NEW WORLDS SCIENCE FICTION

No. 110
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2/6

J. G. BALLARD
Storm-Wind
Part One

JAMES WHITE
Resident Physician

JOHN KIPPAX
Nelson Expects

GEORGE WHITLEY
Change Of Heart

DAVID ROME

D. E. ELLIS

★

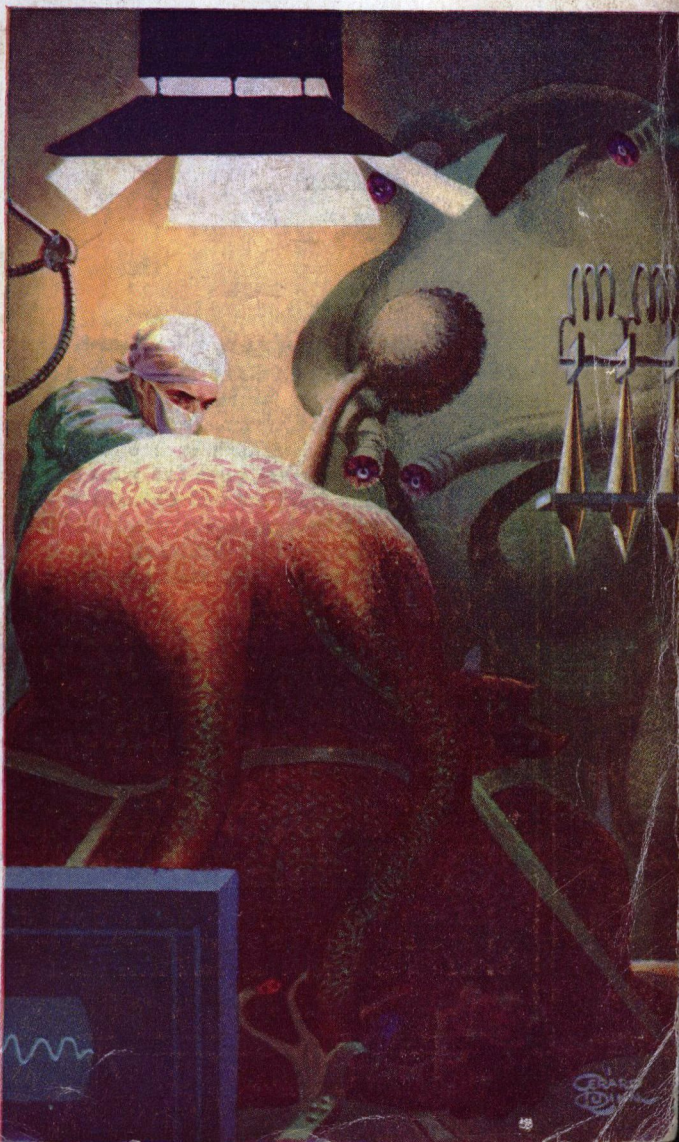
Features

★

A Nova Publication

★

15th Year of Publication



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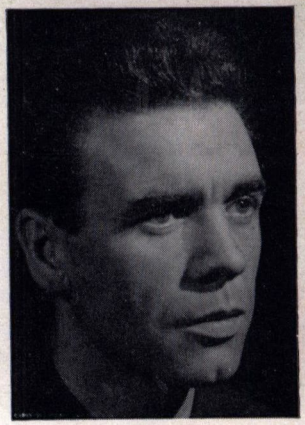
PROFILES



Gerard Quinn

Belfast

This month's pleasant surprise item is the welcome return of Gerard Quinn with the cover painting, a secret we have been deliberately keeping for many months. Gerard, his art work, and *New Worlds Science Fiction* grew up together in the early years, complementing each other and bringing success to both. In this respect, some five years ago, Gerard branched out into commericial art and obtained a very good position with a Belfast business house which left him little time for magazine work — plus marrying "the girl next door," a beautiful Irish colleen, and raising a family of three (so far).

In those early years, too, he became friendly with a young Irish writer named James White, the friendship ripening with the passage of time, each following the other's work with great admiration. The s-f art bug was deeply rooted, however, and when Gerard read the first draft of "Resident Physician" he could no longer resist the urge to create some of the "Sector General" creatures in colour.

His technique has changed considerably during his five years' absence from our magazine. He now uses coloured inks which almost give an oil painting effect and covers the finished work with a coat of Damar varnish.

During those five years, too, hundreds of readers have written and asked for his return and we are hoping that we shall see some more art work from him in the near future.

NEW WORLDS SCIENCE FICTION

VOLUME 37

No. 110

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Editor : JOHN CARNELL

Cover painting by QUINN, illustrating " Resident Physician "

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Comparisons . . .

Throughout a number of recent Editorials I have openly stated that the shape of the science fiction novel now, and to come, is changing, primarily from causes outside the magazine market. That pressures are being brought to bear upon authors by people and circumstances not directly connected with the regular science fiction field. Reading through many American paperbacks this month, mainly for reviewing, the pattern is becoming more apparent and it is only fair to cite examples.

Two books you will be seeing shortly are ideal subjects for dissection. Philip Jose Farmer's *The Lovers* (Ballantine Books, New York), rewritten from a novelette first published in 1952 and rated a ' classic ' of its type, and Arthur C. Clarke's new novel *A Fall Of Moondust* (Gollancz Ltd., London, about September) written for book publication and which, incidentally, is the first science fiction novel to my knowledge ever to be published as a *Readers' Digest Condensed Novel.*

Taking *The Lovers* first, as an example of magazine s-f expanded into a novel for subsequent publication, I did not read the original *Startling Stories* novelette although I was familiar with the mechanics of the plot which lifted this into the " rave " category. At that time it had already been scheduled as a book but circumstances delayed it indefinitely until Ballantine made an offer for it. Nine years have mellowed the original critics' opinions and it will be interesting to see whether any of the current reviewers will have the courage to bluntly state what a bad novel this is. Basically, it is the *idea* behind the story that is classic in its conception—and this and the metabolic explanations which form the *science* fiction part (the crux of the story) take up only a few thousand words. The rest of the story is typical of the racy style required magazine presentation, where every word must count and where cliff-hanging climaxes come monotonously every few thousand words or so.

The overall impression, as Farmer endeavours to build his pseudo-culture of the future, is one of a vast breathless welter of words in which brief glimpses of his intended meaning flash past one's mental eye like telegraph poles viewed from a speeding train. Unfortunately, this is the overall impression I get from almost all the novels which are written first for magazine presentation. There is no time for the normal

. . . Old and New

development of background details—one is plunged willy nilly into the mainstream of the plot and expected to immediately comprehend what is happening. By and large, this is the *basic* fault of all magazine science fiction.

How different to the mechanics of a novel written specifically as such, with its slower tempo in which the author settles his readers into the framework of his story and gradually unfolds the plot step by step. Clarke's *A Fall Of Moondust* is an outstanding example and will undoubtedly rank as his greatest novel to date. The plot is simple—it all take place on the Moon not too many years from now—but from the opening chapter there is a poetry of descriptiveness which eclipses Clarke's own *The City And The Stars*, rated until now one of the best post-war novels of its kind. It is therefore not surprising to learn that the book is to be serialised in the London *Evening Standard* two weeks *before* book publication (in itself an unprecedented event for this particular newspaper). How different the sales approach for an s-f novel written as such with top paying mass markets immediately wide open !

This not only applies to the new Clarke novel but to many others of which I can immediately cite Christopher's *The Death Of Grass* and Wyndham's *The Day Of The Triffids*, both of which were serialised in *The Saturday Evening Post*. Such prestige sales immediately open the gates of the film industry without any undue effort on the part of agent or author. The return on one good novel can repay the careful author a hundredfold although there is always an element of luck involved with any such sale.

Admitted that every author cannot spare his valuable time to such a project. With the *immediate* cash return for magazine publication often of vital importance in making a living, only secondary consideration can be given to book-length presentation. So no-one can really blame the authors for continuing in the pattern already laid down. It does seem to me, however, that magazine editors in general will have to re-evaluate their requirements in the light of the drift towards book presentation *first*. Then perhaps that elusive " sense of wonder " will return to the magazine field.

I am quite willing to accept the fact myself.

John Carnell

With more than twenty short stories to his credit during the past few years—many of them outstanding—it was inevitable that Jim Ballard would eventually turn his thoughts to a novel. This two-part serial is a shortened and altered version of a book-length novel to be published in the near future.

STORM-WIND

by J. G. BALLARD

Part One of Two Parts

one

The dust came first.

Carried out of the low eastern sky, the great clouds spread imperceptibly across London and the Home Counties, the long lanes drifting away into the west. At first no more than a thin stain that darkened the cold January wind blowing up the Thames Estuary, hanging over the drab mud-flats of Gravesend and Wapping, gradually the clouds grew more opaque, until by late February they fanned out across the eastern horizon like the diffusing smoke-pall of some distant but enormous conflagration.

Luckily little of the dust settled, and that which did fall went unnoticed. Like London, most of the industrial cities of Britain were already grimy and smoke-blanketted. After the long winter, which had begun in September with sudden sharp Arctic snaps most people were innured to the cold and dis-

comfort. Unobtrusively the brown crystalline dust began to gather under seats in the parks, along the cornices of the Ministries down Whitehall but by the time it became a nuisance sliding in under doorways and window ledges, it was a familiar part of the urban landscape. Above the rooftops, across the low sky which was now always overcast, the long thin clouds swept on to the Atlantic.

By March, however, people became aware of a second obvious climatic variant. The east wind which had carried the dust stream had blown steadily throughout the winter. never varying its speed and force. The early autumn had been a period of strange storms. Lightning displays flashed nightly across suburban streets, wrecking greenhouses and verandas, and chopping elms and willows down into the small back gardens. In October a tremendous gale, later officially designated Hurricane Juliet, swept down the Channel, sinking a cross-channel ferry and smashing coastal resorts all the way from Dover to Torquay. Several piers were wrecked and the cheaper hotels on the front were gutted, an estimated half million deck chairs were swept out to sea. For weeks afterwards their waterlogged remnants were tossed up on to the beaches.

Immediately after the hurricane, in the first week of November, the first tornado suddenly appeared in Surrey. Materialising out of a black sky late one Saturday afternoon, its long writhing finger swayed across Esher Common, astounding the thousands of motorists waiting in a traffic jam on the Portsmouth Road. Swerving abruptly, the tornado whirled across the road, splitting open the roofs of a dozen cars and tossing them and their occupants two hundred yards away.

These thirty deaths were later seen to be the first casualties in the vast climatic upheaval which was to follow, but at the beginning there seemed little connection between the other incidents which occurred through the late autumn and early winter. Like the dust, the cold grit-laden wind had become a familiar part of the landscape. Immersed in itself, life in the cities continued below the dust-covered rooftops, on their way to home and office people merely stepped forward a little more firmly, tightened their collars.

Steadily, however, by a few miles an hour each day, the wind continued to increase.

Dr. Robert Maitland noticed the rise in the wind strength as he rode back in the taxi from London Airport, after waiting a fruitless forty-eight hours for his BOAC flight to Montreal. For three days not a single aircraft had got off the ground. Weather conditions were freak and persistent—ten-tenths cloud and a ceiling of 600 feet coupled with unusual surface turbulence, savage cross-winds that whipped across the runways and had already ground-looped two 707's on their take-off runs. The Terminus building was clogged with hundreds of prospective passengers, slumped on their baggage in long straggling queues, trying to make sense of the continuous cross-fire of announcements and counter-announcements.

Something about the build-up of confusion warned Maitland that it might be another two or three days before he took his seat in an aircraft. Fed up and longing for a bath, he finally picked up his suitcases, shouldered his way out and climbed into a taxi, arranging to spend the next day or two with a close friend named Andrew Symington, an electronics engineer who worked for the Air Ministry.

The ride back to London depressed him. It took half an hour to get out of the airport, and then the Great West Road was a chain of jams. His departure from England, culmination of endless heart-searching, let alone the professional difficulties involved in switching his research fellowship at the Middlesex to the State Hospital at Vancouver, had all come to a dismal anticlimax. A broadly-built man of thirty-five, with a strong jaw and reflective eyes, he had found himself becoming more and more introjected as time passed, and for several years had been trying to get away from the pressure and over-crowding of Central London. Ironically, now that he had finally made up his mind the weather had abruptly supervened.

As the taxi edged through the Hounslow traffic he looked out at the drab shop-fronts, the congested skyline against the low sky like a silhouette of hell. It was only four o'clock but already dusk was coming in, and most of the cars had their lights on. The people on the pavements had turned up their collars against the hard gritty wind, which made the late June day seem more like early autumn.

Maitland read the flapping headlines on the newspaper stands.

QUEEN MARY AGROUND NEAR CHERBOURG
High Winds Hamper Rescue Launches

A number of passengers who should have picked up the liner at Southampton had been at the airport, but she had been over a week late on her five-day crossing of the Atlantic, meeting tremendous seas, headwinds like a wall of steel.

A pile of fine brown dust had collected on the window ledge. Unlike the usual grey detritus of metropolitan London, the grains had a distinctive red-brown colouring. When they reached Notting Hill the traffic slowed to negotiate a gang of workmen dismembering a large elm that had come down in the wind, and here the dust lay thickly against the curbstones, the street resembling the sandy bed of a mountain torrent.

At Lancaster Gate they turned into Hyde Park towards Knightsbridge. Breakwaters had been erected at the far end of the Serpentine ; white-topped waves broke against the wooden palisades, throwing up the wreckage of boats torn from their moorings on the north side.

" Just heard ITV's gone for a burton," the driver told him through the window panel when Maitland asked if there was any news about the weather. " Crystal Palace tower came down this morning. Supposed to be good for 200 miles an hour."

Maitland was about to frown sympathetically when horns sounded ahead of them. They were moving down Sloane Street towards the Symingtons' house in Chelsea, and had just passed the sheltering bulk of the Carlton Tower Hotel. Braking sharply the driver pulled up and Maitland pitched forward against the glass pane. As he regained his seat a brilliantly flickering catherine wheel fell out of the air into the roadway in front of them. A line of power cables had come down and were arching the vehicle, the gusts venting from the side-streets tossing them into the air and then flinging them back on the bonnet.

Panicking, the driver opened his door, before he could steady himself the wind wrenched it back, dragging him out on to the road. He stumbled to his feet by the front wheel, tripping over the long flaps of his overcoat, and the sparking cables whipped down on to the bonnet and flailed across him like a phosphorescent lash.

Maitland leapt out of the cabin on to the pavement. The traffic had stopped and a small crowd gathered among the stalled cars, watching as the cables cataracted across the taxi and showered over the body of the driver.

two

An hour later, when he reached the Symingtons, the bruise on Maitland's jaw had stiffened the left side of his face. Soothing it with an ice-bag, he lay back on the sofa in the lounge, and sipped at a whisky.

"Poor devil. God knows if I'm supposed to attend the inquest. I should be on a boat within a couple of days."

"I doubt if you will," Andrew Symington said. He was forty-five, a small balding man with a round cranium and the intelligent watchful eyes of a first-class bridge-player. "There's nothing on the Atlantic at present. The *Queen Elizabeth* and the *United States* both turned back for New York today when they were only twenty miles out. This morning a big supertanker went down in the Channel and we couldn't get a single rescue ship to it."

"How long has the wind kept up now?" Dora Symington asked. A pretty, dark-haired girl, she was expecting her first baby.

"Only a month or so," Symington said, with what sounded like deliberate vagueness. "Don't worry, it won't go on for ever."

"I hope not. I can't even go out for a walk, Robert. And everything seems so dirty."

Maitland noticed that all the Symingtons' books and glassware had been packed away.

"You two moving house?" he asked Symington.

"Just taking a few precautions. Dora left the bedroom window open this morning and a flying mirror near guillotined her. If the wind gets much stronger some really big things are going to start moving."

Symington's tone surprised Maitland and Dora looked up from her knitting. "Andrew, do they expect it to get stronger?" she asked.

"Well, it's been increasing by about five miles an hour each day. Of course, it won't go on indefinitely at that rate or we'll all be blown off the face of the Earth. It has one or two unusual features. Have you noticed, Robert, that it doesn't let up, even momentarily?"

Maitland listened to the steady unvarying whine passing through the rooftops and chimneys. "What is its speed?"

"About fifty-five. Pretty brisk, really. Whole gale force on the Beaufort scale. I wouldn't like to be in Tokyo or Bangkok.

Maitland sat up. " Do you mean they're having the same trouble ?"

" Same trouble, same wind. That's another strange thing about it. The wind force is increasing at the same rate all over the world, at its highest—about seventy miles an hour now—at the Equator, diminishing by latitude. It's almost as if a complete shell of solid air, with its axis at the Poles, were revolving around the globe." He turned on the radio. " Let's catch the 10 o'clock news, should be interesting."

". . . widespread havoc is reported from many parts of the world, particularly in the Far East and the Pacific, where tens of thousands are homeless. Winds of up to hurricane force have flattened entire towns and villages, causing heavy flooding and hampering the efforts of relief workers. For the fourth day in succession shipping has been at a standstill. No news has yet been received of the 65,000-ton tanker *Onassis Flyer* which capsized—"

Symington switched off. " You see the pattern forming."

" I think there's something strange about it," Dora said to Maitland. " It's not like an ordinary strong wind. All this dust and noise. If the end of the world was going to come you'd expect it to be like this."

Maitland laughed. Dora's anxiety amusing him. " What do the weather experts think has caused the wind ?" he asked Andrew.

" No one seems to know. There are a lot of rival theories, everything from solar storms to neutron showers. The Royal Observatory people think that the Earth may be tunnelling through a dense cloud of hydrogen, the increased gravitational drag contracting the Van Allen radiation belts and in turn setting off the global windstream. Pure guess-work." He stood up and walked over to the door. " But let me show you something that isn't."

He closed the door behind him, but the air drumming against the windows and the draught pulsing across the room jerked it off its catch. Before Maitland could stop it the french windows burst open, a violent gust of air ballooned the curtains back, knocking over a standard lamp and throwing a whirl of light across the ceiling. With an effort Maitland wrested the windows shut ; the wind leaned on them heavily, apparently coming fron due east with well approaching gale force.

Dora watched him uneasily, fingering her glass. "It was like this down at Brighton last weekend. While we were having lunch in the hotel some of the panes in the sun deck blew in and the wind just exploded. It was terrifying. A lot of the promenade isn't there any more. Pieces of concrete the size of this room are moving in and out on the tide."

Maitland watched the dust settling towards the carpet, filtering through the yellow light like mist in a cloud chamber. "I wouldn't worry, Dora," he said, adding with a grin, "It'll blow over."

After Dora had gone to bed Symington handed Maitland the rack of neatly labelled test-tubes he had brought up from the basement, each containing the familiar red-brown dust.

In the first tube there was a quarter of an inch, in the others progressively more. The last held almost three inches.

"I've been measuring the daily dust-fall," Symington explained.

Maitland held up the tube on the right. "Nearly ten cc's. Pretty heavy." He raised the tube up to the light. "What is it? Looks like sand, but where is it coming from?"

Symington smiled. "Not from the South Coast, anyway. Quite a long way off. A soil chemist at the Ministry analyzed a sample yesterday. Apparently this is loess, the fine silt found on the alluvial plains of Tibet. We haven't heard any news from there recently, and it's not surprising. If the same concentrations are falling all over the northern hemisphere it means that something like 50 million tons have been dumped on the British Isles alone, equal to the top two feet of their entire surface."

Symington paced over to the window, his face tired and drawn. "Robert, do you realise what the inertial drag is of such a mass? It should have stopped the wind in its tracks. God, if it can move the whole of Tibet it can move anything."

The telephone rang in the hall. Excusing himself, Symington stepped out.

Through the door Maitland caught: ". . . we're taking over the old RAF field at Tern Hill. The H-bomb bays there are fifteen feet thick. What? Well tell the Minister that the minimum accommodation for one person for longer than a month is three thousand cubic feet. If we cram thousands of people into those bunkers they'll go mad . . ."

Symington came back and closed the door.

"I couldn't help overhearing some of that," Maitland said. "Surely the Government aren't taking emergency action yet?"

Symington eyed Maitland thoughtfully. "Not exactly. There are people in the War Office whose job is to stay permanently three jumps ahead of the politicians. If the wind goes on increasing there'll be a tremendous outcry if we haven't prepared at least a token number of shelters. As long as one tenth of one per cent of the population are catered for the Commons will be happy." He paused bleakly. "God help the other ninety-nine point nine."

During the next three days Maitland sat by the radio in the Symingtons lounge, listening with Dora to the news reports. The situation, at first confused, slowly began to resolve itself into a uniform set of events. All over the world the same disasters repeated themselves, there were the same inexplicable variations on the normal climate—tornadoes in Dresden, snowstorms in Singapore. As Andrew had prophesied, the grimmest disasters were reported from the countries around the Equator. Razed by eighty mile an hour winds, a continuous belt of devastation extended in a band around the Earth's waist 2000 miles in depth. Although modern steel-supported buildings in Lagos and Nairobi and Bangkok were still standing, the plaster and lathe huts where the majority of people lived had been uprooted and blown away.

Soon there would be demands for massive United Nations Aid, particularly when the Afro-Asian nations realised that Nature, by some gratuitous act of prejudice, had relatively spared the better-equipped countries of Europe and North America. Then the usual politico-economic bargains would be sealed over the crates of Red Cross supplies.

Already up to 70 miles an hour in London, the wind showed no signs of slackening off, but apart from superficial damage to older property life was running much as usual. Traffic had begun to thin out, and there were a host of minor accidents, people cut by flying glass, buses overturning, roofs caving in. But the most noticeable feature was the vast accumulations of litter in the streets. Apart from the tattered newspapers and cigarette cartons, thousands of dust-bin lids and tin cans skittered across the pavements, pieces of timber and galvanised iron, all the detritus of the urban connurbation. Now and then, as they crouched over the radio, sipping their tea,

Maitland and Dora heard the fragments richocheting off the house like shrapnel bursts.

Luckily the small terraced house still held. Sensibly, Symington had fastened heavy shutters to the windows and these effectively excluded the draught. Maitland estimated that the house would easily withstand 100 mile an hour gales.

He was all the more surprised when Symington came home early one afternoon from the Air Ministry and told them they would be leaving the house and closing it down.

"But why, Andrew? Dora asked anxiously. "Surely they're not expecting the wind to get any stronger?"

Symington put an arm around his wife's shoulders, watched her pensively. "Dora, it's already two miles an hour stronger than it was when I went off this morning. For safety's sake the War Office are moving all personnel and their dependents to a central zone where we won't have to worry about the roof falling in. Moving to and from the Air Ministry is getting to be a hell of a job." He turned to Maitland. "The Circle Line track is exposed between Sloane Square and Victoria, of all things a car was blown down on to the line this morning, we were stranded in a packed train for about two hours."

"Where are we going to stay?" Dora asked. "I'd better start packing everything up. Are they sending a truck round?"

Symington smiled at Dora. "Darling, I don't think you realise what's happening. They will not be sending a truck round. Firstly, because the only trucks available are too busy shifting sandbags and cement, and secondly because we've been rationed to one suitcase each. You'll be temporarily billetted in the Park Lane Hotel. Let's get moving, we have to be at the Green Park Guards Depot by six o'clock."

Something about these precautions seemed over-elaborate to Maitland, yet he felt an ominous sense of exclusion from the circle of safety represented by Symington and the War Office. Suppose the wind *did* continue to increase? Presumably it would hardly rise above 100 miles an hour, but it might well continue at that pace for a week or two. With Andrew and Dora gone, he would find it difficult to keep going at the house. Moving about the streets was virtually impossible—already many shops were boarded up, supplies were starting to run low, milk for example was no longer being delivered.

Suddenly he wondered what he would have for dinner that evening.

When Dora went off upstairs to pack Symington said quietly : " I haven't told Dora, but she'll be on her own in the hotel. Wives and families will be there, we'll be billetted in the Green Park Depot."

" We—?" Maitland asked.

Symington nodded. " Lucky for you I missed the briefing this morning. Simon Marshall, the COE chief I'm working for, took me into his office and I managaed to persuade him to fit you into the COE medical unit. Central Operations Executive is acting as the joint arm of the War Office and Home Office, based on Admiralty Arch. Believe me, it's a good place to be." He waved away Maitland's thanks. " Forget it, Robert. You'll like Simon Marshall, he's one of these big burly thugs with a strong streak of romantic sensitivity. It's a good thing he's running COE."

Three hours later they had packed and stepped into a taxi which backed up across the pavement to the front door. Maitland and Symington held Dora between them but the wind almost pulled them off their feet.

Settling down in the seat, they saw that a bus had been blown across the King's Road, was jammed against the corner house, the driver helplessly flogging his gears in an effort to back into the wind.

Above them somewhere there was a loud report that echoed away down the deserted street. One of the third floor shutters had blown out and the curtains were billowing into the air as the wind poured through a breached window on the east side. Symington glanced sombrely at Maitland, who realised his unspoken thought. Within half an hour the house would probably be gutted, one by one its windows blown out. Had he stayed on alone he would have been made to realise the full fury of the wind in a sharply dramatic lesson.

Relentlessly, the wind continued to rise, rushing over the flickering rooftops. Now darkened by a mass of airborne particles, it was marked by occasional lighter striations as the sky showed through, and whirled past like a macadam roadway seen below the window of a speeding car. The few cross-currents of the former prevailing winds had been submerged, and the tornadoes and lightning storms died away as the wind achieved aerodynamic stability.

Like a cosmic carousel, it continued to spin ever faster, its 2000 million passengers clinging on for their lives.

Wind-borne, the sound of engines murmured below the hill-crest.

For a moment they echoed in the air-stream moving across the cold earth, then the horizon rose into the sky as the long lines of graders and excavators, draglines and tournadozers, lumbered forward. Two hundred yards from each other their flanks turned inward to form a giant square and together the huge vehicles jerked to a halt.

From the windward line a small broad figure in a dark coat strode rapidly towards the centre of the square. Here he turned his face to the wind, hard eyes below a massive forehead questing through the low storm clouds.

Glancing at his watch, he clenched his fist above his head, then dropped it sharply.

With a roar of racing clutches the vehicles slammed into motion a phalanx of plunging metal. As they moved away the iron-faced man stood silently in their centre, eyes still searching the wind.

three

FROM : CIC U.S. SIXTH FLEET, CHERBOURG.
TO : COMMANDER LANYON, USS TERRAPIN, PORTSMOUTH.
GENERAL VAN DAMM NOW IN WAR OFFICE EMERGENCY HOSPITAL, GREEN PARK DEPOT, LONDON. COLLECT TROOP CARRIER FROM NATO TRANSPORT POOL. EXPECTED WIND STRENGTH : 85 KNOTS'

Crouched down in the well of the conning tower, Lanyon scanned the message, then nodded to the sailor who saluted and disappeared below.

Twenty feet above, the concrete roof of the submarine pen was slick with moisture. The steel gates of the pen had been closed but the sea pounded against the heavy grilles, driving in high swells which rode the *Terrapin* up and down on its moorings and slapped against the far wall, sending clouds of spray over the submarine's stern.

Lanyon waited until the last of the moorings had been completed, then climbed down into the control room and made his way to his cabin. He was a tall, lean man with a handsome weathered face and calm eyes, more at home on the submarine

than he was on dry land. For the previous two or three weeks he had regarded the storm-wind as little other than a workaday hurricane magnified by a lot of neurotic civilians, but he realised now that he would have to revise his judgment.

He sat down on the bunk, adjusting himself to the rhythmic rise and fall of the submarine. After the two-day crossing of the Channel, at a steady comfortable twenty fathoms, the surface felt like a switchback. His instructions were to make one trial surfacing en route, in a sheltered cove off the west of the Isle of Wight, but even before the conning tower broke surface the *Terrapin* took on a 30° yaw and was hit by enormous seas that almost stood it on its stern.

