

in, but they wouldn't reach him in time.

We swung in close, grazing the load belt, and I threw myself out. Uul Taisnan was at my side. We were a dozen yards behind Woodsterl, and he had reached the platform now. He hesitated for an instant—the monorail and the activation-point just below him—then he jumped downward. And at the same time Uul Taisnan brought one arm back and threw a globular grey object after him. It arced upward, slowly, slowly . . . then it began to fall—and in that instant I knew it was the adhesion bomb she had taken from my chest, and I threw myself face downward, sweeping her off her feet at the same time.

But the explosion, when it came, seemed muffled and far off. And there was no fire, only a boil of energy up there on the monorail line. And when we got to our feet, Woodsterl had gone, and I realized, quite suddenly, that the adhesion bomb had struck him at the moment of transmission, and had been carried through to the Lipps.

Then I realized, too, that I was crushing Uul Taisnan's

hand . . .

We were in Hallstrom's office—Hallstrom, Bahtlost, Price, Uul and myself. Bahtlost and Price were sitting in snugchairs, and moving very infrequently, because movement is unpleasant when the medics have just taken a Nick bomb from your hip.

Uul Taisnan was saying, "We had suspected him for a long time . . ." She smiled apologetically, looking at Isaac Hallstrom. "But you Earth people . . . if Geshtians had accused one of your project leaders, before we had evidence . . ."

I said, "Geshtian Security Force?"

She said quietly, "For many years, Mr. Belloc." And she smiled then, charmingly. "And may I say it was a pleasure—working together?"

Which was generous—considering.

David Rome

Ever tried mentally 'switching off' surrounding objects? It is relatively quite simple providing you concentrate upon one dominant item to look at. But what happens to the 'switched off' objects? Are they still there or do they slip away into some mysterious limbo of Time?

## THE OVERLOADED MAN

#### by J. G. BALLARD

Faulkner was slowly going insane.

After breakfast he waited impatiently in the lounge while his wife tidied up in the kitchen. She would be gone within two or three minutes, but for some reason he always found the short wait each morning almost unbearable. As he drew the venetian blinds and readied the reclining chair on the veranda he listened to Julia moving about efficiently. In the same strict sequence she stacked the cups and plates in the dishwasher, slid the pot-roast for that evening's dinner into the auto-cooker and selected the alarm, lowered the air-conditioner refrigerator and immersion heater settings, switched open the oil storage manifolds for the delivery tanker that afternoon, and retracted her section of the garage door.

Faulkner followed the sequence with admiration, counting off each successive step as the dials clicked and snapped.

You ought to be in B-52's, he thought, or in the control house of a petrochemicals plant. In fact Julia worked in the personnel section at the Clinic, no doubt spent all day in the same whirl of efficiency, stabbing buttons marked 'Jones,' 'Smith' and 'Brown,' shunting paraplegies to the left, paranoids to the right.

She stepped into the lounge and came over to him, the standard executive product in brisk black suit and white blouse.

"Aren't you going to the School today?" she asked.

Faulkner shook his head, played with some papers on the desk. "No, I'm still on creative reflection. Just for this week. Professor Harman thought I'd been taking too many classes

and getting stale."

She nodded, looking at him doubtfully. For three weeks now he had been lying around at home, dozing on the veranda, and she was beginning to get suspicious. Sooner or later, Faulkner realised, she would find out, but by then he hoped to be out of reach. He longed to tell her the truth, that two months ago he had resigned from his job as a lecturer at the Business School and had no intention of ever going back. She'd get a damn big surprise when she discovered they had almost expended his last pay cheque, might even have to put up with only one car. Let her work, he thought, she earns more than I did anyway.

With an effort Faulkner smiled at her. Get out! his mind screamed, but she still hovered around him indecisively.

"What about your lunch? There's no-"

"Don't worry about me," Faulkner cut in quickly, watching the clock. "I gave up eating six months ago. You have

lunch at the Clinic."

Even talking to her had become an effort. He wished they could communicate by means of notes, had even bought two scribble pads for this purpose. However, he had never quite been able to suggest that she use hers, although he did leave messages around for her, on the pretext that his mind was so intellectually engaged that talking would break up his thought trains.

Oddly enough, the idea of leaving her never seriously occurred to him. Such an escape would prove nothing. Besides, he had an alternative plan.

"You'll be all right?" she asked, still watching him warily.

"Absolutely," Faulkner told her, maintaining the smile. It

felt like a full day's work.

Her kiss was quick and functional, like the automatic peck of some huge bottle-topping machine. The smile was still on his face as she reached the door. When she had gone he let it fade slowly, then found himself breathing again and gradually relaxed, letting the tension drain down through his arms and legs. For a few minutes he wandered blankly around the empty house, then made his way into the lounge again, ready to begin his serious work.

His programme usually followed the same course. First, from the centre drawer of his desk he took a small alarm clock, fitted with a battery and wrist strap. Sitting down on the veranda, he fastened the strap to his wrist, wound and set the clock and placed it on the table next to him, binding his arm to the chair so that there was no danger of dragging the clock on to the floor.

Ready now, he lay back and surveyed the scene in front of him.

Menninger Village, or the 'Bin' as it was known locally, had been built about ten years earlier as a self-contained housing unit for the graduate staff of the Clinic and their families. In all there were some sixty houses in the development, each designed to fit into a particular architectonic niche, preserving its own identity from within and at the same time merging into the organic unity of the whole development. The object of the architects, faced with the task of compressing a great number of small houses into a four-acre site, had been, firstly to avoid producing a collection of identical hutches, as in most housing estates, and secondly, to provide a show-piece for a major psychiatric foundation which would serve as a model for the corporate living units of the future.

However, as everyone there had found out, living in the Bin was hell on earth. The architects had employed the so-called psycho-modular system—a basic L-design—and this meant that everything under- or overlapped everything else, the whole development was a sprawl of interlocking frosted glass, white rectangles and curves, at first glance exciting and abstract (Life magazine had done several glossy photographic treatments of the new 'living trends' suggested by the Village) but to the people within formless and visually exhausting. Most of the Clinic's senior staff had soon taken off, and the Village was now let out to anyone who could be persuaded to live there.

Faulkner gazed out across the veranda, separating from the clutter of white geometric shapes the eight other houses he could see without moving his head. On his left, immediately adjacent, were the Penzils, with the McPhersons on the right;

the other six houses were directly ahead, on the far side of a muddle of interlocking garden areas, abstract rat-runs divided by waist-high white panelling, glass angle-pieces and slatted screens.

In the Penzils' garden was a collection of huge alphabet blocks, each three feet high, which their two children played with. Often they left messages out on the grass for Faulkner to read, sometimes obscene, at others merely gnomic and obscure. This morning's came into the latter category. The blocks spelled out:

#### STOP AND GO

Speculating on the total significance of this statement, Faulkner let his mind relax, his eyes staring blankly at the houses. Gradually their already obscured outlines began to merge and fade, the long balconies and ramps partly hidden by the intervening trees became disembodied forms, like gigantic geometric units.

Breathing slowly, Faulkner steadily closed his mind, then without any effort erased his awareness of the identity of the

houses opposite.

He was now looking at a cubist landscape, a collection of random white forms below a blue backdrop, across which several powdery green blurs moved slowly backwards and forwards. Idly, he wondered what these geometric forms really represented—he knew that only a few seconds earlier they had constituted an immediately familiar part of his everyday existence—but however he re-arranged them spatially in his mind, or sought their associations, they still remained a

random assembly of geometric forms.

He had discovered this talent only about three weeks ago. Balefully eyeing the silent television set in the lounge one Sunday morning he had suddenly realised that he had so completely accepted and assimilated the physical form of the plastic cabinet that he could no longer remember its function. It had required a considerable mental effort to recover himself and re-identify it. Out of interest he had tried out the new talent on other objects, found that it was particularly successful with over-associated ones such as washing machines, cars and other consumer goods. Stripped of their accretions of sales slogans and status imperatives, their real claim to reality was

so tenuous that it needed little mental effort to obliterate them

altogether.

The effect was similar to that of mescaline and other hallucinogens, under whose influence the dents in a cushion became as vivid as the craters of the moon, the folds in a curtain the ripples in the waves of eternity.

During the following weeks Faulkner had experimented carefully, training his ability to operate the cut-out switches. The process was slow, but gradually he found himself able to eliminate larger and larger groups of objects, the mass-produced furniture in the lounge, the over-enamelled gadgets in the kitchen, his car in the garage—de-identified, it sat in the half-light like an enormous vegetable marrow, flaccid and gleaming; trying to identify it had driven him almost out of his mind. "What on earth could it possibly be?" he had asked himself helplessly, splitting his sides with laughter—and as the facility developed he had dimly perceived that here was an escape route from the intolerable world in which he found himself at the village.

He had described the facility to Ross Hendricks, who lived a few houses away, also a lecturer at the Business School and

Faulkner's only close friend.

"I may actually be stepping out of time," Faulkner speculated. "Without a time sense consciousness is difficult to visualise. That is, eliminating the vector of time from the de-identified object frees it from all its everyday cognitive associations. Alternatively, I may have stumbled on a means of repressing the photo-associative centres that normally identify visual objects, in the same way that you can so listen to someone speaking your own language that none of the sounds has any meaning. Everyone's tried this at some time." Hendricks had nodded. "But don't make a career out of it,

Hendricks had nodded. "But don't make a career out of it, though." He eyed Faulkner carefully. "You can't simply turn a blind eye to the world. The subject-object relationship is not as polar as Descartes' Cogito ergo sum' suggests. By any degree to which you devalue the external world so you devalue yourself. It seems to me that your real problem is to

reverse the process."

But Hendricks, however sympathetic, was beyond helping Faulkner. Besides, it was pleasant to see the world afresh again, to wallow in an endless panorama of brilliantly coloured images. What did it matter if there was form but no content—?

A sharp click woke him abruptly. He sat up with a jolt, fumbling with the alarm clock, which had been set to wake him at 11 o'clock. Looking at it, he saw that it was only 10-55. The alarm had not rung, nor had he received a shock from the battery. Yet the click had been distinct. However, there were so many servos and robots around the house that it could

have been anything.

A dark shape moved across the frosted glass panel which formed the side wall of the lounge. Through it, into the narrow drive separating his house from the Penzils', he saw a car draw to a halt and park, a young woman in a blue smock climb out and walk across the gravel. This was Penzil's sister-in-law, a girl of about twenty who had been staying with them for a couple of months. As she disappeared into the house Faulkner quickly unstrapped his wrist and stood up. Opening the veranda doors, he sauntered down into the garden, glancing back over his shoulder.

The girl, Louise (he had never spoken to her) went to sculpture classes in the morning, on her return regularly took a leisurely shower before going out on to the roof to sunbathe.

Faulkner hung around the bottom of the garden, flipping stones into the pond and pretending to straighten some of the pergola slats, then noticed that the McPhersons' 15-year-old son Harvey was approaching along the other garden.

"Why aren't you at school?" he asked Harvey, a gangling youth with an intelligent ferret-like face under a mop of brown

hair.

"I should be," Harvey told him easily. "But I convinced Mother I was over-tense, and Morrison"—his father—"said I was ratiocinating too much." He shrugged. "Patients here are over-permissive."

"For once you're right," Faulkner agreed, watching the shower stall over his shoulder. A pink form moved about,

adjusting taps, and there was the sound of water jetting.

"Tell me, Mr. Faulkner," Harvey asked. "Do you realise that since the death of Einstein in 1955 there hasn't been a single living genius? From Michelangelo, through Shakespeare, Newton, Beethoven, Goethe, Darwin, Freud and Einstein there's always been a living genius. Now, for the first time in 500 years we're on our own."

Faulkner nodded, his eyes engaged. "I know," he said. "I

feel damned lonely about it too."

When the shower was over he grunted to Harvey and wandered back to the veranda, took up his position again in the chair, the battery lead strapped to his wrist.

Steadily, object by object, he began to switch off the world around him. The houses opposite went first. The white masses of the roofs and balconies he resolved quickly into flat rectangles, the lines of windows into small squares of colour like the grids in a Mondrian abstract. The sky was a blank field of blue. In the distance an aircraft moved across it, engines hammering. Carefully Faulkner repressed the identity of the image, then watched the slim silver dart move slowly away like a vanishing fragment from a cartoon dream.

As he waited for the engines to fade he was conscious of the sourceless click he had heard earlier that morning. It sounded only a few feet away, near the french window on his right, but he was too immersed in the unfolding kaleidoscope to rouse

himself.

When the plane had gone he turned his attention to the garden, quickly blotted out the white fencing, the fake pergola, the elliptical disc of the ornamental pool. The pathway reached out to encircle the pool, and when he blanked out his memories of the countless times he had wandered up and down its length it reared up into the air like a terra-cotta arm holding

an enormous silver jewel.

Satisfied that he had obliterated the Village and the garden, Faulkner then began to demolish the house. Here the objects around him were more familiar, highly personalised extensions of himself. He began with the veranda furniture, transforming the tubular chairs and glass-topped table into a trio of involuted green coils, then swung his head slightly and selected the TV set just inside the lounge on his right. It clung limply to its identity, and easily he unfocussed his mind, reduced the brown plastic box, with its fake wooden veining, to an amorphous blur.

One by one he cleared the bookcase and desk of all associations, the standard lamps and picture frames. Like lumber in some psychological warehouse, they were suspended behind him in vacuo, the white armchairs and sofas like blunted rectangular clouds.

Anchored to reality only by the alarm mechanism clamped to his wrist, Faulkner craned his head from left to right, systematically obliterating all traces of meaning from the world around him, reducing everything to its formal visual values.

Gradually these too began to lose their meaning, the abstract masses of colour dissolving, drawing Faulkner after them into a world of pure psychic sensation, where blocks of ideation hung like magnetic fields in a cloud chamber . . .

With a shattering blast, the alarm rang out, the battery driving sharp spurs of pain into Faulkner's forearm. Scalp tingling, he pulled himself back into reality and clawed away the wrist strap, massaging his arm rapidly, then slapped off the alarm.

For a few minutes he sat kneading his wrist, re-identifying all the objects around him, the houses opposite, the gardens, his home, aware that a glass wall had been inserted between them and his own psyche. However carefully he focussed his mind on the world outside, a screen still separated them, its opacity thickening imperceptibly.

On other levels as well, bulkheads were shifting into place. His wife reached home at 6-00, tired out after a busy intake day, annoyed to find Faulkner ambling about in a semi-

stupor, the veranda littered with dirty glasses.

"Well, clean it up!" she snapped when Faulkner vacated his chair for her and prepared to take off upstairs. "Don't leave the place like this, what's the matter with you? Come on, connect!"

Cramming a handful of glasses together, Faulkner mumbled to himself and started for the kitchen, found Julia blocking the way out when he tried to leave. Something was on her mind. She sipped quickly at her martini, then began to throw out probes about the School. He assumed she had rung there on some pretext, found her suspicions reinforced when she referred in passing to himself.

"Liaison is terrible," Faulkner told her. "Take two days off and no-one remembers you work there." By a massive effort of concentration he had managed to avoid looking his wife in the face since she arrived. In fact, they had not exchanged a direct glance for over a week. Hopefully he

wondered if this might be getting her down.

Supper was slow agony. The smells of the auto-cooked pot roast had permeated the house all afternoon. Unable to eat more than a few mouthfuls he had nothing on which to focus his attention. Luckily Julia had a brisk appetite and he could stare at the top of her head as she ate, let his eyes wander around the room when she looked up.

After supper, thankfully, there was television. Dusk blanked out the other houses in the Village, and they sat in the darkness around the set, Julia grumbling at the programmes.

"Why do we watch every night?" she asked. "It's a total

time waster."

Faulkner gestured airily. "It's an interesting social document." Slumped down into the wing chair, hands apparently behind his neck, he could press his fingers into his ears, at will blot out the sounds of the programme. "Don't pay any attention to what they're saying," he told his wife. "It makes more sense." He watched the characters mouthing silently like demented fish. The close-ups in melodramas were particularly hilarious, the more intense the situation the broader the farce.

Something kicked his knee sharply. He looked up to see his wife bending over him, eyebrows knotted together, mouth working furiously. Fingers still pressed to his ears, Faulkner examined her face with detachment, for a moment speculated whether to complete the process and switch her off as he had switched off the rest of the world earlier that day. When he did he wouldn't bother to set the alarm . . .

"Harry!" he heard his wife bellow.

He sat up with a start, the row from the set backing up his wife's voice.

"What's the matter? I was asleep."

"You were in a trance, you mean. For God's sake answer when I talk to you. I was saying that I saw Harriet Tizzard this afternoon." Faulkner groaned and his wife swerved on him. "I know you can't stand the Tizzards but I've decided we ought to see more of them . . ."

As his wife rattled on Faulkner eased himself down behind the wings, when she was settled back in her chair he moved his hands up behind his neck, after a few discretionary grunts slid his fingers into his ears and blotted out her voice, then lay

quietly watching the silent screen.

By 10 o'clock the next morning he was out on the veranda again, alarm strapped to his wrist, for the next hour lay back enjoying the disembodied forms suspended around him, his mind free of its anxieties. When the alarm woke him at 11-00

he felt refreshed and relaxed, for a few moments able to survey the nearby houses with the visual curiosity their architects had intended. Gradually, however, everything began to secrete its poison again, its overlay of nagging associations, and within ten minutes he was looking fretfully at his wrist watch.

When Louise Penzil's car pulled into the drive he disconnected the alarm and sauntered out into the garden, head down to shut out as many of the surrounding houses as possible. As he was idling around the pergola, replacing the slats torn loose by the roses, Harvey McPherson suddenly popped his head

over the fence.

"Harvey, are you still around? Don't you ever go to school?" "Well, I'm on this relaxation course of Mother's," Harvey explained. "I find the competitive context of the classroom is-"

"I'm trying to relax too," Faulkner cut in. "Let's leave it

at that. Why don't you beat it?"
Unruffled, Harvey pressed on. "Mr. Faulkner, I've got a sort of problem in metaphysics that's been bothering me. Maybe you could help. The only absolute in space-time is supposed to be the speed of light. But as a matter of fact any estimate of the speed of light involves the component of time, which is subjectively variable—so, bam, what's left?"

"Girls," Faulkner said. He glanced over his shoulder at

the Penzil house and then turned back moodily to Harvey.

Harvey frowned, trying to straighten his hair. "What are you talking about ?"

"Girls," Faulkner repeated. "You know, the weaker sex,

the distaff side."

"Oh, for Pete's sake." Shaking his head, Harvey walked

back to his house, muttering to himself.

That'll shut you up, Faulkner thought. He started to scan the Penzil's house through the slats of the pergola, then suddenly spotted Harry Penzil standing in the centre of his veranda window, frowning out at him.

Quickly Faulkner turned his back, pretended to trim the By the time he managed to work his way indoors he was sweating heavily. Harry Penzil was the sort of man liable to straddle fences and come out leading with a right swing.

Mixing himself a drink in the kitchen, he brought it out on to the veranda and sat down, waiting for his embarrassment to

subside before setting the alarm mechanism.

He was listening carefully for any sounds from the Penzils' when he heard a familiar soft metallic click from the house on

his right.

Faulkner sat forward, examining the veranda wall. This was a slab of heavy frosted glass, completely opaque, carrying white roof timbers, clipped on to which were slabs of corrugated polythene sheeting. Just beyond the veranda, screening the proximal portions of the adjacent gardens, was a ten-foot-high metal lattice extending about twenty feet down the garden fence and strung with japonica.

Inspecting the lattice carefully, Faulkner suddenly noticed the outline of a square black object on a slender tripod propped up behind the first vertical support just three feet from the open veranda window, the disc of a small glass eye staring at him

unblinkingly through one of the horizontal slots.

A camera! Faulkner leapt out of his chair, gaping incredulously at the instrument. For days it had been clicking away at him, God alone knew what glimpses into his private life

Harvey had recorded for his own amusement.

Anger boiling, Faulkner strode across to the lattice, pried one of the metal members off the support beam and seized the camera. As he dragged it through the interval the tripod fell away with a clatter and he heard someone on the McPhersons'

veranda start up out of a chair.

Faulkner wrestled the camera through, snapping off the remote control cord attached to the shutter lever. Opening the camera, he ripped out the film, then put it down on the floor and stamped its face in with the heel of his shoe. Then, ramming the pieces together, he stepped forward and hurled them over the fence towards the far end of the McPhersons' garden.

As he returned to finish his drink the phone rang in the hall.

"Yes, what is it?" he snapped into the receiver.

"Is that you Harry? Julia here."

"Who?" Faulkner said, not thinking. "Oh, yes. Well,

how are things?"

"Not too good, by the sound of it." His wife's voice had become harder. "I've just had a long talk with Professor Harman, he told me that you resigned from the School two months ago. Harry, what are you playing at? I can hardly believe it."

"I can hardly believe it either," Faulkner retorted jocularly.

"It's the best news I've had for years. Thanks for confirming it."

"Harry!" His wife was shouting now. "Pull yourself together! If you think I'm going to support you you're very

much mistaken. Professor Harman said-"

"That idiot Harman!" Faulkner interrupted. "Don't you realise he was trying to drive me insane?" As his wife's voice rose to an hysterical squawk he held the receiver away from him, then quietly replaced it in the cradle. After a pause he took it off again and laid it down on the stack of directories.

Outside the spring morning hung over the Village like a curtain of silence. Here and there a tree stirred in the warm air, or a window opened and caught the sunlight, but otherwise

the quiet and stillness were unbroken.

