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Guest Editorial
GROFF CONKLIN

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of Publication

BRIAN LEWIS.

Groff Conklin

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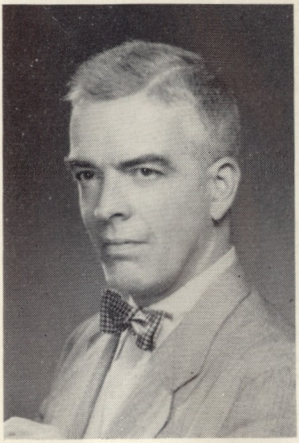

Within the science fiction field, Groff Conklin is undoubtedly the world's leading anthologist—readers will doubtless be surprised to learn that his total is now 28 published with another one due from Dell shortly. Yet his main working activities are largely outside our specialised field, as, for the past twenty-five years, he has been a professional writer and researcher in a variety of fields, including science and technology, architecture and building, medicine and health. At the moment he works four days a week as Senior Writer with the American Diabetes Association and his free-lance anthology work is mainly confined to weekends.

As a science fiction anthologist, he has a most astute discernment in choosing suitable stories for his various collections and it is pleasing to note that his researching also covers the British field to a large extent, several stories we have published in this magazine having appeared in his collections.

Another current project he is working upon is a collaboration with Noah D. Fabricant, M.D. of Chicago on a book entitled *Colds, Cures And Complications*, to be published next year by Collier Books.

His main hobby is (naturally) reading—but usually the philosophy of science and history.

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Editor : JOHN CARNELL

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TWO SHILLINGS AND SIXPENCE

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Guest Editorial

This month well-known and popular American anthologist Groff Conklin takes the editorial chair and discusses some of the ideas written about in earlier editorials by other guest editors.

The Third Level

by GROFF CONKLIN

I hope Jack Finney, the American writer who produced a story using the above title back in the very early Fifties, will forgive me for co-opting it : but the occasion is too urgent for me to observe property rights. I want to use the title in connection with John Rackham's guest editorial last November, the one called " On a New Level," and would ask the patient reader to bear in mind that Mr. Finney's level was, quite simply, The Little Level That Wasn't There.

In other words, *what* " new level ?"

The point at issue is perhaps the most basic one in the whole discussion of the directions of science fiction today. That point is : " Where Now ?" (as Arthur Sellings would ask) are " Our Present Requirements " (in John Brunner's phrase) tending to drive us ? My suspicion is that that question, that painful, pointed question, is " The Origin of (Un)originality " (to misuse Brian Aldiss' title) in our modern science fictional efforts. For our present requirements seem to me to be driving us with almost tragic lemmingism down the old, pot-holed paths of science fictional thinking, and *away* from " originality." Indeed, today's novelty seems—at least to me, a tired old editor and anthological thief-of-brains, little if any more novel than it was in that past we tend to consider so childish and immature.

In other words, I rather suspect that John Rackham's new level is just a " third level " that we only wish were there. But it isn't. Perhaps this grumpy approach to the matter is

due to my advancing years (G.C., b.'04 !) and to a consequent flagging of interest ? I rather doubt it. Consider this :

During the first fifteen years of science fiction's formal existence (about), the pre-Campbell (John W., that is) period, a great many terribly bad stories were written. But at least, as I look back on that period, I seem to remember a truly galloping variety of ideas. The plots were awful, of course, the science bad, and the writing worse*—but the excitement was immense !

* And the characters and characterizations so dreadful as to make to-day's stories seem masterpieces of Freudian elucidation ! See below.—g.c.

And that excitement, of course, became immensely greater during the Forties, when JWC Jr., was creating an essentially new science fiction world with all the good new writers (now fine old Elder Statesmen) from the U.S.A., and the equally first-rate contributors from the Mother Country—Eric Russell, Bill Temple, Bertram Chandler, John Beynon Wyndham Parkes (etcetera ?) Harris, Arthur Clarke, and others of your fine tribe. Even during the early Fifties, it seems to me, the feeling of growth and excitement continued, though I do feel that it was starting to lag. The ideas were getting trite, perhaps ? Or was it the writers who were getting tired ? And perhaps disgusted, too, with the minimal returns, the starvation wages, of the science fiction markets. Anyhow, I began to experience a pretty unsettling case of *deja vu*, and have continued to do so during almost all of the past six or seven years. And today I say to myself, " Boy !—you've *really* been here before !" as I read the typical current science fiction magazines and paperbacks.

I have a suspicion that I know what is wrong, too. It is a hard thing to have to say, but I think that it needs saying : Most science fiction of these later years is beginning to show the essential shallowness of its Pierian Springs. Like too many modern fountains in commercial courtyards, the water is being recirculated ; there is no new supply. And, worst of all, the waters are *chemically clean* ! There is no life in them.

What I mean by that pretty involved bit of poetic licence is that I feel that too many science fiction authors today are leaning far too heavily on a handful of semi-scientific extrapolations, and are not exploring adequately—or at all, for

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We British have always been noted for our reserved nature, although historically this is a recent acquisition. Brian Aldiss's brilliant satire tears this reserve to shreds with the invention of the Emotional Register—a device which shattered everyone's private life.

MINOR OPERATION

by BRIAN W. ALDISS

Part One of Three Parts

Author's note

My thanks go to Aldous Huxley for permitting me to use his name in this story and his opinions on the hypothesis behind the story.

one

For London it was one of those hot July evenings in which the human mind is engulfed in a preoccupation with the moist palm, the damp brow, the armpit.

Sweating continently, James Solent emerged into the motionless heat of Charlton Square. With a folded newspaper raised to his forehead in an odd defensive gesture, he came down the steps of the grey trailer on to the grass and paused. The door of Number 17, where he lived, beckoned him ; but

competing with the wish to go and hide himself was a desire to overhear what three men nearby were saying.

" Such a gross imposition could only be swung on to a politically indifferent electorate," one said.

The second, lacking words to express what he thought of this sentiment, guffawed immoderately.

" Rubbish !" the third exclaimed. " You heard what the Minister of Health said the other day : this is just what's needed to give Britain back her old sense of direction."

It was the turn of the first man to burst into mocking laughter. Seeing Jimmy standing nearby, they turned to stare curiously at his forehead.

" What's it feel like, mate ?" one of them called.

" You really don't feel a thing," Jimmy said, and hastened across the square with his newspaper still half-heartedly raised. He let himself into Number 17. From the hall he could hear Mrs. Pidney, the landlady, drowsily humming like a drowned top in the kitchen. The rest was silence. Reassured, Jimmy discarded his paper, revealing the disc on his forehead, and went up to the flat he shared with his brother. Fortunately Aubrey Solent was out, working late at the BIL ; that undoubtedly saved Jimmy an awkward scene. Aubrey had grown uncommonly touchy of recent weeks.

The flat contained the usual facilities, a kitchen, a living room (with dinerette), Aubrey's large bedroom and Jimmy's smaller bedroom. Everything was so tidy that the one glossy-jacketted LP lying in the middle of the carpet looked to be posing. Skirting it, Jimmy hurried into his room and closed the door.

Just for a moment he played a tune on the panelling with his finger tips. Then he crossed to the looking glass and surveyed himself. The suit Harrods had made him before he began his new job in January was daily growing to look better on him, more like him ; for the rest he was twenty-five, his brown hair not objectionably curly, his face round but not ugly, his chin neither aggressive nor recessive.

All, in fact, he told himself, sighing, alarmingly ordinary.

One feature only was definitely not, as yet all events, ordinary : the shining circle, three and a half centimetres in diameter, permanently fixed in the centre of his forehead. Made of a metal resembling stainless steel, its surface was slightly convex, so that it gave a vague and distorted image of the world before it.

It looked by no means ill. It looked, indeed, rather noble, like a blaze on a horse's brow. It lent a touch of distinction to a plain face.

Jimmy Solent stood for some minutes before the wardrobe mirror, looking at himself and, through himself, in to the future. It was a time for wonder : he had taken the plunge at a period when to plunge or not to plunge was the consuming question. He was one of the first to plunge, and the seal of his precipitance was upon him. His preoccupation was gradually banished by the barking of the loudspeaker in the square outside. Slipping off his jacket, Jimmy went over to the window. His outlook here was generally less interesting, being more respectable, than that from his brother Aubrey's bedroom windows. *They* looked out on to backs of houses, where people were unbuttoned and being themselves ; Jimmy's window, in the front of the house, stared perpetually out at facades, where people put on closed little public faces.

Now, however, there was life in the square. This week, a big grey trailer, so reassuringly similar to the Mass Radiography units, stood on the seedy grass beneath the plane trees. A queue of men and women, most of them in summer dresses or shirt sleeves, stood patiently waiting their turn to enter the trailer. At five-minute intervals, they emerged singly from the other side of it, generally holding a newspaper, a handkerchief, or a hat, to their foreheads, disappearing without looking to left or right. A few spectators idled about, watching the queue; at the beginning of the week there had been cameramen.

From the bedroom window—from safety !—it all appeared rather comical : at once unreal and typically English. Jimmy found it hard to realise he had come through that same mill only twenty minutes ago ; just as the government had promised, his forehead did not ache at all. Though he prodded it experimentally, his disc neither moved nor ached. The marvels of modern science were indeed marvellous.

The man in charge of the loudspeaker, being hot and bored, was not talking into his microphone properly. Only occasional phrases were intelligible. One bit sounded like " We are free to sit here in a fine old state "; he must have been saying something equally preposterous, like " freer citizens of a finer state."

". . . government's assurance . . . many eminent doctors agree . . . nothing but healthful . . . far from being an affront

to national modesty . . . greatest assets . . . no expense . . . only a minor operation . . ."

The voice mumbled like a cloud of bees, and the minor operation was a major operation taking place all over the country : for the grey trailers were parked by now in the centre of every town and village from Penzance to John O'Groats. The whole population was potential queue-fodder. Jimmy came away from the window.

Somebody was moving about in the living room. Jimmy straightened his tie. It was unlikely to be Aubrey, but Jimmy called out, " Is that you, Aubrey ?" and went to see.

It was not Aubrey. It was Aubrey's girl, Alyson Youngfield, if the noun " girl " may be used here ambiguously. She had discarded her summer gloves and was fanning herself with the discarded LP sleeve. Jimmy's face lit at the sight of her.

" He'll be late this evening, Alyson," he told this charming creature settling herself on the divan with the elegance of a puma. Her fairness took on a special quality with the July weather ; under the neat blonde hair, her skin seemed to ripen like wheat.

" Not to worry," she said. " I didn't really expect to find Aubrey at home, but it's cooler here than in my bed-sitter. It gets like an oven just under the roof. Let's have a little hi-fi to combat the heat, shall we ?"

In that instant Jimmy saw she was looking at his forehead. It caused him none of the embarrassment anyone else's regard would have done ; with pleasure, he wondered whether an acquired tactfulness or natural kindness caused her, when she saw his glance, to say matter of factly, " Oh, you've got yours. I must get mine tomorrow."

With gratitude, to draw her into a conspiracy, Jimmy answered incautiously, " Are you really ? Aubrey won't like that."

He knew at once he had said the wrong thing.

" Aubrey will eventually be wearing one himself ; you'll see. It'll come to us all in time," Alyson said. But she said it stiffly, turning her fair head with its most immaculate locks to gaze at the window. As always, Jimmy found himself reflecting how hard it was to gauge the precise relationship between her and Aubrey. A serious quality in Alyson and an evasive one in Aubrey made them both not entirely easy people to estimate.

" I'm going to a party this evening," he told her, to change the subject. " At the BIL, Aubrey's HQ ; I'm sorry you're not coming. I shall have to be getting ready soon."

" I don't envy you," Alyson said. Nevertheless she watched him keenly as he walked into the kitchen. He there assembled a caraway roll, a slice of camembert cheese, a spoonful of cream cheese, a wedge of butter and pickings from the garlic-flavoured salad which reposed in the refrigerator. Hesitating a moment, he poured himself a glass of dry Montrachet ; it was not quite the thing with the cheese, he realised, but he liked it.

" Come over here, Jimmy," Alyson said, when he appeared in the living room with his tray.

He went at once to where she was sitting on the divan. She was wearing the green suit with the citron lining that Aubrey had bought her at Dickens and Jones. Underneath it, she wore a citron blouse, and underneath that could have been very little; all the same, Alyson looked warm. And, ah, undeniably, warming.

Changing her mind about whatever she was going to say, Alyson remarked, " You are too obedient, Jimmy. You must not come when just anyone calls you."

" You're not just anyone, Alyson," he said, but missed the required lightness of tone such an obvious remark demanded. He took his tray sadly into the dinerette, from where he could still see her ankles and calves, curved like a symbol against the plum background of the divan. Then a hint of colour made him hold one hand up before his face ; a pink radiance covered it. The disc on his forehead was doing its stuff.

Feeling both shattered and pleased, Jimmy lingered over his meal. The Montrachet was very good. He sipped it, listening to the music from the record-player. A band featuring an overharsh trumpet flipped through the current trifle called " You Make Me Glow "; that tune had been lucky ; the show in which it was sung had been running for some weeks before the Prime Minister made his sensational announcement. Yet it might almost have been written for the occasion and brought unexpected fortune for the song-writer, who found himself over-night the author of a hit and able to afford the enemies he had always dreamed of.

Alyson switched it off.

" What I was going to say, Jimmy," she exclaimed, speaking with an effort, " is that I feel rather appallingly glum just now.

It's the sight of all those people queueing out there—and all over London—I suppose. They're so *patient* ! Nobody seems quite to have grasped how epoch-breaking these ER's, these Norman Lights as they call them, really are ; not even people who are against them, like this politician, what's his name, Bourgoyne."

" Let's not get on to politics," Jimmy said. " You know how we always argue. Stay as sweet as you are."

Although he expected her to take him up on that, she said nothing, moving her legs restlessly. She began to hum, " You Make Me Glow," but broke off as if realising the idiocy of the tune.

" I sometimes think the opposite of amusement is not boredom but peace," she said. She was deliberately misquoting a current poster, and Jimmy laughed.

" I'm not sure sometimes that boredom and peace aren't the same thing," he said and, having said it, thought it silly. Alyson evidently did not.

" A lot of people feel like that," she replied. " Perhaps otherwise they would never have consented to have their foreheads tampered with ; they're eager for anything that makes a change. It's understandable enough." She sighed luxuriously and added, deliberately guying the pathos of what she said, "We're the generation what missed the war, lovie. Remember?"

Jimmy liked her saying that. It put them on an equal footing, for although Alyson happened to be his brother's mistress, she was Jimmy's age to within a month ; Aubrey, six years older than Jimmy, had been born in 1935, thereby missing the war too, but he had been excluded from Alyson's remark. Alyson was perceptive ; she seemed to know exactly how and when Jimmy felt uncomfortable.

" Don't be glum any more," he advised. " It makes you look so huggable that no one could be expected to have any sympathy for you."

Alyson gave no answer. Contentedly, Jimmy finished his meal and went to take a shower.

Thirty seconds under the hard, cold spray was enough. He towelled himself, applied Odo-ro-no, sucked an Amplex tablet to remove any anti-social traces of garlic, and dressed for the party. As he did so, he looked out of his window again. The queue outside the grey trailer was no shorter ; the shadows in the square were longer.