What it was like top-side Lanyon hated to imagine. Cherbourg, where what was left of the Sixth Fleet were bottled up, had been a shambles. Vast seas were breaking over the harbour area, slamming at the 100,000-ton carrier *Eisenhower* and sending two-foot waves down streets a quarter of a mile inshore.

Portsmouth seemed quieter. With luck the British would have their pants on, instead of running around like a lot of startled baboons, frightening themselves with their own noise.

So Van Damn was still alive. Lanyon had been told confidentially that the general would be dead by the time they reached Portsmouth—he had been severely injured in a plane smash at Orly Airport outside Paris. The five-man crew of the Constellation and two of the general's aides had been killed outright. NATO supreme commander for three years, Van Damm had been expected to declare himself the Democratic candidate in the coming Presidential election, but he wouldn't be of much interest now to the party chiefs, and Lanyon wondered whether it was worth sending the *Terrapin* to rescue him.

There was a knock and Lieutenant Rogers, Lanyon's Number 2, stuck his head in. "I hear Van Damm is still holding on, Steve. What's the programme? It's a sixty-mile run to London, pretty risky with the wind still blowing hard."

"Don't worry, Paul, it should start slacking off today."

Rogers snorted unhappily. "That's what they've been saying for the last month. I think we'd be crazy to lose two or three men trying to rescue a stiff."

For a moment Lanyon surveyed Rogers' plump boyish face, realising he would have to drive up to London himself.

Proctocol probably required it, and besides it would be interesting to see the city he had first learnt to know during the war. Then it had stood up to an even tougher bombardment.

Quietly, he said : " Van Damm isn't dead yet, Paul. He's done his job, so we'll do our's." He pulled on a heavy leather windcheater, then strapped a service .45 around his waist.

They climbed up through the conning tower, crossed the gangway on to the narrow pier. A stairway took them up over the workshops into the control deck housing the NATO contingents. There were six pens in all, at present housing three British submarines, a couple of American ships ferrying VIP's to the States, and a large French atom-powered sub with a damaged reactor.

" Good to see you, Commander," Major Hendrix, the liaison officer, greeted them when they reached his office. A couple of map wallets and a packet of English currency were on his desk and he pushed them forward. " Forgive me if I come straight to the point but the American Embassy is pulling out of London today and I have a million things to do." Something about Hendrix, the fatigue showing through his face, the two buttons missing from his uniform jacket, warned Lanyon that he could expect to find conditions less equable outside.

Hendrix flipped on the intercom. " Sergeant, what are the latest reading we've got ?"

" One hundred and fifteen and 265° magnetic, sir."

" Right. One hundred and fifteen miles an hour and virtually due East, Commander. The troop carrier is waiting for you in the transport pool. Your driver knows the route to London like the palm of his hand so you'll be able to doze off."

" What about the general ?" Lanyon queried. " Everything laid on for him ?"

Hendrix glanced up at Lanyon. " Yes, everything's laid on. Don't worry, he's in good hands."

As they neared the transport pool the sounds of the storm-wind grew steadily louder. Revolving doors had been built into the exits, operated by a couple of men with powerful winches.

Lanyon turned to Rogers. " I'll call you in six hours' time when we make the hospital. Check with Hendrix in case

anything comes in from Cherbourg over my head. I don't want to be ditched here while you save the Admiral's spaniels."

Zipping his windcheater, he nodded to the waiting crew-men and then stepped into the exit section of the door. The men on the winch cranked it round and Lanyon shot out into sharp daylight and a vicious tornado of air and stinging grit that whirled past him, jockeying him across a narrow yard between high concrete buildings.

Holding tight to the map wallets, he lurched across to the troop carrier, a squat twelve-wheeler with sandbags strapped to the bonnet and over the windshield. The driver unbolted the doors and Lanyon climbed forward to the co-driver's seat The two orderlies squatted down on the mattress behind. They were wearing one-piece plastic suits fitted with hoods roped tightly around their faces. Bulky goggles hung from their necks.

It was dim and cold inside the carrier, the sole light coming from the periscope mirror mounted over the dashboard. The doors were taped with cotton wadding, but a steady stream of air whistled through the clutch and brake housings, chilling Lanyon's legs.

He peered through the periscope. Half a mile away were the remains of a fence, tilting posts from which straggled a few strands of barbed wire. Beyond the boundary was a thick grey haze, blurred and shimmering, an enormous surface dust storm two or three hundred feet high, which headed straight towards them.

The carrier ground along at a steady ten miles an hour, left the sub-pens and turned along the boundary road. As it pivoted the vehicle slewed sideways. No longer shielded by the sandbags, there was a continuous rattle as scores of hard objects bounced off the sloping sides of the carrier, each report like a richocheting bullet.

The guard-house looked like a World War I pill-box, hemmed in by corridors of sandbags. The driver spoke into his microphone, then swung out through the gateway and picked up speed.

Portsmouth lay behind them to the south-west, hidden in the haze. They took the M7 Motorway that ran from the coast. All the crops in the adjacent fields had long been flattened, but the farmhouses were still intact, roofs weighed

down and lashed to stakes. No one was about, partly because it was Sunday and also because of the wind's immense force.

They passed through a succession of small villages, windows boarded up, alleyways jammed with the wrecks of abandoned cars and farm implements.

Lanyon switched on the dashboard radio, tuned in a newscast from AFN Munich.

". . . in the Pacific area thousands of casualties are reported from islands as far apart as Okinawa and the Solomons. Indian Prime Minister Pandit Nehru has called on the United Nations to launch a global relief mission. Back home winds of hurricane force have caused damage in the Middle West estimated at four hundred million dollars, but so far few lives have been taken . . ."

That's one good thing, Lanyon reflected. The flooding might bring typhoid and cholera, but so far, even in the Pacific, loss of life had been comparatively low. A hurricane like the one he had seen down at the base at Key West two years earlier had swooped in from the Caribbean without any warning, scores of people along the Atlantic seaboard had been killed driving their cars home. This time the gradual build-up in speed had given everyone a chance to nail the roof down, lay in food stocks.

A few vehicles passed them, crawling along under loads of sandbags, British military or police trucks, patrolling the empty streets.

Lanyon dozed off in the cold greasy air, woke as they crossed the square of a small town to hear a heavy pounding on the steel plates behind his head.

"What's going on?" he asked, squinting into the periscope.

The driver, a tough young Brooklyner called Goldman, flipped away the butt of his cigarette. "Some sort of rumpus back there, Commander. Couldn't make it out exactly."

He leaned on the accelerator, pushed the carrier's speed up to 15 miles an hour. The pounding stopped, then took up again more insistently, a voice somewhere hoarse above the wind.

Lanyon tapped the steering wheel. "Slow down for a second."

Goldman started to protest, but Lanyon straddled his seat and stepped past the two orderlies to the rear doors. He peered out through the grille. A small group of people

clustered around the porch of a church on the north side of the village square, clouds of dust and mortar falling around them. A spur of brickwork, all that was left of the church tower, stood above the roof, and the wind was tearing at the raw masonry.

Someone appeared around the end of the carrier, pressed his face to the grille, jabbering excitedly. A tall gaunt man in a tractor driver's leather jacket.

Lanyon shouted at Goldman: "Back up towards the church! I'll see if we can lend a hand."

"Commander, once we start helping these people we'll never get to London. They've got their own rescue units working."

"Not right here, anyway. Come on, back in!"

As he slipped the catch the tall villager wrenched the door out of his hands. He looked angry and exhausted, and pulled Lanyon out of the carrier, yelling at him and pointing at the church. Goldman reversed up to the porch and the orderlies jumped down through the flying dust.

The villager shouldered his way roughly through the crowd, led them into the nave.

Inside the church a bomb appeared to have exploded in the middle of a crowded congregation. A group of children and older women crouched around the altar while the priest and five or six men pulled away the mounds of masonry that had plunged through the roof on to the people below. A heavy rafter lay across the pews, and beneath it Lanyon could see tags of black fabric, the hunched forms of smothered bodies.

He joined the tall villager at one end of the rafter, but they failed to move it. Lanyon turned to leave the nave and the man ran after him and seized his shoulder, face contorted.

"Don't leave" he bellowed. He pointed to the pile of rubble. "My wife's in there!"

Lanyon tried to pacify him, then tore himself away.

"Goldman, get the winch started! You two run the cable out!" The orderlies pulled the cable from the locker under the endboard, carried the tackle into the nave and lashed it around the rafter. Goldman gunned the 550 h.p. diesel and tautened the cable, swinging the rafter off the pews into the aisle. Immediately two or three people trapped below the pews began to stir. A young woman wearing the remains of

a black dress, now as white as a bridal gown, stood up weakly. Between her feet were several motionless figures, and the tall villager was digging frantically with his hands at the masonry, hurling it away with insane force.

More figures pressed into the nave, a platoon of uniformed British soldiers, carrying stretchers and plasma kits.

"Thanks a lot, Commander," the sub-lieutenant told him. "We're grateful to you." He shook his head angrily. "The villagers were holding a harvest service, praying for the wind to stop. Pretty murderous justice!"

four

They reached London at three o'clock that afternoon, taking the Kingston By-Pass and crossing the river at Putney. The outskirts of London were completely deserted, the shops and houses glimmering in the white dust storm raging past over the roofs. Hundreds of cars lined the streets, tilting back on flattened tyres, lying on their sides with their doors peeled off. Some of the more protected Hammersmith side-streets were crammed with vehicles, ten abreast from pavement to pavement, their roofs dented by huge fragments of masonry that had fallen from the tall buildings their drivers had assumed would provide shelter.

Many of the older houses were badly damaged, windows torn out, ceilings and floors ripped away, but Central London seemed intact. Traffic was moving about, most of the vehicles heavy military half-tracks and armoured cars.

The parade ground of the Guards Depot at Green Park was packed with trucks and staff cars, their drivers huddled in the loading bays. They drove down a long entrance ramp into an underground transport pool. there parked and dismounted. An RAMC sergeant led Lanyon up into the barracks, where a small sick-bay had been set up. To Lanyon's surprise two MP's were guarding one of the small single wards. A burly US Medical Corps major greeted Lanyon and waved the MP's away, then introduced him to Robert Maitland, sitting at a desk in the corner.

"Welcome aboard, Commander," Maitland said. "How do you like England these days?"

Lanyon shrugged with a grin. "Hasn't changed at all, as far as I can see. Everyone's still talking about the weather,

but no one does anything." As Maitland laughed he pulled off his windcheater, then slumped down thankfully on a teak chest resting on a low table against the wall.

Maitland hurriedly pushed across a canvas chair. "Sorry, Commander, but perhaps you'd better use this. I don't want to be accused of showing disrespect to a distinguished American."

Lanyon pulled himself to his feet. "*Which* American?"

The major pointed to the teak box. "Van Damm. You were sitting on him."

"Do you mean Van Damm's dead?" When Maitland and the major nodded he stared at the coffin, shaking his head slowly. It was ringed with heavy steel tape, and there was a Graves Commission seal franked with a Paris movements order.

The major began to chuckle, plucked a paper cup from a water dispenser in the corner and passed a silver hip flask to Lanyon.

"It's Van Damm, all right. May seem a hell of a time to pick, but he's booked into an honour berth at Arlington Cemetery and if he doesn't go now he never will. There won't be room."

Lanyon helped himself to whisky. "So he *was* dead after the crash?"

"He was dead *before* the crash. Van Damm was killed two weeks ago in a car smash near Madrid. He was on a private visit to Franco. They hushed it up for political reasons. Nobody survived the crack-up at Orly. The Connie went straight into the deck on her back before she made three hundred feet. They fished out Van Damm's bits and pieces and decided to mail them collect to London." He wandered over to the coffin and patted the side gently. "Well, goodbye, General, have a quiet trip back to the States. You're just about the only one who will."

Lanyon spent the night at the officers' mess at the depot, now shared with civilians such as Maitland and Symington working for the War Office. Narrow roofed corridors of cement-filled bags had been built along the streets, and a maze of these dripping tunnels criss-crossed the city, but he felt reluctant to venture out through them.

Maitland told him that over 2000 troops and specialists were grouped in the depot and the central bunkers around Whitehall. The wind showed no signs of abating; its rate of increase was a steady 5 miles an hour, by the latest estimates 117. After the initial period of inaction the government were requisitioning mines and deep shelters, stockpiling food and medical supplies.

"They're all confidently stating the wind's soon going to reach its peak," Maitland said over their drink in the bar. "But personally I think everything's pretty near breaking point. There's a limit to how long people will sit out this sort of storm in their basements. Already they're beginning to abandon their homes and go down into the Underground."

Lanyon nodded. "The old World War II reflex. Still, it may be sounder than you think."

Lanyon set off for Portsmouth at seven o'clock the next morning, the teak coffin sealed into a canvas shroud, for the next six or seven hours made slow progress southward.

Five miles north of Guildford they passed through a small village, when Goldman swore and braked the carrier. Through the periscope Lanyon saw a man in oilskins in the centre of the high-walled roadway, waving his arms in wide circles. There was a stack of pastel suitcases on the pavement, gaudy airline stickers clearly visible.

"Hold it," Lanyon snapped. "He's American."

Unbolting the rear doors, he gestured the man over, caught a glimpse of a face at a window behind him.

The man climbed on to the tail board, sat panting in long painful gasps.

"Thanks a million for stopping. We'd just about given up." He was about forty-five, a slimly built man with greying hair. "My name's Charlesby, NBC, London bureau. There's my assistant, Patricia Olsen, inside one of the empty houses over there. We were supposed to be evacuating through Portsmouth, but our car cracked up, we've been stuck here since yesterday."

One of the orderlies ran across the road, picked up two of the suitcases. Lanyon jumped down as the woman, wearing a tight-belted blue coat, blonde hair swirling around her head, stepped nimbly across the pavement. He put his arm around her shoulders and helped her up, then went back for the remainder of the suitcases.

They bolted the doors, then started off again. "How are you feeling?" Lanyon asked the girl, passing a cigarette pack to her. "All in one piece?"

"Uh-huh. Thanks a lot, Commander." She pinned back her hair, looking Lanyon up and down. Her face was strong and full-lipped, with wide intelligent eyes. She steadied herself with one hand on his arm, blew out a long stream of blue smoke from her cigarette.

"We came up to London here last week to get some shots of it being flattened for the folks back home." She tapped a tape recorder next to her. "All I've managed to get on this thing is the sound of my own screaming."

The carrier halted and Goldman stabbed a finger at the periscope. Twenty yards ahead, caught by its bumpers between two houses, was a long black Buick. Slowly it worked itself free, then slithered down the street towards them. It locked for a moment against the carrier's nose armour, and Goldman accelerated sharply. The Buick lifted into the air and careened over the sandbagged bonnet, rolling off the roof of the carrier. They all turned to watch through the rear grilles as the car, its body crushed, slid along the pavement, demolishing a low wall from which clouds of dust took off into the air like supercharged steam.

Patricia Olsen nudged Lanyon. "Bad driver," she commented dryly.

For hours they sat bunched together silently, swaying in unison with the motion of the carrier. They were travelling due south, and the turbulence around the carrier exploded periodically with sharp pressure booms.

Ten miles from Guildford they were moving up a slight incline when the road suddenly sank below the carrier and the off-side rear four wheels dropped sharply, tipping the vehicle over. The hard shoulder of the Motorway had collapsed as the gravel packing below the concrete was eroded by the air-stream.

Goldman swore and accelerated, trying to bring the carrier back on to the road then frantically reversed the engine when it began to tilt over further. But the wind had caught it, before Goldman could slam on the brakes the carrier swung round out of control and rolled over on to its side.

With a savage jolt the occupants were hurled off balance. Lanyon pulled himself away from Goldman, struggled pain-

fully through the dim light past Patricia Olsen, who was rubbing her knees and swearing softly to herself.

He reached the doors, unbolted them and kicked them outwards. The carrier lay immovably on its side, wheels spinning in the wind. Half a mile away was a group of two-storey brick buildings a water tower standing up above them.

Lanyon pointed across the intervening country, narrow farm strips divided by heavy hedges.

"Looks like a barracks," he told Charlesby, who had pulled himself wearily to the door. "We could be stranded here for days. Our best hope is to head for the barracks and see if we can contact anyone. Do you think you can reach it?"

The hint of doubt in Lanyon's voice made Charlesby look up.

"I'll try, Commander," he said evenly.

five

Lanyon leading, followed by Charlesby and Patricia Olsen, Goldman and the two orderlies bringing up the rear, they dived out of the carrier and plunged down the slope towards the hedge fifty yards away.

As he left the vehicle the wind carried Lanyon helplessly across the lumpy soil. He stumbled on to his knees, then was swept upright again, legs racing madly. Over his shoulder he caught a glimpse of the others stepping tentatively out of the carrier and being whirled away on the slipstream, Charlesby and Patricia Olsen arm in arm, buffetted right to left like drunken circus clowns.

He reached the hedge, crawled along to a narrow gateway and slid through it into the sheltered side. The sky appeared to be only a few hundred feet overhead, a whirling typhoon of opaque grey-brown ash.

He crossed the boundary of the barracks area within half an hour, lay in a ditch on the inner side of the ragged fence, waiting for the others to appear.

Hidden in the haze eight hundred yards away, beyond the straggle of buildings, was a curious-looking structure, what appeared to be the base of a huge flat-topped pyramid, partly shielded by an enormous curved screen like a dam wall. The dust storm obscured it, but for brief intervals he was sure he

could see the ant-like forms of construction workers moving across its surface. A large tracked vehicle emerged from its base and headed off towards the Motorway vanishing among the distant hedges, and Lanyon wished they had stayed with the carrier.

On his left something rolled towards the boundary line, then lodged in the ditch, a lumpy bundle of grey and black rags. Lanyon crawled towards it, when he was a few feet away recognised the tattered strips of Charlesby's oilskin, the shreds of his grey suit.

He straightened Charlesby out and massaged his pallid face, barely distinguishable after being dragged across the rough farmland. For a few fruitless moments he pumped the man's lungs, then gave up and wrapped his head in the skirt of the oilskin.

As he backed away he saw someone approaching along the ditch. It was Patricia Olsen. She still wore the belted blue coat, her blonde hair trailing around her head.

He hurried along to her, steadied her carefully into a sitting position. She rolled her head against his shoulder and glanced at the body.

" Charlesby ?" When Lanyon nodded she closed her eyes. " Poor guy. Where are the others ?"

" You're the only one I've seen. We'd better get inside the barracks. Are you strong enough ?"

She nodded weakly. After a short rest they crawled across the clipped turf to the nearest building, pulled themselves around the corner into the leeward side, then stood up and ran into the entrance. Heavy doors were sealed across it.

Lanyon pounded on them, but the building was empty. " No one here !" he yelled to Patricia. They crouched on the steps, then Lanyon pulled Patricia across the yard. He pointed to the square manhole cover, recessed into the cobbles.

" There's a chance we can get in here." He snapped open the blade of his jack-knife and pried it under the lid, wrestled the heavy block out of its socket. Fifteen feet below a metal slide angled into a freight silo, wooden stalls half-filled with sawdust. Lanyon helped Patricia into the shute, watched her disappear into the dim light.

He followed her quickly, sinking up to his waist in the soft rustling material. Shaking their clothes free, they moved towards a low flight of steps into another storeroom. Light

filtered through narrow grilles. They reached a pair of heavy doors on to the basement of the building, peered through them into total darkness. Flashing his torch, Lanyon whistled sharply. Stacked in lines down the room were hundreds of crates and cartons, their contents glinting in the darkness.

"The army must have stored everything here before they left," Lanyon muttered. He brushed against a square waist-high object that gonged metallically, shone the torch on to a large kerosense power generator. He swung the torch against the wall, where a mound of food cans was stacked up to the ceiling, like a display in a darkened shop window. Next to the cans was a line of green-painted wooden crates, metal barrels gleaming in the thin light.

Lanyon leaned over and felt one of the weapons. Most of them were Sten guns, hurriedly packed by someone not used to handling weapons.

"Something strange about this place," he commented. "Doesn't look like a military store."

He opened the doors at the far end of the room. Lights moved in the corridor beyond, and three or four men were peering into the adjacent storerooms.

A shout of recognition went up.

"Steve, they've seen us !" Patricia cried.

Lanyon took her arm and they ran back down the aisle. He pulled Patricia into an alcove between the door and the generator. "Wait here, Pat. Try not to move. They look like looters." He squeezed her arm, felt her hand hold his tightly. Slipping his .45 automatic out of its holster, he eased off the safety catch. He dived away among the crates, just as the doors were kicked back and torches flared across the crates. A tall, heavily built man in a black plastic storm-suit and fibre-glass helmet blocked the threshold, and then two more swarthy-faced men pressed past him and swarmed away between the crates. A third man moved down the aisle, a heavy Mauser in one hand. He spotted Patricia and swung the long barrel at her.

The shot roared out into the confined air, slamming against the tiers of metal cabinets. A pile of food cans next to Patricia toppled with a chatter. The man with the Mauser stopped, feet placed wide apart, then raised the gun again.

Dropping to one knee, Lanyon steadied his elbow with his left hand and fired. The blast of the .45 stunned the air, and

the two men on the far side of the room ducked down. The gunman with the Mauser was kicked back on to the floor by the heavy bullet, lay on his face, blood leaking slowly from his chest across the concrete.

Lanyon knelt down to Patricia, out of the side of his eye he was aware of someone bending over him. He managed to duck just as the blow caught his ear, rode down on to the floor with it. As he started to get up, the man kicked him viciously in the chest and Lanyon staggered back, ribs tearing with pain, trying to level his automatic.

Then the two other men were on him, fists slamming at his face. A heavy boot stamped on to his hand, knocking the gun away, and then he was pulled back and propped against one of the packing cases. He had a confused image of Patricia down on her knees, and then the tall man in the black helmet clubbed him savagely across the forehead with the barrel of the .45. Lanyon sagged back against the case. The big man snapped the gun butt into his hand and levelled it at Lanyon, eyes narrowing.

" Hold it, Kroll." One of the black-suited men spoke. " He looks like an American."

The big man paused. His face was hidden by the deep visor of the helmet and the broad metal chin-strap, but Lanyon could see a tight scarred mouth, sharp nose and cheek bones, hard eyes. His hands were gloveless, rubber seals at the sleeves of his suit clasping thick wrists. In the centre of his helmet was a single large white triangle.

He reached forward and jerked open Lanyon's windcheater, ripping the zip off its mounting, then fingered the gold USN tabs on Lanyon's shirt lapels.

When Lanyon tried to speak Kroll cuffed his head back. " Just listen to me ! Now, what are you playing around at here ?"

Lanyon cleared his eyes, catching his breath. ". . . Lanyon, Commander Lanyon, U.S. Navy. We're on our way down to Portsmouth. Are you—"

Kroll cut in again. " That's your carrier out there on the Motorway ? Where are the others ? You weren't driving that car yourself."

Lanyon shook his head weakly. " They must have got lost. We were all scattered by the wind." Phlegm choked his throat, and he bent over, coughing helplessly.

Kroll eyed him balefully, then lifted the automatic.

"Better take them up to London, Kroll," one of the guards said. "Hardoon won't want to get mixed up with the Yanks down here near the Tower."

Kroll pondered this. "Okay," he muttered finally. He grabbed Lanyon by the shoulder and pushed him forward into the aisle, then raised the automatic and chopped him heavily across the back of the head. As Patricia started to scream at him he bent down and grabbed the collar of Lanyon's windcheater, began to drag him towards the door.

The hill had vanished, obliterated by the fleets of bulldozers, its matrix scooped out and carried away on the endless lines of trucks.

Below the sweeping beams of powerful spotlights, arcs cutting through the whirling dust, huge pylons were rooted into the black earth, steel sheets welded between them to form a gigantic wind-screen one hundred feet high.

Immediately the first graders moved into the sheltered zone, sank their metal teeth into the earth, marking out a huge rectangle. Scores of construction workers moved like frantic ants, bracing giant forms and pouring in thousands of gallons of concrete. As each layer annealed the forms were replaced further up the sloping flanks. First ten feet, then twenty and thirty feet high, it rose steadily into the dust-filled night.

six

Unremittingly, the storm-wind continued to rise, like a steamroller eroding everything beneath it. From a distance the landscape of the British Isles seemed largely unchanged, but the coastline was now a ring of boiling foam two hundred feet high as gigantic seas pounded across the cliffs of Northumberland and the East Riding; inundating huge areas of Kent and Essex. Scarborough, Skegness and the smaller towns down the east coast had almost vanished, poking up like half-obliterated sand-castles, hidden under the vast drifts of spray that reached ten miles inland. The countryside between the towns was raw and empty, but here and there a train lay on its side, a solitary stone barn reared into the spinning sky.

Organised life was centred on the larger cities. The suburban rooftops gaped with countless holes, and most people had

retreated to deep shelters and basements, maintaining a tenuous thread of contact, but becoming more and more isolated as the days passed.

In central London, at the COE Overseas News Room near Admiralty Arch, Robert Maitland took the bundle of teletype despatches off Andrew Symington's desk and scanned them briefly. "Any hopeful news, Andrew?"

Symington shook his head. Behind him the banks of teletypes—labelled Ankara, Bangkok, Copenhagen and on through the alphabet—chattered away, churning out their endless disaster stories. "Still looks bad, Robert. Up to one hundred and seventy-five now, and shows no signs of breaking." He listened to a few phrases from the radio set behind him monitoring the BBC news bulletins. The Home Service was still transmitting half-hourly summaries interspersed with light music and a stream of War Office orders and recommendations.

He stared pensively at Maitland. "London Bridge is falling down," he said flatly. "General chaos building up everywhere."

"When are the government going to start doing something?"

"What can they do, Robert?"

Maitland gestured impatiently. "For God s sake, Andrew, you know what I mean. They're going about this whole thing the wrong way, telling people to stay indoors and hide under the staircase. What do they think this is—a zeppelin raid? They're going to have the most fantastic casualties soon, let alone a couple of typhoid and cholera epidemics." He drummed on the desk. "How much further *can* the wind rise?"

Symington lit a cigarette, inhaled quickly. "The Met experts think the wind strength will increase for several days more at least. Apparently localised areas of turbulence have to appear first, and they've shown no signs yet. Whatever happens it's bound to go up another fifty at least."

Maitland whistled. "Over two-thirty! God Almighty!" He tapped the wooden wall partition which was springing backwards and forwards as air pressed its way past. "Do you think this place will stand it?"

"This building probably will, even if it loses the roof, but already most of the domestic houses in the British Isles are starting to come down. Roofs are flying off, walls caving in—

not all that many modern houses have basements. People are running out of food, trying to reach the aid stations. They're being sucked out of their doorways before they know what's hit them, carried half a mile within ten seconds."

As he finished Deborah Freeman, Marshall's secretary, came into the room to collect the teletype despatches. "Still spreading a gloomy light everywhere, Andrew?" she asked him with a smile.

Maitland gazed up with pleasure at her smooth, intelligent face. Unlike most of the girls working at COE she still kept herself trim and well-groomed. Her blouse was a crisp white, her skirt neatly pressed, showing up the long curves of her thighs.

She glanced through the despatches, bit her lower lip. "Not too good, are they, Andrew? The Cabinet are getting all set to scuttle the boat, Simon needs something to encourage them."

Maitland grinned at her. "What about taking me in there? I'll sing a chorus from Rule Britannia."

Deborah laughed. "Don't do that, Robert, please. All they can think about is the Navy as it is. Portsmouth's crammed with submarines ready to take off for the Arctic." Marshall's green call light pulsed on Andrew's desk. "They're ready to meet now. Get your lifebelts ready."

TOKYO : 174 mph. 99 per cent of the city down. Explosive fires from Mitsubishi steelworks spreading over western suburbs. Casualties estimated at 15,000. Food and water adequate for three days.

ROME : 186 mph. Municipal and office buildings still intact. Vatican roofless, dome of St. Peter's destroyed. Casualties: 2,000. Suburbs largely derelict. Refugees from rural areas pouring into city, catacombs requisitioned by government for relief centres and dormitories.