Lying on the veranda, the alarm mechanism discarded on the floor below his chair, Faulkner sank deeper and deeper into his private reverie, into the demolished world of form and colour which hung motionlessly around him. The houses opposite had vanished, their places taken by long white rectangular bands, the garden was a green ramp at the end of which poised the silver ellipse of the pond. The veranda was a transparent cube, in the centre of which he felt himself suspended like an image floating on a sea of ideation. He had obliterated not only the world around him, but his own body, and his limbs and trunk seemed an extension of his mind, disembodied forms whose physical dimensions pressed upon it like a dream's awareness of its own identity.

Some hours later, as he rotated slowly through his reverie, he was aware of a sudden intrusion into his field of vision. Focussing his eyes, with surprise he saw the dark-suited figure of his wife standing in front of him, shouting angrily and

gesturing with her handbag.

For a few minutes Faulkner examined the discrete entity she familiarly presented, the proportions of her legs and arms, the planes of her face. Then, without moving, he began to dismantle her mentally, obliterating her literally limb by limb. First he forgot her hands, forever snapping and twisting like frenzied birds, then her arms and shoulders, erasing all his memories of their energy and motion. Finally, as it pressed closer to him, mouth working wildly, he forgot her face, so that it presented nothing more than a blunted wedge of pink-grey dough, deformed by various ridges and grooves, split by apertures that opened and closed like the vents of some curious bellows.

Turning back to the silent dreamscape, he was aware of her jostling insistently behind him. Her presence seemed ugly and

formless, a bundle of obtrusive angles.

Then at last they came into brief physical contact. Gesturing her away, he felt her fasten like a dog upon his arm. He tried to shake her off but she clung to him, jerking about in an outpouring of anger.

Her rhythms were sharp and ungainly. To begin with he tried to ignore them, then began to restrain and smooth her, moulding her angular form into a softer and rounder one.

As he worked away, kneading her like a sculptor shaping clay, he noticed a series of crackling noises, over which a persistent scream was just barely audible. When he finished he let her fall to the floor, a softly squeaking lump of spongy rubber.

Faulkner returned to his reverie, re-assimilating the unaltered landscape. His brush with his wife had reminded him of the one encumbrance that still remained—his own body. Although he had forgotten its identity it nonetheless felt heavy and warm, vaguely uncomfortable, like a badly made bed to a restless sleeper. What he sought was pure ideation, the undisturbed sensation of psychic being untransmuted by any physical medium. Only thus could he escape the nausea of the external world.

Somewhere in his mind, an idea suggested itself. Rising from his chair, he walked out across the veranda, unaware of the physical movements involved, but propelling himself

towards the far end of the garden.

Hidden by the rose pergola, he stood for five minutes at the edge of the pond, then stepped into the water. Trousers billowing around his knees, he waded out slowly. When he reached the centre he sat down, pushing the weeds apart, and

lay back in the shallow water.

Slowly he felt the putty-like mass of his body dissolving, its temperature grow cooler and less oppressive. Looking out through the surface of the water six inches above his face, he watched the blue disc of the sky, cloudless and undisturbed, expanding to fill his consciousness. At last he had found the perfect background, the only possible field of ideation, an absolute continuum of existence uncontaminated by material excrescences.

Steadily watching it, he waited for the world to dissolve and set him free.

J. G. Ballard

Mr. Stewart is a "down under" writer and joins the select but growing band of Australians who are bringing a freshness of approach to science fiction, at least as we see it through western eyes. His latest story has some devious twists in the plot.

# JUNIOR PARTNER

### by D. D. STEWART

Lockwood frowned at the official letter as he took it out of the letter-box. He had not expected one. Then he scowled, feeling both annoyance and apprehension. The annoyance because the letter ended his holiday and the apprehension because the invisible They had caught up with him again. The contents were a standard form from the Ministry of Employment directing him to appear at the City Office at 10.25 on Tuesday 29th inst.

At 11.24-and-a-half precisely, the receptionist looked up as Lockwood pushed the door open. What she saw looked interesting, and she mentally catalogued him as her gaze started with the head. Straight, dark hair, blue eyes like the water-sapphire on her married finger, fine brown skin, yes—handsome, thirtyish, average height, well-built, neatly but

conservatively dressed. Good shoes.

"Yes, sir, what can we do for you?"

"Oh, er, good morning, I have an appointment at—I think—11.25, but I've lost the letter so I'm not sure of the date . . . "

"Your name?"

<sup>&</sup>quot;Lockwood-D. J. Lockwood. Is today right?"

She had meant to be very, very angry with Mr. Lockwood when he appeared. People simply must keep their appointments with the Ministry, but he looked such a nice young man, and obviously rather helpless. She sighed.

"Yes, today is correct, but you should have been here an

hour ago, Mr. Lockwood."

"Oh! I am sorry . . . " he tailed off helplessly.

"You'd better go in right away. Sixth door on the left. Mr. Sutter."

He smiled shyly at her. "Thank you."

Lockwood enjoyed confusing Government Ministries, and a mulish streak in him made him deliberately misunderstand instructions, particularly when they included peremptory orders to do something or be somewhere.

The man behind the sixth door glanced at him as he entered, signed a letter in front of him, carefully put it in an "Out" tray, moved a sheaf of papers across his desk, adjusted some writers, blew his nose, and looked up again.

" Yes ?"

"I have an appointment—the girl said that I was to see you."

" Oh?"

"Name's Lockwood," he offered tentatively.
"Lockwood? Ah! Mr. Lockwood—you're late!"

"Yes, terrible of me, lost the letter and couldn't remember.

But—" brightening "—I got the day right."

"This won't do at all Mr. Lockwood, won't do at all. In times like these we all have to make an effort, a real effort, to be helpful to others. Efficiency, Mr. Lockwood, efficiency, that's what's-"

"What am I wanted for?"

Mr. Sutter lost the thread of his peroration, tried to start again, gave it up, sought refuge in reaching for a file in the rack alongside his desk. Lockwood noted that it was rather fat and had a variety of coloured tags sticking out of it.

"Hmm, yes. Mr. Lockwood, why aren't you working?"

"Oh, just having a rest."

"A rest! But everyone must work! And I see from the investigation that you haven't been employed for over a year! Can you explain that?"

"I have. I'm taking a rest."



Ah, good, They had not gone back too far, otherwise They might have found a steady trail of similar inheritances. Perhaps he had been careless there and the risk had been greater than he had calculated.

"About a hundred and thirty million dollars."

" What ! "

" And I've got more now."

"Why didn't you tell us this?"

" No one asked."

"Hmm. Well, let that pass. Any attachments?"

" Not really."

The Secretary paused, tilted his chair back.

"Your wealth confuses me temporarily. Not expected, not at all. The preliminary sorting did not take into account tax returns and so on. It would have been against probability that of the ten possibles turned up out of hundreds of millions any were wealthy. It also introduces another factor, but we'll come to that later."

"What was the sorting done on, then?"

"Firstly for single men aged between twenty and forty, no known family or attachments, and of, er, a certain psych pattern. Your behaviour so far confirms the psych selection."

" Eh?"

"You haven't asked what for, Mr. Lockwood."

"You'll come to it."

"Quite, yes. Even though you're technically unemployed now, and that sounds rather hollow with all that money behind you, I don't think that it will be necessary to direct you. If the selection, and your original psych pattern on file is accurate, I think you'll accept. Brace yourself, here it comes. We need more Messengers."

Messengers! Lockwood went into mental high gear. They drove the ships from Earth out to the Colony Planets, not the generation-ships which took colonists, but the others which took information and, on the side-line, explored, each pushing back the unknown boundary a few star-systems here, a few there. They were faster than the generation-ships, and they came back to Earth, which the others didn't. But even they were slower than dreams. Under light-speed, so that Messengers spent much of their time between worlds in deep-freeze.

And there was still the other drawback. Time. A few years at near light-speed and, on return, centuries could have passed on Earth. Few Messengers lasted more than three trips. Then they settled down on a planet before the changes of centuries alienated them too much from their own race.

But Lockwood had another problem, and he saw in a flash that becoming a Messenger would solve that problem. Lately, he had been worried over the slow development of the Human race. He might not have been able to define the ultimate drift, as age, he felt, was catching up with him. If a Messenger, he could, in a few years of his life, observe the civilization of Earth over centuries. Of course, while he was away, there might be that Final War, but that was a reasonable chance he could take.

The strategy decided, he considered the details carefully. The individual nations of Earth were troublesomely over-regulated, and now this one would haul him out into the open, like a bug jerked from the cool, rotting obscurity beneath a log, and examine him. Careful, Lockwood. Careful! He reviewed his bodily self and decided that he would pass inspection with, perhaps, a few doubts here and there. Also an acceptable risk.

Other thoughts marched regularly through his brain, became ordered, neat. The path ahead was now clear—to

Lockwood.

"Oh?" he said.

"You do know what I mean by Messengers, Lockwood?"

"Yes. You want me for one then?"

"Yes."

"Okay."

"Just like that? Okay. Don't you want to think it over?"

"Yes. No, I've done so. It's a simple decision really."

"Hmm. You are an oddball Lockwood, but I might have expected it from your psych pattern," the Secretary grumbled.

"But this is being settled with almost indecent haste."

Lockwood laughed.

"We intended to guarantee your property in perpetuity, or rather to a maximum absence, Earth-time, of two thousand years, but I'll have to get a further clearance for you owing to that hundred and thirty million plus. Still, that won't take long. How long will you need to put your affairs in order? And of course we'll need a notarized list of your holdings." Then it dawned on Lockwood that here was his great opportunity. His Mentor had warned him of the danger of trying to influence events, saying that it was better to drift with them, using them, but here he saw a gold-plated chance. If he was careful, the desired result should be achieved.

"Two days will do."

"Swift. All right—call here same time Thursday."

Lockwood felt some anxiety at his medicals, particularly when the psychmen got to work, but he had had some experience and was forearmed. Only these men were the best. At the final, decision-making gathering he got some speculative glances, but the investigators did not have references to assess the little out-of-ordinary things that they had noted. So the little things were dismissed, and Lockwood was passed fit in all respects to be a Messenger.

He absorbed his training with a rapidity that earned him a special commendation and, seven months after that annoying letter had arrived, was briefed for his first trip. A milk run to Centaurus. The last person to see him, unofficially, before he left was the Secretary of the Ministry of Employment.

"Lockwood," he said soberly, "I never come down to wish good luck to new Messengers, but I do for you. You—you're a real oddball. It makes me wonder at the diversity of the human race and the factors that created a person of your extraordinary mental stability and self-sufficiency. I just can't begin to understand, so I give up. The best of luck to you."

Lockwood knew that men did not give up as easily as that,

and smiled wryly to himself.

When Lockwood had been a Messenger for over 400 years—Earth time—he noticed the first marked changes on Earth. This was on the return from his sixth trip. Densely populated civilizations tend to become static; their very density requires the closest regulation, and this is the antithesis of change. Change creates confusion and chaos, and can swiftly destroy a finely controlled system of living. The culture of Earth had, expectedly, become world-wide, with one Government, but after centuries the basic mores and taboos were unaltered. Common speech, after all this time, was little changed—another outcome of a closely-integrated civilization. All-embracing communication media, such as entertainment, news, government instructions, plus wide travel, tend to iron out regional

differences and force people to use common speech and

writing.

So the whole pattern of the Earth civilization was much the same as when Lockwood became a Messenger, and it did not seem strange to him after 400 years. Of course he noted many minor shifts, all unrelated in themselves, but only one thing was significantly different, and then so slightly that the people living with its slow development had not noticed. It came to his attention through a series of minor incidents.

There was a female Controller at the Space Field. Two of the helicabs he rode in were conned by women.

A well-dressed, educated young woman tried to pick him up in the private bar of the luxury hotel he was staying at. Very indirectly, perhaps she wasn't even conscious of what she was trying to do, but Lockwood recognized her aim. The bar-girl, if she noticed, made no comment.

In Samoa, he was told of a nearby island where polygamy

was the rule of the day.

Twice he was accused of being a queer, and offered help to cure his affliction—once by a person who must have known the psych pattern required of Messengers and was therefore being illogical.

He noticed an excessive amount of literature, available at

any news-stand, on pre-adolescent upbringing in sex.

Finally Lockwood, concerned, made a special trip round all the Regional Census Offices. At each, in reply to his queries, he was assured that as usual the number of females in the world exceeded males by 1%. He wondered why it had not been seen that this figure, like so many statistics, was not a constant. Life-expectancy of males was now only a year less than that of females. Lockwood wasn't a statistician, but he remembered when the life-expectancy of women exceeded that of men by 14 years—and when the number of women still exceeded the number of men by 1%. If men now lived longer, relative to women, there should be more of them on a percentage basis. But there weren't. There were more women.

Lockwood then spent a month examining in detail the legal backing to his now immense fortune. It seemed sound. He also left a few instructions with his current Business Manager, as the world-wide civilization meant that his business could now expand safely throughout the entire planet.

Still, he left on his seventh trip a thoughtful man. Those

women!

Lockwood anticipated some difficulty, so he tuned in to the tri-vid as he passed the outer planets. He'd found five suitable worlds but, instead of leaving it to Earth to decide their allocation, he'd apportioned them himself. One to Sussit, one to Mikel—where he'd met another Messenger who was going directly back to Earth and who would have spread the news—two to Torsi and only one to Earth. Very irregular for a Messenger, but he'd decided that it was time to stimulate the Colony Planets to do their own expansion, otherwise the Galaxy would never be settled by Earth's laborious methods and appropriation of the lion's share. Earth would, by now, have had ten years to get used to the idea, or else work up a real head of steam.

The news broadcasts confirmed his fears. His ship had already been detected and identified, and the air was full of commentaries on Lockwood and the Five Planets. From them he gleaned further food for thought. Both the President

and the Minister for Colony Planets were women.

He wondered how his trust was standing the strain, if there was still a man in charge of it, or if the women had abrogated the original contract. If not, with vague curiosity, he specu-

lated on the size of his income. Big or enormous?

Lockwood was smiling gently as he unshipped. There was an Official Welcome for him, and enthusiastic crowds behind the barrier fences. Culture Hero in his lifetime? But if the changes he had anticipated had come about, it was more than likely that subconscious urges had driven the majority of the populace towards this very thing. When had not barbarians, uncivilized men, primitives, and so on, been regarded in the mythos of the civilized as great lovers? And he, of all the Messengers, had had no urge to settle down landside, as he had wanted to watch, to observe the Human Race. It made his loyalty to Earth almost incidental, but still he had outlasted all other Messengers.

The few who expected him to show surprise at the new order of things were surprised in turn when he didn't. Ten women to one man and Executive women in practically all the official positions. Lockwood did not even sidle companionably up to the few men in the Reception Party. He took people strictly as they came, their speeches (he made no reply) the Reception Party, all of them.

They put him on tri-vid, and the programme had the biggest audience recorded in over a century. The Producer thought it a flop, but millions of women carried away with them the vision, to them, of a Man. And hundreds of thousands of men took heart, as Lockwood would not be bullied into betraying his integrity. It was plain to all the viewers that the whole show, all the gorgeous women, rotated around Lockwood, and that he did and said what he wanted to, no more, no less.

Many also watched the meeting with the Executive Council. Twenty women and two old men. They got around to the main business gently. First Lockwood was called upon to report on the Colony Planets. He did, laconically, but no one paid much attention to his words. Then the Minister for Earth Affairs, a woman, raised the question of Lockwood's estate, delicately suggesting that the trust be ended

and replaced by a stipend when he was on Earth.

Lockwood grinned. "Surely you realise that the present arrangement is the only certain tie I have with Earth? If you want me, the trust stands." Then, in very hard tones, "Even if you don't want me, the trust stands, and only ends after a two thousand-year absence on my part. The original

contract is still quite valid."

Intransigence. "Well then," suggested the Minister, checkmated on her first proposal and recognizing it, "if it stands it should be administered efficiently and correctly."

"There is no problem there," Lockwood remarked.

"I mean," said the Minister, "that you should have the benefit of a woman, an Executive, as Manager instead of a man."

"Benefit?" Lockwood asked coolly, his dark eyebrows rising. Satisfied with her outraged gasp, he added "I've already had a quick look into my business affairs—and don't forget that in my time I was a highly successful businessman—and am pleased to state that the present Manager has everything at his fingertips. And he has proposed to me an excellent plan for future investments and expenditures which I have endorsed. Now—" in the silence which his statement had caused "—let's really get down to business. All this about my trust is eyewash, and you know it. You really want to talk about allocation of newly discovered planets. Right—who's first?"

The following, horrible silence was broken by one of the old men. His chuckles were like the rasp of coarse sandpaper on the dry hide of a pumpkin. Then twenty women started shouting at once, Lockwood sat back, smiling faintly, his

eyes half closed.

There is no public record of the row that followed, as the Central Tri-Vid Executive turned the programme off, thereby earning herself promotion. But there were rumours, fascinating rumours, that swept Earth like a gale. Of traded insults, of threats, even (whisper this) of Lockwood slapping the face of a Minister. The excitement became intense. Colour pictures of Lockwood, showing in 3-D his dark hair and odd, pale blue eyes, were sold surreptitiously by the million. In male dens they were displayed openly, the current hero, and in female boudoirs they were hidden under pillows, and many millions, mostly women, realised that this particular male was their Employer, and that his Manager, also a man, controlled for him their lives and, incidentally, about a quarter of the Earth's wealth. And they didn't mind at all.

"You" said Lockwood "are a clot."

The Manager of his trust cowered.

"You don't seem to realise that you have a first-class business brain."

"Me? Oh no, Lockwood, I-"

"I know damn well that you let the women run things until I was in the offing. When you realised that, my man, you learned your job in record time. No woman could have done what you did. And on top of that you thought up some excellent proposals for the future that satisfy me, a man too. Get?"

The Minister for Colony Planets made a half-hearted pass at Lockwood, but it was rather like a hungry bunny trying to frighten an anaconda. Lockwood took her Assistant (Personal) to the South Seas instead, to see if he wanted a woman yet. He didn't, and the trip was quite unsuccessful from that viewpoint. But the girl lived in a dreamy daze and when she got back found herself actually courted by no less than five men. If Lockwood picked her, well! She married the youngest.

The Council tried to stop Lockwood going off again, but gave it up as a bad job. He hadn't detoured to Torsi on his

way back for nothing.

The Torsi had founded their civilization on personal privacy; no one on Torsi queried another's business. Paradoxically an advanced industrialization was allied to the privacy phobia. Lockwood had given them the two new planets for those two reasons; they could build the ships to colonise the planets, and he liked their stress on privacy.

So on Torsi he had had certain things made, at no charge from a grateful people and of course no questions, that guarded his ship against interference. And another little device, not yet invented, which gave him personal immunity. Both he had assembled and installed himself, for Lockwood was a

stickler for the rules.

The next trip was his longest. He visited most of the Colony Planets he had ever called at, and then made his deepest voyage into the unknown, stopping here and there to note and beacon suitable new planets. 1,732 years had passed on Earth before he returned.

Few people met him, but many robots—in all shapes and sizes and of many separate functions. Lockwood took no notice of the latter, and walked straight up to the first man in sight.

"It's all right to service the ship, but robots only," he said

tersely.

"Good," the man replied, "and it is good to see you back after so many years Lockwood. These—" casually waving a

hand behind him "-are mine."

Lockwood examined the four women: they did not appear subservient, not independent, but just reasonable. And they looked good—and belonging to the man. Then he considered the man's careful, precise speech.

"Then they can't understand us?"

"No, Lockwood—you are quick! There has been a major

language shift since you last, ah, called."

"I expected something like it to occur. Civilization was at a change point when I left. Then you must have had to learn my speech?"

"Oh, yes. I hold the position of Messenger Liaison Officer, whatever that means. The job is now several centuries old. I have to learn many of the old languages, but

yours is easy as I have a wealth of material to draw on. Of course the younger Messengers, who joined up in the shift period, are the most difficult. Well, let's go."

" Right."

As they walked off the field, the man murmured, quietly, "There is one other who, of course, must speak your language"

"My business manager?"

"You might call him that, titles change, but he is much more." The man frowned to himself.

"It is difficult to express?" Lockwood asked sympatheti-

cally.

"Yes. You see his present title, translated, is 'Correlator '." Lockwood sensed that he wanted to say much more.

"Hmm. I should imagine that he wants to see me rather

badly?"

"How did you guess?"

"I didn't. I extrapolated. Probably he is a pivotal man in your culture, and has taken on my affairs out of, shall we say, historical interest?"

"Well, yes, but not quite."

"This language is inadequate, huh?"

"In a way, but my command of it is insufficient. There are concepts-"

"Never mind. But it's a pity that we don't share the present

one."

Lockwood was flown across Earth in a purely automatic device that flew low and slow when he asked. The surface, or rather Man's artifacts on it, had undergone a radical change and, even allowing for over 1,700 years of development, Lockwood was impressed. No cities. No surface transport. No deserts. Just vast stretches of parkland, interspersed with small villages or, more commonly, individual houses. No large ports either, or big ships, only small yachts.

He estimated world population at about only ten millions. A group of buildings, low, scattered, submerged into the landscape. Capability Brown, mused Lockwood, wouldn't have a look in here, as he followed the lissom girl who had met him at the device when it landed. Even so, he was conscious of the intense, automatic mechanization, hidden, which made all this possible and allowed Nature to flower untrammelled. Then he turned his attention to the girl, considering her. They could not converse, but he knew she

found him attractive. Wisps of telepathy, or of empathy, hung around her thoughts. To Lockwood's intense surprise and consternation, he realised that he found her equally so. The emotion surged through him, novel, and almost blinding in its assault. No, no, not yet, cried a little voice inside him, and the emotion was quickly hidden away. Well, thought Lockwood, well I never! And he hadn't.

