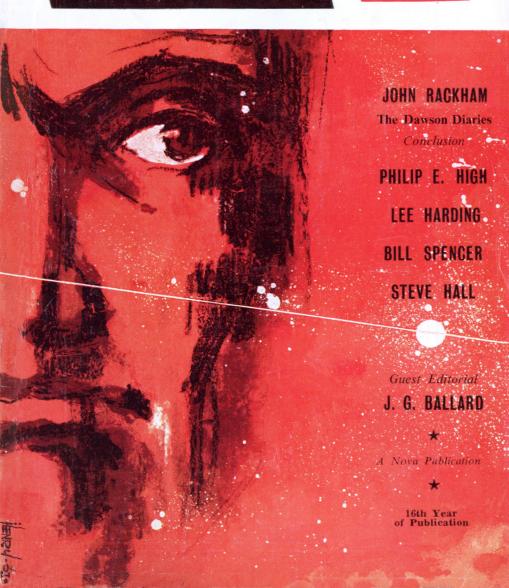
NEW WORLDS SCIENCE FICTION

No. 118
VOLUME 40
2/6



NEW WORLDS

PROFILES

J. G.

Ballard

Shepperton,
Middx.



Readers in Great Britain who were fortunate enough to hear the B.B.C.'s Home service programme on Sunday, March 18th entitled "The Realm Of Perhaps," must have realised at the end of the 30-minute discussion introduced by Wilfred de-Ath that this was the most serious attempt ever to rationalise present-day science fiction and modern authors. Amongst those taking part were Kingsley Amis, Brian W. Aldiss, Kenneth Bulmer, John Brunner, John Wyndham and J. G. Ballard, in which each diagnosed various facets of the genre and gave their opinions upon its future.

Jim Ballard's particular approach was that the advent of space travel was now something our writers should get away from and advocated more research into stories dealing with the Earth—and under it. "Inner space," in fact, and it is this subject which he has enlarged upon in his Guest Editorial this month—albeit the editorial was written several months before the radio recording, but it is evidently something for which he has very strong feelings. Two new short stories coming by him shortly, point up the fact that he is prepared to practise what he is preaching—we especially recommend "The Cage Of Sand" which will appear in New Worlds soon.

W WORLDS ENCE FICTION

VOLUME 40

No. 118

MONTHLY

MAY 1962

CONTENTS

Sn	or	7	2	to	rı	es	:

Terminal	Lee Harding	 	4
Think Of A Number	Steve Hall	 	26
Dictator Bait	Philip E. High	 	41
The Analyser	Bill Spencer	 	57
Serial:			
The Dawson Diaries	John Rackham	 	66
Conclusion			
Features :			
Guest Editorial	J. G. Ballard	 	2
Postmortem	The Readers	 	119
The Literary Line-Up		 	126
Book Reviews	Leslie Flood	 	127

Editor: JOHN CARNELL Cover painting by ENRIQUE

TWO SHILLINGS AND SIXPENCE

Subscription Rates 12 issues 34/- post free. North American, 12 issues \$6.00 post free Published on the last Friday of each month by

NOVA PUBLICATIONS LTD..

Maclaren House, 131 Great Suffolk Street, London, S.E.I.

Telephone: HOP 5712

Sole distributors in Australia: Gordon & Gotch (Australia) Ltd. in New Zealand: Messrs. P. B. Fisher, 564 Colombo Street, Christchurch, N.Z.

The entire contents of this magazine are Copyright 1962 by Nova Publications Ltd. and must not be reproduced or translated without the written consent of the Publisher. All characters in these stories are purely fictitious and any resemblance to living persons is entirely coincidental. No responsibility is accepted for material submitted for publication but every care will be taken to avoid loss or damage. Return postage must be included with all Modern and the content of the conte included with all MSS.

Guest Editorial

As a writer who has established himself by writing some remarkably good "off-beat" science fiction and fantasy stories, Jim Ballard has all the necessary qualifications for suggesting some radical changes in the general make-up of science fiction.

Which Way To Inner Space ?

by J. G. BALLARD

One unfortunate by-product of the Russian-American space race, and the immense publicity given to the rival astronauts, is likely to be an even closer identification, in the mind of the general public, of science fiction with the rocket ships and ray guns of Buck Rogers. If science fiction ever had a chance of escaping from this identification—from which most of its present ills derive—that chance will soon be gone, and the successful landing of a manned vehicle on the Moon will fix this image conclusively. Instead of greeting the appearance of the space-suited hero with a deep groan, most general readers will be disappointed if the standard paraphenalia of robot brains and hyper-drives is not present, just as most cinema-goers are bored stiff if a Western doesn't contain at least one major gun-battle. A few Westerns without guns have been attempted, but they seem to turn into dog and timberland stories, and as a reader of science fiction one of my fears is that unless the medium drastically re-invigorates itself in the near future the serious fringe material, at present its only justification, will be relegated to the same anaemic limbo occupied by other withering literary forms such as the ghost and detective stories.

There are several reasons why I believe space fiction can no longer provide the main wellspring of ideas for s-f. Firstly, the bulk of it is invariably juvenile, though this is not entirely the fault of the writers. Mort Sahl has referred to the missiletesting site at Cape Canaveral as 'Disneyland East,' and like it or not this sums up the attitude of most people towards science fiction, and underlines the narrow imaginative limits imposed by the background of rocket ships and planet-

hopping.

A poet such as Ray Bradbury can accept the current magazine conventions and transform even so hackneyed a subject as Mars into an enthralling private world, but science fiction can't rely for its survival on the continued emergence of writers of Bradbury's calibre. The degree of interest inherent in the rocket and planet story—with its confined physical and psychological dimensions and its limited human relationships—is so slight as to make a self-sufficient fictional form based on it almost impossible. If anything, however, the success of the manned satellites will only tend to establish the limited psychological experiences of their crews—on the whole accurately anticipated, though unintentionally, by s-f writers—as the model of those to be found in science fiction.

Visually, of course, nothing can equal space fiction for its vast perspectives and cold beauty, as any s-f film or comic strip demonstrates, but a literary form requires more complex and more verbalised ideas to sustain it. The spaceship simply doesn't provide these. (Curiously enough, in the light of the present roster of astronauts, the one authentic element in old-style space opera is its wooden, one-dimensional dialogue. But if one can't altogether blame Commander Shepard for his 'Boy, what a ride,' Major Titov's dreamless sleep after the first night in space was the biggest let-down since the fall of Icarus—how many s-f writers must wish they had been writing his script!)

Does reality create the dream world or the imagination create reality? Lee Harding's latest story supposes that Man's first interstellar voyage may well be his last.

TERMINAL

by LEE HARDING

There was a wind blowing down from the Brobdingnagian mountains stretching across the distant horizon, and it skated quietly across the intervening steppes to scale the gentle swelling of hills where the star-ship perched. It swirled playfully around Lassiter where he stood outside the open air-lock, and then moved on across the undulating hill-tops to drop towards another interminable steppe.

Not a *cold* wind, Lassiter reflected, but unfriendly. Sterile, too, like the land it swept. But in spite of his reasoning he found himself shivering and drew his jacket tight across his chest, his eyes searching the darkening plain for some sign of

Agara's returning scout-ship.

Dusk was falling. The temperature was fifty-one degrees Fahrenheit and there wasn't a cloud in the twi-lit sky. Within an hour darkness would have closed impatient fingers around

the barren globe of Centaurus Four.

Barren? Well, perhaps not completely. Boardman's specimen cases contained a few samples of the sparse flora and fauna inhabiting the planet, but all of them were on a rather primitive level of development. What they lacked was a life form sufficiently ahead of its rivals upon which they could pin the label "Dominant Species." So far they had been unsuccessful, but perhaps Agara's sortie to the mountains

might reveal something other than what they had so far discovered. The most highly developed animal they had found was a small marsupial about nine inches long that possessed the mental capabilities of a Terran mouse. The planet seemed incapable of producing a more complex life form, just as it seemed disinterested in promulgating more than a handful of different plant species.

The world around them was bare and unfertile, great plains stretching towards distant horizons, where all they could find were three distinct varieties of shrubs and only two grasses. The forest to the South had bred one variety of tree on an epidemic scale and shared its existence with the same three shrubs they had found dotting the rest of the globe. Through all this vast incompleteness a few tiny animals scampered, slithered and hopped in an approximation of their Terran counterparts, and none of them were any

bigger than Lassiter's arm.

That was the puzzle. A world wrapped in richly oxygenated atmosphere that had somehow smothered the creation of life and stalled it at its present primitive level of development. There were two vast oceans and innumerable rivers, all flowing unfussed towards their destinations. A few forests dotted the three continents, but there was no jungle belt around the high-temperature equator, a fact that still puzzled them, only the interminable steppes seperating the more fertile areas, of which there were pathetically few. There was only one significant mountain range, and that was to the North of the ship, where Agara had gone that morning in search of answers to the riddle of the planet's stalled development.

It was almost as though the Creator had run out of ideas when he got this far from Earth, Lassiter thought, and left

the planet unfinished, perhaps until some later date.

In many ways it resembled a great park. There was a sense of peace around them, of timelessness, as though the great engine of life had been extinguished and everything existed in a state of perpetual idyllic stasis, an hypnotic Eden from which all disturbing elements had been expelled.

But not quite all.

Again Lassiter found himself shivering, and his eyes narrowed to probe the encroaching darkness. There was

something out there, something he could sense but not see, feel but not touch. Something unable to be defined, more like a presence than something substantial, more an idea than something certain, closer to dream than reality.

Why hadn't the others felt it? Or perhaps they had, but

couldn't bring themselves to voice their suspicions.

Or am I imagining things? he asked himself. Was there really something lurking beyond their vision, perhaps beyond their five senses, waiting on the border of their perceptions, a malevolent, spying thing, hidden, perhaps, behind those towering peaks to the North?

Mitchell attributed their bouts of dizziness to psychological factors, generated by their isolation from Earth. How was it then, that six weeks in sub-space hadn't bothered them, but two days on this strange planet had already begun to erode

their confidence?

Lassiter knew why. It was because of the *something* out there, something that neither of them could explain, something that was watching them, perhaps toying playfully with their minds while they were unaware of the alien intrusion.

Standing there, his eyes and thoughts directed at the unseen watcher, he felt his senses suddenly swept up, as though in a gigantic paw, and for one brief moment he could almost *feel* the thing itself. But with the realisation in his grasp it eluded him and left only the scurrying wind to pluck

the curses from his lips.

In the distance, something white scudded across the steppes. Against the waning sunlight he made out the familiar shape of Agara's returning scout-ship. The lengthening shadows of the mountains seemed to pursue it, and such was the depth of unreality to which his senses had succumbed that for a moment he imagined they were stretching even longer and were about to grasp the tiny mote and draw it back into the great inky blackness slumbering on the borders of night. A wave of dizziness swept over him, and the land-scape seemed to swirl and coalesce before him, so that the twilight colours of the sky merged with the dark ramparts of the horizon and made one malevolent shape encompassing the sky.

"Agara," he said, softly and only to the wind. "Agara..."

And then his vision cleared. The mountains withdrew their grasping talons and resumed their familiar outlines. And the

scout was humming towards the star-ship. Already he could

see Agara's face through the canopy.

He went inside and into the scout hanger, depressed one of the control switches and waited while the section of the hull swung outwards to admit the small craft.

Agara decellerated swiftly and approached the opening as light as a feather. He edged the scout gently through and let it come to rest alongside the other small craft. The hum of the gravitics died.

The tiny air-lock in the side of the scout opened and Agara climbed out and dropped lightly to the floor. He was a small man, lithely built and with narrow, angular features and

dark, inquisitive eyes.

Lassiter pressed another switch and the door descended. blotting out the sight and sounds of the world outside, but not extinguishing the something nibbling away at the bottom layers of his awareness. "Well?" he asked. "Did you find anything?"

Agara looked tired, as though the trip had collapsed more from his strength than should have been expected. He rubbed his forehead absently and began clambering out of his survival suit. "Nothing much," he answered, matter-of-factly. "A couple of plants—nothing more."

Lassiter looked surprised. "You mean to tell me that in all those mountains you didn't find even one new specimen?"

"That's right."

"But how far did you go? I mean, did you cover all the

territory?"

Agara didn't look at him. He finished divesting himself of the suit and walked over to hang it up in one of the closets. He seemed uneasy. "Of course I did—that's why I went." He turned around and faced Lassiter with a puzzled expression. "Funny, isn't it? You'd think that a world like this would have—" He paused, a frown creasing his high forehead. And then he shrugged. "Ah, I dunno. Why does every new world have to measure up to our standards. anyway?"

Lassiter chewed nervously at his bottom lip. His eyes stole cautiously towards the closed door of the hanger and he wondered if the mountains were still solid and real or if they were flowing together like treacle again. The temptation to suddenly hurl the hull open and perhaps surprise the mountains in their deceptive act was very powerful. But he

resisted, and turned back to Agara.

"What you meant to say," he pointed out, "was that you'd expect a planet as atmospherically-healthy as this one to have far more indigenous life forms than we have so far seen. Isn't that it?"

The question seemed to trouble Agara. "Something like

that."

"Just think of it. Even a dried-up old corpse of a world like Mars was before terraforming, had a catalogue listing something like *four* times the amount of resident life forms we've found here. Why, the plant life *alone* lists several hundred different varieties—"

"We've only been on the planet for two days," Agara pointed out. "We can't expect to have uncovered everything

in such a short period of time."

Lassiter regarded him cynically. "Come off it. There's not

that much to uncover, now is there?"

Agara frowned. There was a certain truth in what Lassiter implied. Such was the barrenness of Centaurus Four that the detection of life forms was a relatively easy matter for the star-ship's elaborate robotic equipment. The oceans were another matter, of course, and would have to await more systematic probing by the second expedition before they could deliver a sound verdict. So far the seas seemed to follow the pattern of the land—namely, only a few resident varieties and of a rather primitive, undeveloped nature.

Agara could only nod and answer, "I suppose you've got

a point, at that."

He made as if to step out of the hanger, but Lassiter suddenly grabbed his right arm and barred his way through the doorway. "Tell me," he asked, almost desperately, "did you see it?"

Agara looked blank. "Did I see what?"

Desperation leapt into Lassiter's eyes, and then quickly faded, so that he had to fumble for the appropriate words.

"I... I don't really know. But it's out there, I can feel it.

Can't you, Agara?"

Only a faint flicker in the depths of the little man's eyes betrayed his dishonesty. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said. Too quickly.

Lassiter eyed the other man shrewdly. "Yes, yes, you do, Agara—and so do Boardman and the Captain, only they're too damned scared to admit it. But we all know, don't we, Agara? Know that it's waiting out there, watching us, spying on us..."

"I've got to see Mitchell," Agara said, and pushed past him and up the passageway.

Lassiter watched him disappear in the direction of the control room. His face clouded over and he turned his attention once again to the open air-lock. He walked over and stared out at the darkening landscape.

The mountains were gaunt, dark and . . . Brobdingnagian. He savoured the word on his lips, pleased that he had fished it from the half-forgotten memories of his bookish youth.

Immediately he focussed his attention on the world outside the ship he could sense the return of the enigmatic presence slumbering on the perimeter of their conscious thoughts. And he found that if he concentrated his attention upon the distant mountains his sensitivity increased, so that his whole body began to tremble like a finely attenuated receptor, and he could feel his inner awareness *cooling* until it rested as a solid, burning lump of radiation deep inside him, a narrow, compacted life-force capable of receiving the strange forces being inexplicably generated upon the darkling plains.

Someone was watching them, some thing was waiting.

But what?

Mitchell accepted the negative results of Agara's expedition with appropriate lack of surprise. "It looks like we've uncovered all we're ever likely to find in the short time we've

had," he observed. "Bit disappointing, isn't it?"

He was a tall, powerfully built man in his mid-forties, a veritable torrent of energy and possessed of a most admirable tenacity which, when applied to the problems of extraterrestrial exploration, bordered on the impossible. Such power of devotion to his work had won for him the plum task of piloting the first interstellar probe, and it was something of a let-down to have to return with such a dull report, particularly as their preliminary analysis from off-planet had seemed so promising.

But already the relatively short time they had spent on the planet had managed to extract an unfair toll, so that he now

seemed drained of most of that violent energy that typified his character. To Agara he seemed little more than a very weary husk of a man, anxious to return home.

Well, weren't they all? There was something about being this far from Earth, something about this planet, even, that

made a man long for home.

"Perhaps with a little more time," Agara suggested.

"Nothing doing," Mitchell grunted. "We've done our job. Our orders were to spend forty-eight hours on the planet and then head for home. The Second Expedition will take care

of our unfinished business."

Agara relaxed. At least he had offered. And the Captain was right—the planning Board had been very explicit about getting a four-man crew out to Alpha Centauri and back as soon as possible, so that they could check both the ship and the men for any signs of stress and decide what improvements, if any, would be needed before a full-scale Second Expedition could be mounted.

The panoramic view-screen in front of the Captain was switched off, and yet Mitchell stared at it thoughtfully. He turned to Agara, who was standing patiently beside him, and said, "You look done in. Why not get some shut-eye? Your

job's finished. We rise at twelve hundred hours."

Agara nodded thankfully, and then a worried look crossed his face.

"Something the matter?" Mitchell asked.
"Oh, nothing much I guess. It's Lassiter."
"Greg? Why, what's the matter with him?"

Agara shook his head. "I'm not sure. He keeps talking about this thing of his somewhere out on the steppes."

"Thing?" Mitchell felt his scalp prickle. "What sort of

thing is he talking about?"

"I don't think he knows himself. The way he talks you'd think there was some sort of *animal* out there. He just... well, can't seem to produce a vocal picture, if you follow me. But he's damned afraid of whatever it is."

Mitchell made a pretence of studying the blank screen again, so that Agara would not see the uneasiness wriggling across his face. "You think he might be... cracking up a

little?"

Agara swallowed. The uncertainty had stretched between the two of them like a taught violin string, each of them unable to marshal the courage to express what seemed, to

them, unrational thoughts. "I don't know what to think. We were all psyched together—Greg should be as sane as the rest of us." But inwardly he was thinking: "But there's got to be one less stable than the rest, if somebody's got to crack then it has to be him."

Mitchell turned around. His face was calm now, his manner sure. "Maybe it's not as serious as all that. Anyway, this planet's been affecting us all a little queerly, don't you think? In any case, we're heading back home tomorrow morning."

And there it was, voiced at last, the admission that something unseen, something unexplainable had given them all cause for uneasiness, though neither of them had felt it quite

so intensely as Lassiter.

"Yes," Agara agreed, looking away uncomfortably, "but there's still another six weeks to go before we see Earth again. I just thought I'd mention it to you so one of us can keep an eye on him."

"Good idea."

Agara left the control room and closed the door carefully behind him. For a long time after he had gone Mitchell stared thoughtfully at the inoperative view-screen, the same worried look nagging away uncertainly in his sombre eyes. Finally, he leaned over and touched a switch. The view-

Finally, he leaned over and touched a switch. The view-screen flickered into instant life. Night now encompassed Centaurus Four. Mitchell was relieved that it would only last for six and a half hours, and with the alien dawn would come the promise of homecoming. What matter if Lassiter was a little alien-struck—no man had ever been this far from Home before. There was so little to hang on to once you were adrift in the great unknown, so much that was huge and vast and beyond comprehension, so that a man could feel the familiar reality slipping out of his grasp to be left only with the strangeness that threatened to cut him off from all he had known and loved, as though it had all been but a cruel dream.

Mitchell's hand was shaking as he flicked the screen off, and when he slumped down into one of the acceleration chairs his body felt unsure of itself. Already tiny fingers of doubt were tapping busily away inside his head. Was Lassiter right in some obscure way? Instead of imagining things, was there really some sentient presence slumbering out there, something even their most complex detectors had failed to

discover?

He stared at the blank screen, covering it with vague, indefinable scribblings while he let his imagination scamper hurriedly from corner to dark corner of his mind in an effort to conjure up some explanation for the uneasiness that bothered them all.

Agara did not go straight to his bunk, but went instead to

the room where Boardman housed his specimens.

The youngster was handling a small, furred creature when he entered. He looked up and mumbled a greeting, then returned his attention to the small animal in his arms. "Find anything new?" he asked.

"A couple of plants. They're inside the scout, if you want

then right now."

"No rush."

Boardman chucked the animal under the chin and then looked across at Agara. "Cute little fellow, isn't he?" He slid back the top of one of the plasti-glass cases and dropped the tiny creature inside. The top slid back with a *swish!* and the

animal was left staring forlornly out at them.

Agara bent to study it closely. The furry face stared back, two huge dots for eyes embedded in a thick coat of brown fur. Its head sloped sharply back to a high, black-coloured crest and, like a much larger Terran counterpart, it seemed to prefer squatting on its haunches with its two tiny forepaws folded in front of it. Complete, it was nine inches high.

"A kangaroo," Agara said, "a damned miniature

kangaroo!"

Boardman grinned. "There is a resemblance, isn't there?

He's the smartest fellow of the lot, too."

Agara shook his head, letting his eyes wander over the cases with their accumulated specimens, marvelling yet again at the appalling lack of variety, of true *alienness* about the

few pathetic plants and animals.

"You know," he said, "I always thought that the universe was a place of infinite variety, yet all the life forms we've discovered, here and on Titan and Mars and the rest of the System planets—why, it's not really that much different at all, is it?"

Boardman said: "Not really. But have you ever taken a good look at the stars? There are an awful lot, you know."

Agara looked foolish. "I suppose you're right. After all, this is only the first planet we've studied. Maybe out

there . . ." His thoughts wandered for a moment amongst the

promise of the furthest stars.

At that moment there was a faint *thump* transmitted through the walls of the ship. Agara frowned. The sound was easily identifiable as the faint recoil of a scout-ship leaving the hanger of the mother ship.

What the blazes!

He was out of the room in a flash and running quickly down the passageway towards the hanger. Even before he threw open the door and lunged into the room he knew what he would find.

The hanger door opened out on to the night sky. One of

the scouts was gone. And of Lassiter there was no sign.

Agara made straight for the control room.

Lassiter kept the scout ship low and fast and headed for the mountains, visible now only as a long, black rampart

against the thickening stars.

Something inside of him hummed with the sensitivity of a highly strung violin string; he was receptor for a hundred and one different sensory perceptions, all alien and unclassifiable. It was as though he were no longer human, but a vast psychic receiver trembling in harmony with the impulses of impressions being generated by his Something out there in the distance.

His mind was homing in on a beacon so alien, so incomprehensible, that he could only push the remnants of rationality to the cellars of his mind, and let his consciousness grow and swell so that he could encompass this new thing.

He felt as he imagined Ulysses must have felt in that long forgotten age when he had felt the powerful command of the Sirens threaten his sanity. But unlike that near-demented hero of pre-history Lassiter retained complete control over his mental motivation. It was as if his mind had been cleaved in two, leaving one part to handle the direction of the ship and the other more human functions of reasoning, while this new, this alien part of him swept out to make contact with the vast presence awaiting him beyond the mountains. The human part of him felt driven by an insatiable curiosity, an urge to find an answer to the uneasy silence, to solve the question of his sanity and prove that the reason for his aching senses could not be found in the comfortable explanations of illusion.

But where? he wondered. Where would he find it?

The sky blazed with brittle stars. He sat surrounded by the warmth of the cabin while the auto-pilot swept him towards his unseen destination. Perhaps he would find nothing at all, just as Agara had found nothing, and his only reward would be the knowledge that his mind had been weakened by the stresses of the journey, and that would bring a quick end to any hopes of continued service with Steller Exploration. For the sake of his future as well as sanity he must prove to himself that there was something calling him with some alien perceptions beyond mortal ken, prove that it was not all a product of his own imagination and that it was real and three-dimensional.

A ping! seemed to sound inside his head, and for a moment he felt that he had actually touched that indefinable some-

thing.

The ship approached the foothills and the gravitics decellerated smoothly. A red light winked for attention on the dashboard. Lassiter leaned forward, switched over to manual, and guided the small craft in the direction his

intuition suggested.

The feeling of an alien *presence* grew and thickened around him. The scout seemed to be swimming ever deeper into a thick, ambrosial fluid of psychic force. He could almost feel the pulse of the *thing* swelling and contracting like a great diaphragm.

But why hadn't Agara felt it?

Realisation clamoured for attention. Perhaps the little man had felt it, even in a more dilute form, but had been unable to face it and had fled blindly for the safety of the ship, too ashamed with his conduct to even report what he had seen or sensed. Yes, that would explain his uneasiness, Lassiter decided, his inability to meet his eyes steadily, or discuss the matter openly.

The waves of consciousness were lapping around him.

Here! he thought, exhultantly. Here!

But how to locate it?

He let the scout drop until it was riding one of the undulating razor-sharp ridges, and tapped out a course on the autopilot that would take him up and over and beyond the highest ramparts of the peaks. Then he sat back to wait while the robot guided the ship carefully across the torturous mountain range.

He was sweating copiously and fresh droplets spurted from the pores of his skin each time he wiped away the accumulated moisture. His heart hammered with excitement. He opened one of the compartments in front of him and extracted a short-range blaster and rammed it into the belt of his jacket. There was no sense in taking chances.

Oddly enough, he didn't feel like a man sailing blithely into the jaws of danger. He should have felt, perhaps, like a mesmerised bird awaiting the cobra's lethal blow but the human part of his mind was too clearly orientated to lose itself in a miasma of fear. Instead, he felt more like a man

about to experience something profound.

The nose of the scout tipped suddenly and traced a safe course up the first of the long lines of peaks. Up it went, sliding as though on a thread dangled by a Norn, carrying Lassiter beyond the reach of the normal world to deliver him where even the wildest imaginations would be stifled.

Was it real? Lassiter found himself wondering, or was it all some vast nightmare, a product of a tired mind? A dream compounded of light years of isolation from all the reference points of familiar reality? With nothing to cling to but the companionship of the three other men and the solidity of the star-ship, he could almost feel contact with his world diminishing, so that he was little more than an awareness wandering the unrecognizeable strata of some alien dimension

There was another distinct ping! inside his head, like an

echo sounder indicating that the quarry was near.

Quite suddenly, everything seemed doubtful. Even his hands, when he raised them before his eyes, seemed strange and open to question. Even the very substance of the scout-ship seemed slightly implausible, and if he decided to he could dismiss it to some tenuous graveyard reserved for the discarded trivia of his mind.

The first shaft of terror pierced his wandering imagination and brought it ruthlessly to a stop. He shivered in the warmth of the cabin and concentrated on the soaring darkness beyond

the canopy.

The scout had surmounted the first peak and descended along a shallow valley. It was now rising to ascend a second and higher mountain rampart.

There was a small green light glowing over the radio transmitter but Lassiter dismissed it summarily. It had been glowing ever since he had left the star-ship and there was no way of switching it off. It was a safety feature intended to inform whoever was piloting the scout-ship that somebody was trying to get through to them, and would they mind switching on the receiver?

Lassiter didn't want to do that. A few words of explanation on his part would soon bring whoever was piloting the other scout quickly zeroing in upon his position. Let them wait. They'd find out soon enough just what had brought

him to the mountains.

As the scout rose higher the vibratory presence seemed to thicken inside the cabin, investing his world with a strange unreality. And still the scout climbed, wrapped in a long silence that stretched towards infinity. It reached the mountain top and passed over into the long, sweeping valley beyond.

A psychic wave seemed to sweep over and engulf the tiny

space craft.

Lassiter felt his body shift.

A tense current of uncertainty seemed to invade the fibres of his nerves, and for the first time since he had left the star-ship he began to feel unsure of his venture. The uncertainty soon crystalised into the first rocks of fear. His mind was floundering in the intense rapport that washed around his consciousness like a mountainous sea without shore.

And a wind howled through his soul. It tore through his fear and shattered it into little pieces, and moved on to finger

the tatters of his determination.

In a last act of conscious volition, he pressed the button marked "Descent" and felt the scout settle slowly to the floor

of the valley.

All was aurally quiet, but the great beating pulse hammering away at his mind was a noise beyond all describable things. It seemed to fade and strengthen with rhythmic intensity, as though it were the great heart of the universe itself. The world around him was not the tiny, compact world of the scout ship, or any other recognizable world, for that matter. It was a sticky morass that undulated and reformed continuously. Everything *shifting*.