NEW YORK : 175 mph. All skyscrapers in Manhattan windowless and abandoned. TV tower of Empire State Building down, Statue of Liberty minus head and torch. Seas breaking inshore as far as Central Park. City at standstill. Casualties : 500.

VENICE : 180 mph. City abandoned. Casualties : 2,000. Heavy seas have demolished Grand Canal palazzos. St. Mark's Square under water. Campanile down. All inhabitants on mainland.

ARCHANGEL : 68 mph. No casualties. Intact. Airfield and harbour closed.
CAPE TOWN : 74 mph. 4 casualties. Intact.
SINGAPORE : 205 mph. City abandoned. Government control non-existent. Casualties : 25,000.

Simon Marshall read carefully through the reports as Deborah took her seat beside him in the cabinet room.

" Not so good, but not so bad either. Tokyo and Singapore are finished, but one can't expect those cardboard jungles to stand up to winds above hurricane force. Pity about Venice."

A large powerful man of fifty, with a tough handsome face, Marshall sat massively at the long table like an intelligent bear.

It was 3.57, three minutes before he gave his afternoon report to the Combined Chiefs and the other members of the COE cabinet began to take their seats, nodding to Marshall as they entered.

There were five members, under the chairmanship of Sir Charles Gort, Permanent Secretary at the Home Office. He waited for the others to settle down, then turned to Dr. Lovatt Dickinson, Director of the Meteorological Office, a sandy-haired Scot in a brown tweed suit.

" Doctor, perhaps you'd give us the latest news on the weather front."

" Well, Sir Charles, I can't say I've anything very hopeful to report. The wind-speed is now 175 miles per hour, an increase of 4.89 over the speed recorded at 2 p.m. yesterday. The humidity shows a slight increase, accounted for by the passage of these enormous air volumes over the disturbed ocean surfaces. We've done our best to make high-altitude observations but launching a balloon in this wind, let alone keeping track of it, is well nigh impossible. The weather ship *Northern Survey*, off the coast of Greenland, where the wind speed is down to 85 miles per hour, has reported data indicating that the velocity declines with decreasing density, and that at 45,000 feet the air-speed is a mere 30 miles per hour."

Dickinson paused momentarily, and while he shuffled his memos Gort cut in smoothly.

" Encouraging, Doctor, but could we come down to ground level. What prospects are there of the wind subsiding ?"

Dickinson shook his head dourly. "I'd like to be optimistic Sir Charles, but I've every suspicion that it's some way to go before it spends itself. We're witnessing a meteorological phenomenon of unprecedented magnitude. The wind mass now has tremendous momentum, and the inertial forces alone will prevent a sudden abatement. Theoretically there are no reasons why it should not become the prevailing planetary system, similar to the revolving clouds of gas that produce the rings of Saturn. To date the winds on this planet have been dictated by the oceanic drifts, but it's obvious now that far stronger influences are at work. Recently our monitors detected unusually high levels of cosmic radiation. All electromagnetic waves have mass—perhaps a vast stream of cosmic radiation cut through the galaxy, striking the Earth on its exposed hemisphere, the tangential forces setting this global cyclone in motion." Dickinson looked around the table. "Or again, maybe it's the deliberate act of an outraged providence, determined to sweep Man and his pestilence from the Earth. Who can say?"

Gort eyed Dickinson with dry amusement. "Well, let's hope not, Doctor. We haven't got a big enough budget for that sort of emergency. Summing up, it looks as if we were optimistic in assuming that the wind would exhaust itself once it reached hurricane force. We can expect it to continue for an indefinite period, perhaps another month. Now, could we have the latest intelligence picture?"

Marshall picked up his news briefs. "Recapping for a moment, Sir Charles, it's eight days since London first began to experience winds of over 120 miles per hour, well beyond anything the architects of this city designed for. I'm sure you'll be proud to hear that our great capital is holding together with remarkable tenacity. Although almost all commercial and industrial activity has ceased for the moment, the majority of people are getting by without too much difficulty. Most have managed to board up their houses, lay in adequate food stocks. Casualties have been low—about 3,000—and many of these were elderly people literally frightened to death."

"Abroad, in Europe and North America, the situation is pretty much the same. They've battened down the hatches and are ready to ride out the storm. I think we can stand another twenty or thirty miles an hour without feeling it."

Major-General Harris, a small brisk man in a spic and span uniform, turned to look at Marshall.

"Good to hear you say that, Marshall. Morale isn't as high as it could be. Too much negative talk around."

Vice-Admiral Saunders, sitting next to him, nodded agreement. "I hope your information is right. One of the Americans told me this morning that Venice was a complete write-off."

"Exaggeration," Marshall rejoined easily. "The latest report a few minutes ago was that there had been heavy flooding, but no serious damage."

The Admiral nodded, glad to be reassured. Marshall continued with his survey, taking from Deborah a more detailed breakdown of the intelligence picture. She listened to his aggressive, confident tone. With the exception of Gort, a professional neutral, the three others were inclined to be pessimistic, expecting the worst, and misinterpreting the news to serve their unconscious acceptance of disaster. Harris and Saunders were typical of the service man in the saddle at the beginning of a war. They had the Dunkirk mentality, had already been defeated and were getting ready to make a triumph out of it, counting up the endless casualty lists, the catalogues of disaster, as if those were a measure of their courage.

Marshall, Deborah realised, was the necessary counterforce. Although he might be optimistic, this was deliberate, a Churchillian policy that would keep people's heads up into the wind rather than running helplessly before it. At times, though, she reflected, his over-optimism seemed pointlessly misleading, almost calculated to encourage complacency rather than determination.

When Marshall had finished Saunders and Harris described the activities of the government forces, the construction of communications tunnels and first aid stations, fortification of telephone junction points, the number of armoured vehicles coming off the line at Woolwich Ordnance Factory. But these preparations seemed half-hearted, and the real focus of their interest was the fleet of Home Command submarines fitting out at Portsmouth, ready to carry the government inner core to the comparative safety of the Arctic Circle. Deborah listened to them distantly, knowing that Marshall would be one of the last to leave, if he went at all. Nonetheless she felt completely confident.

seven

On the way back to the office they met Symington, carrying a teletype memo.

"Bad news, sir. The old Russell Square Hotel collapsed half an hour ago, some of the piles drove straight through into the Piccadilly Line platforms below. First estimates are that about two hundred were killed in the Russell basement and about twice that in the Station."

Marshall stared blindly at the tape, drumming his fist against his forehead.

"About four hundred down in the Station! For God's sake, what were they doing there? Don't tell me they were waiting for a train!"

"I suppose they were sheltering, the way they did in World War II." Exasperated, Marshall shouted: "But that's just what we don't want them to do! They should have been above ground, strengthening their own homes, not cowering away like a lot of sheep."

Symington smiled wanly. "Properties in the Bloomsbury and Russell Square area are pretty decrepit. High Victorian terraced houses ready for demolition. People there live in single rooms—"

"I don't care where they live!" Marshall cut in. He swung through into his office, pulled a heavy trench coat off the door. "Tell transport to get a car ready. Maitland can ride with us. We'll go out and have a look at this ourselves."

They entered a wide office which was the UK news reception unit. There were a dozen teletypes hooked up with the major provincial capitals, TV screens flickering with pictures broadcast from mobile transmitter units all over London. Marshall moved rapidly around the room, quickly built up a picture of the resources available, when Maitland joined them he took Deborah's arm and led the way down to the Transport Pool.

All the windows were securely boarded. Outside ten-foot-thick walls of sandbags had been stacked up to the roof, but as they neared the ground floor the building shuddered, stirring the foundations in their clay beds. Marshall put an arm around Deborah, smiled reassuringly. The tremor continued as the building settled itself into new foundations.

"Something big must have come down," Marshall commented. "Probably the Palace, or with luck Number Ten."

Maitland laughed at this sally. In the two weeks he had worked with Marshall he had grown to like the man, respect him for his courage and determination. Although powerless to halt the wind, he nonetheless did everything possible to outface it, was a magnificent morale booster for the personnel working at the Admiralty. Often, however, Maitland wondered what the sources of Marshall's courage were.

Inside the building the air was warm and filtered, but beyond the door at the bottom the air seeped in through the casing of sandbags and the corridors were thick with dust and grime, chilled by sudden gusts of air bursting through pressure points.

Marshall's driver, a small wiry corporal called Musgrave, unlocked a panel door in a blastproof bulkhead, and they stepped through into a low-ceiled garage where three armoured cars were parked. These were square 10-ton Bethlehems with canted sides, their 85 mm. guns removed and perspex windows fastened in the mountings.

Marshall swung up on to the turret in two easy powerful movements, helped Deborah into the cabin. Musgrave tested the hatch when Maitland had sealed it, then bolted himself into the driver's compartment.

He drove the car forward on to the wide steel plate of the elevator shaft. Remote-controlled from the car's radio, the elevator rose slowly on its single pylon, carrying the car upwards into a narrow well. Near the top the roof retracted, and the Bethlehem emerged into the rear courtyard, between Admiralty House and the Foreign Office Annex.

Overhead the air-stream swept past in a driving mass, breaking off to plunge into the intervals between the buildings. The Bethlehem lurched from side to side, edging across Trafalgar Square to the National Gallery. It was 4.30, but the air was dark and grey. Only the tracer-like patterns arcing across the Square gave any indication of the air-stream's enormous speed.

The Square was deserted. Nelson's Column was down, the shattered cylindrical segments lying among the overturned lions. The new office blocks along the Strand and the clubs along Pall Mall were heavily sandbagged and looked as if they had been deserted by their occupants to sustain alone the terrors of some apocalyptic air-raid. Most of the smaller office buildings, however, had been stripped away, floors and ceilings gutted.

As they moved up Shaftesbury Avenue towards Holborn the airspeed indicator read 177 mph. In the dim light of the cabin Deborah could see Marshall watching out the strong line of his jaw and forehead illuminated in profile in the flickering light.

He put his hand over her's. " Frightened, Deborah ?"

She held his hand tightly. " Not just for myself, Simon. Looking out here—it's like a city of hell."

Searchlights played across Kingsway and momentarily dazzled them. Ahead, along Southampton Row, were three Centurion tanks, each pulling a steel trailer. Musgrave joined them and the column moved up to Russell Square. More vehicles were drawn up by the collapsed hotel, others were shunting about in the Square, tracks flattening the few bushes and shreds of wire fencing, searchlights playing on the jumble of telescoped floors.

All over the surface of the hotel an endless barrage of facing tiles and dislodged masonry spun away into the air-stream. An exposed staircase three storeys high disappeared step by step in a sudden zipping motion, the flagstones spinning away like dominoes.

A line of Centurions, steel hoods mounted on their track guards, were locked side by side to form a windshield for the rescue squads digging into the basement. Few survivors could be expected. The heavy rescue rigs—built for World War III and pulled out of their mothballs—needed more freedom of movement. A huge dragline with a hinged boom was feeling its way tentatively between two telescoped floors but the wind sent it slamming from side to side.

They passed a massive tractor ramming a circular steel escape shaft through a narrow window below the edge of the pavement. Inside the shaft rescue teams would spread out across the basement, crawling along the foot-high interval.

" If there's anyone alive in there they'll find them," Marshall said to Maitland.

Just then Musgrave jabbered excitedly over the intercom. " Look out, sir ! One of the conveyors is going over— !"

Marshall leapt to the window. The wind had hit one of the huge conveyors dumping rubble on the Square behind them, swung the 30-foot-high escalator around like a balsa dummy. Trying to regain its balance, the driver backed away from the hotel, straight into the Bethlehem.

As they collided the conveyor grabs swung back and inverted, tipping out their contents. A fragment of masonry 15 feet long fell on to the bonnet of the Bethlehem, slamming the car down on to its front axle. Marshall and Maitland were hurled around the cabin, Deborah knocked on to the floor.

Steadying himself, Marshall peered through the window at the concrete slab, its lower edge penetrating the driver's hatchway.

" Musgrave !" he bellowed into the intercom. " Musgrave, are you all right ?"

He and Maitland bent down under the traverse and tore at the panel that sealed off the driver's compartment. They could just see the hunched form of the driver, stuffed head down between the driving columns.

Marshall climbed on to the traverse and punched the hatch sections into the air. Maitland tried to hold him back but the big man pushed him away and heaved himself out of the turret. Immediately the wind jack-knifed him over the edge. He hung there helplessly, then spilled on to the ground. The wind drove under his coat, splitting it down his back and stripping the two sections off his back. Hand over hand, he dragged himself along the camouflage netting hasps rivetted to the bottom of the chassis, then stretched out to the concrete beam, bunching every muscle against its massive weight.

Through the swirling half light the rescue vehicles loomed over the hotel like armoured mastodons feeding on an enormous corpse. Blacking out, Marshall slumped against the front tyre as two Centurions approached the Bethlehem. They swung around the car, lock shields and drove in together, lifting the wind-stream off Marshall.

Maitland jumped down from the turret and helped Marshall back out the vehicle. While Marshall sat back limply in the cabin he ran his fingers over him. A network of fine blue veins webbed Marshall's cheeks and forehead, giving the powerful lines of his face a steely sheen.

Maitland turned to Deborah, who knelt beside Marshall, trying to clean his face with her handkerchief.

" Relax, he's in one piece. Those are just air bruises, minute haemorrhages." He pointed to the radio. " Get me Channel Four. We'll need a tow back, the driver's trapped." He took the microphone from her. " Maitland here. Marshall is okay. I'll ride back with him in case he tries to climb out

again. How's the driver? Can you get him out? All right, seal him in and we'll cut him loose later."

They reached Marshall's Park Lane house in half an hour, towed by one of the Centurions. High steel gates let them into a small covered courtyard where two of Marshall's staff disconnected the tank and rolled the Bethlehem down a ramp into the basement.

A dozen black-suited men swarmed around the vehicle, helped the three passengers out. Marshall limped over to the squad-leader and spoke to him, then turned to Maitland.

"Sorry for the heroics, Robert, but the poor devil was dying in there and I couldn't do a damn thing to help him. Kroll here will radio one of the Army or Navy crawlers in the neighbourhood, they'll give you a tow back to Green Park. See you tomorrow."

Marshall and Deborah took the elevator up to his suite in the penthouse and entered his study, a two-level room with a circular gun-metal staircase. Below, an open log fire burned in a massive fireplace, throwing a soft glow on the long sofa in front of it, reflected off the silver trophies against the walls. Outside a heavy steel dome enclosed the top three floors of the house, and the wind drummed past at a safe distance, occasionally rattling one of the shutters.

Marshall slumped down into the sofa. Deborah slipped off her coat and went over to the cocktail cabinet. She poured whisky into a glass, then splashed in soda and brought the drink over to Marshall. Tucking her legs under her, she began to stroke his cheek and forehead with her finger tips.

"I'm sorry about Musgrave," she said. Marshall's hand rested in her lap, warm and strong. She took the glass from him and sipped at it.

"Poor devil," Marshall commented. "Those Bethlehems are useless." To himself he added: "Hardoon will want something tougher."

"Who?" Deborah asked. She had come across the name somewhere before. "Who's Hardoon?"

Offhand, Marshall said, "Just someone I'm dealing with." He took his eyes off the fire and looked up at Deborah, then slipped his arm around her waist, feeling the warm curve of her hip. Her face was only a few inches from his own, her eyes wide and steady.

"You were saying something about the Bethlehems," she said, still massaging his cheek.

Marshall smiled. Cool, passionate lover, he thought, I must remember to take you with me.

"We need something heavier. The wind's going to blow a lot stronger."

As he spoke Deborah moved her face against his, brushed her lips across his forehead.

Marshall finished his drink, then took her in his arms. Her body was lithe and eager, like a young panther he had once wrestled with, her mouth vivid and devouring.

eight

Maitland waited as the acetylene torch cut through the steel buttress over the driving cabin. Musgrave's body was bunched up below the dashboard and he leaned over and felt for the pulse, then signalled the two mechanics to lift it out.

They carried the driver over to a bench, stretched him along it. Kroll came out of the radio booth and glanced down at it matter-of-factly. Maitland wondered how large Marshall's private unit was. There were no service or rank tabs and the men treated the Bethlehem and himself as intruders.

"There's a Navy trawler on its way down Edgware Road," Kroll told Maitland curtly. "They'll be here in half an hour."

The one bench in the garage was occupied by Musgrave's body, and for the next fifteen minutes Maitland kicked his heels outside the frosted glass doors of the radio booth, finally squatted down against a ventilator shaft. Occasionally the fan stopped and reversed as a pressure pulse drove down the shaft, then picked up again and sped on.

Next to the Bethlehem on the far side of the basement was a long double-tracked vehicle with COE flashes, being loaded from a freight lift by a couple of guards. At each journey the lift brought down a dozen heavy wooden packing cases, many with their lids still waiting to be nailed down. Evidently Marshall was moving out in a hurry. Out of curiosity, while the guards rode the lift down to the sub-basement, Maitland walked over to the vehicle.

Packed into an open crate on the tail-board were six three-and-a-half inch trench mortars, their green barrels thick with protective grease. They were WD issue, but there was no

clearance seal on the sides of the crate. Turning the lid over, Maitland saw that it had been stamped : " Breathing Apparatus. Hardoon Tower."

Further back in the vehicle were other cases, stamped variously as trenching equipment, flares and pit-props.

Hardoon Tower, Maitland pondered, then remembered the newspaper profile he had read years earlier about the eccentric multi-millionaire who owned vast construction interests and had built an elaborate underground city on his estate near London at the height of the cold war. So Marshall was involved with him, presumably in a private survival venture independently of his work at COE. That would explain his total self-confidence and lack of fear, as well as Deborah Freeman's blithe indifference to the wind. All along they knew they would be able to withdraw to Hardoon's retreat.

Yet would they be any safer there than they were at the Admiralty? The government might be fumbling slightly in its handling of the emergency, but its resources were far greater than any Hardoon could muster. As well, there was the question of character—Maitland felt convinced that Marshall would never ally himself with a megalomaniac like Hardoon. Far more likely Hardoon himself was working for the government, putting his construction teams and bunkers at its disposal.

But if so, why the secrecy? As they arrived Marshall had seemed obviously apprehensive about letting Maitland step out into the basement, and Kroll had nodded watchfully when Marshall spoke to him.

" Okay, Doctor ?"

He swung round to see Kroll step across the floor from the radio booth.

Maitland tapped the case of mortars. " Just looking at this breathing apparatus. Unusual design."

Kroll pivoted on one heel and edged Maitland across the basement. " Useful bit of equipment, that, Doctor. But don't let's get too interested in it. Sit down over there and have a rest, take your temperature or something."

Still unable to make up his mind about his discovery, Maitland walked back across the floor, the huge metal-booted figure of Kroll at his shoulder like an attendant robot.

They wrapped Musgrave in a polythene sheath, lowered him into the Bethlehem's turret. Maitland sat back thankfully on the bench, listening to the wind drumming down the ventilator shaft. All around, in the streets outside, were the sounds of falling buildings. He watched the men who were loading the giant tractor from the freight lift, emptying an annexe that had apparently collapsed. Chairs and tables were brought up, covered with dust and ceiling fragments, a dozen crushed metal beds. The men stacked these against the wall on the far side, Kroll whipping them on with his tongue.

Maitland had almost gone to sleep when he heard a sudden altercation, saw Kroll snapping at the guard who had brought up the elevator. Kroll stood in front of the open door, gesturing to the guard to take the lift down again. Two of the other guards watched Maitland carefully.

Maitland had a glimpse of two figures in the back of the lift, a tall, lean-faced man and a blonde-haired girl in a blue raincoat. The man was wearing a stained khaki-drill jacket and reminded him of an American he had seen a week or so earlier.

With an oath Kroll slammed in the grille, then stepped back as the elevator began to sink. Briefly Maitland saw the bruise on the girl's cheek, the half-conscious glaze in the man's eyes like the syndrome of mild concussion.

On an impulse, he called out : " Commander ! Commander Lanyon !"

The man looked up, raised one hand uncertainly, as the lift disappeared. Maitland got to his feet and ran forward. Kroll approached him threateningly, arms outstretched like a grappling gorilla.

" I know that man !" Maitland snapped at Kroll. " He's an American, a Navy officer. What's he doing here ? Call Marshall !"

Without looking over his shoulder, Kroll waved in the other guards, who closed in a loose circle around Maitland.

Maitland stepped past Kroll, but the big man held his arm, his grip like a hydraulic clamp. " Where are you going to all the time, doctor ? You seem to be the restless type. Didn't I tell you to sit down ?"

Maitland tried to free his arm, but Kroll was eyeing him moodily, a trace of a smile on his broken lips. Maitland put his right hand around Kroll's massive wrist, started to twist

it away when Kroll suddenly swung him around and drove his knee into Maitland's stomach.

Doubling up with pain, Maitland staggered back, and one of the guards kicked his feet from under him. Kroll stepped over him, breathing thinly, pushed Maitland back when he tried to stand.

"Sit *down*. You're trying to annoy me, doctor. I warn you, you're liable to get suddenly very tired." He snapped his fingers at the open elevator that had come up behind them and two of the guards seized Maitland by the arms and dragged him into it.

With a clash of steel teeth, the grille slammed in, as Maitland struggled to his knees the elevator jerked and began to sink. Beyond Kroll's legs he saw a large tracked vehicle with RN flashes edging into the entrance ramp. Then the grip on his collar tightened and he slumped forward against the grille.

By now the pyramid was almost complete. Its apex overtopped the steel wind shields, and a second line of screens, staked to the upper slopes of the pyramid, protected the men sealing the peak. They moved slowly, strung together by long slings, securing the last lynch-stones, buffetted together like blind slaves.

Below, the huge graders and mixers were laying the long ramparts which led into the wind from the base of the pyramid. Ten feet thick and twice as high at their deepest point, they rose from the black earth, stretching from the body of the pyramid like the forelimbs of some headless sphinx.

Watching them from his eyrie in the pyramid, the iron-faced man christened the ramparts 'the gateways of the whirlwind.'

nine

Two days later they set off on the journey towards Hardoon Tower.

Taken down to a cell in the sub-basement, Maitland had found Lanyon slumped on one of the metal beds, slowly regaining his strength after the beating he had received from Kroll. Patricia Olsen was held in a cell on the next level, and Lanyon had seen her only when they were being transferred from the annexe on the other side of the building.

"The whole place just collapsed on our ears," he told Maitland. "Six floors above telescoped like a concertina. Luckily the load walls held and the basement was intact. If we'd been on one of the floors above ground we wouldn't have had a chance."

Twice a day, when the guards brought them food—coffee, soup and bread—they tried to ask for Marshall, but none of the black-suited men would reply. Once they heard Kroll slamming about at the end of the corridor, ordering his men to load up the freight lift.

"A pretty nasty piece all round," Lanyon commented. "Whoever's using him must be a tough nut."

"I can't believe it's Marshall," Maitland said. "I've worked with the man, Kroll isn't his style. My guess is that the man behind all this is Hardoon, I remember reading about his estate south of London, probably where you were caught by Kroll. It looks as if you strayed into one of their store-houses."

Continuously through the night, Marshall's guards loaded up their vehicles, the sounds of their activity steadily receding away into the upper floors. Now and then the building shook uneasily in its foundations, once shuddered heavily as the apartment block on its north-east side collapsed on to it. Finally the echoes above died away altogether. For an hour they sat together silently in the dark cell, listening to the stray draughts stir through the refuse in the corridor outside, a burst transformer box hiss and splutter.

"Looks as if we may have been left here," Lanyon said. He tried the door, then began to pound on it, shouting: "Patricia! Patricia Olsen!"

Suddenly the door slammed back and Kroll glared in at them. He jerked a thumb. "Let's go then." Maitland hesitated and Kroll grabbed his shoulder. "Come on, snap out of it, doctor, you're dreaming!" He bundled them into the elevator, drove it up to the basement garage, half turning his back on them as if contemptuous of any attempt at escape they might make. Both Lanyon and Maitland felt too weak to risk grappling with Kroll. Maitland guessed that the big guard would have relished the opportunity to get rid of them.

Three giant personnel carriers were in the garage, two angled into the approach of the exit ramp. Both were crammed with gear, leaving only enough room for four or five passengers

by the rear doors. Patricia Olsen was sitting against a crate inside the lead vehicle between a couple of the guards, and Lanyon waved to her, saw her smile back bravely.

Kroll gestured them over to the second vehicle, and the two guards sitting inside pulled them in over the tail board.

As he stepped up Maitland looked over at the third vehicle, by the service station at the other side of the basement. One of the tracks was being repaired, and two men were painting 'US NAVY' in huge yellow flashes along the hull.

"Lanyon." He touched the American's elbow, estimating whether they could make a dash for it. Then he heard Kroll chuckle.

"You gave me an idea there, Commander. No one's going to dare interfere with the Yanks, are they?"

"Where are you taking us?" Maitland asked.

Kroll lifted the tail board. "I'm not taking you anywhere, doc. I've got some business here to finish off. But I'll be seeing you all in a couple of days. So do what you're told, eh?" He slammed up the tail board, jarring Maitland's knee, leaving him in no mistake about his meaning.

Ten minutes later the engines roared out and they surged forward up the exit ramp. Outside, Park Lane thudded with the sounds of falling buildings. The air-stream moving past at nearly 190 miles an hour lifted the carrier out like an enormous hand, slewing it around under a hail of fist-sized stones. The two guards hunched together uneasily on either side of them, holding back the shifting crates piled into the front three-quarters of the cabin. There was no contact between them and the three men in the driving cab. Even the turret was jammed with a stack of radio cabinets.

Lanyon massaged his face, starting to sweat again, the jerking and thrusting motion of the carrier making his head throb.

Just past Hyde Park Corner they stopped in the entrance to Knightsbridge, and Maitland looked out through the plexiglass window slit at the dim outlines of the office blocks and apartment buildings. They were all shaking perceptibly, heavy tremors jolting the roadway under the carrier. All the small boutiques had been gutted, their plate-glass windows smashed, interiors cleaned out to the last hat-pin and curler.

Harrods lay in ruins, brown-stone facing tiles lying thickly across the roadway, the wind picking like a thousand vultures

at the tangle of girders, detaching fragments of furniture and tattered drapery and carrying them away in its fleeting clasp.

The guard facing Maitland searched for his cigarettes, had just flicked on his lighter when the carrier braked sharply. For a moment they sat motionlessly in the quavering light, the wind drumming past outside, then heard the men in the driving cab shout out. Immediately afterwards there was a tremendous mounting roar and an avalanche of rubble cascaded down on to the road, slamming the carrier back and then piling over its bonnet and cab. Maitland peered through the window slit, saw that one of the ten-storey blocks past Harrods was collapsing into the roadway ahead, the outside brick wall peeling off floor by floor. Huge slabs of masonry plunged down around the carrier, jerking it savagely and the cigarette lighter the guard was holding fell out of his hand on to the floor.

As he bent to retrieve it, Maitland noticed that the carrier was straddling a narrow six-foot-deep ditch that had opened in the roadway, the remains of a shallow sewer, taking with it part of the grey humped back of the Brompton Road pedestrian tunnel. A small entrance point was only fifteen feet away.

The guard's head was bent down, searching for the lighter. Shouting to Lanyon, Maitland grabbed the guard's shoulders, pulled his head between his knees and punched him heavily in the back of the neck.

" Lanyon ! Unbolt the doors !"

Lanyon slammed back the bolt, holding off the other guard who was struggling in his bulky uniform, trying to free his revolver. As the doors swung open, the mound of rubble ahead deflecting the air-stream, Lanyon grappled with the guard, pushed him back against the stack of crates and began to pull them down, heaving the heavy metal radio cabinets on to the man's knees.

The first guard sank head-down on to the floor at Maitland's feet, and Maitland kicked back the tail board and jumped down into the ditch, pulling Lanyon after him while the second guard struggled helplessly with the crates.

They crawled along the bottom of the ditch to the tunnel, the massive bulk of the other carrier nosing around the road above them, its tracks bulging down into the ditch, clay peeling off the giant steel cleats a foot above their heads. Maitland

clung to the dank soil, crawled along to the access point and helped Lanyon up into the tunnel.