A bath, a rest in the soft sunlight, all in the exquisite house, where everything was where it was needed, quiet and flawlessly beautiful, flowing seemingly into the parkland around it. For the first time—in how many years?—Lockwood felt

at peace.

Lockwood?" said a quiet, deep voice behind him. "No

-don't get up. I'll join you if I may?"

"Surely." Lockwood examined the Correlator. Quite a figure of a man. Looked forty, and a very fit forty, but Lockwood guessed that his real age was nearer sixty. Strongly built, but fluid in his movements, and of a patriarchal handsomeness.

"I have been waiting for you, you know."

" Oh?"

"Yes. You'll pardon my launching straight into questions, but I have waited so long."

"Aren't the answers in the records?"

"Records!" the Correlator snorted. "They just create extra questions."

"I'm surprised that they have been kept so long."

"Are you? But that's an unfair question. For a man like vou they have been kept. And kept very well indeed."

Lockwood got up and fixed himself another drink. Really, it was marvellously good; he must get a sample and the brewing instructions.

"This is a-" he started to say, then stopped abruptly.

The Correlator was staring at him fixedly.

"—is something wrong?" he finished lamely.

"I hope not. I sincerely hope not. You are Lockwood, aren't you?"

"Of course. Proof of identity is part of de-briefing. And I checked out kay. Why?" Lockwood felt peeved.

"Sorry-I forgot for the moment. I was surprised."

" Oh. how?"

"You're taller. You see, I examined the records so carefully that I have a detailed picture of you. But you're a good

two inches taller! Why?"

A part of Lockwood, his secret part, gasped. Of course he'd never used the deep-freeze on his trips, but so soon! And he hadn't noticed. Then his feelings for that girl! Why hadn't he noticed? He should have. Careful, Lockwood!

"Am I?" He sounded completely astonished. "Well! Some effect of space travel perhaps? I've done quite a lot."

"Let it pass, please, I was caught unawares. We can go

into it later."

Lockwood's eyes narrowed momentarily; the Human race was too tenacious to dismiss a startling development so easily. He was getting careless.

"Okay," he murmured equably, sitting down again.

They sat awhile in silence, sipping their cool drinks in the warm dusk. Finally the Correlator sighed.

"My name's Habaran. What's yours?"

"Lockwood. Just Habaran?"

"Yes, it is sufficient. But you have initials, I suppose, because multiplicity of names was needed for identification in your crowded era. What do they stand for may I ask? Even the records are incomplete there."

"D. J. So long since I've thought about them. Decimus J."

"J for what?"

"Just J."

"Oh, come, surely-"

"That's what my parents gave me—"
"But you have none—an orphan—"

Lockwood laughed.

"All children born of man had parents, even then, and they gave them names, or initials, soon after birth."

"Ah yes, born of man. But were you?"

Lockwood dropped his glass. "What?" he exclaimed. The glass tinkled into little, shining bits on the paving slabs.

Habaran smiled happily at him. "Get yourself another drink. And don't apologise for the broken glass. Then please listen to me before you say anything more."

"Thanks," Lockwood replied. When he sat down again,

he said "Shoot."

Habaran straightened the crease of his shorts, idly rubbed his bare chest, looked blankly up at the cloud-scattered sky, and began mildly. "Correlators are carefully selected and trained. Naturally. In accordance with a contract centuries old—yours. Some ten centuries ago the question of your wealth was a matter of intense investigation. The political desire was to abrogate it, but even then politicians were of minor account, and when the proposal was examined in detail it was realised that the legal system would also have to be abrogated, and that was quite unacceptable. Then there was the realization that there would also be economic chaos. Direction would have been removed from the conduct of half the world's wealth. For those times, in an astonishing burst of adulthood, it was decided to go along with your contract, although the consequences were understood. But some steps were taken to control the, ah, tiger and to arrive at a, a—" he flicked his fingers "—ah yes, another ancient term, a modus vivendi." Habaran paused, sipped his drink.

"Now, my dear Lockwood, despite the controls, you own the world. Earth is yours. We have been your dutiful servants for many, many years. Funnily enough, it means nothing to you in absolute wealth. And it means nothing to us. The necessity of wages for your workers vanished many years ago. Your dividends could no longer be employed to buy further property as there was none to buy. Instead they were ploughed back into the business. That business was and is the Human race. So the question of wealth became meaningless. You follow?"

"Of course," said Lockwood, discreetly.
"I need not go into further detail?"

" Not really." ...

Habaran looked slightly disconcerted, then relapsed into a

brown study.

"Of course," he murmured finally, "of course. I said that we are carefully trained. We get a mass of figures, facts and impressions, all relevant to your Earth, to assess, with courses of action, conclusions to come to, and so on. A standard assumption is that all information relating to a particular problem can be fitted together. If not, then all the facts aren't available or else some are wrong. The opposite may apply. In the course of one problem I found that I could adequately correlate the information on all Messengers, except you. So I delved deeper. No good. I was left with er tain facts about you, and you only, which were indisputable



"Jiro'osocalla'canssa." Lockwood took a sip of his drink, listening to Habaran's intense attention in the heavy-breathing silence.

"I always knew that Men were persistent, and that sooner or later someone would ferret things out. It was a near go when I became a Messenger, but they were rather ignorant and bound by what they knew. Still, sooner or later-" he stopped.

Please, Lockwood," Habaran burst out, "answer my question! Please! Are you immortal or are you an alien!"

"It would be foolish to do so, my friend. It is impossible to keep a secret, even in a culture such as this, and even with a man like you." He paused, reflectively. "And I think that I should be going soon. Habaran!"
Startled at Lockwood's vehemence, Habaran looked at him.

" Yes?"

Lockwood drew into himself, and then flowed out over the mind that was Habaran's. Something that he had not done, or needed to, for centuries. His ultimate defensive weapon. Quickly he deleted all the 'snags' in the attentive, entrapped mind beside him. He felt tired when it was done.

"Let us go into dinner," Habaran said mildly.

Lockwood left Earth on his last trip a little while later. It had not taken him long to write out certain instructions concerning his 'property,' and to seal them in a multiple timevault that would disgorge one metallic envelope every century The last, a scant five hundred years in the future, contained the reversion of Earth to its inhabitants. He was satisfied that 'his' race was on the bottom rung of the ladder which led to racial adulthood, and that a steady flowering, in contrast to the wild growth of youth, was ahead of it. He might even meet them again when he was old.

He went straight to Torsi, where he handed over his tapes for onward relay. For his ship, he had made sundry bits

and pieces, each odd in its own right.

Then Lockwood-Jiro'osocalla'canssa-left Torsi. He did not take one of the usual outward courses. In space, he spent a few days fitting the new parts, while he mused on a so-far immutable law of intelligent beings. They all produced an Einstein in their frenetic youth, a brain whose indisputable equations kept them from travelling too fast and from going too far when they were still wild. But rules could be broken

—was not the Universe infinite? So all youngsters had to be watched. And who better to watch them than a youngster?

Then he pressed a button, and the ship headed outwards at a speed that was virtually instantaneous relative to the Galaxy which held Earth. Where he was going would take time so, happily, Jiro'osocalla'canssa started to lapse into dormancy.

High time I left, he thought, as the sleepiness came up over him, high time. And other thoughts of Jiro's were slightly smug: I am adolescing sooner than my parents estimated, and soon I shall be twenty feet tall, and already I want a

woman.

His lips quirked faintly at that thought. Some things are universal.

D. D. Stewart

When the ecological stability of a planet is upset, if only by one minor variation in the scheme of living or growing things, one can expect some violent changes in Nature. Including human beings.

## THE TROUBLE WITH HONEY

## by JOHN RACKHAM

The trouble with all pleasant moments is that they must come to an end, sometime. For David Morgan, the end came when the bullet-hole appeared. Before that, for two idyllic hours, he had heard nothing more than the quiet drone of his engine, seen nothing but the azure blue of the sky, the deeper blue of the sea, and the cream of white surf as he came within sight of the dark green jewel of the island. His course was pre-set, even to landing procedure, all on auto-pilot. He had nothing to do but sit back and enjoy life. Then the bullet-hole changed it all.

He had actually been looking, lazily, in that direction, when it came. In front of his eyes had come the sudden round blackness and the spiked-up edges of ruptured plastic, in his port wing-tip. His eyes told him what it was, even as his rational mind rejected the idea, and even while his educated reflexes took over, of themselves, to cancel the auto-pilot, to seize the wheel, to kick the engine into whining overdrive.

A mistake, his mind argued, as the sudden increase in speed shoved him back against the cushions. Who would shoot at a "trouble-shooter"? That gave him a new slant, entirely, on his functional label. He'd never thought of it like that before. Just the same, it had to be a mistake. People didn't shoot at each other, nowadays. While he was framing that not-altogether-convincing argument, there was a sharp thump on the floor by his foot, ghost-fingers twitched the sleeve of his outstretched arm, and another neat round hole grew,

suddenly, in the clear plastex bubble over his head.

That settled the argument, conclusively, although it did nothing for the sudden chill which ran up and along his spine. Almost without thinking, he formed the trigger-phrase "Attack from the ground while air-borne . . . data!" and his educated subconscious took over, at once, through his hands and feet. The little flier fell in a breath-taking dive, pulling out scant feet above the tree-tops, and screaming at full throttle towards the white-painted air-strip ahead. This close to the ground, he felt a little less exposed, less vulnerable than being in midair inside a frail bubble of plastic fuselage.

But the question mark was still there, and something else, too. How had Levermore known? David thought back, swiftly and bitterly, to a scene no more than two and a half hours old, when he had been sent for, by Levermore. He had gone expecting trouble, and prepared to argue. He had a good argument, too. He had just completed a strenuous threemonth assignment in Sector Four, in the sub-tropical zone of this Earth-type planet, complete with Earth-type mosquitoes and old-fashioned sweat. He was entitled to a break, a holiday. But Levermore had disarmed him by beginning with

that very point.

"Ah, Morgan!" he had said. "You're free, now, aren't you? Due for a bit of a rest, eh? Well, I have the very thing for you. They say a change is as good as a rest, and this will be a change. Not your kind of thing, at all, but I have no-one else I can call on, just now. You know how understaffed I am?" This was so true that there could be no question of it. As Chief Executive of Ecological Research on this frontier planet, Oriole, Levermore had a thousand and one details to worry about, only the bare minimum of technical staff, and he suffered from a constitutional inability to delegate responsibility. He had to know all about everything that went on, or he wasn't happy. He wasn't very happy, now. David could recall feeling mildly sorry for this little, balding, fat man, crouched behind a desk, struggling to keep track of an infinite stream of complications.

"It's like this," Levermore had said, pushing back in his chair. "You know that I need data. I must have it. The life-blood of this office is milked out of data. Reports, communications, facts, figures, details. I must have them. They are absolutely essential. And, from Sector Seven, I am not getting them. In five long weeks, not one word, a sound, nothing!" David knew Sector Seven very well. In response to the term, the facts and figures rolled up into his mind.

An island over to the north-east—called itself "Erin" because the resident controller was an Irishman, called Dooley, and the island reminded him of his ancestral land—one hundred small-holder farming units, each with its own forty-acre plot hewn out of virgin woodland. On trial, various wheat strains and varieties; climate, gentle and mild; no predators, apart from a rodent not unlike a rabbit. The island shaped roughly like a figure eight, or the torso of a buxom woman, whichever way you preferred; a small field-laboratory at the south tip, and, in the laboratory, one Mara Muldoon. Here, David's recalls became a trifle blurred, as Mara Muldoon was, in herself, the essence of everything meant by the term "Irish colleen," plus a few centuries of progress and improvement. He had come out of his warm haze to catch Levermore's bitter words.

"That dammed bog-trotting Mick! He ought to know, by now, that I have to have regular reports. I've told him, often enough. But there it is. Ever since they decided to set up as a legal community, with him as Mayor, he's been so full of himself . . . ."

"Mayor?" David said, in mild disbelief. "A community?

What has that got to do with ecological research?"

"You may well ask," Levermore groaned, "but it's not important. They have little enough to do. If it amuses them to play politics, all right. But I must have those reports. I have estimates to prepare, demands to be made, for seeds, supplies, storage space, all the rest of it." He laid his hands on the desk. "If you take a flier, you can be there before noon. Present my compliments to Mayor Dooley, damn him, and ask him if he would kindly take enough time off from affairs of state to let me have his reports for the last five weeks. All right?"

David had thought about it, at it, round it, through it, and even under it, and he had been unable to find anything wrong with it, at all. Quite the reverse. Just to be sure, though, he

had asked.

"You don't suppose there's some sort of trouble there, do

you? '

"Now what sort of trouble could there be?" Levermore had retorted, in indignant pain. "There's a hundred bone-idle farming families, with nothing to do but watch the wheat growing, nothing bigger than a rabbit to be afraid of, and the finest climate on the whole blessed planet. Wrong? I expect it's nothing more than a breakdown in their main transmitter,

and you can fix that, can't you?"

David could. He could do anything in that line. It was his peculiar gift that he had the type of subconscious mind that lends itself to retentivity and compartmentation. In effect, he was a walking reference-file and advisory system. A multipurpose robot, he often called himself, humorously. All the information he carried was filed away where it bothered him not the least, until he pushed the appropriate button, in his mind. On the surface, he was six-foot two and two hundred pounds of easy-going, mild-mannered cheerfulness, browntanned from a lifetime spent in the open-air.

Now, though, his tan was tinged with grey, and he felt anything but cheerful. Glancing again at the bullet-hole, he wondered once more—how had Levermore known? How was it that whenever he was sent out on a job, it always turned out to be something wildly fantastic, like this. Bullet-holes! There could be a minor war going on here, for all he

knew.

The flier bounced down on its sprung undercarriage. He cut the engine. The silence made him feel naked. What now? He tried his radio. Nothing. Not even a carrier-wave. He couldn't just sit there. But what else? The nearest buildings were an uncomfortably long way off. The intervening concrete was horribly bare and open. With no data, he had no buttons to push. He couldn't think of a thing.

The low, distant growl of a motor interrupted his quandary. He peered into the bright sunlight, to see a green-painted air-sled skim out of the shadow between two store-houses and come gliding towards him. Staring, he doubted his eyes as he saw, across the blunt prow of the sled, the crudely daubed word 'POLICE' in red. Then he noticed that on either side the driving seat had been slung, hastily and askew, sheets of metal plate. Dents and bright streaks on those plates

told their own story. Someone else had been shot at, had been expecting to be shot at. The sled slid close, sighed to a stop.

"Can ye hear me, plain, whoever it is?" a hoarse voice

demanded.

"Muldoon!" David shouted, recognising the voice. "What

the blazes is going on here?"

"Is it yourself, David Morgan? That's good. Listen now. Will you turn round your machine, fly back to Levermore himself, right away, and tell him to send us some help."

"Help? What kind of help?"

"Why, soldiers, to be sure. The military!"

David blinked. Information came uselessly to his mind, and tongue. "The nearest unit of combat forces is three and a half light-years away, on Glandar. But, what the hell—what's

the trouble?"

"It's armed revolt, so it is. The farmers have taken up arms against us—that's meself and Mayor Dooley. Five weeks ago, it started. He said to me, Muldoon, he said, this will bring trouble, for sure. I hereby appoint you as Chief of Police, and will you be rounding up a body of men, to stand by. So I did, but they all deserted, every last one of them, as soon as the warning was sent out. The blackguards."

David put a finger in his ear, waggled it. He put out a hand to touch his control panel, his canopy. All felt real and solid. No dream. It was all true. But it didn't make sense.

Catching up a word at random, he asked, "Warning?

What warning? "

"The radio-message, from the field-station. From my own Mara, herself. A general warning, she said. Nobody is to touch any more of the honey until further notice, by order from Doctor Hunter. That's the scientist fella, her boss. And that's what set it all off, ye see. Sure, wasn't everybody listening, on the general wave-length, and them having nothing else to do?" David wrestled with this, unhappily. Parts of it sounded rational. Hunter he knew, as a little, grey-haired, absent-minded biological chemist. The dizzy-making Mara was his assistant. Straightforward, even rather pleasant, up to there. But 'honey'? And orders not to touch?

"I haven't the foggiest idea what you're talking about," he said, flatly. "And I'm not going back to Levermore until

I find out." He eyed the bullet-holes again. "I've been shot

at!" he said, still hardly able to credit it.

"We all have," Muldoon told him. "Pay no attention to it. Just hints, they are. Them fellas can shoot the whiskers off a gnat, if they've a mind to, with all the time in the world for practising."

"Any of 'them fellas' likely to be watching us, now?"
David demanded, well aware of the thinness of the plastic

which shielded him.

"It's hardly likely," Muldoon sounded none too certain. "Haven't they the holdings to keep an eye on, and them frightened to miss so much as a lick of the honey, the divils." David sighed. There was that word 'honey' again.

"It's no use," he said, sadly, "I shall have to see Dooley. I can't make head nor tail out of what you're saying. Get your

door ready, I'm coming across."

As he scrambled into the sled, Muldoon, his bright red bristles on end with anxiety, slewed the sled round and sent it skimming back whence it had come. Settling into the hot darkness, David eyed Muldoon. "Why the dickens hasn't this been reported?" he demanded. "Levermore is furious. Is there something wrong with your big transmitter?" "Somebody put a shot into it," Muldoon said, briefly,

"Somebody put a shot into it," Muldoon said, briefly, and we had a wee bit of a note to say that the next one would be in one av-us, if we went trying to repair it. So it's

busted, and likely to stay like that, for a bit."

"But you still have the short-range network?"

"For all the good it is, we do. It's like talking to yourself, with not one of them obliging enough to answer." Muldoon brought the sled to a stop in the cool dimness of the weighing-pound, right under the Sector-office, and they scrambled out, safely shielded by thick concrete walls. They found Dooley, grim and unyielding, all alone in his big office. David cast an enquiring glance at the many empty desks and the idle machinery. Dooley grunted.

"A fine staff I have. Part-time workers, they were, and glad enough to do it, willing to make a bit of extra money, on the side, until they got the taste for the honey. Damn them

bees, so."

Buttons were pushing themselves in David's mind, now, whether he wanted it or not. Nothing analogous to bees had yet been found on Oriole, so far as he knew. Nor was there

anything equivalent to honey. It was the one major blot on the otherwise desirable report on the planet. No sugar. For some reason, the soil was reluctant to support any kind of sugar-producing plant. Canes, of a kind, had been persuaded to grow, feebly, in certain tropical areas. Their syrup was violently toxic. Beets flatly refused to grow at all. The chemists were working on it, but not with much hope.

"Is it real honey? he asked, and Dooley growled.

"One lick, that's as much as I've had, so. Them damned farmers guard it as if it was holy juice."

"You haven't been able to-produce-any for yourself,

then?

"Isn't that the whole blasted trouble, then?" Dooley roared. "It was their own idea that we should organise ourselves into a community, with meself as Mayor and with a staff, so as to take the paper-work off their backs. They would put me in charge, they said, to advise and help, and tell them what to do. That would be better than me sitting back in an office and just passing on their reports and findings. We would all work together, they said. Grand, it was, or it was going to be, until they had the first taste of authority from me, along with the first lick of honey. I gave an order. Leave the honey alone, I said, until we get a report on it from Doctor Hunter."

" And they refused?"

"They took a shot at me, the blackguards!" He waved a hand to indicate a punctured window. "Then they busted the big radio, so that I couldn't call for help. I tried talking to them on the communal network, and I know they can hear me. But never a word. It's a revolution, so it is. As the duly constituted authority on Erin, I'm requesting you to carry my message to Levermore, asking for military assistance. What else can I do?"

"I doubt if Levermore would take a very keen view of that," David frowned. "Apart from the fact that he hasn't any reinforcements to call, and the nearest 'heavy' squad is all of three weeks away. if not more. He would be sure to say that you haven't handled the thing in the right way."

"Anyway," Muldoon put in, gloomily, "it wouldn't work. They shot at him on his way in. They'd never let him get

back, that's certain."

That aspect of it hadn't occurred to David, until Muldoon said it, and it struck him as highly unpleasant. He had no fancy to die a martyr in a cause he knew nothing about. Or

any other cause, for that matter.

"That's settled, then." Dooley sagged back in his chair with a grim satisfaction. "It's a revolution, sure enough. I'm the Mayor. You, Muldoon, are the Chief of Police, and you David Morgan, are the representative of outside authority, an ambassador. And here we are, outnumbered and surrounded, but we won't surrender. I'll just tell them rascals, so I will, what they're up against."

"That will be enough of that," David said, loudly, shedding something of his easy-going manner. "There must be a solution to this mess, but we're not likely to find it without information. I want to know a lot more about this 'honey' you keep mentioning. Surely Doctor Hunter must know

more, by now?"

"And if he does?" Dooley demanded. "Go on, call him, on the radio, it's right there. Call him, and you'll have every damned farmer on the island with his ears flapping, listening to every blessed word." David paused in the act of stepping to the radio, and thought, hard. Data he had to have. Hunter would be the likeliest person to give it. But not this way, with the 'enemy' listening in. There was only one sensible way, and his mind buzzed round it a long time before he could persuade his tongue to frame it.

"All right," he said. "We'll go and see Hunter. In person!" He met instant opposition from the other two. Dooley sat

back.

"Not me," he said, flatly. "Nor Muldoon. We are the duly constituted authority and law and order on this island. We

stand by our posts."

In a breath, David shed the last traces of his easy manner. Buttons labelled 'Emergency' 'Armed revolt' and 'Martial law' were flooding his mind with information and instructions.