These ER Installation Centres, to give the trailers their proper name, had dispersed themselves over a bewildered Britain on the previous Monday morning. It was now only Thursday evening, and already some 750,000 people up and down the country, had the Register painlessly—and perpetually—embedded in their brows.

The great conversion, in fact, had begun with many of the omens of success. Although much of this was due to the careful government campaigning which had preceded the conversion drive, the personal appearance of the Prime Minister on TV, wearing his ER, on the evening before the grey trailers opened their doors, had undoubtedly won over thousands of doubters to the cause he favoured. Even the Opposition conceded his speech had been powerful.

His disc gleaming interestingly but unobtrusively below his shock of silver hair, Herbert Gascadder had said to the watching millions : " I beg each one of you to realise that only a superficial view can hold that the ER is a menace to society. If you think more deeply, you will see the ER as I do, as a badge of liberty. We have, as a nation, always been diffident about expressing ourselves ; that, perhaps, is why some sociologists have called loneliness one of the great curses of our age. The ER is going to break down that barrier, as well as many others.

" The ER is the first invention ever to bring man closer to his fellow men. Even television, that great institution by whose medium I am able to speak to you in your homes tonight, has proved a not unmixed blessing—in fact, often a disruption—to family life. Over the ages, since we ceased to huddle together in caves, we have inevitably drawn further apart from one another. Now, I sincerely believe, we shall find ourselves drawn nearer again, united by those common impulses which the ER makes apparent.

" Yet I would not have you think of the ER as something fantastic or crack-brained, a mere aberration of science. It will, in fact, have the same effect as any other invention, once we are accustomed to it ; that is, to make a slight but inevitable modification to man's daily life. We can only continue to exist by a policy of change in this highly competitive world. Let us thank God that the ER is a *British* invention. More, let us show our thankfulness by getting our ER's installed as soon as we can, so that by simplifying our private lives we can all pull together and make this nation, once more, a land of opportunity."

" How Gascadder would love me now," Jimmy thought, glancing again at his brow in the mirror while he adjusted his tie. His ER was still there, slightly larger than a penny, a symbol of patriotism and of hope.

" Be a good boy and don't drink too much," Alyson advised, as he finally appeared, ready to leave the flat.

" Don't be so motherly !" Jimmy said. " We are meant to be Unlovable Young People."

" Good God !" she exclaimed. " That ! It's hard enough being People !"

For a moment he shuffled by the door, looking at her. The rest of the room was nothing ; she, sitting there in her Dickens and Jones suit, had an extra dimension, a special reality, a future in the balance. " Good-bye, Alyson," he said, and went out to the most momentous party of his life.

Jimmy was usually unassuming ; yet the feeling had grown on him lately that there was some sort of help he could give Alyson.

What convinced Jimmy that this was no illusion of his romantic imagination was the contrast between Alyson's and Aubrey's natures and their relationship with each other.

A smell of sausages coiled juicily about the landing. As he descended the stairs, Jimmy could hear them frying.

The kitchen door, as usual, was open. Hilda Pidney spotted Jimmy as he reached the hall and came out, as she always did unless one was moving very rapidly, to exchange a few words. She was stocky and fifty, with the face, as Alyson once remarked, of one crying in a wilderness of hair. Despite her miserable expression, she was a cheerful soul ; her first words now struck exactly the right note with Jimmy.

" Why it suits you a treat, Mr. Solent !"

" I'm so glad you think so, Mrs. Pidney," he said, putting his hand up self-consciously. " I see you've got yours."

He had, in truth, the merest glimpse of it through her mop of hair.

" Yes, I went straightaway at nine o'clock this morning," she told him. " I got there just before the trailer opened. I was second in the queue, I was. And it didn't hurt a bit, did it, just like what they said ?"

" Not a bit, no."

" And I mean it is *free*, isn't it !" She laughed. " Henry's been trying to make it work already. I ask you, at my age, Mr. Solent. I can see I'm in for something now !"

He laughed with her without reservations.

"I think these Emotion Registers are going to give a lot of people a new lease on life," he said.

"You know what people are calling them," she said, grinning. "Nun Chasers or Normal Lights. Funny how these nicknames get round, isn't it? I'd better get back to me sausages, quickish-like. Cheerio."

He strolled gently towards Park Lane, where he intended to capture a taxi, making himself enjoy the heat by contrasting it favourably with the cold rain-bearing wind which had been blowing only a few days before. Everyone behaved much as usual in the streets. Considering that the grey trailers had been hard at work everywhere for four days, surprisingly few people had additions to their foreheads, but those few were attracting no interest. The man and woman in the bright red Austin-Healey, the cadaverous commissionaire, the two squaddies sunning themselves on the corner of South Audley Street, all wore their Emotion Registers as to the manner born. The cabby who answered Jimmy's raised hand also bore the new token. Into every class, the ER's were finding their way.

The party to which Jimmy was going, Sir Richard Clunes' party, was being held in one of the formidable blocks, Kensington way, which had been built at the end of the last decade. It was—with a few exceptions like Jimmy himself—a British Industrial Liaisons party for BIL personnel, and therefore more in Aubrey Solent's line than Jimmy's, for Aubrey was a BIL man; Jimmy was entangled in literature. But Sir Richard, while promising to lend Jimmy a portrait for an exhibition he was organising, had genially invited him to the party at the same time, on the principle that younger brothers of promising executive material were worth suborning in this way, particularly as party material was always scarce at this season of year.

It was a smart party: Jimmy could see that as soon as he arrived—much smarter than the literary parties to which he was more accustomed, which were generally toned down by provincial novelists with no style or reviewers with no figure. These were London people; more, BIL people!—BIL people living useful days and efficient nights. "They're already at their primes, I'm sure they read *The Times* at breakfast," Jimmy told himself, glancing round as he shook hands with a beaming Sir Richard and Lady Clunes. Sir Richard had mobile eyebrows and a chin the shape of a goatee. His manner

flowed with milk and honey, and he engaged Jimmy in pleasant talk for two minutes precisely.

" Now let me see whom you'll know here, Solent," Sir Richard said, as that halcyon period drew to its scheduled close. " Ah, there's Guy Leighton, one of our most promising young men. You'll know him, of course—he has been working on the K. R. Shalu business with your brother. Guy ! Can you spare us a moment, my dear boy ?"

A dark young man who balanced perpetually on the balls of his feet was expertly prised from a nearby group and made to confront Jimmy. They bowed sadly to each other over their champagne glasses, with the polite dislike one partygoer so often feels for another. Guy and Jimmy were no more than acquaintances ; their orbits only intersected when their invitation cards coincided.

" Shall we dance ?" Jimmy said, and then, very seriously to counteract this facetiousness, " This looks a worthy gathering, Guy."

" Worthy of or for what, Solent ?" the dark young man parried. He could have been no more than four years older than Jimmy, but his habit of using surnames seemed to give him a good decade's start. " The usual set of time-servers one finds at these bun-fights : no more worthy than the next man, surely ?"

" *Looking* more worthy," Jimmy insisted. It was not a point he cared to labour, but he could think of nothing else to talk about. Gratefully, he accepted more champagne in his glass.

" You, if I may say so," Guy said, cocking a sardonic eyebrow at Jimmy's forehead, " look positively futuristic."

" Oh . . . the ER. Just a minor operation, to coin a phrase. Everyone'll be wearing them in time, Laddie, yew mark moi words," Jimmy said, with that abrupt descent into dialect with which some of us cover our inadequacies.

" Possibly," Guy said darkly. " Some of us have other ideas ; some of us, I don't mind telling you confidentially, are waiting to see which way the cat will jump. You realise, don't you, you are the only person here wearing one of the ghastly things."

He could not, announcing Armageddon, have shattered Jimmy more thoroughly.

" You're all living in the past, you scientific fellows. These are the mid-sixties, the Era of the ER," he replied, but he was already looking round the large room to check on Guy's statement. Every brow, high or low—some of them were the really interesting low brows of genius—was unimproved by science. The wish to conform hit Jimmy so hard that he scarcely heard Guy's remark about oppressed minorities.

" The Solent pioneering spirit . . ." he said.

" And another thing I ought to tell you," Guy said. " I'm sure you will not mind my mentioning it. People in the swim refer to these discs as Norman Lights ; after the firm of Norman which invented them, you know. I rather think it's only the lesser breeds without the law who refer to them as ER's—or nun chasers, which being pure music hall might just possibly catch on. Of course it's too early for any convention to have crystallised yet, but take it from me that's the way the wind's blowing at the BIL."

" I'll be terribly careful about it," Jimmy said earnestly. He concealed his earnestness by a parody of earnestness ; Guy, the born Insider, had just the sort of information one listened to if one hoped to get Inside oneself.

Then the group of men and women from which Guy had been separated flowed about the two young men, and a welter of introductions followed. Everybody looked well, cheerful and in good humour ; that they were also interested in Jimmy lessened his interest in them. As if they had been waiting for a signal, they began talking about the registers ; they were *the* topic of conversation at present. After a long burst of animation, a pause set in, during which all eyes turned on Jimmy, awaiting, as it were, a sign from the fountainhead.

" As the only fox with a tail," he said, " I feel I ought not to give away any secrets."

" Has it lit up yet, that's what I want to know ?" a commanding man in heavy glasses said, amid laughter.

" Only once, so far," Jimmy said, " but I haven't had it more than three hours."

More laughter, during which someone made a crushing remark about fancy dress parties, and a sandy woman said, " It really is appalling to think that everyone will know what we're thinking when we have ours installed."

A man, evidently her husband by the laboured courtesy with which he addressed her, took her up instantly on this

remark. " My dear Bridget, will you not remember that these Norman Lights go *deeper* than the thought centres. They register purely on the sensation level. They represent, in fact, the spontaneous as against the calculated. Therein lies the whole beauty of them."

" I absolutely couldn't agree more," the heavy glasses said. " The whole notion of submitting ourselves to this process would be intolerable were it not that it gives us back a precious spontaneity, a *freedom*, lost for generations. It is analogous to the inconvenience of contraceptives : submit to a minor irk and you inherit a major liberty."

" But don't you see, Merrick," Guy said, perching himself on tiptoe to address the heavy glasses, "—goodness knows how often I've pointed this out to people—the Norman Lights don't *solve* anything. Such an infringement of personal dignity is only justifiable if it *solves* something."

" And what do you expect them to solve ?" Merrick of the heavy glasses asked, addressing the whole group.

" There are evolutionary directions, and in relation to them the Normal Lights are an advance. Why are they an advance ? Because they enable the id for the first time to communicate direct, without the intervention of the ego. The human ego for generations has been growing swollen at the expense of the id, from which all true drives spring ; *now*—"

" Then surely these Norman Lights are causing a reversion," Bridget interrupted. " A return to the primitive—"

" Not primitive : primal. You see, you've got to differentiate between two entirely separate but quite similar—"

" I can't help thinking Merrick's right off the beam. However it comes wrapped, an increased subservience to the machine is something to reject out of hand. I mean, in the future—"

" No, wait a moment, though, Norman Lights aren't machines ; that is to say, they aren't instruments for the conversion of motion, but for the conversion of *emotion*. They're merely registers—like a raised eyebrow."

" Well, I'm still capable of raising my own eyebrows."

" And other people's, I hope."

" Anyhow, that's not the point. The point is—"

It was at this point in the argument spluttering round him that Jimmy, listening in interested silence, found that a man he had heard addressed as Bertie was tipping rum into his—Jimmy's—champagne from a pocket flask.

" Give it a bit of body," Bertie said, winking conspiratorially and gripping Jimmy's arm.

" Thanks. No more," Jimmy said.

" Pleasure," Bertie said. " All intellectuals here. I'm a cyberneticist myself. What are you ?"

" I sort of give exhibitions."

" You do ? Before invited audiences ? You'd better count me in on that. I tell you, when I get my red light, it's going to wink in some funny places." He laughed joyously.

" I'm afraid these are only book exhibitions," Jimmy said, adding, for safety, " Clean books."

" Whose talking about books ? They're full of antique imperialist slogans," Guy said, butting in and making a face at him. " Don't change the subject, Jimmy. There's only one subject in England at the moment—it's even ousted the weather. You, presumably, are more pro NL's than anyone else here. Why are you pro ?"

" For practical reasons," Jimmy said airily. The champagne was already making him feel a little detached from the group ; they were only talkers—he was a pioneer. " You see, entirely through my own stupidity, Penny Tanner-Smith, my fiancee, broke off our engagement last week. I hoped that if she could see how steadily my ER glowed for her she would agree to begin again."

There was much sympathetic laughter at this. Someone said, " What a horribly trite reason !" but Merrick said " Bloody good. Excellent. That's what I mean—cuts through formality and misunderstanding. Our friend here has inherited a major liberty : the ability to *prove* to his fiancee exactly how he feels about her ; try and estimate what that is worth in terms of mental security. I'm going to get my Norman Light stuck on tomorrow."

" Then you disappoint me, Merrick," Guy Leighton said.

" I cannot wait on fashion, Guy ; I have an aim in life as well as a role in society," Merrick said amiably. It sounded as if he knew Guy fairly closely.

Gazing beyond them, Jimmy could see Sir Richard still welcoming an occasional late arrival, his eyebrows astir with hospitality. A tall, silver man had just come in escorting a tall girl with a hatchet face who, in her survey of the company, seemed to " unsee the traffic with mid-ocean eye," to borrow a phrase from a contemporary poet Jimmy disliked. The man

smiled and smiled ; the girl seemed barely to raise a grin. She wore the silver disc on her brow.

" There's someone—," Jimmy said, and then stopped, foreseeing an awkward situation. But Guy had also noticed the newcomer ; he became tense, his manner underwent a change.

" Oh, *she's* here, is she !" he muttered, turning his back on that quarter of the room and shuddering as if he had witnessed a breach of etiquette. " I say, Solent, here's a chance for us all to try out your gadget."

" Include me out," Jimmy said hastily. " I don't like public demonstrations. Besides, I can tell from here that she would have no attraction for me ; she doesn't look as if she could make a firefly glow."

" You haven't met her yet," Guy said, with surprising fierceness.

" You never know what's in your id," Bertie said, appearing again with his pocket flask. " Or in hers, Freud save us." He crossed himself and nudged Merrick, who did not smile.

The inevitable, as it inevitably does, happened. Guy, with unexpected delicacy, did not go over to the newcomers. Instead, Sir Richard and Lady Clunes ushered them over to Jimmy's group in a frothy tide of introductions, among which two waiters sported like dolphins, dispensing drink.

" Martini for me this time," Jimmy said and, turning, was introduced to Felix Garside and his niece, the hatchet-faced girl, Rose English.

Seen close to, she was no longer hatchet-faced, though her countenance was long and her features sharply moulded ; indeed she could be considered attractive, if we remember that attraction is also a challenge. As Rose English glanced round the company, she was making no attempt, as most of the others present would have done upon introduction, to conceal the engagement of her mind and feelings in her surroundings. In consequence the unconventional face, less a mask than an instrument, drew to itself the regard of all men and most of the women. Her countenance was at once intelligent and naked ; invulnerable perhaps, but highly impressionable.

Her eyes rested momentarily on Jimmy's brow. She smiled, and the smile was good.

" Et tu, Brute," she said and then turned with a suspicion of haste to talk to Guy, who showed little inclination to talk

back ; though he remained on the balls of his feet, his poise had deserted him. This at once disappointed and relieved Jimmy, for he discovered he was flushing slightly ; Merrick and several of the others were watching his Norman Light with eagerness.