Crouching down, feeling their way with their hands, they set off for Knightsbridge Underground Station. The tunnel had originally been six feet high, but successive shells of concrete had lowered the ceiling to little more than five feet off the ground. Here and there a storm lantern cast a fitful glow over the dripping bags. A few people lay near them in makeshift sleeping bags—claustrophobes more terrified of their basements and the Underground than of the wind.

The Station entrance had been heavily fortified with a huge dome of concrete. After the deserted streets, the Station was a blaze of lights, hundreds of people huddled about on the upper level with their bundles of luggage, assembling crude cubicles with blankets and raincoats. Scores more were crammed down the stationary escalators, leaning against each others knees.

Armed police checked their identities, directed them to the Army signals unit set up in the ticket booth.

"The Green Park Depot closed down yesterday," the sergeant in charge told Maitland. "All government forces have pulled out of Central London to the new command posts around the outer circle road. Don't waste time trying to get back into the Depot—half the barracks have collapsed."

"What about the Admiralty?"

"The COE intelligence unit is still there, but not for much longer. If I were you I'd walk through the Underground tunnel to Hammersmith, you might pick up some transport there."

Lanyon had sat down against the ticket booth, face grey with exhaustion. "They'll look after you here," Maitland told him. A Red Cross unit was working over on the south side of the Station, a queue of people with injuries waiting for treatment. "I'm going back to see if I can get through to Whitehall. Most of the surface tunnels seem to be standing"

Lanyon held his arm. "Wait a minute, Robert. It's too much of a risk. The whole city's coming down."

"I've got to take the chance. Symington's in there with Marshall. He'll be pulling out soon—Kroll was probably waiting for him. He's capable of anything. I'd have an alert sent out but Marshall might intercept it."

Shaking Lanyon's hand, Maitland left him and forced his way through the late arrivals pressing into the Station. Many of these were even worse equipped than those already there, carrying a milk bottle of water as their sole rations for the next few weeks.

Crude signposts had been put up at junction points within the tunnel system. Heading eastwards towards Hyde Park Corner, he felt his way along the irregular corridor. Two hundred yards down the tunnel forked, the left-hand section ending abruptly in a heap of rubble where one of the older office buildings had collapsed into the road. The right-hand section turned into Lowndes Square, then detoured through the basement garage of the Pakistan Embassy.

Maitland paused there to rest, wondering at his chances of threading a way through the maze. On the ramp outside a black Cadillac sagged back on broken axles, tyres flat, suitcases abandoned in the half-filled trunk. Tiles richocheted off the houses nearby, and air whirled around his feet, changing its direction every few seconds. Outside he could hear the high-pitched whistle of the storm-wind, overlayed by countless muffled crumps that shook the ground like sticks of bombs. More and more buildings were coming down, the stately houses of Belgravia collapsing like condemned tenements before a fleet of bulldozers.

The Embassy had begun to quiver restlessly, its roof breached. Soon heavy sections of the chimney would topple through the floors, knock out the transverse supports and allow the wind to push the walls in like cardboard hoardings.

Reaching Hyde Park Corner, he approached the entrance of the Underground Station. He ran forward down half a dozen steps, then pitched on to his knees, banging his head against the upper half of the London Transport sign embedded in the protective dome of concrete.

Half way down the staircase, steel shutters had been sealed into place, an immovable bulkhead of three-inch plate that cut him off from the sanctuary below. Switching off the torch to conserve the battery, he climbed back into the tunnel and groped along the walls, retracing his way back to Knightsbridge.

Somewhere to the left, a dim rumbling had started. He hurried along as it came nearer, then stopped and waited, flicking on the torch.

Ten yards ahead, in a cataract of dust and noise, an enormous section of wall plunged straight through the roof of the tunnel, letting in a tornado of exploding brickwork. Maitland stumbled back, massive pieces of rubble avalanching towards his feet, the air swirling around him in the torch-beam.

After a few moments the quake ended, and the building which had collapsed across the tunnel—St. George's Hospital—slowly settled itself. Maitland started to crawl up the sloping debris, then gave up and backed away from the acrid dust.

He was trapped neatly, like a rat in a pain corridor, except that here there would be no further signals. Disturbed for a minute, the air was soon completely still.

Putting his hand up to his head, he felt blood eddying from a wide wound across his scalp. He took out his emergency dressing, then realised he was losing consciousness, managed to switch off the torch just as his mind began to spin.

Around him, the rubble began to shift again.

To be concluded.

Outside of science fiction one of our favourite Magazines is America's Playboy, noted for its brilliant fiction and satire—which strongly influenced the purchase of John Kippax's "Nelson Expects," a story that could well have been published in that magazine.

NELSON EXPECTS

by JOHN KIPPAX

"Edwin," said Mr. Nelson James, "I get nervous when you climb those things."

He stood looking up at the great trees, like palms and then again not like them, watching the agile brown boy as he swarmed around at the top, cutting away at the great succulent fruits which, greeny gold, clustered thickly amid the golden fronds. Twenty yards away, down the lilac sands the waves of the green sea lapped in the lagoon, while, farther off, echoed the plunging of the breakers of the mysterious ocean.

They did not know how big it was, any more than they knew the name of the planet, and it riled Mr. James that Edwin could often seem so happy in his ignorance of such things.

Plop!

Two more fruits tumbled down to join the six which lay near Nelson James' feet. The man shaded his eyes again as he looked once more into the green-blue of the sky, from which a white sun beat with an intensity rather greater than Sol. Sol—thought Mr. James. Would they ever see it again?

"And take *care*," he warned, as the boy reached down for his next foothold.

Edwin shouted back cheerfully.

"It's not really high," he called, "and you like mangoloons, don't you? They do, down the hill."

Mr. James gave a small, tight smile. Edwin was always naming things, not always successfully, but 'mangoloon' was a good-sounding name. And the phrase—'down the hill'; wherever they were, the four women, to Edwin, always lived 'down the hill.'

"Oh yes, we all enjoy them." Nelson James adjusted his thick spectacles, ever grateful that they had not been smashed in that fearful landing. The smile on his lean, fit face broadened. "But remember Edwin, if you fall, we have only the part of the lifeboat medical kit."

He watched the boy with some fondness. Both were dressed in brown emergency overalls. They wore thick soled shoes, and broad hats which they had plaited from leaves. He gathered up the mangoloons as Edwin dropped down the remaining six feet, descending a fraction slower than he would have done under Earth gravity. Then they sat in the shade and began to husk the hefty fruit.

"Edwin—I never asked you before; how old are you?"

"Fourteen and a half." Edwin ceased his efforts with the leathery skin of the fruit for a moment and gazed, dark and serious, at the stringy figure beside him. "I wonder how old I shall be before we are rescued?"

"I don't know." Nelson James shook his head seriously. "We were making a hyperspace journey, for one thing, and for another, there are many planets like this, beautiful, but no use at all to a modern technology."

"H'm. Still, we could be worse off."

"We could. We might have had to come down on an ice world. But as for rescue—even if the *Adair* is reported missing within an Earth month of the smash, it will still be a long time before all possible systems are investigated."

"That's not quite what I meant. Because of you, there is a much better chance than there would have been." He pointed at a set of crude aerials on top of the bluff. "No one else could have rigged the beacon; I've done only fourth grade electronics, and the women—they're just stewardesses."

"Yes." Mr. James thought about the women for a moment, and then turned his mind away, firmly. Vanessa would not have approved.

"I did what I could from the gear in the wreck, Edwin. But remember the limitations. The sweep, powered with solar energy, has a range of about ten light years. It will never wear out, and we man that night and day. But the assistance beacon can't be kept going constantly. We can only switch that on after we've located a ship in the area. That's the snag. And my electronics knowledge is not at all that brilliant."

"I think your electronics knowledge is real crack," said Edwin, generously, peeling away at the mangoloons.

"Thank you," murmured Nelson James. There was something he had to say to the boy, and he did not know how to say it. It involved high principles of good behaviour—the behaviour of a gentleman to a lady. Awkward. He funked it, and glanced up at the beacon again.

"Who's on watch, now?"

"Ilena."

Mr. Nelson James looked narrowly at the boy.

"You know all their first names, eh?"

Edwin grinned.

"Yes, I know their first names—they know mine, too."

Mr. James found the answer a little upsetting.

"I always call her Miss Lundquist."

"Sure—she's *nice*."

Mr. James accepted the opinion, even agreed with it, but remained a shade uneasy.

"We are fortunate in our company, Edwin."

The boy kicked aside the mangoloon rubbish, and watched a six legged creature, about the size of a teaplate, crusty brown, sidle out from behind a rock and examine the peelings.

"How old are you, Mr. James?" He saw the eyebrows raise and added quickly, "You asked me, and I told you."

"It's—not quite the same."

"Why not? Ilena's twenty-two, and Marja's twenty-three, Tania's twenty-five and Ilse's twenty-nine."

Nelson James pursed his lips at these revelations. At each name, he had a mental glimpse of the owner—Ilena, dark and slim and small, Marja, very black and dignified, Tania, brown haired and plump, with wonderful hazel eyes and laughter in her voice—and Ilse. Ah, Ilse. A Viking woman, tall, big boned, very blonde, and with the eyes of the deepest blue. She was a goddess—but with warmth. Nelson James

was sure that there was warmth. No! Away with that last thought! Vanessa would never have approved!

"How old *are* you, Mr. James?"

"Ah—forty-four, Edwin."

The lad made an incredulous noise. Mr. James turned away. One must not ask so much of one so young, as to expect . . . After all, he was good company, up there in the 'men's cave.' Nelson James had insisted on that. Down by the westward sweep of the lagoon there were three caves, and the stewardesses—the *ladies*—had suggested that he and Edwin should have one of these. In the most polite manner possible, he had refused. Propriety demanded that they should have a dwelling farther away, propriety, and the memory of Mrs. Nelson James, Vanessa, who was no more. In the incredible, tearing confusion of the wreck of the *Adair*, he had missed her . . . Vanessa.

He walked up to the cave alone. Sitting down on the bed of lashed bamboo-like wood, he extracted her picture from his wallet.

It was getting near midday; time for Edwin to go down to the shore caves and bring up the midday meal. Fish and mangoloon eked out the supply of concentrates which had been recoverable from the lifeboat; everything usable had been taken from it, and only the hull remained, tough, shining and useless, in the valley beyond the first ridge, two miles inland. Thank goodness for the supply of water . . .

He stared at Vanessa's image, and told himself that she was gone for ever. He had always tried to do his best for her. Never let it be said that he did less than his best. The motto echoed in his brain to the sound of his mother's voice. Presumably, she still lived, on distant Earth; perhaps by now she was mourning her son. Idly, he swung his feet on the bed. It was very hot. He looked forward to the afternoon's siesta.

He wondered what the women thought of him, and remembered some instances of quickly suppressed giggling and nudging. He really believed that if he tried to do a large proportion of the heavy work, and remained sociable in a distant sort of way, that was the best thing. And there was always the memory of Vanessa to remind him of the differences in social status between himself and the *ladies*.

A slight noise from the entrance of the cave made him look

up. Edwin, just beyond the cave mouth, was staring intensely down at the lagoon. Nelson James got quietly off the bed and went forward. What he saw held his attention too. Two of the ladies, entirely without benefit of swimming costumes, were playing in the shallows. He took in his breath sharply. Tania and Marja; where was—where was *the* one? Where was Ilse?

He saw her come, bronze and gold, from one of the caves, and pick her way along the beach. At the water's edge she stopped, like a Greek goddess posing, and lifted her arms to tie back her hair. Then she waded in; he watched the water reach her knees, her thighs, her generous hips. At last she surged forward and began to swim with steady strokes. He followed her in his mind and swam beside her, beneath her, looked up through the clear water and saw her above him . . .

Starting, when he realised what he had been doing, he put a hand on the boy's shoulder. Edwin jumped.

"Come!" he said, sharply. "They—we musn't—intrude on their privacy."

Edwin shot him a wise look from his dark, wholly Indian eyes.

"Do you think they mind?"

"Really, Edwin!"

"*We* have to go a long way when we want to swim, Mr. James. Right round the headland."

Nelson James drew back, and Edwin followed him a pace or two, with some reluctance.

"I—er—think it's best if . . . We must remain civilised, you know." He glanced at his watch. "It still wants half an hour to lunch time."

Edwin appeared to change the subject.

"I'd like to take my turn on watch, by the beacon, Mr. James."

The man looked hard at the boy, wondering about motives.

"You were shaken up when we came down. Take things steadily, boy. Plenty of time."

Edwin looked fixedly at the other, gave an inscrutable twitch to his dark brows, and wandered away down into the cave.

Nelson James took out the picture of Vanessa again. She had been good for him, he insisted, good for him. And he had always done his best.

"Nelson, I feel a chill."

Every bit of the *Adair* had been superbly air conditioned, but Vanessa could feel chilly. It was marvellous, really.

He looked at her over his spectacles, an old-fashioned device to which he clung. They gave him an elderly air when seated. When he walked, however, his was the gait of a very fit man. Nelson James always considered it his duty to remain fit. He slipped a piece of paper into the leaves of his book on ancient Martian civilisations.

"Yes, my dear. Shall I get you something warmer?"

She inclined his head, and he padded away through the throng of passengers seated in the wonderfully simulated 'Earth Garden' lounge. He went to her cabin next to his. No sharing of cabins for her. His wife was seven years older than himself, and had never been much interested in those aspects of married life which engaged the attention of younger —or better matched—couples. She liked her comfort, and she enjoyed the dominance over others which her money gave her. It was her money which enabled Nelson James to continue his studies of the civilisations of other planets, too.

He came back with a wrap, and draped it over her plump shoulders.

"There, my dear."

She gave no word of thanks as he sat down to resume his reading. He was used to her, used, even, to the way in which she harried the staff on the ship. Only one of these had she failed to cow. That one was Ilse Rasmussen, the chief stewardess, and for her, the tiny mind of Vanessa James held inexhaustible hate.

It might have driven some men to murder, but Nelson James was made of stern stuff. He had a strict code, being a product of one of those schools which are called public in England and private in the North American continent. He was not the kind of man to shrink from what he conceived to be his duty. With Vanessa, his duties were many, ranging from the trivial to the downright unpleasant. They travelled, he explored and studied, and, strangely, there were times when she seemed almost proud of him. She tolerated his daily physical training, his work with picas and springs.

"Disgusting!"

It was one of her favourite words. She looked up at a passing girl, burned dark brown by the realistic sun of the

garden, except for three places where she wore triangles of orange cloth. She was an attractive creature with fine swinging hips.

"Disgusting!" said Mrs. James again, and helped herself to another candy. Mr. Nelson James met her disapproving eye.

"I saw you, Nelson. And I saw the way you looked at that Rasmussen woman, when I told her off about the way my cabin was supposed to have been tidied. H'm?"

"My dear," he said, mildly, "don't distress yourself."

"Distress," she snorted, "I wouldn't be surprised if that woman was the mistress of all the crew, beginning with the captain." She thought about the captain. "Well, beginning with the first officer, anyway. They're all alike, these space crew women. I shall speak to Chief Councillor Garnage when we return home. As a director of this passenger line, he ought to realise that a few flippertigibbets—"

She rattled on. He had the habit of half-listening, knowing when to murmur a word. This was his task, and no one should accuse him of not doing his best. After all, if it had not been for Vanessa's money . . .

"Nelson . . ."

Vanessa was calling him.

"Nelson . . ."

He must go to her.

He was on his bed in the cave, and someone, sweet-voiced, was gently shaking his arm. He sat up to see Ilse Rasmussen, who had brought his midday meal.

"Hello, Miss Rasmussen." He rubbed his eyes. "But the boy should have gone for this."

She smiled her big, even toothed smile. How that tan suits her, he thought, what fine arms, what big smooth hips—but need she have left her shirt quite so far open? Vanessa would have said . . .

"I was glad to do it." Her voice was soft and deep. Though they were all four of them young and vital, this one was exceptional. If he was the chief human male on the planet—that was funny!—then surely she was the chief female. A glorious creature. The others accepted from her the leadership which had, in the first instance, been imposed by the company she worked for. He had a complete picture of her in his mind; he remembered how strong she was, never shirk-

ing the hardest work, how gay and cheerful, a fine person. And the glimpse of her that he had lately had, in the sea, made the picture even more clear. He could never believe that she had been the captain's mistress, and as for the first officer, he had squinted. And if she had been, what of it now? Except that Vanessa would not have approved. Miss Rasmussen. Miss—had she called him by his first name, when she woke him?

"The boy is relieving Ilena," she said. She sat on the floor with her hands clasped about her knees. "He is growing; almost a man."

Nelson James nibbled the white flesh of the fish with appreciation.

"Er—I feel I should mention that he was watching you bathe this morning. I took him away."

"Oh?" How deliciously the corners of her mouth curved when she smiled!

"It is—ah—a little difficult to respect your privacy, Miss Rasmussen."

"M'm? I don't think we could have made too disgusting a sight."

He was alarmed.

"Oh no, no!" She used *that* word; was she making fun of him?

"Mr. James—Nelson—do you know how long we have been here?"

"Four earth months, Miss Rasmussen."

"And still you call me by the handle."

Passenger and stewardess, he thought.

"My name is Ilse." As she threw back her head, the light shimmered upon her golden hair.

"Er, yes. I know."

"Then call me by it, Nelson."

He savoured it in his mind, before utterance.

"Very well, Ilse." It had a beautiful sound.

She put a hand on his arm.

"Will you come down and see us this evening?"

"To play cards? Certainly."

"Well—no. We will have a meal, and we may play cards, but we all want to talk to you—and to show you something."

"To show me—"

"Yes." Was she breathing a little deeper than usual? "It is important. Just before sundown."

"Very well Miss—Ilse."

"Goodbye then."

She rose and walked to the entrance of the cave. A Viking woman, he thought, an Amazon, Penthesilea herself! She turned and smiled again.

"Thanks for bringing the food," he said.

She waved.

"It's the least we want to do," she said.

Considering the limited resources of the island, the meal had been excellent. Nelson James complimented them upon a very successful effort; a piece of white sheeting laid on a flat rock had made an unexpected touch of civilisation, a tablecloth. He realised that he had forgotten about tablecloths. He tried to be at ease, and to call them by their Christian names. In the glow of the firelight they all seemed more beautiful than he had ever noticed before. Ilena had a yellow flower in her hair, and it suited her perfectly; Marja, black haired, wore a red flower. Tania was on duty by the beacon. There remained Ilse, and for her, a white flower. She looked utterly magnificent, bronzed, statuesque. No wonder Vanessa did not like her.

He glanced at his watch.

"I must not be too long, ladies. Edwin is alone."

"He is a big boy," said Ilena, "and sensible."

"He can come to no harm," murmured Marja, softly.

"True," said Nelson James, "When you consider that so far the only mammals we have seen have been the size of rabbits . . ." His voice trailed away; he could not help feeling that there had been a tension, a *something*, about this evening. He had noticed certain swift glances pass between them. Well, they were ladies, even as he was a gentleman.

"Nelson," Ilse said, softly, "we have been here four months."

"And no sign of rescue," said Marja.

"It—er—may come quite suddenly," pointed out Nelson James, "and I think that the arrangements I tried to make were the best that could be managed, in the circumstances."

"It may be a very long time," said Ilena.

"Indeed it may. If ships have to search each system at normal speeds . . ."

"We are fortunate, nevertheless," murmured Ilena.

"So long," whispered Marja.

Why were they looking at him so hard?

"We could do all the heavy work," offered Ilse.

"Hunting those turtle things, and so on," added Ilena.

He stared from one to the other. Had they invited him in order to talk to him in riddles?

"One person cannot do everything," put in Marja, as though it were the most lucid remark possible.

"To each according to his ability," said Ilena.

"And to each according to her need," added Ilse.

Was it merely his imagination, or had they, by some unobvious wriggling, got themselves closer to him? He saw how Marja's eyes gleamed in the firelight; then he noticed how the eyes of all of them seemed very wide open. But Nelson James, insulated by the years with Vanessa, sat in puzzlement.

"Er—is that all?"

"No." Suddenly, Ilse was emphatic. "Let's show him."

He stared at them as they got up, and stood as though waiting for him. The night was warm, and very beautiful, with the tiny twin moons, the caress of the sea, and the velvet shapes of the trees.

"Nelson," said Else.

He rose.

"This way," she said, softly.

He followed her to the mouth of a cave. The ground in front of the doorway, which he had shaped and fixed, was swept clean; the entrance was decorated with exotic flowers.

And a small area within the stomach of Nelson James began to quake alarmingly.

They stood aside to let him enter, and they followed. He gasped. The cave had been so decorated with flowers that the walls were quite covered. Illumination was by battery lamp, carefully shaded, and the sanded floor was primly clean. In the centre was a large, well made couch—a *large* couch, with, actually, a sheet upon it.

When he turned to the three young women, he saw that the wideness of their eyes had not been caused by a trick of the firelight outside. And, in the oppressive silence of the garlanded cave, he could hear them breathing. From near the entrance he thought he heard a slight scuffling noise, but they did not appear to notice.

They looked at him steadily.

"It—seems very pretty," he hazarded.

With one accord they moved a step nearer. His sensibilities reacted to the natural perfume of their clean, sunburned bodies.

"You see?" murmured Ilena.

Shaken, he looked at the three beauties.

"We do not want you to live up there in your cave any more, Nelson."

"Good God!" He gulped. He sought words, and, for half a minute, he found none. "I—er—I do try to be a gentleman, you know."

They sighed. They thought that he understood.

"Ah!" Ilse said. "Then you will not live up there any more?"

"Of course not!" cried Marja. "He understands, you see!"

He felt trapped.

"No—er—yes—that is—now, listen." Oh, this was damnably difficult! How to explain to these women his very necessary, and very English point of view? "When we came here I pitched in and did my bit, didn't I? I mean, a gentleman should try to discharge his obligations . . . "

"Yes," said Ilena, quickly.

"What you have done before," pointed out Marja, "is not enough, now."

"Obligations," said Ilena, "a fine old English word. It carries much."

It seemed to carry three, thought Mr. Nelson James. No, by God, four. There was Tania, on watch.

Tania came in.

"Edwin is on the watch," she said.

"Yes, Edwin!" Mr. James grasped at this. "You see, he is so—"

"He can be taken care of," Ilse assured him.

"Like everything else," said Ilena.

"If we get co-operation," said Tania.

At once, in his mind, there burst the voice of memory; Vanessa seemed to cry *Nelson, Nelson! What is going on?*

"Let me get out of here," he cried, with some heat. "This is no place for thinking."

"Exactly," agreed Ilse, "that is what we tried to make—"

Outside, he faced them again. Their fixity of purpose weighed heavily upon him.

"You are determined?"

"Yes." They spoke as one.

In the pause, with the moonlight and the sound of the sea, their scent came to him again.

"After all," murmured Ilse, "we are ladies. We would not like to provoke you into doing something ungentlemanly."

He tried to evaluate this, and failed.

"Thank you," he said, weakly.

"On the other hand," said Marja, "we would not like to be provoked into doing something *unladylike.*"

How safe things had been with Vanessa!—and yet, how lovely Ilse had looked when she waded into the water, so easily, so gracefully . . .

"Time!" cried Nelson James, breathlessly. "I must have time to think!"

"He thinks we are ugly!" exclaimed Marja, indignantly.

"No, no, it is not that at all! But—" Mr. James writhed like Lacoon with the semantic serpents. "There are things—attitudes—which are difficult to explain. Please, ladies, let me go and think"

"Give him an hour," said Ilena.

"He must make the right decision," said Tania.

Ilse put a firm hand on his arm.

"He must, indeed."

When Nelson James arrived back at the cave, his panting was not all from physical exertion, for he was a fit man. Their determination shook him; they had sized him up, they had seen that his middle aged outlook was not a barrier which . . .

He switched on the light, and looked at Vanessa's picture again. As he looked, he seemed to see, superimposed upon it, a picture of Ilse, all her charms displayed, walking into the warm sea. And over it, like a sound technician's trick, the voice of his mother, from distant childhood. *Always do your best, Nelson; never let it be said that you did not do your best.* He had done his best at school, at university, with Vanessa: that was certain.

He rose, deciding to go and see what Edwin was doing at the beacon. That would solve nothing, of course; one could hardly discuss this with a child.

He swung easily up the steep path; against the starlight, the aerials stood out like hopeless skinny fingers. He stepped into the rough shelter. One or two lights glowed dimly.

"Edwin!"

There was no answer. The place was empty.

Mr. James looked at the radar sweeping, swinging steadily over millions upon millions of miles. And he gasped, leaping forward and staring down at the turning line of opalescent green. Close in, within half a light year, according to the scale, a blip showed, burgeoning and fading a little, but clearly there. A ship, after all these months. And that criminally careless boy would have missed it! In a flash he saw—and the seeing was shot with strange pangs—that his problem had been settled for him. As he sat down at the panel of the *M'aidez* beacon, and put on the headphones, the picture of Ilse swam before his eyes, as he had seen her that morning, only close, close. They had not said who was going to be first, but he thought he knew.

Was going to be first.

"Damn!" said Nelson James, heartily, "oh, damn!"

He pressed the switch of the beacon, watching the 'on' light with a savage frown.

And nothing happened.

He jiggled the switch, then another switch, and there was no answer at all, while the blip moved slowly under the slim line of the radar.

"What the devil—?"

He grabbed an inspection light and jabbed it round the side of the panel to inspect the cables. For a moment, his mind did not register the enormity of what met his gaze; they were all disconnected.

Almost paralysed, he rose, and stared at the blip on the radar screen. As he watched, it twitched once, and then it disappeared altogether. He groaned, knowing that this was what happened when a ship moved into hyperspace.

Sabotage, sabotage, sabotage! And it could only have been Tania. She had seen the slow blip appear—no! The blip would have been faster than that; therefore there remained only Edwin as the culprit—unless Ilse had given instructions.

He stood now in the darkness outside.

"Mr. James." said a voice.

He jumped.

"Edwin! What is the meaning of this! The ship showed clearly on the screen—and the beacon will not work!" He took the boy by the shoulder, and shook him. But Edwin

was bigger and tougher than he had been when they first came, and he did not shake much. His eyes rolled pale.

"I was down by the cave, tonight, their cave I mean. I heard them talking."

Nelson James spluttered.

"Tonight was not the night for us to see a ship on the screen," said Edwin, and his voice had some of the soft quality which Nelson James had noticed in the women's voices that night. "Not tonight. There will be other ships. There are bound to be other ships. So, we must do the best we can with what we have. My mother always said that to me."

It was a voice coming from one older than his years, and it struck a deep and vibrant chord in the heart of Nelson James.

"She—said that to you?"

"Yes, Mr. James."

A small song began to sing itself in the heart of the elder of the two. In answer to that song's appeal, he began to turn away, when another thought struck him.

"But Edwin, I'm not sure that I understand why you should have done that to the beacon, unless . . ."

"I like to please nice people—you and others. We might be here a long time, Mr. James, and I am a man. Man enough, anyway."

Nelson James was halfway down the slope, with the song in his heart welling stronger and stronger, when he caught the boy's full meaning. So, it would not be as difficult as he thought. He tried to feel shocked, but he could not. He and Edwin were two of a kind; they would both do their best.

Ahead the light of the caves glowed.

Nelson James broke into a trot.

John Kippax

In this new story of the gigantic Sector General Hospital in space, Dr. Conway is posed with a particularly sticky problem—to diagnose and cure a sick alien who is both immortal and apparently a murderer.

RESIDENT PHYSICIAN

by JAMES WHITE

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one

The patient being brought into the observation ward was a large specimen—about one thousand pounds mass, Conway estimated—and resembled a giant, upright pear. Five thick, tentacular appendages grew from the narrow head section and a heavy apron of muscle at its base gave evidence of a snail-like, although not necessarily slow, method of locomotion. The whole body surface looked raw and lacerated, as though someone had been trying to take its skin off with a wire brush.