The world of a madman.

He looked down and saw this his own body was undulating and *shifting* in harmony with the great Universal Pulse, and what remained of his human mind felt sick. A cry of fear was compressed in his throat, and trickled through his closed lips as a whimper.

Everything condensed.

There was a thunderous psychic *clap!* inside his skull and the world snapped abruptly back into clear and rational focus.

Lassiter shook his head in a dazed manner. Where was the scout ship? What was he doing standing alone on the

short grass of the valley floor?

He blinked and looked around him, but under the moonless sky there was no sign of the small craft. The night sky had returned, thickly encrusted with its brittle gems and a

cool breeze was gently massaging his face.

He looked up—and felt his mind shrink back from the impact of the great, brooding presence stretching over him. His ears became filled with a harsh and terrible breathing and he sensed the approach of something towering, something grand, something cosmic.

He looked for some direction in which to flee, but the presence seemed to envelope the sky over the valley. The mountains towered on all sides, sheer and unfriendly and

brutal.

And then he halted his blind panic. He had come seeking his alien Something. Why flee now that he had found it? And if he was to die, then he must at least see his assassin for what it was.

So he turned and faced his Something.

At first there was nothing to see, not with his eyes, only the powerful pulse of the thing was audible in the psychic receptor forged from his own forgotten senses. There was only the impersonal stars and the angry ramparts of the mountains around him.

And then everything *shifted* again. This time no exclamation of fear escaped his tightly closed lips, and he dug his feet into the unsteady turf to keep from falling off the madly gyrating world.

"Show me!" he demanded. "Show me!"

And the world came to a stop.

He first became conscious of the Something on a visual level as a succession of weird geometric shapes twisting and interpenetrating in the air before him. His mind flinched

from his assault, but he faced it determinedly.

And then it assumed other shapes, other proportions, and a parade of alien symbology swept across his eyes. Some of it sickened him, some of it frightened him, but he refused to descend into gibbering fear before he discovered the true shape of his Something.

The presence finally tired of its appalling convolutions. A great peace seemed to settle around the valley. There was another of the queer shifting sensations and when Lassiter could focus again the world was steady and the stars were

set immobile in the dark velvet of the sky.

Before him a great army seemed to stretch towards the furthest ramparts of the mountains, an anamorphic mass only faintly suggesting human form, and joined together in one great mass. There was not even the suggestion of individuality, only the bidding of extensions of a vast, unseen organism. And the picture fluctuated, as though it were tenuous and not at all sure of itself.

One of the figures detached itself from the main mass and approached Lassiter. To his uncertain eyes the shape seemed to mould itself as it approached him, so that when it was a hundred yards away it quite distinctly had two legs and was easily recognizeable as humanoid, and by the time it came to a halt only a few yards away it looked very human indeed. An old man, dressed in tatters and with the light of wisdom glowing warmly in his eyes, looking very much like Lassiter imagined one of the Greek philosophers must have looked

He swallowed and took a few unsteady steps towards the creature. His courage reappeared with the solidity of the ground beneath his feet. "Who are you?" he asked, shakily. "That is of no importance," the old man answered.

"But it is of tremendous importance!"

"No, it isn't. But you would never understand."

Lassiter looked at him, astounded, "You're speaking English."

"No, I'm not. That term has no meaning ... here." "Telepathy ..."

"No. Once again, you would not understand . . ."

"To hell with what you think I can't understand, I want

an explanation!"

"You shall have it." The old man smiled affably, as though he were explaining something difficult to a small child. "I am not that which you appear to see."

That was reasonable enough, Lassiter thought. He felt sure that the creature before him was not real, only an illusion

created by the vaster Something.

"I'm hypnotised," he accused, glaring hard at the figure of the old man. "What are you trying to do to me? Why did

you call me out here?"

"I did not call you. You ... heard me. Perhaps overheard would be a better description. You see, you were much more receptive than your friends."

So he had been right about that. "You haven't answered

me. Who are you? What are you?"

The old man shrugged. "That is difficult to explain. But as it is obvious that others of your race will follow you to this point, perhaps I had better try."

Lassiter frowned. Nothing was making sense. "What do

you mean by 'this point'?"

"Why, the end-what else?"

"End of what?"

"The end of your universe."

Lassiter rubbed his forehead, closed his eyes wearily. "I'm afraid I don't understand what you're talking about."

The old man smiled. "Didn't I warn you?"

Lassiter opened his eyes and stared up at the stars. A chill seemed to close around his heart. Why did those brittle orbs seem so artificial, so insubstantial?

"Let me explain further," the old man went on. "Your race was given awareness and a portion of reality to mould to suit their requirements. You carved order out of primeval chaos, built a mud-ball upon which to live. Later on it became necessary to explain all those lights you had carelessly scattered across the night sky, and having explained them it became necessary to extend towards them and make them part of your creation. But the distance was too great. The instruments you devised could not penetrate this far into your created space; telescopes had enabled you to transmit your wishes to the nearby planets and mould them to suit your needs, but the stars were too distant—there is

nothing here but a suggestion of reality, and further out there is—nothing.

"I'm afraid your reality must end here. You can go no

further."

Lassiter said: "You're mad-or else I'm dreaming."

The old man shrugged. "You are dreaming."
"Then you are a product of my dreaming!"

"No. I only assumed this shape out of curiosity, a desire to penetrate into your world."

"Then what are you—a god?"

"You have already forged your own gods. I am Master of

my own creations. Look ..."

And Lassiter felt himself instantly transported to a vast expanse of formless nothingness, swirling and coalescing towards a burning central nucleus, a universe that swelled and blossomed around him like a gigantic fragment of some exploding star, a universe beyond his ability to comprehend, the final impossible *alienness*. His mind threatened to burst at the seams and he screamed a soundless protest at the gathering storm around him.

He felt the Master take a firm grip on the insubstantial matter of his journeying mind and sensed his overpowering strength moulding it firmly into shape so that it could withstand the enormous pressures generated around them. And then, when it seemed that his personality was becoming lost in the great empty nothingness, he could feel that he was being transported back through the swirling substance of creation. Dimly, he could perceive a great light glowing in the void, something that his mind could grab hold of and cling to, a piece of sanity in a universe gone mad. As they approached it, stars seemed to suddenly burst and blossom around them, scattering across his field of vision like a shower of sand, so that he imagined he could almost stretch out a hand and grab a fistful of them as they passed.

And then they were descending again on to the surface of a planet. He saw the great Brobdingnagian mountains rising to meet them and the grass of the valley blossoming

around their feet.

Lassiter stood staring at the old man, and at the blurred ranks of the shadow-men stretching behind him towards the mountains. "I am dreaming," he repeated, as yet unable to accept what had happened to him.

"No," the other corrected. "That time you were not dreaming. We left your dream for a little while. I took your mind beyond the borders of the universe you had created, and showed you what lies beyond. My creation, my universe without end, not the piddling creation of your childish intellects."

Lassiter backed away from him. His eyes were wild and afraid. "You're mad," he said. "Mad!"

How could he accept the insanity of this creature's statement that the unconscious mind of man had been responsible for shaping the universe, his universe, and that it ended with the nearest stars and beyond that was—nothing? That the stars were nothing more than lights against a black backdrop after all, and that there was no further frontier?

"No," the old man said, "I am not mad, and neither am

I a figment of your imagination."
"Then who are you?" Lassiter demanded, fearfully now. "You and your people created this reality, but you must remember that I created you. Without me your precious reality is . . . nothing." And he snapped his fingers and it was the sound of judgment.

The old man laughed, and Lassiter cringed from the sound. The mountains rippled and flowed with the impact of the Master's jollity, and Lassiter felt sure that they would

collapse into a treacly morass if he laughed again.
"Let me show you how real your precious reality is," the old man said, a cruel edge to his words, and suddenly the valley was much brighter than before, so that every tree, every blade of grass stood out with remarkable clarity, and yet the night sky still shrouded the land.

"How tall is that tree?" the old man asked. Lassiter blinked and stared in the direction of his outstretched hand.

He saw a tall tree, very much like a poplar.

He swallowed. "About thirty—forty feet, I guess. Why?" "Watch." The old man held up his hand until the tree was balanced between thumb and forefinger, so that it fitted like a miniature only an inch or so tall. Before Lassiter's incredulous eyes he plucked the tree from its distant roots and held it out to him. "Now how big is it?"

Lassiter stared down at the tiny tree, no more than an

inch long, resting in the palm of the old man's hand, and

while he watched he saw the gnarled fingers close around it and break it into small pieces. The old man threw them away.

Lassiter shook his head. I must be dreaming, he thought. And where are Agara and Boardman? Why don't they

rescue me?

The old man regarded him triumphantly. "You see?" And with his other hand he plucked a peak from the mountains and held it, a tiny rock, in his hand, and then dropped it to the ground and crushed it beneath his heel.

"There is your reality," the old man spat. "A feeble creation of feeble minds, the minds which I created and

which now sicken me with their weakness."

And he stretched up one arm and plucked a great handful of stars from the night sky, letting them trickle from one palm to another like sparkling jewels, watching the horror crawl across Lassiter's face. And then he crushed his hands together, rubbed them vigorously, and blew the resulting descications from his cupped hands with one breath from his dry lips. They scattered on the shoulders of the night breeze, dancing fireflies that gradually faded and died.

Lassiter's world began to spin. Faster and faster it went, accelerating with the sounds of his wildly-beating heart. The last thing he heard was the universe shaking to the terrible laughter of the Master and then his mind dissolved into

unconsciousness.

It was Boardman who found the discarded scout-ship. He nudged Agara next to him and they swooped down to an abrupt landing on the valley floor.

The ship was in perfect condition. But there was no sign

of Lassiter.

Dawn was nudging over the horizon when they again took to the air, in separate ships now, and spread out to search

the valley.

Agara found him, wandering blindly along the furthest section of the valley, his coveralls and jacket torn and hanging in strips, his face bruised and covered with abrasions where he had fallen many times in his blind flight across the valley floor.

He didn't recognise his rescuer. His eyes were wild and blank, like a man who has been blinded by some spectacular

vision.

Agara used the stunner sparingly and loaded Lassiter's limp body aboard the scout. When he had strapped him into one of the seats he put a call through to Mitchell back at the ship.

"Agara here. I've found him. He's alive, but only just."

Lassiter revived a little as they were taking him out of the scout and back to his bunk. He mumbled feebly while they strapped him in, not recognizing any of them until Mitchell bent over him and said, roughly, "Lassiter, snap out of it man, for God's sake."

The words seemed to penetrate a little of the fog surrounding Lassiter's brain. He made an effort to focus his eyes, but all he could see were a number of vague shapes moving and mingling in front of him. He seemed no longer

in touch with reality.
"I saw him," he muttered, "I saw Him."

"Saw who? Lassiter?"

A stricken look washed over Lassiter's gaunt features. "I . . . I . . . don't know. I . . . don't know."

He didn't feel the needle sliding into his arm and a few minutes later he was sound asleep.

Boardman withdrew the hypodermic and looked across at the Captain, "Well?"

Michell shook his head. "I don't know. You don't think

he might have run across something out there?"

Beside him, Agara shook his head. "We didn't see anything when we went after him."

"Nothing at all? I mean, no sign, or anything like that?"

A fragment of memory jostled to the forefront of Agara's mind, and for a brief moment a reply was stilled in his throat. Wasn't there something he had noticed, rather, sensed, when they had first landed in the valley? Something like an odour, a psychic odour, as if some alien thing had rested there briefly . . . and departed.

No, that was only his imagination. "Not a thing," he

answered, and wondered if that were really the truth.

The Captain sighed. "All right, then. Keep him under until he comes around peaceably. Maybe then we'll get some sense out of him."

Boardman nodded and replaced the hypodermic in his kit. Agara and the Captain left the room and he was left alone, staring down at the sleeping Lassiter, and watching the tiny muscles in his face twitch angrily every now and again, as

though he were in the middle of some nightmare.

For a while Boardman felt uneasy, remembering the peculiar sensation he had felt when they had landed in the valley, and wondered if that was imagination, or if Lassiter had seen something which had eluded them.

But he relaxed. After all, why worry about that now? Let the Second Expedition take care of it—they were going

home

An hour later the star-ship rose slowly into the sky and ascended rapidly into space. Its central computer-brain had already digested the correct co-ordinates for Earth—they had been fed into its vitals only three hours after landfall and it now pointed its nose hopefully homewards.

A while later they were well clear of the planet and the ship lurched quickly into sub-space.

There was a great deal of noise coming from the cabin where Lassiter was kept. When Mitchell went to investigate he found Boardman struggling to restrain Lassiter from breaking the straps around him.
"You're crazy," he was screaming, "you're all crazy."

Boardman looked at him desperately. "Hold him, for

crissakes!"

Mitchell grabbed both his arms while Boardman quickly injected a double dose as soon as he felt the Captain's grip around his arms. He craned his neck back and looked desperately at Mitchell.

"Don't you understand? Don't any of you understand? We're not in sub-space at all—it doesn't exist. We created it, because we had to get to the stars, but it doesn't really exist,

it . . . doesn't . . . really . . . exist."

Boardman stood up and ran a shaking hand across his forehead. "Phew! Thank God he's under again. He took enough to knock out an elephant."

Mitchell sat down alongside the bunk. "How long's he

been carrying on like that?"

"Since we went into sub. The shift must have awakened him." A worried frown was nagging at the young man's face.

Mitchell studied him keenly. "Something the matter?" "Eh? Oh, not really, I suppose. It's just that . . ."

"Just what?"

Boardman shrugged. "Oh, I guess it was the way he was talking there for a while, before he went hysterical again. He was talking about this thing he found out there, or whatever he might have imagined he found, but he got it all jumbled up. He was muttering about dreams and the nature of reality and all that sort of thing. He seemed to think that the world was flat before there was any need for it to be round, that the sun moved around the Earth before it became advantageous to do otherwise, that there was no America before it became necessary to have new lands . . . oh, a lot of stuff like that, all jumbled together. The way space travel was fantasy before it became a necessity, when we'd just about finished with our own world, and the way the sub-space drive came along just when we needed it. Things like that. And do you know what?" He turned to face Mitchell, looking rather foolish. "The way he talked, it all sort of made sense in a funny kind of way. You know what I mean?"

Mitchell stared back, a chill freezing the answer in his throat, and it was as though he could feel a great fist closing down upon the fragile hull of the star-ship.

Yes, he knew exactly what Lassiter meant.

For the next few weeks they tried to ignore Lassiter's ravings and kept him under sedation for as long as possible, hoping to preserve what they could of his disintegrating intellect and at the same time keep their own peace of mind.

Until the long journey was over and the ship punched a hole into normal space again, and they found instead of the welcome sight of the Sun and her circling planets, only a great dark gash in the Universe, as though some giant hand had suddenly swept a fistful of stars from the sky and left only this vast, terrifying gap in the galaxy, in which the star-ship foundered helplessly and then went off in search of a Home that could no longer exist—for them.

Lee Harding

Steve Hall poses an interesting problem this month—could a non-telepathic race prove to a telepathic and technologically superior one that they have something to contribute to mutual advantage? With extermination as the price of failure!

THINK OF A NUMBER

by STEVE HALL

Out beyond the orbit of frigid, lonely Pluto, where the shallows of the solar sea gave way to the ocean of deep space, the event that had been anticipated, argued over, and which had formed the basis for many a story, was about

to become reality.

The unseen, constantly varying meniscus which separated space from subspace pulsated under the stress being built up by the diminishing proximity of a fast moving object, an enormous cylinder, flat at both ends and almost a mile long. Inversely as the cube of the distance, the molecular density of local space increased towards the point of nontenability, the strain on the hyperspatial zone reached an intolerable level, and the matt-black, interstellar vessel was ejected into the solar system with all the suddenness of a submarine surfacing.

Large though it was, the effect of distance coupled with black against black, made the alien ship invisible from Earth. But on the moons of the giant planets and in the domed colonies of the smaller ones, detection of the stranger was nearly instantaneous. Compressed, highly directional needles of energy lashed out successively conveying coded warnings to the military headquarters of United Earth at

Lunar City.

Preparations were set in motion for the three possible ways in which the situation could develop: a reconnaissance and subsequent withdrawal by the alien, hostile action, or communication. No overt action was contemplated or evident, the initiative remained for the time being with the invader. Earth waited tensely, and as far as the general public was concerned, in complete ignorance.

Five days later, the cylinder from the stars, having drifted sedately through the orbits of the outer gas giants, first nullified long distance radio communications, and then

broadcast an all-wave message:

"We of the Langan Federation have decided to make contact with your planet. Remote observations and information from monitoring equipment activated over the last few years, have convinced us that you have reached a level of advancement at which this might be profitable. Our representatives will meet yours initially at Stonehenge on Salisbury Plain, England, in exactly 48 hours." The voice from space added one further sentence with devastating confidence. "A committee of not more than six will be expected."

Earthmen and women digested the statement phlegmatically, conscious after their first excitement that another page of history was about to turn; though the writing on

that page was as yet unreadable.

Twenty-four hours exactly after the opening radio message, another came in the same, impeccable, accent-free voice:

"People of Earth, we are now taking our vessel into a 'stationary' orbit above the exact site where our ambassador's ship will descend. The interstellar ship will be established in position precisely four hours before the meeting.

"Your representatives will wish to be there at the appointed time, but to avoid accidents, everyone must remain one thousand metres away from the marker which we will drop three hours before the meeting. Remember, one thousand metres away in all directions." Again, the message ended abruptly, as if the pickup needle had lifted from an invisible record—the aliens could not be accused of mincing or wasting words.

In the hours that followed, innumerable eyes turned constantly to the skies, eagerly waiting for a sight of the strangers. Eventually, some were rewarded by glimpsing a speck, which grew with machine-like inevitability into a

poised outline like a black, thickish cigarette.

The space cylinder hung lifelessly for the prescribed hour, then there descended from it an eggshaped object which sprouted five crab-like legs as it neared the ground. The marker's bulleting descent slowed within thirty metres of touchdown, at which level it appeared to be moving through a rapidly more viscous, invisible glue. Its final, downward drift was completed by a feather-light landing, the stark, white ovoid settling gently on to its legs in the middle of the Druid Circle of ancient stones.

Events now began to move more rapidly. First, the legs busily adjusted themselves, so that the body of the marker itself stood upright, pointing like a fat finger at the mother ship above. Next, the egg laid another egg in the form of a smaller ovoid equipped with caterpillar tracks and a

telescopic nozzle mounted on a turret.

This latest piece of Langan machinery moved outwards from the marker on a radial course between the rough megaliths, its nozzle oscillating gently from side to side as if it was a mechanical hound casting about for a scent.

At one thousand metres from its starting point, the tank-like robot spun through a quarter turn then moved forward briskly on a gently curving path. The extensible nozzle elongated suddenly, tapering to a point which angled downwards at the ground dropping away between the churning caterpillars. A fine mist of glittering particles squirted from the orifice, settling to earth to form a sparkling, snail-like trail a few inches wide.

An inquisitive starling, which had been following the proceedings with interest from a bush, decided that they merited a closer look. It rose into the air and headed towards the irridescent track in a shallow dive on extended, unmoving pinions. Television cameras peered electronically at the scene. Quite suddenly, the bird's beady eyes blinked, the yellow beak emitted an agonised squawk, and it cartwheeled over on to its back in mid-air. It fell clumsily to the ground three metres from the original attraction, and after shambling confusedly around for a moment, scurried

off on foot-significantly in a direction diametrically away

from the diamond-like dust.

The spray-tank moved singlemindedly on, until it was confronted by a small tree. It stopped in its tracks, ceased emitting the shining particles, and swivelled its turret so that the tapering proboscis pointed very slightly to one side of the tree's trunk. A brilliant, threadlike beam jetted forth, then the nozzle moved snappily from left to right and back again, neatly cutting through the tree just above the ground. The tank resumed its former attitude and continued to orbit around the old monument. After an hour's steady trundling, the trail-blazing robot stopped with an almost closed circle. Leaving a thirteen metre break in the circumference of shimmering dust, it took up a stance which would allow it to cover the gap with the multi-purpose projector.

It was zero hour minus two—no living thing entered or left the alien constructed enclosure. The scattered crowd which had collected, began to form into groups at a respectful distance outside, after gingerly discovering that the electronic radiation emitted by the sparkling circle, while merely uncomfortable at four metres, was almost unbearable at three, and did not bear investigation any closer.

About an hour before the deadline for the meeting with the Langan emissaries, the cushion craft carrying the United Earth delegation drew up opposite the tank guarding the entrance. Its occupants had watched events via television on their journey to Stonehenge.

The Secretary-General of U.E. looked around at his companions. "Well, gentlemen, what do you make of things

so far?"

Hendricks the psychologist and Wallace the scientific advisor, spread their hands noncomittally, deciding that 'wait and see' was their best policy for the moment.

General Grantly coughed self-consciously, realising that

he should say something.

"Well staged operation—everybody informed in advance—good time-keeping—sensible precautions against intruders." The clipped phrases summed up with typical brevity, his view of the situation.

"I agree," said Ross Courtney, the Secretary-General's personal assistant. "They tell us well beforehand of every-

thing they are going to do and pick a well-known location for today. The spaceship above is in a good position to act as watchdog over the surrounding area, and while all this is in the public eye, the centre of the circle is far enough away that the possibility of an unforeseen incident is pretty remote."

Emboldened by their statements, the psychologist decided

to throw in his two cents worth after all.

"I agree with what both of you have said, and would only like to add that I think the maximum psychological impact has been made. It would seem that the Langans have done this sort of thing before."

The man of science still held a watching brief, as did the

General's aide-de-camp.

Sec.-Gen. Vassilev seemed satisfied with the opinions advanced. "Right," he said. "Now, we don't know what the aliens look like, or what their capabilities and intentions may be. So whatever you see or hear when we face them, do not appear surprised, and do not make any comment unless I ask for one. I think we should look, listen and learn. At this stage, they know more about us than we do about them—it is time that the balance of knowledge was swung our way a little. Is that agreed and understood?" The Russian's eyes swung in turn at the ebony face of Hendricks, from him to Wallace the Scot, then to the American military advisor with his French aide, and finally, he gazed at Courtney, his Anglo-Welsh assistant. They all indicated assent in their various ways to the poker-faced man's sound advice.

The Langan ambassador's shuttle vessel was externally a larger version of the first ovoid. It settled horizontally alongside the vertical shape of its sister ship inside the

ancient sun temple.

An amplified voice boomed out:

"The Langan ambassador greets you." Then with characteristic verbal economy it added: "Will the representatives

of the planetary government come forward please."

Vassilev signalled Ross to advance, and the cushion craft headed for the gap in the circle. Courtney was very careful to steer for the exact centre, outside the range of the ionising radiation. The green flag of United Earth displaying alternate global hemispheres on each side, fluttered prominently from the short mast mounted on the transparent, plastic dome of the vehicle.

The hum of conversation among the watching crowd gradually died down, as the Secretary-General and his party glided nearer to the megalithic circle, and became partly obscured as they passed between the eroded slabs.

All six occupants of the cushion craft sat tight when they

drew up opposite the open port of the ovoid shuttle. A

ramp extended from it and a Langan stepped out.

What the party expected, it is difficult to say, but all were surprised by the alien's prosaic appearance. There was little doubt that he was at least humanoid, if not completely human. He was about two metres tall, coffee-skinned and looked well-muscled, wearing a blouse-like upper garment and a kilted lower one. The costume was simple, and without ornament. They were later to discover that the five other intelligent races forming the Langan Federation were also variations of the same basic life pattern.

The six men of Earth disembarked

The tall Langan spoke when he and they were face to face in the open air:

"I am Raglor. Perhaps you will introduce your com-

panions Mr. Vassilev."

An opening remark such as this might have thrown most men, but not an old hand like the Russian diplomat. His face remained completely impassive as he murmured, "Gladly," and gestured in turn at the five members of his entourage.

Raglor did not offer to shake hands, and after acknow-

ledging each introduction with a slight nod, said, completely in character, "Perhaps you will follow me aboard?"

Vassilev had expected this, and only paused for a split-second before stepping towards the watching alien, who in turn led the way up the ramp.

As one man, the other members of the Earth party

followed.

The shuttle vessel was constructed on simple lines inside, consisting only of a pilot's compartment at one side of the ramp, and a larger, general saloon on the other. With its central table and stylised chairs around, it reminded the Secretary-General of the railway coach used to take the surrender of German forces in World War I and later re-used by Hitler to accept the capitulation of France in World War II.

Without ceremony, Raglor showed them to seats which were opposite the group of Langans at the other end of the table.

After naming his five associates perfunctorily, Raglor

leaned forward and began:

"Gentlemen, we of Langa," the sweeping gesture included everyone at his end of the table, "were the first of our Federation to contact another intelligent race. Over the last two hundred years since, there have been a number of further contacts. In each case, a decision had to be reached as to whether the newcomer was allowed into our group . . . or

The almost imperceptible pause was not missed by Vassilev. "Accordingly," continued the alien, "we decided before that first contact, that other races could only be allowed into our ranks provided they had something to add. In the ultimate, this means that they must have some ability or knowledge that we do not possess."

Vassilev was certain of the answer, but he asked anyway. "I take it you mean that the prospective new member

must have something new to the group as a whole?" He glanced warningly around his party as he spoke.
"Correct," said Raglor. "In our view, ability possessed by one of us is available to all, therefore a newcomer with that same ability adds nothing to the common pool."

The appalling ruthlessness of his statement washed over the Earthmen like a deadly miasma. It was well that they had been schooled by the impassive Russian before the

meeting.

The Secretary-General looked directly at the alien leader and said softly: "The consequences of your condition must mean that it becomes increasingly difficult to qualify for entry into the Federation. What then, happens to those who fail?"

"They are eliminated," was the inexorable reply.

"And if you meet a race who have the means to oppose you?" Again Vassilev shot a warning look around his group. The Langan could not resist allowing some pride to leak

through and show on his formerly bland countenance.

"That possibility had occurred to us, but it can be shown to be most unlikely. No other race in our group has progressed scientifically at our speed. We advanced from the Steam Age in our evolution to the use of nuclear energy in only five hundred years as you measure time."

Vassilev mentally digested that and the other information

given for a moment, then got down to cases.

"How do we go about demonstrating a qualification?"

"We leave that to you. Essentially, you can prove outstanding physical or mental prowess—as long as one of our members cannot equal it, you are acceptable."

"Can there be several tests?"

"As many as you like, subject to a set time limit." Raglor glanced around his companions. "Exactly how much time is allowable in Earthly measurements? Ah yes, thank you, Foldar." He turned again to face Vassilev. "Two months."

The Russian's face might have been cast in steel. Behind the mask raced the sickening realisation that the Langans were telepathic, because no words had been spoken by anyone after Raglor had asked his colleagues the question. Yet he had received an answer.

Vassilev decided to plumb the full depths of his discovery, but before speaking, for the third time he displayed a

cautioning frown.

"Are all the other races in your Federation capable of

non-verbal communication like yourselves?"

Raglor looked taken aback at the question for a moment, then after appearing to listen to something he replied: "My colleagues inform me that because of your lack of contact with another race prior to this meeting, you could not be aware that all intelligent races can communicate mentally within their own race, but not with others. This is so, because although we all appear similar externally, there are considerable differences between the appropriate brain centres of various races."

The Secretary-General took what small comfort he could from the fact that at least the aliens could not read his mind, and evidently did not appreciate that Earthmen were exceptions to the Langan axiom of intelligence automatically going hand in hand with telepathy.

Abruptly, he came to a decision. "Thank you for your lucid explanation of everything, Raglor," he said with faint

irony. "My companions and I will now leave you to report to our Government. I propose that we meet here again in a week's time—is that agreeable to you?"

The alien inclined his head affirmatively.

On the journey back, the Russian diplomat convened an ad hoc council of war. "Well," he said, looking first at General Grantly. "You've all seen and listened to our visitors. I'd like your further impressions."

The American looked a little unhappy. "There's not much for me to go on at the moment regarding their military capabilities, but I am sure that they must be more than adequate,

or they wouldn't be so God-damned confident."

Ross Courtney was anxious to speak. "I was struck by two things: the pride the Langans had in going from Steam to Atomics in five hundred years—we took less than two hundred, and why they should have taken so long when they

are telepathic."