"As the duly constituted authority," he said, with a bite in his tone, "if you will have it that way, you're responsible. I'm going to hold you responsible, too. I'm going to see Doctor Hunter. On what I get from him, I'm going to take whatever action I think may be necessary. You'd better be there to back me up, or I might have to deliver you back to Levermore, tied hand and foot."

At the back of his mind, itchingly, was the thought of riding that air-sled across a hundred miles of rough, wooded wilderness, with a rifle behind every tree. The thought made him tense, and sharp. Dooley looked his surprise at this new David, tried a defiant bluster, and gave in.

"Ah, all right," he said. "Sure and I'll come with ye, lad. I've me authority to uphold, after all. Come on now,

Muldoon. We'll show the blackguards."

Fifteen minutes later, and clear of the settlement without a shot fired, David began to feel a little easier. Perhaps there was some huge mistake here, after all. Who, he reasoned, would go to such lengths for the sake of a bit of honey, anyway? The sled skimmed over a shallow rise and down a long lane of a track, bordered on either side with high-standing wheat, glowing golden in the sunlight. Muldoon had his eye firmly fixed on the road ahead, anxiously alert for possible danger, but David was casting the eye of expert knowledge on the waving grain-stalks.

"That's strain 5-C, surely?" he queried. "I thought that had been written off as a loss, because of the hand-pollination

needed."

"Sure, but isn't all that changed," Dooley pointed out, "now that the bees have come? Isn't that what all the trouble is about? It was like this. Each holding has its own set of grain-types to try, but all the holdings had to try a small planting of pollinatings types, just to see what the yield would be, in the hope that maybe the native insects would take a fancy to them, and help out."

David understood that part, well enough, recalling the difficulties that had been experienced with other crops. Oriole boasted only a few native insects, and none of them seemed to care for Earth-type flora, or the nectar they produced. Presumably, the juices from them were as toxic to the insects as

they were to the humans. Except these 'bees.'

"And you can see the difference," Muldoon pointed out.
"We don't know what the yield is, to be sure, because we've never had any in, to weigh, but you can see it must be tremendous."

"Slow down a bit, will you," Dooley suggested. "It looks safe, here." Muldoon pulled the sled to a halt, unwillingly.

"'Tis the M'Coy holding, Dooley, and him with four grown sons all fast with the trigger. It's no place for a natural history lesson."

"Be easy," Dooley advised. "Come on, David, and I'll show you."

David followed the Mayor out into the sunshine and between the tall lanes of wheat, trying to ignore the itching sensations in the small of his back. "There, d'ye see that, now?" Dooley whispered, and David saw a fat, furry, buzzing thing, with black and yellow stripes. It was easily as big as his thumb, whereas the biggest known insect on Oriole, hitherto, was mosquito-size. This was new. He watched, forgetting his fears for the moment. Furry-stripes hovered a moment, then settled on a stalk, clung tightly, and shivered. Fascinatedly, he saw it disgorge a round blob of stuff, sticky purple, almost as big as a grape, stick it to the stem, and then take off, to buzz away.

"That's the honey," Dooley whispered. "Grab it, quick, and come on, before the shooting starts up!" Dooley took the sticky lump in his fingers, and followed Dooley as he scuttled back to the sled. Muldoon was watching for them,

strain-faced.

"Will ye come on, now?" he implored, and the sudden 'pow' and scream of a ricocheting bullet added point to his urging. The sled leaped into speed. From a slit in the rear, David saw a tiny figure, far down the track, waving a furious arm. Then it knelt, there was a quick puff of smoke, and another clanging shock on the sled. Then they were round a bend in the track, into wooded silence. David looked at the purple blob in his hand, and felt awe.

"What do I do with it?" he asked, and Dooley showed him. Unashamedly, he seized David's wrist, held it, and lowered his head, to lick. So, heedless of hygiene, did David.

And then he knew.

It was sweet, at first, dissolving and spreading over his tongue, making his mouth water. Then he swallowed, and a warm fire burst into life in his throat and streamed down into his inside, sending needles of excitement right out to his toes and finger-tips. Of a sudden, he felt like ten men, all of them bursting with life. He sucked in a deep breath, with a whoop of excitement all ready to let fly. His built-in intelligence was almost too late. The shrewd foresight that had prepared him a cut-off for 'intoxication' just saved him. With a wrench, his conscious control severed itself from his primitive reactions, and he was able to observe and analyse the riot of

excitement and stimulation which was flowing in his veins, as if from a distance. And all that from just a small taste.

He shot a side-glance at Dooley, saw him snuggled in a corner, his face twitching, eyes staring, breathing heavily, taking not the slightest notice of the heave and rock of the sled as Muldoon put it full out along the rough track. He was obviously lost in the grip of the strange euphoria.

"Have you tried it?" David leaned forward, and Muldoon

didn't bother to look round.

"Not me," he muttered. "I've seen what it can do, and that's enough. I was raised teetotal, thanks be. 'Tis my belief there's a divil in the stuff."

It wasn't far from the truth, David thought, as he stared at the blob of psychic dynamite in his palm. Like all the saccharides so far, it was toxic, but in a different and deadly way. Small wonder the farmers were unwilling to give up the stuff. With a kick like that, it could get hold of man very quickly. Dooley stirred suddenly, sat up and swelled his chest, bristling.

"It's the grand stuff, so it is," he sighed. "With a spoonful of that in him, sure a man could face the world and spit in its eye. Ah, the greedy divils, keeping it all to themselves.

Give us another lick, David."

"No fear!" David clenched his fist, moved it out of reach. "I want to hear what Doctor Hunter has to say, first. It

might be poisonous."

"It would be a fine way to die, at that," Dooley argued, "and I've yet to hear of anybody even being sick from it . ." but David clung to his prize. The sled purred on, in and out of the patches of golden cultivation, and every field they passed was big and yellow with the '5-C' grain. The news must have travelled fast, and they'd all hurried to favour this rewarding harvest. You couldn't very well blame them, he thought, but his face was grim as he guessed at the possible results. If this stuff was toxic, in some way, then these farmers had to be made to leave it alone and to take steps to get rid of the bees. But how? David punched all the buttons he could think of, for data on intoxication, addiction, prohibition—and his information was uniformly depressing.

In cold, hard fact, there was no known effective way of stopping people looking for, and finding, the easy way to

ataraxia, the short path to happiness. There was even less chance of preventing them from taking that path, when found. He squeezed the sticky lump in his palm, and shivered as he realised that he held the fortune and future of a whole planet, right there in his hand.

"We'll be within sight of the field-laboratory, in five minutes," Muldoon warned, "for all the good that will do

us."

David leaned forward to look over his shoulder. They were running out of a wooded defile. Ahead lay a flat open space, three-quarters ringed with untouched scrub-land. Beyond that, as he could hear, lay the sea. But, between the sled and the low fence which ringed the laboratory building, there was immediate trouble. Three check-shirted, khaki-trousered figures broke and ran for cover as the sled shot out into the open. Seconds later, the hot interior of the sled gonged like a bell gone mad, as a rain of slugs bounced from the steel plates. Muldoon, his head ducked well down, pulled back on the controls so that the sled reared like a horse on its front jets, as it stopped. Then he started slewing round.

"I've had enough, already," he muttered. "Them fellas is only playing. If we don't take the hint, sure they'll put the next shots right through the slit-windows. It wouldn't be any

trouble to them. We're going back!"

"We are not!" David dived forward over the back of the seat, shouldering Muldoon aside. His hands went to the controls, under sudden emergency instructions from his trained subconscious. Knocking off the proximity-auto control, which kept the sled an unvarying six inches above the surface, he boosted the power to maximum, slewed the sled round again. It went up like a rocketing pheasant, swooping and heaving as he juggled the downdrafts, trying to maintain it on an even keel and point it towards the laboratory building at the same time. Muldoon clung to the door-handle in a death grip, and looked down, his face green. He had never seen an air-sled do this before. Nor had any of the others, David thought. With luck, they'd be able to get to the flat top of the building before the enemy could collect its wits enough to start shooting again.

Guessing the correct moment, he slapped the proximityauto into action again, and the sled fell like a stone until the white surface was within a foot. Then the engine screamed into desperate correction-power, and all three of them were squashed to the floor under the groaning weight of decelleration.

"Safe enough, for the moment," David gasped, getting up, "Until somebody thinks to climb a tree. Come on, out of it!" They piled out, found the trap-door in the roof, levered it open, and fell through, hastily, into an indoor plant-room. Seconds later, they were clattering downstairs. David noticed, even in his haste, that he was moving much more violently than usual, that his reflexes were speeded up. Something else he had learned about the effects of the honey. If only Doctor Hunter could fill in the rest of it.

"I am pleased to see you, of course, Morgan," Hunter nodded, but with a hint of surprise at the sight of the other two. "This is a peculiar situation, to say the least. But I don't see where it need concern Mr. Dooley, or Mr. Muldoon? "

"Is the honey poisonous?" David demanded.

"Not a bit. It isn't toxic at all, in the usual way." Hunter wiped his hands carefully on a piece of tissue, and indicated a small jar. "I have managed to acquire a sample, and have run tests on it, using myself as a subject . . .'

"How can you say it isn't toxic? What about that tremendous lift it gives, the euphoria? Isn't that dangerous?"

"You've tried it, I see. No, it isn't dangerous, in the normal sense. In fact, although I have no idea how, or what this substance is, yet—all it does is to suppress the fatigue and depletion-warning centres of the brain and body."
"Ye mean . . ." Dooley said, slowly, " . . .that it just

stops a man from feeling tired. Is that all?"

"In effect, yes." Hunter smiled. "It shuts off the warnings. Hence the uplift, the total freedom from inhibitions. You see, the question of . . ."

"And you mean to tell me that that," Dooley was indignant, at once, "that was the only reason you sent out that

bit of a warning. That . . ."

"Just a minute," David chipped in, firmly. "Hunter, if I understand you correctly, this stuff is deadly. Man, you may not feel tired, or exhausted, or hungry, but those things are more than just feelings. You have to pay the piper, sometime, surely?"

"Oh yes, of course," Hunter turned to a notebook, tapped it. "I have full records, here, of my own performances. For instance, on a dose of three ounces, I kept going for almost four days. I never felt better in my life. I never had to stop. or sleep, not even to sit down. Had no desire to. But for the two days following, I was as weak as a child, shaky, halfstarved and stupid. Mara had to care for me like an invalid -which, in fact, I was."

"Mara!" David snatched at the name, "Where is she?"

"Out in the woods, somewhere," Hunter said, casually. "Been gone some time, too. She should be back any time now."

"How long has she been gone?" David demanded, and Hunter scratched his head, thoughtfully, striving to recall.

"I'm not sure," he confessed, at last. "Three days. Four maybe? "

"Three or four days?" David roared, and Hunter frowned

at him mildly.

"She'll be quite all right, you know. She spends a lot of time in the woods, collecting specimens, observing things. As a matter of fact, she is on the track of the original wild version of the very insects which are causing all this problem. The so-called bees. Studying their life-cycle, you know. That's very important, if we are to get a lead on how they produce this odd syrup."

He sounded very enthusiastic, and David restrained the impulse to hit him. The act of clenching his fist recalled the sticky blob, and he looked about for something to wipe

his hand on. Hunter saw, and pounced.
"The very thing," he said. "You have one of the deposits, there. Come, I will show you what I mean. Just hold your hand, so . . ." he siphoned up a little water, dissolved the sticky mess and guided it into a jar, carefully, leaving in David's palm a small white ball, about the size of a pea.

"Watch," he said, taking it delicately, and cracking it. Inside were a cluster of tiny white grains. "Now, what would

you say they were?"

"Eggs, I should guess," David said, impatiently. "Seems

obvious.'

"Obvious, yes. The whole thing is some sort of eggdepositor, with a ready-made food-supply for the emergent young. But I have been completely unable to get them to hatch out, despite many attempts. Quite obviously they do hatch, in some way, else there wouldn't be so many bees about. So there is something we do not yet know. That's why Mara is out there, observing."

"It's all very fine, to be sure," Muldoon put in. "But three or four days, and her nothing but a girleen, among all them damned murdering farmers!"

"Murdering?" Hunter stared. "What can you mean? Surely, as Chief of Police, you wouldn't allow that kind of

thing?"

"Doctor Hunter," Dooley had a sudden air of deflated weariness, and David guessed it was the wearing-off effect of the honey. "There's meself, and Muldoon, David Morgan, here, you, and Mara—and that's all. The rest of them is raving mad with this bee-spit." Hunter looked stunned.

"You seem to have overlooked," David put in, grimly, "that they wouldn't take any notice of your warning. They like the stuff. They're willing to fight to keep it. We were shot at, on the way here. There's a ring of them, outside, at this moment, ready to use force against anyone who looks like taking their honey away from them. That's why we had to come through the roof." He paused to let it sink in, then

added "Addiction, doctor. Withdrawal symptoms!"

"Good Lord!" Hunter went grey, and groped for a chair.

"I never thought of that angle. But . . ." he forced a brightness to his face, " . . . Mara will be all right, you know. We use a pair of walkie-talkies, for this kind of thing. She has one with her and I have the other, right here. She would be sure to call, if she was in any trouble." David strode to the bench, caught up the instrument, and growled as he looked at it.

"She'd have a fat chance of calling you, on this!" he glared at Hunter. "It's not switched on, you . . ." he

swallowed the words, and pushed the switch.

"You mustn't call her," Hunter began, in distress. "She may be in the act of observing something very delicate. The noise . . ." he stopped, as the set in David's hand began to give out a regular 'peep' 'peep' call signal. David thumbed the reply-button, and listened.

"Glory be," that lovely, unmistakable voice was rich with sarcasm, "are you awake, at last? I've been calling for an hour or more."

"Mara? Are you all right?' David asked. "Where are

you? "

"Sure and I might have known it was you, Morgan the Brain. Who else would park a car on the roof. And how do you propose to get it down from there?"

"The same way I got it up," he snapped. "Are you all

right?"

"That's all according to which way you look at it. I'm not hurt, if that's what you're worried about, apart from a few scratches. Is Doctor Hunter there? Will you tell him I have the information he wants, all checked."

"Why don't you come back in and tell him yourself?"

"Because there are things in the way. Two-legged things, with rifles. From where I am, I can see two of the Johnson boys, and old man Harker and his daughter. And one or two more. I'd say they're guarding the place. By the looks of them, I doubt if they'd take kindly to me trying to get back in, just now."

"Good Lord!" said Hunter, again. "But they wouldn't

shoot at her, surely, would they?

"I wouldn't care to bet on it," David said, grimly. "We shall have to work out some sort of distraction, to draw their fire, somehow. You sit tight, Mara, and don't take any chances. I'll figure some way out of this, don't worry."

"Don't you take any chances with that trick brain of yours, either," she said, with sweet kindness. "You might do something rash and regret it for the rest of your life." He grinned, despite himself. There was a long-standing feud between himself and the lovely Mara. She made no secret of the fact that she was determined to 'break' his training, to incite him into something 'rash.' So far, he had successfully resisted all her temptations to 'let himself go' just for the hell of it, because he knew, instinctively, that the day he did go down before her allure, she would despise him just as she did all the other males who had fallen slave before her charms. His grin faded as he met the enquiring looks from Hunter, Dooley and Muldoon. There would be precious little help forthcoming from them, he realised.

Digging into his subconscious, he looked round the laboratory for inspiration. The air-sled, on the roof, came to mind. Air-attack. Bombs? Some kind of explosive? He dismissed that line of thought as a last-ditch resort. But gas—or smoke—bombs? That might work. Formulae ran through his mind.

"White phosphorus?" he demanded, of Hunter, and the bio-chemist shook his head. "Titanium tetrachloride? No? Damn it, what the hell have you got?" He scanned the rows of reagents, and another answer clicked. "Ammonium chlo-

ride. That'll do. Hunter, get these two to help. Make up a handful of smoke bombs. Look, I'll show you. Two test-tubes, taped together. Ammonia in one, hydrochloric acid in the other—and we could use a few loaded with ether, too."

Fifteen minutes later, at the controls of the air-sled, he talked to Mara again, getting a bee-line on where she was.

"All right," he said, at last, "I can see the tree you mean. Now, you start climbing it, right away, as high as you can get. I'm going to bring the air-sled over there. Dooley and your father will be chucking out smoke-bombs, to baffle the local opposition. While they're smothering, I'll throw down a line. You grab it. All clear?"

"I get you," she said, "and it's the nearest you'll ever come, David Morgan, to having me on a string, let me tell

you."

"Shut up," he said, "and start climbing, or I might decide

to let go the rope at a bad moment."

He ran the motors up to speed, took a deep breath, and looked at his nervous companions. "Now, all you have to do is hang on, try to spot the enemy, and then pelt them. I'll do the rest. Here we go! "He sent the air-sled straight up into the sunshine, and there was an immediate, far-away chorus of yells. He lined up for the tree, sweating as the sled jiggled and bucked to his juggling. It was never designed for this kind of treatment, and his reflexes were nothing like as fast as the automatic controls which kept it stable when close to the ground.

They were about half way to the target tree before the first puff of smoke announced the vigilance of the watchers. Then the sled jumped and clanged as the bullets found their target.

"Watch the smoke!" David yelled. "And hold on a bit, until I can get to windward of them." He fought the unweildy vehicle, tensing to the clanging shocks of the bullets, and the screams as they bounced off into the sunlight, until it hung, unsteadily, to windward of the attackers. "All right!" he shouted, to the other two. "Start chucking out."

A few minutes later, thick white fumes began to curl, lazily, from the bushes, and the firing died away. He swung round and went for the tree again, going down as low as he dared before tossing out the line, and praying that the looped end wouldn't snag on a branch. It had seemed a simple enough idea, when he'd first thought of it. Now, trying to get the

dangling line close to the branches, it seemed like rank madness. At last, he saw an arm reach out and grab, and the rope went taut. As gently as he could, he lifted up and clear, and went swooping back to the laboratory.

"Pull her up!" he shouted, to his uneasy companions. "I.

can't land on that concrete with her dangling down there."

They struggled, manfully, and got her up to the level of the side of the sled, where she was able to grab and help herself inboard, in a scramble of arms and legs. Shaking her black hair out of her eyes, she gave David that wide, gleaming grin that always made his head swim a little.

"That was doing it the hard way," she said. "If it's all the same to yourself, I'd rather walk, next time." He noticed that she had left the greater part of her cotton shirt down there on the thorns, and that her slacks were in shreds from the knees down, but there was no quenching her valiant spirits. The light in her deep blue eyes was as defiant as ever.

"Next time," he said, turning back to his controls, "you damn well might have to walk, at that. I can't always be around to get you out of trouble."

"Would you hear that?" she appealed to her audience. "As if I made a habit of it. Sure and I've managed to stay out of trouble up to now, haven't I? And not for the want of opportunity, either."
"Ah . . . " he shrugged, and put his mind to the job of

steering the sled safely back to the roof-top. He knew he could never hope to match wits with her, in a straight contest.

"Still . . ." she went on, unable to let the opportunity pass. "We're all right now, so. We have you on our side. You'll think of something."

"That's my job," he muttered, defensively, and she

chuckled.

"And still they stood, and still the wonder grew—that one small head could carry all he knew," she quoted mockingly.
"Deserted Village," he said, instantly. "Oliver Goldsmith.

Where did you dig that up, for Heaven's sake?"

"Damn you, David Morgan," she sighed. "It took me months to find that one. Isn't there anything you haven't got in that trick brain of yours?"

Within minutes, they had landed and hustled back down to the laboratory where Hunter was waiting for her report.

"It's nothing much," she warned. "And I don't see that it's going to help at all, but here it is. The native bee-type is smaller than ours, of course, but it deposits a ball of stuff in the same way, again not so big. The little white specks hatch out into a kind of worm. Going by the look of the business, I'd say that the layer of syrup on the outside is a hindrance, more than anything. Anyway, the worms don't seem to eat

any of it."
"Ah!" Hunter nodded. "That would explain why mine have never hatched. Derived from our wheat strain, that outer layer must be more virulent than that which they are

normally exposed to. But this can only mean . . . "
"That they are a parasite," Mara concluded for him, and nodded. "They aren't eggs of the bee, at all, but of a wormlike parasite of the bee. So, by feeding on our wheat, the bees are able to produce a stronger syrup, which beats the worms, and thus the bees are thriving. They've got the upper hand."

"Wait a bit," David begged, his mind clicking at a furious rate to keep pace with this new twist. "This is an old story, surely. By planting this new strain of wheat, we have interfered with a natural check-and-balance system. If we don't do something about it, we'll have a plague of bees."

"Sure and the only way to do is to cut down the wheat,

then!" Dooley declared, and Muldoon grunted.

"And how will you be getting them crazy farmers to do that now," he demanded, "when they're not taking orders from us, or anyone else, for that matter? Sure, they'd just

laugh in our faces, so they would."

"Wait a bit," David insisted. "There must be an easier way. Mara, just what do these worm parasites do, after they hatch out?" She looked at him with a curious light in her dizzy-making blue eyes, so that he felt weak at the knees.

"Another bright idea from that trick brain of yours?"

"It's my job," he mumbled.

"All right, so it is. But I'll say this, David. If you can come up with a way of solving this awful mess, peacefully for all concerned, then never again will I say so much as a word against your 'trained' mind."

"Oh no!" He was instantly distressed. "Don't say that,

please. I like it when you bite at me the way you do. I don't

know what I'd do if you stopped it. Nobody ever treats me

like that, Mara. I'd miss it.

"What?" She stared at him, wide-eyed. "Have I been needling you, and mocking and slanging you, all this timeand you liking it? Enjoying it? David Morgan! Oh, you make me feel such a fool!"