To Conway there was nothing very unusual about the physical aspect of the patient or its condition, six years in space Sector General Hospital, having accustomed him to much more startling sights, so he moved forward to make a preliminary examination. Immediately the Monitor Corps lieutenant who had accompanied the patient's trolley into the ward moved closer also. Conway tried to ignore the feeling of breath on the back of his neck and took a closer look at the patient.

Five large mouths were situated below the root of each tentacle, four being plentifully supplied with teeth and the

other one housing the vocal apparatus. The tentacles themselves showed a high degree of specialisation at their extremities; three of them were plainly manipulatory, one bore the patient's visual equipment and the remaining member terminated in a horn-tipped, boney mace. The head was featureless, being simply an osseus dome housing the patient's brain.

There wasn't much else to be seen from a superficial examination. Conway turned to get his deep probe gear, and walked on the Monitor officer's feet.

"Have you ever considered taking up medicine seriously, Lieutenant?" he said irritably.

The lieutenant reddened, his face making a horrible clash of colour against the dark green of his uniform collar. He said stiffly, "This patient is a criminal. It was found in circumstances which indicate that it killed and ate the other member of its ship's crew. It has been unconscious during the trip here, but I've been ordered to stand guard on it just in case. I'll try to stay out of your way, Doctor."

Conway swallowed, his eyes going to the vicious-looking, horny bludgeon with which, he had no doubt, the patient's species had battered their way to the top of their evolutionary tree. He said drily, "Don't try too hard, Lieutenant."

Using his eyes and a portable x-ray scanner Conway examined his patient thoroughly inside and out. He took several specimens, including sections of the affected skin, and sent them off to Pathology with three closely-written pages of covering notes. Then he stood back and scratched his head.

The patient was warm-blooded, oxygen-breathing, and had fairly normal gravity and pressure requirements which, when considered with the general shape of the beastie, put its physiological classification as EPLH. It seemed to be suffering from a well-developed and widespread epithelioma, the symptoms being so plain that he really should have begun treatment without waiting for the Path report. But a cancerous skin condition did not, ordinarily, render a patient deeply unconscious.

That could point to psychological complications, he knew, and in that case he would have to call in some specialised help. One of his telepathic colleagues was the obvious choice, if it hadn't been for the fact that telepaths could only

rarely work minds that were not already telepathic and of the same species as themselves. Except for the very odd instance, telepathy had been found to be a strictly closed circuit form of communication. Which left his GLNO friend, the empath Dr. Prilicla . . .

Behind him the Lieutenant coughed gently and said, "When you've finished the examination, Doctor, O'Mara would like to see you."

Conway nodded. "I'm going to send someone to keep an eye on the patient," he said, grinning, "guard them as well as you've guarded me."

Going through to the main ward Conway detailed an Earth-human nurse—a very good-looking Earth-human nurse—to duty in the observation ward. He could have sent in one of the Tralthan FGLIs, who belonged to a species with six legs and so built that beside one of them an Earthly elephant would have seemed a fragile, sylph-like creature, but he felt that he owed the Lieutenant something for his earlier bad manners.

Twenty minutes later, after three changes of protective armour and a trip through the chlorine section, a corridor belonging to the AUGL water-breathers and the ultra-refrigerated wards of the methane life-forms, Conway presented himself at the office of Major O'Mara.

As Chief Psychologist of a multi-environment hospital hanging in frigid blackness at the Galactic rim, he was responsible for the mental well-being of a Staff of ten thousand entities who were composed of eighty-seven different species. O'Mara was a very important man at Sector General. He was also, on his own admission, the most approachable man in the hospital. O'Mara was fond of saying that he didn't care who approached him or when, but if they hadn't a very good reason for pestering him with their silly little problems then they needn't expect to get away from him again unscathed. To O'Mara the medical staff were patients, and it was the generally held belief that the high level of stability among that variegated and often touchy bunch of e-ts was due to them being too scared of O'Mara to go mad. But today he was in an almost sociable mood.

"This will take more than five minutes so you'd better sit down, Doctor," he said sourly when Conway stopped before his desk. "I take it you've had a look at our cannibal?"

Conway nodded and sat down. Briefly he outlined his findings with regard to the EPLH patient, including his suspicion that there might be complications of a psychological nature. Ending, he asked, "Do you have any other information on its background, apart from the cannibalism?"

"Very little," said O'Mara. "It was found by a Monitor patrol vessel in a ship which, although undamaged, was broadcasting distress signals. Obviously it became too sick to operate the vessel. There was no other occupant, but because the EPLH was a new species to the rescue party they went over its ship with a fine-tooth comb, and found that there should have been another person aboard. They discovered this through a sort of ship's log cum personal diary kept on tape by the EPLH, and by study of the airlock tell-tales and similar protective gadgetry the details of which don't concern us at the moment. However, all the facts point to there being two entities aboard the ship, and the log tape suggests pretty strongly that the other one came to a sticky end at the hands, and teeth, of your patient."

O'Mara paused to toss a slim sheaf of papers on to his lap and Conway saw that it was a typescript of the relevant sections of the log. He had time only to discover that the EPLH's victim had been the ship's doctor, then O'Mara was talking again.

"We know nothing about its planet of origin," he said morosely, "except that it is somewhere in the other galaxy. However, with only one quarter of our own Galaxy explored, our chances of finding its home world are negligible——"

"How about the Ians," said Conway, "maybe they could help?"

The Ians belonged to a culture originating in the other galaxy which had planted a colony in the same sector of the home galaxy which contained the Hospital. They were an unusual species—classification GKNM—which went into a chrysalis stage at adolescence and metamorphosized from a ten-legged crawler into a beautiful, winged life-form.† Conway had had one of them as a patient three months ago. The patient had been long since discharged, but the two GKNM doctors, who had originally come to help Conway with the patient, had remained at Sector General to study and teach.

†"Out-Patient"—New Worlds No. 95.

"A Galaxy's a big place," said O'Mara with an obvious lack of enthusiasm, "but try them by all means. However, to get back to your patient, the biggest problem is going to come *after* you've cured it.

"You see, Doctor," he went on, "this particular beastie was found in circumstances which show pretty conclusively that it is guilty of an act which every intelligent species we know of considers a crime. As the Federation's police force among other things the Monitor Corps is supposed to take certain measures against criminals like this one. They are supposed to be tried, rehabilitated or punished as seems fit. But how can we give this criminal a fair trial when we know nothing at all about its background, a background which just might contain the possibility of extenuating circumstances? At the same time we can't just let it go free . . ."

"Why not?" said Conway. "Why not point it in the general direction from whence it came and administer a judicial kick in the pants?"

"Or why not let the patient die," O'Mara replied, smiling, "and save trouble all round?"

Conway didn't speak. O'Mara was using an unfair argument and they both knew it, but they also knew that nobody would be able to convince the Monitor enforcement section that curing the sick and punishing the malefactor were not of equal importance in the Scheme of Things.

"What I want you to do," O'Mara resumed, "is to find out all you can about the patient and its background after it comes to and during treatment. Knowing how soft-hearted, or soft-headed you are, I expect you will side with the patient during the cure and appoint yourself an unofficial counsel for the defence. Well, I won't mind that if in so doing you obtain the information which will enable us to summon a jury of its peers. Understood?"

Conway nodded.

O'Mara waited precisely three seconds, then said, "If you've nothing better to do than laze about in that chair . . ."

Immediately on leaving O'Mara's office Conway got in touch with Pathology and asked for the EPLA report to be sent to him before lunch. Then he invited the two Ian GKNMs to lunch and arranged for a consultation with Prilicla regarding the patient shortly afterwards. With these arrangements made he felt free to begin his rounds.

During the two hours which followed Conway had no time to think about his newest patient. He had fifty-three patients currently in his charge together with six doctors in various stages of training and a supporting staff of nurses, the patients and medical staff comprising eleven different physiological types. There were special instruments and procedures for examining these extra-terrestrial patients, and when he was accompanied by a trainee whose pressure and gravity requirements differed both from those of the patient to be examined and himself, then the 'routine' of his rounds could become an extraordinarily complicated business.

But Conway looked at all his patients, even those whose convalescence was well advanced or whose treatment could have been handled by a subordinate. He was well aware that this was a stupid practice which only served to give him a lot of unnecessary work, but the truth was promotion to a resident Senior Physician was still too recent for him to have become used to the large-scale delegation of responsibility. He foolishly kept on trying to do everything himself.

After rounds he was scheduled to give an initial midwifery lecture to a class of DBLF nurses. The DBLFs were furry, multipedal beings resembling outsize caterpillars and were native to the planet Kelgia. They also breathed the same atmospheric mixture as himself, which meant that he was able to do without a pressure suit. To this purely physical comfort was added the fact that talking about such elementary stuff as the reason for Kelgian females conceiving only once in their lifetime and then producing quads who were invariably divided equally in sex, did not call for great concentration on his part. It left a large section of his mind free to worry about the alleged cannibal in his observation ward.

two

Half an hour later he was with the two Ian doctors in the Hospital's main dining hall—the one which catered for Tralthan, Kelgian, human and the various other warm-blooded, oxygen-breathers on the Staff—eating the inevitable salad. This in itself did not bother Conway unduly, in fact, lettuce was downright appetising compared with some of the things he had had to eat while playing host to other e-t colleagues, but he did not think that he would ever get used to the gale they created during lunch.

The GKNM denizens of Ia were a large, delicate, winged life-form who looked something like a dragonfly. To their rod-like but flexible bodies were attached four insectile legs, manipulators, the usual sensory organs and three tremendous sets of wings. Their table manners were not actually unpleasant—it was just that they did not sit down to dine, they hovered. Apparently eating while in flight aided their digestions as well as being pretty much a conditioned reflex with them.

Conway set the Path report on the table and placed the sugar bowl on top of it to keep it from blowing away. He said, " . . . You'll see from what I've just been reading to you that this appears to be a fairly simple case. Unusually so, I'd say, because the patient is remarkably clear of harmful bacteria of any type. Its symptoms indicate a form of epithelioma, that and nothing else, which makes its unconsciousness rather puzzling. But maybe some information on its planetary environment, sleeping periods and so on, would clarify things, and that is why I wanted to talk to you.

" We know that the patient comes from your galaxy. Can you tell me anything at all about its background? "

The GKNM on Conway's right drifted a few inches back from the table and said through its Translator, " I'm afraid I have not yet mastered the intricacies of your physiological classification system, Doctor. What does the patient look like? "

" Sorry, I forgot," said Conway. He was about to explain in detail what an EPLH was, then he began sketching on the back of the Path report instead. A few minutes later he held up the result and said, " It looks something like that."

Both Ians dropped to the floor.

Conway who had never known the GKNMs to stop either eating or flying during a meal was impressed by the reaction. He said, " You know about them, then? "

The GKNM on the right made noises which Conway's Translator reproduced as a series of barks, the e-t equivalent of an attack of stuttering. Finally it said, "We know of them. We have never seen one of them, we do not know their planet of origin, and before this moment we were not sure that they had actual physical existence. They . . . they are gods, Doctor."

Another VIP . . ! thought Conway, with a sudden sinking feeling. His experience with VIP patients was that their cases were *never* simple. Even if the patient's condition was nothing serious there were invariably complications, none of which were medical.

"My colleague is being a little too emotional," the other GKNM broke in. Conway had never been able to see any physical difference between the two Ians, but somehow this one had the air of being a more cynical, world-weary dragonfly. "Perhaps I can tell you what little is known, and deduced, about them rather than enumerate all the things which are not . . ."

The species to which the patient belonged was not a numerous one, the Ian doctor went on to explain, but their sphere of influence in the other galaxy was tremendous. In the social and psychological sciences they were very well advanced, and individually their intelligence and mental capacity was enormous. For reasons known only to themselves they did not seek each other's company very often, and it was unheard of for more than one of them to be found on any planet at the same time for any lengthy period.

They were always the supreme ruler on the worlds they occupied. Sometimes it was a beneficient rule, sometimes harsh—but the harshness, when viewed with a century or so's hindsight, usually turned out to be beneficence in disguise. They used people, whole planetary populations, and even interplanetary cultures, purely as a means to solve the problems which they set themselves, and when the problem was solved they left. At least this was the impression received by not quite unbiased observers.

In a voice made flat and emotionless only because of the process of Translation the Ian went on, ". . . Legends seem to agree that one of them will land on a planet with nothing but its ship and a companion who is always of a different species. By using a combination of defensive science, psychology and sheer business acumen they overcome local prejudice and begin to amass wealth and power. The transition from local authority to absolute planetary rule is gradual, but then they have plenty of time. They are, of course, immortal."

Faintly, Conway heard his fork clattering on to the floor. It was a few minutes before he could steady either his hands or his mind.

There were a few extra-terrestrial species in the Federation who possessed very long life-spans, and most of the medically advanced cultures—Earth's included—had the means of extending life considerably with rejuvenation treatments. Immortality, however, was something they did *not* have, nor had they ever had the chance to study anyone who possessed it. Until now, that was. Now Conway had a patient to care for, and cure and, most of all, investigate. Unless . . . but the GKNM was a doctor, and a doctor would not say immortal if he merely meant long-lived.

"Are you sure? " croaked Conway.

The Ian's answer took a long time because it included the detailing of a great many facts, theories and legends concerning these beings who were satisfied to rule nothing less than a planet apiece. At the end of it Conway was still not sure that his patient was immortal, but everything he had heard seemed to point that way.

Hesitantly, he said, " After what I've just heard perhaps I shouldn't ask, but in your opinion are these beings capable of committing an act of murder and cannibalism—"

" No! " said one Ian.

" Never! " said the other.

There was, of course, no hint of emotion in the Translated replies, but their sheer volume was enough to make everyone in the dining hall look up.

A few minutes later Conway was alone. The Ians had requested permission to see the legendary EPLH and then dashed off full of awe and eagerness. Ians were nice people, Conway thought, but at the same time it was his considered opinion that lettuce was fit only for rabbits. With great firmness he pushed his slightly mussed salad away from him and dialled for steak with double the usual accessories.

This promised to be a long, hard day.

When Conway returned to the observation ward the Ians had gone and the patient's condition was unchanged. The Lieutenant was still guarding the nurse on duty—closely—and was beginning to blush for some reason. Conway nodded gravely, dismissed the nurse and was giving the Path report a rereading when Dr. Prilicla arrived.

Prilicla was a spidery, fragile, low-gravity being of classification GLNO who had to wear G-nullifiers constantly to keep from being mashed flat by a gravity which most other species considered normal. Besides being a very competent doctor Prilicla was the most popular person in the hospital, because its empathic faculty made it nearly impossible for the little being to be disagreeable to anyone. And, although it also possessed a set of large, iridescent wings it sat down at mealtimes and ate spaghetti with a fork. Conway liked Prilicla a lot.

Conway briefly described the EPLH's condition and background as he saw it, then ended, "... I know you can't get much from an unconscious patient, but it would help me if you could—"

"There appears to be a misunderstanding here, Doctor," Prilicla broke in, using the form of words which was the nearest it ever came to telling someone they were wrong. "The patient is conscious ..."

"Get back!"

Warned as much by Conway's emotional radiation at the thought of what the patient's boney club could do to Prilicla's egg-shell body as his words, the little GLNO skittered backwards out of range. The Lieutenant edged closer, his eyes on the still motionless tentacle which ended in that monstrous bludgeon. For several seconds nobody moved or spoke, while outwardly the patient remained unconscious. Finally Conway looked at Prilicla. He did not have to speak.

Prilicla said, "I detect emotional radiation of a type which emanates only from a mind which is consciously aware of itself. The mental processes themselves seem slow and, considering the physical size of the patient, weak. In detail, it is radiating feelings of danger, helplessness and confusion. There is also an indication of some overall sense of purpose."

Conway sighed.

"So it's playing 'possum," said the Lieutenant grimly, talking mostly to himself.

The fact that the patient was feigning unconsciousness worried Conway less than it did the Corpsman. In spite of the mass of diagnostic equipment available to him he subscribed firmly to the belief that a doctor's best guide to any malfunction was a communicative and co-operative patient. But how did one open a conversation with a being who was a near deity ...?

"We . . . we are going to help you," he said awkwardly. "Do you understand what I'm saying?"

The patient remained motionless as before.

Prilicla said, "There is no indication that it heard you, Doctor."

"But if it's conscious . . ." Conway began, and ended the sentence with a helpless shrug.

He began assembling his instruments again and with Prilicla's help examined the EPLH again, paying special attention to the organs of sight and hearing. But there was no physical or emotional reaction while the examination was in progress, despite the flashing lights and a considerable amount of ungentle probing. Conway could see no evidence of physical malfunction in any of the sensory organs, yet the patient remained completely unaware of all outside stimulus. Physically it was unconscious, insensible to everything going on around it, except that Prilicla insisted that it wasn't.

What a crazy, mixed-up demi-god, thought Conway. Trust O'Mara to send him the weirdies. Aloud he said, "The only explanation I can see for this peculiar state of affairs is that the mind you are receiving has severed or blocked off contact with all its sensory equipment. The patient's condition is not the cause of this, therefore the trouble must have a psychological basis. I'd say the beastie is urgently in need of psychiatric assistance.

"However," he ended, "the head-shrinkers can operate more effectively on a patient who is physically well, so I think we should concentrate on clearing up this skin condition first . . ."

A specific had been developed at the hospital against epithelioma of the type affecting the patient, and Pathology had already stated that it was suited to the EPLH's metabolism and would produce no harmful side-effects. It took only a few minutes for Conway to measure out a test dosage and inject subcutaneously. Prilicla moved up beside him quickly to see the effect. This, they both knew, was one of the rare, rapid-action miracles of medicine—its effect would be apparent in a matter of seconds rather than hours or days.

Ten minutes later nothing at all had happened.

"A tough guy," said Conway, and injected the maximum safe dose.

Almost at once the skin in the area darkened and lost its dry, cracked look. The dark area widened perceptibly as they watched, and one of the tentacles twitched slightly.

"What's its mind doing?" said Conway.

"Much the same as before," Prilicla replied, "but with mounting anxiety apparent since the last injection. I detect feelings of a mind trying to make a decision . . . of making a decision . . ."

Prilicla began to tremble violently, a clear sign that the emotional radiation of the patient had intensified. Conway had his mouth open to put a question when a sharp, tearing sound dragged his attention back to the patient. The EPLH was heaving and throwing itself against its restraining harness. Two of the anchoring straps had parted and it had worked a tentacle free. The one with the club . . .

Conway ducked frantically, and avoided having his head knocked off by a fraction of an inch—he felt that ultimate in blunt instruments actually touch his hair. But the Lieutenant was not so lucky. At almost the end of its swing the boney mace thudded into his shoulder, throwing him across the tiny ward so hard that he almost bounced off the wall. Prilicla, with whom cowardice was a prime survival characteristic, was already clinging with its sucker-tipped legs to the ceiling, which was the only safe spot in the room.

From his position flat on the floor Conway heard other straps go and saw two more tentacles being failing about. He knew that in a few minutes the patient would be completely free of the harness and able to move about the room at will. He scrambled quickly to his knees, crouched, then dived for the berserk EPLH. As he hung on tightly with his arms around its body just below the roots of the tentacles Conway was nearly deafened by a series of barking roars coming from the speaking orifice beside his ear. The noise translated as "Help me! Help me!" Simultaneously he saw the tentacle with the great, boney bludgeon at its tip swing downwards. There was a crash and a three-inch hollow appeared on the floor at the point where he had been lying a few seconds previously.

Tackling the patient the way he had done might have seemed foolhardy, but Conway had been trying to keep his head in more ways than one. Clinging tightly to the EPLH's

body below the level of those madly swinging tentacles, Conway knew, was the next safest place in the room.

Then he saw the Lieutenant . . .

The Lieutenant had his back to the wall, half lying and half sitting up. One arm hung loosely at his side and in the other hand he held his gun, steadying it between his knees, and one eye was closed in a diabolical wink while the other sighted along the barrel. Conway shouted desperately for him to wait, but the noise from the patient drowned him out. At every instant Conway expected the flash and shock of exploding bullets. He felt paralysed with fear, he couldn't even let go.

Then suddenly it was all over. The patient slumped on to its side, twitched and became motionless. Holstering his unfired weapon the Lieutenant struggled to his feet. Conway extricated himself from the patient and Prilicla came down off the ceiling.

Awkardly, Conway said, "Uh, I suppose you couldn't shoot with me hanging on there?"

The Lieutenant shook his head. "I'm a good shot, Doctor, I could have hit it and missed you all right. But it kept shouting "Help me" all the time. That sort of thing cramps a man's style . . ."

three

It was some twenty minutes later, after Prilicla had sent the Lieutenant away to have a cracked humerus set and Conway and the GLNO were fitting the patient with a much stronger harness, that they noticed the absence of the darker patch of skin. The patient's condition was now exactly the same as it had been before undergoing treatment. Apparently the hefty shot which Conway had administered had had only a temporary effect, and that was decidedly peculiar. It was in fact downright impossible.

From the moment Prilicla's emphatic faculty had been brought to bear on the case Conway had been sure that the root of the trouble was psychological. He also knew that a severely warped mind could do tremendous damage to the body which housed it. But this damage was on a purely physical level and its method of repair—the treatment developed and proved time and time again by Pathology—was a hard, physical fact also. And no mind, regardless of its power

or degree of malfunction, should be able to ignore, to completely negate, a physical fact. The Universe had, after all, certain fixed laws.

So far as Conway could see there were only two possible explanations. Either the rules were being ignored because the Being who had made them had also the right to ignore them or somehow, someone—or some combination of circumstances or mis-read data—was pulling a fast one. Conway infinitely preferred the second theory because the first one was altogether too shattering to consider seriously. He desperately wanted to go on thinking of his patient with a small P . . .

Nevertheless, when he left the ward Conway paid a visit to the office of Captain Bryson, the Monitor Corps Chaplain, and consulted that officer at some length in a semi-professional capacity—Conway believed in carrying plenty of insurance. His next call was on Colonel Skempton, the officer in charge of Supply, Maintenance and Communications at the Hospital. There he requested complete copies of the patient's log—not just the sections relevant to the murder—together with any other background data available to be sent to his room. Then he went to the AUGL theatre to demonstrate operative techniques on submarine life-forms, and before dinner he was able to work in two hours in the Pathology department during which he discovered quite a lot about his patient's immortality.

When he returned to his room there was a pile of typescript on his desk that was nearly two inches thick. Conway groaned, thinking of his six-hour recreation period and how he was going to spend it. The thought obtruded of how he would have *liked* to spend it, bringing with it a vivid picture of the very efficient and impossibly beautiful Nurse Murchison whom he had been dating regularly of late. But Murchison was currently with the FGLI Maternity Section and their free periods would not coincide for another two weeks.

In the present circumstances perhaps it was just as well, Conway thought, as he settled down for a good long read.

The Corpsmen who had examined the patient's ship had been unable to convert the EPLH's time units into the Earth-human scale with any accuracy, but they had been able to state quite definitely that many of the taped logs were several

centuries old and a few of them dated back to two thousand years or more. Conway began with the oldest and sifted carefully through them until he came to the most recent. He discovered almost at once that they were not so much a series of taped diaries—the references to personal items were relatively rare—as a catalogue of memoranda, most of which was highly technical and very heavy going. The data relevant to the murder, which he studied last, was much more dramatic.

. . . *My physician is making me sick*, the final entry read, *it is killing me. I must do something. It is a bad physician for allowing me to become ill. Somehow I must get rid of it* . . .

Conway replaced the last sheet on its pile, sighed, and prepared to adopt a position more conducive to creative thinking; i.e. with his chair tipped far back, feet on desk and practically sitting on the back of his neck.

What a mess, he thought.

The separate pieces of the puzzle—or most of them, anyway—were available to him now and required only to be fitted together. There was the patient's condition, not serious so far as the Hospital was concerned but definitely lethal if not treated. Then there was the data supplied by the two Ians regarding this God-like, power-hungry but essentially beneficent race and the companions—who were never of the same species—who always travelled or lived with them. These companions were subject to replacement because they grew old and died while the EPLHs did not. There were also the Path reports, both the first written one he had received before lunch and the later verbal one furnished during his two hours with Thornnastor, the FGLI Diagnostician-in-Charge of Pathology. It was Thornnastor's considered opinion that the EPLH patient was not a true immortal, and the Considered Opinion of a Diagnostician was as near to being a rock-hard certainty as made no difference. But while immortality had been ruled out for various physiological reasons, the tests had shown evidence of longevity or rejuvenation treatments of the unselective type.

Finally there had been the emotion readings furnished by Prilicla before and during their attempted treatment of the patient's skin condition. Prilicla had reported a steady radiation pattern of confusion, anxiety and helplessness. But when the EPLH had received its second injection it had gone berserk, and the blast of emotion exploding from its mind

had, in Prilicla's own words, nearly fried the little empath's brains in their own ichor. Prilicla had been unable to get a detailed reading on such a violent eruption of emotion, mainly because it had been tuned to the earlier and more gentle level on which the patient had been radiating, but it agreed that there was evidence of instability of the schizoid type.

Conway wriggled deeper into his chair, closed his eyes and let the pieces of the puzzle slide gently into place.

It had begun on the planet where the EPLHs had been the dominant life-form. In the course of time they had achieved civilisation which included interstellar flight and an advanced medical science. Their life-span, lengthy to begin with, was artificially extended so that a relatively short-lived species like the Ians could be forgiven for believing them to be immortal. But a high price had had to be paid for their longevity: reproduction of their kind, the normal urge towards immortality of race in a species of mortal individuals, would have been the first thing to go; then their civilisation would have dissolved—been forced apart, rather—into a mass of star-travelling, rugged individualists, and finally there would have been the psychological rot which set in when the risk of purely physical deterioration had gone.

Poor demi-gods, thought Conway.

They avoided each other's company for the simple reason that they'd already had too much of it—century after century of each other's mannerisms, habits of speech, opinions and the sheer, utter boredom of looking at each other. They had set themselves vast, sociological problems—taking charge of backward or errant planetary cultures and dragging them up by their bootstraps, and similar large-scale philanthropies—because they had tremendous minds, they had plenty of time, they had constantly to fight against boredom and because basically they must have been nice people. And because part of the price of such longevity was an ever-growing fear of death, they had to have their own personal physicians—no doubt the most efficient practitioners of medicine known to them—constantly in attendance.

Only one piece of the puzzle refused to fit and that was the odd way in which the EPLH had negated his attempts to treat it, but Conway had no doubt that that was a physiological detail which would soon become clear as well. The important thing was that he now knew how to proceed.

Not every condition responded to medication, despite Thornnastor's claims to the contrary, and he would have seen that surgery was indicated in the EPLH's case if the whole business had not been so be-fogged with considerations of who and what the patient was and what it was supposed to have done. The fact that the patient was a near-diety, a murderer and generally the type of being not to be trifled with were details which should not have concerned him.

Conway sighed and swung his feet to the floor. He was beginning to feel so comfortable that he decided he had better go to bed before he fell asleep.

Immediately after breakfast next day Conway began setting up things for the EPLH's operation. He ordered the necessary instruments and equipment sent to the observation ward, gave detailed instructions regarding its sterilisation—the patient was supposed to have killed one doctor already for allowing it to become sick, and a dim view would be taken if another one was the cause of it catching something else because of faulty aseptic procedures—and requested the assistance of a Tralthan surgeon to help with the fine work. Then half an hour before he was due to start Conway called on O'Mara.

The Chief Psychologist listened to his report and intended course of action without comment until he had finished, then he said, "Conway, do you realise what could happen to this hospital if that thing got loose? And not just physically loose, I mean. It is seriously disturbed mentally, you say, if not downright psychotic. At the moment it is unconscious, but from what you tell me its grasp of the psychological sciences is such that it could have us eating out of its manipulatory appendage just by talking at us.

"I'm concerned as to what may happen when it wakes up."

It was the first time Conway had heard O'Mara confess to being worried about anything. Several years back when a runaway spaceship had crashed into the hospital, spreading havoc and confusion through sixteen levels,* it was said that Major O'Mara had expressed a feeling of concern on that occasion also . . .