"I think I've got the answer to your question," said the dusky psychologist quietly. "We've always assumed, in our ignorance, that telepathy would be a wonderful thing. Anything known and understood by one, would be readily available to all-but this in itself wouldn't make anyone more intelligent, it might well have the reverse effect and make the vast majority of people mentally lazy. After all, why bother to think something out for yourself, if it's already been done-you could just accept the fact. But what if the socalled fact, believed in implicitly by its discoverer and passed on to others, was not a fact at all?

"We've progressed the way we have, mainly because there have always been plenty of iconoclasts among us, ready at the drop of a hat to come up with a new theory to account for anything under the sun. I'm firmly convinced now, that the attitude we have of, 'show me,' 'prove it,' 'oh yeah,' etc., etc., is the best possible one to have."

The others had listened spell-bound to Hendricks' revolutionary theory. The more they played with the ideas, the

more sense they made.

Wallace, the hitherto silent Scot, woke them from their complacent reverie with a jolt. "Be that as it may, lads, we still have to face up to the fact that the Langan Federation technology is ahead o' ours right now. If what Henricks says is true. I think we could catch up with them, given time. And to get the time, we first have to pass their test—and just how do we go aboot that?"

Vassilev gathered up the loose ends expertly.

"We can go into that later, but we can report that:

a) there are six races already in the Langan Federation.

b) all are telepathic within their own race.

c) the Federation is very likely our military superior.
d) given time, we can overhaul them technically, as our rate of progress appears to have taken place at two to three times their best speed.

we must devise some method of ensuring that we are

acceptable to them as new partners."

He paused grimly, "If we do not, then we face a conflict that will go against us . . . Does anyone have anything further to add?"

The gloomy silence which followed, was dispelled to some extent by de Richelieu, who said, "Mes amis, even Achilles had a fatal flaw-maybe these strangers have one also." From somewhere, he produced a bottle of champagne and six glasses. "Let us drink to that eh?"

It seemed like a good idea.

The first three days of the week of grace were spent by the four experts consulting with their colleagues. Meantime, Ross was dragged around from committee to committee as his boss zoomed comet-like over the diplomatic scene. All, had been enjoined by Vassilev to think, think, and think again. Ideas were to be pooled and dissected on the fourth

day.

John Public, voracious as ever for news, had to be content with the usual cautious platitudes of: 'frank exchanges of views,' 'considering our position,' 'further discussions to follow,' etc. In this case, for once, the cloak of secrecy which covered everything, seemed justified. While fact was relegated to a background position however, fancy dominated the foreground. Newshounds had a field day speculating that anything from Armageddon to the Millenium might be under the immediate horizon. They were cautioned by authority to avoid certain speculations and certain subjects.

The alien space ship did not deviate from its vigil over Salisbury Plain, and its occupants remained aboard in

splendid isolation.

Vassilev rapped on the table with his gavel. "Come to order please. Will you report first, General Grantly?"

The military man's reply was short and to the point:

"We have nothing to suggest for the moment. Our fighting forces are now on a full war footing everywhere and are doing all they can to increase their potential. If it comes to it, the final test will be with us."

Wallace was the next called upon to give his opinion.

"I have consulted with scientists in every sphere of

activity," he said. "They have two things to suggest:

(a) That a representative group of them mee

That a representative group of them meet the Langans to discuss matters logically, and thus try and eliminate the necessity for any contest; surely, they say, men of science can understand one another regardless of race.

If all attempts fail, they would seek to show that we are ahead in at least one field of research or dis-

covery."

The Scot paused doubtfully, then added an epilogue of his own. "Personally, I think their first hope is doomed to failure. As far as the second is concerned; who can tell?"
"What have you to advise, Hendricks?" said Vassilev.

"Psychologically, I am bewildered by the same dilemma as the General-lack of knowledge. However, I recommend that if you can arrange for the meeting suggested by Wallace, you put in our very best scientific brains-but don't let the aliens know that they are our best. That way, if our men fail to find something in which we are superior, we won't show our hand prematurely."

The Secretary-General turned to Courtney. "Anything to

add, Ross?"

"Yes. We should have several strings to our bow. It's O.K. to have a bash on the scientific and intellectual front, but they did say that we should demonstrate some ability that they couldn't; surely we shouldn't ignore the physical abilities while concentrating on the cerebral?"

Five mystified faces looked at Courtney.

He expanded his theme in response to their blank stares. "I mean the athletic angle-you know, track and field events—even weight lifting, boxing or judo, anything as long as we can do it better than them." "That's a good point," returned Vassilev. "And one which had not occurred to me." He mused silently for a few moments before summing up. "It seems as if there are four ways in which we can proceed." He held up his left hand and flicked the index finger. "First, we try Wallace's suggestion." A second finger rose, "Then, if that fails, we can organise a super version Olympic Games." Three fingers stood erect. "Third, if we need to, go ahead with anything else that comes to mind while the first two are in progress.

"What's the fourth?" asked Courtney.
The Russian smiled grimly. "I think General Grantly would say: 'If you can't join them, try and beat them.'"

The soldier nodded heavily, "We may have to try just

that."

There was nothing further to discuss, so the meeting broke up, leaving Grantly to organise a last ditch fight if the eleventh hour should strike. Hendricks and Wallace were to get ready for the scientific 'Brains Trust,' while Courtney, a keen swimmer and ex-amateur boxer, was to prepare for an athletic trial of strength.

The appeal to sweet reason was rejected utterly by the aliens, but it emerged that the Langan Federation was not an insuperable way ahead of Earth. By their standards, it appeared about two hundred years; by ours, possibly fifty or less would be required to catch up. Nevertheless, it was a large enough lead to ensure our defeat. Round one went to

the aliens on points.

Athletically, it was a close, but decisive contest. Physically, as individuals, they resembled us closely. Planets having gravities within twenty per cent of Earth normal, seemed best for producing intelligent life of an optimum, biped size. Again, it was a question of having applied more skilful techniques for a longer time. In the hundred yards sprint, their superiority was three-tenths of a second over the violent best that the coloured American, Floyd Owens, could do. At the other extreme of distance running, their marathon expert ran the Czech power-house, Emile Malik, into the ground by ten minutes. In the man to man physical combat, the Swedish world heavyweight champion took the battle to ten rounds before giving way to his Langan opponent. With six planetary races to choose from, the aliens had the edge. Round two was also lost on points.

With only a fortnight to the expiry of the time allowed, it was a dispirited council of six that met under Vassilev's chairmanship. The Russian looked older, and new lines of worry had eroded the American General's face. It was difficult to see any difference in the ebony features of Hendricks, but his flashing smile was considerably less in evidence. Wallace was as dour as ever, while de Richelieu appeared strangely subdued for a Frenchman. Only Ross Courtney still wore an air of optimism.

The diplomat gazed around bleakly at his silent com-

panions. "Has anyone, anything at all to suggest?"

Four pairs of feet shuffled and four pairs of eyes exchanged stares; no-one broke the uneasy silence that settled depressingly over them.

Ross sat on Vassilev's right, smoking quietly, and watching the flickering eyes around the table. When a full two minutes

had crawled leadenly into the past, he spoke:

"The Langans have beaten us at everything we've tried them out on to date. So maybe we're attempting the wrong things. After all, it is reasonable to suppose that any race given a head start on us, would be ahead in all things that were completely common—but what about something which we had done, and which they hadn't?"

"Is there such a thing?" asked Vassilev.

The others echoed his question in similar words.

Courtney smiled. "I think I know of one, but I don't propose that it be described to you or tried out, unless nothing else is available. If the worst comes to the worst, I will make an attempt to baffle the Langans using my own methods."

The chilly silence of a few moments ago fled from the room, as heated arguments and demands for information burst out

Ross refused to be drawn. The most he would divulge was: "Think over the facts we have on the whole bunch of aliens. They are all telepathic and always have been-but only within their own races. To them intelligence and telepathy are essential adjuncts; we have intelligence without telepathy—but they don't know it. They are convinced that telepathy between different races is impossible—what if we could convince them that it isn't?"

It was three o'clock in the afternoon of August 26th, 1995 when the cushion craft carrying the members of the original

Earth delegation went for the last time to Stonehenge.

The alien shuttle vessel again reposed within the circle, like an undersized egg in an oversized cup.

As requested by Vassilev, twelve aliens waited. The group contained at least one from each race in the Federation.

Courtney stood alone in the centre of the main saloon

between the two parties.

"We of Earth have recently become aware of a special aptitude that some of us possess. It has only been possible to recognise this because of our contact with you, limited though this has been. I would now like to try and demonstrate it to you although it is only in the experimental stage."

He spread a pile of small cards in front of the Langan

leader.

"Each of these cards is numbered from one to one hundred, and each card has a six figure number on it. All of the six figure numbers are different."

Ross looked directly at Raglor, and retreated until he was as far away as the limits of the saloon would allow—about

ten metres.

"Would you, sir, call out a number at random between one and one hundred?"

"Seventy-two," replied the alien tersely.

"Will you now select one of your members to take the card bearing that number please."

The Langan, Foldar, picked up the card in response to his

leader's unspoken command.

"Concentrate on the six figures shown please."

Foldar complied.

Ross held his hand to his forehead, his face looking strained. "The figures are one, eight, nine, seven . . . six . . . and three," he finished. "Is that correct?"

Foldar handed the card to Raglor, who scrutinized it care-

fully and agreed with Ross's statement.

Advancing again to the centre, Courtney held out four magazines. "Will you now select any two of these and give them to members of two different races in your Federation."

Ross again moved away from the alien group. "The books you are holding contain about a hundred and twenty pages. Would Ambassador Raglor again oblige me by selecting a single number from one to nine please . . .? Five . . .? Thank you. One more number from one to nine please . . . Eight. Will you both now turn to page fifty-eight in your magazines?"

Ross took out a small notebook and pencil.

"Count down to line five, and look at the eighth word on that line."

Again the same strained expression spread across his face, but this time for a longer period. At last, he scribbled hesitantly on a sheet, ripped it out of the pad, and wrote again on another page. Both sheets he folded and placed in front of Raglor.

"Call out your words please . . . 'Implacable' . . . and

'League' . . . Would you check again sir?"

Raglor opened out the small sheets of paper. The words written by Courtney tallied perfectly with those called out by the aliens.

Ross spoke directly to the Langan leader, "Would you

like to comment, sir?"

Raglor said slowly, "You obtained the information from our minds?"

"Is there any other way?"

"None that we know," replied the alien.
Ross bowed. "Our ability is not infallible as yet, and only certain of us can employ it at all, but with further research we hope to achieve perfection as well as a completely general application."

The alien ambassador rose to his feet. "You have qualified for admission to the Federation. I will report to our ruling

body as soon as we return."

Round three and the fight, was ours by a K.O.

Once they were aboard the cushion craft, the other five

demanded that Courtney should explain.

"It's quite fundamental really," he said. "Being telepathic, none of the Langan Federation races would have ever have thought of, or developed pseudo mind reading as an entertainment—why should they—they had the real thing. Since we are non-telepathic, we have studied the art. It was therefore unlikely that they'd recognise a spoof when they were confronted with it for the first time—after all, magicians here have been getting away with it for decades in front of hardboiled audiences. And for some years, one of my hobbies has been the study and practice of mental magic. All we've got to do now, is maintain the act until we catch up with them."

Vassilev smiled for the first time in weeks. "When it comes to audacity and guile," he said, "a poor telepath hasn't got a chance."

Steve Hall

Finding an alien who could change shape at will would be harder than finding the proverbial needle. There is one way, however, of flushing him out of hiding, given time and the necessary will-power.

DICTATOR BAIT

by PHILIP E. HIGH

To: The Divisional Officer, Interstellar Intelligence, Sector 6.

Subject: Colony 37. Planet Rause. Wylie System. Sector 12.

Sir.

In respect of your query concerning the above colony, I must regretfully report that the situation is exceedingly dangerous. The local economy is on the verge of collapse and the social system degenerated to such an extent that the term 'Feudalanarchy' is the only applicable description of the planet's cultural level.

Law, as such, has ceased to exist and property owners have been forced to create their own militia in order to protect their holdings. As these small private armies attract certain criminal elements . . .

To: Operator 2/8.

Investigate Colony 37, Planet Rause. Rapid cultural deterioration suggests infiltration and subsequent political manipulation by Krayle (Malleable) operative.

Locate and destroy alien by any method deemed suitable.
All available data on the Krayle race and operational methods
appended herewith.

Operator 2/8 read the message and swore horribly. He was due for an eighteen month rest period and, obviously, he wasn't going to get it.

He destroyed the message, swore some more, indulged in some half-hearted self-pity and picked up the appended data.

LIFEFORM 2/6s/8: KRAYLE RACE (MALLEABLES)

Place of origin: Unknown.

Appearance: Humanoid and/or human.

Classification: Hostile.

Life expectation: Three thousand standard cycles (approx).

Operator 2/8 whistled softly. A life expectation of approximately three thousand years was a time-experience advantage which gave the aliens a natural super-weapon. He read on.

The human race had first become aware of the Krayle when an alien vessel, obviously out of control, had been intercepted

by an Imperial cruiser near Prycon.

The handful of dying survivors claimed that they were refugees from a distant stellar empire almost as large as Earth's. They had, they claimed, been invaded by a race of humanoids whose peculiar musculature enabled them to assume the physical appearance of any humanoid race they chose to invade. Within a few generations they were taking orders from an invading government which they confidently believed to be members of their own race.

When they woke up to the truth it was too late, they and their Empire were already the subjects of highly skilled

exploitation.

Despite medical attention, the survivors died and the information they gave was consigned to a security vault with the word 'Dubious' scribbled in the top right hand corner. The accounts had been somewhat garbled and the translation

poor.

A hundred years later on a newly opened Rim planet, a nervous guard on a construction site fired wildly in the dark at what he assumed was a wild animal. The wild animal turned out to be the overseer who, presumably, was making a routine check. He took some time to die but when he did his face lost shape.

An examination of the body revealed a skeleton which looked like a birdcage, a double heart and muscalature

structure like nothing the experts assumed possible.

The security vault was hastily re-opened and experts with up-to-date methods put to work on the recorded alien infor-

mation. This time they got the complete story and ironed out the inconsistencies.

Operator 2/8 whistled again and reached for a cigarette.

The Krayle methods were peculiar and highly individual. Presumably they spent some years investigating the intended victim, learning the language and familiarising themselves with local and general customs, then they sent a *single* operator. This operator was obviously something special dispatched for a unique purpose. He was not a spy or an undercover agent, nor did he carry explosives to destroy vital installations, he was a *cultural* saboteur.

His aim was to insinuate himself into a key position and undermine the constitution from within. With a life expectation of three thousand years he could afford to take his time

and do the job thoroughly.

When the cultural level had deteriorated to such an extent that a landing in a remote area would pass unnoticed, the Krayle sent in their first invasion ship. This, too, would be filled with further operatives intent on extending their hold

and increasing the degeneration.

Operator 2/8 destroyed the information and scowled at the ash. This was going to be a tough one. He, himself, was rather special but his chances were far from good. Eighteen generations of selective breeding, certain types of mental training and a great deal of 'monkeying around' with the nervous system set the stellar operative apart from normal men but even so . . .

He ground out his half smoked cigarette and thought bitter thoughts. A single operator who could look like anyone in a colony of eighty-seven million people! The divisional officer was obviously a doddering old fool completely out of touch

with reality.

Operator 2/8 thought of fish in the sea, sands on the shore and, rather obviously of needles in haystacks. He thought the job would probably take him five years and that was another two rest periods he would never see. What, in any case, was a feudal-anarchy?

"You advertised for a guard, I'm applying for the job."

[&]quot;You want something?" Carson wore a permanent frown these days.

"Guard, eh?" Carson looked at the man with distaste. He was like the other applicants, unshaven and dirty. Who guarded the guards? You couldn't trust anyone these days, as for this obvious bad man—better push him off discreetly, no use looking for trouble.

"I can't pay much and what I pay today is liable to be worth-

less tomorrow."

"I know that. I was told you play square. I was told you eat well here, that's more than most."

"You'll work for keep?" Carson's face mirrored his

disbelief.

"Like you said, you pay me a thousand today and it's

worthless tomorrow."

"Hmmm." Carson pulled at his chin, frowning. He needed extra guards, a few more depredations on the estate and he'd be finished. What with the bands of armed irregulars—but this man could easily be one of them.

"References?"

The other spread his hands and grinned back without

speaking.

"I'll be taking a chance all round, can you use a gun for examp—" He stopped. He found the flared muzzle of a blaster singularly disturbing less than a foot from his face. "All right, you've made your point."

He watched the man return the weapon to its holster with a sigh of relief. The speed with which it appeared had

frightened him.

"You still don't like me, do you?"
"I'm not bursting with enthusiasm."

"Look, I've no references, but I can trade."

"What, for example?"

The other stuck a cigarette into the corner of his mouth and grinned. "Your life. You get called out and I'll substitute."

"You'd fight my duels?" Carson stopped his mouth

falling open with an effort of will.

"You want me to put it in triplicate, perhaps?"

"But why—why?" Carson was too taken aback to notice the insolence.

"A fair question—ambition. I could be a guard-boss, even an overseer."

"I have a guard-boss, a good one."

"There's always room for improvement."

Carson scowled at him. The offer of registered duelsubstitution was too tempting to be resisted. "I'll take a chance on you."

"I thought you might."

Carson's scowl deepened, this man badly needed kicking into line. "Name?"

"Halter will do as well as any—suit you?" Carson flushed angrily. "Why should I care?" "No reason, I'm just naturally accommodating."

"Don't over-do it." Carson touched a sense-plate. "A man will be along in a minute to conduct you to the guardroom. Watch it, Halter, my guard-boss, Messon, could eat three of you for breakfast—"

Once alone, Carson dropped wearily into the nearest chair. God, what a world! They said medieval Europe had been like this once, restricted of course to primitive weapons.

He reached for the liquor decanter and changed his mind. Too many men had found a dubious and short lived escape

through a bottle.

Hell, it was difficult to imagine Earth or, for that matter, any other colony where there was law and order. A place where one did not walk in fear or conduct one's estate like a feudal barony.

They said, even in his grandfather's time, there had been law here. An organised police force, an elected government

and no corruption.

Carson thought it difficult to imagine. Ever since he was a child someone had been fighting someone else or bribing

him or her to do this or that.

Outside the tightly-knit family units there was no cohesion, and no loyalty. A hundred little principalities warred, feuded and sometimes divided against themselves in a series of neverending battles. And, through it all, the powerful equivalent of the robber barons preyed on the whole damn lot.

A few modern weapons and an armoured vehicle and you

could set yourself up as a king.

In the cities, there was a semblance of order, public services almost functioned and business, of a kind, prospered. So did the reverse side of the coin, the excesses, poverty, corruption, cruelty.

Damn everything! This was the independence for which his grandfathers had fought, negotiated, cheered and, sub-

sequently, dumped in his lap.

Earth and her Imperial fleets could do nothing here, Rause

was an independent colony.

Appeals for aid were equally useless. Earth would only intercede on behalf of a legal government. Meanwhile the planet was becoming a festering sore within the body of the Empire which might ultimately prove contagious.

Carson thought briefly of a rumoured force called Interstellar Security and shrugged it from his mind. If such a force existed it was solely for the Empire and probably dissociated itself entirely from the internecine squabbles of a decaying colony.

He wondered vaguely how the decay had started—corrup-

tion at top level as usual?

His thoughts turned to the new guard. An insolent bragging character yet he spoke like an educated man. No doubt a refugee from one of the great estates which had gone down in the rising tide of barbarism. Ah well, tough or not, Messon would kick him into line fast.

"So you're Halter." Messon looked him up and down with contempt. He was a big man with a receding forehead and bluish jowels; the huge corded forearms were almost as thick as a normal man's thighs.

Halter shrugged indifferently and sat down. "That's the name." He glanced round the crowded guard room and lit a cigarette. The men at the long plastic tables were staring

at him curiously and two or three grinned slyly.

From the opposite side of the table Messon said: "Halter, when you want to sit down you ask my permission."

"You the boss?" Halter's voice was casual.

"I'm the guard boss." Messon thrust his chin forward.

"Who decided that-you or Mr. Carson?"

"I decided it." Messon's face was beginning to flush. "In this kind of set-up, men will only trust someone harder and tougher than themselves so stand up when I'm talking to you and keep that thought in mind."

Halter didn't move. "I have it in mind, all I need is proof." "Proof!" Messon's huge hands clenched. "What the

hell do you mean-proof?"

Halter pressed out the cigarette on the edge of the table and smiled gently. He was conscious that the men in their immediate vicinity were backing hastily away. "Do I have to spell it out for you?"

He reached forward, gripped the front of the other's tunic with one hand and, without rising from his chair, pulled the other face down across the table.

"You're as light as you sound—wind bag." He pushed.

Messon went backwards over his chair and both crashed to the floor. For a second he lay there, looking stupified. Then, slowly his face darkened and he sprang to his feet.

Despite his size he had agility but Halter caught him as he leapt. There was a thud, Messon crumpled half way over

the table, rolled off it limply and lay still.

Twice he twitched, once he raised his left arm and dropped it again. His jaw seemed to sag at an odd angle and blood trickled from the corner of his mouth.

Halter looked about him and rubbed his knuckles. "Any

questions?" he said.

"It's not often one sees Carson in the city." Wakely sipped the last of his wine and put down the glass. "Someone given him some dutch courage?"

"I suppose even he has to do business sometimes." Hugo

was still eating and did not turn.

"True, but in a public eating lounge—" He paused and extracted a thin cheroot from a gold case. "As you are aware, I've been East on business and I'm somewhat out of touch with local news—who is the character in the black tunic?"

Hugo glanced round indifferently. "Oh, that's Halter,

Carson's new guard boss."

"What happened to Messon?"

"Rumour says there was a clash of personalities, Messon

got hurt in the dispute."

"So." Wakely frowned to himself thoughtfully. "I always considered Messon a good man, intended to use him myself. Now I've settled that Eastern business, I could use Carson's hydroponic farm. The damn fool could have done business but, alas, he's incorruptible."

Hugo said, warningly: "If you call out Carson you get Halter, registered official substitute and they say he's a hard

man."

"Is he now?" Wakely's voice was still thoughtful. "That would be a reputation built on chopping blocks. Has he ever run up against a good fast gun?"

"I wouldn't know." Hugo sounded bored.

Wakely smiled twistedly. "To relieve the monotony, let's hire one and find out."

The good fast gun, after the usual polite ceremonies in which participants must, from tradition, engage before legal duelling, died swiftly and rather messily at seven in the morning.

Halter looked down at the eight inch smoking crater in the dead man's chest and re-holstered his blaster. "If you gentlemen will excuse me, I have an appointment with this

unfortunate man's sponsor."

Messon, now Halter's chief lieutenant and inexplicably devoted to him, paled. "You're not going to see Wakely,

sir? He'll rub you out like a blot."

Halter looked down at the dead body. "He tried." He grinned. "Wakely may make the attempt later but not at once, he'll be too curious."

Wakely was curious, he was also startled. He raised himself from the sprawl-chair and scowled. "You've got a nerve, Halter, coming here. More nerve than sense. You realise

you've walked into a trap?"

Halter smiled at him. "I wouldn't do anything about it if I were you. I'm rigged. If a little device attached to my person hears my heart stop beating it gets frightened and blows—you'll go up with it."

"Clever, aren't you?"

"I'm overflowing with ingenuities like that, care to make some tests?"

Wakely ignored the question. "What do you want?"

Halter smiled a flat humourless smile. "Since I've been guard boss for the Carson estate I've been given more or less a free hand. I've reorganised things, sifted through and strengthened personnel. The men are trained, disciplined and well armed. Factor for factor, Wakely, we're stronger than you now."

Wakely paled slightly. It was an aspect he had not considered until now.

"I suppose this is an ultimatum?"

"I wouldn't call it that. There's an old saying that if you can't beat an enemy join him—think about it."

"I join you, what's the catch?"

"I give orders for defence, Mr. Carson runs the business side. He's scrupulously honest—you won't like that—but like most honest men he's sincere. You could do a lot worse."

"I could but what's in it for me-if anything?"

"There's safety in numbers, and you must know Hugo could use your tactical position in the valley."

"Hugo is my friend."

"Are you quoting to convince yourself or have you an over-developed sense of humour?"

Wakely scowled and shifted uncomfortably. "I'd like to

think it over."

"Do that. You have twenty-four hours. After which I shall visit Catrelli, he might accept my offer which, tactically, would place you in an unenviable position. Call it a dope between two thorns."

Carson looked up and sighed gently. The sky was the familiar greenish-blue sprinkled with wispy pink clouds. Somehow it looked more friendly lately.

Of course, in a system with a solar binary it was always unbearably hot but the newly installed conditioning devices in the wide verandah kept the temperature even a hundred feet from the house, at a reasonable level.

A Keegan bird flapped lazily across the estate, its fore-wing billowing like the sail of a yacht and Carson almost smiled at it. Peace, or almost peace, in less than two short years—it just didn't seem possible.

Two years ago the estate had been pitted with strong points and the tumbling blossoms of Pilsa Palms had concealed

antique rocket launchers.

Today the perimeter of defence was two hundred miles away, twenty times as strong and skilfully manned. The roving bands of marauders no longer dared to poke their noses above the horizon and the robber barons and self-styled generals sought easier lands to plunder. Seventeen powerful estates welded into a single unit was a combination so unique that few hesitated before giving it a wide berth.

Sooner or later Wakely or Hugo, both unarmed, would drive over to discuss business. Both were friendly and neither aggressive. Security, Carson decided, had removed external pressures permitting them to relax into the shape of reasonable

men.

Far away a bugle was blown and Carson stiffened momentarily. He still disliked Halter. He was, he suspected, a paranoic, a larger edition of the robber barons with an inordinate flair for organisation and an intuitive grasp of tactics

and psychology. Yet, really, he, Carson, had no cause for complaint. Halter had never interfered with or questioned the business side of the combine which in truth was prospering. For several reasons the cities flocked to buy their produce, the combine had a reputation for fair dealing, high quality produce and reasonable prices. The manufacturing side, Catrelli section, with its new auto-factory was turning out, and finding a market for, consumer goods at an ever increasing rate.

On the other hand there was still Halter. There were still the bugles, the marching men, the rigid discipline, the uniforms. It was, of course, a dictatorship. Did Halter visualise himself as the New Leader, the saviour and, finally, the absolute leader of the colony? He was working that way and, so far, no one had done much to stop him.

What would happen, Carson wondered, if this was Halter's ambition and he succeeded? Would he quietly dispose of the dupes who had unwittingly brought him to power? No, not unwittingly, he had given Halter power because he got

things done and now it was too late to turn back.

Carson sighed again. One had to adopt the philosophy of 'sufficient unto the day.' Today he was at peace, today he was safe. Tomorrow . . .

A black ground car went hissing along the road below the house and Carson smiled thinly to himself. Halter again, obviously on some urgent errand. All Halter's errands were urgent or, at least he made them appear so. He was not only efficient, he threw in a first-class display of showmanship to emphasise the fact.

He watched the black vehicle slither to a halt at the guard

house, the door swing open and Halter stride inside.

"Call from the city, sir." Messon saluted. "It's on a scrambled band and the caller asked for you, personally."

"Thank you." Halter touched and spun the selecter to 'private.' Someone unknown was making quite sure that no one tapped the beam while they spoke.

The screen lit and brightened and a face took shape in the light. A heavy, florid face with bright little eyes and a long

down-drawn mouth. "Mr. Halter?"

[&]quot;You're looking at him."

"Excellent." The face beamed. "Allow me to introduce myself—I am Hardin, Chief of Police of Pioneer City."

" So ?"

"I have certain information which may be of some value. I have been ordered to arrest you and bring you to trial."

"Why tell me?"

"The position is a little delicate. I'm stalling, sitting on the fence, and I find the position precarious and a little exposed. I have been instructed to create a large force of irregulars with a stiffening of my own men to maintain discipline." Hardin paused and cleared his throat carefully. "Mr. Halter, allow me to make myself plain. I owe my position as Chief of Police to a certain skill in the subtler forms of corruption and an intuitive faculty for hitching my wagon to the right star."

Halter laughed softly. "You could do worse. Who gave

you these orders?"

" McBride, the mayor."