" It is just turning faintly pink, I think," the sandy woman said. " It's rather difficult to tell in this lighting."

" The maximum intensity is a burning cerise," a clerical-looking man informed them all.

" Then cerise will be the fashionable colour next season," Lady Clunes said. " I'm so glad. I'm so tired of black, so really tired of it."

" I should have thought it ought to have registered a little more than that," Merrick said, with a hint of irritation, staring at Jimmy's forehead. " Between any normal man and woman, there's a certain definite sexual flux."

" That's what it'll be so interesting to find out," Lady Clunes said. " I am just longing for everyone to get theirs."

" Oh yes, it'll be O.K. for those who're exempt : a damn good sideshow, I'd say," Bertie remarked, precipitating a frosty little silence. The new ER bill just passed through Parliament, which specified that everyone should have a Norman Light fitted by September 1, exempted those under fourteen or over sixty ; it was generally agreed that this upper age limit would preserve the status quo for Maude Clunes. Her friends were waiting, hawk-like, to see if she would have a disc installed.

Guy, to fill the gap in the conversation, brought Rose back into it with a general remark. Seizing his chance, Merrick bunched heavy eyebrows over his heavy spectacles and said, " Miss English, your having your Norman Light installed so promptly shows you to be a forward-looking young lady. Would you co-operate in a little experiment, a scientific experiment, for the benefit of those of us who have still to, er, see the light ?"

" What do you wish me to do ?" she asked.

He was as direct as she.

" We would like to observe the amount of sexual attraction between you and Mr. Solent," he told her.

" Certainly," she said. She looked around at each one of them, then added, " This is a particular moment in time when our—my—responses may seem to some of you improper, or immoral, or ' not the thing,' or whatever phrase you use to cover something you faintly fear. In a few months, I sincerely

hope such moments will be gone for ever. Everyone will register spontaneously an attraction for everyone of the opposite sex and similar age ; that I predict, for the ER's function at gene level. And then the dingy mockery which our forebears, and we, have made of sex will vanish like dew. It will be revealed as something more radical and less of a cynosure than we have held it to be. And our lives will be much more honest on every level in consequence."

She spoke very simply, very intensely, and then turned to look into Jimmy's eyes. Listening to her, watching her moving mouth, seeing her tongue once briefly touch her lips, taking in that face a sculptor would have wept at, Jimmy knew his Norman Light was no longer an ambiguous silver. He caught a faint pink reflection from it on the end of his nose. When the rangy girl surveyed him, he saw her disc redden and his own increase output in sympathy. She was so without embarrassment that Jimmy, too, remained at ease, interested in the experiment. Everyone else maintained the surprised, respectful silence her words had created.

" A rosy light !" exclaimed the sandy woman and the momentary tension relaxed.

" Not by Eastern casements only . . .!" Jimmy murmured. It surprised him that, although he still glowed brightly, he consciously felt little or no attraction for Rose. That is to say, his fiancee, Penny Tanner-Smith (not to mention Alyson Youngfield), was still clear in his mind, and he felt no insane desire to go to bed with this strange, self-possessed woman.

" The attraction is there and the ER's detect it," Rose said. " There lies their great and only virtue : they will force a nation of prudes to recognise an incontrovertible natural law. But, as I say, they work at gene—or what will no doubt be popularly termed ' subconscious '—level. This force lies like a chemical bond between Mr. Solent and me ; but I feel not the slightest desire to go to bed with him."

Jimmy was amazed at how unpalatable he found this truth, this echo of what he had just been thinking ; it was one thing silently to reject her, quite another for her openly to reject him. This absorbed him so completely he hardly listened to the discussion which flowed around him.

Merrick was shaking Rose's long hand ; she was admitting to being a " sort of brain specialist." The wife of the clerical-looking man was squeaking something about " like a public

erection . . ." and urging her husband to take her home. Everyone was talking. Sir Richard and Felix Garside were laughing at a private joke. Bertie was signalling to a young waiter. Drink and olives circulated.

When Sir Richard excused himself to greet someone else, Jimmy also slipped away to another part of the room. He was disturbed and needed time for thought. From where he stood now, he could see Rose's back, a rangy figure with a handbag swinging from her crooked arm. Then a heated discussion on the effects of colour TV on children rose on his left and broke like a wave over him. Jimmy joined in vigorously, talking automatically. He emerged some while later to find the subject held no interest for him, though he had been as partisan as anybody ; muttering a word of excuse, snatching another drink, he went into the corridor to stand by an open window.

Here it was distinctly cooler and quieter. Jimmy leant out, looking down four stories to the untidy bottom of the building's well. He lapsed into one of the untidy reveries which often overcame him when he was alone. His thoughts went back to Rose English, the woman with the unlikely name, and then faded from her again. Euphoria flooded over him. A waiter brought him a drink. He groaned at his own contentment. The world was in a hell of a state : the political tension in the Middle East was high, with war threatening ; the countries of the Common Market were discovering how little they had in common ; the United States was facing a worse recession than in 1958 ; the British political parties were bickering over a proposal to build a tunnel under the Severn ; gold reserves were down ; the whole unstable economic edifice of the country, if one believed the newspapers—but who did ?—tottered on the brink of collapse ; and of course the ER's would deliver a rabbit punch to the good old status quo of society.

But it was summer. It was summer in England, hot and sweet and sticky. Everyone was stripping off to mow a lawn or hold a picnic or dive into the nearest dirty stretch of river. Nobody gave a hoot. Euphoria had its high tide willy-nilly, come death, come danger. The unexpected heat made morons of us all, quite as effectively as did the interminable wretchedness of winter.

He sighed and breathed the warm air, full of discontent and indifference, those hallmarks of the true-born Englishman. As

Jimmy withdrew his head from the window, Rose English was approaching, coming self-assuredly down the corridor.

" Hello," she said, without noticeably smiling. " I wanted some cool air too. People should not give parties on nights like this."

" No," Jimmy replied, rather glumly. Yes, she had something about her.

" I didn't mean to embarrass you in there, Mr. Solent."

" Jimmy, please. I've got such a wet surname." He had trained himself not to wait for laughter after making that modest joke. " You didn't embarrass me ; as you say, everyone'll soon be in the same boat."

" No, I didn't mean that. I mean, I hope I said nothing to hurt you."

" Of course not." His Norman Light was glowing ; without looking directly, he could see hers was too. To change the subject, he said, " I could do with a swim now."

" Same here." He thought it was a schoolgirlish phrase for somebody of her seriousness to use and wondered if she was in some way trying to play down to him.

" I know a fellow—he was at Oxford with me—who's got a private swimming pool. Would you care to come for a bathe with me ?"

" Thank you. I should really prefer dinner," she said. He knew by her tone she thought he had tried to trap her into that ; how could she believe him so subtle ? He took one of her hands, thinking at the same time he must be a little tight to dare to do so. A lunatic notion blossomed in his brain swelling like a blown balloon.

" I've just thought of the idea !" he said. " Quite spontaneous—there's no catch. An evening like this is wasted in a place like this ; it'll probably pour with rain tomorrow ! We could go out and have a swim with them—Hurn, their name is —and then we'll still have time for a meal afterwards. Honestly! I mean how about it ? It's a genuine offer. It would be great fun."

" Perhaps it really would be great fun," she said pensively. A waiter, watching them interestedly, gave them gin-and-its. And all the while a drowning Jimmy-inside was telling him, " She's not your kind, kid. You don't like the cool and stately type. She's nearly as big as you are. She's too experienced : she could blow you into bubbles. She's too old for you—she must be thirty-five if she's a day. I warn you, Solent, you'll

make the biggest gaffe of your life if you persist in this bit of foolishness."

" You can ditch Uncle Felix, can't you ?" he implored her, grinning ingratiatingly and swallowing the gin-and-it.

" Uncle's no obstacle," she said. " He's staying afterwards to talk to thingme—Clunes."

" Come on, Rangey !" he said, taking her hand again. " Nothing's stopping us. Nobody'll miss us. Down that drink and let's go while the going's good."

Jimmy-inside noted with disgust the lapse into basic American and the abuse of adverbial " down " as a verb. He also noticed that this large, handsome girl was about to surrender herself to Jimmy's care. " She's a wonderful creature ! Just be careful, that's all I can say," Jimmy-inside sighed, and went off duty for the night.

They put their glasses on the window sill ; superstitiously Jimmy slid his over till it touched Rose's. Then he took her arm and hurried her down the carpeted stairs. The unending roar of the BIL party died behind them.

two

Anyone who drinks at all knows there are a hundred degrees of sweet and subtle gradation between sobriety and the doddering old age of intoxication ; Jimmy was a mere thirty or forty notches down the slide, and still firing on most cylinders. Only his old aunt Indecision had been shut away.

He conjured up a taxi directly Rose and he got outside and urged it to Charlton Square as fast as possible. Knowing something of the oddness of women, he had realised the cardinal fact that once they had bathing costumes and the question of nude bathing was thus disposed of, the whole stunt would seem, by comparison, respectable. He wanted to borrow Aubrey's car : taxis to and from Walton-on-Thames would be expensive. He had yet to tell Rose exactly where the pool was, for fear that she would object that it was too far away.

Jimmy found when he reached the flat that Aubrey had evidently come in and gone out again with Alyson. That was bad ; perhaps he had taken the damned MG. Moving like a clumsy wind, while Rose sat downstairs in the ticking taxi, Jimmy seized his own swimsuit and Alyson's from the airing cupboard—it would have to fit Rose, or else. Sweeping into

the kitchen, he pulled two bottles of Chianti from the broom closet which served as wine cellar. Then he was downstairs again, shouting goodnight to a surprised Mrs. Pidney, and back in the taxi with his arm round Rose.

At the garage they were in luck. The MG was there. Aubrey and Alyson would be walking ; it was a nice evening for walking, if you did not have to get to Walton. Jimmy paid off the taxi and bustled into the coupe.

" They're looking at us as if you're trying to kidnap me," Rose said, waving a hand in indication at a couple of mechanics.

Jimmy laughed.

" No, it's because we're both bright pink," he said.

Laughing, they backed out of the garage. Jimmy drove with savage concentration, fighting to keep the whiskers of drink away from his vision. They could crash on the way back and welcome, but he was not going to spoil the evening now. He was full of exaltation. He had won a prize !

He drew into the side of the road without signalling, braked, and took a long, deep kiss from her. She shaped up round him immediately like a young wrestler. Together, they plunged.

" Let's have a swim first, sweet," she said, gasping.

Jimmy struggled up and looked at her. They were bathing each other in pink light. It was like a warm liquid over them. The long face had undergone a change. Her brow was wide and tolerant ; every line of her face had relaxed, so that she seemed plumper, less mature, even less sure of herself. Here, now, she was beautiful. He took a long look at her, trying to remember it all.

" And threw warm gules on Madelaine's fair breast," he quoted, half-shyly. " Have some Chianti ?" Just how much had she drunk before the party, he wondered, that she should ever want him ?

They drank gravely, companionably, out of the one glass Aubrey kept stowed in his locker, then drove on. Jimmy covered the road more slowly now. For one thing, he had caught the savour of the evening ; it was something peaceful, relaxedly relentless—a kind of homecoming. He was going to be a proper man and take the correct tempo ; Rangey would appreciate that. She knew and seemed to tell him exactly how these things should go. For another thing, he was having misgivings about the Hurns and their pool.

Rupert Hurn had been at Merton with Jimmy. Their friendship had not been close, but twice Rupert had taken Jimmy and another friend to his home. They had met Rupert's younger sister (what *was* that plump child's name ?), and his docile mother, and his pugnacious little stockbroker father ; and they had swum in his pool. But the last visit had been two years ago. Rupert might not be at home ; the family probably would not remember him. They might even have moved. Jimmy's idea began to look less bright with every mile they made.

He mentioned no word of his misgivings to Rose. If the evening was going to spoil, it should do so without any help from him.

The sun was setting as the MG passed Walton station. To Jimmy's relief, he remembered the way clearly and picked up Ryden's Road with confidence. He could recall the look of the house now ; it crouched between two Lutyenesque chimneys ; the porch rested on absurdly fat pillars and a laburnum grew too close to the windows. Jimmy had passed the place before he realised it ; they had had the sense to chop the tree down.

He backed into the drive and climbed out. Rose climbed out and smoothed herself down. She took his arm, looking at him quizzically ; her irises were a perturbing medley of green and brown. Jimmy wondered how on first impression she had seemed unattractive.

" Er . . . come on," he said. Their Norman Lights had ceased to burn. He stepped between the fat pillars and rang the bell ; in reply, a mechanism in the hall said " Ding Dong Ding Dong." There was no other sound.

" Perhaps they're out," Rose said. " There are no lights anywhere. Surely they won't have gone to bed yet ?"

" You're beautiful," Jimmy said. " Forgive me for not mentioning it earlier. You're beautiful, wonderful, unique."

The door opened, and a very young man thrust his head out. After a searching glance at them, he stepped on to the porch, pulling the door to behind him. He wore a soft black suit with a mauve bow tie and big suede shoes ; he had a (violently) contemporary fringe-cut to his hair, while on his brow an ER disc glinted metallically. His little, enquiring face was at once sweaty and fox-like.

" Who are you ? You aren't Fred," he said, surveying them anew.

" Touche," Jimmy said, with an attempt at what he called his society laugh. " What can we do to redeem ourselves ?"

" What do you want ?" the young man asked, refusing to be deflected into a smile.

" We are friends of the Hurns," Jimmy told him. " We beg entry in the name of hospitality—or don't they live here any more ? Tell me the worst."

" Which Hurn do you want ? They're nearly all out."

" For heaven's sake," Rose said, making a determined entrance into this asinine conversation, " Who are you, a bailiff ?"

The young man shot her the look of dumb endurance one sees on the faces of wet dachhunds. He was about to speak when a girl appeared in the open doorway, wearing a severe blouse and slacks, the austerity of which was relieved by a hundredweight of charm bracelet clanking on her left wrist. In the dim light, she looked very young, very lovely. She also wore an ER, though her hair was swept forward so as partly to conceal it.

" Jill !" Jimmy exclaimed. The name of Rupert's sister had returned to him suddenly, just when vitally needed. Jill !— That podgy creature who had swooned over Chubby Checker and played Jokari from a sitting position had transformed herself into this moderately svelte little armful. He wished two years had done as much for him.

" My giddy aunt, you're—aren't you Jimmy Solvent, or someone ?" the girl said.

" Solent. Wish I was solvent. Fancy your remembering my name !"

They clasped each other's hands.

" My *dear*, I had a perfectly silly crush on you once. You used to look so sweet on the back of a motor bike !"

" Cross my heart, I still do," Jimmy said, sliding in the nicest possible way round the fringe-cut, who stood there nonplussed by this turn of events. " This, forgive me, is Rose English ; Rose English, this English rose is Jill Hurn."

" And this," Jill said, swinging up the charm bracelet in the direction of the scowling youth, " is my boy friend, Teddy Peters. You'd better come in. Were you looking for Rupert, because he's not here. He's in Holland."

With Jill leading and Teddy following, they had reached a living room at the back of the house. A teleset radiated dance

music softly from somewhere upstairs. Jill switched on a light on a corner table ; in the illumination flowing over her face, Jimmy saw she was too heavily made up and a trifle spotty. All the same, it was a good attempt for—what ?—sixteen, she would be no older. She headed for an expensive cocktail cabinet, moving with copy book grace.