"I'm trying not to think about that," said Conway apologetically. "It just confuses the issue."

* "Sector General"—New Worlds No. 65.

O'Mara took a deep breath and let it out slowly through his nose, a mannerism of his which could convey more than twenty scathing sentences. He said coldly, "Somebody should think about these things, Doctor. I trust you will have no objection to *me* observing the coming operation . . . ?"

To what was nothing less than a politely worded order there could be no reply other than an equally polite, "Glad to have you, sir."

When they arrived in the observation ward the patient's 'bed' had been raised to a comfortable operating height and the EPLH itself was strapped securely into position. The Tralthan had taken its place beside the recording and anaesthetizing gear and had one eye on the patient, one on its equipment and the other two directed towards Prilicla with whom it was discussing a particularly juicy piece of scandal which had come to light the previous day. As the two beings concerned were PVSJ chlore-breathers the affair could have only an academic interest for them, but apparently their academic interest was intense. At the sight of O'Mara, however, the scandal-mongering ceased forthwith. Conway gave the signal to begin.

The anaesthetic was one of several which Pathology had pronounced safe for the EPLH life-form, and while it was being administered Conway found his mind going off at a tangent towards his Tralthan assistant.

Surgeons of that species were really two beings instead of one, a combination of FGLI and OTSB. Clinging to the leathery back of the lumbering, elephantine Tralthan was a diminutive and nearly mindless being who lived in symbiosis with it. At first glance the OTSB looked like a furry ball with a long ponytail sprouting from it, but a closer look showed that the ponytail was composed of scores of fine manipulators most of which incorporated sensitive visual organs. Because of the *rapport* which existed between the Tralthan and its symbiote the FGLI-OTSB combination were the finest surgeons in the Galaxy. Not all Tralthans chose to link up with a symbiote, but FGLI medics wore them like a badge of office.

Suddenly the OTSB scurried along its host's back and huddled atop the dome-like head between the eye-stalks, its tail hanging down towards the patient and fanning out stiffly. The Tralthan was ready to begin.

"You will observe that this is a surface condition only," Conway said, for the benefit of the recording equipment, "and that the whole skin area looks dead, dried-up and on the point of flaking off. During the removal of the first skin samples no difficulty was encountered, but later specimens resisted removal to a certain extent and the reason was discovered to be a tiny rootlet, approximately one quarter of an inch long and invisible to the naked eye. My naked eye, that is. So it seems clear that the condition is about to enter a new phase. The disease is beginning to dig in rather than remain on the surface, and the more promptly we act the better."

Conway gave the reference numbers of the Path reports and his own preliminary notes on the case, then went on, "... As the patient, for reasons which are at the moment unclear, does not respond to medication I propose surgical removal of the affected tissue, irrigation, cleansing and replacement with surrogate skin. A Tralthan-guided OTSB will be used to insure that the rootlets are also excised. Except for the considerable area to be covered, which will make this a long job, the procedure is straightforward — "

"Excuse me, Doctors," Prilicla broke in, "the patient is still conscious."

An argument, polite only on Prilicla's side, broke out between the Tralthan and the little empath. Prilicla held that the EPLH was thinking thoughts and radiating emotions and the other maintained that it had enough of the anaesthetic in its system to render it completely insensible to everything for at least six hours. Conway broke in just as the argument was becoming personal.

"We've had this trouble before," he said irritably. "The patient has been physically unconscious, except for a few minutes yesterday, since its arrival, yet Prilicla detected the presence of rational thought processes. Now the same effect is present while it is under anaesthetic. I don't know how to explain this, it will probably require a surgical investigation of its brain structure to do so, and that is something which will have to wait. The important thing at the moment is that it is physically incapable of movement or of feeling pain. Now shall we begin?"

To Prilicla he added, "Keep listening just in case . . ."

four

For about twenty minutes they worked in silence, although the procedure did not require a high degree of concentration. It was rather like weeding a garden, except that everything which grew was a weed and had to be removed one plant at a time. He would peel back an affected area of skin, the OTSB's hair-thin appendages would investigate, probe and detach the rootlets, and he would peel back another tiny segment. Conway was looking forward to the most tedious operation of his career.

Prilicla said, "I detect increasing anxiety linked with a strengthening sense of purpose. The anxiety is becoming intense . . ."

Conway grunted. He could think of no other comment to make.

Five minutes later the Tralthan said, "We will have to slow down, Doctor. We are at a section where the roots are much deeper . . ."

Two minutes later Conway said, "But I can *see* them! How deep are they now?"

"Four inches," replied the Tralthan. "And Doctor, they are visibly lengthening as we work."

"But that's impossible!" Conway burst out; then, "We'll move to another area."

He felt the sweat begin to trickle down his forehead and just beside him Prilicla's gangling, fragile body began to quiver—but not at anything the patient was thinking. Conway's own emotional radiation just then was not a pleasant thing, because in the new area and in the two chosen at random after that the result was the same. Roots from the flaking pieces of skin were burrowing deeper as they watched.

"Withdraw," said Conway harshly.

For a long time nobody spoke. Prilicla was shaking as if a high wind was blowing in the ward. The Tralthan was fussing with its equipment, all four of its eyes focussed on one unimportant knob. O'Mara was looking intently at Conway, also calculatingly and with a large amount of sympathy in his steady grey eyes. The sympathy was because he could recognise when a man was genuinely in a spot and the calculation was due to his trying to work out whether the trouble was Conway's fault or not.

"What happened, Doctor?" he said gently.

Conway shook his head angrily. "I don't know. Yesterday the patient did not respond to medication, today it won't respond to surgery. It's reactions to anything we try to do for it are crazy, impossible! And now our attempt to relieve its condition surgically has triggered off—something—which will send those roots deep enough to penetrate vital organs in a matter of minutes if their present rate of growth is maintained, and you know what that means . . ."

"The patient's sense of anxiety is diminishing," Prilicla reported. "It is still engaged in purposeful thinking."

The Tralthan joined in then. It said, "I have noticed a peculiar fact about those root-like tendrils which join the diseased flakes of skin with the body. My symbiote has extremely sensitive vision, you will understand, and it reports that the tendrils seem to be rooted at each end, so that it is impossible to tell whether the growth is attacking the body or the body is deliberately holding on to the growth."

Conway shook his head distractedly. The case was full of mad contradictions and outright impossibilities. To begin with no patient, no matter how fouled up mentally, should be able to negate the effects of a drug powerful enough to bring about a complete cure within half an hour, and all within a few minutes. And the natural order of things was for a being with a diseased area of skin to slough it off and replace it with new tissue, not hang on to it grimly no matter what. It was a baffling, hopeless case.

Yet when the patient had arrived it had seemed a simple, straightforward case—Conway had felt more concern regarding the patient's background than its condition, whose cure he had considered a routine matter. But somewhere along the way he had missed something, Conway was sure, and because of this sin of omission the patient would probably die during the next few hours. Maybe he had made a snap diagnosis, been too sure of himself, been criminally careless.

It was pretty horrible to lose a patient at any time, and at Sector General losing a patient was an extremely rare occurrence. But to lose one whose condition no hospital anywhere in the civilised galaxy would have considered as being serious . . . Conway swore luridly, but stopped because he hadn't the words to describe how he felt about himself.

"Take it easy, son."

That was O'Mara, squeezing his arm and talking like a father. Normally O'Mara was a bad-tempered, bull-voiced and unapproachable tyrant who, when one went to him for help, sat making sarcastic remarks while the person concerned squirmed and shamefacedly solved his own problems. His present uncharacteristic behaviour proved something, Conway thought bitterly. It proved that Conway had a problem which Conway could not solve himself.

But in O'Mara's expression there was something more than just concern for Conway, and it was probably that deep down the psychologist was a little glad that things had turned out as they did. Conway meant no reflection on O'Mara's character, because he knew that if the Major had been in his position he would have tried as hard if not harder to cure the patient, and would have felt just as badly about the outcome. But at the same time the Chief Psychologist must have been desperately worried about the possibility of a being of great and unknown powers, who was also mentally unbalanced, being turned loose on the Hospital. In addition O'Mara might also be wondering if, beside a conscious and alive EPLH, he would look like a small and untutored boy . . .

"Let's try taking it from the top again," O'Mara said, breaking in on his thoughts. "Is there anything you've found in the patient's background that might point to it wanting to destroy itself?"

"*No!*" said Conway vehemently. "To the contrary! It would want desperately to live. It was taking unselective rejuvenation treatments, which means that the complete cell-structure of its body was regenerated periodically. As the process of storing memory is a product of ageing in the brain cells, this would practically wipe its mind clean after every treatment . . ."

"That's why those taped logs resembled technical memoranda," O'Mara put in. "That's exactly what they were. Still, I prefer our own method of rejuvenation even though we won't live so long, regenerating damaged organs only and allowing the brain to remain untouched . . ."

"I know," Conway broke in, wondering why the usually taciturn O'Mara had become so talkative. Was he trying to simplify the problem by making him state it in non-professional terms? "But the effect of continued longevity treat-

ments, as you know yourself, is to give the possessor an increasing fear of dying. Despite loneliness, boredom and an altogether unnatural existence, the fear grows steadily with the passage of time. That is why it always travelled with its own private physician, it was desperately afraid of sickness or an accident befalling it between treatments, and that is why I can sympathise to a certain extent with its feelings when the doctor who was supposed to keep it well allowed it to get sick, although the business of eating it afterwards— "

"So you are on its side," said O'Mara drily.

"It could make a good plea of self-defence," Conway retorted. "But I was saying that it was desperately afraid of dying, so that it would be constantly trying to get a better, more efficient doctor for itself . . . Oh!"

"Oh, what?" said O'Mara.

It was Prilicla, the emotion sensitive who replied. It said, "Doctor Conway has just had an idea."

"What is it, you young whelp? There's no need to be so damn secretive . . !" O'Mara's voice had lost its gentle fatherly tone, and there was a gleam in his eye which said that he was glad that gentleness was no longer necessary. "What *is* wrong with the patient?"

Feeling happy and excited and at the same time very much unsure of himself, Conway stumbled across to the intercom and ordered some very unusual equipment, checked again that the patient was so thoroughly strapped down that it would be unable to move a muscle, then he said, "My guess is that the patient is perfectly sane and we've been blinding ourselves with psychological red herrings. Basically, the trouble is something it ate."

"I had a bet with myself you would say that sometime during this case," said O'Mara. He looked sick.

The equipment arrived—a slender, pointed wooden stake and a mechanism which would drive it downwards at any required angle and controlled speeds. With the Tralthan's help Conway set it up and moved it into position. He chose a part of the patient's body which contained several vital organs which were, however, protected by nearly six inches of musculature and adipose, then he set the stake in motion. It was just touching the skin and descending at the rate of approximately two inches per hour.

"What the blazes is going on?" stormed O'Mara. "Do you think the patient is a vampire or something!"

"Of course not," Conway replied. "I'm using a wooden stake to give the patient a better chance of defending itself. You wouldn't expect it to stop a steel one, would you." He motioned the Tralthan forward and together they watched the area where the stake was entering the EPLH's body. Every few minutes Prilicla reported on the emotional radiation. O'Mara paced up and down, occasionally muttering to himself.

The point had penetrated almost a quarter of an inch when Conway noticed the first coarsening and thickening of the skin. It was taking place in a roughly circular area, about four inches in diameter, whose centre was the wound created by the stake. Conway's scanner showed a spongy, fibrous growth forming under the skin to a depth of half an inch. Visibly the growth thickened and grew opaque to his scanner's current setting, and within ten minutes it had become a hard, boney plate. The stake had begun to bend alarmingly and was on the point of snapping.

"I'd say the defences are now concentrated at this one point," Conway said, trying to keep his voice steady, "so we'd better have it out."

Conway and the Tralthan rapidly incised around and undercut the newly-formed bony plate, which was immediately transferred into a sterile, covered receptacle. Quickly preparing a shot—a not quite maximum dose of the specific he had tried the previous day—Conway injected, then went back to helping the Tralthan with the repair work on the wound. This was routine work and took about fifteen minutes, and when it was finished there could be no doubt at all that the patient was responding favourably to treatment.

Over the congratulations of the Tralthan and the horrible threats of O'Mara—the Chief Psychologist wanted some questions answered, fast—Prilicla said, "You have effected a cure, Doctor, but the patient's anxiety level has markedly increased. It is almost frantic."

Conway shook his head, grinning. "The patient is heavily anaestheticised and cannot feel anything. However, I agree that at this present moment . . ." He nodded towards the sterile container. ". . . its personal physician must be feeling pretty bad."

In the container the excised bone had begun to soften and leak a faintly purplish liquid. The liquid was rippling and sloshing gently about at the bottom of the container as if it had a mind of its own. Which was, in fact, the case . . .

Conway was in O'Mara's office winding up his report on the EPLH and the Major was being highly complimentary in a language which at times made the compliments indistinguishable from insults. But this was O'Mara's way, Conway was beginning to realise, and the Chief Psychologist was polite and sympathetic only when he was professionally concerned about a person.

He was still asking questions.

" . . . An intelligent, amoebic life-form, an organised collection of submicroscopic, virus-type cells, would make the most efficient doctor obtainable," said Conway in reply to one of them. " It would reside within its patient and, given the necessary data, control any disease or organic malfunction from the inside. To a being who is pathologically afraid of dying it must have seemed perfect. And it was, too, because the trouble which developed was not really the doctor's fault. It came about through the patient's ignorance of its own physiological background.

" The way I see it," Conway went on, " the patient had been taking its rejuvenation treatments at an early stage of its biological life-time. I mean that it did not wait until middle or old age before regenerating itself. But on this occasion, either because it forgot or was careless or had been working on a problem which took longer than usual, it aged more than it had previously and acquired this skin condition. Pathology says that this was probably a common complaint with this race, and the normal course would be for the EPLH to slough off the affected skin and carry on as usual. But our patient, because the type of its rejuvenation treatment caused memory damage, did not know this, so its personal physician did not know it either."

Conway continued, " This, er, resident physician knew very little about the medical background of its patient-host's body, but its motto must have been to maintain the *status quo* at all costs. When pieces of its patient's body threatened to break away it held on to them, not realising that this could have been a normal occurrence like losing hair or a reptile periodically shedding its skin, especially as its master would

have insisted that the occurrence was not natural. A pretty fierce struggle must have developed between the patient's body processes and its Doctor, with the patient's mind also ranged against its doctor. Because of this the doctor had to render the patient unconscious the better to do what it considered to be the right thing.

"When we gave it the test shots the doctor neutralised them. They were a foreign substance being introduced into its patient's body, you see. And you know what happened when we tried surgical removal. It was only when we threatened underlying vital organs with that stake, forcing the doctor to defend its patient at that one point . . ."

"When you began asking for wooden stakes," said O'Mara drily, "I thought of putting *you* in a tight harness."

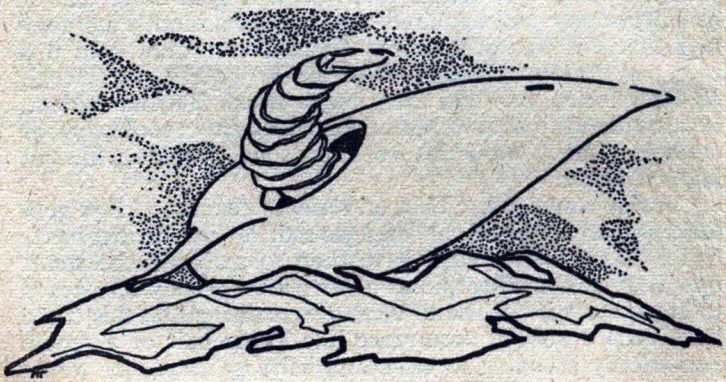
Conway grinned. He said, "I'm recommending that the EPLH takes his doctor back. Now that Pathology has given it a fuller understanding of its employer's medical and physiological history it should be the ultimate in personal physicians, and the EPLH is smart enough to see that."

O'Mara smiled in return. "And I was worried about what it might do when it became conscious. But it turned out to be a very friendly, likeable type. Quite charming, in fact."

As Conway rose and turned to go he said slyly, "That's because it's such a good psychologist. It is pleasant to people *all* the time . . ."

He managed to get the door shut behind him before the paperweight hit it.

James White



Very few people will have missed reading about the intelligence tests which have been put to dolphins and the amazing results these tests have shown. So, George Whitley improves upon this theme and comes up with some nerve-racking possibilities

CHANGE OF HEART

by GEORGE WHITLEY

Once, during the Second World War, I depth charged a whale.

Those of us who served in the fast (but not fast enough) well armed (but not well armed enough) independently sailing merchant ships were apt to suffer from itchy trigger fingers, were liable to shoot first and to ask questions afterwards.

This was such an occasion.

We were homeward bound, running north and east from Bermuda to Liverpool. It was a typical Western Ocean morning—not too cold, for we were in the Gulf of Stream and the following half gale was south-westerly. There was a penetrating, unpleasant drizzle that threatened to turn to fog at any moment. We had no radar, neither were we equipped with asdic. The possession of either instrument would have made us much happier, especially since we knew that a convoy not very far ahead of us had been badly mauled by a wolf pack. But we were not lacking in armament. We mounted a six-inch gun, a twelve pounder, eight Oerlikons, half a dozen light machine guns and our full quota of

assorted rocket weapons. In addition we carried, sitting smugly in their racks right aft, three depth charges.

It was my forenoon watch.

I was nervously pacing the bridge, checking the alteration of course every time that the bell of the zig-zag clock in the wheelhouse sounded, making sure that the Oerlikon gunners in the bridge wings were keeping an efficient look-out. With my own binoculars I scanned the heaving greyness ahead and astern, to port and to starboard.

And then I saw it, fine on the port bow, a long dark shape that broke surface briefly in a smother of foam, that was crossing our bows and heading out to starboard. It was, perhaps, half a mile distant. The port Oerlikon gunner saw it too; his weapon hammered suddenly and shockingly, sending a stream of twenty millimetre tracer shells hosing out over the waves. I ran for the wheelhouse, shouting to the helmsman. "Starboard a little! Starboard five degrees! Steady!" I pushed up the plunger switch that actuated the alarm bells, then twirled the calling handle of the sound-powered telephone.

"Six inch!" I snapped.

"Six inch here, sir."

"Arm and set depth charges!"

The six inch gun's crew would have closed up by now; there would be somebody to attend to the telephone while the gunner on watch set the charges. There would be somebody to stand by the docking telegraph, which could be used for warlike purposes as well as for its original function, a means of rapid communication when berthing the ship. I made a mental computation, felt rather than reasoned that at our speed we should be, now, right over the submarine. I was dimly aware that the other officers were on the bridge, that the Old Man was standing at my elbow. He did not interfere, but followed me out to the wing of the bridge, to the telegraph.

I jerked the handle to *Let Go*. The bell jangled as the pointer come round to acknowledge the order.

"Submarine?" asked the Captain tersely.

"Yes, sir. She was right ahead when I picked her up. I tried to ram, but she must have dived . . ."

We stared aft, at the turbulence of our wake. And then there was more than the disturbance created by our racing

screws. We saw the surface of the sea boil and break before we felt the hammer blow of the underwater explosion. We saw a geyser of white water—and lifted on it, twisting and turning, the great body. The enormous head, the fluked tail, made recognition instantaneous.

The broken thing fell back into the violently disturbed water, remaining afloat for a few seconds. The sea around it was red with blood.

Then—but it was a long time ago—I felt sorry for that whale.

Now . . .

The war was over, and then there was the Cold War, and there was the Korean War, and there were the various revolutions and the suppressions of revolutions—but we, in the Merchant Navy, soon forgot all that we had ever learned about guns and gunnery, very soon lost the feeling of naked defencelessness that at first afflicted us when we ventured out of port without as much as a light machine gun mounted about the decks. Our status hadn't changed. We were still civilians—but we were no longer civilians expecting to be shot at and equipped with the wherewithal for shooting back.

Time passed, and with its passage came the usual promotions until, not so long ago, I found myself Master of one of the Company's smaller and older vessels, outward bound from the U.K. to New Zealand via the Panama Canal.

Frankly, once the initial worries were behind me I was enjoying the voyage. I had no intention of running "a taut ship"—that phrase, in fact, has always rather repelled me. A happy ship is not necessarily an inefficient one; the so-called taut ship very often is just that. My officers were capable and no lazier than the generality of certificated personnel. As long as things got done I let them do them in their own way. My attitude, I admit has rather changed of late. I am apt to be extremely fussy about an efficient lookout. Recently I overheard my disgruntled Third Mate complaining to the Second Mate at the watch relief, "The Old Man's getting worse. He gave me hell because I hadn't seen a blasted porpoise playing about the bows!"

So my not very taut—but quite happy—ship was in mid-Pacific, a little artificial satellite falling down the long orbit between the Gulf of Panama and Auckland. (After all, a Great Circle track could be classed as a surface orbit.) There

was the sky, usually cloudless, above us, there was the blue, empty sea all around us. There was the familiar, pleasant ship's routine—the routine that on a long voyage seems to be built around meal times and deck golf times and gin times. There was a well-stocked ship's library, supplemented by the books that I had brought with me. There was the novel—*the* novel—that I was going to write some time when I felt strong enough; at the moment, however, I was enjoying the laziness after years of a more or less strenuous life as Chief Officer far too much to be able to drive myself to break out my portable typewriter and supply of paper.

And then, one fine afternoon, I was awakened from my afternoon sleep by the buzzing of the telephone.

I took the instrument from its rest, said drowsily and irritably, "Captain here."

"Second Officer, sir. I've sighted something ahead and a little to starboard. Looks like a raft."

"I'll be right up," I told him.

I found him on the starboard wing of the bridge, his binoculars focussed on the distant object. I brought my own to bear. It was a raft all right—a roughly constructed affair with a mast from which a tattered rag depended limply. There was a man sprawled at the foot of the mast. I thought that I saw him move. I depressed the lever of the automatic whistle control, heard the deep, organ note go booming out over the gently undulant water. The man heard it too. He tried to stagger to his feet, managed to get to his knees. He clung to the mast with one hand, waved feebly with the other. Then he collapsed.

Meanwhile, my Second Mate had not been idle. I had been faintly conscious of the shrilling of his pocket whistle as he called the stand-by man of the watch. Shortly afterwards I realised that the Chief Officer was standing behind me, waiting for orders, and that the Bo's'n was waiting behind him.

There was no need to give any orders really. It was just a nice, uncomplicated rescue job, with weather conditions more in our favour than otherwise. I could have brought the ship right alongside the raft and sent a man down with a gantline to make fast around the castaway—he would obviously have been unable to climb a pilot ladder. But I wasn't sufficently sure of my abilities as a ship handler; it would have been a cruel irony to crush or overset the flimsy craft and to kill the man at the very moment of rescue.

So I stopped the ship about a quarter of a mile from the raft and lowered and sent away the motor boat, under the Chief Officer. The Mate handled the boat well, laid it alongside the rough platform and then sent two A.B.s to help the man aboard. They had to lift him, to carry him, to pass him over the gunwales into the lifeboat. One of them reboarded, the other one remained on the raft for a minute or so, searching the small area. He found nothing—I could see the gesture that he made with his empty hands—and then rejoined his mates.

I went down to the boat deck when the lifeboat returned. I looked down into the boat as it was rehoisted. The castaway looked more dead than alive. He was bearded, shaggy, emaciated, deeply sunburned. He was naked but for a ragged pair of shorts. A jolt as the gunwale of the boat fouled a plate edge seemed to stir him into consciousness. He started up, looked around wildly. The Mate put out a hand to restrain him. He seized the Mate's hand in his own two claws, hung on to it desperately. The sight could have been ludicrous—but it was somehow frightening.

The boat was brought up to fishplate level and then the winch was stopped. The castaway was lifted and passed inboard—"Light as a bleedin' fevver, 'e is," I heard one of the A.B.s say—and then strapped into the waiting stretcher. The glaring eyes in the dark brown face—the face that was little more than dry skin stretched over a skull—found mine. "Captain?" he croaked.

"Yes. I am the Captain."

"Must . . . Must tell you. Must warn . . ."

"In a little while," I told him.

"Now," he whispered demandingly. "*Now*."

But I had other things to attend to. I ignored his pleadings, went back to the bridge where I waited until the boat had been swung inboard and secured. I have the orders that put an end to the interruption to our voyage. Then, with the ship once again on her course and with the engines turning at full speed, I left the bridge to the officer of the watch and went down to the hospital.

We carried no doctor that trip, but it didn't really matter. Given the Medical Guide and a well stocked medicine chest the average ship's officer can manage as well as the average

G.P.—rather better, perhaps, as he has a deeper understanding of the psychology of merchant seamen.

The Mate, I found, was coping quite well. He had put the man into one of the hospital bunks. He had smeared the cracked lips and the cracked skin of the upper face and body with petroleum jelly. He was holding a cup of hot, sweet tea from which the castaway, propped up with pillows, was sipping slowly. He was saying soothingly, "You can tell your story later. You must get your strength back first . . ."

The man jerked his head violently so that the tea slopped over the Mate's hand and over the white bed linen. He cried—and already his voice was stronger, was less of a croak—"But this is important. You must be warned. You have radio. You must warn the world!"

Pirates? I wondered. *Russian submarines on the prowl? Little green men from flying saucers?*

"Let him talk," I said.

He turned to stare at me. "Yes, Captain. I'll talk. And you will listen. You must listen. You must. *You must!*" His voice had risen to a scream.

"Yes," I said soothingly. "I'll listen."

I listened—and this is what I heard.

There were six of us (he said). There were six of us, and we were bumming around the islands, picking up the odd parcel of cargo, the occasional deck passenger. She had been a smallish patrol craft during the war, and then she'd been converted into a fishing boat, with refrigeration, so we could always catch and later sell fish when there was nothing else offering. Jimmy Larsen—he'd been in the Navy—was our navigator, and Pete Nusso was the engineer, and Bill and Clarry and Des and myself just lent a hand as and when required. It was a good enough life while it lasted.

But it didn't last.

We were making a passage from . . . from . . .

Sorry, I wasn't the navigator, and I could never remember the names of those islands. But it was a French island, a small one, and we had this cargo of government stores. And it doesn't matter much where we were taking it to, because we never got there.

It was a fine morning when it happened. I was at the wheel. Bill and Clarry were sunbaking on the foredeck, Pete was in the engineroom, Des and Jimmy were sleeping. I was

damn' nearly asleep myself, but I was keeping the lubber's line steady enough on the course.

I heard Bill call out, saw him get to his feet. He was pointing, out to starboard. Clarry got up to look. I looked too. I thought at first that the broken water was indication of a reef—then saw that it was a school of dolphins. Nothing unusual, perhaps—but this was unusual. There was a whale among them. A big fellow. A sperm whale, by the looks of him.

They were heading our way. I didn't worry, neither did the others. Porpoises are friendly brutes. They like to show off their superior turn of speed, like to make rings around even fast ships. And the poor little *Sue Darling* wasn't a fast ship. She may have been, when the Navy had her, but she wasn't now.

She was Jimmy's girlfriend in Honolulu, Sue Darling. Yes, that was her name. You'd better tell her, Captain. But break it gently to her if you can. She was a good kid, and she thought the world of Jimmy.

They were heading our way—and then, as I had known they would, they altered course before they hit us, half of them passing astern, the others passing ahead. But the whale didn't alter course. He was a big brute. There must have been damn' nearly a hundred tons of him, and he was doing a good twelve knots.

He hit us at speed, right amid ships, and that was the end of *Sue Darling*. She was a wooden ship, and she was old, and she just fell to pieces at the impact. The diesels must have gone straight down when the bottom fell out of her, taking Pete Russo with them. We never saw anything of him. I did glimpse Jimmy briefly before he went down. He must have been dead—there was a lot of blood. Something must have hit him, must have smashed his skull in. Des got out of it all right—not that it did him much good in the end. I shall never forget the absurd look of amazement on his face as he woke up to find himself struggling in the water.