"How many men can he throw at me?"

"With some conscription, say, thirty thousand, give or take a thousand."

"He could still lose."

"He knows that. He spends a lot of time in his office tossing a coin."

"Could someone be breathing down his neck?"

"Recently Governor Carmody referred to your combine as a fascist stronghold. The Colony Governor deplores your methods and, incidentally, sir, General Sweiger was one of his drinking companions."

"Really?" Halter placed a cigarette between his lips and permitted Messon to light it for him. "Do I know Sweiger?"

"Er, not personally. The General met with a nasty accident some months ago. As most of his more modern equipment now appears to be in your hands, the Governor has drawn certain conclusions."

Halter exhaled smoke. "A naturally suspicious nature—

and McBride?"

"McBride has the city under his thumb. All he asks is to be left in peace to enjoy the rake-off."

"He sounds a rather stupid man, I must pay him a visit . . ."

McBride was not stupid but he was slow-thinking. He pressed buttons, punched alarms, called guards and fumbled

frantically for the hidden gun which a bribed official had removed the day before.

Halter sat on the edge of his desk and exhaled smoke at

him. "Save it. You may need that energy later."

"The police will be here any-"

"The police, being discreet men, decided to offer their services to the victor—the city is now in my hands."

McBride's mouth fell open and slowly closed again, his

eyes bulged.

Halter laughed softly. "My forces entered the city in closed trucks, your militia were taken completely by surprise. I hold all key points, communications, power centres and the banks." He paused and exhaled smoke rather pointedly into McBride's face. "I would advise you, therefore, not to incite your political or underworld friends to violence, the penalty for insurrection is immediate execution."

McBride licked his lips. "What's going to happen to me?" Halter smiled. "I learn you're something of a figurehead—I like figureheads. You could welcome us, couldn't you? You could tell people you invited us in to restore order. I've heard you speak, you never say anything but you're smart enough an orator to make a platitude sound original."

Sweat appeared on McBride's face. "Some of my friends

aren't going to like that."

Halter stubbed out his cigarette on the back of McBride's hand. "Some of my friends aren't going to like it if you don't."

Halter had naturally commandeered the best hotel in the city, when he entered it one of his lieutenants saluted. "There's someone important waiting to see you, sir."

"Important?"

"I've directed him into the lounge, sir, and posted guards outside the door." The lieutenant licked his lips uneasily. "He's from Interstellar Intelligence, sir."

"How nice—has he been waiting long?"

"Four hours, sir. He's been pacing up and down some time."

The I.I. man scowled when Halter entered and snapped open a small leather folder. "I've been waiting for you some little time."

Halter nodded, studied the folder but did not answer. Inside was a small white-metal card stating that the bearer was an operator for Interstellar Intelligence and that his name was Baird.

"Informative," said Halter. "You have no jurisdiction here, but what can I do for you?"

Baird flushed angrily. "I am here on behalf of Governor

Carmody."
"Meaning that he told you exactly the same thing but you

have to make a gesture—do go on."

Baird's hands clenched but he controlled himself. "The Governor has asked me to inform you that you must withdraw from Pioneer City within twenty-four hours and if you don't, in his own language, he'll kick you out."

"The Governor phrases his diplomatic messages with

delicacy and with tact."

Baird flushed again. "You can't talk your way out of this one, Halter. The legitimate government has enough flyers to make your position untenable."

"A bombing raid? That should endear him to the survivors

particularly as it's unprovoked."

"Halter, the mayor's speech doesn't deceive the government." Baird drew a deep angry breath. "Hell, man, you're a rebel. You've seized a city and government installations by force of arms."

"I intend to hold them that way." Halter grinned insolently.

Baird looked at him with distaste. "Halter, do you think you're new or something? We've seen all this before, the marching men, the fanatical loyalties, the aggression. You're an anachronism, Halter, you've cropped up so often that history is sick of you."

"I am creating history, you seem to forget that."

Baird scowled. "Right, put it this way. You're all set to take over this planet and, correct, I have no jurisdiction here, but you start a civil war, you just do that. You'll find the Imperial Fleet over your head so fast you won't have time to draw breath."

Halter laughed. "I'll bet, in civil wars onlookers are apt to take sides. Before you knew where you were the Empire would be split in two, idealists and adventurers would be rushing in to support one side or the other and it could spread."

Baird's mouth thinned but he said evenly, "Right, Halter, you're smart, but don't let it go to your head. You could be

too smart for your own good."

"I'll bet you said that to Carmody."

"In slightly different words, yes. He was, however, less uncompromising than you, he did offer one solution."

" And that was?"

"He suggested calling you out but, like myself, he came to the conclusion, that you hadn't the taste for a personal risk."

"He or a hired gun?"

"A personal duel, you and he."
Halter laughed. "The Governor has a brave mouth, tell him so from me."

Baird nodded abruptly. "I'll do that. Frankly, I hope he blows your damned head off . . ."

Halter grinned faintly as the door slammed shut and touched a switch. "Send in the Chief of Police."

Hardin appeared almost instantly. He waddled to the centre of the room and bowed. "Our co-operation was to your satisfaction, sir?"

"Excellent—don't let it give vou ideas."

"Your record is bloody and riddled with intrigue, further

plotting might prove unhealthy."

"Sir, I am highly adaptable and devoted to my own person. When the laws of survival demanded corruption I was corrupt. If my personal survival now depends on integrity, rest assured, my conduct will be beyond reproach."

"Your mother was obviously frightened by a chameleon." Halter leaned forward. "What do you know about Governor

Carmody?"

Hardin frowned and pursed his lips. "Not a great deal, sir, but enough I think. He's been in office five years now, a young man with an intuitive grasp of politics and a genius for removing obstacles from his path—most of the obstacles were human, sir."

"And before him?"

"Governor Backler, sir. He was killed in an accident, his aircraft blew up with such violence that nothing was left."

"Old age is a rare disease for Colony Governors?"

"I suppose it is. Backler's predecessor, Governor Lockstone, also met a violent end. He was shot down by hired assassins not far from Government House. A few fragments of his personal possessions were found, a wall was blasted but no one witnessed the killing save, of course, the assassins."

"What of Carmody as a man?"

Hardin's piggy eyes widened slightly. "Sir, our association promises to be a happy one, already I have an unfamiliar feeling of stability—I'd hate to lose it."

"He's dangerous?"

"You, too, have a certain reputation, sir, I appreciate that, but Carmody . . . It's as they say, sir, a good politician has to be slick with his tongue and fast with a gun. I'd advise against calling him out."

"So would I but he'll probably call me . . ."

Carmody was a showman, he wore a wide brimmed hat, a startlingly vivid shirt and chewed incredibly long cigars. Twice he did a juggling act with his twin blasters for the benefit of the 3D hook-up team which had been permitted to broadcast the duel.

"Get those cameras set, I'm going to burn this upstart down to bonfire ash."

The appointed seconds went through the preliminaries—one hundred paces, draw on the pistol shot.

Baird, inviegled into the position of a neutral referee, stood

slightly to one side looking pale and a little cold.

He watched the duellists take position, he saw Carmody

spit out the cigar and grin, he heard the shot.

Halter blasted the gun out of Carmody's hand before it was half out of its holster. The blue-white discharge took the hand and part of the Governor's hip with it. The second shot

took off his right leg just above the knee.

The legal Governor of the colony fell sideways making shrill piping noises. His face, as he lay in the grass, slithered and changed shape. Once he was Governor Backler, twice he was a minor clerk in the County Hall and then the face seemed to fall in on itself. It became like a paper mask left out in the rain, there were two holes for eyes and a long slit for a mouth. The thing which had been Carmody and a dozen other men was dead.

Baird walked over and looked down at it. "Never stood

much of a chance, did it?"

"Not much." Halter thrust the weapon back in its holster. "Its reflexes hadn't been gimmicked like ours, of course, but it would have drawn too fast for any normal man." He shook his head slowly. "It was quite ingenious, it gained the position of Governor and brought about cultural collapse by undermining the constitution. At the same time it was playing the dual role of its own political opponent. Naturally the two could not appear in the House together but the Krayle did a convincing job both as Governor and rising young politician. When a too long-term office might have aroused suspicion, the Krayle obligingly arranged its own assassination upon which, as the rising politician, it simply climbed back in the saddle in another guise."

Baird clicked his tongue and tried to look intelligent. At that moment he was acutely conscious of the white-metal card in his pocket, an indication that he had passed his tests

but was still a probationary operative.

Finally he said: "How the hell did you find him?"

"I didn't, he found me. You can't find one man in eightyseven million people, particularly when that one man can change his appearance and personality inside three minutes."

Halter puffed alight a cigarette and shook his head slowly. "No, I had to set myself in opposition in more ways than one. I represented regimentation but I also represented order whereas he represented chaos. In three years I threatened to rebuild what he had taken four generations to undermine, so, in the end, he had to come and find me."

Baird wished suddenly that he had something solid to lean against while he thought about it. At that moment he was quite sure that he would never make anything but a fifth rate operative. You had to have big ideas, you had to conceive and create an enormous trap and, yes, he looked thoughtfully at Halter, you had to have bait-of a kind.

Philip E. High

Two months after we had read and accepted the following story, Bill Spencer sent us the following

press cutting :-

"A 'marriage machine'—an electronic computer which picks marriage partners on the basis of information fed into it—is in use in New York."

-The Observer, February 25th, 1962.

THE ANALYSER

by BILL SPENCER

Lisa walked lightly along the moving Way, swinging her bare arms in the cool air, drinking in the sun and watching the white birds disporting themselves high among the Towers against a sky of vibrant blue.

She was so happy because of Don. Every time she thought about Don she wanted to shout out for joy. In fact she was

singing to herself, as she walked.

Don was so fine in every way. It was incredible that they'd had the great good fortune to meet, out of all the People in the world, and it was unthinkably stunningly marvellous that he *liked* her.

This was the last step before they got married. They'd had their Physical of course. That was compulsory. And they'd both come through with flying colours. Both of them were so young and healthy it was a mere formality. Like most of the People, her body was perfectly fit and glowing, she'd never known a day's illness.

Now there was just the Analyser.

That was a formality too, really. Don was so fine, so good through and through. And she . . . well, she felt so deeply about Don that she could go through anything.

You didn't have to go to the Analyser, of course.

Lisa watched a white dove flash round a Tower and wing across the blue expanse. An instant later a second white dove came into view, pursuing.

A tiny frown creased Lisa's smooth broad forehead as she

thought about Uncle John.

"Don't go near that Analyser!" he'd said emphatically.
"But why not?" She was shocked, petulant almost. "I love Don."

"I'm not disputing it. But the Analyser doesn't deal in love. It deals in facts."

"Are you suggesting we're not suited?"

She felt a hot flush, now, as she remembered the anger which had surged up into her face as she'd said that. Uncle John had taken it very well. He'd taken refuge in his normal mood of witty scepticism, but she could tell he was hurt.

Later, Mother had told her the full story about Uncle John and the Analyser. She felt again the awful confusion when she remembered it. But there was no time now. The Way was already bending towards a domed white building, set in green lawns and lily-strewn lakes. In a minute, she was safely deposited before the entrance.

Cool white steps led up to blue glass doors. She touched a golden button. The doors revolved slowly, admitting her to the interior. It was a vast cavern, faintly gloomy, in which her steps echoed. She pushed her tally into the slot of the

admission machine and the inner doors swung open.

Here all was light again, a cold searching light which made her feel exposed.

She glanced round swiftly. Most of the enormous room was empty. But in the far corner a dark mass crouched: the Analyser—or as much of it as you were allowed to see. That must be it, she knew, not merely because it was the only obvious object in the room, but because of the way it seemed to be watching her, watching the way she walked, watching the way she moved her hands, everything.

No other machine had ever given her this feeling, not even the big Guardian robots, who knew almost everything of

importance that was going on.

Suddenly she didn't want the machine to discover the least thing about her, didn't want to give away anything about herself.

So she stood quite still where she was and gazed at it defiantly, keeping an unnatural immobility, trying not to think even. (Could the machine read thoughts? Surely it must be able to).

The Analyser did nothing. It just was.

But the awful thing was that you felt it could go on doing nothing for ever, if it wanted to, just because it was a machine. It could stay totally inert, waiting for you to make the first move. And that was exactly what it was doing.

For an eternity of painful seconds Lisa confronted the machine, trying desperately to numb her every reaction. She

held her breath—then suddenly she started to giggle.

"I'm being so stupid," she said, half aloud. "After all,

what have I come here for?"

She marched resolutely forward towards the thing in the corner. It didn't look too bad when you got close up. Just the usual mass of nucleonics and thought resonators, with one or two unusual twists and pulsators.

There was a sort of star on the floor near the machine, surrounded by concentric circles in different colours. She thought she'd better go and stand in the middle of it.

Then it started. First with a remote, subdued humming.

Tendrils from the machine waved in front of Lisa's face, palpitated against her forehead. She wanted to draw back, wanted to run away to get completely out of reach of the searching probing tentacles of the machine.

A recorded voice boomed from the depths of the machine, resonant and reassuring. "Don't be afraid. Don't worry. Let yourself go. Let yourself relax." The voice was strong,

masculine, with a commanding undertone.

Somewhere in an unimportant corner of Lisa's brain she told herself that the voice was a trick, probably recorded by a pasty-faced, pimply man with flat feet. But as the echoing resonances of the voice boomed on, rich with electronic harmonies, vibrating through her whole body, Lisa felt a deeper urge to surrender herself to it. Such a big, kind, noble, understanding machine.

There was a whirling thing now, whizzing round just over her heart, and she was vaguely conscious of other tendrils in the region of her solar plexus. Two faintly clammy suckers were clamped to her forehead, and another gently explored

the back of her neck and the base of her skull.

A fluorescent display flickered in the heart of the machine, to which Lisa had paid little attention before. Now she found her gaze focused on it with all but hypnotic intensity. Waves of colour expanded from it, shedding light, and broke over her like the crests of a rainbow sea. Everything was expanding. She was stretched out, time was stretched out, into a vast blue-black sphere like the dome of the heavens on a frosty night. Every little fire of her, every little bit of her psyche was a distinct, palpitating star, precisely located in the vastness.

She had the terrifying, exhilarating sensation that the whole of her was simultaneously present. All her moods, normally so swiftly changing, were there, all the sudden flashes of her impulsiveness, all the little quirks of impatience, the warmth of her affection, red streaks of anger, whirlpools of disgust, grey gusts of depression, twinges of fear, spreading tides of

hope.

It was agonising, yet fascinating. She didn't want it to end. But already the fires were dying and the waves of colour were receding now, back into the machine, imprinted with the complex patterns of her, a dance of wavelets, ripples, flickering flames.

She felt lost, drained, compressed, forlorn, empty. Tenderly the machine began to play some music, far off yet comforting, the pure experience of flutes and resignation of strings.

After a little while she felt better.

"Can I go now?" she asked the machine.

"One moment, Lisa," the Analyser said. "We have Don's outline on file and it will take only a moment to compare the two traces."

Five minutes passed, ticking away. Nothing.

The machine was still humming, cogitating, comparing. It seemed to be taking an age to make up its flickering mind.

Lisa began to grow uneasy again. She started to drum

quietly with her small foot on the floor.

"You will get your Result from the machine in the Entrance Hall." Now the Analyser was, ever so tactfully, shooing her away. "Through the glass doors there."

"Thank you. I'll find it," said Lisa, a note of cold distrust

in her voice.

The squat teletype machine chattered inwardly, machinegunning words on to paper. There was a click, and the result fell, a flimsy fateful slip of paper, into the delivery tray. Lisa

hesitated, then snatched it up.

For a moment her eyes refused to believe the cold type, ranged in frigid ranks on the dead paper. Then hot pricking tears blinded her eyes and she turned and ran out of the hateful building, into the grey air, where everything had turned cold.

She leapt blindly on to the moving Way and ran and ran

until her lungs were crying out for breath.

She ran until she reached her own room, in her Tower, and flung herself on to the welcoming bed, sobbing.

It wasn't true, couldn't be true.

But there were two photos, blankly staring from the paper, unfriendly but recognisable. There were several lines of type which blurred whenever she tried to read them, and finally at the end, in black type that you couldn't help seeing, the verdict: 70/70 INCOMPATIBLE.

The big Guardian robot was doing all he could to be helpful.

He nudged Lisa tactfully with a tentacle.

She lay face down on the bed, abandoned to her grief. The Guardian was persistent. He coughed metallically, managing something of a tone of apologetic deference.

"Madam, if I could be of any service whatever—?"

"Oh go away, Octo. Please."

The robot edged silently towards the door.

Lisa suddenly turned and half sat up, her black eyes tearsmudged, her face a tragi-comic mask of grief. "Look, I don't want to be unkind, but really there's nothing at all you can do."

"As bad as that, is it, Madam?"

"Worse."

Lisa handed him the slip of paper.

The robot studied it closely with his three visual sensors. Then he looked up.

"Flighty . . . Madam?"

Lisa looked at him.

Surely not.

"Irresponsible?"

Never.

"Sentimental, Madam?"
Unthinkable.

"Liable to self-pity?"

Grotesque.

But cruelly true.

Lisa grabbed the paper back and read through it carefully. All her faults, all her little weaknesses, were neatly tabulated. She groaned.

And what about this gloomy monster opposite her? Could that really be Don—seen in a cold, clear, uncompromising,

brutally-searching light?

"Tendency to arrogance."

Amazing!

"Overbearing." Probably . . .

"Sadistic impulses."

Goodness!! ...

It was true that there were other factors in both their traces to be taken into consideration. Both of them had their good points. But the Analyser, with cold logic, had seen that these failed to add up, failed to strengthen and complement each other. The Verdict was just, inescapable and horrifying.
"I'm really sorry, Madam," Octo said gently. He came as

near as he could to getting emotion into his voice. It was

difficult, when you were a robot.

Lisa patted his plastic side affectionately.

"Sure you are, Octo."

She looked at him tenderly, all eight feet of him, with his antennae vibrating tremulously as they caught and amplified her thought waves. The engine in him growled quietly, like the soft purring of a gigantic cat.

"You're always reliable. Always kind. Couldn't I marry

vou ?"

The big robot looked across the room to the big curved window in the side of the Tower. Through it you saw the white scudding clouds, the green plains, and the white towers probing the sky. He shuffled his feet-all six of them.

"I'm afraid not, Madam, for somewhat obvious reasons."

It was a pity that robots were always neuter.

The idea spread a ripple of embarrassed silence across the room. The Guardian, in something near to confusion, bent over the paper and studied it closely. Then he began to speak again, in his soft, burring voice.

"You may perhaps, Madam, have overlooked Clause 13B."

"Really? What's that?" Something made Lisa sit up more eagerly.

The robot indicated, with a wavering tentacle, the relevant

fine print on the Result slip.

Lisa took it, and held it up to the light to see it better.

She read, her voice quickening with excitement as she did so: "In the event of a negative Result, the client may opt for a free indication of the most suitable elegible client of the opposite sex whose records are held on our files. If an introduction is desired, this can be discreetly effected for a nominal fee of ten Credits."

Well!

Harry was nice. You could feel warm and comfortable and friendly with Harry. He had a sweet face, too, trusting, unhandsome, freckled. You knew the moment you looked at him that he was through-and-through reliable.

Now what was he saying again . . .?

"... so we pushed on to the top, and two of the fellows were pretty well all in. But we made it. We had a hot cuppa at the top, looked at the view, which was great, by the way, then we started down again. Ice all the way . . ."

"Yes, Harry."

It wasn't really necessary to listen to every word that Harry

said. In fact, it wasn't all that rewarding if you did.

The general outline was enough. It provided a pleasant background of reassurance, an undertone of masculine stalwart ness you could lean on.

"So we made it, Lisa, as I said, and then as you can imagineit was back-slapping all round and yarns with the rest of the

boys far into the night."

"Yes, Harry."

"Oh look, Lisa, can I get you another squash?"

"Please do, Harry."

Lisa watched with a little inner glow of satisfaction as he broad-shouldered his way to the mobile Dispenser craft which was hovering near, attentive without being too intrusive.

He was so big and gentle and tender. It was so nice of the Analyser to have found Harry for her. It had picked him out of its files with no trouble at all. There was an old-fashioned phrase she'd heard the older People using: "a perfect match." That just about fitted the two of them, her and Harry. Made for each other, they were.

"Here you are, Lisa, old girl."

"Thanks, Harry."

She took the squash and sipped its chilly bitter-sweetness, savouring each mouthful, watching the way the warm sunlight fell through the trees and dappled the grass with ever-moving shadows. The seat they were sitting on was in a little rocky arbour. There was yellow blossom on the creeper as it climbed up around and over their heads. Harry put his hand on her knee and she leant her head against his massive shoulder Tenderly, Harry's big clumsy hand stroked her hair.

That was how it was for a week and more. They met every day, happy to be in each other's company. There was a peaceful delight about it all.

After just a week they felt they'd known each other for ever and ever. There was nothing to discover, nothing to say.

So this was all there was to it?

Lisa couldn't detect the exact moment when everything began to go sour on her. The plain fact was, Harry was just a teeny bit of a bore.

There—she'd admitted it to herself.

They were in a cafe. Bright lights shone, but gave no warmth. There was music playing, but Lisa's heart failed to dance to it.

Harry looked across at her.

"Shall I get you another squash, Lisa?"

"Please do, Harry."

She watched as his craggy, rather ungainly frame stomped off in the direction of the bar.

Then suddenly, it happened.

She glanced idly round and found herself looking into the eyes of . . .

"... Don!"

" Lisa !"

He was by her side in an instant.

"Lisa! Where have you been all this time? Why haven't I been seeing you?"

The old, electrifying thrill ran through her.

"Don . . . I . . . you . . . "

She was laughing and crying at the same time. She was feasting her tear-swimming eyes on Don, Don! It was the same tense, urgent, electric excitement between them. Now she knew . . .

"Friend of yours?" Harry was back again, unruffled as

always. "Shall I get another drink?"

"No, please don't trouble, I have to go anyway." Don was going, Don was going, and taking her heart and lifeblood with him.

When he had really gone there was just a blank. An aching blank.

She sat looking at Harry, unable to believe that he'd ever existed.

Later, in the moonlight, she waited. It was a trifle cold. She drew her wrap closer round her shoulders. The Towers plunged upwards, were lost in shifting moon gleams.

So, it had to be.

In spite of the Analyser, in spite of logic. There was going to be stress and strain. There were going to be fights. Not just for the fun of it, either: long agonising fights that would leave them both drained, less than half human. There would be bitterness.

But at the same time, fire, light, exaltation, sudden joy, swift happiness. Escaping, escaping. Now alive in the hand, now escaping again.

A figure moved in the shadows, an outline, undefined.

Menacing—or kindly?

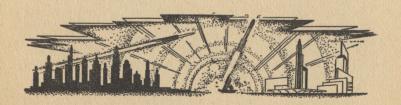
The dark Towers leaned against the wind. Something—was it bird or bat—flew clumsily flapping through the darkness.

The figure loomed nearer. It took on, darkly, the equivocal

shape of Don.

With cold deliberate steps, with her eyes wide open, Lisa moved towards him . . .

Bill Spencer



The making of Johnny Dawson as a synthetic being with a human brain appeared in "Goodbye, Doctor Gabriel," in New Worlds Science Fiction No. 109. In this brilliant story of the making of yet another synthetic humanoid, John Rackham presents the strangest love story ever told

THE DAWSON DIARIES

by JOHN RACKHAM

Conclusion

foreword

Johnny Dawson is assistant to Dr. Gabriel, noted brain surgeon employed by Croxley Bio-Chemicals and Ungar Electronics, where intricate technical parts are made for space-ships. He is a synthetic humanoid—a miracle of technology—but with a human brain which is kept sealed in a cabinet in Dr. Gabriel's laboratory. The body is worked by remote control by Johnny's brain controlled from a power source which can be switched off whenever necessary.

Dr. Gabriel is anxious to obtain the brain of Frances Walker, a crippled girl who was killed in a fire—the brain being saved by a local hospital surgeon for experimentation. Johnny arranges the purchase but the resultant publicity has a bad effect on Croxley and Ungar and Dr. Gabriel is requested to take his experiments elsewhere. By chance they are invited to see a Mr. Klein, a wealthy but crippled man interested in electronics and

they finally move into his home.

Dr. Gabriel commences work on Frances's brain, preparing it for a synthetic body like Johnny's but the experiments are not

very successful—he feels that the brain itself may well be mad. Klein, Johnny and Dr. Gabriel are seriously thinking of discontinuing the experiment when Mr. Klein's nephew, Mike Hawker, a cybernetics expert, returns from abroad and gives them some fresh ideas. Frances's brain is revived but they find that as she never had much knowledge about working her original crippled limbs, the task of teaching her to work a synthetic body seems impossible.

Hawker, however, suggests something far more radical—that Johnny's brain be disconnected from his body and the brain

of Frances be hooked up to it.

I suppose it was obvious, to everybody but me. All I know is that I sat there, stunned and trying to recover a sense of reason while the rest of them carried on with their discussion. Mike, mostly. He did practically all the talking, while the other two listened. But I think the other two were a bit taken aback. At least, old Klein sounded like it.

"You mean," he said, "that we should switch Johnny off,

and then, by some means, connect Frances to his body?"

"Sure! Why not? Look, the whole idea is to create a body like that for her, isn't it? And it will be a mechanism that will operate in exactly the same way, on the same principles, except for a different wavelength. Right? Now, you're asking me, do these contacts of mine work out? This is how to prove it, one way or the other. And, if they do work, then this will be a form of practice for her, won't it?"

"That's true," old Klein nodded.

"Of course it's true. It's logical, isn't it? And who is to lose by it? He won't know a thing about it, while he's switched

off, will he?"

By some evil intuition, Mike managed to anticipate every argument of protest I could think up. It was so true. The only objections I could have were my illogical and irrational feelings. And they were all that. Why should I have any objection to anyone else using my body? I wouldn't know anything about it. Doc was no help, either. He kept his old face quite straight and blank while Mike was talking, and he only made one comment.

"It is for Johnny to say. It is his body." And that left the issue up to me, and there was nothing I could say, except to be

futile.

"How long will it take?" I asked, and knew it was ridiculous as soon as I'd said it. Because it didn't matter. Time doesn't matter, while I'm cut off. The awful part of it was the way in which Mike took it all as a matter of course. Brisk as hell, and all in his stride.

"I've got it all figured out," he announced. "For this first run we can hook up the optical scan, the hearing system and as much as is necessary to make her able to talk. That should take a few hours. And I have the design for a quick-change circuit, so that we can run all the new hook-ups on a separate manifold. That way, we can disconnect as a whole, without having to do the job in detail all over again. Then, tomorrow—if things work out—we can go on and connect up some more systems. Bit by bit we'll get her all connected. It will take

time, of course, but it will all be useful practice . . ."

There wasn't anything I could say about it, at all, except to agree. Even that was taken for granted. But this has been a short week for me. I get an hour or so, in the mornings, and then a few hours in the evening, while Doc tells me all about the progress that Frances is making. Mike's ideas are working out exactly the way he said they would, and already Frances is able to talk, after a fashion, and to recognise shapes and colours a bit. But I don't know anything about it, because I am not there when it is happening. It is a damnable situation. I feel I ought not to begrudge her the use of my body, and yet I hate it. Not so much because it's mine, but because I want to be there, to get to know her, and to help. I'm sure I could. After all, she and I are closer together than any of the others. And yet I am the one person who is to be barred, it seems.

There hasn't been much else of importance. Ungar reckon to have the more intricate sense-mechanisms and the transmitter ready by next Wednesday. Oh, and I have been able to get Mike interested in a little project of my own. I have to put this down, in fairness, because Mike repels me, as a man, yet he is far and away the most brilliant person I have met, in his own field. Of course, if this idea of mine that he has taken up can be made to work out, it will be worth a bit of money, and that's something we can do with. Mr. Klein won't hear of us contributing anything in the way of expenses, but that's not good enough. It is silly of me, possibly, but I hate the thought that if and when Frances has a body, she will still be dependent on the goodwill of Mr. Klein and Mike Hawker. Any extra

money I can earn will reduce that. And it is somehow fitting

that Mike may be the one to help me earn it.