" You must have a drink," she said. " Daddy and Mummy are out." That was a slip, although it told Jimmy nothing he had not already guessed. To readjust the role she was playing (and that little lout Teddy wouldn't have noticed the slip, Jimmy thought), Jill sloshed whisky into three glasses, squirted soda at them and doled them out like Maundy money. She reserved something else for herself ; perhaps a Pepsi-cola.

Jimmy took his glass, looking askance at Rose, wondering just how she was feeling. She took a sip and said, " What a lovely room you've got here "—which greatly cheered Jimmy; even half stewed, he could see it was a ghastly, ostentatious room.

" It's beautiful," he lied. " Your chandelier must have been particularly expensive. And your Jacobean radiogram."

" Let's get back upstairs, honey," Teddy said, speaking for the first time since his setback on the porch. Turning to Rose, he added, with a sort of rudimentary 'Parody of Cagney' courtesy, " We was dancing."

" How heavenly," Rose said gravely. " I love dancing."

Jill, tilting her tightly covered rump like a snub-nose, was edging Jimmy into a corner. He was content to be edged until the vital question was answered ; this now popped impolitely out of him : " Can we have a swim ?"

She did not answer at once, being busy breathing somewhat industriously.

Her eyes were ludicrously wide. Her perfume was as painful as a trodden corn, and then she smiled.

" Of course you can swim, Jimmy," Jill was saying. She had made her voice husky for extra appeal ; perhaps, Jimmy thought, she did it by holding Pepsi-cola at the back of her throat ; and he watched her mouth eagerly to see if she dribbled any. " Only you see, Jimmy," she continued. " Daddy isn't very broad-minded about couples swimming after dark—we had a lot of trouble in the spring with Rupert and an awful girl called Sonia MacKenzie—you ought to hear about *that* some time—but of course *I'm* broad-minded, so I don't care, but

you'd better be out before Daddy gets back. Teddy and I would come with you, but Teddy can't swim."

" Pity about that," Jimmy murmured.

" Here's the key to the changing hut," Jill said, handing over a large label tied to a tiny key. Her hand touched his and stayed there. He stroked her chin with his free hand.

" You're an absolute darling," Jimmy said. " I love you, and I'll remember you in my will."

" I never think that's a very practical suggestion," she said frowning. The remark amused Jimmy considerably ; he choked over his whisky.

" As you can see," he said, " owing to present commitments, I am unable to offer you anything more practical !"

Still laughing, he turned to find Rose dancing a slow quickstep with Teddy. Both of them still clutched their drinks. Both scowled in concentration. Both were showing faint pink on their ER's.

" Hey, you're meant to be swimming !" Jimmy said, forgetting his manners. Catching hold of Rose round the waist, he dragged her away, turning to wave at the other two as he pushed her through the door. Shoving her down the hall, he got her into the open and shut the front door behind them.

" That was very rude !" Rose said admiringly. Under the stars she drained the last of her glass, let it drop on to the gravel, and slid forward into his arms. They kissed, rapturous with reunion. In the house they had been apart : it was another world. Now they were together again, the evening riding once more on their shoulders like a tame raven.

Jimmy grabbed the Chianti and the swimsuits out of the car. " I just don't give a damn," he thought wonderingly ; " not a damn !"

" Hang on here a moment, pet," he whispered. " I'm going to take the car just down the road a bit, in case the old man comes home early and spots it."

" What old man ?" she asked curiously.

" Any old man, Rangey, my love, my bright shiner."

The swimming pool was at the rear of the house. By daylight it looked small and impoverished ; the concrete was a maze of cracks, the diving boards both drooped. Now, camouflaged by night, Aphrodite could have risen from it without putting it out of character. On the other hand, the changing hut (the Hurns showed a surprising modesty in not

labelling it ' the pavilion ') was even smaller, darker and stuffier now than by daylight. Inside the door with the frosted glass window was one room with a partition down the middle, opposite sexes who changed there together being trusted not to look round it—a simple-minded but ideal arrangement, Jimmy thought.

" Can you see to undress ?" he asked Rose.

" Yes, by the light of your ER," she said.

" Sorry," he muttered, turning tactfully away.

" How's the costume ?" he asked, when they emerged into the night air a minute later.

" A bit tight."

" So'm I. Feel O.K.?" She looked like a lusty goddess.

" Hungry," she said, wrapping her arms round her middle.

" We'll eat later, that I swear : Jimmy'll never let you starve. The night's young !"

Suddenly he knew indeed that the night was young and he was young. The excitement of the dark purred through his body. In one grand flash, he recalled all the events of the day, getting up, his work, having his ER fitted, the party, Rose. It was all unreal, bygone, prehistoric. A new era had begun ; the ER's were going to change everything. In Merrick's words, he had inherited a major liberty.

He raced round and round the lawn, puppy-like.

" The world's begun again, Rangey my love," he shouted. " You and I are the only ones to guess it yet, but the jolly old millenium began today ! Hurray ! Life's the greatest invention yet !"

" Not so *loud*, Jimmy," she said. " You're crazy !"

" Nuts to you, you great big lovely ploughable adult of a woman," he called. Charging at the pool, he bounded in and disappeared with a resounding splash. Rose followed more gracefully, diving off the side of the bath.

" Distinctly frappe," she said in a small voice, as they swam together. She shook her head vigorously in distress.

" Where have they kept this pool all day ?" he asked. " Feels like liquid oxygen. Death to the loins."

" Oh Jimmy, I do feel funny. I think I'd better get out."

He put an arm round her shoulders. Her flesh was as heavy and cold as refrigerated meat.

" Come on then, pet," he said. " I'll give you a hand out. You'd better go indoors and have a warm-up. A sip more whisky's what you need."

" No, wait a tick . . . Ug, better now, I think. It was just one of those momentary things. Sorry. I seem to be functioning properly again now."

Rose trod water, and then they began swimming slowly round the tank like goldfish in a bowl. The water had evidently had a cooling effect on their genes, for their Norman Lights no longer glowed, spoiling what might have been rather an unusual effect.

" Are you sure you're all right, Rangey ?"

" I told you I was."

" The water's quite hot when you get used to it."

" What I was thinking."

He floated on his back, gazing into the clear night sky with its complement of stars. Somewhere way up there was a super-civilization which had solved all its troubles and wore new suits every day ; it was not having half the time he was.

" I think I'm ready to get out," he said. " How about you, Rangey ?"

" I could stay here till dawn now I'm properly in. One becomes acclimatised, you know."

He drifted over to her. Her face and the reflections of her face seemed to palpitate before him like butterflies in a cupboard. Reaching out, he caught and kissed her ; they climbed together up rickety wooden steps, trotting over short grass and gravel to the changing hut.

There, Jimmy thoughtfully locked the door on the inside, and proceeded with the next stage of his master plan. Waiting a moment, he called softly in mock-consternation. " Rangey, what a fool I am ! I forgot to bring any towels."

" You are lying to me, Jimmy, and I hate lies," she said from her side of the partition.

" I'm not lying !" he said angrily. " I did not bring any towels. I was in such a hurry I forgot."

In the faint light, he noticed as he spoke a towel hanging on a hook, on the rear wall of the hut. Rose presumably had found one too and believed Jimmy had provided it. Snatching it off the peg, he bundled it up and thrust it under the seat. Then he bounded round the partition.

" If you've found a towel, you'll have to let me share it, pet," he said. He saw at once that she had one.

" Go away, Jimmy," she said quickly, clutching the towel round her body as he bathed her in his ruby light. " I haven't got any lipstick on yet."

He was too intent to laugh.

" It's a lovely warm towel !" he exclaimed, grabbing a corner of it. " Don't be greedy ! It's big enough to cover two of us ! How about saving me from the foggy, foggy dew ? I'm shivering."

The odd thing was, that when they were pressed together under the towel, Jimmy did begin to shiver. Excitement made him shiver as he felt her wet limbs wet upon his. He ran his hand down the great hyperbola of Rose's back.

" Oh, Jimmy, you know I'm hungry !" she wailed.

" Oh, darling . . ." Rose sighed at last, " what a rough brute you are !"

" Me ! You're the brute !—you're the beauty *and* the beast. Rangey, you're all things. Rangey, how old are you ?"

" Don't ask petty questions," she said, giving him a final hug, tugging his hair gently, kissing his neck.

" But I know so little about you !"

" That's just as well for you," she said, getting on to her knees.

" We must be filthy from this beastly floor !" she said. " It's all gritty and beastly. Don't they ever sweep the damned place ?"

" Wonderful, heavenly floor !" Jimmy said. " We'll come and visit it and lay an offering to Venus on it every anniversary of this date, won't we ?"

When she did not reply, he knew he was being hearty. More, he knew they would never come here again.

It astonished him that he should be feeling suddenly irritable with her, and hid it as best he could ; we resent those who please for they can guess our weaknesses. " I'm going to get you a meal now, woman."

" Really ?" She relaxed at once. She was nearly dressed.

Pulling himself together, he blundered round the partition to put his own clothes on.

" Where, Jimmy ?"

" Where what, pet ?"

" Where are we going to eat ?"

" Your uncle Jimmy knows a dirty little Chinese restaurant off Shaftesbury Avenue which stays open till two in the morning."

She came and stood on his side of the partition then, to show him she was proud of him. When they were finally ready, they

crept out of the hut, leaving the key on the outside of the lock, and walked quietly round the pool. Its surface was as still and black as oil. Keeping on the grass as far as possible, to avoid the scrunch of gravel, they skirted the house, where no lights burned.

A voice softly called " Goodnight !" from above them. They looked up to see Jill Hurn leaning out of her bedroom window, shadowy under the eaves. She must have been there a long while, watching for them. Jimmy raised a hand in silent salute to all good things and led Rose back to the car.

three

The home of the International Book Association, where Jimmy worked, was a tall, undistinguished building just off Bedford Square. Unlike its rival and elder sister, the National Book League, the IBA claimed no Regency graces. There was American capital behind it : it was modern and proud of it.

As you went through plate glass doors into a foyer ambushed with cactus, a sign in sanserif announced, " Only books stand between us and the cave. Clyde H. Nitkin." The IBA ran mainly on dollar lubrication supplied by the Clyde H. Nitkin Foundation, and the words of the great man, at once original and obvious, were in evidence throughout the building. In the cafeteria downstairs, among the Mojave Desert decor, was "To read is to strike a blow for culture. Clyde H. Nitkin." In the Main Exhibition room on the ground floor was " Speech is silver : silence is golden : print is dynamite. Clyde H. Nitkin." Up in the library, appropriately enough, was " Only by libraries can man survive. Clyde H. Nitkin." And, most touching heart cry of all, reserved for the board room up by the roof, was " Dear God, I would rather be an author than Clyde H. Nitkin."

This morning, Jimmy came in rather late. He stood for a moment in the rear of the foyer, exuding general goodwill. It was only six months since he had come to live in London and take this, his first job. Pleasure still filled him at the thought of it ; he surveyed everything with a contentment at once filial and avuncular. Posters and book jackets jostled convivially here under busts of Shakespeare, Sophocles and Edna St. Vincent

Millay. Mr. J. B. Priestley would speak on the 18th next on " What the Canadian Theatre Means." Angus Wilson's new play " Regular Churchgoers " in its fifth week at the Criterion. Thyroid Annerson's new play at the Stumer. The new Francis Bacon exhibition—the one with the laughing dogs—at the Hanover Galleries. Kingsley Amis to speak, mysteriously, about " The New Distaste " on the 25th. The posters at least were quietly, staunchly English.

The book jackets struck a more exotic note. Peter Green's name appeared on the serpent-haunted jacket of his large new novel " Patinotoxa's Donkey."

A formal jungle surrounded the word " Popacatapetle " on Edmund Wilson's new collection of travel essays. Orange prisms crashed across " Berg and the Instability of Our Times." It was all, Jimmy told himself, at once homely and exciting. " The hoi polloi are rather coy at facing the printed word, but mad dogs and publishers care nought for the midday herd," he intoned to himself.

He nodded amiably to Mrs. Charteris, the receptionist (somehow he could never think of anything to say to that woman) and went to his room. This room, lying beyond the Main Exhibition chamber, was isolated from everyone else in the building ; nevertheless, it was nice to have a room at all, and Jimmy, who was second-in-command of exhibitions while Dirk Hanahan was away being ill in Boston, relished its privacy —especially this morning.

He was in a golden daze. He wanted only to sit quietly and think of the raptures of last night, with Rose alive in his arms. His room was almost bare ; even the inevitable bookcase contained little more than Webster's Dictionary and a pile of IBA pamphlets on people like Svevo. A Ben Nicholson relief on one wall only added to the austerity. That suited Jimmy well ; the fewer external distractions the better.

The intercom on his desk buzzed.

" And now a word from our sponsor," Jimmy groaned.

He depressed one of the ivory keys and said " Solent " in a suitably crisp tone.

" Scryban here, Jimmy. We're having an informal discussion on next month's activities, just pooling a few ideas. You'd better be in on it from the exhibition angle, I think. Would you kindly come up, please ?"

" Certainly." That was a blind. Jimmy felt perfectly fit, except for a dry mouth, but he just did not want to face people

this morning. However, Scryban was Scryban and business was business. He took the lift up to Scryban's room.

" Literature is a jealous god : serve it in deeds and words," adjured Clyde H. Nitkin from eye level.

Four people were already closetted with Scryban. Donald Hortense, the IBA librarian, a science-fiction magazine tucked in his pocket, winked at Jimmy. He was the only one here Jimmy could really say he knew. Mrs. Wolf, a little, lipsticked woman with a big, difficult husband, smiled at him : Jimmy smiled back, for Mrs. Wolf was always very sweet to him. Paul de Perkin, whose office door bore the enticing word " Social," acted up to his label, indicating a chair for Jimmy and offering him a cigarette. The only person to ignore Jimmy's entrance was standing looking out of the window ; this was Martin " Bloody " Trefisick, who called himself a Cornishman, though his detractors claimed he came from Devon. He was the declared enemy of Mrs. Wolf, and his office door bore the oblique message " House Organ."

Sitting sideways behind his desk, his neat knees crossed, was Conrad Scryban, the Managing Director of IBA. Jimmy had admired this man from their first meeting ; so effectively and unassumingly was he the English literary man, that Jimmy felt sure there must be fraud in the fellow somewhere. It made him roughly ten times as interesting as any of the other solid but transparent characters in the room.

Apart from Scryban and Trefisick, everyone in the room already bore a Norman Light on his forehead. It lent an air of strangeness and newness, like a paperback found among Roman relics.

" Splendid," Scryban said vaguely, as Jimmy sat down between de Perkin and Mrs. Wolf. Scryban's baldness, like a tonsure, gave him a monastic look which his clothes quietly refuted. " We were saying before you joined us, Jimmy, that next month, being August, is rather a dog month generally. Anyone who is anyone will be no nearer Bedford Square than Teneriffe. Nevertheless, we are duty bound to offer some sort of diversion to such of the general public as wander through our doors . . . Have you, I wonder, any suggestions ? I hasten to add that none of the rest of us have."

" Actually, I believe the centenary of the publication of Newman's " Dream of Gerontius," falls some time next month," Mrs. Wolf said cautiously.

A hush settled over them. " I ought to suggest something," Jimmy told himself, as gradually the dread of being laughed at by Trefisick was dwarfed by the dread of being considered unimaginative by Scryban. He cleared his throat.