The porpoises were all around us, buffeting us with their sleek bodies, making odd grunting noises. At first I thought that they were attacking us. But they weren't. They were herding us to where the dinghy that had been lashed to the ship's cabin top was floating, bottom up. And it seemed—I thought at the time that I was going mad—that those

grunting noises were some sort of speech, that they were talking among themselves and trying to tell us something.

They helped us to right the dinghy. Yes, Captain, they helped us. And one of them surfaced under me and gave me a boost as I was trying to struggle over the gunwale. I should have been grateful to the brute, but I wasn't. I was frightened. It was . . . uncanny.

Anyhow, there the four of us were—Bill, Clarry, Des and myself. The four non-specialists. We were seamen by courtesy only. We were no more than pen-pushers who had heard the call of the islands, who had found a nomadic life in a rickety little island tramp preferable to an existence chained to an office desk. But we were none of us much good at doing things—which, perhaps, was just as well. But the porpoises weren't to know that.

There were no oars in the dinghy. They had fallen out, and were drifting with the wreckage of the ship. We argued among ourselves about it, tried to decide which one of us was going to swim from the boat to bring them back. But none of us was keen on going over the side. That water was too . . . too crowded. And for the same reason we weren't keen on using our hands as paddles until we recovered the oars. Suddenly we had become very frightened of the sea and of everything that moved within it.

The porpoises settled the argument. They surrounded the boat—to port, to starboard, astern. I was afraid that the pressure of their bodies would push in the planking. They got under way—and we got under way with them. I don't know what speed we were making—but it was a respectable one. We were soaked by the water slopping in over the bows and the low sides.

We travelled—towed or pushed by the porpoises—all that day, and all of the following night. We travelled all the next day as well, and the day after that. When, in the late afternoon, we saw the island, a blue smudge on the far horizon, we were in a sorry state. It was Clarry who had kept us going. He had read a lot. He was one of those people who reads anything and everything. It was Clarry who told us to keep our bodies immersed in the sea water—there was plenty of that—so that our skins could absorb the moisture. It was Clarry who told us to tear buttons from the shorts that were all that we had in the way of clothing, and to suck them. It was Clarry who told us about the old legends concerning

porpoises or dolphins that have saved the lives of shipwrecked sailors.

But he never convinced me that those porpoises were really friendly.

It was just on sunset that our dinghy grounded on the sandy beach of the island. It wasn't much of an island, although we were glad enough to tumble out of the boat and to stagger up on to the dry land. It wasn't much of an island, as we were to discover when we got around to exploring it the next day. There were a few palm trees, but either they weren't coconut palms or coconuts weren't in season. There was some low scrub. And that was all.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. We staggered up the beach, as I have said, and then, after we had got some of our strength back, we began to feel thirsty. But there wasn't any water—we never found any then, neither did we find any later. Clarry suggested that we dig—which we did, with our bare hands. The trickle of moisture that oozed through into the holes—after a long, long time—was salt. Clarry said that we should pull the boat well up on to the beach so that it would not drift away during the night; it seemed that we should not be able to stay on the island, there was nothing there to support life.

But the boat was gone. There was no sign of it.

And then we saw a commotion out to sea. It was light enough—the full moon had risen as the sun had set—and we could see the flurry of white water, the leaping bodies. It was the porpoises back again—and this time they were driving before them a shoal of mullet. They chased those fish right up on to the sand where they flopped, energetically at first, then more and more feebly.

"Water," said Clarry.

"Food," croaked Des. "Food—if you don't mind eating raw fish. But where is the water?"

"In the fish," said Clarry. "In the flesh of the fish. You always have to take salt with fried fish, don't you? The body fluids are practically pure fresh water."

Those body fluids were fresh water all right—but far from pure, very far from pure. Raw fish is so very much fishier than cooked fish. There was food, and there was water, and we got the revolting mess down somehow, tearing the still living bodies to pieces with our fingers and teeth, spitting out scale and bone and . . . and other things.

And that the first night on the island.

We slept well enough. Come to that, we slept surprisingly well. When we woke up at sunrise we made our exploration of the tiny island, found nothing that would raise our hopes. But we were alive, and that was something. And then Clarry set us to building a pile of brush for a signal fire. How we were going to light it—in the unlikely event of our sighting a passing ship or aircraft—nobody was quite sure, not even Clarry. It's one thing reading about making fire by friction—the acquisition of the necessary technique isn't so easy.

The porpoises came back at mid-morning—about forty of them. There was great splashing and confusion as they pushed something up on to the sand. We ran down to examine it. It was a tangled mass of wreckage—steel wreckage. What paint that remained on it was grey. It may have come from a surface ship, it may have come from a submarine. None of us know enough about ships to be able to hazard a guess.

Another school of the brutes drove in from the horizon. They were pushing more wreckage, but floating wreckage this time. There were shattered timbers, some of them old and barnacle encrusted, some of them comparatively new. There were planks that could have come from the *Sue Darling*, from her dinghy. Led by Clarry we waded into the shallows, dragged the wood well inshore. It seemed that the sea beasts had presented us to the wherewithal to construct a raft. (But why had they taken and broken up the dinghy?)

Then the porpoises all retired to seaward but one of their number. He cruised up and down in the shallow water, pointing with his beak first of all at the steel wreckage, then at the timber. He grunted and he whistled. It seemed that there was a note of exasperation in the sounds that he was making.

He dived at last.

"He wanted something," said Bill. "He wanted to tell us something. What did he want to tell us?"

"But he's only an animal," objected Des.

"What are we?" asked Clarry. He said softly, "The history of Man is the history of the tool-making, fire-using animal . . . What must it be like to be intelligent—as intelligent as Man, perhaps—but to have no hands, no tools, no fire?"

"Rubbish," said Des. "Those things aren't intelligent."

"Their brains are as heavy as ours, and as convoluted. Nobody is sure just how intelligent they are. They are at least as intelligent as dogs. *At least* . . ." He stared out to sea, looking worried. "But there could have been changes, mutations. Radiation is supposed to be one of the causes of mutation—if not *the* cause—and there must be large volumes of radio-active water in the Pacific after the various Bomb tests. And all the Cetacea—the whales and the porpoises—must be genetically unstable. Think of it—not too long ago, geologically speaking, their ancestors were bearlike mammals, living on dry land. They returned to the sea, and must have been able to adapt themselves to the new conditions—or the old conditions?—rapidly, in a very few generations. And now there's been another mutation, another jump ahead . . ."

"Hogwash," said Des, but his voice failed to carry conviction . . .

While Clarry talked and we listened the porpoises returned. We became aware that a half dozen of them were pushing something else through the shallows. It was a large slab of slatelike rock. There were scratchings on its smooth surface. At first they made no sense at all as we studied them after we had pulled the slab ashore. Human artists see things differently from each other and such differences are obvious enough in the finished paintings. An essentially alien but intelligent being will see things differently from a man.

And then, quite suddenly, those pictures made sense. There was a fire—depicted by curly lines—about which stood vaguely manlike figures. There were those same manlike figures engaged upon some sort of work, hitting something with hammers. And then there was a porpoise—the shape of that was more easily recognisable—and then there was a swordfish. But it wasn't a swordfish. It was a porpoise and it was wearing a sort of harness from which the sword projected ahead of it.

Clarry—he was quick on the uptake—started to laugh. He spluttered, "The damned things want us to turn armourer. They want us to fit them out—for war!"

Well, that was what they wanted.

They kept us fed—and I never want to eat fish again!—and as long as they saw us working they seemed to be satisfied. Oh, we never did get around to making fire, although it would have been a pity to have burned the timber that we

were supposed to use for firewood. We had other ideas about that timber.

We used stones for tools at first—there was a rocky outcrop at the centre of the island—and managed to knock conveniently shaped hunks of iron from the jagged wreckage of the submarine or whatever it was. And with these crude hammers we knocked the nails out of the timbers—and knocked the same nails back in again as we constructed the raft. We were cunning enough to do this inshore, well out of the reach of prying eyes. (At times I thought that the seabirds had become intelligent too, would report what we were doing to our captors). And those of us who stayed on the beach put up an impression of busyness. Towards the end, however, the leader of the school—I suppose you could call him that—was getting impatient, was cruising up and down snorting indignantly. Clarry tried to tell him that we were handicapped by having no fire; he pointed to the sun, he pointed to the diminished pile of timber, and then he shook his head violently. Whether or not he got the message across I don't know.

And then the raft was finished. We launched it that night. There was no moon, and the sea was quiet, undisturbed by splashings or snortings. We all clambered aboard the flimsy contraption somehow and the current took us out and away. We knew that our attempt at escape was almost certain death—but we were crazy enough to consider death superior to serfdom to lower animals.

But were we so crazy?

And were those animals so very much lower?

Lower or not—they found us.

They found us at noon, when our spirits were at a low ebb, when we were looking back with regret to the scanty shade afforded by those few poor palms, when we would have sold our souls for a trickle of the fishy water, that we had found so revolting, down our throats.

They found us at noon—and I, I must confess, was glad to see them. When they pushed us back to the island I would be a good boy, I decided. I would try to make a fire. I would try to make one of the sword and harness affairs that they wanted. I would try to turn swords out in dozen lots.

They found us—and the others found them.

They came sweeping in at forty knots or so from the south'ard, great, vicious brutes, in appearance not unlike the creatures milling about our raft but bigger, much bigger, black, with white bellies and with great dorsal fins. They may have been what Clarry called mutants; they may have been killer whales. Whatever they were—they were killers. They drove in like a charge of marine cavalry, heavy cavalry, and as they smashed through the squadrons of our captors the water was reddened with blood. They turned, charged again.

And again.

And then one of them nudged the raft. Des was the first to go, to slide, screaming, into the bloody water. His screams ceased abruptly. Then Bill went as the raft was almost capsized, and then Clarry and I were fighting for the mast, for a firm grip on the shaky pole that could mean salvation. I'm glad about one thing. Clarry was unconscious when he went overboard. I felt like a murderer when I hit him as hard as I did—I am a murderer—but at least he didn't feel those teeth that chopped him in two.

I don't know why they left me. Perhaps they thought that there were only three men on the raft. Perhaps they were so well fed that they just didn't bother me. But, quite suddenly, they were gone—and the sea was empty but for the floating fragments of fish, left-overs from the feast. (The air wasn't empty; the birds were feeding well).

And that's all. That's all as far as I'm concerned, Captain. When we get to port I'm leaving this ship, and I'm going as far inland as I can get, and I never want to see the sea again. It's up to you, now. You must get the messages out—for your sake, as well as everybody else's. You aren't safe. Those things—as we found out—can control whales. Think of it—think of a hundred ton whale sent to mash himself in your screws and then, while you're drifting, helpless, a dozen or so of the brutes charging against the plating of your side.

You're not safe.

Nobody's safe.

You must warn . . .

You must . . .

" He's passed out," said the Mate. " He excited himself too much."

I looked at the sleeping man. There was nothing, I hoped, wrong with him beyond exhaustion and the effects of prolonged exposure. His breathing seemed natural enough.

"What did *you* make of it?" I asked.

The Mate put his finger to his forehead, made a circling motion. "Round the bend, sir. Round the bend. Probably his raft was chivvied by porpoises. But all this talk of mutants and such—why, it's straight out of science fiction!"

"So are artificial satellites and rockets to the Moon," I told him.

"They're *different*," he said.

"Detail the cadets to stand a watch in the hospital," I ordered. "And arrange for the watchkeeping officers to look in when they come off watch."

I went back to my quarters and started to draught a radio message. A warning? No—not yet. I had no desire to expose myself to ridicule showered upon such master mariners as observe sea serpents and then are unwise enough to report it. "Picked up survivor from island trader *Sue Darling*." That would do. That would have to do for the time being.

But a full report would have to be made.

I was still working on that report after dinner. It had not been continuous work—I had gone down to look at the rescued man at frequent intervals, and each time he had been sleeping. But I was working on it when I heard the weird whistlings and snortings drifting in through my open port.

I went out on to the lower bridge.

It was a brightly moonlit night, and I could see that the sea around us was alive with porpoises, with sleek, leaping forms that matched our seventeen knots with ease. Suddenly I felt afraid, found myself scanning the ocean for the tell-tale spout that would betray the presence of a whale.

There was a shout from aft.

I heard a youthful voice crying, "Stop him! Stop him!!"

I ran down the ladder, then to the after end of the boat deck. I saw the castaway standing on the bulwarks, shaking his fists, hurling imprecations at the things in the sea. Then the ship lurched and he overbalanced. He kicked at the ship's side as he fell, so he hit the water well clear of the suction of the screws. It should have been easy enough to pick him up again—especially since the cadet who had been on hospital watch threw him a lifebuoy.

It should have been, but . . .

They say that porpoises will never attack a man in the water. These porpoises could never have heard of the saying. They made a quicker and messier job of their victim than a school of starving sharks would have done.

Somebody with both authority and imagination will read my report in time, I hope. Meanwhile, there are far too many small ships going a-missing, far too many little craft, built of wood, of the type that can be disposed of by one charge of a single whale.

And what was it that the castaway had said?

"You aren't safe. Those things—as we found out—can control whales. Think of it—think of a hundred ton whale sent to mash himself in your screws and then while you're drifting, helpless, a dozen or so of the brutes charging against the plating of your sides.

"You're not safe."

"Nobody's safe . . ."

I felt very sorry for the whale that I depth charged all those years ago.

But now . . .

But now I'd feel a lot happier if somebody in authority did something about the situation, if once again I had those horribly lethal ashcans sitting smugly in their racks at the stern.

George Whitley

There was only one way in which to neutralise the fortress—by blowing it up. But getting in was almost impossible.

THE FORTRESS OF TRUE

by DAVID ROME

In the morning Mcfyfe got up early and dressed in his cubicle while the servomaid bustled about in his room, sweeping and polishing and smoothing his bed. The Manatian binary sun was striking hot through the blinds, and when he had finished dressing Mcfyfe drew them open and stood by the window, looking down at the street.

It was quiet so early in the morning. A breeze from the parched plain of the Thirst Sands was whispering down on the city, and squat metal store-assistants were drawing down the heat shields for the day.

He watched them for a time, their silent wheels rolling, steel fingers clicking, then he turned away from the window and went back into his bedroom. The servomaid had finished now. She stood by the door, bowing respectfully and Mcfyfe waved her away with his fingers. She opened the door and rolled out.

He crossed to the bed and pulled back the sheets, baring the foam mattress. He lifted the head of the mattress, curling it over. There was a knife-slit twelve inches long in the plastex, and he reached into it now and withdrew a pencil-slim object that winked dully in the sunlight as he held it in his palm. He opened one end of it with his fingernail, took a silver tube

from his pocket, and eased the tube into the object in his hand. Then he reclosed it, raised it precisely to one eye and swept the room with it.

Satisfied, he picked the morning's paper from his delivery tube—ignoring the headlines MANAT-EARTH WAR?—and rolled it up tightly. Then he slipped the pencil-slim object into it, examined it closely from both ends to satisfy himself that it was concealed. Finally, with the newspaper in his hand, he opened the door, took down his hat and put it on. He stepped out into the passageway.

He ate breakfast in a little roadside place off the Vi le Quot. When he was halfway through his pazzna he saw a tall, thin Manatian come into the eating-house, and he smiled faintly to himself and continued eating.

He finished his pazzna, ordered the single cup of imported coffee which he allowed himself each day, and sat silently waiting for it to be brought to him. There were tiny whirlwinds dancing in the streets now, and the children were rushing through them, squealing in high-voiced excitement. Mcfyfe watched the flickering tentacles, the small, active feet . . .

He turned away.

"Pardon," a soft voice said beside him. "You are Mr. Mcfyfe?" The tall Manatian was bending over him, amber eyes smiling. "Mr. Joseph Mcfyfe?"

"Yes," said Mcfyfe.

A slim hand gestured apologetically. "I disturb you while you are eating . . . I am sorry." The amber eyes blinked slowly.

"Sit down," said Mcfyfe.

The Manatian slipped into the seat opposite. He regarded Mcfyfe with interest. "I know you," he said. "I have heard of your work." He spoke English well.

Mcfyfe said, "You're mistaken."

"You are Joseph Mcfyfe? You are the science-writer?"

"Was," said Mcfyfe. "That's the word, friend." His coffee arrived. He drank it slowly, watching the Manatian over the edge of his cup. "What's your interest?" he said. "What the hell is it to you?"

"I have read, Mr. Mcfyfe. I know your work."

"So?" Mcfyfe said.

"You are a very great writer."

Mcfyfe put his cup down very carefully. His big hands were resting on the table, fingers curling. "Get to hell out of here," he said softly.

The Manatian stood up, smiling gently. "So sorry, Mr. Mcfyfe . . . I forgot . . . you don't write now, do you? Not since *World Herald* turned you out."

Mcfyfe stared down at the table, controlling his anger. A single word from his tightly rolled newspaper glared blackly up at him: WAR?

The Manatian was gone. Mcfyfe finished his coffee and left. As he stepped down into the street he heard laughter behind him. But he didn't turn. He wasn't looking for trouble.

He crossed the roadway and rode the walkamat to a visiphone cubicle. He stepped into the silence and closed the sound-proofed door behind him. The light clicked on overhead. He dialled a number. He didn't turn on the vision.

"Walker speaking," a voice said.

"Listen," Mcfyfe said. "They know who I am."

The voice was silent.

"I volunteered," Mcfyfe said. "I asked for the job. But I didn't expect this. They're riding me. They know where to hit me."

Walker said, "Does it matter?"

"Hell," Mcfyfe said. "You don't know how it is."

Walker was silent. Mcfyfe hung up. He stepped out into the heat again, and when he looked across the road there was a Manatian girl standing motionless under the heat-shield of a store. He turned his eyes away from her and walked down the static pavement toward Tuoffa Port. When he stopped to look into the window of a store the girl was behind him.

There was a radio playing in the terminal of the Port. A Manatian voice was singing the new popular melody of "Earthman Go Home." Mcfyfe walked to the booking cubicle, aware of hostile eyes on him as he joined the queue. He paid for his ticket in copper units, smiled at the Manatian girl who was watching him from the doorway of a visiphone, and made his way out on to the launching pad.

A big one was lifting-off, rising on its pillar of energy toward the blueness of the sky. An Earth ship, going home. Mcfyfe averted his gaze.

He reached the tiny buzz of activity that surrounded the ship in which he was going to ride, and he relinquished his ticket. He climbed into the passenger compartment with his newspaper in his hand, and when he sat down he felt the slim tube inside it move slightly. He put the newspaper beside him on his seat and kept his hand on it. The Manatian stewardess brought coppua-tea to the passengers who were already seated. When Mcfyfe smiled and beckoned to her, she ignored him.

He looked around the compartment. There were many children in the viewport seats, slim tentacles quivering eagerly. There were mothers, and fat Manat babies. And in the front seat, his back turned to Mcfyfe, there was a tall Manatian male.

They took off.

The ship climbed rapidly and turned, planing over the city. Its engines grumbled to half power. The children chattered excitedly. The tall Manatian turned and looked at them, and his eyes touched Mcfyfe's.

"Below us now," a voice began from the speakers over their heads, "is the Rubiit River, winding seven-hundred clonetres from the Pessuo Valley to the sea . . . To your left is the coastal fishing region, the white cottages of the people catching the sunlight now, as we turn . . ."

Mcfyfe listened. He had paid seven units for the privilege. The Manatian in the front seat looked at the children again. When his eyes touched Mcfyfe's, Mcfyfe nodded and smiled.

"Below us now," the voice said, "is the very heart of the city . . . To our right is the Square of Omal and the Fortress of True, behind the walls of which lie the armament factories of Manat . . ."

The Manatian was looking at Mcfyfe again. Mcfyfe smiled. He raised the newspaper and brushed it lightly across his right eyebrow. For an instant, through the pencil-slim tube, he glimpsed the Fortress of True. His fingers pressed briefly on the outside of the newspaper. A film turned.

He replaced the newspaper on his seat.

The ship glided on, the voice purring from the speakers. Mcfyfe lay back and thought of Earth and Home and The Worthwhile Days, and when the ship turned for the last time, and the voice said, "Thank you for your interest . . ." he opened his eyes and Tuoffa Port was below.

As he went through the barrier and began to walk across the terminal, the girl who had followed him to the Port fell into step behind him. She hung back in the crowd as he stepped out into the street, but she was there again as he crossed the Vi le Quot, and when he went into his hotel he saw her turn toward a visiphone cubicle.

He rode the lift-tube to his room, took off his hat and locked the door behind him. He unrolled the newspaper, removed the pencil-slim object and took it into his dressing cubicle. He closed the blinds and turned out the light. With his fingernail he opened the end of the object and took out the whirl-lens. Then he let the silver tube slide out into his fingers. He opened it carefully.

The pictures were good ones.

He turned on the light and opened the blinds again. In the rush of sunlight he studied the photographs of the Fortress of True. He used an eyeglass, and as he bent over them he took an everpen from the pocket of his hot-world suit and touched the nib of it to a point on the upper edge of one of the pictures. Then he put the eyeglass down and used the everpen again to draw a heavy half-circle around a section of the wall of the Fortress. Satisfied, he returned to his bedroom, opened the drawer of his bedside table, took down a book from his selection cubicle. He opened the book and placed the picture of the Fortress between the leaves, with the minute mark he had made on the edge of it directly under the letter I of the word KILL. Then he closed the book carefully and put it into the drawer.

He ate lunch in the hotel dining-room, in a corner on his own. When the servowaiter brought him his ressitta it spun suddenly on its silent wheels and showered him with red sauce. The sauce was very hot. It burned Mcfyfe's face, and as he sprang to his feet to sponge it off, the servowaiter struck him lightly with its shoulder and threw him back against the edge of the table.

Its controls had been tampered with—and it was dangerous. Mcfyfe faced it. He could see Manatians crowding closer ; eagerly. He curled both hands around the edge of the table and waited. And as the servowaiter whirled, and rolled toward him, he kicked out with the soles of his shoes and caught it savagely above the massive, jointed knees. It tottered.

He struck it again. And this time it went down, spinning helplessly.

Mcfyfe seized his plate of ressitta then, and smashed it on the floor. The red sauce washed like a wave of blood to the feet of the crowding Manatians. As he pushed his way toward the door, a stumpy Venemat—Manat father, Venusian mother—pushed a grey face close to his and growled, " Run you Earth scum."

Mcfyfe shoved him aside. He slammed the slide-door open and went out into the hallway. The lift-tube was waiting, gate open. As he turned toward it, the servodriver closed it and started upward.

Mcfyfe used the stairs.

When he got into his room, he lifted the visiphone. Again, he didn't turn on the vision. The quiet voice said, "Walker speaking.'

Mcfyfe said, " Things are getting rough down here."

" How rough ?" Walker said.

Mcfyfe told him.

" Don't wait too long," Walker said. " Do the job soon."

" Yeah," said Mcfyfe. He hung up. He was sweating. He went to the air-conditioning console to reset it, but someone had turned off the flow from the control centre. He smashed a fist through the filter mesh, and that gave him some satisfaction.

The drawer of the bedside table was still closed, as he had left it. He sat on the bed and pulled the drawer open. The book lay inside, apparently untouched. He parted its pages carefully until he came to the photograph. He didn't touch it. He let it lie flat on the pages and he took out his eyeglass and focussed on its upper edge. The tiny mark he had made on it with his everpen was no longer under the I of the word KILL.

Mcfyfe smiled. He got up and went to the window, rolling back the plexiglass. It jammed halfway, its mechanism defective ; but that didn't spoil his enjoyment of the Manatian afternoon.

The warm breeze brought the smells of the streets into his room. He breathed deeply, watching the children playing on the opposite side of the Vi le Quot. The binary sun was a blaze of golden fire in the dark blue sky, and in the eating-

places along the static pavement men sat idly drinking loosa-wine, and cuffing the tussling children when they rolled too near.

Mcfyfe watched for a long time, sitting at the window. But when the sun began to fall, and the lights of the city flickered reluctantly to life, he could see the fluorescent news-strip travelling its endless route around the Central Exchange building; and the words that winked out of the half-night were: WAR IS IMMINENT.

He stood up then, and the darkness was closing in quickly now. He left the window open and the breeze was cooler already. He took the photograph of the Fortress of True out of his book, and slipped it into his pocket. He went into the dressing cubicle and crushed his tube camera into dust with the heel of his shoe. Then he crossed to his bookshelf, ran a light finger along the titles, and finally took down a heavy volume: CHRISTIANITY AND ITS MEANING. He opened it and looked without feeling at the intricate wiring and the solid bulk of the bomb which had been fitted into its centre.

The room was very quiet. He closed the book again, tucked it under his arm, and picked up the visiphone. He dialled a number.

"Walker here," the voice said.

Mcfyfe said softly, "Tonight . . ."

And as he put down the phone, he heard the quiet click of a hotel extension being replaced, and he smiled without humour.

Outside, the aircars were streaming through the city streets, headlights blazing. Mcfyfe crossed the Vi le Quot with the book under his arm, boarded a rumbling slowbus and stood up, gripping the bar with one hand, as they swayed across the Square of Neudal and turned into the Reeze Way. A tiny, glowing-eyed Manatian girl slipped out of the seat beside him. "A place for you, senior-sir," she said, smiling. Then she saw the paleness of his skin and his blue, Earthman's eyes, and she sat down again, flushing angrily. Mcfyfe turned away and watched the city rolling by.

He got off at the entrance to the monorail terminal, and the slowbus was emptying behind him as he turned to his right and walked up the winding magnificence of the Vi le Dekkel. His footsteps echoed comfortingly on the static pavement as

he climbed away from the crowds at the terminal. But when he turned into Rett Place and got on to the walkamat, it was busier again and he could feel the hostility pressing about him.

Ahead now was the broad street that led up to the centre of the city. There were no static pavements here, and the walkamats moved quickly. Mcfyfe rode along, the book held securely, its title turned outward ; and when he reached the first rise of Faith Hill he stepped off the walkamat and branched to his right, down the Vi le Casseng.

It was quieter here. And beside him now, as he walked—and his fingers could actually reach out and touch it—was the outer wall of the Fortress of True. It towered above him, its force-field flickering like blue lightning in the darkness.

Mcfyfe slowed in mid-stride, looking upward. Behind the wall, he knew, was a quarter-mile strip of patrolled ground : Syrian beast-dogs and steel men tuned to kill. Beyond that was the inner wall : Manatian granite and tungsten-hard red rock. And beyond that again, in the very heart of the Fortress, lay the armament factories that could destroy Earth.

He stopped. A boy and a girl, tentacles trembling delicately, passed in the lover's darkness on the other side of the Vi. Mcfyfe let them dwindle into the night, and then he stepped toward the wall.

An aircar swept round from Faith Hill, headlights approaching him. He sprang back, began walking again. The aircar didn't pass. A finger of light snapped out from its beam turret. It caught Mcfyfe and held him, and he stopped walking. Swift Manatian figures sprang toward him.

" Hell," Mcfyfe said. " I'm walking. Just walking."

A hand gripped his coat and tore it open. A thin face—the face of the Manatian in the eating-house—thrust itself close to his. He felt the fingers tear his shirt away, felt the coolness of the breeze on his skin. The book-bomb was taken from under his arm.

" An anti-grav belt," the Manatian said. " He was going to lift over. The force-field would have killed him."

Mcfyfe said, " I'm walking. That's all."

The spotlight was striking into his eyes. Hands forced him forward. He got into the aircar, and he didn't say anything now. The tall Manatian struck him in the face as he was getting in, and then the aircar whispered forward. The darkness ran by on either side. They turned out of the Vi le

Casseng and into Touss Square. Mcfyfe felt the ancient roadway disrupt the aircar's cushion, then it was steady again and they were passing under Freedom Arch, and the gates of the Fortress of True were opening in front of them.

The aircar passed through. An electronic mind made contact with the console speaker, challenging them. The driver of the aircar responded. They rode on in safety.