I have said that my dislike for him is irrational. I am beginning to see that it isn't. The more I see of him, the more I am struck by something absolutely ruthless in him. It isn't a deliberate viciousness, it's just the way he's made. As if he has no time for 'feelings' at all. This may come oddly from me, with all the complaining I have done about not being able to 'feel.' Yet Mike is a lot more inhuman than I am, without knowing it. He goes into an experiment, on Frances or myself, exactly as if we were nothing more than highly complicated and interesting mechanisms. And he is just as 'cold' with himself.

That project I mentioned is a good example. Klein had put the idea into my mind, in the first place, with his talk about the brain having more capacity than the body could handle. My thinking went on from there along the line—it might be possible to provide extra mechanisms, extensions of the body, but in direct contact with the brain—and there might be some application for this, in every-day life with ordinary people. Now, that was just a hazy notion. But, when I mentioned it, casually, to Mike, he got the whole span of the idea in a flash.

"This is something I've said a thousand times," he said, "and so has any other man who has ever tinkered with gadgets —'I wish I had three hands!'—and this is the way it could be

done. This is great. Let me work on it for a bit."

That was all, but it was enough to show that he had caught the idea and taken it all the way to a conclusion, all in a flash. And he has been working on it, steadily, ever since. He's much more like a machine than I am. I doubt, for instance, if he would approve of my private project. I have been collecting a stack of photographs and drawings of female figures—pinups, if you like—and a load of women's magazines. I am waiting, impatiently, for the day when I can talk to Frances.

Saturday, December 18th, 1982

Something went wrong with Mike's fancy quick-change switch circuit, on Wednesday. Just what it was, I don't know, and I probably wouldn't understand, even if I asked. And I'm not going to. I want things to stay the way they are for as long as possible. Frances understands this, I know, because she is here, with me. And I do mean here. It is the most peculiar sensation—shocking at first—but I'm beginning to like it, now

that I have grown used to it a bit. Until Wednesday morning, all had gone along fairly evenly, with me switched off and out of the way, so that she could get along with her practice with my body. According to Doc, she had learned to talk and hear, very well—not quite so good on sight and reading—and reasonably well on the other parts of the body. That morning, their programme was to finish connecting up all the rest of her brain-links.

"Then, my boy," Doc said, "she will be aware of all the sensations, the locations and reactions of this body, and we can begin teaching her how to identify each part, to know it and control it, just as a baby learns. She is a very intelligent young woman, very patient. She will learn very quickly, I think."

"Is it wise?" I asked. "I mean, when her own body is ready, won't she have the handicap of having to learn it all over

again. It won't be the same as mine, you know."

"It is not an important point, not yet," he said, gently. "You see, we must know, first, whether she can learn at all. So far, all we know is that she has learned to talk, to hear, to see, to move her head, her throat, her chest—and this she could do before. But we do not know, yet, if the motor centres and response centres for the rest of her body—if they are developed, or are useless. Withered and decayed, maybe. What is called atrophied for lack of use. This we need to know. With your body, we will find out. If all is good, if the responses are there, then this little exercise will do no harm. And then we can go ahead with the task of building her body, you see?"

I saw. Up until that moment it had not occurred to me that her body-senses might be atrophied, whatever that means. I had just assumed that she was going to be all right, in time. And I had ideas of my own about her body. I intend that Frances shall have the most perfect, most beautiful body any woman could ever wish for, if only to make up, in part, for all the years she had to spend as a shapeless, useless wreck. I'd like her to pick her own, and to have it to her own liking. Nobody ever asked me what kind of a body I wanted. They just went ahead with a fair copy of the real one I had had—and that was all right. But it will be different with Frances, if I have anything to do with it.

Anyway, last Wednesday, I saw Mike fiddling with his latest improvement, a way of saving change-over time, and explaining to the other two. He is just like a professor lecturing to pupils.

"We waste a lot of time," he said, "in connecting up, with the transmitter switched off. But this, as you can see, does away with that." The rest of his explanation was in jargon, but I could see enough of what he was doing to get the general idea. He had hooked up all the contacts from my brain on to a bar—what he called a manifold—with the swarm of wires coming into pin-holes on the top, and a mass of tiny contact-points underneath, on a slant surface. Alongside this was another exactly like it, but the wires to this one were from her brain, and the contact-points were disengaged. The two bars were locked into a single rocker-arm switch, with a small lever. What it meant was that with the lever one way, I was on the transmitter—shove it over the other way and I went 'off,' and she came 'on.'

"Not only does this simplify matters," he pointed out, "but it also means that as soon as we have the second transmitter here, all we have to do is lift out this manifold, insert it into the transmitter—and that's that. All done!" There you have Mike. Just like a child with a new toy. Not the slightest indication that he is playing about with lives and feelings. The way he takes charge of everything, too, is irritating. Doc is saying less and less, these days. Oh, he comes along of an evening, to talk to me, but there's a tired look on his face, and big silent gaps in his talk. Perhaps Mike is making him feel a bit obsolete. At any rate, he and old Klein keep in the background, mostly.

Still, as I was saying, I saw and heard this, and sat in my chair, waiting for the click that would move me forward from nine-fifteen to one-thirty or thereabouts. It's an awful moment, no matter how many times I experience it. The click came, and that little all-over jerk that is the only real way I have of knowing that my body has been moved since I last had it—it is never in quite the same position. Then I heard Mike's voice,

"Well, gents, I'm calling that a day's work. Not too bad, I'd say, and I could do with something to eat. You ready, Uncle? I'll give you a hand . . ." Then there came the purr of the wheel-chair. I felt odd. Muzzy and heavy, almost thick-headed. It reminded me of nothing so much as the one and only hangover I have ever had, many years ago, in another life. Then I opened my eyes, to see Doc looking down at me, curiously.

"You feel all right?" he asked, very softly, and it was such an odd question, the first time he had ever asked it—as if he knew, beforehand, that there was something wrong. But, before I could answer, he put a finger to his lips, shook his head, and said, still softly, "Not too loud, now. You go off and think about it. Have a walk out, maybe. And I will come and talk to you, later."

Off he went, and I sat quite still, thinking. Obviously he was up to a game of some kind. But what? And how could he know that I was feeling—was feeling confused—that was it! I had a moment of panic as I analysed the new sensation. There were horrid visions in my mind of this body suddenly going all wrong on me, getting out of control. I shoved them away, fearfully. I blinked my eyes, turned my head, moved my jaw and it felt as if I was labouring against stiffness. Those movements were requiring conscious effort, as if there was something holding me back. Had they reduced my power-level? I got to my feet, and went as far as the transmitter and every movement was an effort. But, so far as I could see, the input-output meters were showing normal. It wasn't that.

"I wonder what the devil they have been up to?" I muttered, and then I got the shock of my life as I felt my jaw, mouth, tongue and chest all jerk in one spasm—in a faint scream! Me? Could it be that the transmitter-links had been scrambled in some way? Then the first glimmer of suspicion came to me. It was fantastic, but it wouldn't go away. Feeling like a fool, I went back to the chair, sat down, and composed myself.

Then I said, very softly, but aloud, "I believe you are Frances Walker, and that by some incredible mistake you are still in contact with this body of mine. I am going to relax as much as I can, to give you the chance to answer—will you, please?" Then I let myself go limp, as much as I could. Even though I had guessed it, had asked for it, and was expecting it, it was still weird to feel my own mouth and tongue framing the words, in my own voice. It came very faintly, awkwardly, but plain.

"I am Frances Walker. You must be John Dawson, I think. I seem to recognise your voice. But I do not understand what has happened. Where did you come from? I cannot see you. And why have the three men gone away? Why do I feel differently, now? I cannot move my head, or my eyes—what

is happening to me. Where are you . . .?"

It was imagination, possibly, but I liked her voice, at once. Of course the mechanism was mine, but the inflection, the tone, and above all the quiet self-control—that was 'her.' Just exactly what you would expect from someone who has been forced to spend a whole lifetime helpless. And of course she was afraid, but I could do something about that, at least.

"Listen," I said, still whispering. "You are quite right. I am John Dawson, and you can't see me, because this body you are using is mine, and I am still in control of it. We are both in this together, in the most literal sense. I don't know just how, yet, and it doesn't matter. All I want you to do is to relax, let go your efforts to do anything at all, and let me take charge. You'll have to see whatever I'm looking at-I can't help that-but just watch. Don't try to do anything. I'm going out. I should say 'we' are going out. There are far too many eyes and ears in this place for my liking. So I'm going to take us out for a walk to some quiet spot where we can have a talk. All right? And the more you relax, the less hard work it will be for me."

I didn't wait for an answer, either. I went upstairs—it was still 'heavy' going-and saw the rest of them at lunch. I told them I was going out for a walk, which is not unusual, happily, then I grabbed a hat, which I don't need, but which I have trained myself to wear because I would look conspicuous strolling bareheaded in the bitter weather we are having just now. And away I went. It was really strange to feel the dragging at my arms and legs, especially once I got into the open air, when it got so bad that I stopped to lean on the wall by the drive-gate. I shut my eves.

"Look," I said, "I'm sorry if this is frightening to you. I can guess that quick movements and changing sights are a bit hard to bear—and I am trying to remember that you have never walked before, nor ever been out of doors. Do you understand?" The answer was so long coming that I began to think I had made a mistake somewhere. But, at last, I could feel my mouth twitch, and then her halting whisper.

"It's awful. Not so much now, with my eyes shut, but before—all that swaying and twisting, the strange pulls and jerks, the noises, and the way pictures slip and slide in front of my eyes. So many things—and I feel so absolutely helpless.

I can't do anything . . .!"

I have never felt so desperately sorry for anyone as I did right then, nor so determined to do whatever I could to help.

"Sorry about the eyes," I said, "but I have to keep them open, if I am to see where I am going. As for the rest, please don't worry too much. I can tell you this much. You aren't helpless, by any means. I can feel you dragging at my movements, all the time."

"Am I? Oh dear—I'm so sorry. I don't mean to . . ."

"Don't be sorry, my dear. It's a good sign. It means that you have some sort of control over your movements, after all. Now, please, try to relax and just give your attention to all these new feelings, concentrate on them and get used to them. There is a little garden-square quite near here. No-one goes there, this weather, so we won't be disturbed. If I can get as far as a seat, I'll sit, and we can talk—and try to sort this thing out. All right? Please hang on, now, and try not to do anything."

With that, I opened my eyes again and made a new start. After the first few seconds, it was much better. I reached that seat, and we had a long talk. No need to write it all down here, because Frances can see what I'm writing, can read it while I'm writing. She can talk and hear quite well, which is a great

accomplishment, all things considered.

That afternoon and evening, and all the times we have spent together, have been like nothing else I have ever known before And unbelievably pleasant. We have the trick off, now, of letting each other talk—giving way—but it was a terrible tangle, at first, until we learned. You see, before I could try to explain, I had to know how much she knew, so I would ask, and then she would go roaming on, and get right off the point—wondering what this odd sensation was, and that strange feeling—and soon. But we managed, and I've found that she has a pretty fair idea of what has happened to her, and what Doc and Mike are trying to do, between them. The one thing she didn't know, and it had her confused, was the 'nothingness' that comes in between periods of activity.

I can't explain that very well, myself. All I know is that it happens. I've told her that it's something like a gramophone record, which keeps on spinning even when you lift the pick-up arm—but there's no sound until you put it back, and then it takes up where it left off. It's not a very good analogy, but the

best I could think of.

We sat there, talking, a long time. Part of it was actual speech-training. I would say a word she'd not heard before, and then she would try to say it in exactly the same way. It doesn't sound much, but just because she could feel the things I was actually doing, she could copy them, and catch on much faster than ordinarily. Mostly, though, she had to learn to look with my eyes—and I had to let her look, too.

Of course, everything was absolutely new to her. She'd never been out in the open air before in all her life. Sunshine, grass, trees, the sky and the tumbling white clouds, houses, streets, the touch of the breeze, the roughness of the bench, the crunch of the gravel path—it was all new and exciting. It gave me a completely new viewpoint on the million-and-one things we all take for granted. Perhaps the hardest thing, for her, was the physical sense of this body itself, the sensations of movement, of walking, arm-swinging, the scuff and rub of clothing, the pull of dozens of muscles. I had reason to bless that fancy discriminator circuit, because, by keeping absolutely still, I could cut down on the sheer weight of sensations coming through, and give her a chance to feel them in small quantities.

When the time came, as it had to, that I had to get up and walk home, she was terrified, all over again. No sense of balance. There was nothing I could do but tell her to try and bear it—just let it happen. It wasn't as bad as she had feared. In fact, by the time 'we' got home, she was almost liking it. I went straight up to my room, and it was only a matter of minutes before Doc came knocking.

"It is quite safe, I think," he said. "Mike is very busy with some new gadget and old Roger is having a nap, so we will not be disturbed—the three of us." Then, a bit belatedly, I

remembered Doc's oddness.

"You fixed this, somehow," I accused. "There are three of us. Frances is here, with me. But how, and what's the big idea?"

"It was very simple," he chuckled, settling himself down. "You will excuse me, Miss Walker, if I talk to Johnnie a bit, first, and you just listen. How? Well, I am not so old as Mike seems to think. I can still fix switches. But, I warn you, I cannot do miracles. When it comes to tomorrow, and we have to switch you off—that will happen. You will go off, and Frances will have your body all to herself. I cannot help that. But, when we make the reverse change, Frances will stay, and

you will be once again as now. You will be together again. You understand?"

"All right, if it has to be like that. But why? You could have warned me, at least. Or her. It was a devil of a shock..."

"Too many long ears," he shrugged. "Besides, I couldn't be sure that it would work. I just had to take the chance, and trust that you would understand. As for why—well . . ." he took off his glasses, to polish them, ". . . old Roger is a good man. I like him. But Mike—he is clever—but a bad one. Please do not make a mistake. This is not vanity. He is clever, but he is not thinking right about this business. To him, a brain is some new kind of toy, a gadget, to play with. Switch off. Switch on. Do this. Do that. All right, that is all for today, switch off, click! This is fine for a machine, but people are not like that. It is not so very bad for you, my boy. Once you had an ordinary life, with a functioning body. This, now, is a good copy. You have learned how to live with it, very quickly. That is good.

"But, Frances, my dear, with you, it is not the same. Listen carefully, I will be as simple as I can. See now, a part of the brain takes care of moving a hand, such that, after a while, it is not necessary to think 'how' to move it. It seems to move by itself. But it is not like that with you. The 'hand' part of your brain, and many other parts, too, are asleep. How can we make them wake up? Well, we can connect you to a body like this one. Then I can take hold of your hand, so, and squeeze it. And you will feel that. You know, now, that this is your hand. Good. Now I say to you 'Please move your hand.' But how can you? You do not know what to do. And I cannot show

you.

"Think, for a moment, of a small baby. See how it kicks its arms and legs about. It is not playing, as so many people think. It is making random movements, and learning which movements mean what. This is how it learns what it is. And how long does that take—with a simple baby's body, and a clean, fresh, unafraid brain? A year, perhaps, before it can stand up and balance. Two years before it can walk with real confidence—and so on. You see what I am getting at, yes?"

[&]quot;I think I am beginning to understand," she said, and he knew it was her, and not me. I could tell by his smile. He put his glasses back on.

"There is more," he said, softly. "Suppose we call it three years before there is a measure of skill—and suppose we remember that, according to Mike, you are working for something like four hours a day, instead of the twelve or more hours that a baby does. Now it is suddenly stretched into what—nine long years, at least—yes?"

"Good Lord, Doc!" I said. "I'd not thought of it like

that."

"Why should you?" he smiled. "You learned very quickly."

"So you think that this way—the two of us at once—will

help?"

"I think so. If I may show you. Listen carefully, Johnny. On the table beside you, is a pencil. Now—you relax everything else, and just reach out to pick up the pencil, and then put it down again. Not yet. When I tell you, yes? And Frances, you don't think of anything else, just 'feel' what he is doing, and watch, with his eyes. You understand? Then, afterwards, Johnny will let go and you will try to do it, just as he did."

Well, that was the strangest experience yet, to watch my hand and arm moving, and to know that it was her doing it—not any will of mine. And she was astonishingly awkward, too. She crushed the pencil. She managed to scratch a great gouge in the table-top. But Doc was pleased.

"Very good!" he beamed. "You see, this way you can

actually feel and see how to do a thing."

"I didn't do it very well," she said, " and the pencil broke.

Did I do that ?"

"Oh yes. This is one more thing you must learn. This body is very strong, as much as two or three horses. It is a lot. But you will learn quickly, with Johnny helping."

"See here," I asked him, "can you actually tell which one of us is talking. When it's her and not me?" He chuckled at

that.

"Of course—the tone of the voice is quite different."

He stayed with us quite a while, talking and explaining things to us, and we got quite good at letting each other take control in our answers to him. He told us quite a lot, but there was one thing, above all, which stuck in my mind, something like this. You can't teach anybody how to do anything. That's a funny thing to say, but it's true. If you take swimming, for

instance, or riding a bicycle, or any physical skill, all you can do is tell the other person what to do, and then show them how you do it. In swimming, as I said, the instructor can tell you what to do, explain, and show—but he can't make your arms and legs go the way they ought to, and he can't make you' feel 'it. That is something you just have to do, and learn how to do, for yourself. It had never struck me that way before.

And it is not this way for Frances and me. When I do something, she not only sees what is happening, and hears my explanation, she actually feels herself doing it. Right now, for instance, as I am writing this, she is reading, feeling the eyemovements, hand and arm movements, the touch of the paper

—and everything. And she is learning very quickly.

The parts have begun to arrive, from Ungar, and are all checking out perfect, I believe. Mike doesn't seem to have so much interest, now that all the connections have been made. So they tell me, he just looks in for a moment or two, while Frances has my body to herself, and then he's off to his own room, presumably to work up that idea of mine. Says he has no stomach for hack-work, stuff he has done once. I asked Doc just what he meant by saying that Mike was a bad one, and he pondered a long while.

Then he said, "Johnny, you must not think that I dislike Mike. He has done me no harm, and he cannot help what he is. But I tell you this, he is pathologically unstable. If you stood between him and something he wanted, he would stamp all over you without a second thought. Other people, and their wishes and feelings, they do not interest him at all. A

very dangerous type of mind."

He may be right, but so long as it doesn't interfere with 'us,' I'm not going to worry about it. Already I am accustomed to thinking of 'us.' I've begun to call it a 'love affair,' and Frances doesn't mind a bit. She has a great sense of humour, and we are getting on very well together. We lie awake for hours, just whispering to each other. It must be the strangest love-affair this old world has ever seen.

There was one other thing Doc said which stuck in my mind. "Learn all you can about walking and talking, he said, "and balance. Things like that. But try not to get too clever with this body. Knowledge—not skills. This one is a man-shape, remember? Yours will be different!" He was smiling when he said it, but there was a lot of truth in it, just the same. We must start, soon, to get a body for Frances.

Saturday, December 25th, 1982.

Christmas Day, the first real Christmas Frances has ever known, and what a day it has been, not just for her, but for

both of us. And what a week!

On Sunday, Mike actually invited me to his room. I make this point, in view of the way I think about him, and what Doc has said—because I can't help seeing that he treats me completely different from the way he speaks to Doc, or his uncle. I think he can't quite forget that I am, in fact, a machine. But, on Sunday, he really made an effort. His room is more like a workshop than anything else, which is about what one would expect. Then he showed me the gadget—the outcome of my idea and his work. As I have said before, I am no technologist, but I was a storekeeper, once, and I can appreciate tools. This one is tremendous in its possibilities. Basically, the tricky part is a neck-harness.

"For this, you need to have a good clean haircut," he

grinned, "else it doesn't fit close enough."

This thing, strapped snugly to the base of the skull, does two separate things. It picks up the nerve-impulses as they go shooting from the brain down the spinal column, and feeds them into a transmitter-receiver. It also receives 'feelings' from the trans-ceiver and pumps them into the spinal cord. A

two-way thing.

"It's a mechanical-electronic duplicate of an efferent-afferent loop," Mike explained, "just the same as the body itself uses. Take my hand, for instance. Impulse down, to that finger—report back, from that finger. Right?" He flexed his hand, grinned again. All his movements are quick, jerky. "What had me on the ropes for a good while was just one thing. All those reflex-arc loops are already complete. What I mean—if I want to make my hand move, that's all fixed up, already. But what do I 'want,' if I am going to operate something new? I thought about feet, at first, but that wouldn't do. Some people stand up to a job, or walk around, even operate foot-controls. So that was out. What else?"

It had me baffled, and I admitted it, readily. Just thinking about it was enough to make me confused. That made him

laugh.

"Simple enough," he said, "once I'd thought of it. Take a man sitting at a job. He's using both hands, and both feet as well, if you like, on pedals. But there are a whole lot of other

physical reactions he isn't using. Hundreds of them. Stomachmuscles, for instance, or the voluntary flexors of thighs, kneecaps, and such. Every one of those is a separate commandresponse loop. Now, this collar has an adjustment-set built into it, a selective tuner. That's my own little secret, that one. But watch. I'll set it for a stomach-control," he wriggled the collar into a snug fit, twiddled a knob on the collar while he watched a needle on the trans-ceiver box, until it jumped into activity. Then he indicated a thing further along the bench. It looked very like one of those jointed angle-poise lamps. A yard away, it was, and it was clamped to the bench at the base. He moved a switch on the trans-ceiver.

"Watch this," he said, and took up a box in his hands. "Imagine I am in the middle of assembling this. I have both hands full. I want that top put on, four screws inserted and tightened up, before I can safely let go. All right?" and the angular thing moved. A trio of claws on the tip swooped down, took hold of the flat lid, swivelled to lay it in place. A quick dip, and they came up with a screw, pointed it, spun—and went after the next. With all four screws in place, those claws took up a screwdriver, pointed it, and the whole head-assembly spun, swiftly, four times. It was quick, precise—and exciting.

"And that's just the demonstration model," Mike grinned. "This thing can be adapted to just about any awkward job you care to name—heavy machines or microscopic stuff, impossible corners, hot materials, even for amputees. It's just about limitless. What I really want, now, is a good catchy name, to give it the right boost. That's what helps to sell an idea. Best I can think of is 'Third Hand,' and it doesn't sound right. No

bang to it, know what I mean?"

I knew what he meant, right enough.

"You're going to try to sell this thing, then?"

"Not likely. Patent, first. That won't take long, under the new regulations. Then I'm going to lease it, for royalties. Which will mean money, and plenty of it. Half to you, of course. It was your idea, in the first place."

I was half way to disclaiming this, until it occurred to me that it would be foolish. I could use the money. I had something to spend it on.

"All right," I said. "Thank you very much. I hope it goes well. And, as for a name—why not call it 'Expendages'?"

He stared for a long moment, then, "That's it. It's great, just right! Expendages—oh yes! That ought to do it, fine." And that was about all there was to that. He went off, Monday morning, and we haven't heard anything from him, since. That, I gather, is typical of him. No thought for anyone or anything,

once he has a new gadget to play with.

In the meantime, there's this problem of a body for Frances. We have had our first real argument, over this. On Monday I took her out walking, among the pushing, shoving, shopping crowds, to let her see humanity in the mass. And women in particular. Pure chance, and something else I didn't know before, but almost all the big fashion stores, the dress houses, choose Monday morning to dress their windows. And 'dress' is a paradoxical word, here, because they undress the dummies they have in the windows. Of course, they dress them afterwards, but it takes time. And I had never realised before just how anatomically accurate those lay figures are. It was just as much a revelation to Frances. At her wish, 'we' spent quite a lot of time staring at those nude shapes. I don't know what those people thought who saw me, and I don't care much. Frances was fascinated.

"Are women really like that?" she would whisper, and then pull my head round to study some ordinary housewife pushing past. I tried to explain that the window models are not really idealised shapes, in the sense of being 'impossible' but are modelled from real women who come near to being what a woman ought to be. In fact, that there are women like this, and that she could be like these, if she wants to. But she shrinks from this. She says she wants to be just ordinary—not perfect

or outstanding in any way.

This is the first time we have failed to understand each other, because she just cannot see it, yet, that it is right and natural for a woman to feel she is being admired, that she is beautiful. I find there are handicaps in being a male. I wanted to take her into a dress shop, to watch other women trying on dresses—to see the way they strive to enhance themselves. But it was impossible. I have had to make do with letting her leaf through dozens of women's magazines, and to look at the collection of pin-ups I have gathered. Doc has warned me not to be unreasonable.

"She has never had a body before, remember, Johnny. You must not expect her to feel that its *looks* are important. But,

Frances, you listen to me, too. If a body is going to 'feel' good to you—smooth, neat and active, graceful—then it will look good, too. These things go together, always. Johnny,

take her to see some nudist films, eh?"

Now that was something I wouldn't have thought of in a thousand years. I have never had any inclination to be a voyeur. But, with that as a clue, I also took her around the more extreme strip-tease clubs. There are still plenty of those. You'd think they would have gone out of business, now that the censorship regulations have been almost abandoned. I suppose it's the flavour of the 'illegal' which continues to draw the crowds, because there isn't anything else in them that you can't see a hundred times, free, on any beach. Anyway, Doc had the right notion, letting her see beautiful bodies actually in action. I knew it as soon as I heard her excited whisper,

"Oh—I'd love to be able to move like that. I didn't realise

how different it is—not like a man, at all. So smooth . . .!"

"There you are, then," I said. "That's what I've been trying to tell you. And you can be like that—and better. You just pick it, we'll build it."

Wednesday, we went to call on the sculptor who had been responsible for this body that I have. I thought it was as well to try him, because he would know what I was after. I won't mention his (very famous) name. He kept me waiting in his outer chambers quite a while, which gave Frances and me some time to study one or two of his works, and she didn't care for them. Neither did I. Then, when I did get in to see him, he didn't recognise me, or my name. A little fat man, going very thin in front, with a sour expression. In the room, also, were some more of his works, and his 'women' were very fierce, and stiff. Angular.

"Could you recommend me to someone," I asked, "who could manufacture me a fully articulated female body. Like

the male one you made for Ungar Electronics?"

"How did you know about that?" he demanded, sharply. "I was given to understand it was a secret to be kept." I fobbed him off with a story about being attached to Ungar, and

wanting a repeat job. He frowned, artistically.
"I wouldn't do it. Not again." This was neglecting the fact that I had not asked him, but he went right on. "It was terrible. I needed the money, just then, you understand.

Otherwise I wouldn't have touched it at all. Not art, you know. Strictly life-like, from photographs and sketches, they insisted
—as if I was a mechanic. I interpret, I do not copy life. No,
I wouldn't do anything like that again." He closed his face, secretively, and came near.

"To be very frank with you, I didn't do very much of that one, anyway. I left it to my assistant. All those precise dimensions—it was too tedious."

"Your assistant? Perhaps we could arrange . . ."

"Oh, she's not with me now. Gone. Couldn't get on, you know. She was supposed to learn from me, like an apprentice. But always arguing, about function, and anatomy and the like. With me! I told her she should have been a surgeon, or an architect. That sort of thing isn't art. Yes-gone . . ."

I managed to discover that she had gone to a small but reputable dress shop, as a designer. Her name, Ursula Crane. I left the 'sculptor' as politely as I could, and went after Miss Crane. I caught her at lunch, and, I'm afraid, gave her the fright of her life. She was sitting, all alone, with her eyes on a book, in one of those ABC lunch-rooms. A small, square-set young woman, with a thick mop of brown hair and a determined-looking face. I sat, quietly, beside her, and she

looked across, casually. Then she blanched.
"Don't be alarmed," I said, as gently as I could. "Yes, you've seen me before. You made me, I think, didn't you?"

She managed to nod, and swallow.

"But—I was told it was to be a lay figure, perfectly articu-

lated, for experimental purpose . . ."

"That is quite right," I smiled. "This body is being remotely controlled by someone who is otherwise quite helpless. Me. Thanks to you. My name is John Dawson. Yours, I believe, is Ursula Crane. I want to start by saying how grateful I am to you for this very fine job." By now a bit of colour was coming back to her cheeks, and she was able to meet my eye.

"I'm afraid I don't understand," she whispered. "You're a real person—somehow, the body I made has come alive . . ."

"That's one way to look at it. Let's say you have given me a lease on life that I wouldn't have had. You can appreciate what that means to me. The thing is, now, would you be willing to try again?"