"You could never be that, Mara, honey," he said, unsteadily. "You . . . "

"Honey!" Dooley said, explosively. "Will you cut out the soft talk, the pair of ye, and get on with the job?" Mara stepped back, and went pink.

"About the worms," she said, hurriedly, "they cling to the wheat-stem—a kind of grass, in the wild—then they crawl down, feed awhile at the roots, then they pupate, and out comes an insect very like a small wasp. It preys on the bees, killing them off, all except the one it saves to plant its eggs in, for the next generation. Is that what you wanted, David?"

"That will suit us just fine," he grinned. "I think we can crack this whole problem, right here and now. It will call for help from all of you, though. Dooley, you're a convicted criminal, and I'm taking you in. Muldoon, you and me together have just overthrown the legal government, and you're the new Mayor" and he went on to explain, in terse sentences, just what he wanted them all to do. It took a while for them to catch on, and then some more time to learn their lines. Then David went to the network radio in Hunter's office.

"Farmers of Erin," he announced, firmly. "I have an important announcement to make. You know who I am. David Morgan, special assistant to Mr. Levermore, the Chief Executive of this planet. You all know what has happened. I came here to interview your elected leader, Mayor Dooley. I should say, your ex-leader. By on-the-spot investigation, I find that Mayor Dooley has been guilty of a gross abuse of authority. By virtue of the authority invested in me, I am hereby deposing him from office . . . " he had to pause as a burst of cheering came back over the open network. When there was a silence of sorts, he went on, "I have consulted with those who sympathise with your point of view, and suggest that you accept as your new mayor, Mr. Muldoon, who will now speak to you."

"My friends," Muldoon began, nervously, "ye've heard Mr. Morgan, and he's quite right. Dooley was all wrong about the honey, sure he was. It's grand stuff. I've not tried it myself, being an abstainer by upbringing, but I'm a liberalminded man. I'm not against it. As a matter of fact, I have Doctor Hunter here, with me, to tell you how to go about increasing the yield of the stuff, so that there'll be more than enough for everybody." There was another burst of confused but jubilant approval from the speaker, and Hunter came diffidently to the mike, to advise the listeners on the best way to get the most of the honey, and free the delicate seed-case inside.

"You must place this, as soon as possible," he advised, "at the root of the grain-stalk, thus allowing the grubs inside to

hatch out . . .

When calm had been restored once more, David took the microphone again, smothering his grin, and adjusting his

voice to appropriate gravity.

"I shall be leaving, at once," he told them, "and I shall be taking Mr. Dooley with me, to answer to Mr. Levermore in person . . . " which would take care of the reports, he thought. "I shall also be taking Miss Muldoon, to give expert evidence. The long-range transmitter will be repaired, and the new administration is asked to keep in close touch with us, as we will be very interested to know what happens—I mean, how things are progressing. You have my word that the new administration will do everything necessary to encourage the production of honey, and, in the case of any difficulty, you are recommended to call headquarters "-he covered the microphone with his hand and turned to Hunter.

"I'll arrange for a full-scale medical unit to be standing by, ready, as soon as you give the word," he said. "It's going to be a bit rough on them, this way, but nobody will get

killed, at any rate."

"I suppose not," Hunter sighed. "I had no idea things would come to this. You will impress on Mr. Levermore that no time must be lost, won't you? The reaction is very fast. As soon as the honey runs out, they'll be dropping like flies, and they are going to be very sick people, indeed."

"I'll see to it. Come on, Dooley. You, too, Mara. I doubt

if anybody is likely to shoot at us, now."

"Just a minute," she said. "Just what would you be wanting from me, when we get back to the mainland, eh?" And he looked at her, seeing the smile that tugged at the corner of her mouth, no matter how she tried to stifle it.

"I think you already know," he said. "Probably better than I do. I don't know whether my 'trick brain' has been trained in that particular spectrum of information, never having had the need to try it. You'll just have to take a gamble on that—do something rash. Care to risk it? "
"Training!" she mocked, blushingly. "Who needs to train, for what comes naturally—" But she was quite wrong.

David had been very thoroughly trained, in everything. And everything, as she found to her delight, was quite a lot.

John Rackham

# THE LITERARY LINE-UP

John Rackham is in the lead position next month with another novelette, "Goodbye, Dr. Gabriel," an android story with a tremendous difference, for Mr. Rackham cleverly builds up the character's thoughts and feelings right from the moment that his consciousness awakens; from birth to maturity in a short time, during which there is a period of blindness when only the android's senses are operating—and how explain colours and objects to a blind person?

Short stories by Mike Davies, D. E. Ellis and Robert Silverberg, and the final closing instalment of John Brunner's fine novel "Put Down This Earth," which, as can be expected,

has a big surprise in it.

# Story ratings for No. 104 were:

1. Venus Plus X (conclusion) Theodore Sturgeon Moon of Delight -- Brian W. Aldiss 2. Gigolo E. C. Tubb 3. 4. The Singing Grasses Mike Davies Star Light, Star Bright 5. Lan Wright Five 6. D. S. Stewart

On an overpopulated world, how feed the masses? Somewhere, somehow, an international organization is peddling "happy dream" drug to the youth of the world. For what purpose?

# PUT DOWN THIS EARTH

# by JOHN BRUNNER

Part Two of Three Parts

## Foreword

With the rapidly increased birthrate after World War Two, governmental administrations break down and the United Nations is called in to form a world government. Specialised departments are set up to handle Food and Agriculture, Health, Fuel and Power, Conservation, Pure Research, but they fight a losing battle, and resentment grows internationally for the lack of luxuries and even necessities.

As overpopulation reaches a critical point the UN Narcotics Division discovers that a new drug craze is sweeping teenage America—a powder called "happy dreams;" injected in the thigh it gives the user glimpses of a fantasy world. The addiction seems to last about a year, after which the victim disappears.

Nicholas Greville, a UN narcotics agent, is taking a sample of "happy dreams" from New York to laboratories in Colorado, when his car breaks down in Kansas and he is stranded in a small town called Isolation. Greville is horrified to find that the drug craze has hit this remote area and informs Dr. Barriman in Sandy Gulch by visiphone. Barriman sends a helicopter to pick up Greville and leaves a field team in Isolation to investigate the drug situation.

At the laboratories Greville meets Dr. Kathy Pascoe of World Health who is using "happy dreams" on monkeys and apes. One ape named Tootsie is in the final stages of the drug and is closely guarded. During the night the cage is found empty

despite electronic alarms.

Anxious to get back to New York in time for his wedding anniversary, Greville telephones his wife Leda. They quarrel and

she threatens to join the "happy dreamers."

Eventually arriving in New York Greville finds that his wife is out and falls asleep worrying about her threat. Hours later he awakes to find her home—and a "happy dreamer." She tells him that while he slept she gave him an injection also—one shot is sufficient to start him on the road to addiction.

#### nine

"Well?" said Leda sharply after a pause, an edge of disappointment on her voice. "Well, aren't you going to act like a good little narcotics agent and turn me in?"

She put her hands on her hips, throwing back her shoulders to raise her bust, and stared down at him almost menacingly.

"Where did you get it?" Greville said wearily. "Who sold

you the stuff?"

Leda laughed mirthlessly, spun on the toes of one foot, and walked humming across to the side of the room to take a cigarette from a box there and light it. "That's my affair!" she said, and chuckled throatily. "Yes, darling! That's literally my affair. I had to celebrate our anniversary with somebody, didn't I? Oh, we laughed ourselves sick thinking about you, stuck out west somewhere. And we laughed a whole lot more to think about you being a narcotics agent."

The turmoil in Greville's mind was dying down. He said in a voice like the lash of a whip, "I suppose it was your boy-

friend's idea to dose me, as well !"

"Not at all." Leda turned, sat back on the edge of the table bearing the cigarette box, and smiled like a beautiful devil. The pale curve of her bottom reflected in the polished surface of the table. "That was my idea. All mine. And you can

do what you like to me for it."

"Give me a cigarette," said Greville. He pulled himself to his feet. Now that he was aware of the stab on his thigh, he could feel it aching just a little, like a prick from a pin.

Leda blinked in surprise. Then she shook her head. "No

-come and get it yourself, damn you !"

Greville didn't attempt to argue. He reached past her as though she didn't exist, took the cigarette, put it to his lips and reached for the table lighter. A puzzled expression crossed Leda's face; she watched him put the flame to the cigarette, watched him put the lighter down again, watched him begin to turn away.

"No!" she said with sudden violence, and seized his shoulder with a hand that trembled. "Look at me! Turn

round and look at me !"

Greville obeyed, his face blank as a statue's. Leda stood up,

panting, and met his eyes with hers.

"Aren't you going to say anything?" she demanded. "Don't you understand what I'm telling you? Look at me! Look at my body! Don't you remember what it felt like to touch this skin?" She snatched his hand with hers, pressed his fingers against her. "Remember now? Do you? Well, he touched me here, and here, and here! He kissed me here! Here! He—"

She broke off, her voice dissolving into a groan, and her lips quivered as she searched his face for signs of a response.

"What are you?" she said at last in a low, shaking voice.

"A human being, or a machine?"

"I'm not a voyeur, at least," said Greville. "What you did in someone else's bedroom doesn't interest me."

"But aren't you jealous?" Leda took a horrified pace back, pressing herself hard against the table behind her. The last

word spiralled up towards a cry of despair.

"Why should I be jealous?" said Greville. His mind was cold and clear now, like a crystal bowl full of pure water. "I might be jealous of what my wife did. But I didn't marry a happy dreamer. I didn't marry a trollop who would give herself to a drug peddler—something lower than an animal on any scale of human values. I don't know you. You're a stranger. What are you doing in my apartment?"

Leda covered her face with her hands and began to utter hysterical, self-pitying sobs. Her cigarette burned between her fingers; the green-dipped lock of her hair brushed across its

glowing tip and sizzled.

"Now look what you've made me do!" she sobbed accusingly, and Greville suddenly found that he wanted to laugh. But he couldn't. No matter how much he wanted to, he couldn't. He waited for her sobbing to stop.

At length she lowered her hands, drew a deep breath, and looked at him pleadingly. "What—" she began, and had to stop, swallow hard, and start again. "What are you going to do?"

Greville shrugged. "One shot doesn't make a habit. Or it

doesn't have to. I'll go in for treatment."

"No!" There was terror in her voice now. "Oh, but—hell, what else could I have expected?" She let her shoulders fall despairingly. "That's always been the way, hasn't it? You've never thought of anyone but yourself. You only married me for my body. You never let me have any fun. You're a stupid, heartless selfish animal!"

"You've got your fun now," said Greville glacially. "And

you're welcome to it."

He stubbed out his cigarette and strode towards the bedroom. "Where are you going?" cried Leda. "Nick!"

Greville dragged on his shirt, picked up his pants, drove his feet into his shoes. "Like I said," he answered eventually. "I'm going down to the department. I'm going to turn myself in for treatment. You can stay here or not, as you like. I don't care. All I care is that your boy-friend is a drug peddler, and with you to lead us to him we stand a good chance of catching up on him."

Dressed, he strode across the room towards the door. He had a vision from the side of his eyes of Leda's face, ghastly, suddenly old, somehow *crumbling*. He almost halted before he actually opened the door. But like a prick from a goad, the little insect-bite stab on his thigh reminded him of what she had done, and he went through the door without a pause.

Its closing behind him cut off the start of a high-pitched wail

of self-pity.

He walked slowly towards the Narcotics Department building, in the humid morning air that seemed to grow hotter by the minute. The events of the past few minutes seemed to have insulated themselves from the rest of his memory, as though a hard vacuum surrounded them. Partly, he did not even yet altogether believe that Leda had dosed him with happy dreams; partly, he had been firming himself over months for this final blowing up of their marriage. Because of both these facts he was not suffering the full pain, but only a kind of ache masked with the analgesia of resignation.

Hasn't she ever grown up? Greville found himself turning the words over in his mind. They fitted. They made sense. At the beginning, that was no obstacle. It helped to make life more amusing. But bit by bit the amusement wore off. And

finally . . .

But how could you be vindictive about her dosing you with happy dreams, when she was probably chuckling gleefully at

her own cleverness when she did it?

Getting her own back. A suitable punishment for the unforgivable crime of not taking her out on her wedding

anniversary.

His train of thought turned aside there. He felt the flow pause, as though reaching a dam formed by the words "dosing you with happy dreams;" in the instant before it found a new forward path, he glanced at his watch and found that it showed seven-thirty. There was no point in getting to the department before work started at eight. He went into a restaurant and had coffee—thin, rather flavourless, but warm and tolerable when sweetened.

So those visions he had had were due to happy dreams. Were happy dreams. Leda's violent outburst had prevented

him from putting things together until now.

He had seen—open plains, woods, a river, grass, trees, animals, fish, rocks, veins of native copper. Someone had seemed to talk to him, explaining something very important. And then . . .

He fumbled for a word, and started with a jerk that spilt hot coffee on the back of his hand. "Varm," he said wonderingly.

" Varm !"

It meant nothing, uttered like that. It was the German pronunciation of warm, meaning the same as in English, and possibly had other meanings in other languages. But it had come to him as the name of a colour: a colour neither red nor blue nor yellow—nor anything else. A different sensation, classifiable as "colour-sensation" because apprehended with

the eyes, but not classifiable as anything in the normal

spectrum.

What colour would infra-red be, if one could see it? Greville thought of the test animals in the cages at the Institute, and of the films recording the heat radiation from their bodies. What colour was that radiation? Not varm; somehow he was sure it wouldn't be varm' It would be infra-red.

It would be fascinating to see it again, to have another . . .

He caught himself with a jerk, and felt sweat prickle on his face again. So that was how the habit could catch hold of happy dreamers! That was a subtler lure than the lure of any other drug he knew of: intellectually provoking, rather than sensually rewarding. How do you explain varm? How do you explain colour to a blind man? Cliche. But like all cliches, a condensation of an essential.

But even setting varm aside, there had been something else appealing in the sight of those woods and plains, that river and those rocks. Was it not that they were empty? Unclaimed?

Virgin ground?

Well, that was a predictable kind of paradise for a UN agent! In a world where making two ears of grain grow where one grew before led as though by a law of nature to five mouths gaping where two gaped before, that was a vision of paradise soundly based on economics.

As common as smoking tobacco in the last century . . .

But Leda couldn't regard it as lightly as smoking, with a load of risk comparable to the danger of lung-cancer—which the development of carcinogen-free tobacco had reduced to a fraction of one per cent. Not unless she had closed her ears to everything he had ever said about happy dreaming. No, she couldn't have failed to know the consequences. And knowing, she had tried to ruin her own life and his.

Was he wrong to have walked out of the apartment and left her? Should he not have stood guard over her until he got an ambulance up from the department, made sure that she went into hospital before she had another chance to dose herself? Maybe she had a year's supply already bought and paid for,

hidden somewhere around the apartment.

No, that would be out of character. Leda wouldn't plan that far ahead. It was plain from her parting words that she had expected him to fly into a panic and save her from herself, and she would have enjoyed seeing him suffer. That was where she had guessed wrong. She no longer had the power to make him suffer. All the suffering she could inflict on him, he had already endured, in Lumberger's office at Isolation, hearing the tinkle of her laugh like glass shattering.

The part of him which would suffer because of what she did was numb now. Probably forever, as though through that prickmark in his thigh an anaesthetic had been injected

directly into it.

And the only thing remaining was to try and follow her to the peddler from whom she had bought her—and his—first dose.

"End," said Greville under his breath. And then he felt the stab in his thigh aching again, reminding him that however important a stage of his life had ended, one infinitely more significant had just begun.

#### ten

Eight o'clock. The third wave of workers was pouring through New York. Like flooded storm-drains the subways, the streets, strained to cope with the surge of more than a million people on the move. Some workers went in at seven, some half an hour later, others again at half-hour intervals until nine-thirty. More than a million workers moved from home to their place of employment in each wave. Soon they would have to cut each wave in half, and plan peaks at quarter-hour intervals instead of half-hours. After that . . .

Greville's mind wandered over that question and others as he made his way to the department, going not to his own desk

on arrival, but making instead for Al Speed's office.

In years, Al was younger than Greville; he had been one of Barriman's pupils when Barriman was lecturing in biochemistry and neurochemistry at Cornell, before he accepted his present post as head of research into the chemistry of addiction at the Institute. Somehow, although Al was a doctor by training and an expert on the therapy of addicts, Greville had never been able to picture him in a hospital ward, or indeed anywhere else except where he found him this morning: seated behind his wide plain tidy desk, his long head under its short light brown hair poised on his long neck, his contact lenses making his blue irises spread across the whites of his eyes.

He hardly looked up as Greville was announced; merely indicated a chair and said, "Morning, Nick. Is it about that

chimpanzee?"

Words balanced on the front edge of Greville's mind went flying as he readjusted his thinking. He sat down, shaking his head; he had almost forgotten the report he had brought in yesterday evening about Tootsie's disappearance.

"No-it's something else, Al," he said stiffly.

some technical information about happy dreams."

Al gave a sad laugh and leaned back. "This chimp seems to have taken most of our knowledge of happy dreams into the wide blue yonder with her. Still, go ahead and I'll see if I can help." He linked his thin fingers behind his head and jutted his elbows out so that his arms made a lozenge-shaped frame for his face.

"What do we know about happy dreamers whose supply is

cut after their very first shot?"

"The very first?" Al echoed musingly. "I can't recall off-hand whether we've studied any addicts caught that early. Two shots, yes; half a dozen, several. Why? What do you want to know particularly?"

"I'm bringing you a one-shot happy dreamer," said Greville. "Interesting," nodded Al. "You're certain it's strictly a one-shot case, are you?"

"Beyond doubt," said Greville, and passed his tongue across dry lips. "It's me, Al."

Hardly any reaction showed on Al's face. The words sank into his mind, were absorbed like water on thirsty soil. Another neutral nod. "How did it happen?" he asked softly. "Is

this a case of extreme devotion to duty?"

Greville gave a mirthless chuckle. "No, it's revenge, Al. I haven't told Lamancha yet, because the-the person who did it isn't a peddler. There's a chance we may get a lead to a peddler through—through this person, though. But before I do anything else, I want to make absolutely double-damned sure I never decide to take a shot of my own accord."

Al let his eyelids fall over his exaggerated blue eyes. "Tell

me the whole story," he requested.

Greville did so, baldly. He was tempted to hide Leda's part in it at first, but he changed his mind; Al was a pretty close friend, close enough to understand. And in any case Al's concern was medical—he dealt with the therapy of addicts and supervision of curative facilities. The tracking down of drug supplies and the arresting of peddlers and addicts was not his

responsibility.

When Greville had finished, Al unclasped his hands and sat forward in his chair. He spoke in a voice of clinical detachment. "Your reaction is pretty typical," he said. "Most happy dreamers tell the same story. The first shot lasts about three to four days; you get vivid dreams the first two nights, a fading one the third night, like a torn sepia movie print following two in full colour. It isn't a habit yet—not after one shot. No withdrawal symptoms of any kind. Just a sort of deadly fascination, like a tantalising, insoluble puzzle, like the sensation of having a name on the tip of one's tongue. A kind of unstoppable frustration, which can only be assuaged by another shot of happy dreams—and after that another, and another."

"But this—this colour varm," said Greville, and spread his

hands helplessly. "That's what I don't understand."

"No one understands the action of happy dreams properly," said Al. "Franz Wald claims to, but—"

"Who did you say?"

"Franz Wald. Do you know him?"

"The man who was fired from the Institute under suspicion

of having turned loose the experimental animals?"

"That's him. He probably didn't do it, but Barriman was convinced that he might have done. I suppose now this chimp has vanished he may change his mind—I hope he does, because with all due respect to Mike Barriman, Franz is capable of far more original work than he'll ever do."

"What does he have to say about happy dreams?"

Al shrugged. "He has this theory, but I'm afraid it's all guesswork, with no solid experimental evidence to back it up. His idea is that our perception of reality depends purely on the chemical composition of our nervous systems, and that the visions you get from drugs are no less 'real' than what you normally see. He's a metaphysician in that respect."

Greville struggled with the words for a moment. At length he shook his head. "That's over my head," he said. "It sounds like something out of one of the classical philosophers."

"I think he was influenced a lot by Kant and Berkeley," Al said off-handedly. "Well, that's a red herring. Nick, you said you wanted to make sure you never took a dose of happy

dreams of your own accord. Do you mean that you want to be insulated against the temptation? Because I can arrange that for you easily enough. Get you a week's sick leave and put you under sedation in the hospital. By the time you come out of sedation, the metabolic processes will have cleared away the compound. You'll only have the memory of the visions you've had so far to bother you."

"That's the easy way," said Greville hesitantly. "And it was roughly what I had in mind. But—well, you say you haven't properly studied any one-shot cases before. Would I be more use to you conscious and under observation? If the tension got to be unbearable afterwards, you could clear my memory

with hypnosis, I guess. Could you?"

Al's thin-lipped mouth compressed, considering, then relaxed. "If you're really willing to do that, Nick, we would be grateful. I can't promise to help you afterwards, with hypnosis or anything else. But we would do our best."

"Then I'm willing," said Greville, and felt a jerk of appre-

hension accompany the words.

Al gave a sudden grin. "Good man." He jerked a notepad across the desk and rapidly jotted down a few sentences. "Do you know what time you got your shot?"

Greville shook his head. "Some time between one and seven a.m., presumably," he said. "I was asleep. I wish I'd

woken up . . ."

Al didn't comment. "Have you any work on hand that you have to clear up before you come into hospital?" he said.

"I guess I'll have to tell Lamancha about—Leda's boy-friend," Greville answered mechanically. "There's an outside chance he may be a peddler, and we so badly need to trap a peddler."