The archway of the inner wall passed overhead. Mcfyfe glimpsed the blue fire of a second force-field, then there were buildings ranked in uniform greyness under the spotlights of the Centre.

They halted outside a squat security block. The tall Manatian gripped Mcfyfe's arm and got him out of the car. Others closed in around them. They went up a ramp, down a softly lighted corridor, stepped into a room harsh with glare.

The Manatian sat down. He lit a pleasurette and inhaled. He blew sweet smoke at Mcfyfe and said softly, " You smoke ?"

Mcfyfe said, " Not often."

The Manatian smiled. " And never again." He shook his head slowly. " There is an immutable sentence . . ." He spoke in English, and the word was rounded on his tongue.

Mcfyfe said, " My life's worth nothing."

" Ah yes . . . Again I forgot. You no longer care whether you live or die. But later, perhaps . . ." He gestured with his hands. " You made it too easy for us, Mr. Mcfyfe. We watched you ; tapped your visiphone ; found the photograph. We were waiting for you tonight."

Mcfyfe said quietly, " You were supposed to be . . ."

He reached into the pocket of his hot-world suit, brought out the everpen and let it lie in his palm. Then he tightened his fingers, arming it.

And let it fall.

The explosion was visible across the country, and from the rooftop of a building, eight miles to the north, a man called Walker watched the destruction of the Fortress of True.

—*David Rome*

New author D. E. Ellis presents a novel idea on the enforced development of the psi powers when four 'long voyage' travellers are trapped in suspended animation when something goes wrong in their ship.

STRESS

by D. E. ELLIS

The four bodies lay stiff on the bunks. The temperature in the cabin was near freezing. There was no hand to control the ship as she sped on her way to Tibor, a lonely planet revolving round a sun on the opposite edge of the Galaxy to Earth. None was needed, the ship answered perfectly to her pre-set automatic controls.

" How much longer?" queried John Denham. According to the experts, the arrangements were foolproof, nothing could go wrong. Yet something had! Why was he still able to think? The experiment had been intended to take the monotony out of the voyage, to conserve food space and enable them to transport more equipment. Scout vessels were notoriously uncomfortable craft. Their small crews had to be exceptionally well balanced, mentally, to stand the strain of being cooped up together, sometimes for periods as long as two years.

Orders had been to secure themselves into their bunks immediately on leaving the solar system. The simple action of depressing a key, situated near the fingers on the side of

each bunk, brought into action a series of mechanical arrangements. First, the injection of a drug designed to prevent the ageing of the body cells, then the introduction of a drip feed into a vein in the leg and the slow lowering of the cabin temperature. The nutrition supplied by the drip feed was gradually lowered with the temperature. A final injection was supposed to induce suspended animation. To the travellers, who would be automatically revived when the time came, the voyage would seem to be accomplished in a night of sleep.

There was no way of calculating the passing of time. He had long since ceased to feel any sensation whatsoever. He could not move so much as an eyelid to find out what was happening. He had run out of reminiscences, reciting poems, working out mathematical equations, and was forced to consider his position.

First—why was he still awake? It could be that the drip feed had not stopped operating when it should, and was keeping the body over-stimulated, or perhaps the cabin temperature was not low enough. Whatever the reason he felt sure that days, instead of hours, had passed since they had strapped themselves in, and that the apparatus should have ceased to function by now. Had it? There was no way of telling.

Secondly—if something had gone wrong, what was likely to happen now? Would his brain stand the strain of being imprisoned in a lifeless body for almost two years? The prospect of death, due to the factors required to produce suspended animation being unbalanced, seemed more desirable. There was a faint hope that the body would revive in a short while if the balance was upset.

If the cabin temperature was to blame, what of the others? Could they still think? He imagined each locked up in a separate cell, unable to communicate. He chewed the thought over for a moment. At least it was something to occupy his mind.

"Dave, can you hear me." He pushed the thought with all his might. No good. Still, he might as well keep on trying, there was nothing else to do.

Hours afterwards, giving up his imaginary conversation, he thought of sleep. Even that was denied him. It seemed that only the body needed sleep to recuperate, the brain was tireless. Fear was beginning to fight its way to the surface of his mind—fear of madness.

Two weeks later, an uncountable time for John, he was fighting a losing battle for sanity. Words revolved in his brain, a meaningless kaleidoscope. Had he been able to speak he would have been a gibbering idiot.

"Help!" The cry pierced the discordant jumble. He would have wept for joy, if his tear glands had been functioning. There came the first coherent thought he had for days—he could hear, he was beginning to come to life again. Gradually the confusion in his mind quietened. He listened eagerly for a repetition of the sound, which meant that someone else was beginning to regain control of their body.

"Help!" There it was again. His disappointment was so great, it almost sent him back into the realms of madness again. The plea for help had come from inside his own mind. It was not a sound, not even a word, but an unspoken plea for assistance. It came again. This time John was sure his own mind had not uttered the plea, he had received it from outside.

"Who?" Although he felt certain it was one of the other three, there was no identity behind the call. Once more he tried projecting a thought himself. "Can you receive me?"

The cry, which had become a continuous wail, ceased. Then came an incredulous whisper in his mind—"Thank God I've made contact. Who?"

"John. Did we go mad before it happened? I tried before, while I was still able to think clearly, but nothing happened then. I can't get your identity."

"I'm Graham. You're right about identity being lost. I suppose we shall recognise each other's mental pattern before long, but I never realised before how much recognition of a person depends on superficial things." .. ..

"We're in a mess, aren't we? I suppose you don't know how long it's been, any more than I do?"

"I'm absolutely paralysed, as I suppose you are, and I haven't any extraordinary sensory powers that will enable me to judge the passing of time."

"We seem to have developed one talent in that direction. If we do come out of this all right, I wonder if it will persist?"

"There isn't much chance, is there? Obviously something has gone wrong with the apparatus. Even using one's brain must consume some energy. The body will waste away if it isn't properly replaced. Apart from that, being able to talk to you is only a respite from madness. At the moment it's a novelty, but soon we shall start thinking more of our straight-

jackets and be thrown back on our own resources. I know I shall never last out two years."

"Don't give up yet, anyway." John was horrified at the thought he might lose contact. "Listen. A few moments ago I was over the border myself, now I feel able to think calmly. At least, being able to exchange thoughts is doing that much good. It may be that the drip feed is still functioning. If so, it's bound to run out sometime and suspended animation may then take its normal course."

"It's rather a coincidence if both our drip feeds are still functioning, and if they run out how is the apparatus going to revive us at the end of the journey?"

"Don't think about it. We don't know why our minds are still awake, we're only guessing. The main thing to do is concentrate on keeping sane, in case we come out of this alive. Let's explore the possibilities of mental contact. Do you think the others are in the same fix? If we unite our efforts, maybe we can reach them."

"I'm willing to try. I still can't get over the miracle of contacting you. How about concentrating on Dave first?"

"Right. We'll leave Gus till last, there might be complications there."

Dave, it appeared, was completely out; either that or their technique was at fault. There was no response. Releasing their minds from the sustained effort that had lasted nearly an hour, they broke contact. Freedom was needed for each to pursue his own thoughts on the new development. For the time being silence was welcome, loneliness not to be feared.

"Why don't you try contacting me?" It was a seductive whisper rather than a thought. John knew immediately it was Gus. Even without the inflection of voice, or outward expression and movement, the personality was there.

"We were going to, when we've had a rest from trying to contact Dave." John felt confused, as though he had been caught plotting against Gus. Gus laughed. John knew it, although he could hear nothing. He wondered that anyone could find anything funny under the circumstances. "I suppose you thought I would crack easier. It may interest you to know that I rationalised things days before you two came to your senses. I tried contacting you, but you were far down in the murky depths."

"I suppose you picked up our efforts to contact Dave?"

" Couldn't be off it, your efforts were pretty crude. Still you've hardly time to learn to communicate on a tight beam yet."

" And I suppose you have!" John commented, sarcastically, incensed by the other's patronising manner. " Dave must be awake then."

" He is, but I doubt if he'll answer you. I can't tell you why just now. You'll have to learn to adjust your thoughts to the person you are addressing. Anyone can pick up what you are saying at this moment, but only you can receive me."

John decided to test this. " Graham, I have contacted Gus. Did you manage to get any of our conversation?"

" You're not quite completely cracked yet then. I was afraid you were when I heard you talking to yourself as though someone else was there. Take care though, you're beginning to imagine things—there was no one talking to you."

" See, I told you so. I don't want to risk Dave catching any of my remarks about him, and if I explain what I mean to you now, an unguarded thought from you might make the position worse. Don't ask me to say more now. Just hurry up and learn that tight beam technique. I'll contact Graham now and then you can practice with him."

It required constant practice for many hours before John and Graham could confine their communication to a tight beam, intended only for each other. Once they had definitely recognised the fact that Gus was using a different technique to their own, they had something to go on. At last John felt safe to contact Gus again.

" Now will you explain what this is all about. I haven't dared to let a thought stray in your direction since we last conversed, just in case Dave should gather there was something you wanted to keep from him. What is it? Has he gone off his rocker?"

" He can't read minds, but he could have picked up the thoughts you were deliberately broadcasting in the hope they would be received. Thank goodness I can tell you at last. He's not only completely nuts but homicidal as well!"

" Poor Dave, but I can't think why you're worried about him being homicidal. It isn't as if he could attack us. He's in the same position as we are." A horrible thought crossed his mind. " He is, isn't he? Surely he can't move his body either?"

"Not yet. He's keeping quiet about it but he has discovered how to leave his body."

"He really must be mad then to have delusions like that. I wonder you believed him, when you say yourself he's completely crazy."

"You don't understand—he didn't tell me, I saw it myself."

John now began to doubt Gus's sanity. Gus, who had so far appeared to be the sanest of the three.

"I know exactly what you're thinking, just as I know what Dave is thinking. That's how I know what he is planning to do. You think I'm mad because I said I can see. My eyes are closed as tight as yours but I didn't require them to see Dave project himself out of his body. I saw it through his mind."

"I can't believe it, it's impossible!"

"No more incredible than the fact you and I are talking without using our mouths."

A thought struck John. "Can you see into anyone's mind? You said just now you knew exactly what I was thinking."

"Yes. Don't worry on your own account though. In a short while you will find the means of erecting a barrier against intrusion. That's another reason I don't want Dave to pick up what I'm saying. If he finds out I can read his mind, he'll be driven to do something of the sort himself."

"You and Dave seem to be loaded with all the talents," observed John, a trifle jealously. "Any chance of Graham and me being able to pick up a bit of this mind-reading lark, or do a bit of spirit raising ourselves?"

"I'm not sure about the mind-reading. It may be possible to acquire it, but I think it requires a certain amount of inborn talent which you may not possess. As for leaving your bodies, I believe that's a matter of stress. If we get sufficiently desperate and concentrate all our efforts on it, there's a chance we can all do it. If Dave gets too dangerous, it may be our only chance."

"How did Dave manage it?"

"Soon after he became paralysed, he suffered from a kind of claustrophobia. Whereas we struggled to communicate, he strove to escape from his body. His panic and desperation were so great, it actually happened. He's hovering over us now, gloating at our helplessness."

"But he's existing only as a spirit. He can't do anything, can he? I can't understand why he's so hostile to us."

"He can't do anything at the moment, but he's thinking of trying to operate his body by remote control. He's found he can telekineticise other objects."

"My God! If only we could see what is going on."

"There's only one answer. You will have to escape from the body yourself."

"But how? My mind is perfectly clear now. You said Dave managed it when he was mad and quite desperate."

"Try anyway, and keep on trying. Meanwhile I'll keep contact with Dave's mind and let you know what's going on inside it."

"Can't you talk him out of it? Surely he'd listen to you."

"I've tried that already, but he has cut himself off from all ordinary communication. I know what he's thinking but I can't get through to him with thoughts of my own. He has just succeeded in releasing his body by telekineticising the straps elsewhere . . ."

"Look," John begged. "If he really means to kill us why should he take the trouble to reactivate his body. He could easily do it by telekin . . . whatever you call it, some large blunt instrument."

"The obvious thing doesn't always occur to a madman. Besides he's naturally interested in the well-being of his own body—it has taken his mind off you for the moment. He's now moving his feet, just a twitch. Now the hands—there, he has managed to raise one to his eyes. Rubbing them now . . . yes he has got them open. It's a funny sensation being able to see from two viewpoints at once. He has flexed his legs and arms once or twice, I think he's going to try and sit his body up now. No, it's all right. You can relax for a moment, it's too stiff. He's going to activate the massaging apparatus instead. It will give you a few moments extra to try and escape."

John groaned. "Graham—is there any hope of you succeeding. Gus is fully occupied keeping watch."

"I haven't a clue. It doesn't seem possible. The only thing seems to be to try and move the body. We know that's impossible, but if we struggle hard enough, perhaps we'll leave it as Dave did."..

"I've tried that too but I can't forget it's impossible to move."

" John, Graham, watch out now. He's on his feet . . . "

Terror struck at them both, numbed their minds and rendered them incapable of thought. To lie there helpless and know they were about to be murdered.

" Please John—Graham—you must do it now. He's coming towards you, with something in his hand—a knife I think. The thought of killing you has blotted out everything from his mind. John . . . " Gus's thoughts seemed to shriek. " . . . he's coming after you first. You won't even feel the knife in your paralysed body, but you'll stop thinking and I so badly want you to live . . . "

The words screamed in John's brain, but desperation had put him beyond coherent thought. It was as though his body was paralysed with fear instead of drugs. Gathering his strength in an almighty effort to get it moving again, he exerted all his force on what he suddenly knew was the weakest point of his prison.

With a feeling of relief, he shot up, able, at last, to see for himself. Dave was standing by his own bunk—there was no sign of any weapon. Assuming it to be already stuck in his own body and wondering how long he would continue to survive in his present form, his only thoughts were of revenge. There were also Gus and Graham to be protected, unless Dave had already killed them. Without waiting to make sure, he decided to attack in the only method available to him. Fury set aside any doubts as to his ability to telekineticise anything.

" Watch out Dave!" warned Gus, as a hammer apparently removed itself from the toolbox and hurled itself towards him. Dave ducked just in time.

Suddenly there were two astral bodies in the cabin. John calmed down a little as he saw it was Graham. Then he realised that there should have been a third astral body present, that of Dave. He gazed warily around, expecting to find it sardonically watching them.

" It's all right now," came the soothing thoughts from Gus. " Dave isn't going to hurt you. He's as sane as you or I."

" Where is he? That's only his body down there." John could still scarcely restrain his violence, and removed a spanner ready to throw at the body.

" Wait, John. It's all my fault. There has been nothing to fear really. Just a minute and I'll join you. You'd better

come too, Dave, we've done what we set out to do. There's no need to keep up the pretence any longer."

"Thank goodness for that. I hated every minute of it."

To John's and Graham's astonishment, astral bodies issued from both Gus and Dave.

"I think Dave and I reached breaking point sooner than you two did. With Dave it was the horror of being buried alive that caused desperation to build up so quickly. I've already told you how he came to leave his body. For me it was different. My whole mind was appealing for someone else to help me. It reached out, searching—found your and Graham's wrapped in an impenetrable fog. Then, suddenly, it met up with Dave's, just as he emerged from his prison. With him I experienced a joyous sense of freedom. I could see again with his eyes. He was unaware of my presence. I found I knew exactly what he was thinking. All at once it seemed despicable to spy on him in this way, so I withdrew.

"Nevertheless sharing Dave's experience, I knew how to escape from my own prison. He was not surprised to see me, believing that in time we would all discover the method. We learned to communicate just as you did, and experimented with telekinesis. We waited patiently for you to put in an appearance. Occasionally I tried to pierce the fog and discover what progress you were making.

"Then we realised you were both becoming sane again. Somehow you had saved your reason by communicating with each other. Dave and I began to give up hope that stress would build up sufficiently to enable you to free yourselves . . ."

"So you hatched a plot between you, calculated to provide the necessary stimulus?"

"There's more to it than just freely floating around. Watch . . ."

Gracefully Gus and Dave flowed back into their bodies. Completely naturally the 'bodies' came to life and waved to them. "See! We've managed to restore our bodies completely by remote control, and now we can enter them and become normal human beings again—or leave them at will. We could have revived you too—but then you would never have developed this rather useful extra talent."

"Well now we've got it, what are we going to do with it—hire ourselves out as ghosts or something?" John was still rather unenthusiastic over the pleasures of being able to leave

his body. The nightmare had been a terrible sum to pay for the privilege. "We've still got a long way to go and scarcely any food on board. I suppose the bodies still need to eat when they're conscious. I'm not anxious to find out what happens to the spirit if the body dies."

"You have a point there," Graham agreed. "How about it, Dave, you've had more time to get used to the situation—do you feel hungry yet?"

"Now you have reminded me, I do. I've got a terrific appetite I'm happy to say. I told you the bodies revived quite normally."

"I don't see that food is any particular problem now we have control," Gus interrupted. "All we have to do is cut out the Drive, bring the ship back into normal space and put in at some suitable planet to stock up. Alternatively, we can make sure the apparatus is functioning correctly and place ourselves at its mercy again. This time we know we have the means of releasing ourselves if anything goes wrong. Besides, have you thought what will happen if we take the ship back under our control and confess to our method of escape?"

"They might not like having telepaths and telekineticists around, but I can't see what they could do about it—they can't keep us locked up."

"They can try to kill us, I say 'try' because as yet we don't know the full extent of our powers. What's to stop us blocking and returning a bullet before it even reaches us?"

"If we see it in time," John corrected.

"Well, anyway, I was only supposing. In any case, you're wrong when you say they can't keep us locked up—they can keep our bodies locked up, even if our spirits can roam. We seem to have acquired the art of telekinesis, but not of teleporting. To remove our bodies from a locked room or building by the former method might result in damage to them. It's very clumsy too, even though we could probably unlock doors by remote operation. But teleportation—I wonder. If we stay awake we'll have plenty of time to experiment before we get home."

"How about following both your suggestions. It would do us good to play around for a bit after what we've been through, then we could step up the Drive and put ourselves under again. We'll keep quiet about what has happened and let them think everything went according to plan. That way everyone will be happy," said Dave.

" You're quite right when you say we would be unpopular back home if they knew we were different. Do you think we shall be able to lead normal lives again?" John looked wistfully at Gus.

" Not normal, but I don't see why they shouldn't be happy. I have an idea we can spread these talents, particularly if we work in unison and concentrate on one person at a time. Anyway, I'm quite sure our children will have these unusual abilities." Gus's remark seemed solely addressed to John.

Dave and Graham took due note of this. " Augusta seems to be suffering from that complaint called ' feminine intuition'," Dave grinned.

D. E. Ellis

THE LITERARY LINE-UP

An anti-gravity device is the next logical possibility, perhaps in our lifetime—and " Project Moonbeam " was just such a device, despite a hundred experts testifying that it could not possibly work. Then, on the test run, lightning came out of a cloudless sky and destroyed " Moonbeam." That is the opening of Colin Kapp's long novelette " For the Love of Pete " next month—and the title has a double meaning, too !

Among the short stories is one translated from the French, " Cold Blood," by George Langalaan, a particularly suspenseful plot about an apparent murder by a man who had been dead fifty years ! And the closing instalment of Jim Ballard's " Storm-Wind " with its fitting climax of Man attempting to defy the elements.

Story ratings for No. 105 were :

1. Venus Plus X (conclusion) - - Theodore Sturgeon
2. The Scapegoat - - - - - - Alan Barclay
3. The Other Face - - - - - - Donald Malcolm
4. The Ark - - - - - - - - - M. Lucas
   Time Of Arrival - - - - - - - David Rome
5. Button-Pusher - - - - - - Bill Spencer

British—Hardcover

One of the strangest books to come my way is—**And So Ends the World** (Elek, 15/-)—blurbed "a prophetic and terrifying novel of cosmic holocaust when the moon comes out of orbit"—by Richard Pape, an author famed for his personal stories of war-time heroism and post-war adventures. It is hardly science fiction, being utterly unscientific and illogical, but it is to my mind a heartfelt plea on behalf of a disturbed mass of humanity faced with possible, fearfully destructive results of ill-used inventions in atomics and spaceflight. A plea—by a layman aided only by narrative ability and sincerity of intention—that the salvation of mankind lies in acceptance of the true wisdom of a Supreme Intelligence who created and rules the universe ; by casting out hatred and rivalry leaving only pure spiritual belief. The framework for this moralising is a prophecy of the next few decades revealed as a series of psychical dreams. But apart from several minor incidents later verified, the important revelations are concealed until the earth-shattering events take place. An uneasy constructional flaw here, as one feels, though with some doubt, that if the prophecies were immediately disclosed to the world, the subsequent calamities could perhaps have been avoided.

However, to retain the story until the final salvation for man's survival is also spiritually given, we have a fantastically involved and unconvincing assortment of trances and other psychical phenomena, marvellous advances in technology of atomics and astronautics (with no increasing comprehension of their use by the users), power politics, anti-Russian propaganda, a romance and lunar colonising—all laced with the gloom of doom from scientific evil-through-ignorance. The afflictions of Job had nothing on what is in store for us if we do not mend our ways (certainly one acceptable premise, but not inevitable). It would be comforting to know that the world could be guided through its coming ordeal by fire and given the chance to escape final self-destruction. Any thinking man must believe

in a Supreme Architect (or Mathematician) of the Universe, but is He concerned over our welfare? Only a reconciliation of man's colossal conceit and ineffable humility will eventually reveal the ultimate truth. Meanwhile, Mr. Pape has duly recorded his own contribution.

With Eric Frank Russell we are back on more comforting ground (or should it be space?). He writes of a far future when man has reached out to the stars, and is concerned with the relations of alien and man in assorted situations. His sardonic humour, well characterised and detailed stories of remote galactic exploration, with emphasis on the superiority of homo sapiens giving the old come-uppance to cocksure aliens, are admirably displayed in **Far Stars** (Dennis Dobson, 13/6d). The stories are "The Waitabits" (can't beat 'em, can't even join 'em—they're too slow !), "The Timeless Ones" (ultimate destiny of the Yellow Peril), the uproarious "Allamagoosa" (shenanigans in a space-ship inventory), "Diabologic" (the science of driving people nuts !), a very fine s-f crime story "Leg Work," and the quite disconcertingly touching "P.S." A show piece of top-quality, versatile science-fiction.

Recent additions to the rapidly growing Fitzroy Edition library of the works of Jules Verne, ably edited and translated by I. O. Evans, and published by Arco Publications at 12/6d each, are the perennial favourites **Journey to the Centre of the Earth** and **20,000 Leagues Under the Sea.** Then we have Capt. Hatteras' polar adventures **At The North Pole** and its sequel **The Wilderness of Ice,** and an unusually readable satire of a floating island utopia in **Propellor Island.** And finally the remarkable conjunction of the talents of Edgar Allan Poe and Verne in **The Mystery of Arthur Gordon Pym,** wherein the former's unfinished mss. "Narrative" with its Gothic overtones is completed by the latter's scientific "Sphinx of the Ice-Fields."

Hugh Walter's **Moon Base One** (Faber & Faber, 13/6d) continues, in this fourth volume, the adventures of one Chris Godfrey, young and perky first space pilot from Earth. In "Operation Columbus" the first landing on the Moon was made to try to discover the secret of the "Domes of Pico" (sic). The unsolved mystery is now cleared up by a joint East-West expedition to establish a permanent lunar base. Way up in the well-written juvenile class.

Voyaging to the Moon, still our next practical step despite s-f's romantic cosmic travels, is also the theme of **First Men to the Moon** (Fredk. Muller, 13/6) by no less an authority on astronautics than Dr. Wernher von Braun. It is an extremely well produced and copiously illustrated novel-cum-textbook, unique in its fashion, which tells the slightly dramatic story of the pioneer two-manned flight to our satellite, with concurrent marginal technical explanations of the various scientific points as they are raised. Based on material first used in the magazine *This Week*, and a trifle pretentious, it nevertheless is convincingly authentic and ideal for the layman whether adult or teenager.

Maurice Goldsmith, very active in the many fields of popular scientific education, has added to his laurels with **The Young Scientist's Companion** (Souvenir Press, 15/-) which is worthy of mention in this column for its chapter on " Books to Read " with an added commentary on science-fiction, being a lucid, well-baited, miniscule, introduction to s-f for the scientific student

Leslie Flood

American—Paperback

The early summer months have brought a paucity of good novels (offset by some extremely good collections of short stories) publishers presumably holding back their better titles for the winter. Pyramid Books have two ' colourful ' titles with down-beat doom and destruction for old Mother Earth—Paul Tabori's **The Green Rain,** a novel cluttered with characters and conversation, in which a " chlorophyl bomb " is accidentally let loose in the upper atmosphere resulting in part of the populace becoming green. Plenty of satire in the first half of the book but the second half becomes weighted down with offbeat cultism and crackpot political isms.

You may go for their second title if you saw the movie of the same title—**Voyage To the Bottom of the Sea.*** The book version is written by Theodore Sturgeon from the original screen play by Irwin Allen and Charles Bennett but not even Sturgeon's great talent seems to lift this above the level of a B-picture. Super-sub beneath the polar ice (bought and paid for by private enterprise) a set of typical Hollywood cardboard characters, world disaster in the shape of over-heated ozone layers under the Van Allen belts, and the only salvation in sight rests with the submarine crew. The best part of this novel is the scientific discussions.

A mixed bag from Ballantine Books, who keep up a steady output of good quality titles. Taking the novels first, van Vogt's **Slan** makes a welcome reappearance in cheap format, fitting into BB's ' classic s-f series,' and rightly so. There must be thousands of new readers who have not seen this revolutionary novel of mutant man and his attempt to live in a normal society. In keeping with the van Vogt, Ballantine have just placed on the British market Theodore Sturgeon's **More Than Human*** another great mutant novel but not at all in keeping with the mutation of **Slan**. As we have reviewed this title earlier there is no need to do so again but only add the somewhat trite phrase " it is a must " if you haven't yet read it.

Collectionwise there is Sturgeon's now-famous **Not Without Sorcery**, eight stories from that rather breathless period of *ASF* and *Unknown* 1939 to 1947, outstanding of which is " It "; a fair-average selection of the short stories of James Blish, **So Close To Home**, ten stories from a wide range of magazines—Blish's strength is in the novel, not the short story. Another selection from the earlier short stories of the late Henry Kuttner, **Bypass To Otherness**, good. but the cream has been skimmed in earlier collections ; a better-than-average collection of Poul Anderson's, **Strangers From Earth**, although five of the eight stories originally appeared outside the leading three American s-f magazines. Regrettably, I disagree with American reviewers on the greatness of Poul's writings, for, so far, I do not think he has fulfilled the great promise he showed when I first met him some years ago. Somewhere along the line he has become side-tracked in his plot ideas or the presentation of them. Finally, Lester del Rey's eleven-story collection, **Robots and Changelings*** previously reviewed.

On the Bantam front a remarkable collection, **More Stories From The Twilight Zone*** by Rod Serling, taken from a regular weekly TV show on CBS and, as one may expect from visual appeal, the stories are considerably different in outlook to run-of-the-mill s-f. In fact, this gem of a collection is more fantasy than anything else, but outstanding is the lead story, " The Lonely," despite its very unscientific setting (on a desert-type asteroid) ; one lone murderer serving life sentence, his only companion a robot in the shape of a woman. Also on the Bantam line-up a first-class collection by Howard Fast, **The Edge of Tomorrow** ; six of the seven stories were taken from *F & SF*, which is a strong enough recommendation. Fast,

incidentally author of *Spartacus*, is a great writer, and you should watch out for his stories in mediums other than s-f.

Last but by no means least from Berkley Books comes one of Groff Conklin's celebrated anthologies, **Possible Worlds**, probably the best buy of the season so far. A beautifully balanced selection of ten stories, featuring Bradbury, Asimov, Leinster, Simak, Anderson, and others, and incidentally a little-known gem by van Vogt, " Enchanted Village," which appeared long ago in *New Worlds* before the anthologists found it.

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