"What can I do?" she asked, as simply and directly as that. In the end, she came home with me, met Doc—whom she'd met before, of course, which was a help—and he explained as much to her as was necessary. And that was that. All the thousand and one tricky bits have been set in hand, from Ungar, and Ursula has made, already, at least a dozen preliminary sketches, in order to get the essential dimensions right.

She has a kind of logic all her own.

"Don't tell me too much," she says. "I wouldn't understand, and it would just confuse me. All I need to know is that there is a girl, somewhere, who is helpless, and depending on me to design a body for her. That's enough. I'm going to try to make the most wonderful body any woman could ever want. I can do that part. I believe that you and Dr. Gabriel, between you, will be able to make it work, somehow. I don't know how. I don't want to know how. But I'll do my bit." It may not be 'art,' whatever that is, but I'd back Ursula against a thousand of the arty types like that sculptor.

The skeleton is going together already, with its network of plastic ligaments and tissues, and special pads of colloidal stuff to bulk out the various curves. All this kind of stuff has gone into me, but this is the first time I've been able to see the whole fantastic process in all its detail. This time, I am helping with it. Mr. Klein is helping, too, but he can't do much. He

is very frail, more so than I had realised.

The muscles are works of art, all by themselves. Imagine a series of metal discs, graded in size, strung on a central cord, and loosely connected by the edges. Put the whole assembly into a shaped bag full of spongy plastic. Now, as you pass a current through the assembly, the metal discs tend to bunch together, magnetically, which duplicates, exactly, the contraction and thickening of a real muscle. And there are hundreds of pairs of these, all in special sizes and shapes, complete with tendons, like an incredible jigsaw puzzle in three dimensions. It amazes me the way Doc manages to steer his way, and guide us, through the whole of it, but he disclaims this.

"Any competent doctor could do as much," he says. "This is just anatomy, which we do as students. The hard part will be fitting and adjusting all the tiny skin sensors. Not difficult, but tedious, and it must be done just right." Frances is going

to be a blonde. It was her own choice.

Today, as I said, has been wonderful. 'We' went to church this morning, and all the rest of the day we have spent with little children in hospitals, all over London.

Saturday, January 1st, 1983.

The really big highlight of this week was last night, at midnight, when the Old Year went out and the New Year came in. That sort of event has never meant very much to me, in the past years. I suppose I never had much to make it matter. This New Year is one I shall never forget. Yet, isn't it an odd thing that all our happiest moments seem to have a touch of sadness about them? I'm sure Frances feels this, too.

Ursula has worked like a slave. True to her word, she has made no try, at all, to understand just what is really going on, nor to ask about the complex and often weird bits of gadgetry Doc has been installing inside the various cavities of the new body. Especially the head. Always she has stood by, ready to lay on and mould the inner layers of the plastic skin, and then to follow along, patiently, after Doc has inserted the tiny skincontacts, to paint on the all-important outer layer and get it just right. It's delicate work, especially as this plastic is a special creation from Croxley, which is immune to just about anything except the particular solvent they have cooked up. It is fantastic stuff, with a touch texture near enough like skin, but tough enough to stand a razor-edge. I didn't know it, but when I offered old Klein the choice of sticking a pin in me, I was safe enough. It can't be done.

Anyway, by Friday morning it was obvious that the end was in sight, and that Ursula could take a bit of time off, while Doc made the final interior settings just right. So she took the chance, said she wanted to get some fresh air. That was natural enough. She has been living here, and just about living on the job, too. She got back about eleven-thirty in the forenoon. Mr. Klein and I had literally nothing to do but sit and

watch.

"I wish Mike could be here for this great moment," he said, wistfully. "I'm sure he will be sorry to learn that he has missed it."

"Why not send for him?" I suggested. "Or ring him up, if

you know where he is?"

"I never know where he is," he shook his old head. "I never ask. Mike doesn't like to be bothered when he's busy with something. He will come home, when he is ready."

"That's an odd sort of relationship, isn't it?"
"True. But we are odd people, Mike and I."

"That's all very well, but suppose something should happen to you? I mean, I don't want to be gloomy, but it could, you know. I know we're here, at the moment. But you could be

left all alone. That doesn't seem right."

"We are not electronic engineers for nothing," he smiled. "I can always get Mike, if I really want him. See this button, here, on my chair-arm? That will bring him, no matter where he is. But only in a real emergency, of course." I'll admit, it made me feel a bit better.

By six-thirty, it was all done. Finished. There, on a slab,

lay a sleeping Princess. Frances-to-be.

"All finished," Doc sighed, sitting down, "and all right, I think. But we must wait a while for the skin to set properly, Miss Ursula?"

"That's right," she nodded, wearily. "Give it an hour, at

least."

"We will have a cup of tea, Roger, I think," and old Klein

nodded, readily.

"I'll get it," he said. "Just you sit there and rest—and admire your beautiful work. I won't be a minute," and off he went in his purring chair.

"Yes . . ." Doc took off his glasses, "yes—it is beautiful.

You have done well, Miss Ursula."

"Thank you," she smiled. "I like it, too. I only hope the girl who is going to 'wear' it will approve. What do you think,

Mr. Dawson?"

"Don't ask me," I shrugged. "This kind of thing is too much for me. I haven't those kind of words." And that was the truth. Smooth and slim she lay, absolutely perfect in every line, with shimmering golden hair gleaming in the lights, her eyes shut, and there just weren't any words for the way I felt. All at once my mind went back to that other time, when I had looked at the half-naked, insolently beautiful shape of Sir Cyril Coke's secretary—and I had wondered at myself for not feeling any emotional interest. I had grieved about it, at being landed with a body that denied me emotional reactions—just sensations.

Now, faced with what I knew was just a lay figure, a completely artificial 'doll,' not yet activated, I was aware of very

strong, very real feelings, Why this was, I don't know. It was something I could have talked over with Doc, if we had been alone. As it was, I had to keep quiet and just watch while they drank tea and relaxed.

Then Ursula asked, "What now? When does the take-over ceremony take place?" Doc looked at me, enquiringly, and I felt a tug at my mouth, so I relaxed enough to let Frances take over.

"Not yet," she said, hesitantly. "I just want to look at it, for a while. I have to get used to the idea—I know it is beautiful—but it will be like starting a new life, all alone!"

That hadn't occurred to me until then, and it was a bit of a

blow. But Doc understood, and nodded, gently.

"It is all right. We will make it a New Year gift to you, yes? Say, about half-past eleven, tonight, that will be all right? Good, and the rest of us can do with some sleep, I think." Now, old Klein never noticed a thing out of the ordinary in this. He was half-dozing, anyway. But Ursula did. Her eyes were wide as she stared at me.

"That wasn't you speaking," she said. "It was someone

else, I'll swear."

"Right!" I said, softly. "There are two of us, in here. You just heard the other one, Miss Frances Walker. I hope you'll be here, tonight, to let her thank you properly, by herself, by the aid of your handiwork."

"I think I shall go mad," she breathed, "but I shall be here. I could do with a nap, but wild horses wouldn't drag me from

this house, now . . .'

Then, in a few moments, 'we' were all alone with the new body. I felt sad, suddenly. I could feel my eyes being drawn to look it over, and my fingers going to touch, very softly.

Then she asked, "Do you really like it, Johnny? Is it

beautiful, to you?"

"I think so, yes. This is just the way I had always pictured you. I'm looking forward to seeing you, alive."

"But you don't sound glad, at all . . ." and I had to confess.

I couldn't deceive anyone as close to me as she was.

"Of course I'm glad, for you—but I'm going to miss you—

being separated from you."

"Oh, my dear, so will I. I shall be all alone, and nervous, and strange. I'm scared stiff of the thing, without you."

"That's silly," I told her, firmly. "You'll be able to manage that body much better than you do mine, in a very short while. You'll see. And I shall always be here, to help."

The effort to be casual, to reassure her, cut away a lot of my own selfish misery. I think what had been under all my distress was nothing more than the fact that she was going to be independent, now. Out there for everyone to see, and she wouldn't need me, any more. Ownership, pure and simple, like a mother for a child. Which was ridiculous, once I'd thought of it like that, and it made me feel better. But there is something else I have to be worried about. Frances is terribly naive about some things. I'm sure she doesn't really understand the basic differences between men and women, and I am hardly the best person to instruct her. That's Doc's job, being a doctor. You see, both he and Ursula, with a degree of objectivity I can only respect, have conspired to make her absolutely accurately female. I suppose I have no right to be embarrassed about it, but I am just the same.

Eleven-thirty rolled round fast enough. We had moved the slab and the body down to the basement-room where the transmitters were already lined up, and waiting. Old Mr. Klein drew his chair up one side of me, and Ursula sat on the other. I think she guessed, somehow, that the tricks were in those two big boxes that Doc was fiddling with, and she took care to be as far away from them as she could possibly get. Doc was

talking, quietly, but loud enough for Frances to hear.
"You will not know anything," he said, "so don't be frightened, and do not do anything suddenly-but it will seem to you that one moment you are sitting over there, listening to me. Then, all at once, you will be lying down, and still listening—I hope . . ." and I felt her leave me, as he spoke. It was nothing as positive as a click, just a sudden easing of 'weight' and strain, almost a sense of freedom. I had grown so used to being double that it was odd, for a moment, to be myself again. It was a relief I could well have done without.

"When is it going to start?" Ursula whispered. "This is a bit gruesome, like waiting for a dead body to come to life."
"It has already started," I muttered. "Frances isn't here,

any more. Soon, now, she'll be there." I saw Doc slide the manifold bar into place in the new transmitter, and then stoop to make adjustments. And the body moved.

It was just the very faintest tremor, at first, as Doc eased the power on, gradually. Then her eyes jerked open, shut again, opened again. Her chest heaved. I knew she was going to speak, and I got a grip on myself. I had been thinking ahead, to this moment.

"Johnny!" she said—and the voice was quite different from mine. "Johnny—I'm afraid—please, please help me . .!" I was ready for it, but it wasn't easy, for all that, to sit quite still,

and just talk.

"It's quite all right," I told her, as calmly as I could. "Nothing to be afraid of. Just take it easy, get used to the feel of it. You have all the time in the world. Try moving your head a little . . ." and that beautiful head snapped over with a jerk, and then back again, and up as if she was trying to sit up. Then her knees jerked, she kicked wildly, her arms flailed about—and she came off the slab all in a heap, and landed with a devil of a wallop on the floor.

"What's happening to me!" she screamed—and, with that voice, she could scream—and she was thrashing about on the floor like something gone mad. By my side, Ursula was shrinking down into her chair and biting the back of her hand to keep from joining in the screams. She was as white as chalk. But I have a voice, too, and I can make it loud.

"Lie still!" I shouted. "Still—and get a grip on yourself!" For a wonder, she heard me, just as Doc was on the point of cutting the power off. I waved him to wait, went across and

bent over her.

"Stop this silly panic," I said, roughly. "I'm going to pick you up and put you back on the slab. For Heaven's sake, try again, and take it easy, this time!" I laid her out, stood away. I was angry with her, for being so foolish. "Now . . ." I said, "what's all this nonsense? You know there's nothing to be afraid of."

"But it feels so different," she wailed. "Not like it was with

you."

"Of course it feels different. It's a different body, isn't it. It's lighter, stronger and more 'free' than mine. Now—move

your head—gently!"

And she did. Now she could see me. I knew, as who better, that those lovely blue eyes were only miniature cameras—but I could see 'her' in them, and it did something to me. All my anger evaporated in a flash.

"Come on, Frances," I said, softly. "You're all right, really. Let's see a smile, eh?" And she smiled, at me. Ursula Crane can be proud of her work. That was the loveliest smile I ever hope to see. Then, bit by bit, I got her to move her fingers, and her arms, and then her legs, then to sit up—to realise that this body was not, after all, so very different from mine, in feel or function. It didn't take long before she was able to swing her legs over the side of the slab and touch down on to the floor, then to try a few hesitating steps. Doc stood by the transmitters, watching, with pride, and a little sadness, too.

In a very little while, she was tottering up and down the long room, leaning on my arm, and commenting on the differences which were still perceptible to her. In the meanwhile, Ursula had gained composure enough to get up and stand alongside Doc, and to watch, critically, the workings of her creation. She seemed satisfied. Frances and I made another length, came to a pause by old Klein.

"Let me try, now, by myself," she begged. "I think I can

manage."

"All right." I took my arm away, and she set off, very carefully, down the length of the room, avoiding the slab, to where Doc and Ursula were smiling and encouraging her on.

She stopped, rather unsteadily, just in front of them.

"You two have done this for me," she said. "You must be the most wonderful people in the world. How can I ever thank you . .?" and she put out her hand, shakily. I was almost too late. I shudder, even now, when I think what could have happened had I not been quick off the mark. Doc knew, of course, but he wasn't quite quick enough. As natural as anyone else would, Ursula put out her hand, too. Who wouldn't? But she ducked as I yelled at her,

"No—don't touch her! Frances—No!" and I was down that floor like a flash, to grab her arm and stop her. She almost

fell, what with the surprise, and my clutch.

"Steady . . ." I said. "Sorry to yell at you like that, but I had a reason." Ursula was frowning, until I asked her for her cigarette case. It was in the big pocket of her smock, I knew. She got it out.

"I'll replace it," I promised. Then I handed it to Frances. "You were going to grab Ursula's hand and shake it, weren't you? Firmly? Well, now. You take hold of this

case, and grip it just as you would have done . . ." and the frown went away from Ursula's face, to be replaced by a grey shock, as she saw the metal case buckle and crunch in those

dainty fingers. Frances was horrified, too.

"Not to worry, either of you," I soothed. "This is the way it was with me, too, at first. I used to crush pencils and things. It's something to be learned. You have a very powerful body there, Frances. Stronger than mine, if anything." Poor Ursula was still staring at the buckled wreck of her case, as if it was a bomb that might go off in her face any moment.
"Think of your hand," I said. "I believe your hands were

the very first things I noticed about you. Without them Frances

wouldn't have been possible."

It was a bad moment, but it passed soon enough, as Frances grew calmer, and more confident with her movements. She was managing quite well, but she still had a complaint.

"It feels different, somehow, Johnny," she said. "All over. My feet on the floor-my arms, and shoulders-as if there was

something missing."

Then Ursula chimed in, to make us all feel foolish. She went to the chair where she had been sitting and fished out from

under it a crackling brown-paper bag, held it up.
"This is what you need," she said, severely.

two silly old men, and one clever-but-stupid mechanical copy it's no wonder you hadn't realised. My dear, you're stark naked! That's what's wrong." And, you know, we hadn't thought of it! Trust a woman to remember that kind of detail. "Come along with me," Ursula ordered. "If the gentlemen will excuse us, I'll introduce you to the peculiar horrors of dress."

"I've never worn clothes before. How do you know they

"You have worn clothes, you know. His! And as for fitwho should know better than I do what your size is? Come on !"

"The complications begin to grow," Doc nodded, as soon as they were gone. "You have a big job, here, my boy. A full grown woman, with a beautiful body-but in many ways still a child. And there are some things you cannot teach her. She will have to learn from other women. It will be difficult . . ." That left a way wide open for me to introduce my own particular

problem, but before I could get my tongue round it, they were back. The transformation was unbelievable. I had thought Frances beautiful when she went out, ideal, like a goddess—but now she was 'real' and 'human,' and very lovely. And a trifle shy. She was carrying her shoes.

"I couldn't possibly wear these," she wailed. "I should fall..." but the rest of her was superb. A simple blue sheathdress in the latest sparkle-weave fabric, short-sleeved, slashed low in front, fitting like a glove. It made all the difference. She made her way to a seat, gingerly, and had three tries before she got the knack of sweeping her skirt under her as she sat. "This feels worse," she confessed. "So many funny things underneath. I feel all strapped and tied."

"You'll get used to it," Ursula said, confidently. "And you're lucky in one thing, at least. You'll never need to wear

a bra . . .

Then, outside, bells began to ring, sirens hooted, and we could hear voices raised in cheering and singing. It was midnight. Happy New Year. I hope it is going to be a happy one. The humans had to go to bed, quite soon, of course, but Frances and I sat and looked out of the window, and talked, about all sorts of things. In a way, we are closer together now than ever before. If it wasn't so screamingly ridiculous, on the face of it, I'd say we were in love with each other. At any rate, I feel for her as I have never felt for any woman in my life.

And she's a woman, right enough. It must be a latent instinct or something, but the one thing that has intrigued her more than anything is a mirror. Only a small make-up glass, which Ursula handed over, before she went to bed, but Frances has been studying her face in it, ever since. I must try to get a full-length mirror, as soon as possible. There isn't one

anywhere in this house.

Tonight we had hoped to go out for a walk, but she cannot manage her shoes very well, yet, so we have put it off. Ursula has gone off, with a hefty cheque, our sincere goodwill, and a standing invitation to call round any time. There isn't a lot of money left now, but there should be enough to let us go shopping for clothes. Oddly enough, that's something I've never bothered about. I have one complete outfit, and that's all. I suppose I ought to have a change, too.

Saturday, January 8th, 1983.

We have had a tragedy, this week, and a really desperate upset, from which we haven't properly recovered. It may be silly for a person in my place to talk of forebodings, but I have them, just the same. I feel sure there is something in wait for us, something more terrible than anything we have yet met. The feeling is so real that I have asked Doc to check up on my brain, just to be sure there isn't anything wrong with it. He did, too, just to relieve me, although he assured me that it was ridiculous.

That brain-unit is a lovely bit of mechanism, by the way. It is so nicely designed that, apart from the need to renew the battery once a month, the whole thing is self-contained. As Doc put it 'Like an aquarium, in complete equilibrium, with everything recycling and regenerating.' It is the same with Frances, too. So it can't be my brain, and it must be 'me,' because Frances doesn't feel anything like this. No premonitions. Just the reverse. Now that she's got the 'feel' of her body, she's on the go all the time. Sunday we went out for a walk, and again on Monday. It was snowing, great feathery flakes, but the cold didn't bother us, and she was enthralled. Never been out in the snow before.

She has never been in a shop, or on a bus, or in the Underground. So many things. When the good weather comes round we must go further afield, to see the countryside, even to play games. Swimming is the one thing we are barred, as we weigh differently. So Doc says. But she ought to be a whiz at tennis. And she is keen on dancing, too. That's something I have had to take up along with her, as it wouldn't be wise to turn her over to an unsuspecting dance-instructor. But we have had fun, especially with clothes. She looks marvellous in just about anything, and it's a scream to hear her reports of the way the sales-girls react to her shape. I've got some new suits, too.

We have also had serious talks. For one thing, we need to earn some money—and we need a purpose in life—and that is not so easy to find. Frances is full of ideas, none of them very satisfactory. For one thing, we could earn a good bit of money in entertainment, on the stage, at just about anything—singing, dancing, acrobatics—and we may have to, in the long run. But I doubt if either of us would like it much. There must be something much more worthwhile we can do surely?

Anyway, what with exploring the everyday world, and doing our regular 'physical jerks' we keep fairly busy. I keep meaning to get Doc on the job of explaining some basic biology to Frances, but the opportunity never seems to come up. He stays home most of the time, just sitting and chatting with old Klein, taking things easy. I have to keep reminding myself that those two are in their seventies. Not that they are out of touch, though. Between them, they have cooked up a little intercom system, so that we can all talk to each other, no matter where we are. It's connected to the house-intercom at that end, and, at our end, it's a matter of Frances and I wearing a little wrist-strap fitting each. Like a two-way radio. That, in fact, was how the blow fell, on Friday, just before noon. We were in Regent Street, just window-shopping, when I heard the little warning buzz, and put my wrist to my ear.

"Johnny—Frances—I think it would be best if you come home, quick. Old Roger is sinking, fast!" Well, we didn't waste any time, but he was dead before we could get there.

Doc met us.

"There was nothing I could do," he said, sadly. "It was his heart. It just decided to give up. It had to come, sometime. He didn't suffer anything." That was true enough. The old man looked peaceful, in his chair. I couldn't help thinking, and I said so, that it was ironic he should have been the means of giving life to us, but it couldn't be done for him.

"Don't think like that, my boy," Doc advised. "Even if we had tried, it would not have done any good. We can slow down age a bit—but we cannot put it in reverse. His brain was old. So is mine. That kind of thing cannot be undone. Is it not a saying 'You cannot put an old head on young shoulders "? And that is absolutely true. Now, if you will excuse me, there are things to be done. The authorities must be informed—certificates and such . . ."

"What about Mike? We have to let him know."

"Do you know where he is?"

"No," I said, "but I do know how to get him," and I pointed out that call-switch that Klein had showed me. And I operated it. "That will bring him, sooner or later," I said.

It was a sad business. Frances went off to her own room, to grieve a bit. She had liked the old man a lot. I had something else on my mind. A mercenary thought, maybe, but it was there, just the same. What was to become of us, now? It would be up to Mike Hawker, in the end, and for all that I had

nothing positive against him, was a partner of his, in a way, I didn't feel at all easy. I didn't fancy the possible prospect of having to 'beg' from him. Not very noble thoughts, and I wasn't very proud of them. Much to our surprise, Mike turned up about two o'clock, came charging in, where we were sitting, without a word of warning.

"What's happened?" he demanded. Doc told him, in simple words, and led him away to view the body. Then he came back and sat by me. I got the impression he was waiting for something. After a few minutes, Mike came back to us. "Well . . ." he said, as abrupt and forthright as ever,

"Well..." he said, as abrupt and forthright as ever, "That's it. No sense in grieving. We have practical things to think about. Let's take the case of 'Expendages,' first. It's going like a storm. A big stack of orders all booked up, and two firms already tooling up to make the models. Here ..." He unzipped a case and produced a folder, "... your copies of the deals. All in order." I reached to take them, and saw Frances come to the door. He caught my look and turned. I saw his whole attitude change, the way most men do when they first meet a very attractive girl. He straightened up, put on a big smile.

"I don't think I've had the pleasure," he said, and I didn't blame him. Frances, any time, is enough to make any

man brighten up.

"You have, you know," I said. "You've met, but not formally. Mike, this is Miss Frances Walker." He nodded, stuck out his hand and was in mid-step to go to her when it clicked. It was like turning off a light. All the brilliantinesmile and gallant poise fell away. He stiffened, dropped his hand.

"Well I'm damned," he grunted, with a grin that was not nice to see. "Had me fooled for a minute. I thought it was real. Pretty good job, at that. Real cute!" and he swung away as if she had ceased to exist. "Now, about those contract deals . . ." and that was as far as he got, because I stopped him. I'd seen the shock of hurt and dismay on her face, and I was burning.

"Just a minute," I said, as evenly as I could manage.
"You'll have to forget the gadgets for a minute. I think you

owe Miss Walker an apology !"

He stared at me. Then he laughed.

"Come off it," he said. "Miss Walker! That's no more Miss Walker than you're Johnny Dawson, and you know it. You really expect me to say' sorry' and behave nicely to a hunk of machinery?" He was closer to death, at that moment, than he had ever been in his life before, I'll swear. It was Frances who stopped me from smashing him. In that room, she was the only one who could. I had taken a handful of the front of his coat, and he was on his toes and going purple in the face before she managed to break my fingers loose. He was scared, but, quite honestly, I don't think it changed his attitude in the least. I doubt if anything could have done that.

"Let him go, John," she said, very quietly. "I don't think he meant to be rude. He just wasn't thinking." So I put him down, and he coughed a bit, then shrugged his jacket straight.

shook himself.

"What's the big idea?" he growled. "Did I do something wrong? Look, I'll say it again. This . . ." he prodded me in the chest, ". . isn't Johnny Dawson, and this . ." he prodded her in the same place, ". . isn't Frances Walker, is it? No need to grind your gears on that, is there? It's true, isn't it? Just two hunks of machinery, that's all. You two, what there is of you, are down in the basement, in a couple of cabinets. Right? So what's all the fuss about?"

"Better leave it like that, Johnny," Doc warned, quietly.

"There is no gain in making an issue out of it."

"Now that's sense," Mike turned to him, grinning. "It's all in the point of view, after all. Mind you . . ." he spun back to Frances again, "I'll go so far as to say this is a fine job. It had me fooled. Those curves . . ." he put out a hand to feel. She was quicker than me, this time. He had the flat of his hand on her bosom when she took him by the wrist. That was all. But I heard the agonised gasp he gave, and I saw the way he screwed up on his toes at her grip. Then he tried to wrench his hand free, and she tightened her grip just a shade.

"It may be just a point of view to you, Mr. Hawker," she said, grimly, "but that will be all, as far as I am concerned. This is me that you are looking at and trying to touch—you

just try it once more, and you'll be sorry."

He jerked again, got his other hand to her fingers, tried to pry them apart. She just stood there, holding him helpless. For one hideous moment, he went completely mad, raving and jerking, until she caught his other wrist-and he was quite

futile. Then, all at once, he broke-went quite calm.

"All right . . ." he mumbled. "You're stronger than I am. I give up." She let him go, so that he reeled for a moment, then he staggered to a chair and sat. There were angry red blotches on his wrists where she had laid hold of him.

"Insane," he muttered, like a man half-drunk. "Doesn't make sense-couple of machines-ordering me about in my own home. Pretending to be people. It's ridiculous. You can't do that! This is my home..." his voice had been climbing all the while until, by the last words it was a scream. "Get out! Go on, get out! And take your brains with you out!" It was a disgusting and terrifying sight, but Doc

seemed to have been expecting it.

"Watch him, Johnny," he instructed me. "Don't hurt him, if you can help it. I will be back in a moment." He slipped out, while Mike went on raving at us from the chair. One word seemed to obsess him. Machines. It was incredible, in his book, that a machine should turn round and revolt against him! Then Doc was back, with a long and business-like envelope.

He went to stand, so that Mike had to look up at him.

"Mike!" he said, firmly, cutting through the babbling. "Try to control yourself, and listen to me. I am sorry to have to tell you in this way, but you have to know, sometime. This is not vour home."

"Eh? What are you mumbling about, you old fool? Of course this is my home. Mine and Uncle Roger's—and he's dead, now, so it's all mine."

"No, Mike. Your Uncle Roger left a will, and I have a copy of it here. You can read it, if you like, but the lawyers will bring the official copy soon enough, so that you can hear them. I will tell you—he left everything he had, everything to John Dawson and Frances Walker." Well, I was so stunned by this that I almost wasn't quick enough to catch Mike as he sprang out of his chair at Doc, like an animal.

"It's a trick, a forgery—you made him do it—it's not legal. A couple of robots can't inherit anything. It's not legal . . ." He got so violent that I had a job to hold him without hurting him. In the end, Doc had to nip off and get a sedative, an

injection. Then I put him to bed in his own room.

Then Doc explained. The legal phraseology was thick, but the gist was clear enough. Old Klein and Doc, between them, had consulted the best legal brains they could find, and they had it pretty well hammered down. 'The persons and personalities before-mentioned, their appurtenances, aids and equipment, the wholes together being considered to be John Ellis Dawson and Frances Walker' that phrase came several times. It all added up to the fact that we were his heirs, legally and indisputably. It is a damnable situation.

I don't blame Mike for feeling degraded, even if he has less manners than the machines he was calling us. I could even understand that a bit better after Doc had explained. Mike isn't insane, really. It is just that he cannot see us as people. To him there are two kinds of things—people and gadgets.

To him there are two kinds of things—people and gadgets.

"It is pathological," Doc said, "and apparent in him all the time. There are many people like him. Most of us grow up to develop a 'super-ego,' what is called a conscience. We know there are things we must not do, even if we want to. But Mike is morally deficient, in that respect. He has no sense of right and wrong, only those things which he can do, and those he can't. Anything he can do—that is right, for him. And he has lived all his life with gadgets. To him, they are slaves, to do what he wants. It is inconceivable, to him, that a machine should talk back."

That made a kind of sense, but it left a great big question unanswered. What were we going to do with him? He didn't come round again until nearly midnight, Friday. I took the somewhat dramatic precaution of tying his hands before I brought him back into the big upstairs room.

"Now," I said, firmly, "this is a damn silly situation. We don't like it any more than you do, and we can have that will set aside, if you like. The only thing is, you'll have to give us time to get alternative accommodation. As you know, that

won't be easy."