" How about some sort of tie-in with politics ?" he asked the company generally, following up with a brilliant improvisation: " I've been thinking about the Nitkin pearl that every poem is a pincer movement. Couldn't we drag out some contemporary examples of that ?"

" I can see the implications," said Scryban, appearing actually to view them in a far corner, " but how exactly do you visualize . . . I mean, what I don't see . . ."

He was too gentle to name what he did not see, but Jimmy suspected it must be the same thing he himself did not see : just what the deuce he was suggesting. He tried a counter-move.

" Well how do you feel about the present political situation?" he asked.

Scryban did not immediately answer. Instead Paul de Perkin leant forward, his face gleaming with interest, and said, " I think you have something promising there, old boy. Do you mean the international situation ?"

" Heavens, is he really fool enough to think I've got something ?" Jimmy asked himself drearily, and then decided that de Perkin, also unsure of himself, was also trying to appear bright.

" Yes, the international situation," he said at random.

" Ah now, let me see," said Scryban, conscientiously. " We have the Western bloc on one side and the Soviet bloc on the other, have we not ? And the Middle East shuttling tediously about in between. That is how matters have been, internationally, for some years, I believe, and I confess I find it an uninspiring situation : an unfruitful situation."

" We are all in a perpetual state of non-combatancy," Mrs. Wolf said. Jimmy liked the remark and laughed ; she smiled at him and laughed herself.

" All very trying for everyone," Scryban agreed. " One may, in fact, quote the words Donne employed in a somewhat different context : " The foe oft-times having the foe in sight, Is tired of standing though he never fight.' "

" We shall see a change now," Trefisick said, wrestling to fit his broad shoulders into the window frame. " These ER's completely topple the status quo at home ; they are bound to

have repercussions abroad. Without being in any way a prophet, I'd say that chaos will come again. Britain is already the laughing stock of Europe."

"That just isn't so ! *The Guardian* says Scandinavia is green with envy," Jimmy said hotly, venturing for the first time to contradict Trefisick.

"Really ? In those very words ?" asked Scryban, interested at last.

"I see the *New Statesman* is less outspoken about Tory intrigues than it was last week," de Perkin observed. "And certainly the Commonwealth seems to commend us . . . Especially Australia ; I always think Australia's very forward looking . . ."

"There was a paragraph in the *Telegraph*," Mrs. Wolf said, looking round as she whipped out her paper. They had all brightened considerably under the new topic of conversation. "Here we are. It points out that we have inaugurated a social invention whose power potential is far greater than that of the hydrogen bomb."

"And we go and use it on ourselves !" Trefisick exclaimed bitterly. "My God, but I never saw such bloody folly. You'll never catch me wearing one of the beastly things, I can assure you of that !"

"Life has grown too complicated, Martin," said Scryban gently. "We have said that so often in past years that it has become a platitude. Now that something has come along which, it is claimed, will simplify things for us, surely we are morally obliged not to look our gift horse in the mouth—especially when they are free on the National Health Scheme ?"

"But *will* these damned gadgets simplify life, that's what I want to know ?" Trefisick said pugnaciously, squaring his shoulders by inserting his thumbs in the top of his trousers. "Have they simplified *your* sex life, Solent ? What about yours, de Perkin ? Find things easier for having a tin medal over your nose ?"

"I've only had mine a day," Jimmy said, simultaneously feeling his cheeks redden and cursing himself for not standing up to this man.

"You'd better ask all my mistresses about that, Trefisick," de Perkin laughed feebly, and Jimmy cursed him for being another time server.

Mrs. Wolf rolled up her *Telegraph* pugnaciously. She was at least forty-nine, and every wrinkle showed ; but for a second defiance gave her back her youth. " This damned gadget as you call it, Martin, has certainly not simplified my life," she said without heat, her sharp teeth gleaming as she faced Trefisick. " On the contrary, it has complicated it. My husband and I are in the situation which comes to many couples : we are out of love with one another. Whereas for years we have manoeuvred unceasingly to hide this state of affairs from each other—and from ourselves—*and* from other people—we can no longer conceal it. The Norman Lights confront us with the truth."

" I'm sorry to hear that," Trefisick said, rubbing his neck, abashed ; he added, despite himself, " All the same, Veronica, you've proved my point about their being a menace."

" Not at all," she said. " For the first time my husband and I are free to be perfectly honest with each other. I have only hope for the future ; forced to acknowledge the facts at last, we may reach something better than a dead compromise," She paused. " I'm sorry. I shouldn't have . . ."

" Dear Mrs. Wolf," Scryban said, lifting his hands from his knees and replacing them there, " I refuse to allow you to apologise. What you say only makes us respect and admire you the more ; our vegetable love for you grows marvellously quicker than empires. You do show—"

" I'm just trying to show you," she interrupted a little breathlessly, " that these Norman Lights really should have our utmost faith : they are the first scientific invention ever to make us face ourselves."

They had been embarrassed by revelations about Mrs. Wolf's marriage before. Silence burst over them like an exploding muffin.

" Well, thank you all very very much for coming up and giving me your ideas. We'll think along the political line, shall we ?" Scryban said, with more haste than usual. " Now I'm sure I'm keeping you all from your coffee. I would just like to say, if I might, that though I disapprove of ER's personally, I find it difficult to understand why all the criticism of them from the culture camp, from people like Betjemann and Clarke and Ayrton, has confined itself to aesthetic principles. I find those of you here who have your Registers installed "—this was said with a deprecatory smile "—of an enhanced appearance."

As they left Scryban's room, Donald Hortense materialised at Jimmy's left elbow. He was one of Jimmy's closest friends, which made him rather less than more endearing at present, Jimmy's lover's soul feeling far from chummy.

" Come on down to the cafe for a chat," Donald said, " there isn't a blessed thing to do this morning in the library."

In the cafeteria they sat at a corner table, just out of striking distance of a giant American aloe cactus. Donald sat genially with his elbows on the table. Despite the beautiful tailoring which enveloped him, he looked like a rugger forward just off the field, his hair spikey, his nose slightly flat. He had a healthy look about him ; Jimmy already accepted the fact that Donald's light glowed intermittently in his presence.

" Had a poem accepted this morning, me boy," Donald said. "*Mandragora* took it—the one that Tambimuttu turned down."

" I remember. Good ! Congratulations. It should appear in about three years." Jimmy enjoyed none of Donald Hortense's poems, but he found them oddly memorable—partly because, as a member of the Scribist movement, Donald only composed poems which were seven brief lines long.

" Of course, I'm going to have to change my entire method of writing poetry," Donald said thoughtfully. " What a lot of people have not realised is that Norman Lights are going to put a new aspect on everything," Donald said. " For literature, it'll be a far more sweeping change than any of the multitude of changes it's already undergone this century. It'll mean writers having to learn a new language even more difficult than Shaw's forty letter alphabet would have been : the language of changed mores and responses in the external world. Willy nilly, poetry and the novel are dunked back into a realm of exploration."

" I suppose so," Jimmy agreed. " A writer writes most richly of his childhood. Facing the new set-up will be a tax on him. Any novelist not tackling the immediate present will be classed as an historical novelist."

" Not only that. The NL's will bring a state of flux which is going to last for years, as all the ramifications see through every level of society. A synthesis, an analysis, will be a more demanding task than ever—*and* its value more questionable. Because no sooner do you get the novel or what-have-you written than your specimen is out of date. Have you seen *Vogue* ?"

Jimmy shook his head. He had never seen *Vogue ;* Donald always had. Women's fashion magazines were irresistible to the librarian ; through them he caught glimpses of a vast, busy world with which he had not the slightest connection.

" There's an interesting article in it by Grigson," Donald said. " Versatile type, Grigson ; I admire him for it. He's attempting to predict the effect NL's will have on such womanly wiles as make-up and hats—and hence on the whole conception of female beauty. He thinks that at first hats will be designed to *conceal* NL's and then, later, to *reveal* them. As a long range prediction, he emphasises that we have supplied our bodies with a new sexual focus, which he thinks may supplant some of the others in superficial importance. So that by about the mid-seventies bare breasts may be quite the thing ; they just won't seem anything to be excited about any more."

" It's something to look forward to, anyhow."

" Infantile traumas springing up right, left and centre." Donald exclaimed, gulping down his coffee in disgust. " Well, I must be awa'."

When Jimmy returned to his little room, he pulled the Haiti folder out of the desk and opened it. On the first sheet of paper, he had written boldly, " Books in Haiti since 1804." It was going to be a good and unusual exhibition : *his* exhibition. He ought to write straight away to the faculty in Pisa for photographs of Queen Marie-Louise's grave ; sufficiently enlarged, they would fill the awkward alcove at the far end of the Main Exhibition Hall. He began a rough sketch to indicate the sort of camera angle he required.

In no time, his pencil stopped. Blankly, gently he gazed into space. The soft and nutritious thought of Rose slid over him. As if silent upon a peak in Darien, he seemed to have discovered a new ocean of truth. He perceived that most of the books in the building, and nearly all the books he had ever read, had lied; that his friends and acquaintances had deceived him ; that his parents and teachers had misled him ; that few, in fact, except a smattering of sages mislabelled voluptuaries, had ever staggered on his mighty discovery. Physical love was good !

He recalled all the modern novels he had consumed in which passion was shown as a dark destroyer or, at best, as a parched desert. How crudely those authors had misread. Truth lay buried in the body and could only be reached as Jimmy had reached it last night. The plunge was what absolutely must be

taken. And though one had wings, the dive into the burning lake was necessary for life.

Jimmy Solent, as may perhaps be gathered from this summary of his feeling, was practically a stranger to the wilder alchemies of the human system. A diffident creature, his experience hitherto had been limited.

The more Jimmy explored all the agreeable sensations which filled him, the more uneasy he grew. A contradiction puzzled him, until its source suddenly became clear. He had to have more of that wonderful world, and he had not got Rose's address. He had not had the elementary intelligence to get her address, and she had not suggested another meeting.

He was at lunch in the IBA cafeteria when this oafish bit of stupidity occurred to him. He set down his cup with such force that his friends jumped in alarm.

" I've just remembered—I've got to make a phone call," Jimmy told Donald Hortense and Sylvia Redfern, the IBA sub-librarian.

" Crikey, man, it'll wait till you've finished your coffee, won't it ?" Donald said. " You haven't forgotten it's a bob a cup here, have you ?"

" This is going to be a private call," Sylvia said, " you can tell by the look on his face."

Bitterness was detectable in her tone : she had hoped to make Jimmy's ER light, and had failed.

As soon as he could decently get back to the privacy of his office, Jimmy did so. There were two possible ways of procuring Rose's address, through Sir Richard Clunes or through Guy Leighton ; Guy was the obvious choice, although Jimmy bore him little love and Aubrey had to be phoned first to obtain Guy's number. Finally, however, there was that competent voice of Guy's in Jimmy's ear ; odd how even a voice can sound as if it is balanced on the balls of its feet.

" Hello, Solent. This is so sudden. What can we do for you ?"

Without finesse, Jimmy asked for Rose's phone number. There was a distinct pause on the line.

" Had you met Miss English before the cocktail party last night ?" Guy finally asked.

" No ; I thought you knew I hadn't. Why do you ask ?"

" Look, Solent, it runs quite contrary to my principles to ladle out free advice, and I say this purely by way of friendship,

but really if I were you I should steer quite clear of the Iral fraternity at present. Do you understand ?"

" No, I'm sorry, Guy, I don't understand. I didn't mention Iral ; I just asked if you knew where I could find Rose."

The voice at the other end assumed the slightly constricted tones of martyrdom as it said, " As perhaps you may have heard, the Norman Laboratories, which invented the Norman Light or Emotional Register, are controlled by Iral Chemicals. They rival Monsato in size, and this new product is giving even ICI a twinge of regret ; you may have noted, if you keep abreast of such things, how Iral shares have jumped recently. Felix Garside is a director of Iral. Rose English is his niece. I am not at liberty to say too much, but if this NL deal with the government fails to come off, Rose and everyone else is—er, going to be in trouble."

" I don't follow you," Jimmy said, feeling disquieted by this information. " Surely this NL deal *has* come off ? Everyone has to have one fitted by the first of September, by law."

Guy laughed dryly.

" You submerge yourself in books too deeply, Solent," he said, " or you would have observed considerable opposition to Norman Lights—opposition which grows as public opinion becomes more enlightened. It is more than likely that the government will have fallen by September the first."

When he had absorbed this, Jimmy heard himself say weakly, " It may be as you say, Guy, but I don't honestly see how all this should affect my seeing Rose."

" I'm trying to explain in your own best interests, why I think you're plunging in out of your depth, Solent."

" Good heavens, I'm not asking you to worry if I drown. All I want to know is how I can get in touch with Rose."

" Then I'm sorry but I do not know. To my knowledge, which is limited, she is rarely in London. Goodbye, Solent. You must have a drink with me some time."

Jimmy put the phone down and sat being quietly angry. An additional item in his fury was an inability to see just how much of Guy's rudeness was deliberate. When he had really come to the boil, he marched out into the foyer to Mrs. Charteris, the receptionist. For once he could think of something to say to her. He asked her for the London telephone directory and looked up Iral.

four

That afternoon, when the IBA had closed most of its doors (only the library, cafeteria and lecture rooms were still open) Jimmy walked gently in the hot sun, paying more attention than usual to his surrounding. Two IBA typists, bottoms jolting, passed him hurriedly and were whistled at by two lowly members of the Army, that blue-jowled mother-surrogate.

The soldiers wore ER's which did not glow at the girls ; their whistles had been purely automatic, a signal to each other rather than to the typists. A small percentage of the crowd bore the metal discs on their foreheads

An array of posters met Jimmy's eye at the end of the street. Beside " The toast is—Melloaf !" the toucans drinking Guinness, Jack Hawkins in " First the Beachheads," and the now familiar U.N. poster saying " The opposite of Peace is not War but Death," was the new government poster on which a pretty but suitably reticent-looking girl wearing her ER announced " I'm respectable now ; nobody will pester me when they can *see* I'm not interested." Under this unlikely statement was the legend " YOUR life will be Simpler," but as Jimmy passed the half acre of paper he saw somebody had scrawled on it " We don't want sex in our home."

He bought a *Standard* from the newsboy at the corner. Only a third of the front page was given over to the Test Match against Ceylon. The rest bore a heading " ' Big ' Bill Bourgoyne says : Lights Bring Darkness." Under the headline, a report said : " Amid Opposition cheers, ' Big ' Bill Bourgoyne, Socialist member for Sludge (East), claimed that ER's, brilliant new inventions of Norman Laboratories, would bring about a New Dark Age. ' Don't listen to Government claims that they are going to make life better,' he shouted during a stormy scene. ' They are going to make the Police State stronger.' The Commons were meeting to discuss the new Double Daylight bill.

" Will Bourgoyne, forty-six-year-old M.P. and TV star, famous for his outbursts when the ER bill was passed early this year, is leader of the Bourgoyne Group holding a protest meeting in Trafalgar Square this evening. The ranks of his ' Hands Off Sex ' campaign, as one of his critics has pointed out, are made up of ageing ladies who appear never to have had their hands on. Tonight's meeting should be lively, notwithstanding.