"Yes." Al frowned. "If we had a peddler, instead of just casual addicts... Nick, why have your people never managed to follow even one trail to its ultimate end? Why have you never caught up with a happy dreams peddler?"

"Because all the addicts we've ever investigated have got their supplies casually from other addicts. Maybe there are no peddlers. Maybe the stuff comes into existence by spontaneous generation. We've tried again and again to track down the end of the trail; always, without exception, we've wound up with an advanced addict who disappeared from sight last week or last month." Al sighed. "Okay. Go and see Lamancha, tell him what's happened, and come right back. And you'll go into an observation ward the moment you return."

On Lamancha's desk was an engraved metal plate, long and narrow, which said DIRECTOR OF NARCOTICS INVESTIGATIONS. It was like a caption permanently underlining the man on the other side of the desk.

Theodore Lamancha was a long way apart from Greville, or Al Speed, or Barriman—not in time, because he was Barriman's age, nor in his profession, because he was after all chief of this department. The direction in which he was distant was one of personality and background. He was an old policeman who had come into narcotics investigation when it was mostly still a matter of crime and punishment. His fiendish talent for organisation had kept him ahead of the field when the emphasis shifted first to psychological study, then to the chemistry of addiction and the specific therapy of the addict.

When Lamancha went, of course, the Narcotics Department would cease to have any connection with law enforcement or police action, and come under World Health where it properly belonged, thus completing the progress which had started already, and everyone would breathe a sigh of relief. But till then, Lamancha was Lamancha and this was his department.

Greville wondered whether he kept on at the job because it was all he knew, or for a better reason—because he believed it needed to be done.

"Sit down, Greville," Lamancha grunted. "Speed just called to say you're going into hospital for observation. Nothing serious, I hope?"

"I hope not, director," Greville agreed.

Lamancha grunted. "If this hadn't happened, I was going to send you out to that place in Kansas again—Isolation. The fieldworkers they sent out from the Institute confirmed your report at once; they said the town was crawling with addicts. But people like that are fine for writing up comprehensive reports on the home life of addicts, fine for describing the contributory conditions and suggesting changes—and no damn' good at the real work of tracing peddlers and cutting supplies. That's our kind of job, Greville."

He broke off, searching Greville's face. "Something

wrong?"

"Yes," said Greville stonily. "My wife seems to have taken up with a happy dreams peddler."

Lamancha's face froze, like a granite statue ravaged by time. Greville ploughed on. "You'll understand—I hope you'll understand—why I haven't done anything myself. I'm too nauseated, I guess. But—well, she was in my apartment when I left an hour or so ago. She may be still there. Someone had better trail her when she leaves. See who she goes to visit. I don't know who the guy is. I didn't ask. I couldn't make myself ask."

"You don't have to kill yourself giving me the details," Lamancha said harshly. "All right—you can leave it to me. I—uh—appreciate your putting your duty ahead of your

marriage.

"What marriage?"

Lamancha hesitated. "I thought you put in for absence yesterday because it was your anniversary," he said finally. "Wasn't that right?"

"That's right. Only I was stuck overnight in Colorado, and Leda got tired of waiting for me. That's how it happened."

Lamancha picked up a pencil, which looked like a match in his large bony hand. He made a note on a sheet of paper.

"All right," he said again. "I'll see that the matter gets handled discreetly, Greville. And if it turns out—like it usually does—that she didn't get the stuff off a peddler, but only off another addict, then we'll take her in for treatment and get Speed to see what he can do."

"If she leaves New York," said Greville through a throat that seemed constricted, "I guess we can assume she won't lead

us to the guy. He's probably right near here."

Lamancha nodded. He didn't say anything. After a while, Greville got up and went out.

## eleven

The process was very like being one of Barriman's experimental animals, except that his cage was a tiny isolation ward,

furnished with a bed, a locker and a sink.

They took a sample of his blood and another of his spinal fluid directly he came down to the hospital with Al. While they were at work on the measurement of results, Al fired a string of probing questions at him, using a tape recorder to enable a permanent account of Greville's case to be prepared later. Most of the questions were concerned with the nature of the

colour varm, and left Greville hopelessly frustrated by his own inability to re-visualise it.

When the analyses were finished, the treatment began in earnest.

They pumped out his stomach so that complex organics from the food he had taken recently would not affect their later calculations. His diet for the next few days would consist of flavoured but inert bulk by mouth, and his sugar and vitamin and essential protein requirements intravenously.

When he passed water or defecated, the products went for analysis. There were more blood tests and spinal fluid tests. They examined his retinae, his reflexes, his skin for dermographia, his brain for irregularities of wave-pattern, and all

his internal organs for disturbance of function.

They injected a labelled sample of a compound whose solubility compared with happy dreams into his thigh, and timed its progress towards his extremities and particularly to his head. They checked his personality file from the department record office to see if his IQ or social index had altered since his last annual tests.

And when he slept, he shared his pillow with the leads of a

complex encephalogram recorder.

That night, and the night after, the visions were rich and detailed with colour. Again he saw a virgin world, whose every hill and valley, every rock and stream, was pregnant with promise of riches. And there were still flowers that shone brilliant varm against the banks of the rivers.

But the night after the vision was shabby and dull, as if obscured by drifts of heavy yellow smoke. As Al had said, by comparison with the rich tints of the visions that had gone

before, this one was like a tattered sepia movie print.

There was no varm in the third night's vision.

"How do you feel, Nick?" Al inquired, having finished his probing questions about the nature of the latest of the visions. He kept the microphone of his recorder switched on.

Greville leaned his head in his hands and sighed. "Trapped,"

he said after a while.

"Trapped?"

"Just that. Walled in. Walled in by people and by circumstances. As though I was running in a nightmare—a

kind of Red Queen's Race where the fastest I can run is just enough to keep me in the place where I started."

"Most of us in UN agencies feel that way," commented Al.

"Of course we do. Every time World Health gets another disease licked, that means more work for Food and Agriculture. Every time Food and Agriculture abolishes another pest, that means trouble for Conservation because it upsets the ecology. God, Al! Can you imagine what it would be like to start again, without forgetting all the lessons we've learned the hard way? To sail to a new America and find it waiting to be picked like a ripe apple?"

Al's long face bore a wistful smile. "For pipe-dreams, your

visions are good and alluring, Nick."

"That's right. And they're solid, too. Almost solid enough to catch hold of. But they're as hard as any other kind of

dream to recapture once they're over."

"This helps to explain why happy dreams becomes compulsive even before there are any physical withdrawal symptoms," said Al thoughtfully. "Visions like that must be hard to resist."

"But if it was just a matter of their subject, there would be no trouble," countered Greville. "Look, sometimes when a real disappointment hits you, it hurts a lot less than you expect it to. And when you've been bracing yourself unconsciously for it for a long time. So you're ready to resist it."

"Leda, for example?" suggested Al sympathetically.

"Like with Leda." Greville licked his lips. "Anyway, I've been so conditioned to this treadmill world of ours that I can brace myself against dreams of a brand-new virgin America, or unlimited elbow-room, or untapped resources—we all dream of discoveries that will fix this cranky planet and make it hum along its orbit sweet and true. Only there's varm as well—and that's too much."

"Varm," repeated Al musingly. "The only varm-coloured things you've seen are these flowers, aren't they? Is that because varm is unique to the flowers? Or does varm take the

place of some other colour—blue, for instance?"

Greville closed his eyes and frowned with the strain of recollection. At last he sighed and opened his eyes again. "I can't say!" he said, with a touch of irritation. "I suppose there may be other varm-coloured things—but how many bright red things do you see in nature? Flowers, a few insects,

some not very common minerals, clouds at sunset, and that's about it. As for whether varm takes the place of some other colour—well, I didn't see anything bright red, but how do I know that there aren't bright red flowers around the next bend of the river?"

"You're talking as though the place really exists," cautioned Al. "Don't let the idea get hold of you. If you start regarding a dose of happy dreams as an airline ticket to a brave new

world, you're hooked !"

"Don't worry," said Greville, and sketched a smile. "I don't intend to get hooked."

" Addicts never do."

The truth of the jab made Greville shudder. He switched the

subject quickly. "Al, is there any news of Leda?"

"None so far," said Al, in a tone that suggested he was going to be dogmatic about it. Greville found that he himself didn't really want to talk about Leda It was better to try and forget that she existed, and in forgetting that, to forget as well that she had been responsible for dosing him with happy dreams.

Al was going on talking. "I've been comparing your visions with the rather skimpy case-histories we have on file," he said. "Addicts tend to get less communicative as they progress; still, we have some material. I was trying to find whether anyone else had seen this—this varm."

Greville found himself reaching up to scratch his head, and checked himself with a grunt of annoyance and amusement. Varm! This was like having an itch in his very brain,

shielded by his skull from the relief of scratching!

"When it comes to varm," he said wryly, "I'm like one of the seven blind men confronted with an elephant. I can make noises about this colour. I can isolate it by saying what it isn't; I can define it as a colour rather than a taste, a smell, a noise. But aside from that, it's just a hole in my head."

He broke off. "Has anyone else mentioned it?"

"Not in so many words."

Greville scowled. "Al, let me see your case-histories, would you? Ones in first-person, for choice. And I'd like the happy dreams master file, too, if you can get Lamancha to send it down. Or get it copied for me. I want to find out as much as possible about this stuff, so I know what I'm up against."

"Sure. So you're going to try and fight it out?"

"I'm going to try," Greville agreed.

Al rose to his feet, shutting off his recorder. "I wish you luck, then. I can't do much for you, except have the nurse give you a shot of noetine. That's the natural stuff which happy dreams fouls up in your brain-cells. I doubt if there's much deposited out in your brain yet, so maybe it won't do any good. But for sure it won't do any harm. And after that, Nick, it's all yours."

It was a shock, when the copy of the happy dreams master file arrived together with the other documents he had asked for, to re-discover how little was known about the drug after more

than two years.

The first item in the file was a two-page summary of the physical characteristics of the compound—its crystal structure, its composition, its solubility, biological effects as far as known, taste, smell, appearance and other details. A highly condensed and technical account of its reactions with the constituents of nerve tissue followed, part of a report submitted to the department by Dr. Michel Barriman and Dr. Franz Wald of the UN Research Institute. Greville tried to follow the descriptions given, but he lacked the technical knowledge to interpret the shorthand symbols for various compounds and reactions.

Franz Wald. The man who had been fired under suspicion of releasing the experimental animals. Greville filed the fact in

his mind and turned up the next item.

This was a progress report covering investigations in the Americas. Date of discovery of the first addict, two years and two months ago. Estimated number of addicts at present: Barriman's estimate, in fact, of one quarter of the age group fifteen to twenty-five in most major cities. Price. (That insanely low price!) Source: unknown. Peddlers: unknown. Publicised by example and word of mouth.

Translations of similarly unsatisfactory progress reports from the other continents followed. About the only item Greville found there which he did not previously know was that

two ounces had been seized the other day in Moscow.

He slapped the file shut and turned to the ones from Al's section. He didn't usually get to see these—by the time Al's staff were in a position to report on addicts, Greville's job of finding them was over and done with. He devoured the words greedily.

"Non-habituated addicts," was the clumsy formal title on the first file—a thin one. The contents proved to consist of digests of medical reports clipped to transcripts of interviews with addicts. They were thin and watery; they presented facts

like naked bones, without the flesh to give them life.

"A-HD-8," began a typical example. "Susan Adelaide Peel, f., age 19 yr. 2 mo., coloured. Eleven scars, last two fresh, on left thigh (see att. diagram). Arrested 2/5/032. Slight withdrawal symptoms. Responded favourably to treatment. Announced intention of resuming addiction at earliest possible moment. Committed care-and-attention home, Albany, NY, 1/10/032. Escaped 19/11/032. No further reports."

The transcript with the medical report, condensed from a recorded interview, ran: "I started about a month ago. I got some from a boy I knew in school. I left school end of last summer. I like it because it takes you away from this—city and it's all clean and there's room to move and the air smells like it's been washed. I do it in my room at home. Sure it hurts, a bit, but that's worth it. I don't see why anybody has the right to stop me doing it. No, I won't say who the boy is I got it from (established under hypnosis to be case A-HD-34). No, he's not a peddler, he just gets a bit sometimes and gives it to people who ask him. It always costs two dollars except the first one which costs five. I don't know why. If someone asked me for some, I'd sell it to them. If you hadn't stopped me I'd have gone right on doing it, and when I get out of here I'll do it again."

Greville frowned and turned up case A-HD-34 on the file entitled "Confirmed addicts." This one was much fatter, and had perhaps a hundred items on it. Case A-HD-34 was a white boy of the same age as the girl, with fifty-four scars indicating about five months' addiction. He got his supplies from cases A-HD-107 and A-HD-229. Both those cases were on the file marked "Incurable addicts," and had more than a hundred

scars on their thighs.

Incurable? Greville riffled back to the medical report on A-HD-34, and his lips drew back in a mirthless grin. This boy was still in the Merciful Angels sanatorium, and his prognosis

was bad. Was he curable on that showing?

Incurable—oh, all right. So there might be a faint chance for him. Those who had put up their century were obviously beyond hope. The closing entry on case A-HD-107 said, "Died in Merciful Angels sanatorium." And the other stated baldly, "Escaped; probably resumed addiction."

A few facts energed from his reading of the case-histories. One salient point was that most of them were months old, and many more than a year; this fitted with the realisation that had finally penetrated the Narcotics Department about the beginning of the current year, that there were far too many addicts to treat all of them, or even to arrest them, and that unless the supply of the drug was cut off so that the number ceased to rise, they were chasing their tails. Another point which came out was the common factor in the happy dreams themselves. Room to move. Open spaces. Fresh air.

On one of the scores of case-histories which emphasised the same element, one of the psychologists on Al's staff had made a scornful comment: "Obviously compensation against over-

crowding and scarcities. Of little significance."

After satisfying himself of what Al had said earlier—that there were no references to the impossible colour varm, except oblique statements that could be read half a dozen different ways—Greville came back to this brief dismissal and re-read it.

"I wonder," he said aloud to the air. "I wonder. . . "

It was true on the face of it, when you considered the hopelessly over-populated conurbations of the coasts and the mid-west. But how about those kids in Isolation, Kansas? What was their happy dream—Saturday night in Times Square?

That was a point to check up on.

But the consistency between these case-histories, some of them going on two years old, and his own visions, was remarkable. Especially since most of these addicts were young people, turned in by schoolteachers, parents, neighbourhood policemen They were still being turned in, but half New York would have had to be made a single vast sanatorium to cope with the flood.

The young addicts got caught more frequently than those over—say—twenty-two, living on their own and independent financially. Often, the final dropping out of sight was the first sign of addiction in such a case. Out of sight, into—what? Most likely, a kind of comatose half-world where his identity blurred like mist.

Leafing again through the "Incurable addicts" file, he came across a note in Al's handwriting, which he had previously overlooked. He read it, re-read it, and then stared at it with eyes unfocused, shivering. It ran:

"The number of disappearances presumed due to extreme happy dreams addiction is increasing asymptotically. By

sheer chance, we must sooner or later start to bump into some

of them! Director Lamancha's comments, please."

But there was no trace of Lamancha's reply. Having hunted for it in vain, Greville laid the file down and considered the consequences. Yes, it was logical. You could lose one man in twenty million the way you could lose one raindrop in a thunderstorm. But when you were looking for any one man of a thousand, the odds jumped. And pretty soon it wouldn't just be one of a thousand, but ten thousand, or twenty, or more.

Al was late for his daily visit, Greville found on checking his watch. Impatiently, wanting very much to ask him more about this increase of addicts who vanished, he stared at the door of the ward and wished it would open to admit Al.

After a long wait, it did.

Looking harassed, Al entered, apologised, removed his contact lenses with his little sucker-tube and applied fresh lotion to them before replacing them. His eyes, Greville saw, were red-rimmed and tired.

"I'm sorry, Nick," said Al, blinking to settle the lenses in place. "But I've had trouble. Two of my best men have

disappeared."

"What? Where?"

Al gave a bitter laugh. "Who knows where happy dreamers go?" he said, and spread his hands.

# twelve

Greville halted the questions he had on the tip of his tongue. He stared at Al blankly. "Right in the department?" he said

after a pause.

"Why not?" Al sat down wearily. "There were four hundred and eighty disappearances in New York State last month, and we know that most of those were due to happy dreams addiction. Sheer chance demands that sooner or later we shall be affected."

"Who were the two who vanished? Anyone I know?"

"Clements and Agnew. Brilliant, frustrated as hell, fed up with the treadmill... They were due for their annual medical check next month. A year ago they definitely weren't addicted. It looks almost as though they timed it deliberately."

"How can you be sure they were happy dreamers?

"We searched their apartments. Last night. Found traces of happy dreams in Agnew s bedroom." All passed his hand over his face. "Damnation, Nick! With the increase in the number of disappearances, why in hell can't your section trip over some of them, even if it's too much to ask you actually to trace them?"

Greville let the implied insult slide past him; Al was plainly overwrought. He said calmly, "I saw your note on one of these files, saying the same thing. You asked for Lamancha's

comments. What did he say?"

"Approximately, mind your own damn' business. I pointed out that the number of known disappearances now tops three thousand, and that a little calculation ought to show some area of very high incidence where a random check must by the law of averages turn up at least one of the vanished addicts. But he wouldn't have it."

"It's beginning to look," said Greville, "as though advanced

addicts go the same way as Tootsie the chimpanzee."

"Yeah."

There was a pause. Greville broke it by saying awkwardly, "Al—this thing on the file here by one of your psychologists, dismissing the common element in these happy dreams as simple compensation."

"I remember it. What about it?"

"Have any of the addicts in Isolation been interviewed yet? Because I want to know whether their visions can be dismissed as compensation too. If they're compensating, their visions

ought to be quite different from those of city-dwellers."

"Could be." Al frowned. "So far, I haven't heard much about the situation there. The fieldworkers from the Institute are keeping things warm while we try and find some staff we can send out to help them. There's practically no one we can spare from New York or LA. I was going to send Clements—and he's gone."

"I think Lamancha was going to send me there. Has any-

one from my section gone out?"

" Mischa Poliakoff, I think."

"Him!" Greville snorted. "He couldn't catch fish in a barrel! Al, how much longer are you going to want me in here? I feel I could be more use outside if you've got what you want."

"It's not how much longer we want you in here. It's how soon you think you can stand the strain of going back. You've been in three days, is all."

"Give me a post-hypnotic compulsion against thinking

about happy dreams. And varm. How about that ?"

"Almost certainly impossible. Nick, you're standing up fine so far. But how about next week, or next month?"

"It'll probably get easier as time goes by."

"Maybe. May not." Al regarded him thoughtfully. He seemed to take a sudden decision. "Well—all right. We'll see how you get on tonight. In the morning, I'll give you as much hypnotic protection as possible, and send you home. But I'm not letting you back to work. You'll rest up for two or three days first, reporting in for a check every day."

"But if I'm out of here, I might as well be working—"

"Not if your next assignment is in Kansas, Nick. I want you here. Right now you're a guinea-pig; you volunteered as one, and you are one."

Greville sighed. "Okay," he said reluctantly. "As you

insist."

"I'm not insisting. I'm just telling you what my experience of treating addicts suggests is the best course."

"You're the expert."

"Not so much in your case. You're the only one-shot addict we've studied in detail—I think we'd better find another word than addict, because you don't seem to have suffered any worse than someone who's had one day of smoking . . . I wish I was unethical enough to let an addict go the full course under observation. It seems to me that's the only way we can make sure of finding an addict past the crisis point. But till we get that desperate, we'll just have to rely on Barriman's experiments at the Institute."

"No news of the chimp, I suppose?" Greville suggested.

"None at all. And it's happened again, incidentally—to a rhesus macaque, this time. In spite of the fact that since the chimp vanished there's been a night-and-day watch on the sterile labs."

"What? But-"

"That's what they tell me. Lamancha is wild—he's threatening to fire Joe Martinez, the Institute security chief. I told him he was crazy. Joe's unimpeachable." "But Lamancha has no jurisdiction over a member of the security branch! And in any case, it's up to Desmond, as

head of the Institute, not to Lamancha."

"You know as well as I do that Desmond is a figurehead—a weathercock, turning obligingly whichever way the wind blows. And of course Lamancha can fix Joe if he tries; he has enough friends in the security branch, from his police days."

Greville clenched his fists. "There's so damned much going on!" he said helplessly. "I wish I was out there getting

on with the job !"

"Nick, you're going to be more use to the department as a cured one-shot addict—there I go again—a cured victim who knows from first-hand experience what happy dreaming is like, than you would be as a potential addiction-risk. And I'm not going to pass you with a clean bill of health till I'm satisfied that varm is no longer an obsession to you. Fair enough?"

"Hell-oh, I guess that's fair," Greville sighed. "I don't

have to like it, though."

Al rose to his feet. "I'd better get back upstairs," he said. "Those bastards left a pile of work unfinished, and no one else can clear it up except me—or that's what it looks like. Nick, what's it going to be like when the disappearances rise to thousands every week?"

"But that's ridiculous!" Greville countered. "As you yourself said in that memo, when it gets to such a level we must

by the law of averages start finding them again !"

"Averages," said Al, and started to open the door.

"Al!" Greville said sharply. "Just before you go—is there any news of Leda?"

"She was last seen in Philly," said Al. "That's all I know."
"Yes—Pennsylvania is her home state so I guess she would
naturally go there if she left New York. Say, I told Lamancha
that if she left New York she wouldn't be going to see her
peddler friend. But it struck me afterwards that she might
have been given a list of contacts, or something. So it might
be worth trailing her, even in Philly."

"I'll pass the word," said Al, and was gone.