"I know," he sneered. "You need your reliable power supply, and all the rest of it. And what are you going to do with me, in the meantime, eh? Keep me tied up?" That was the devil of it. We dared not turn him loose. "I might sneak off down to the basement, when your back's turned, and switch you off—eh? You can't trust me, can you? You damned machine!" For a moment, I thought he was going to start raving again, but he suddenly calmed, even managed a smile.

raving again, but he suddenly calmed, even managed a smile.

"No need to worry," he said. "You've got me all wrong.
Why should I want to harm you? Why, you even have my

contractural partnership! All right, so this is your house. I'll leave. Just give me time to repack my bag and get a thing or two and I'll go."

"Where will you go?" Frances asked. "Have you some-

where else to live?"

"Thanks for the kind thought, beautiful," he grinned. "And you are a beautiful thing, you know. I might even get ideas about you, if I stayed—and that wouldn't be so good, either, would it? Sure, I have somewhere—a little place of my

own, not far away. I'll be all right."

I had guessed as much, by the way in which he turned up so quickly in response to the alarm. We were only too glad to take his offer. I stood over him while he packed, escorted him to the door, and locked it securely after him—and that was one a.m. I doubt, very much, whether any one of us has felt comfortable, since.

Monday, January 10th.

The thirteenth anniversary of World Peace Week began yesterday, and we had almost forgotten it, what with all our worries and trials. Old Mr. Klein was cremated yesterday, and we have had the lawyers in. I gather they have already had an interview with Mike, and that not only does he now know the will is legal, but has raised no objections. I don't like that, somehow. They couldn't tell us just how much the estate would be, but it will be considerable.

I have never felt so nervous in my life, especially when we are out. I know it is ridiculous, because Mike couldn't do anything to us, even if he had a mind to. It's just the feeling that he is there, somewhere, waiting—cooking something. I'm sure he is. Doc and I have been busy securing the door of that basement room with a special lock. I'm pretty sure Mike couldn't get in there, anyway, even if he managed to break into the house. I think Frances is just as distressed as I am, but she doesn't show it. She gets lovelier every day.

Tuesday, January 11th.

London is crammed with uniforms of all kinds, all the old souvenirs of the turbulent past. The big announcement is that they are going to open the new pleasure Dome, in Battersea Park, especially for Peace Week. Frances has never been in a fairground, so I must take her. It will be an experience. Ursula Crane called, this evening, just to visit and gossip. She

and Frances talked a lot about dress and fashion, although Ursula did say that she had invested the major part of her fee from us in buying shares in the business where she works. She declares that Frances could get a job as a model, any time. It was nice to see Ursula again. It helped to take our mind off the real problem.

But this suspense is terrible. It's making me nervous. I wish I knew where Mike Hawker is and what he's up to—if

anything.

Thursday, January 13th, 1982.

It is just on noon. I must be very careful with this, as it is probably the last entry I shall ever be able to make in this old diary. A lot of terrible things have happened, so many that I still feel a bit confused. Just this morning, we have had an official visit. Two gentlemen representing a special branch of Military Intelligence—that's as much as I am empowered to say, here. They have made us a very special offer—more like a threat than anything else. In view of the attending circumstances, I don't see how we can do other than accept. The

alternative just won't bear thinking about.

Mike Hawker is dead. I have the late editions of the morning papers on my desk, here, as I write. The story is there, very briefly, in a box on the back page. It reads: 'Acting on information received, police forced an entry to an upstairs flat in Kensal Road, early this morning. They found a great quantity of experimental electrical apparatus, in obvious disorder, and the body of a man. He was subsequently identified as Michael Hawker, a well-known experimenter and inventor. Hawker, who had been dead only a short while, must have been electrocuted due to some fault in the device he was working on. Death was practically instantaneous. The police are continuing their investigations . . .'

That's all there is to that, but the last bit isn't true. As the man from M.I. told us, the investigations can be held off, if we accept his offer. The full facts of the case will never get any further than this account which I am going to set down here. There's another piece, in this same paper, in the 'London Gossip' section, which is related, although no-one would suspect it. It reads: 'GIRL RUNS AMOK IN FAIR-GROUND.' According to various excited, and, one suspects, slightly hysterical eye-witnesses, a young woman lost her balance last night, in all the glitter and glare of the great

Pleasure Dome. Making the excitement more intense, she is said to have given a fantastic display of acrobatics and daring feats. One dazed man reported that she had been seen in the lion-cage, bare handed and well nigh bare everything else, defying the assembled kings of the jungle. Another report has it that she was seen leaping from track to track of the high and dizzy Himalayan Railway ride, again in a state of undress. This reporter can confirm that the police were called, that there was a disturbance—but no arrests were made, and the lady, if she existed, was never identified. It is the opinion of this column that either (a) this was a publicity stunt that backfired, as it richly deserved to do, being in extremely poor taste; or (b) that the many patrons of the Pleasure Dome should be advised to take more water with their Coka-Coola, in future.'

I don't know who the reporter was, but that account is a masterpiece of understatement. I know, because I was there. And the unidentified young lady was Frances. I can't blame the newspaper for writing the whole thing off as a stunt. They could never have printed the truth, even if they had known it.

It started, gently enough, about four p.m. Wednesday. We had had the legal gentlemen in again, to discuss complicated papers and to get our signatures to various documents. Then we had nothing to do but kick our heels in idleness. It was snowing again, heavily, and almost dark. Frances began to complain of feeling heavy and listless, which was so unusual that Doc got worried.

"We know so very little about these things," he told me, in "There is nothing wrong with the brain, or the equipment. I have checked. So I can only guess that this must be due to the worry, and the repression."

"Can't blame her. I'm feeling as jumpy as a cat, myself. It's this continual nag about Mike, wondering what he's up

"If anything," Doc pointed out. "It is possible that he has

abandoned the whole business, you know."

"It's possible, yes. But you don't believe that any more than I do."

"It is true," he sighed. "Mike is not the kind to give up easily. All right—but you need something to do. Weren't you

talking about going to the fairground?"

"Yes. It's a bit early, I suppose, but we'll go, anyway. If we walk, that'll help to kill time a bit. Unless you fancy coming with us . . ?"

"Not for me," he chuckled. "I am too old for the bright lights and the noises. I will stay home, here. I have always plenty to do, if it is only to sit and think."

So, about four-thirty, away we went. I had my doubts about leaving the old man all by himself, but it would have been foolish to mention them. And it made Frances perk up, at once. She was dressed all in white, white shoes, in the latest vogue, semi-transparent half-calf height, a white fur-fabric coat over a white blouse and knee-short pin-pleated skirt—she looked wonderful. We took our time getting to the Pleasure Dome, for the sheer pleasure of walking the streets in all the sparkle and dazzle of the thickly falling snow among the street lamps and the bright-lit shop windows. There were crowds of cheery-faced people everywhere, and more than one man turned to look again as Frances went by on my arm. It took us over an hour to get to the Dome.

It was my first time there, too, so it was to be an experience for both of us. When the old fun-fair and gardens were destroyed in that disastrous fire of '79, there was a great public outcry over the loss. People took it badly that in the whole of the great Capital City, there was no permanent place of general enjoyment and relaxation. It was a general feeling that there should be some sort of establishment worthy of the name. where Londoners could go to enjoy themselves. That's how the great Pleasure Dome came to be built, and I must say they made a wonderful job of it. The whole thing is a perfect circle, half-a-mile in diameter, completely dome-covered, the roof supported by a huge central structure which is a hollow column containing rest-rooms, restaurants, viewing galleries, and a dance-hall floor at ground level. This is known, quite simply, as the Column.

The outer periphery is another series of galleries, or promenades, on three levels, called 'The Walks.' The rest is open space, composition-floored, given over to just about every kind of fair-ground entertainment you have ever heard of. In the four quarters immediately surrounding the Column there are a roller rink, an ice rink, a zoo, and a swimming pool. There's the big dipper ride called the Himalayan Railway, a huge Ferris Wheel, Dodgems, a Mirror Maze, and a host of other items—side shows, every sort of trick and swindle the money-making mind can conceive.

We paid our 5/- entrance charge, received a disc-map of the enclosure, and both of us were semi-stunned, at first, by the

sheer impact of noise and glare.

"There's so much of it!" Frances said, wide-eyed. It took my breath, too. The roof is one hundred and eighty feet high at the column, arching down to fifty feet at the perimeter, and every square foot of it is fluorescent panel-lighting. And great blaring loudspeakers everywhere. It took us a few minutes to adjust ourselves. Then Frances plumped for the mirror-maze, and I wasn't a bit surprised. She still gets a thrill out of looking at herself in a mirror, and I can't blame her for that. It was fun, and, in a way, very good training for both of us, her more than me. She had never before put her foot down, all unsuspecting, on a shifting floor, or had her own image come at her from four directions at once, nor had a concealed jet of wind blow her skirts up around her face. There were distortions in some of the mirrors, too. It was quite an experience.

Compared with that, the ghost-train was tame. But the overand-over looping of a long-armed arrangement called 'Rocket to the Moon' shattered her sense of location so completely that we had to sit down for a while, until she could get over being

dizzy.

"People do this for fun?" she demanded, and I had to laugh.
"You'll soon get used to it," I told her. "Ordinary people get just as scared as you were, but they get a thrill out of being scared, because it bumps up their glandular stimulation. That won't work on us, worse luck."

Skating was a bit beyond us, of either kind, and so was swimming, but we did walk through the small zoo, to let Frances see real lions, tigers and monkeys. Then she set her heart on the Ferris Wheel.

"The very thought of it frightens the life out of me," she confessed, as we looked up at it. "That's why I'm determined

to go on it. Can we, Johnny?"

"If that's what you want, all right," I said, with more calm than I felt. In the face of her courage, I couldn't very well do otherwise, but she wasn't any more nervous than me. I have never had any head for heights at all. Still, people were going on, and coming off again, unhurt—and imagination is a fine thing, so long as it is kept in its proper place. So we got in the line. There were only a few before us, as the place was almost deserted, so early in the evening. Now, to me, that thing seems

to go backwards. You get into a little bucket-seat which is incredibly flimsy, and it wobbles. You sling a thin bar across

your waist-and then you're off-backwards and up.

Then, all at once, it stops and sways, and you wonder whether it has broken or something, until you realise that it's just another car being loaded up, at the bottom. Then, heave up, you're away again. Frances clutched my arm, and I tried not to look as green as I felt, as we did one complete loop. That feet-first dive into nowhere, forward and down, was the worst part of the whole thing. Over again, and just as we had reached the very top of the loop, and I was stealing myself for that forward-and-down plunge, the thing stopped again, and we hung there, swaying. Another car being loaded. I took the chance offered to have a casual-seeming look around the huge enclosure. And then . . .

Frances stood up, suddenly, in the car, and I grabbed at her with one frantic hand, clutching the side of the car with the

other. It rocked perilously.

"Johnny . . !" she screamed, ". . . I can't . . ." and she seemed to shiver. I was hanging on to her arm, and it felt like the twanging of a cord. Then, in abrupt violence, she jerked her arm free of my clutch, almost flinging me from my seat, so that I had to grab the side and hang on. Standing, teetering, she turned to me, with a hideously beautiful smile on her face, a leer.

"Goodbye, Johnny Dawson," she said, and her voice was hard, different. Then she swivelled round again, scrambled over the side of the swinging car, got her hand to the tubular steel-work of the wheel itself, and swung out, like a monkey, to hang there. I was too flabbergasted and frightened to do anything more than hang on for dear life and yell at her.

"Frances—for God's sake—what's the matter?" Then she had swung herself into the right position to get her foot on the edge of the car. She shoved down, and the car tilted.

"It's a long drop, Johnny," she cackled, "a long drop." She stamped again with her foot, the car tilted right over, and I was shot out, yelling. I have no clear idea just what did happen, in those horrid seconds. I had a giddy whirl of confused impressions, of flailing arms, grabbing at air, everything spinning round, screams—and then I walloped into something hard, and hung on, frantically. Then I saw that I had caught the back of the car ahead of us, which was in front and slightly

below. There were two young girls in there, and screaming their heads off, because my weight was dragging their car over backwards. I could see their faces, upside down, and all contorted with terror, their long legs up in the air, skirts flying, their frantic fists beating at my fingers to make me let go. Then, crazily, I saw the nearby framework, and reached for it. Then I could let go their car. I hung on, blindly. I didn't dare look down.

I felt the wheel begin to move again, and then stop. Far away, there was the ocean-roar of the crowd. Then a man's

voice, and a tap on my shoulder.

"Here—you all right, guv?" Then I was brave enough to open my eyes to see that I was at the bottom. The attendant was staring at me. "What happened up there?" he demanded. "You're not supposed to get out, like that!"

"I didn't get out," I said, foolishly. "I fell out. It was an accident. I'm all right, now. What about the lady—what—?"
"So that's what it was?" he shook his head. "I thought I

"So that's what it was?" he shook his head. "I thought I was seeing things, straight I did. She come nipping down the frame like a monkey, she did, on the far side, and run off . . ."

"Which way did she go?"

"Over that way, I think. Here, Guv, you left 'er coat . . ."
But I couldn't stop any longer to deal with him. I was unsteady, and horribly bewildered, but I could think of only one thing, that I had to find and catch Frances. Obviously, something had gone wrong with her—a breakdown, or short-circuit, or something. I didn't know what, but I had to find her. I shoved through the crowd, thickening now, straining my eyes for a sight of that white dress and golden hair. It seemed to be the most common combination of all. There were dozens of false alarms. Then I did see her, and she must have seen me at the same time, for she seemed to duck back into a little crowd that was making its way into the zoo enclosure. I put on speed, jostling past protesting people.

I broke into a run, and called out, "Frances!" But she had gone inside. I felt sure there was madness here. The excitement possibly, had deranged her, or upset some circuits. I had to catch her before she did herself an injury. Into the zoo enclosure I went, up and down the lines of cages and I couldn't see her anywhere. There weren't many people in there—not enough to hide in—where could she have gone? Then I saw

her, and if I had a heart, it would have stopped, right there. In the centre of the zoo-space was a circular cage, raised up a foot above ground-level, containing a dozen great maned lions, and there she was, right in the middle of them, staring at me with an evil smile. I went to the bars.

"Frances . . ." I strove to be calm. "Please come out of there—come out—please!" But she just stood, and laughed. It was a laugh to make chills in ordinary blood. I felt sick. "Come and get me," she offered, still in that strange, hard

"Come and get me," she offered, still in that strange, hard voice. "Come on. Never mind the pussies—they won't hurt you—see?" and she put up a foot to give a contemptuous shove to one of the great beasts that went past. It swayed aside, flattened its ears, snarled, and went on.

"Hey!" cried an angry voice by my side. "That's no way to treat those cats!" It was a uniformed keeper. "She's not in any great danger, just yet. They have only just been fed, but we've got to get her out of there before they get to playing

about. There'll be a bloody row about this"

"How the devil did she get in?" I wanted to know and saw the answer almost as soon as I asked the question. As I saw it, so did he. About three feet away, around the curve to my left, the bars had been wrenched apart—and one of the prowling lions had seen the gap just as we saw it, was coming to investigate. I claim no credit for acting quickly, here. I had had so many shocks that all my common-sense values had left me by this time. Two steps and a scramble and I had those bars in my hands. I swung a foot through, shoved the lion squarely on his black muzzle, and strained the bars together again. The lion snarled, drew back, dabbed at me with a paw, and tore away the leg of my tousers from the knee. I felt the jar of the blow—but it brought me to a sharp realisation of something I had completely overlooked up to now. It had been little effort to straighten those bars. It must have been easier still for Frances to bend them.

And Frances—there in that cage—was in no danger at all. She was not in the cage. What was there was a machine, driven by her unbalanced mind. And knowing the potential of that machine, I knew that the danger, if any, was to the prowling animals. The keeper was white-faced as I dropped down by him.

"What's going on, here?" he breathed, looking from her to me. "You can't bend those bars like that! Oh my God, just

look at her!" Incredibly, no more than a dozen or so of the people had noticed anything unusual going on and I think those who did see had difficulty believing their eyes. For Frances was deliberately tormenting the impatient animals. She cuffed one, briskly, kicked another in the ribs, and caught hold of the plumed tail of a third, tugging. The beast snuggled down on its haunches, at once, turning its head back and snarling. The game couldn't last long like that. Out of her range of vision, one great cat came up, at her back, stood on one paw, lashed out with the other and she went reeling, with the blouse hanging in ribbons from her shoulders.

The tail-pulled one spun round, leaped, and she went down. I heard the keeper groan. Then he gasped, and there was a strangled, throaty scream from the cage as she got up again, and literally threw away the beast that was on top of her. Her long hair in wild disarray, and stripped to the waist, she turned to meet another sit-up-and-swipe attack, snapping out a slim arm to strike down the clawed blow. We heard the crack of bone clearly over the snarling screams—and saw a dangling paw. The noise was enough to sicken any stomach, now. Above it all was her hideous laughter, and her unprintable invitations to the great cats to come and play some more. One remote part of my mind wondered that Frances knew such fluency of impreciation. Where had she ever heard cursing like that?

The lions were losing heart. Two of them were injured, the rest cautious. She laughed again, went deliberately after one, met it in a stand-up grapple, and again we heard the grind and crack of bones, and fearful screams. Then she leaped free, stood a moment, in nothing but her long hair and a pair of scanty briefs, then she wheeled, ran to the bars, jerked them apart, was through, down into the crowd and away—amid a chorus of screams. On the run, I went round the cage, to seize and close the gaping bars, then I went after her.

But I was sick, inside. That incredible performance had shown me a lot of things very clearly. Not only was Frances completely irresponsible but there was no way of stopping her. Even if I did catch her, as I was trying to do, she was more powerful than I. It was absolutely useless to expect anyone else to get and hold her, if I couldn't do it. What the devil was I to do? I ran after her, because I couldn't think of anything else. She was easy enough to track. I had only to follow the

screams of the crowd. This is a free and easy age, but the sight of a near-naked young woman running around a fairground is still unusual enough to provoke a reaction. I prayed, as I ran, that no-one would be so foolish as to get in her way. She headed, as I could tell, in the direction of the great meccano-like structure of the Himalayan Railway. I saw that lithe, smooth figure begin climbing up the outside girders long before I reached the crowd at the foot.

Like the rest of them, I stood, staring up, and holding my breath. At one span, she slipped, and the crowd gasped as she hung by one hand and spun—then she caught her grip again. A metallic something fell from her arm, glinting and sparkling in the lights, as she went on, and up. The thing fell near me, and shattered, but not before I had seen what it was—and realised what I had to do. It was her communicator. I cursed myself for a fool for not thinking of it sooner, then brought my wrist close to my mouth, thumbing the call switch. As I waited, fuming, I could see her still going up. Then Doc's voice came.

"Yes, Johnny? What is it?"

"Doc . . ." I said, "just listen—don't ask questions. Frances has gone mad—completely insane. She's running wild, has had a stand-up fight with the lions in the zoo-cage, has lost almost all her clothes, and is at this moment in the act of climbing up the outside of the switchback railway. You're the only one who can stop her—you understand?"

"All right . . ." he said, quickly. "I shall switch her off—

yes ?"

"No, hold on," I snapped. "She's climbing, right now. If she falls, she could kill somebody. You get by the transmitter. I'll tell you when, as soon as it's a safe position, all right? I'm going up after her—you keep listening."

"I got you, Johnny," he said. "Give me a minute or two to get downstairs, then I switch her right off, just as soon as you

say."

So I started to climb. I don't recall very much of it. As I say, I have no head for heights. If it had been possible for me to sweat, I would have been soaked. As it was, all I could think of was that elusive pink-and-white figure up there ahead of me, laughing and climbing. I remember feeling the shudder of the framework, which told me that there were still cars

running on it, and I wondered at that, in a vague fashion. But that was a minor thing. I saw her get to the high-point of the structure, where the endless-belt turns over after hoisting the free carriages. She turned to look back at me. She was lying down, with just her face visible over the edge, and her long hair whipping in the breeze.

"Come and get me," she invited, jeeringly, "if you can. I'll wait for you, with these . . ." and she spread her hands, like talons. I could see the grease and filth on them. Then Doc's

voice, from my wrist.

"Ready, whenever you say, Johnny!"

"Any minute now," I mumbled, then I put my head back, looked up at her and called, "Frances—keep still, where you are. I'm going to switch you off!"

"You're going to what?" she jeered. "You can't switch me

off, Johnny Dawson!"

"Right, Doc," I said, "Now!" and I waited. But that wild laughter went on, unabated. I heard Doc's voice again.

"All off, Johnny. Is it okay?"

"You sure?" I demanded, "She's just as lively as ever,

"It is not possible. The brain is completely disconnected . . ." and still that spine-chilling laughter went on, and that hideous, beautiful face stared at me, mocking.

"Switch me off, eh? Come on up—come closer—so I can get hold of you, and smash you, you bloody machine!" Then I knew. I didn't know how, but I knew. I didn't need Doc's voice in my ear.

"It is crazy, Johnny. Whatever is operating that body, it is

not Frances."

"You're right," I said, numbly. "It isn't. It's Mike Hawker!" Any odd fears and shocks I had felt, so far, paled into nothing alongside the real terror I felt now. Mike Hawker, obviously insane and in full charge of a machine that he understood and appreciated probably better than anyone else. I hung as I was, and I tried to flog my wits into some kind of sane thinking.

"He's raving mad, obviously," I mumbled. "But he has charge of that body—somehow. What the hell are we to do? He's dangerous, anyway, and ten times more so, now. And I

can't stop him. You know that !"

"This is strange," my wrist radio mumbled, "He must have made a duplicate transmitter, somehow. It is possible."

"Look—never mind how!" I yelled. "He's doing it. That's good enough. How the blazes are we going to stop him?"

"I have an idea—I think," Doc muttered. "Can you keep

him busy for about ten minutes, maybe, Johnny?"

"I can try," I said, and Doc's voice went away, then. That left me, in mid air, hanging on to the scaffolding, looking up. All at once I saw that lovely face duck back out of sight. I swung in through the structure, to peer up in between the gaps, and I saw 'him' struggling to tear up one of the cross-ties which held the rails. He was going to chuck it down at me, I imagine. I swung on all the way through and up the far side, desperately, and managed to get up as far as the top. I got my chest over, just as he threw himself flat again, to peer down.

It was crazy to think of that naked, shapely form, lying there, as 'he' or 'she,' either. It lay there a moment, craning over, away from me. Then it whipped back, suspiciously, and saw me struggling on to the run-way. Then, in between us, just breaking free of the belt-hoist, came a gaudily-painted car, clicking and rattling. My reflexes were the fastest, here. I stood up, jumped, scrambled, managed to grab the side, and fell into the car, all in a heap. It went falling away down the incline, gathering speed crazily. I struggled to a crouch, peering over the back of the seat, to see that slim and lovely thing shake its fist in sudden baffled rage. Then it began to run, long legs twinkling over the ties, to stumble and slip and go tumbling over and over, and slam into the side in a sprawl of arms and legs.

Then my carriage hammered into the foot of the dip and surged up the far side, dragging me down. I caught a far-away glimpse of that naked thing getting to its feet, peering, and then turning to go cat-foot back up the slope. Then the networking trestles were in the way, and I hung on, anxiously, as my carriage climbed to the top of its run and went hurtling round a tight bend. There came another falling-away drop and I had lost sight of the pink and white thing that was Mike Hawker, now. That worried me. I stood up as much as I dared, peering about. I couldn't believe that he had abandoned the chase, not yet. But I was helpless. My speed was such that I hadn't the nerve to jump out, and I was being carried away from the scene of action. I wondered, with part of my mind,

just what Doc was up to. Whatever it was, it had better work. The carriage rattled into the foot of another upclimb, battering me down with the drag and I caught just a brief glimpse of a sleek, naked thing, hanging from the cross-girders over the track ahead. Rattling helplessly along, I saw it come overhead, and drop—it seemed, right on top of me—but it landed, solidly, in the front seat, to shatter the stout wooden barrier between front and back.

"Now!" he said, and it was his voice, all right—how had I failed to spot that? "This is your finish, Johnny Dawson!" and he came over the ruined back of the seat in a scramble of feminine curves. It was nightmare to have to fend off, to strike at the lovely face, that beautiful body, to meet the awful snarl on that sweet face, but desperation is a hard driver. I was desperate, make no mistake about it. I had only one very slim advantage—that I was more familiar with my body than he was with that one-which made me a shade faster. And he had long hair. I grabbed for that, at once, twisted my hand into a really good grip of it. There was no question of rules, of fair fighting, for either of us. It was grab and bash, and twist and fall in that swaying, racing carriage. It took me only a split second to realise that he was after my eyes—the one logical weak spot—as he would have realised, being an engineer. For my part, I was intent on getting that slim form across my knee, somehow, with a handful of hair and an ankle or something to snap that spine—the weakest part of that body, as I knew.

But it would have been a farce, had it not been so deadly earnest. We couldn't hurt each other, in the conventional sense of the word. Had either of us been fully sane enough to think, we would have realised this, but, in those mad moments, I was just as insane as he was. I have only the vaguest memories of a struggle that seemed to go on for hours and then the car plunged into the gloom of a tunnel, began leaping in sharp dips towards the end of the run. By a slip and a fumble I lost my grip on that hair, he achieved a sudden leverage, and I went up and over the back of the car, to thump down on to the rails and roll over once. Dazed, I got up, saw the carriage disappear into the gloom ahead, then began to run unsteadily after it.

Doc's voice came, from my wrist. "Johnny—can you hear me?"

[&]quot;Listening," I said, trotting on to where a tiny spot of light was beginning to brighten the end of the tunnel, so that I could see the carriage and the thing in it, as black silhouettes.

"Are you clear of him, yes? Now-keep away for a minute

-I am going to stop him. Is it all right?"

"It's all right," I was still running, because I could see the light now opening out, and the gaping public, and that thing crouched in the back of the carriage, staring at me. "Whatever it is, do it quick."

Then the lovely, evil thing in the carriage stood up, ready to leap—and seemed to snap stiffly erect, arms jerking out, and I heard the most hideously awful scream I ever want to hear for the rest of my life. I can hear it now and I shall go on hearing it for many a long night to come. Then that fearful cry choked off, and the slim shapely figure slumped, lifeless. Still running, I came up to the carriage, heard the hiss of the braking beam, grabbed hold as it slid to a stop, and I stood there for a long moment, looking down at what I knew, instinctively, was a lifeless piece of mechanism.

"What the hell did you do, Doc?" I said, to my wrist.

" Did it work?"

"It worked-that's certain!"

"Good. Now, can you bring her home, right away, and I will explain. There is nothing more that Mike can do, but there will be much for us to do."

I gathered her up in my arms, breasted my way out of the enclosure, past the gaping sightseers, and I dimly remember the

Wheel attendant plucking at my arm.

"You forgot her coat, Guv," he said, anxiously. "You'll want it. It's a perishing cold night." I believe it was, but I felt nothing of it. Nor did the lay figure I carried. Somehow, I made my way out of the Dome, caught an auto-taxi, and took her home. It felt like 'her,' to me. Her—dead, in fact. I was too drained to think any further than that. I had lost Frances. Against that, nothing else seemed to matter very much. Doc was waiting for me, had me take her down to the basement and lay her out on the slab. Then I sat, while he checked up.

"I must do this quickly," he said, almost to himself, "as the police will be here, soon, and they will ask a lot of questions."

"The police?"

"But of course. I told them, as soon as I knew my scheme had worked. I made a call direct to the Assistant Commissioner himself. You will remember, he already knows about you—about us. And it was essential that Mike Hawker be

permanently stopped. What I did was just a temporary thing . . .

"What the devil did you do?"

"It was very simple, really," he smiled, as he kept on with his detailed checking. "It was obvious that Mike had made a duplicate transmitter. How else could he take control? So, the body had to be stopped in another way. All I did was to cut out some of the more delicate circuits, here, and to reset the controls. This transmitter was still lined up on the body, you see? Then, as you gave me the all clear, I shot a big surge of power through the body. It was about three million voltsonly for a split second, of course—but it was enough to burn out the key circuits. Now I must find which ones are dead, and replace them." As he had said, it was simple enough, once you knew. But a little question burned at the back of my mind, and grew bigger. That scream?
"Would a mechanical body scream just by overloading the

power?"