" When Bourgoyne claimed that ER's were camouflaged mind readers, Mr. Peter Thornton, from the government benches, shouted ' That is dangerous and unscientific nonsense! Emotion Registers are man's greatest contribution to social living—you are a Victorian prude.' There were cries of ' What have you got to hide, Bourgoyne ?' The Speaker brought the house back to the subject in hand, which was—later closing in public parks. It had been suggested that glowing ER's might help park attendants to locate late visitors."

Jimmy smiled and headed for the tube. He could see little hint in the activities of Bourgoyne that the government was threatened ; Guy Leighton did not know what he was talking about : the fellow was obviously too eager to impress. If trouble had been coming, it would have come before the bill was made law. But the party in office had laid its plans with care and those who spoke out against the motion were easily made to seem opponents of progress and oppressors of the mixed-up young, if not downright dirty old men. " Every man is not a proper champion for truth," said Sir Thomas Browne, " nor fit to take up the gauntlet in the cause of verity," and the case against the ER was quickly brought to disrepute by the obvious crankiness of many of its detractors.

Even so, the installations of an ER on every forehead in the kingdom would have remained forever a dream but for one factor : the very revolutionariness of that invention. As *Time* commented, " Pixilated by novelty, Britain decides to put love-light above eyes." The whole thing was launched like a surprise attack. There were contributing factors also which won over, if not public support, public acquiescence for the Government ER campaign. The Prime Minister, Herbert Gascadder, and his very able Minister of Health, Dr. Warwick Bunnian, were careful never to alarm anyone by employing the word " sex "; they merely mooted a design for common sense living with clarified emotional standards in which ER's would do for the blood what traffic signals did for the highways. It was left to the opponents of the design to use that terrifying three letter word, with the foreseeable consequence that they thereby stirred up prejudice against themselves. The true aspects of the debate, as so often happens, were lost, and Sense v. Sex was presented as the issue at stake.

Humbler and saner levels of the great British public might still have repelled the new notion from behind a barricade of prudery. But under the first concerted frontal attack it had ever faced, that prudery collapsed ; it had been a poor, frail thing, a middle class myth of hardly more than a century's standing. The heritage of the past, Chaucer's, Shakespeare's, Wycherley's, Boswell's, revived overnight, and the majority of people found themselves eager to discover which of their acquaintances actually felt how strongly about them ; it was worth revealing one's own feelings to find out. *And* the ER's were free on the National Health Scheme. That simple economic fact tipped the scale—despite the equally simple fact that the next Budget would have to find the needed millions.

While the bill was before the Commons, the *Daily Mail* Gallup Poll asked the country two questions and got their revealing answers :

' Will you feel conspicuous in your ER (Norman Light, sex detector, etc.) when everyone else is also wearing theirs ?"

Yes	No	Don't know.
31%	24%	45%

" Shall you be interested in seeing other people's reactions to you and to each other ?"

Yes	No	Don't know.
93%	2%	5%

Ask the nation any question—did you wake up this morning? —and at least five per cent will always not know ; no doubt it is always the *same* five per cent. The fact remained : the country's traditional love of privacy was overturned by its traditional love of " having a go." The ER bill went through and became law. Four months later, the grey trailers were attracting queues throughout the country.

The trailer in Charlton Square looked to be doing a brisk business as Jimmy went past it that fine evening. It cost him an effort to realise he had been wearing his own Norman Light for only twenty-four hours, so busy had that time been. Yesterday he had met Rose for the first time : tonight he was, he hoped, going to meet her again—for he had phoned through to Iral and had finally been connected with a secretary who had grudgingly, and only in exchange for Jimmy's name and address

informed him that Miss English stayed at the Debroy Dalmar when in London. Jimmy was going to that lustrous hotel as soon as possible ; he needed a shower and a snack and then he was going.

" When lovely woman stoops to folly, he who helped to egg her on should see she stoops again before the in-clin-a-ti-on is gone," he muttered, adding to himself, " Don't try to be hard and bright about her, laddie : I can tell you're soft as butter underneath."

He showered and walked about the flat in a gaudy silk dressing gown, assembling a rapid meal. He dressed and was out of the house before his brother arrived, and strolled, in the very best of moods, towards the Debroy Dalmar, wondering dreamily how comfortable the beds would be there. It took him a quarter of an hour and he enjoyed every step. His shoes, bought a month ago, had just learnt to fit his feet properly. The air was so warm and still that the boundary between his flesh and the external world for once became unapparent, making the whole evening an extention of his content.

The Debroy had its awning out, and pretended, in a dignified way, to gaze over the Mediterranean. The foyer was pugnaciously unostentatious and overwhelmingly discreet ; an Indian woman in a gold, silver and blue sari moved through it like a spirit, giving Jimmy one breath of chypre. He sought another, but the perfume had gone. Smiling rather vacantly to himself, he stood where he was, looking about him, enjoying the eight-guineas-a-day atmosphere, neither blase enough to ignore it nor naive enough to feel guilty about it—just, in fact, smiling vacantly. Then he jumped into action and went over to Reception where a beautiful young man stood behind a curving pallisade of beech and elm.

In answer to Jimmy's enquiry, this lamb, his manner suggesting he had been born and bred in the Quai d'Orsai, regretted that Miss English had driven off about forty-six minutes ago and was not expected back until after the weekend. Jimmy admired the " about forty-six minutes " and hated all the rest. Limply, he wandered out again into the malicious evening. It was too hot and his feet were tired.

Three dreary days had to pass before she was again accessible ; Quai d'Orsai had regretted he had no other address for Miss English.

In the nearest pub he could find, Jimmy sat moodily over a tepid lager. He wanted no distractions ; he wanted merely to soak in melancholy ; in the bar-side TV, two comedians told a joke about ER's. ". . . and so *he* said, ' Well, how should I have known ?—I'm colour blind !' " Wild applause, whistling, stamping.

Following the comedians were three acrobats performing on one-wheel bicycles, the ballet " Swan Lake." The lager was nearly gone ; should he go or have another ? He spun it out indecisively.

Glancing gloomily up at the TV screen, he saw that the cameras were sweeping over Trafalgar Square, where people clustered like pigeons round the Landseer lions. The Bourgoyne Group had started its meeting ; everything was as orderly as a congregation of Lord's Day Observance Society officials. Under banners bearing the words " Suppress Science !" " Hands off sex !" and " Beware Second Norman Conquest !" a meagre man addressed the crowd in an academic tone. He spoke from notes, without gestures.

". . . since the Industrial Revolution. England's green and pleasant land has been eradicated, my friends—by science. Yes, by science. Look around you and see what it has done ! But it is only getting into its stride. The new despotism has only just begun. Oh yes ! This new invention, this so-called Emotional Register, strikes a deadly blow where we shall feel it most : in our thoughts. Yes, your thoughts and feelings are no longer sacred. They are to be harnessed to the machine. It is no longer legal to keep your reactions to yourself. We shall become a nation of robots unless you give us your support and your pennies now."

An influx of customers to the bar obscured Jimmy's view of the screen. He got up and leaned against the bar to see better.

" And that was Percy Warren, Chairman of the Suppression of Science Society, which has just publicly associated itself with the Bourgoyne Group," announced the hushed voice of the announcer. He was talking through an open mike ; faint in the background were the strains of a brass band playing " Oh, Peaceful England !" " And as I stand here, I can see the Friday evening crowds coming slowly down Whitehall, and the tops of the historic buildings about me are still gilded, still beautifully gilded, with the rays of the setting sun. And even the starlings seem to be hushed. And now everyone is waiting

for the next speaker, William Bourgoyne himself. I can see his car, his Armstrong Siddeley Sapphire, waiting for him near the National Gallery. And now he is going to speak."

Bourgoyne in action looked very like the Labour leader, John Burns, who had once spoken from between these same indifferent lions. He had what is termed a good presence which, coupled with an ample beard and a resonant speaking voice, generally compelled respect from his audiences.

" You've heard of Herbert Gascadder," he began, without preliminaries. " He is our Prime Minister ; he and his Cabinet have brought disgrace upon us. They've brought us disgrace *internationally*. Can you imagine the French having any nonsense with these Norman Lights ? Of course you can't! They've always managed without them—so have we. And we can go on managing without them. We have been disgraced *nationally*. When these badges of the devil are installed, what son is going to care to face his mother, what sister is going to face her brother ?" (Someone in the crowd shouted, " We don't all feel that way about our sisters !") I warn you, family life will be shattered at one blow. But most of all, we have been disgraced *personally*. Whether or not these registers function as they are supposed to do is immaterial ; the fact remains, it is an insult to expect a man or a woman to have a tin badge welded to his or her forehead. It's shameful ! It is a descent into savagery. Soon we shall be issued with rings to go through our noses !"

He was working himself up now, but Jimmy in the bar felt only an increasing restlestness, perhaps because the TV cameras were also growing restless, and fidgeting about the crowds, or even taking a peep at Nelson up on his column, when they should have been concentrating on that hypnotic beard. Or perhaps, Jimmy reflected, he suffered from that typical failing of the British mentality : he could not grasp that when a problem graduated into the realm of politics it did not thereby lose its reality.

This Bourgoyne business, as far as he was concerned, although more absorbing than, say, the Test Match, was about as relevant to everyday life. Wearing an NL was a personal decision—and in this case he had had no doubts—against which all that Europe or a continent of mothers thought was immaterial ; perhaps he would have felt differently had his parents been alive.

" But we can resist !" Bourgoyne was shouting. " If you will give me your support, we can resist. Britons never, never shall be slaves of the Lamp. We must take a leaf out of Ghandi's book. Passive resistance means effective resistance. If *none* of us submit to these metal brands, the whole country cannot go to jail, can it ? Men, be Men ! Women, be Women ! Resist this disgrace ! Keep Gascadder out of your private life !"

" Of course, he's right, you know," a woman sitting over a gin said to the company round the bar. " It is a bit of a cheek, when you come to think of it, *making* us wear the things."

" At least it'll stop men marrying us for our money, Nancy, love," the barmaid said, winking all round.

" Is that so much worse than marrying for sex ?" an angular man in a pin-stripe inquired severely. There was a tiny silence ; the word was tolerable in print, the meaning welcome in innuendo, but *spoken*, when everyone was drinking together all nice and friendy-like in a nice respectable pub . . . Well, of course, they'd have to get used to it. It was a sign of the times.

" Look at old Freddie over there," the barmaid said, pouring a bitter. " You wait till he gets his fitted. This place'll be bathed in pink all the time, like the Folly Bare-Jair."

In the laughter that followed, a fat man was heard to say, " Still, they say you don't feel a thing."

" Don't you believe it," the pin-stripe who had made the unpopular remark said. " My daughter Else, who's a trained nurse, says there are two little wires behind that plate which go right through into your brain." This remark also produced a silence.

" Ah, you're all wet," someone said.

five

The fact that what surprises most people in most revolutions is their unrevolutionary quality. Life goes on, whether the barricades go down or stay up. This is particularly so when the issue is ill-defined and the national drama is largely enacted in individual bosoms. Blood is a great heightener of tension, and there was no blood.

Or very little. The day after Bourgoyne's speech was the first Saturday on which the grey trailers, known officially as ER Installation Centres, were operating. More people are more

restless on Saturdays than on any other day of the week. In Glasgow, a party of demonstrating undergraduates emerged from Sauchiehall Street and overturned a grey trailer standing in Kelvingrove Park. In Pontypool, a postman assaulted a housewife whose Norman Light, he claimed, had glowed at him ; later, it was established that her light had merely been reflecting the colour of his mail van. In Frinton, and one felt it was somehow typical, a seaside guest tried to remove the ER he had had installed that morning, and was taken to a hospital. In Bickington, North Devon, an old lady of seventy-five put her head in the gas oven rather than submit to such new-fangled devices ; as she was safely over the statutory installation age limit of sixty, the gesture was largely fruitless.

On Orkney, a determined brigade of islanders repulsed the seaborne medical unit which tried to dock with a cargo of ER's. On the West Cliff at Bournemouth, a young lady was charged with causing an obstruction ; for a modest half-crown a head, a queue of enthusiastic young men were attempting, by kissing her, to make her Norman Light glow and thus win ten cigarettes

But these incidents were as nothing beside the march of world events. Despair on Wall Street, despots in Jordan, despond over the City. Earthquakes in Greece, revolt in Roumania, sackings in the Egyptian Army. Two-man space ship being planned at Woomera, report of sea monster off Belgian coast, yeti tracks sighted by First International Himalayan Expedition. Terrible fire in Georgetown, British Guiana, sensational mass murders in Milan, dope ring exposures in Marseilles. And, of course, film star marrying, Royalty on tour, darling baby panda at the zoo, three drowned at seaside resort. Oh, and the Test Match.

Between these large scale worries and the usual personal preoccupations with money, food, love, sport, prestige, tax evasion, work, and class, the problem of the ER never really received due attention, although its cruder aspects were on everyone's lips. People tended either to go and get theirs fixed on and be done with it, or to wait until their friends got theirs. Abstract thought as a national trait is something even the ubiquitous TV quiz shows have been unable to foster.

In this respect, as in so many others, Jimmy Solent was the average citizen. He went about that Saturday with hardly a constructive thought in his head. Cupid, that grim reaper, had got him.

In the evening, his brother Aubrey took him in a fit of exasperation to see the new Thyroid Annerson play, " No Anchorage But Ithaca," at the Stumer Theatre. Then for a little while the spectre of the Rose was banished from Jimmy's mind. Before a black backcloth, under execrable lighting, the mackintoshed figures of Odysseus and his crew confronted the bespectacled figure of Circe.

" I thought it had a rather *Caravaggio* touch about it," Aubrey pronounced cautiously, as they left at the end of the play. He took his playgoing as seriously as another man takes snuff.

Jimmy, who had loathed every word he heard and who recognised his brother's gambit anyway, solemnly said, " I thought that for *Greeks* they were far too Grecian."

" Yes, it certainly wasn't universalised enough," Aubrey agreed soberly. " I quite felt that myself. There is a provincialism of time as well as of space."

Alyson, who was with them, hooted with laughter and said, " Jimmy's being a Philistine and pulling your leg, Aubrey."

" Then he has no right to," Aubrey said without rancour. " He was asleep throughout the crucial second act. You Unloveable Young People are frightful cowards when it comes to a bit of culture."

At thirty-one, Aubrey Solent had been a solid citizen for too long. He still retained, however, many of the loveable Solent traits, as he demonstrated after the play by taking Alyson and Jimmy to his club, the Quadrant.

" This hive of iniquity !" Jimmy exclaimed, pretending to hang back at the door. " That ill-lit bar packed with well-lit customers ! Not for me !"

They went in, Jimmy conscious of an unhappiness rising in him which he did not want drink to liberate. He glared down at his whisky when it appeared, as if defying it to produce any chemical effect on him.

" Cheer up, Jim," Alyson urged. " It's so much brighter in here than you feared."

" Bright ! These fluorescents are simply lurid. I'm never at my best when I'm turned beige."

" You do look rather like a fugitive from Eastman colour," she said sympathetically. " Drink up, here come some friends of Aubrey's."

To his relief, Jimmy found that the friends were no one he knew. Then and throughout dinner, and during another drink afterwards, he was able to keep slightly detached from the party. When he realized his ER was glowing mildly at Alyson, he detached himself altogether, until the light had faded.

He returned home with the other two in a subdued fashion. Two days had to pass before he could see Rose. Long as it sounded to him, he had a suspicion that for Rose it might be merely . . . well, a couple of days.