Strange, thought Greville when he was alone. Strange how after so short a time the ashes of his pain had grown quite cold, and he could speak of Leda almost as though she was a stranger.

And of course it was true that she was a stranger. The Leda he had married was dead. Or maybe she had never

existed.

That night, there were no visions—only chaotic jumbled fragments of ordinary dreams, interspersed with snatches of remembered things. There was no varm; no satisfaction of seeing virgin plains and unexploited rocks. There was a sense of loss and frustration, and once Greville woke up in the middle of the night to find that his eyes were blurred with tears.

But of itself, this disappointment and frustration was no harder to bear than the thousand and one disappointments the whole world had to put up with. And this Al accepted, when

he saw Greville in his office the next morning.

"I think you'll make out, Nick," he said after studying the morning's report from the hospital lab. "Our tests show that there's no detectable trace of happy dreams in your metabolism now, so you only have the memories to bother you. Now I'm going to give you a couple of crutches, so to speak-but remember they are crutches, and you've got legs of your own."

"What are they?" Greville snapped, impatient at the figure

of speech.

"I'll have one of the psychologists give you a hypnotic compulsion against the use of an injector, and teach you a short auto-hypnotic formula which you can use when the idea of varm gets hold of you. And I'll tell the dispensary to let you have a dozen Formula K tablets; they're depressants, useful for cutting down anxieties. They're a sort of disinhibitor, really, or tranquilliser, rather than a sleeping pill. But if you have trouble sleeping without dreams, you can take one of them to calm your mind."

" And-?"

"Relax. Walk the streets a bit. Go to a bar and try and pick up a girl. Or read. Watch TV. Keep yourself occupied with things that don't connect with your work. I'll call you this evening if I'm free, and we can have dinner somewhere if

you feel like it. All right?"

"I guess so," Greville answered. "Anything else?"

"I can't think of anything." Al glanced at his wall clock. "So now you step along, because I have work to clear up, and this afternoon Joe Martinez is coming to talk over the disappearance of the experimental animals at the Institute, and I want to try and sabotage Lamancha's attempts to fire him. See you, Nick-this evening, if I can."

"Okay," said Greville, and went out.

# thirteen

Obedient to Al's instructions, Greville went to bed that night without having taken one of the tablets he had obtained from the dispensary, determined to try and achieve natural sleep before resorting to artificial aid.

He had been lying in darkness for almost half an hour, unable to still the restless surge of his thoughts, and was coming to the decision that he was wasting his efforts, when there was a click, faint but distinct, from the apartment's front door.

His eyes flicked open. Straining, he made out the sound of the door opening, and soft footfalls on the resilient floor of the lounge. And then words which made him suddenly tense with anger. In Leda's voice, shrill as a wet finger rubbing a glass.

'C'mon, lover! C'mon in and shut that door!"

Greville felt the muscles of his face strained by a grin absolutely without humour: the utterly primitive teeth-baring reaction which was properly called a snarl. His mind reviewed his actions immediately before coming to bed, while his body moved with savage purpose. As far as he could remember, he had left nothing obviously to betray his presence in the lounge; if Leda had been back to the apartment since she fetched her clothes, she might just possibly realise that he had moved a few items, but he could see through the partly open door of the bedroom that only the sidewall lighting was on, which was dim and diffuse.

On soundless bare feet he went to the door; standing well to the side of the opening, he contrived to catch sight of the intruders. The man—whoever he was—had his back to Greville; there was something hauntingly familiar about his appearance, but maybe that was only due to the fact that he wore UN uniform. The light was too dim for Greville to distinguish his shoulder-badges. And Leda's white arms were around his neck, crushing his face down against her own.

Greville took a deep breath, measuring the distance he had to cross the other side of the door, feeling a vast excitement seize him like a blaze spreading through dry grass. He jerked

the door wide and went through.

There were four simple motions. A leap, like the pounce of a wild animal, which carried him to arm's-length from the man's back. A heave, which lifted the man backwards and broke Leda's grip on him. A punch delivered with bunched knuckles which threw him staggering against the wall. And lastly an open-handed slap across Leda's face—a face on

which horror had barely begun to dawn.

Greville stared at her, panting, his hands curling at his sides. "You really decided to glory in it, didn't you?" he said in a tone of contempt. "You really made up your mind to foul vourself!"

Her mouth worked, but no sound came out. In the pale mask of her face, only her eyes reflected the mortal terror in her

mind.

Greville turned aside deliberately. "Now for this-drug peddler of yours," he said, and was so certain in his first assumption that he had been looking at the man for fully half a minute before the circuit of recognition closed. And then he said, in a voice like the distant soughing of trees, "No . . ."

The word was something of a prayer.

One hand bracing himself against the wall, the other holding his jaw where Greville had hit him, Joe Martinez stared back, his dark eyes wide with disbelief. The shock of Greville's blow passed from him more quickly than the shock of recognition passed from Greville, and he spoke in a dazed tone.

"Hell, Greville-I didn't know! I didn't know who she was! She said her name was Young. I just wanted—hell, man! I've just been thrown out of my job by that bastard Lamancha, and I was past caring what I did."

He stood up straight with a kind of dignity. "I can't say

anything to excuse myself. I'd better just get out."

"No," said Greville in a voice that sounded strange to his ears. He looked at Leda. "No. Martinez. Whether you've

been fired or not, there's a job to be done."

An apprehensive look showed in Leda's eyes. She put one hand forward as though to ward off an attack. "No!" she forced out between straight lips. "No, Nick, you couldn't !"

"Martinez, you're used to interrogation techniques, aren't you?" Greville said, not taking his eyes off Leda. Martinez looked startled.

"I don't suppose you'd got as far as this," Greville said after a pause. He raised his arm and pushed Leda; it was not much more than a touch with his fingers, but she stumbled back and fell into a chair behind her. Greville followed her. He caught her right arm with one hand and thrust her skirt back

over her thighs with the other. There were three of the small round stab-marks now.

"See ?" said Greville coldly to Martinez. The other licked

his lips, staring down at the scars.

"Greville, I-I swear-"

"I believe you," said Greville, and let the bunched fabric fall from his hand. "Even if Lamancha has thrown you out, you're still in the job. We all are, permanently. Now the day after you saw me out at the Institute—no, the same day, because we met in the morning—Leda took up with a happy dreams peddler. I thought it was the peddler she'd brought home, of course. Only you were in Colorado that day, so it looks as though Leda has just made up her mind to crowd what's left of her life as a human being with plenty of excitement and lots of men. She knows perfectly well what happens to happy dreamers at the end of their time—I've told her often enough."

"I never saw her before this evening," said Martinez in a

strangled voice.

"All right. Well, the department's been watching her in case she led us to the peddler, but she went to Philly and gave her tail the slip. What happened to your boy-friend, by the way, Leda? Did he get cold feet when you went to him

crowing over what you'd done to me?"

Leda moved her head from side to side. She didn't answer, and Greville gave a shrug. "Well, we can find out. I have some disinhibitors in the next room, which I was given to help me sleep. A weak solution of one of them, crushed up in water and injected intravenously, ought to be a pretty good makeshift truth drug, by my reckoning. Right?" he snapped with a sudden glare at Martinez.

Martinez bit his lower lip. "Right," he agreed hesitantly.

"But how about injecting it?"

Greville reached down and unfastened the buckle of Leda's pouch-belt. "One of the first things a happy dreamer learns," he said musingly, opening the compartments one by one, "is not to leave his injector and his supply of stuff lying around. Ah! See?"

He slid out an injector from one of the compartments in the belt—obviously newly purchased—and a little plastic sachet containing a fine brown dust. Leda made no move to interfere; her eyes closed as though an intolerable weight had dragged the lids down.

"Here!" said Greville with sudden violence, and thrust the sachet and the injector into Martinez's hands. "Get some water while I fetch the pills. And put that sachet out of my sight—I ought to turn it in to the department, but the way I feel just now, I'm more likely to throw it down the drain."

The Formula K pills were less efficient than a proper truth drug, but worked well enough. At first Leda maintained a sullen silence in face of Greville's questions; bit by bit she grew irritable, and sweat started out on her forehead, smearing her evening makeup. Martinez sat to one side, his face drawn and expressionless, not offering to join in the questioning. Greville accepted his silence. After all, this was a personal affair.

Patiently, hating himself, trying to mask the nature of what he was doing by hiding behind his justifiable anger, Greville hammered again and again at the same question: "Who is he? Who gave you the happy dreams? Who taught you the habit?"

He could see the strain building up in Leda's face, like floodwaters straining a cracked levee. A little more pressure,

a little more patience, and the levee would burst.

And it did, in a voice that was like a ghost of a scream. Under the disinhibiting effect of the drug, Leda could not resist any longer, but because it was only a makeshift it did not wipe away completely her tensions, anxieties and fears as a specific would have done.

"Who the hell do you think?" Leda's voice poured out.
"Who would I know? Who do I get the chance to meet, being tied to you? His name's Clements, and he works in your

department, right under your nose !"

A huge expanding vacancy grew cold in Greville's mind. He turned away blindly and fumbled for a cigarette in the pocket of his robe.

"Wasn't that what you were after?" said Martinez in a thin voice, after a moment of lonely silence. Greville nodded.

"Then—well, what's wrong? Is he a friend of yours, or

something?"

"I've never met him in my life," said Greville, and gave a hollow chuckle. "Now I'm never likely to. He disappeared two days ago, like all the rest of them."

"But—you mean he was working in the department right up till a couple of days ago?" Martinez kept switching the direction of his remarks, as though slightly dazed. "Isn't there some way of telling an advanced addict like that? Of spotting

him before he drops out of sight?"

"We haven't found one." The taste of his cigarette was foul in Greville's mouth; he stubbed it, barely shortened. "Call the department, would you? Have an ambulance sent out. I think maybe Leda would be better off in hospital."

Martinez nodded and went to the phone. While he was making the call, Greville sat staring at his wife's pallid face.

So the peddler had vanished. Because he was a peddler and knew that Leda might put the department on his track? Or because he was an advanced addict, as Al Speed had assumed?

"Why did you have to do that of all things?" he said softly. Leda heard him through the mist of the hypnotic fogging her brain; she stirred and spoke in a miserable, empty voice.

"It was a thing to be done. It was what he said. I hated you for a minute—I made myself hate you, and I wanted to make you suffer, and he wouldn't touch me, so that was all I could do—"

Greville seized on the one significant phrase. He jerked forward, hissing his words. "Did you say—he wouldn't

touch you?"

"He wouldn't do anything," said Leda wearily. "I only told you he had because I wanted to hurt you every way I could—make you jealous and angry and make you show that you still cared about me . . ." Her voice tailed away; she tried to raise one hand in a gesture of dismissal, but her hand was limp on her limp arm, and she failed.

Martinez came away from the phone. "There'll be an ambulance right down," he said. "Do you want me to stay, Greville? I'd like to get out. I guess you ought really to throw

me out."

"Sit down," said Greville. "It isn't your fault. It isn't really Leda's, either—and maybe it wasn't Clement's fault either, but the fault of whoever started him on happy dreams, and not his either but the fault of this whole damned stupid messed-up planet. I tell you, Martinez, I sometimes think human beings aren't fit to be trusted with Earth."

Martinez's dark, lean face, calm now, with a bruise starting where Greville had struck him, turned towards him. "You don't believe that. None of us do. After being thrown out of

my job for not doing the impossible, I still don't."

"How did it happen?"

Martinez shrugged. "You saw the sterile lab at the Institute. You know it was impossible for anyone to get in or out. After the chimp vanished, I put a twenty-four-hour guard on the building. And then this rhesus disappears. My head rolls. The best I can hope for now is a transfer to the worst job available."

There was a note of stolid resignation in his tone.

"What's that?" Greville asked, more to save the room from total silence than because he expected an answer.

"God knows."

And after that there was silence, until the ambulance came and they took Leda to the sanatorium, and Martinez went after them, having again apologised and having been told wearily that it wasn't his fault, which it wasn't.

That left Greville alone, and with the help of the Formula K

tablets he forced himself under the surface of sleep.

#### fourteen

When he woke, streams of rain like straight steel legs were marching across the city to the rattle of a thunder like drums. He tried for a little while to sleep again, and avoid the need to face a day of absolute blankness at once. But the effect of the drug he had taken had worn off, and his mind at once crowded with disturbing images.

He swung his legs to the floor and sat looking at Leda's

empty bed.

He felt curiously light-headed, almost exhilarated, as if he had come to some decision which was intrinsically right. What it might be, he could not at first work out. All he knew was that it had nothing to do with what had happened to Leda, or with Martinez, or with any of the events of last night.

He was genuinely hungry for the first time in some days, and sent for breakfast at once. While he ate it, he listened to a news broadcast over the telephone, which was mainly concerned with the monthly UN report on the state of the planet's resources. There were a few cheering facts: a new method of extracting usable fuel oil from an alga, shortly to go into effect on industrial scale; a short cut to a new cheap plastic suitable for insulating the walls of apartment buildings. But there were

grave facts, too, and the worst of these was the monthly total of disappearances due to happy dreams addiction. It had

topped six hundred in New York State.

That was the decision Greville had come to. He knew it as soon as the words triggered his memory. Maybe he had made up his mind while he was asleep, or last night before he dozed off. But nonetheless the decision was made.

He finished his breakfast calmly, and then fetched a notepad and scribbled two letters: one to Lamancha, stating that he would report for duty in Isolation at the beginning of next week, having been directed to take a few days' sick leave; the other to Al, explaining what he had told Lamancha, and continuing:

"You'll probably want to tear me to ribbons, Al, for walking

out on you and then having the gall to ask you to cover for me with the department. I suppose I'm being cynical when I say that after studying your one-shot addict—me—you now have a chance at an addict slightly past the initial stage. I mean

Leda, of course.

"But I'm sure that I stand a far worse chance of ridding myself of the temptation to—well, to see varm again, if you like—if I stay in New York and try to kill time doing nothing. Instead, I'm going off to ask various people various questions, questions which have stuck in my mind as a result of reading the case-histories you gave me while I was laid up. Maybe they're stupid questions; in case they are, I'm not going to put them down here. If they aren't, though, maybe I'll solve at least part of our problem. But since I only have three days, I'll have to hurry."

He sealed the letters and dropped them down the mail chute to the basement. Then he called the airport and got himself a reservation on the Mach 5 express for the West Coast at eleven

o'clock.

He kept recalling what Martinez had said about not believing that man was unfit to be trusted with Earth, even though he had been thrown out of his job unjustly. Well, there was another man who had been thrown out of a job unjustly. He was the first person to whom Greville had a question to put—and the question was, "Do you feel the way Martinez feels?"

At the airport, he ran into Martinez himself, in the waiting room. Although the room was crowded, there was no opportunity for them to avoid one another, as Greville judged Martinez would have preferred. A little stiffly, they greeted one

another, while the flow of passengers surged about them.

"Are you—uh—going out to the Institute?" Martinez suggested when they had been standing for a moment in

silence. Greville shook his head.

"I'm going out to the West Coast to try and see this man Franz Wald. I want to find out more about this theory of his regarding happy dreams. You knew Wald, I suppose, during his stay at the Institute."

Martinez nodded.

"What sort of a person is he?"

"Young-about thirty, I think. I only knew him at second hand, of course, before this thing about the animals vanishing. I mean, I knew him to speak to, like all the staff, but he kept mostly to himself. Barriman seemed to have a sort of grudge against him, I remember. I think he was on pretty close terms with Kathy Pascoe. It you want to know about him, you should ask her."

"I was going to ask him," Greville said dryly. "I suppose when he was transferred to the Coast he went to bio-research

"Didn't you check up before letting yourself in for a trip

right over there?"

"This is highly unofficial. I'm actually supposed to be on sick leave. I couldn't start making inquiries around the

department which might reveal where I was going."

"I see." Martinez's dark eyes studied Greville's face. "Well, to the best of my recollection Wald did go, as you say, to bio-research in LA. Something to do with sea-fertilisation. I don't know exactly what."

"It should be easy enough to track him down."

Again, there was a moment's uneasy silence. During it, Martinez's eyes strayed to the wall-clock, to see how long remained before his flight was due to leave.

"How about yourself?" Greville said. He was conscious of

trying a little too hard to be friendly, to wipe out Martinez's

embarrassment about last night.

"I'm going back to the Institute," Martinez answered off-handedly. "To clear up for whoever they put in my job. I wish him joy of it. The last sentence was bitter but resigned.

" And after that ?"

"Who knows? They're transferring me to general security duties,' that's all I know. What about yourself? How long are you free to chase your own ideas all over the country?"

"I have three days or so. After that I'm due to go to Isolation and work with Marek and Rice. Did you hear

anything from there recently?"

"Only that they had found a lot of addicts. So far they

haven't traced any supplies or anything."

A bell rang, and a number lit up on the outward flights board. Martinez couldn't completely hide his relief as he said, "My plane, I'm afraid. I'll see you again some time, maybe."

"Probably at the Institute, before I go to Isolation," Greville nodded, and put out his hand.

Summer traffic for LA was now mainly routed to the offshore pontoons; the Mach 5 express which brought Greville in was accordingly within a brief 'copter ride of the bio-research headquarters of FAO when it landed. Unless Wald was out on a trip, Greville felt he stood a good chance of catching him at his office. The first intimation he had of a possible let-down came when a receptionist at the inquiry desk of the main building noted down his inquiry, excused herself, and vanished behind a soundproof screen to make a phone call.

She returned after a couple of minutes, her expression indecipherable, and asked him to sit down and wait. He did so, taking a comfortable low chair in the middle of the entrance hall from which he could see the water of the experimental fish-ponds catching and breaking up the reflection of the sun

outside.

He was lost in thought when his name was spoken sharply a few feet away. Snatching himself back to awareness, he found a tall, brisk woman in summer uniform standing over him, her face calm but hardly welcoming.

"I'm Dr. Fizer," she said shortly. "Assistant head of sea

fertilisation. Please come with me."

Greville rose hesitantly. "I didn't wish to disturb anyone—" he began, but she cut him short with a humourless smile.

"Mr. Greville, anyone inquiring after Franz Wald disturbs

us. Please come with me."

Wondering what on earth he had intruded on, Greville accompanied her to her office—a small room on an upper floor, from which direct sun was excluded by green louvered blinds. As briskly as she seemed to do everything, Dr. Fizer took her place behind her desk, indicated a chair for Greville, and leaned forward with her hands together.

"I think you said you were with the Narcotics Department,

Mr. Greville," she mused. "May I see your ID cards?"
Greville produced them; Dr. Fizer studied them with care,

handed them back, and gave a nod.

"That's in order. I was uncertain for a moment. One can never tell when Franz Wald is involved. All right, what was it you wanted to see him about?"

"Dr. Fizer," said Greville, and took a deep breath, "I'm not trying to intrude on the running of another agency, you understand. But I should like to make it clear right away that all I want is to see Dr. Wald—ask him a few questions in connection with happy dreams addiction. Mainly arising out of his transfer here from the Institute at Sandy Gulch after the disappearance of the first batch of experimental animals."

Dr. Fizer's oval, tanned face remained blank until Greville finished speaking. Then she sighed. "I was afraid of that,

to be honest."

"What do you mean?"

"Mr. Greville, this is a branch of FAO. Our job is mainly concerned with nutrition. We are currently engaged in a very detailed study of the utilisation of nutriment by potentially valuable aquatic fauna and flora. As you may or may not be aware, sea-farming ought to have been on a sound scientific footing by the turn of the century; accordingly, we've got about thirty years' backlog of work to clear off. Because it still isn't on a sound footing."

"I don't quite see-"

"Let me finish. Dr. Wald is a biochemist of the first rank. His job is—or is supposed to be—the study of uptake of additives from sea-water, work he ought to be capable of doing standing on his head. We need the results he's supposed to be getting for us."

"But what has this got to do with-?"

"Precisely!" said Dr. Fizer with sudden vehemence. "When we acquired Dr. Wald for our staff we were overjoyed, because his reputation had preceded him. We went so far as to hand him a complete—and very important—research programme which had been hanging fire owing to shortage of personnel with the necessary skills. It's taken us six months, very nearly,



### fifteen

Wald was a lanky man with a small round aggressive head. smooth dark hair, round cheeks plumped up beside an illtempered mouth. His manner and voice were impatient. He stood over a tank in which there were colonies of shellfish; it was one of perhaps fifty ranked on shelves along the walls of a temperature-controlled laboratory. Under the shelves were racks that held aqualung equipment, harpoon guns, nets, draglines, cans of organic compounds and packets of blank forms.

He didn't turn around as Dr. Fizer escorted Greville into the lab, but spoke in a disgruntled voice. "For heaven's sake

don't interrupt, Ilse!" he snapped. "It'll just have to wait!"

Dr. Fizer put her mouth close to Greville's ear and spoke in a tone of weary resignation. "Just as he gets really involved, vou see ?"

Greville felt uncomfortable and apologetic. "I can wait

until he's through," he whispered in reply.

Accordingly, they waited. Greville watched with fascination what Wald was doing. With astonishing deftness he was poking at one of the shellfish, using a device that consisted of sharp-jawed tongs sliding in a shiny metal tube. Near the jaws of the tongs was a small hook with something stuck on it—a scrap of food, presumably. Cautiously, the shellfish let its valves open, sensing the presence of food; three times it snapped shut again. The fourth time, Wald jabbed down with the tongs, released the spring catch holding them open, dislodged the scrap of food so that it fell into the creature's shell, and withdrew his instrument before the shell clamped shut again.