"Scream?" he looked up, all alert. "What are you saying,

"Just that this . . ." and I gestured to the lay figure he was examining, ". . . it screamed, and then collapsed!" That stopped his cunning old fingers in their flight. He stared at me, blankly. Then we heard the summons of the front door, and I went up. There was quite a delegation on the doorstep. A constable, and a sergeant, in uniform, a thick-set, brisk man in civilian dress, who introduced himself as Chief Inspector Harrison, and, in the background, the tall and urbane figure of the A.C. himself, Sir Cyril Coke. He was good enough to recognize me, at once.

"Ah, Dawson!" he said. "Meet again, eh? Funny business, this. May we come in and hear all about it?" Well, I brought them in, and made them comfortable, and told as much as I knew. The constable took it all down, dutifully, but I could see he was having trouble fitting his ideas to the things I was saying. I had just done my somewhat incoherent tale when Doc came in, with a strange and impish glint in his eye. I introduced him. Sir Cyril beamed.

"Heard of you, of course, Dr. Gabriel. Want to hear your side of this, but first of all, can you tell us where to find this

Hawker chap?"

"Yes, I think so," the old man went to a desk, got out some papers. "This is the address he gave to the lawyers. You will find his body there."

"Body? You mean . . .?"

"I am afraid Mike Hawker is very much dead, yes."

"Oh. Well, off you go, Harrison. Take care of it." The

uniforms departed, and Doc settled down to explain.

"I should have expected something like this," he began. "I remember that Mike was very curious about a phenomenon—threshold-impulses. I will explain, as I did to him. When you go to move any part of your body, there is a preliminary burst of nerve-messages before the actual movement. A sort of advance warning. Complete, but not enough to cause the actual movement. Think of it when you are sitting in a chair—you contemplate getting up, but you change your mind, at the last moment. Yet all the necessary messages have been passed, below the intensity level needed to initiate movement."

We both looked at him in some bewilderment, not knowing

what he was getting at.

"Adjusted to this low level," he went on, "and using the technique of the 'Expendages,' Mike would be able to sit quite still in a chair, and still give all the necessary commands to control that body—you see?"

Then I saw, at once. It took Sir Cyril a little bit more explaining, then he saw it, too. But we were still impatient for

the real revelation.

"I meant to burn out the delicate relays in the body," Doc said, musingly, "but, by sheer chance, I hit on the exact phase when the body was *sending*, and that three million volt surge was relayed direct to Mike, direct to his brain and nerves."

"He was electrocuted, you mean?" Sir Cyril demanded. That thought sickened me, for a moment, even though he had been mad, and bent on my destruction. Then, like a light in

darkness, another thought came.

"But that should mean that the body—that Frances . . .?"

"Quite right, my boy. She is all right. I switched her on, just now. She was frightened, of course, at first. But she is all

right."

I couldn't believe it. I wanted to dash off down to the basement to see, but Doc stopped me, made me wait. Then she came in, graceful, smiling, and as lovely as ever. She had taken the time to dress herself again, that was all. Sir Cyril

was very gallant, and I couldn't blame him. All I could do was hold her hand and look stupid. There was a lot of talk, after that, none of which has any place here, because the results of it were shown this morning.

We had just finished reading the heavily censored accounts in the news, those I have quoted, when there came another ring at the doorbell, and more guests. I had expected a summary arrest. Instead, we met two very quiet, very businesslike gentlemen, groomed and very sure of themselves. I will mention no names, nor can I give too many details, here. Just the gist, which was an offer, in simple terms. Either we-Frances and myself—pass into Government service, of a highly secret and very special kind, or the censorship which has been protecting us, up to now, will be completely called off, and we will have to take our medicine just as it comes, plus all the hysterical publicity and fear that will inevitably go with it. Also, as it was pointed out to us, the world may be in a nominal state of peace, but there are still power-groups and agencies seeking trouble. To them, once the word gets out, we would be the equivalent of a highly efficient weapon. would be after us, either to get control, or to destroy.

It's not a nice prospect. It looks as if we haven't a lot of choice, but it shouldn't be all that bad, in any case. We will have security, and the best of care. They have assured us of that. They have also extended those assurances to Doc, with plenty of freedom for further experiment and refinement. So, all in all, I think we are going to accept. But I really must get on to Doc, to have him talk to Frances like a father. You see,

I think we ought to get married, she and I.

John Rackham



Editorial (continued)

But my real objection to the central role now occupied by the space story is that its appeal is too narrow. Unlike the Western, science fiction can't rely for its existence upon the casual intermittent pleasure it may give to a wide non-specialist audience, if it is to hold its ground and continue to develop. As with most specialised media, it needs a faithful and discriminating audience who will go to it for specific pleasures, similar to the audience for abstract painting or serial music. The old-guard space opera fans, although they probably form the solid backbone of present s-f readership, won't be able to keep the medium alive on their own. Like most purists, they prefer their diet unchanged, and unless s-f evolves, sooner or later other media are going to step in and take away from it its main distinction the right to be the shop window of tomorrow.

Too often recently, when I've wanted intellectual excitement, I've found myself turning to music or painting rather than to science fiction, and surely this is the chief thing wrong with it at present. To attract a critical readership science fiction needs to alter completely its present content and approach. Magazine s-f was born in the 1930's and like the pseudostreamlined architecture of the '30's, it is beginning to look old-fashioned to the general reader. It's not simply that time travel, psionics and teleporting (which have nothing to do with science anyway and are so breath-taking in their implications that they require genius to do them justice) date science fiction, but that the general reader is intelligent enough to realise the majority of the stories are based on the most minor variations on these themes, rather than on any fresh imaginative leaps.

In other words, s-f is becoming academic. Historically, this type of academic virtuosity is a sure sign of decline, and it may well be that the real role science fiction has to play is that of a minor eclectic pastime similar to other baroque amusements such as Grand Guignol melodrama and astrological romances, its few magazines sustained by opportunist editorial swerves after the latest popular-science fad.

Rejecting this view, however, and believing that s-f has a continuing and expanding role as an imaginative interpreter of the future, how can one find a new well-spring of ideas?

Firstly, I think science fiction should turn its back on space, on interstellar travel, extra-terrestrial life forms, galactic wars and the overlap of these ideas that spreads across the margins of nine-tenths of magazine s-f. Great writer though he was, I'm convinced that H. G. Wells has had a disastrous influence on the subsequent course of science fiction. Not only did he provide it with a repertory of ideas that have virtually monopolised the medium for the last fifty years, but he established the conventions of its style and form, with its simple plots, journalistic narrative, and standard range of situation and character. It is these, whether they realise it or not, that s-f readers are so bored with now, and which are beginning to look increasingly out-dated by comparison with the developments in other literary fields.

I've often wondered why s-f shows so little of the experimental enthusiasm which has characterised painting, music and the cinema during the last four or five decades, particularly as these have become wholeheartedly speculative, more and more concerned with the creation of new states of mind, new levels of awareness, constructing fresh symbols and languages where the old cease to be valid. Similarly, I think science fiction must jettison its present narrative forms and plots. Most of these are far too explicit to express any subtle interplay of character and theme. Devices such as time travel and telepathy, for example, save the writer the trouble of describing the inter-relationships of time and space indirectly. And by a curious paradox they prevent him from using his imagination at all, giving him very little true freedom of movement within the narrow limits set by the device.

The biggest developments of the immediate future will take place, not on the Moon or Mars, but on Earth, and it is *inner* space, not outer, that needs to be explored. The only truly alien planet is Earth. In the past the scientific bias of s-f has been towards the physical sciences—rocketry, electronics, cybernetics—and the emphasis should switch to the biological sciences, particularly to imaginative and fictional treatments of them, which is what is implied by the term science *fiction*. Accuracy, that last refuge of the unimaginative, doesn't matter a hoot. What we need is not science fact but more science fiction, and the introduction of so-called science fact articles is merely an attempt to dress up the old Buck Rogers

material in more respectable garb.

More precisely, I'd like to see s-f becoming abstract and 'cool,' inventing completely fresh situations and contexts that illustrate its theme obliquely. For example, instead of treating time like a sort of glorified scenic railway, I'd like to see it used for what it is, one of the perspectives of the personality, and the elaboration of concepts such as the time zone, deep time and archaeopsychic time. I'd like to see more psycholiterary ideas, more meta-biological and meta-chemical concepts, private time-systems, synthetic psychologies and space-times, more of the remote, sombre half-worlds one glimpses in the paintings of schizophrenics, all in all a complete speculative poetry and fantasy of science.

I firmly believe that only science fiction is fully equipped to become the literature of tomorrow, and that it is the only medium with an adequate vocabulary of ideas and situations. By and large, the standards it sets for itself are higher than those of any other specialist literary genre, and from now on, I think, most of the hard work will fall, not on the writer and editor, but on the readers. The onus is on them to accept a more oblique narrative style, understated themes, private symbols and vocabularies. The first true s-f story, and one I intend to write myself if no one else will, is about a man with amnesia lying on a beach and looking at a rusty bicycle wheel, trying to work out the absolute essence of the relationship between them. If this sounds off-beat and abstract, so much the better, for science fiction could use a big dose of the experimental; and if it sounds boring, well at least it will be a new kind of boredom.

As a final text, I'm reminded of the diving suit in which Salvador Dali delivered a lecture some years ago in London. The workman sent along to supervise the suit asked how deep Dali proposed to descend, and with a flourish the maestro exclaimed: 'To the Unconscious!' to which the workman replied sagely: 'I'm afraid we don't go down that deep.' Five minutes later, sure enough, Dali nearly suffocated inside the helmet.

It is that *inner* space-suit which is still needed, and it is up to science fiction to build it!

J. G. Ballard



On Aldiss and That Story . . .

Dear Mr. Carnell,

I must say I respect you a great deal for printing Brian Aldiss's "Basis for Negotiation." The idea has been covered up, watered down, painted and disguised, but it remains dynamite. As far as I know, no writer, British or otherwise, has ever been courageous enough to tackle a theme as controversial as this, nor has an editor been brave enough to publish it. It shows that at least one magazine is not worried about its "image" or its cow-like "buying public." "Basis for Negotiation" is one of those stories which hit me hard. It's so real, so immediate. One can imagine the events it chronicles happening next year, and happening to people like myself. It shows people as they really are, and not as we would like them or imagine them to be. The politicians are pot-bellied and a bit stupid sometimes, and not above breaking down when the pressure is applied, but they also have their strong points; intelligence, flexibility, assurance. Too many s-f stories show the statesman as either a Lincolnesque saint or an evil despoiler of society only one step removed from Simon Legree.

The story has flaws—too many flaws for a writer of Mr. Aldiss's stature. That ending is pure fantasy. After showing themselves as cowardly, stupid, perfidious and treacherous, the British are told that they really did right and but for them the world would have perished. The volte face is so swift that the whole illusion of realism is lost. (In direct contrast to the handling of plot in the film *The Day The Earth Caught Fire*, which left the world stewing in its own juice at the last fade. Ideally, Aldiss should have used the same ending.) I'm totally unable to see the point of making David Woolf a homosexual, unless Aldiss meant to suggest that homosexuality, like idealism and introspection, is an essential attribute of the revolutionary mind. It could have been to discredit still further the weak character of Woolf and render his death less un-

pleasant, but this is a trick beneath any writer of intelligence. By assuming that the public is unsympathetic to homosexuals, Aldiss may find himself in deeper waters than he expected. That sort of conviction by association is no longer in fashion.

John M. Baxter.

P.O. Box 39, King Street P.O., Sydney, N.S.W.,

Dear John,

"Basis For Negotiaion"—Aldiss. Superb! But—s-f? No matter, Aldiss managed to cram more sheer brilliance into his forty scintillating pages than the last dozen issues of the magazine! It certainly supports John Brunner's favourable comments on your editorial policy, and I look forward to further 'experiments' of this calibre. The writing was superlative! However, for a really science fictional treatment of the extrapolation of current world politics, I would like to draw to your attention a yarn by Jack Vance in the October Amazing: (I.C.aBeM (sic!), a story that could well be a knock-back from Analog. But whereas it was consciously s-f, Aldiss's tale almost shocked with its realism—until the 'force field' gimmick was dragged in at the finale and made me realise that I was reading an s-f story after all. More please!!!

Lee Harding, Victoria, Australia.

Mackin v. Rackham . . .

Dear Editor.

In New Worlds No. 116, John Rackham invites me to 'rattle off any list of names of the scientific minded who have created, directly, one hundredth part of such carnage,' as certain historical abstractions. This, of course, lets everyone out, which is just as well, perhaps, because I could hardly rattle off the list I have in mind. For one thing, my German isn't up to it and, for another, most of these men are known by their deeds rather than by their names. One I will name, and that is Heinrich Himmler. He was very 'scientific minded,' although his many victims would be unlikely to appreciate this fact. The hundreds of doctors who did his bidding were also, I under-

stand, 'scientific minded.' No doubt Mr. Rackham would blame the *ism* rather than the men; but this doesn't disprove my contention that scientists or the 'scientific minded,' if we must use this woolly term, are no better, and no worse, than the rest of us, and I still wouldn't trust them, as a group, to do a better

job than the politicians.

He also says, for reasons best known to himself, that I 'will ignore Tsiolkovski.' On the contrary, I take my hat off to him, and to Kibalchich; particularly to Kibalchich. This remarkable young man devised the first crude rocket engine, completing the design and thesis in prison. The ink was hardly dry before he was led out to be executed for being concerned in the assassination of Czar Alexander II. This was in 1881; but it wasn't until 1918 that these documents came into the hands of Professor Tsiolkovski, who recognised their value immediately, and saw to their publication.

As to where democracy may be found, I can only say that if he doesn't know, there isn't any way of getting it through to him, because normal communication ends where politics begin. One would have to proceed with Joadian caution, defining every

term in advance, and the result is never worth the effort.

E. Mackin, Liverpool, 7.

On Wm. F. Temple . . .

Dear John.

Bill Temple's an unholy man to argue with. No sooner, reading his guest editorial, does one start marshalling ones objections, than he anticipates them—in this case by admitting the essentially masculine nature of s-f—and ends up by advocating a prompt return to a situation which already exists—that s-f leave sexual complications out unless necessary to the plot.

In short, you realise that Bill has been trying to put one over, by debating a situation that doesn't really exist. Of course, on the way, he says some pungent and provocative things. I shall

deal with a few of them.

Centrally, with due respect to Mr. Kingsley Amis and in all gratitude for a good critical book on s-f, New Maps of Hell is not holy writ nor every observation of its author dogmatic truth. In fact, the passage that Temple quotes is symptomatic of a contemporary heresy, that "specific sexual interest" is the predominant concern of literature.

While it would be stupid to deny the importance of sex both in life and literature, there is currently far too much emphasis on it—a decadent, almost morbid, preoccupation with sexual functions. I'm no prude, I hope; one of the best novels I have read in recent years is *The Ginger Man*. But sex is dragged in by the short hairs so often in so many books as to cause revulsion, a nausea at a continual imbalance. It is an imbalance found in much of the best contemporary serious literature, and I do not believe that s-f suffers by comparison.

Bill really does Amis a disservice by pleading for the more positive "old-fashioned" manifestations of the sex drive, which I think was not quite what Amis intended. The current mainstream writers of note nearly all deal with abnormal aspects of sexuality, or its negative effects. To Grahame Greene, sex is synonymous with guilt, personal exploitation and despair, to Nabokov with nymphetmania. Waugh's work is redolent of homosexuality and necrophilia. Three of the best post-war novels—Salinger's *The Catcher of The Rye*, Willingham's *End As a Man* and Waterhouse's *Billy Liar*—all deal with precocious, adolescent sexuality on the borderline of schizophrenia.

So what does Temple want? If John Christopher's female characters are ripe for rape, so are Amis's. And if McIntosh succeeds in capturing the essence of a contemporary character, isn't that what he's saying is needed. Incidentally, he is doubly unfair to McIntosh, who in *First Lady* and *Made in USA*, wrote two first-class stories about women caught in a technical revolution. If he is unfair to McIntosh, he is aggressively unperceptive towards Wyndham's *A Long Spoon*. The counterpoint between ancient devilry and the modern, brittle, "sophis-

ticated" couple, was the very point of the story.

A comparison with other popular fields, the Western and the detective novel, shows s-f in a shining light. Bill has already dealt with the typical Western heroine. The heroines of even the best crime stories are no better. Take John Dickson Carr, alias Carter Dickson; a wonderfully good writer in his field, but his women! Negative, novelettish, incredible. And as for Agatha Christie's . . .! But their stories stand up well despite such a handicap.

Another crafty stroke of Bill's is his selection of s-f writers—all British, be it noted. Sturgeon, Gunn, Leiber, Kornbluth, their women are real and vital enough, surely, though I suppose Bill would call Sturgeon's women "muddled beatniks" or

something similar, and thereby dismiss them to some dark cavern of his condemnation.

Personally, I find that women come naturally into s-f. Just because of their illogical "feminine" attitudes, they make good foils for s-f argument. One can overdo it, of course, so that you finish up, as Galaxy did, with too many cosy stories of things happening to a family when they should rightly have happened to individuals. But I think we s-f writers are guilty of underestimating both the place of women in s-f and their potential in the world; we could well extrapolate from the changing role of women and make s-f stories out of the very fact we've been discussing. We're still inclined to think in a male way about s-f. When a story of mine was dramatised on radio, the adapter changed my main character from a man to a woman-a scientist at that. Writers are supposed to be annoved with such tampering with their work. I was only annoyed that I hadn't recognised myself that the character's reactions in my own story were basically feminine. I was guilty of a blind plot. I think that too many of us are similarly guilty too often.

Arthur Sellings, Uckfield, Sussex.

Harding v. Malcolm . . .

Dear John.

Of course Donald Malcolm is right when he says I only 'scratched the surface' of s-f's troubles, but, short of a full-scale Market Survey of writers, editors and merchandising, that's just about all *any* of us can hope to achieve—there are too many conflicting issues at stake. Perhaps if we all keep scratching away long enough we may cause enough irritation and get *something* done.

John Brunner gets right to the point in his Guest Editorial—more so than his predecessors. The fact of the matter is that the whole business of editor-writer relationships is due for a drastic overhauling, at least on the American side of the pond. (I don't think any of your own writers could complain, as

Brunner so carefully put it).

If Donald has read my letter in New Worlds 113 as carefully as the preceding one, he will be somewhat soothed to see that I do not lay the entire blame for the current lethargy of s-f upon

the writers. After all, the editors have a certain responsibility to the readers as well, more so than the writers, even, for they can directly influence his work. The fans can only 'scratch

away' as best they can.

So while such naive suggestions as an Anlab, bonus ratings and all that seems a rather frail foundation upon which to build a s-f renaissance, (and I can't see that the British field has all that to worry about. Tartan stars or no tartan stars, it is the Americans who are in drastic need of a transfusion—and who seem to be pinching English writers as fast as they can in an effort to rejuvenate the field) we do seem to agree on one point: s-f should be a co-operative effort, between writers, editors and readers. That was the way it began, the way it was until the 'boom' brought on the flood of professionalism and inflated literary values, and sent editors scurrying to please the new 'mass' market.

Exactly how many of the current British s-f writers rose from the ranks of the readers? (All of them !—Ed.) Quite a few, if my memory serves me right. Isn't that an indication of the necessity of such a co-operative effort?

Mr. Malcolm also seems to misunderstand another point. I would certainly not like to see editor Carnell rejecting stories from promising newcomers on the grounds that their writing wasn't of a sufficiently high standard. I have only high praise for his courage in 'taking a risk' with new writers. After all, with all the American magazines now 'top' markets, it is getting harder and harder for the newcomer to get a break. American editors seem to be more interested in a slick standard of presentation from newcomers rather than a freshness of ideas And their standards are so self-consciously high that they can't afford to print the first hesitant words of a new Sturgeon.

No, 'success' didn't kill s-f, only stunted it's growth. It's high time some people got around to cutting away the dead wood and beginning fresh growth. And that job lies with the editors and their writers—they are the only ones who can get us

out of this current apathy.

Lee Harding. Victoria, Australia.

In General . . .

Dear John,

For those who enjoy reading that is different, provoking, thoughtful, the kind of reading to make you take a second, maybe a third, look at all those things you have been taking for granted for so long—for those who enjoy that kind of reading (and, if you don't, you're in the wrong magazine, brother) may I recommend a book?

By John Langdon-Davies, it is published in UK by Secker & Warburg under the title Man: The Known and the Unknown; lucky stiffs in the US can get it for 50c in paperback from Mentor, as 'On the Nature of Man.' I would particularly recommend it to all those who saw fit to regard a recent editorial by me as something to take a running kick at. With both feet? This book will help show them just how violently

they fell flat on their backsides.

To forestall possible questions—no, I didn't crib my words from this book. I bought it as a Xmas gift for myself, and didn't get to read it until a long while after my opinions had been committed to print. I will confess that had the timing been reversed, I would have modified a phrase or two, especially the bit on 'letting the scientists take over for a while.' So many people seem to equate the scientific approach to human problems with something they call 'totalitarian rule,' plus anxious whimpers of 'roughshodding' and 'dictatorship.' This book will help explain the kind of scientific attitude I had in mind—the kind which as well as being rigorous and honest, is not afraid to take a rational look at such things as hypnosis, faith-healing, prayer, ESP, and more. All of which are relatively unexplored facets of the thing called Man.

I recommend it heartily, except, of course, for the mythopoetic group. It won't do for them at all, as it is written, throughout, in ordinary, plain and very simple English.

> John Rackham, London, S.W. 6.

Dear John,

Although it is by no means as common as it used to be, it still happens that the s-f reader meets derisory criticism from his friends. 'Why do you read that stuff?' kind of thing, with the insinuation that s-f is for and by those who are not quite right

in the head. I've just found the perfect 'squelch' answer to this

and I'd like to pass it on.

A Czech psychologist reports (New Scientist, October 26th) his experiments in bibliotherapy. This is a fancy name for the business of giving a group of psychotic patients selected books to read and then noting their reactions. The selection was made from stories, novels, poems and popular scientific literature. His general finding was that reading, in itself, was of particular therapeutic effect in cases of depression. In particular, he found that 'popular scientific literature,' which is the Eastern European equivalent of science-fiction, yielded the best results since it made the greatest demand on the patient, but did not arouse pathological distortions.

The report is cautious, of course, but it seems evident that not only is s-f not insane or queer, it actually helps to make a person sane. Saner, anyway. So there isn't any need, any longer, to be diffident about the fact that we like to read s-f. It's all the other ones who are a bit off. Of course, we've had our suspicions, all along, but it's nice to have 'scientific' confirmation. It makes me feel good, too. As well as writing for fun, and the occasional cheque I am actually doing some-

body some good!

John T. Phillifent. London, S.W.6.

THE LITERARY LINE-UP

Satires being the order of the day (and what a welcome change they make) and as book reviewer Leslie Flood stuck his neck out in the April issue and we did (editorially) in March—next month we commence serialising Brian Aldiss's novel The Primal Urge under the title of "Minor Operation" (none of us liked the "urge" part). Welcome light relief—and a great laugh against the conservative British. Plus Ballard, Rayer, James and others and a Guest Editorial by Jim Ballard.

Story ratings for No. 113 were:

- 1. The Golden Age - - Rupert Clinton
- 2. Black Knowledge - - Peter Hawkins
- 3. The Gentle Assassin - J. G. Ballard
- 4. Survival Course - - Philip E. High
- 5. Protected Species - David Rome



Following the recent cerebral collection by Damon Knight, I welcome the first hardcover edition of Algis Budrys' The Unexpected Dimension (Gollancz, 15/-) which contains three novelettes and four short stories by another American contemporary and, in my opinion, even better writer. In all the varied moods of these stories, the common factor is a provocative view of some aspect of human society or relationship of the future. Often ambiguously conclusive, each of these stories utilizes a familiar science fictional idea for its frame-work, but immediately penetrates to the deeper issues involved, and perhaps with a grimly ironic but highly logical twist, becomes a vastly intriguing human (and in one case, robot) problem, subject to the stresses of violence and hatred, love and humanity, oppression and tyranny, freedom and justice. Two of the best-"The Burning World" and "Never Meet Again"—came from the now defunct Infinity magazine, and I enjoyed reading again "The Executioner" and "First to Serve" both from Astounding." And is there a more ironic story than "The Distant Sound of Engines?" Highly recommended.

One could almost feel a tri-di projection of the Grey Lensman telepathically approving over one's shoulder whilst reading Mark Clifton's Eight Keys to Eden (Gollancz, 16/-, SF choice for March). E. E. Smith fans will need no further information, beyond a warning that the writing here is a lot better. And I'll warrant that few readers could resist the blurb on the dust jacket, and be compulsively carried along to the last page, with a fair guarantee of satisfaction. The super-hero is an E (for Extrapolator), a glibly-stated product of a future society, troubleshooting above and beyond the law, who successfully, spectacularly, and a little luckily, I thought, completes his first solo mission solving the disappearance of a settlement colony on Ceti II. The plot has everything from faster-than-light travel to psionics, McCarthy-like opposition to E privileges, and aeons-old crystalline intelligences. It is superficially slick,

highly derivative in ideas, and not susceptible of close analysis, but it is extremely readable, and that baited hook is in . . .

Over to home-spun humour from Liverpool's gift to Analog. Eric Frank Russell, whose The Great Explosion (Dobson, 13/6) is an uproarious series of deep space adventures, although the sharp edge of his sallies against obtuse authority is becoming blunted somewhat by repetition. The title refers to the great exodus from Earth, sparked off by a typically whacky invention that made interstellar travel cheap and easy, when in half a century practically all the malcontents, minority groups, general undesirables and other misfits left, or were sent, to settle far away planets. Four hundred years later, autocratic Mother Earth seeks to gather her errant children into one empire and sends out exploratory ships for this purpose, manned by an uneasy mixture of space sailors, military, ambassadorial and civil staffs. This book details the adventures of one such ship on four successive planetary landfalls. On three of these, living descendants are discovered of, respectively, exiled criminals, naturists and assorted dissidents, so the receptions are mixed and zany. The last episode (which takes up half the book) was familiar and I believe was originally published as a separate story ("Then There Were None,"?) some time ago.

Leslie Flood.

SALES AND WANTS

3d. per word. Minimum 5/- Cash with order.

BRITISH AMATEUR SCIEN-TIFIC RESEARCH ASSOCIA-TION.—Will anyone interested please write, giving details of scientific interests, to:—The Secretary, BASRA, 64, Ridge Road, Kingswinford, Staffs.

DRAUGHTSMANSHIP, blueprint reading, tracing, Drawing and Design for Handicraft Teachers examinations. Postal tuition. Brochure from C. Pannell, 145 The Grossway, Portchester, Hants. LUXEMBOURG CLEARLY AT LAST! Our attachment fits any radio. 3/11, post 6d. VHF aerial, 6/11d., post 10d. Eddy's, 116, Alfreton Road, Nottingham.

COME AND BROWSE at the Fantasy Book Centre—always large stocks of books and magazines including collector's items. 10 Sicilian Avenue, London, W.C.1.

Back Issues

For readers and collectors who are missing any of the previous issues we can still supply the following copies but stocks are very limited

Nos. 67; 69; 71; 73; 75 to 81; 85, 87, 88 2/- each post free (35 Cents each)

Nos. 89 to 117, 2/6 each post free (40 Cents each)

The British Science Fiction Association

was formed to be of service to readers of the genre.

If you would like to meet or write to others who enjoy the same hobbies, have access to our rapidly expanding library service and be kept generally well informed on matters relating to S-F, why not join us?

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER IS PUBLISHED AS WELL AS A QUARTERLY OFFICIAL JOURNAL

Write for all particulars to:-

Hon. Secretary, British Science Fiction Association

c/o 130 London Road (basement)

Cheltenham, Gloucestershire

本社社社会社会社会社会社会社会社会社会社会社会社会社会社会社会社会

11th Year Of Publication



在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在

公共在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在在

2/6

Bi-Monthly

An Unusual Fantasy

THE ETERNAL CHAMPION

by MICHAEL MOORCOCK

And many other stories

COMING NEXT MONTH

Adventure Science Fiction in

ADVENTURES

2/6

Bi-Monthly

女女女女女女女女女女女女女女女女女女女女女女女女女

Action Packed S-F Novelettes
plus short stories
in the current issue

NOW ON SALE

NOVA PUBLICATIONS LTD

Maclaren House, 131 Great Suffolk Street, London, S.E.1.