So the day of revolution passed for Jimmy, its grand, imperative issues almost completely blurred. Sunday, however, brought them more sharply into focus. For Sunday brought the Sunday papers.

Aubrey went as usual to Communion, leaving Alyson and Jimmy to breakfast together, Alyson with a stiff and decorous white nylon gown over her nightdress. When, at the beginning of the year, Jimmy had first come to share his brother's flat, some embarrassment had been generated over the Alyson-Aubrey sleeping arrangements—at one careless remark of Jimmy's, indeed, the atmosphere had frozen to the size of a postage stamp ; but he had soon accustomed himself to the idea that Alyson came for the night just whenever she pleased, although she generally pleased at weekends. It was not, perhaps, a very unusual arrangement : what made it unusual was the characters of those who entered into it.

" This is really rather fun," Jimmy said, smoothing out the *Observer* beside his plate and carefully not eyeing the white nylon gown. " They've got a heap of what are tenderly called Eminent Contemporaries to say whether they are for or against Norman Lights."

" There's a long article in the *Times* by Aldous Huxley," Alyson said. " Aubrey will like that—you know how much he has always admired Huxley."

Jimmy did indeed.

" Huxley has come over from California especially to observe how things work out," Alyson continued, scanning the paper while Jimmy watched her white nylon neckline admiringly. Huxley, with his usual admirable elasticity of mind, welcomed the new regime as the first valuable socio-scientific innovation since the introduction of Arabic numerals from India. Emotional Registers should merely be regarded as another step forward in the domestication of sex which the declining

influence of the Judaeo-Christian ethic had made possible. Thousands of ergs of nervous energy were expended every day in individual attempts to decide who represented whose next potential sexual encounter : in a community fully equipped with ER's, that problem resolved itself on sight, with a consequent release of psycho-power which would be available for more constructive ends.

The two of them, Jimmy and Alyson, sat happily over hot rolls and Cooper's Oxford Marmalade reading out bits of the papers to each other.

" Damon Goldgate, Texas oilman now in England, asks ' Could Utopia be just around the corner for the U.K.? I don't know, but I'm figgering to stay around here just so long as my firm'll let me. This is Big.' Many Americans with similar feelings now visiting Europe are cancelling Continental trips to stay in England and see ' what breaks.' Against the one disgruntled Californian who exclaimed, ' Why does a country have to go nuts just when I get to it ? I came over here to get away from people talking on the one subject all the time,' may be set many Americans who regard the ER experiments as noble if dangerous. ' This is Britain's finest hour,' one of them told me at Gatwick Airport yesterday."

Continued on Page 52

The *Observer* had a slightly less optimistic tale to tell of American reactions, from the President's firm view, " No statement," down to a Hollywood starlet's " Anything those Limeys can manage with their Lights, I can manage with *me*." The Mayor of Rapid Rapids, Iowa, said, " This could never happen in Rapid Rapids, Iowa." The College of Puget Sound was sending a sociologist, a pupil of Dr. Kinsey's, to England to make an independent report. Sophomores of a New York university voted Britain the silliest country they had ever heard of. The *Herald Tribune* predicted a dire collapse in the body social before the deadline date of September 1.

" European reactions are likewise mixed," Alyson said, " if not so outspoken. The usual boring phalanx of Soviet condemnation apart, nobody seems to know what to think of us."

" Did they ever ?" Jimmy asked.

" Well, I suppose that just as it used to be a national boast that we were overmodest, we have been pretending for years that we did not have much love life, and now . . ." Alyson faltered and then said hurriedly, " Anyhow, the Scandinavians seem to think we've been progressive. And Canada and Australia approve."

It was exceedingly pleasant to be sitting in this cosy fashion, talking to an elegant creature in her elegant night clothes. Jimmy would have preferred Rose there, but Alyson made a charming substitute. He pushed his cup forward for more coffee ; as she reached out for it, he seized her hand.

" You're going to look so sweet in your nunchaser, Alyson." he said. " Hurry up and get it fixed ! I feel at such a disadvantage here with you and Aubrey without them."

She pulled her hand away.

" I've changed my mind about them," she said. " They're going to bring trouble. I don't want one. The whole idea frightens me, really. I'd . . . I'd rather be locked up and fined than wear one."

A pink emanation coloured the table and its utensils ; Jimmy's genes were registering. Jimmy shook his head helplessly, then went round to Alyson, putting his hands on her shoulders. The view south was wonderful.

" I feel such a fool, Alyson," he said, " and that's something I never did with you. You must know what's going on just as

well as I do. With this damned gadget turning pink over you I can't conceal how I feel any longer. I want to ask you . . ."

She got up, slopping coffee as she did so, but he still managed to keep his hands round her upper arms.

"Alyson, give me . . ."

"Take your hands off me, Jimmy," she said quietly. "You're getting too big to play these games. It's not very nice to your brother, is it? And it's taking advantage of me. You can be so maddening, Jimmy. I suppose you really think that because I'm his . . ." She stopped.

"I don't think any such thing," Jimmy said, warmly. "But now you can *see* how I feel."

"I don't want to see!" Alyson said. "For heaven's sake go into your bedroom until the effect wears off. I wish nobody had ever invented those awful things. It's like tying a tin can to a dog's tail—he's suddenly conscious he's got a tail. And now every man is suddenly conscious—oh, for heaven's sake, Jimmy dear, clear off and cool off. You're just making life difficult for all three of us, if you only knew it; really you are. Go away and cool off."

He dropped his hands. He had never seen her angry and could tell she was not so now. Even as she told him to go away, she gave him a half-smile.

"This isn't just a flash in the pan," he said. "Can't you see that for yourself? Ever since I first came to live in the flat . . ."

"You were engaged to Penny then," she reminded him.

"That doesn't make any difference to what I was going to say."

"It does, and you know it does," Alyson said firmly. "*And* you know that wretched ER has made a difference to you. You haven't had it three days and you're quite changed!"

"How am I changed?"

"Don't think I haven't noticed—and I don't mean just because of my wet swimsuit. It's been so obvious I wonder Aubrey hasn't said something. What happened to you on Thursday night? I heard you come in at some unearthly hour. And you've been very strange ever since, dragging about with a dreamy look on your face. You hardly spoke at the Quadrant last evening. I'm worried about you, Jimmy; it's a woman, isn't it? And don't attempt to tell me it's none of my business —because you've just tried to make it my business."

He stood there stupidly, thinking of fifty answers he could make.

" I wasn't going to say it was none of your business," he replied. " But I must say that I find this big sisterly attitude rather a bind—especially when you're in your dressing gown."

Alyson went over to the divider unit and lit herself a cigarette. Exhaling the smoke, she looked forcefully at him. Though her hair was the colour of ripe wheat, her eyes and eyebrows were dark ; they commanded even when she pleaded.

" Come over here, Jimmy," she said.

He went to her.

She sighed. " You're too obedient, as I've told you before," she said, not moving away from him. " You're so suggestible. Oh God, Jimmy, how you and your brother do need looking after—especially now . . . I worry about you . . . All the experts and smart alecs in the country have been discussing these ER's for months, and I think they've all missed the obvious : with *the* problem on everyone's minds, we're going to be in for a wave of libertinage. Everybody's thinking about sex in a way they've never done before. Just get hold of yourself and don't join in, hey ? It's a line of country which doesn't really suit you."

Jimmy found as he fumbled himself a cigarette that his hands were shaking. He was furious with Alyson and baffled with himself. It suddenly seemed very important not to offend this girl in white nylon. She was, after all, his sort—more so than Rose, though that was something not to be considered.

" I'm sorry . . ." he finally said.

" So am I," Alyson replied, and whisked into the bathroom.

End of Part One

Cape Canaveral and Cocoa Beach sometime in the future, when the gantries of the launching pads are but mute testimony to Man's drive to the planets—and seven satellites orbit as coffins as constant reminder.

THE CAGE OF SAND

by J. G. BALLARD

At sunset, when the vermilion glow reflected from the dunes along the horizon fitfully illuminated the white faces of the abandoned hotels, Bridgman stepped on to his balcony and looked out over the long stretches of cooling sand as the tides of purple shadow seeped across them. Slowly, extending their slender fingers through the shallow saddles and depressions, the shadows massed together like gigantic combs, a few phosphorescing spurs of obsidian isolated for a moment between the tines, and then finally coalesced and flooded in a solid wave across the half-submerged hotels. Behind the silent facades, in the tilting sand-filled streets which had once glittered with cocktail bars and restaurants, it was already night. Haloes of moonlight beaded the lamp-standards with silver dew, and draped the shuttered windows and slipping cornices like a frost of frozen gas.

As Bridgman watched, his lean bronzed arms propped against the rusting rail, the last whorls of light sank away into the cerise funnel withdrawing below the horizon, and the first wind stirred across the dead Martian sand. Here and there miniature cyclones whirled about a sand-spur, drawing off swirling feathers of moon-washed spray, and a nimbus of white dust swept across the dunes and settled in

the dips and hollows. Gradually the drifts accumulated, edging towards the former shoreline below the hotels. Already the first four floors had been inundated, and the sand now reached up to within two feet of Bridgman's balcony. After the next sand-storm he would be forced yet again to move to the floor above.

" Bridgman !"

The voice cleft the darkness like a spear. Fifty yards to his right, at the edge of the derelict sand-break he had once attempted to build below the hotel, a square stocky figure wearing a pair of frayed cotton shorts waved up at him. The moonlight etched the broad sinewy muscles of his chest, the powerful bowed legs sinking almost to their calves in the soft Martian sand. He was about forty-five years old, his thinning hair close-cropped so that he seemed almost bald. In his right hand he carried a large canvas hold-all.

Bridgman smiled to himself. Standing there patiently in the moonlight below the derelict hotel, Travis reminded him of some long-delayed tourist arriving at a ghost resort years after its extinction.

" Bridgman, are you coming ?" When the latter still leaned on his balcony rail, Travis added : " The next conjunction is tomorrow."

Bridgman shook his head, a rictus of annoyance twisting his mouth. He hated the bi-monthly conjunctions, when all seven of the derelict satellite capsules still orbiting the Earth crossed the sky together. Invariably on these nights he remained in his room, playing over the old memo-tapes he had salvaged from the submerged chalets and motels further along the beach (the hysterical " This is Mamie Goldberg, 62955 Cocoa Boulevard, I really wanna protest against this crazy evacuation . . ." or resigned " Sam Snade here, the Pontiac convertible in the back garage belongs to anyone who can dig it out.") Travis and Louise Woodward always came to the hotel on the conjunction nights—it was the highest building in the resort, with an unrestricted view from horizon to horizon—and would follow the seven converging stars as they pursued their endless courses around the globe. Both would be oblivious of everything else, which the wardens knew only too well, and they reserved their most careful searches of the sand-sea for these bi-monthly occasions. Invariably Bridgman found himself forced to act as look-out for the other two.

"I was out last night," he called down to Travis. "Keep away from the north-east perimeter fence by the Cape. They'll be busy repairing the track."

Most nights Bridgman divided his time between excavating the buried motels for caches of supplies (the former inhabitants of the resort area had assumed the government would soon rescind its evacuation order) and disconnecting the sections of metal roadway laid across the desert for the wardens' jeeps. Each of the squares of wire mesh was about five yards wide and weighed over three hundred pounds. After he had snapped the lines of rivets, dragged the sections away and buried them among the dunes he would be exhausted, and spend most of the next day nursing his strained hands and shoulders. Some sections of the track were now permanently anchored with heavy steel stakes, and he knew that sooner or later they would be unable to delay the wardens by sabotaging the roadway.

Travis hesitated, and with a noncommittal shrug disappeared among the dunes, the heavy tool-bag swinging easily from one powerful arm. Despite the meagre diet which sustained him, his energy and determination seemed undiminished—in a single night Bridgman had watched him dismantle twenty sections of track and then loop together the adjacent limbs of a cross-road, sending an entire convoy of six vehicles off into the waste-lands to the south.

Bridgman turned from the balcony, then stopped when a faint tang of brine touched the cool air. Ten miles away, hidden by the lines of dunes, was the sea, the long green rollers of the middle Atlantic breaking against the red Martian strand. When he had first come to the beach five years earlier there had never been the faintest scent of brine across the intervening miles of sand. Slowly, however, the Atlantic was driving the shore back to its former margins. The tireless shoulder of the Gulf Stream drummed against the soft Martian dust and piled the dunes into grotesque rococo reefs which the wind carried away into the sand-sea. Gradually the ocean was returning, reclaiming its great smooth basin, sifting out the black quartz and Martian obsidian which would never be wind-borne and drawing these down into its deeps. More and more often the stain of brine would hang on the evening air, reminding Bridgman why he had first come to the beach and removing any inclination to leave.

Three years earlier he had attempted to measure the rate of approach, by driving a series of stakes into the sand at the water's edge, but the shifting contours of the dunes carried away the coloured poles. Later, using the promontory at Cape Canaveral, where the old launching gantries and landing ramps reared up into the sky like derelict pieces of giant sculpture, he had calculated by triangulation that the advance was little more than thirty yards per year. At this rate—without wanting to, he had automatically made the calculation—it would be well over five hundred years before the Atlantic reached its former littoral at Cocoa Beach. Though discouragingly slow, the movement was nonetheless in a forward direction, and Bridgman was happy to remain in his hotel ten miles away across the dunes, conceding towards its time of arrival the few years he had at his disposal.

Later, shortly after Louise Woodward's arrival, he had thought of dismantling one of the motel cabins and building himself a small chalet by the water's edge. But the shoreline had been too dismal and forbidding. The great red dunes rolled on for miles, cutting off half the sky, dissolving slowly under the impact of the slate-green water. There was no formal tide-line, but only a steep shelf littered with nodes of quartz and rusting fragments of Mars rockets brought back with the ballast. He spent a few days in a cave below a towering sand-reef, watching the long galleries of compacted red dust crumble and dissolve as the cold Atlantic stream sluiced through them, collapsing like the decorated colonnades of a baroque cathedral. In the summer the heat reverberated from the hot sand as from the slag of some molten sun, burning the rubber soles from his boots, and the light from the scattered flints of washed quartz flickered with diamond hardness. Bridgman had returned to the hotel grateful for his room overlooking the silent dunes

Leaving the balcony, the sweet smell of brine still in his nostrils, he went over to the desk. A small cone of shielded light shone down over the tape recorder and rack of spools. The rumble of the wardens' unsilenced engines always gave him at least five minutes' warning of their arrival, and it would have been safe to install another lamp in the room—there were no roadways between the hotel and the sea, and from a distance any light reflected on to the balcony was indistinguishable from the corona of glimmering phosphors

which hung over the sand like myriads of fire-flies. However, Bridgman preferred to sit in the darkened suite, enclosed by the circle of books on the makeshift shelves, the shadow-filled air playing over his shoulders through the long night as he toyed with the memo-tapes, fragments of a vanished and unregretted past. By day he always drew the blinds, immolating himself in a world of perpetual twilight.

Bridgman had easily adapted himself to his self-isolation, soon evolved a system of daily routines that gave him the maximum of time to spend on his private reveries. Pinned to the walls around him were a series of huge white-prints and architectural drawings, depicting various elevations of a fantastic Martian city he had once designed, its glass spires and curtain walls rising like heliotropic jewels from the vermilion desert. In fact, the whole city was a vast piece of jewellery, each elevation brilliantly visualised but as symmetrical, and ultimately as lifeless, as a crown. Bridgman continuously retouched the drawings, inserting more and more details, so that they almost seemed to be photographs of an original.