"Hah!" he said, and knocked his hair back out of his eyes. "All right, Ilse—get this sample down to be analysed—"

And he realised that it wasn't Ilse who had entered the room. "I'll take it down," said Dr. Fizer, stretching out her hand. "This is Narcotics Agent Greville, Franz. He insists on

having a word with you."

"Does he now?" Wald's bright brown eyes fastened on Greville's face as his tongs had fastened on the mantle of the shellfish. "Well, if it's another experimental animal gone from that lab at the Institute, I'm not responsible. And if that's not what it's about, I don't see what."

He turned away, picking up a towel to dry his wet hand.

Dr. Fizer, making it clear that she was glad to be going. took the tongs he had sampled the shellfish with, and went out without another word, leaving Greville to make his own headway. He moistened his lips.

"It's indirectly about that, Dr. Wald," he said. "I regret

taking up your time, but-"

"Look," said Wald with exaggerated patience, and tossed his towel on to a high-set hook, "my connection with narcotics is finished. That's been made clear enough to me over the past few weeks. If it hasn't been made clear to you, then I guess it's up to me to repeat it."

"I understand that you feel justifiably annoyed at having been transferred away from the work you were doing at the Institute," Greville said as calmly as he could manage. "But —well, to be frank, my people are not satisfied that Dr. Barriman was right in his judgments—"

Wald interrupted him with a snort. "Don't tell me! Someone has had a fit of blinding sense. Do go on !"

Greville took out cigarettes and offered one to Wald; it was refused with a sharp gesture. He said, "If you like. I know you had some unorthodox theories about the nature of happy dreams addiction. Orthodox approaches have got us exactly nowhere. I'm an absolute layman myself on the chemistry of addiction-I'm just an investigator. But I want to get your ideas."

"Ask Barriman!" Wald snapped. "He knows them. He just won't accept them."

"I don't have any prejudices," Greville said.

For a moment Wald seemed to be debating with himself. At length, he shrugged and threw himself into a chair. "Well, why the hell not?" he said. "I ought to warn you first that if you try and make Barriman see the facts the way I see them he'll say you're talking nonsense. He told me pretty often."
Greville didn't reply, but pulled up a chair for himself and

sat down, waiting.

"Layman, you said?" Wald grunted after a pause.

" Pretty well completely."

"Then you may not have prejudices, as you claim, but you probably don't have the basic facts either. What do you know about the biological mechanism of addiction?"

Greville frowned. "Well, essentially it's a matter of metabolic disturbance. Psychological factors enter into it, but

they aren't uniquely determinant, because you usually find that any one of a group of habits can replace another. The oral component of smoking, for instance, can be gratified by other oral compensations. But the effect of tobacco on the sugarstorage system of the liver is determinant, and has a definite and specific effect on the metabolism."

Wald was waving one hand idly. "Okay, okay," he said. "So you know the basics. How about neurochemistry? Are

you grounded there?"

"I only know the vague outline of theory."

"All right, so we'll start there. You think—okay? You get sensory impressions of the outside world in the form of codings supplied by nerves. The optic nerve, the nerves from your skin, your gut, all over; your kinaesthetic nerves telling you where your limbs are in relation to one another, and so on. You don't perceive anything at all directly. All your knowledge of the universe, including your own physical body, exists—well, we call it existence—in the form of this nerve-code, which can be stored in the cells of your brain as electrochemical energy. Right so far?"

Greville nodded. Wald spoke with a dry didactic off-hand tone, like an unenthusiastic teacher instructing his fiftieth class

in the same elementary subject.

"You can mess about with this storage-system we call the memory in lots of different ways. You can foul up the input with hypnosis, for example. You can stimulate total recall by the action of mild electric currents on the bare brain. You can use chemicals. You can also foul up the perception system itself. And the kind of drugs which produce hallucinations do just about that."

He leaned forward, eyes fixed on Greville, and his voice became warmer, as though he was working up to the

enthusiasm he had previously lacked.

"What I'm trying to get at is this. Our entire knowledge of the universe, what we assume to be the external reality—if there is one—depends absolutely on the action of the complex active compounds which make up our nerves and the cells of our brains."

"You mean external reality is a figment of-"

"No, no, no!" interrupted Wald on an exasperated tone.

"This is a completely hypothetical view which is inconsistent with human experience. I'm pragmatic when it comes to the

question of reality or das Ding an sich or whatever you call it. Human experience indicates that there's something external to our nervous systems which acts on our organs of perception, and whatever it may be in its own essence we therefore have to accept there's something. But don't let's get sidetracked!

"Now you grant that every characteristic we assign to the external world, so far as we're able to establish, is subjective in the sense that its existence as a characteristic depends on the receipt and storage of coded nerve-impulses in our brains. In 'reality'-let's say, in the view of a purely non-material being which we can hypothesise as perceiving light and other radiation and matter directly and remembering them as themselves rather than as coded impulses—in the view of this imaginary being, then, the nature of the water in that tank is water-nature. But to you and me, it's a collection of characteristics. Follow me? It's slightly blue-green; it's liquid, wet, salty, cool to the touch, and so on. We could define its characteristics more precisely by analysing it, measuring its precise temperature on a fixed scale, measuring its weight, volume, density, refractive index—but nothing we could possibly or conceivably do would fix its nature in our minds in the form of anything but a series of coded impulses."

Greville suddenly felt a little faint. He said, "I think—I

think I get what you're going after."
Wald eyed him cynically. "Do you?" he said. "Let's hear

it, then. You're probably wrong."

"You're saying," Greville stated, formulating his words with care and pausing between each phrase to check his logic, "that whatever the nature of the external world may be, it's plastic so far as human perception is concerned. Our idea of the world depends on symbols which in turn depend on the actual material of our nervous systems. In fact, a-well, a marijuana addict, for instance, is experiencing a world of reality which is nonetheless real for being a minority opinion."

"I'll be damned," said Wald in a matter-of-fact voice. "Finally I run up against someone with some sense. Go on."

"Well-this runs you into the kids' problem. How do you know that what you see as red is the same as what I see as red?

You don't; it's purely subjective."
"Right!" said Wald, now absorbed completely into his own enthusiasm. "Likewise, it involves you with the question of whether yesterday is real. Picture some event at which two people were witnesses. Their accounts differ. It happened in the past. Its reality, so far as we're concerned, hangs on their individual reports of it, which differ."

"And how does this view connect with the spread of happy dreaming?" Greville asked, after a few moments' silence in which he tried to find a flaw in his own, and Wald's, reasoning.

Wald's face suddenly seemed to go blank. He said, "I'm afraid if you can't see that for yourself, I'm not going to stick

my neck out."

A bell rang quietly at the end of the room; he glanced at the watch on his thin wrist. "That's the end of the day shift," he said. "And I have an appointment in half an hour. So I'm afraid I must ask you to let me leave."

Greville rose slowly to his feet, feeling paradoxically that he had both been cheated of what he came for, and given an invaluable clue. He said, "How about the colour varm?"

"What? Varm, did you say?"

Continued on page 120

### Your Favourite Film is probably

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London, W.C.1.

"How about the possibility of an absolutely new colour? Neither red nor blue nor anything else. A new colour."

Wald regarded him speculatively. He was shrugging out of his working coveralls. "Possible," he said in a neutral tone. "After all, colour is the most ultimately subjective of all

sense-impressions, isn't it? So it's the first to be affected."

"Affected? By what? By happy dreams?"

"For example." Wald opened a tall locker and hung up his coveralls; with his back to Greville, he drew on his outdoor uniform over his singlet and undershorts. The undershorts were long and loose on his awkward frame.

"My rest period starts tomorrow," Wald was saying. "I'm going to get hell from Sourpuss Fizer for not showing utter devotion to duty and feeding you to the abalone as it is. I hope you've got what you want and won't be coming back."

Greville hesitated. "I'd have liked to ask you a few more

questions," he began.

"What for? You've got the sense of what I think about happy dreams. I've nothing to do with the problem any more —they didn't like what I thought, so they threw me out. If you want information solidly based on scientific evidence "-his mouth twisted a little with bitter sarcasm-" instead of wild speculation, you ask the people who are still at the Institute. I doubt whether they can go on denying their own evidence much longer. You go see Kathy Pascoe, for example; Barriman hasn't thrown her out yet, and maybe she'll see what's staring her in the face before he does."

"Are you going to be available during your rest-period at

all ?"

Wald gave a short harsh laugh. "I'm going to commune with nature," he said acidly. "I'm going somewhere in Montana to get away from feeding fish. Maybe I'll find somewhere where I can catch some. I suppose if you wanted to you could stop me, so that you could go on firing questions at me, but you couldn't make me answer them. No, you've got what you need to figure things out. Start figuring. But I warn you—as a layman, you're in a worse position than I was to make other people see sense about this problem, and I failed."

He put a uniform cap on his head at a haphazard angle and finished, "You figure it! You've got the evidence!"



Dear John,

Lately I've re-read a small mountain of back issues, some of which I had read before, others being those published during my Scandinavian holiday, and some of my earlier impressions have been confirmed—namely, that the remark "Simplicity is the keynote of good design" applies well to much science fiction. Reading as impartially as possible, I found that most of the stories which stood up to another reading were the simple ones—probably because they dug more deeply into the characters, and were more carefully written. To quote (accurately, I hope): "What is life, if full of care, We have no time to stand and stare?"

Change "life" to "s-f" and that sums up much of my attitude. Heroes can rush hither and yon, pursued by or pursuing half a dozen different sets of enemies at once, and for me it means little if they never do find "time to stand and stare." I like stories whose characters do pause occasionally to look and think and see something as though they'd never clapped eyes on it before, or never thought about it in this way before. One writer who seldom disappoints me in this respect is Clarke. While it's dangerous to generalise, I'd say British s-f satisfies me more than American s-f in this matter of conveying the wonder of things and people instead of the excitement of fast plotting or narrative. (Although some authors such as Sturgeon often combine the two styles brilliantly).

There are, of course, glaring exceptions! Ted Tubb's serial "Star Ship" had little impact on me, for all its action and apparent drama of situation—the characters never took shape, and not once did I feel that the novel's action took place far out in space, and the entire shipload could have perished without rousing my emotions very much. Then Wilson Tucker's "The Time Masters" used the "British" approach in my opinion: those characters lived, and their feelings roused my feelings, and two consecutive chapters of dialogue in the same office between the same two men satisfied me more than the

entire length of "Star Ship."

The "sense of wonder" approach will ultimately produce the s-f meriting the name Literature, particularly when combined with deeper characterisation, in that it can be read again and again regardless of its scientific content. Not for a moment do I really believe that the lunar surface resembles that depicted by Wells in The First Men In The Moon (nor did Wells, in fact); but that story is worth reading, not once but many times. I'm not supporting scientific inaccuracy on the strength of literary level, not as a general rule, anyway; Wells got away with it there by his writing power, producing something that disarms a cold scientific criticism—as Bradbury did occasionally. I do want technical plausibility, but feel that the value of any s-f story will finally be decided by its qualities as fiction rather than by its accuracy as scientific description or extrapolation.

I deplore glaring ignorance or absolute carelessness, but I can tolerate the occasional lapse from accepted scientific fact if the characterisation, emotion and style are present (just as I can listen to accoustically recorded 1923 jazz and forget the abysmal fidelity for the sake of the musical value—poor technical recording doesn't imply that the music should be written off as an historical curio. Perhaps this is a clumsy analogy, but I hope you see my meaning). After all, how many classic stories would be lost if we threw out those whose characters can breathe the present Martian atmosphere! The ideal lies somewhere between the Science Fantasy Guest Editorial of J. F. Burke and the one by Wilson Tucker (but closer to the latter) and with careful note being taken of the

one by William F. Temple, too).

The "sense of wonder" arguments were boiling merrily when I lost contact with s-f generally and fandom in particular. In Forces parlance I'm only just "getting with it" again, so

perhaps all this is tired old material to you.

At times during my separation from so much that was dear to me (s-f, record collection, bookshelves, etc) I delved in the s-f in Oslo bookshops—mainly American paperbacks which I had read or Norwegian ones which I hadn't—and the first ones left me cold. I thought with a feeling of panic that in two years' abstinence I had "lost the message." It was a nasty feeling! Then I found better samples and the old fire in my belly was kindled again. And with a fresher approach to what I'm reading, and possibly a bit more perspective on the subject, I'm more than ever convinced that if the "sense of wonder" is

lacking, it isn't necessarily because the long-suffering reader is tired, jaded or blase; it's more likely that the author either lacks it himself, scorns it as "old fashioned and slow," or is too lazy to bother infusing his work with it!

John Ashcroft, Halsall, Lancs.

### Dear John:

I'd like to register an objection to Donald Malcolm's letter in a recent New Worlds. Any writer neglects the basic rules of English, because the basic rules of English are not only wildly illogical, but keep changing on one. (Any scientific theory which had to acknowledge as many "exceptions" as any "basic rule" of language that Mr. Malcolm cares to mention would be laughed out of existence immediately). The only basic rule governing the English language is current usage, and that changes constantly. (For example, the use of "like" as a synonym for "as," which Malcolm cites with contempt, is a part of current usage and in another fifty years will be as respectable as any other word. I'd like to see how well the "basic rules of the language" fit the writings of James Joyce, for one example—since Mr. Malcolm seems to feel that great

writing can only be done by following the rules).

Second, most of your readers seem to feel that the apex of British writing is reached by such authors as Tubb, Clarke, and Chandler (picking the names quoted by another letter writer in the same issue, with memories of these same names having been quoted often before). Well, those writers are good, no question about it. But in the past two or three years, Nova has published several stories that really impressed me; the type of story in which I remember the plot several months after I've read it (in most stf, I can't even recall a single thing about a story a couple of hours later, let alone months). These stories have two things in common: they have all been novelettes in Science Fantasy, and they have all been either by John Brunner or Ken Bulmer. "This Rough Magic," "The Kingdoms Of The World," "Reason For Living," "Earth Is But A Star," "The Bones Of Shosun," "City Of The Tiger," "The Whole Man," "Echo In the Skull," "Castle Of Vengeance." Maybe I'm just a sucker for the *Unknown*-type story but while I hope that you get future stories from Clarke, Chandler, Wyndham and Tubb, I hope even more that you keep on getting them from Brunner and Bulmer.

For my money, they're the best writers in England today; the only "old-timers" who can equal them are Russell and Clarke, neither of whom appear much in British (or American, for that matter) magazines any more. (Tubb comes close, but his recent stories haven't been as good as the two B's—perhaps someday fantasy will have its "three B's." like classical music. How about Brunner, Bulmer and Bradbury as counterparts to Brahms, Beethoven and Bach? Well, not seriously, perhaps; or at least, not yet).

Bob Coulson, Wabash, Indiana, U.S.A.

Dear Mr. Carnell,

In your recent editorial for *New Worlds* No. 104 you commented on the lack of reader reaction to your new interior art work. The majority of fans would like to see the return of interior illustrations, but from past experience it seems as though it would be a waste of time writing to you about this subject.

Unfortunately, your attitude to readers seems to be rapidly approaching the standard of one, J. W. Campbell, and it is very noticeable that your magazine, slick though it is, is definitely

less enjoyable than it used to be about three years ago.

That proverbial 'sense of wonder' that constantly crops up in fannish conversation was most definitely helped by the fantastic illustrations used during the 'Golden Age' of science fiction. Completely apart from fiction, the imaginative drawings of Emsh, Finlay, Quinn and others were the very life blood of the exciting, wholesome magazines of that period. At the present moment, the paintings of Brian Lewis, though well executed, fail dismally in their task of stimulating the reader's imagination.

The general effect obtained from your magazines, now, seems to be that you are trying to conceal the fact that they are science fiction; ordinary drab covers, no interior art, plain interior layout. One thing that you could do, and which would please the vast majority of fandom, is to print about three really good, full page illustrations by Quinn. This would still

leave 125 pages of fiction.

Make your mags look like s - f. Most men want the fantastic illustrations! The rest of the readers, as you say in your editorial, couldn't care one way or the other, so you wouldn't be offending them. Those readers who say they don't want illustrations because it costs 3000 words of fiction can quite

easily, for the same price, go out and buy a paperback novel

with twice as many words as the magazine.

So shall we come down to earth now, Mr. Carnell, by saying (with all due respect) that you should finish your rather unsuccessful experiments and return New Worlds to its traditional Science Fiction format; full size cover, proper illustrations, good, exciting science fiction.

Harry W. Douthwait,

Manchester 16.

Dear Sir.

Congratulations on your 100th issue, which I have just got round to reading. But how I agree with John Peters about the need to revitalise science fiction with a more adventurous policy. At one time most of my friends were enthusiastic readers, but one by one they have dropped off, the reason being summed up by one who remarked that as the mores of all the stories were those of a pre-pubertal mid-20th century American from one of the more respectable suburbs, he might as well read Mickey Mouse, which had the same atmosphere and also specialised in peculiar looking characters in slightly out of the ordinary situations.

Not long ago the British cinema and theatre were in the same position that s - f finds itself today but they have swept out of the doldrums with a "new wave" of stimulating, realistic and controversial plays and films which have also been, in most

cases, immensely profitable.

What I think is more interesting to most people is not so much the kind of physical background to our descendants' lives, which by this time we have all got a pretty good idea about, as the effects this will have on their belief and personality structures. These effects are sure to be very radical, as any old age pensioner can tell you from his experience of 65 years.

There are, of course, many other possibilities, all of which would make good stories and make readers better citizens by causing them to think about presentday problems and how they personally can help to shape the future. This, after all, is the kind of thing H. G. Wells did and unless something like it is done again I am much afraid that s-f will continue its present decline, just when the future it predicted for so long is virtually upon us.

And why not get Kingsley Amis to write a story set in a

Socialist future?

David E. Reid, London, W.2. Dear John,

New Worlds No. 105 received and digested. Feel that once every hundred or so issues we should write to thank you and

your team for the fine work you continue to do.

On a spot check: liked Jordan's cover very much. Confirmed finally a growing conviction through the Lewis series that a good cover artist deserves—in fact needs—a full cover and should not have to share it with a contents listing. Several covers which, as full-size pictures, would have been impressive, came out as claustrophobic and fussy on a three-quarter page. A good idea to change cover artists frequently and preferably fairly drastically, as different styles will pick up different types of reader—and by the time, say, three months has gone, they're hooked.

A bad one to let Lewis illustrate so highly personal a scene as the Venus Plus X statue cover—everyone who read it will have formed their own deep picture of it, probably none will agree with Lewis, and probably there will be a mild hostility and criticism of his ability as an artist for having 'misinterpreted' it. The narrative or 'factual' illustration is safe but illustrating any passage with emotional and/or religious overtones is

dicey.'

Liked Alan Barclay's "The Scapegoat." Good, human characterisation, sustained interest, and raises ones dying hopes for the tradition of the eccentric British officer, more liberal humanist than militarist, continuing into the age of push-

button warfare and universal decimal systems.

All the shorts seemed peculiarly limited, obvious and conventional, until I realised that to every generation the riddle of why does the chicken cross the road must, at some point, be novel and revolutionary. You must cater in every issue for different generations, from those to whom the idea of the legendary Ark being a spaceship will 'open magic casements,' to hardened addicts who teethed on Campbell 'back when.' Fair's fair, after all.

Which ties in with a strictly personal comment that whilst I turn first in Astounding to the Editorial and articles, knowing that whether I agree or not, there's going to be something to stimulate my mind and add to my knowledge of the universe, the New Worlds articles are always impeccably worthy and—let's face it—dull. There are surely as many unquestionably accepted assumptions in English science and society as in

America which could do with a brisk run-over?

From what you say, there seems to have been less than justice done to the Nova publications in the field of copyright acknowledgment and I can understand your annoyance at Amis not honouring the British side equally with the American, but let's not get as in-bred as your editorial comment "Should I give them another free plug now?" would suggest. There isn't a strictly limited public with strictly limited cash amongst whom the Editors have to conduct border raids. This, if anything, must be an open community where the improvement of any one part of it must benefit all the others: a reader for New Worlds should mean a reader for Astounding and vice versa. Those who go without one lunch to get Science Fantasy will get F & SF if it means missing another. Those to whom only one of them appeals won't buy another, not anyhow.

This isn't a matter of publicity—that can be covered by reciprocal advertisements—but of distribution. And that has had some very odd things about it from time to time, especially as trade outlets tend more and more towards monopoly. Otherwise, when we take up the "you-haven't-mentioned-meso-I-won't-mention-you" attitude, we're back to the law of the jungle; unless an ethic is self-sustaining under the most adverse

conditions, it wasn't worth adopting in the first place.

Your book reviews are always honest—no axes to grind, good coverage, worth following.

Kevin Smith, (no address).

Dear Sir,

Science fiction has given us many pictures of Utopia, which may or may not have conformed to the authors' secret wishes; but New Worlds has sponsored one which is quite unique in my reading—one in which a man can walk in off the street into the home of a perfect stranger and proceed to slap her buttocks. ("Blink," by John Rackham in No. 106—Ed.) Ah, well. I make no moral judgment on corporal punishment for women and most of us I imagine have our sexual fantasies.

My objection is almost wholly literary. The way sex is stuck on externally to this story, rendering it unpleasing without contributing to the structure—like pebble-dashing on a cheap house. This story justifies up to the hilt all complaints of Amis, Wilson, etc., about the unspeakable quality of the writing in s-f and its treatment of sex in particular. Some few years ago you

laid it down in an editorial that Women in S-F were to be out. (Not so—I said sex should be kept in the background unless an integral part of the story—Ed.) It would have been better to have stuck to the principle.

If you cannot provide us with better stuff than "Blink," it would be better to go back to six issues per year. Can it be you read so much stuff in your editorial task that you are losing the

ability to tell good from bad from indifferent?

F. Haller, Derby.

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