Most of the hotels in the town—one of a dozen similar resorts buried by the sand which had once formed an unbroken strip of motels, chalets and five-star hotels thirty miles to the south of Cape Canaveral—were well stocked with supplies of canned food abandoned when the area was evacuated and wired off. There were ample reservoirs and cisterns filled with water, apart from a thousand intact cocktail bars six feet below the surface of the sand. Travis had excavated a dozen of these in search of his favourite vintage bourbon. Walking out across the desert behind the town one would suddenly find a short flight of steps cut into the annealed sand and crawl below an occluded sign announcing ' The Satellite Bar ' or ' The Orbit Room ' into the inner sanctum, where the jetting deck of a chromium bar had been cleared as far as the diamond-paned mirror freighted with its rows of bottles and figurines. Bridgman would have been glad to see them left undisturbed.

The whole trash of amusement arcades and cheap bars on the outskirts of the beach resorts were a depressing commentary on the original space-flights, reducing them to the level of monster side-shows at a carnival.

Outside his room, steps sounded along the corridor, then slowly climbed the stairway, pausing for a few seconds at every landing. Bridgman lowered the memo-tape in his hand, listening to the familiar tired footsteps. This was Louise Woodward, making her invariable evening ascent to the roof ten storeys above. Bridgman glanced to the time-table pinned to the wall. Only two of the satellites would be visible, between 12-25 and 12-35 a.m., at an elevation of 62 degrees in the south-west, passing through Cetus and Eridanus, neither of them containing her husband. Although the siting was two hours away, she was already taking up her position, and would remain there until dawn.

Bridgman listened wanly to the feet recede slowly up the stair-well. All through the night the slim pale-faced woman would sit out under the moon-lit sky, as the soft Martian sand her husband had given his life to reach sifted around her in the dark wind, stroking her faded hair like some mourning mariner's wife waiting for the sea to surrender her husband's body. Travis usually joined her later, and the two of them sat side by side against the elevator house, the frosted letters of the hotel's neon sign strewn around their feet like the fragments of a dismembered zodiac, then at dawn made their way down into the shadow-filled streets to their eyries in the nearby hotels.

Initially Bridgman often joined their nocturnal vigil, but after a few nights he began to feel something repellent, if not actually ghoulish, about their mindless contemplation of the stars. This was not so much because of the macabre spectacle of the dead astronauts orbiting the planet in their capsules, but because of the curious sense of unspoken communion between Travis and Louise Woodward, almost as if they were celebrating a private rite to which Bridgman could never be initiated. Whatever their original motives, Bridgman sometimes suspected that these had been overlayed by other, more personal ones.

Ostensibly, Louise Woodward was watching her husband's satellite in order to keep alive his memory, but Bridgman guessed that the memories she unconsciously wished to perpetuate were those of herself twenty years earlier, when her husband had been a celebrity and she herself courted by magazine columnists and TV reporters. For fifteen years after his death—Woodward had been killed testing a new

lightweight launching platform—she had lived a nomadic existence, driving restlessly in her cheap car from motel to motel across the continent, following her husband's star as it disappeared into the eastern night, and had at last made her home at Cocoa Beach in sight of the rusting gantries across the bay.

Travis's real motives were probably more complex. To Bridgman, after they had known each other for a couple of years, he had confided that he felt himself bound by a debt of honour to maintain a watch over the dead astronauts for the example of courage and sacrifice they had set him as a child (although most of them had been piloting their wrecked capsules for fifty years before Travis's birth), and that now they were virtually forgotten he must single-handedly keep alive the fading flame of their memory. Bridgman was convinced of his sincerity.

Yet later, going through a pile of old news magazines in the trunk of a car he excavated from a motel port, he came across a picture of Travis wearing an aluminium pressure suit and learned something more of his story. Apparently Travis had at one time been himself an astronaut—or rather, a would-be astronaut. A test pilot for one of the civilian agencies setting up orbital relay stations, his nerve had failed him a few seconds before the last ' hold ' of his count-down, a moment of pure unexpected funk that cost the company some five million dollars.

Obviously it was his inability to come to terms with this failure of character, unfortunately discovered lying flat on his back on a contour couch two hundred feet above the launching pad, which had brought Travis to Canaveral, the abandoned Mecca of the first heroes of astronautics.

Tactfully Bridgman had tried to explain that no-one would blame him for this failure of nerve—less his responsibility than that of the selectors who had picked him for the flight, or at least the result of an unhappy concatenation of ambiguously worded multiple-choice questions (crosses in the wrong boxes, some heavier to bear and harder to open than others ! Bridgman had joked sardonically to himself). But Travis seemed to have reached his own decision about himself. Night after night, he watched the brilliant funerary convoy weave its gilded pathway towards the dawn sun, salving his own failure

by identifying it with the greater, but blameless, failure of the seven astronauts. Travis still wore his hair in the regulation 'mohican' cut of the space-man, still kept himself in perfect physical trim by the vigorous routines he had practised before his abortive flight. Sustained by the personal myth he had created, he was now more or less unreachable.

"Dear Harry, I've taken the car and deposit box. Sorry it should end like—"

Irritably, Bridgman switched off the memo-tape and its recapitulation of some thirty-year-old private triviality. For some reason he seemed unable to accept Travis and Louise Woodward for what they were. He disliked this failure of compassion, a nagging compulsion to expose other people's motives and strip away the insulating sheathes around their naked nerve strings, particularly as his own motives for being at Cape Canaveral were so suspect. Why was *he* there, what failure was *he* trying to expiate? And why choose Cocoa Beach as his penitential shore? For three years he had asked himself these questions so often that they had ceased to have any meaning, like a fossilised catechism or the blunted self-recrimination of a paranoic.

He had resigned his job as the chief architect of a big space development company after the large government contract on which the firm depended, for the design of the first Martian city-settlement, was awarded to a rival consortium. Secretly, however, he realised that his resignation had marked his unconscious acceptance that despite his great imaginative gifts he was unequal to the specialised and more prosaic tasks of designing the settlement. On the drawing board, as elsewhere, he would always remain earth-bound.

His dreams of building a new gothic architecture of launching ports and control gantries, of being the Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier of the first city to be raised outside Earth, faded forever, but leaving him unable to accept the alternative of turning out endless plans for low-cost hospitals in Ecuador and housing estates in Tokyo. For a year he had drifted aimlessly, but a few colour photographs of the vermilion sunsets at Cocoa Beach and a news story about the recluses living on in the submerged motels had provided a powerful compass.

He dropped the memo-tape into a drawer, making an effort to accept Louise Woodward and Travis on their own terms, a wife keeping watch over her dead husband and an old

astronaut maintaining a solitary vigil over the memories of his lost comrades-in-arms.

The wind gusted against the balcony window, and a light spray of sand rained across the floor. At night dust-storms churned along the beach. Thermal pools isolated by the cooling desert would suddenly accrete like beads of quicksilver and erupt across the fluffy sand in miniature tornadoes.

Only fifty yards away, the dying cough of a heavy diesel cut through the shadows. Quickly Bridgman turned off the small desk light, grateful for his meanness over the battery packs plugged into the circuit, then stepped to the window.

At the leftward edge of the sand-break, half-hidden in the long shadows cast by the hotel, was a large tracked vehicle with a low camouflaged hull. A narrow observation bridge had been built over the bumpers directly in front of the squat snout of the engine housing, and two of the beach wardens were craning up through the plexiglass windows at the balconies of the hotel, shifting their binoculars from room to room. Behind them, under the glass dome of the extended driving cabin, were three more wardens, controlling an outboard spot-light. In the centre of the bowl a thin mote of light pulsed with the rhythm of the engine, ready to throw its powerful beam into any of the open rooms.

Bridgman hid back behind the shutters as the binoculars focussed upon the adjacent balcony, moved to his own, hesitated, and passed to the next. Exasperated by the sabotaging of the roadways, the wardens had evidently decided on a new type of vehicle. With their four broad tracks, the huge squat sand-cars would be free of the mesh roadways and able to rove at will through the dunes and sand-hills.

Bridgman watched the vehicle reverse slowly, its engine barely varying its deep base growl, then move off along the line of hotels, almost indistinguishable in profile among the shifting dunes and hillocks. A hundred yards away, at the first intersection, it turned towards the main boulevarde, wisps of dust streaming from the metal cleats like thin spumes of steam. The men in the observation bridge were still watching the hotel. Bridgman was certain that they had seen a reflected glimmer of light, or perhaps some movement of Louise Woodward's on the roof. However, reluctant to leave the car and be contaminated by the poisonous dust, the wardens would not hesitate if the capture of one of the beachcombers warranted it.

Racing up the staircase, Bridgman made his way to the roof, crouching below the windows that overlooked the boulevard. Like a huge crab, the sand-car had parked under the jutting overhang of the big department store opposite. Once fifty feet from the ground, the concrete lip was now separated from it by little more than six or seven feet, and the sand-car was hidden in the shadows below it, engine silent. A single movement in a window, or the unexpected return of Travis, and the wardens would spring from the hatchways, their long-handled nets and lassoes pinioning them around the necks and ankles. Bridgman remembered one beachcomber he had seen flushed from his motel hide-out and carried off like a huge twitching spider at the centre of a black rubber web, the wardens with their averted faces and masked mouths like devils in an abstract ballet

Reaching the roof, Bridgman stepped out into the opaque white moonlight. Louise Woodward was leaning on the balcony, looking out towards the distant, unseen sea. At the faint sound of the door creaking she turned and began to walk listlessly around the roof, her pale face floating like a nimbus. She wore a freshly ironed print dress she had found in a rusty spin drier in one of the launderettes, and her streaked blonde hair floated out lightly behind her on the wind.

" Louise !"

Involuntarily she started, tripping over a fragment of the neon sign, then moved backwards towards the balcony overlooking the boulevard.

" Mrs. Woodward !" Bridgman held her by the elbow, raised a hand to her mouth before she could cry out. " The wardens are down below. They're watching the hotel. We must find Travis before he returns."

Louise hesitated, apparently recognising Bridgman only by an effort, and her eyes turned up to the black marble sky. Bridgman looked at his watch ; it was almost 12-35. He searched the stars in the south-west.

Louise murmured : " They're nearly here now, I must see them. Where is Travis, he should be here ?"

Bridgman pulled at her arm. " Perhaps he saw the sand-car. Mrs. Woodward, we should leave."

Suddenly she pointed up at the sky, then wrenched away from him and ran to the rail. " There they are !"

Fretting, Bridgman waited until she had filled her eyes with the two companion points of light speeding from the western horizon. These were Merril and Pokrovski—like every schoolboy he knew the sequences perfectly, a second system of constellations with a more complex but far more tangible periodicity and precession—the Castor and Pollux of the orbiting zodiac, whose appearance always heralded a full conjunction the following night.

Louise Woodward gazed up at them from the rail, the rising wind lifting her hair off her shoulders and entraining it horizontally behind her head. Around her feet the red Martian dust swirled and rustled, silting over the fragments of the old neon sign, a brilliant pink spume streaming from her long fingers as they moved along the balcony ledge. When the satellites finally disappeared among the stars along the horizon, she leaned forwards, her face raised to the milk-blue moon as if to delay their departure, then turned back to Bridgman, a bright smile on her face.

His earlier suspicions vanishing, Bridgman smiled back at her encouragingly. " Roger will be here tomorrow night, Louise. We must be careful the wardens don't catch us before we see him."

He felt a sudden admiration for her, at the stoical way she had sustained herself during her long vigil. Perhaps she thought of Woodward as still slive, and in some way was patiently waiting for him to return? He remembered her saying once : ' Roger was only a boy when he took off, you know, I feel more like his mother now,' as if frightened how Woodward would react to her dry skin and fading hair, fearing that he might even have forgotten her. No doubt the death she visualised for him was of a different order than the mortal kind.

Hand in hand, they tiptoed carefully down the flaking steps, jumped down from a terrace window into the soft sand below the wind-break. Bridgman sank to his knees in the fine silver moon-dust, then waded up to the firmer ground, pulling Louise after him. They climbed through a breach in the tilting palisades, then ran away from the line of dead hotels looming like skulls in the empty light.

" Paul, wait !" Her head still raised to the sky, Louise Woodward fell to her knees in a hollow between two dunes,

with a laugh stumbled after Bridgman as he raced through the dips and saddles. The wind was now whipping the sand off the higher crests, flurries of dust spurting like excited wavelets. A hundred yards away, the town was a fading film set, projected by the camera obscura of the sinking moon. They were standing where the long Atlantic seas had once been ten fathoms deep, and Bridgman could scent again the tang of brine among the flickering white-caps of dust, phosphorescing like shoals of animalcula. He waited for any sign of Travis.

"Louise, we'll have to go back to the town. The sand-storms are blowing up, we'll never see Travis here."

They moved back through the dunes, then worked their way among the narrow alleyways between the hotels to the northern gateway to the town. Bridgman found a vantage point in a small apartment block, and they lay down looking out below a window lintel into the sloping street, the warm sand forming a pleasant cushion. At the intersections the dust blew across the roadway in white clouds, obscuring the warden's beach-car parked a hundred yards down the boulevard.

Half an hour later an engine surged, and Bridgman began to pile sand into the interval in front of them. "They're going. Thank God!"

Louise Woodward held his arm. "Look!"

Fifty feet away, his white vinyl suit half-hidden in the dust clouds, one of the wardens was advancing slowly towards them, his lasso twirling lightly in his hand. A few feet behind was a second warden, craning up at the windows of the apartment block with his binoculars.

Bridgman and Louise crawled back below the ceiling, then dug their way under a transom into the kitchen at the rear. A window opened on to a sand-filled yard, and they darted away through the lifting dust that whirled between the buildings.

Suddenly, around a corner, they saw the line of wardens moving down a side-street, the sand-car edging along behind them. Before Bridgman could steady himself a spasm of pain seized his right calf, contorting the gastrocnemius muscle, and he fell to one knee. Louise Woodward pulled him back against the wall, then pointed at a squat, bow-legged

figure trudging towards them along the curving road into town.

" Travis—"

The tool-bag swung from his right hand, and his feet rang faintly on the wire-mesh roadway. Head down, he seemed unaware of the wardens hidden by a bend in the road.

" Come on !" Disregarding the negligible margin of safety, Bridgman clambered to his feet and impetuously ran out into the centre of the street. Louise tried to stop him, and they had covered only ten yards before the wardens saw them. There was a warning shout, and the spot-light flung its giant cone down the street. The sand-car surged forward, like a massive dust-covered bull, its tracks clawing at the sand.

" Travis !" As Bridgman reached the bend, Louise Woodward ten yards behind, Travis looked up from his reverie, then flung the tool-bag over one shoulder and raced ahead of them towards the clutter of motel roofs protruding from the other side of the street. Lagging behind the others, Bridgman again felt the cramp attack his leg, broke off into a painful shuffle. When Travis came back for him Bridgman tried to wave him away, but Travis pinioned his elbow and propelled him forward like an attendant straight-arming a patient.

The dust swirling around them, they disappeared through the fading streets and out into the desert, the shouts of the beach-wardens lost in the roar and clamour of the baying engine. Around them, like the strange metallic flora of some extra-terrestrial garden, the old neon signs jutted from the red Martian sand—' Satellite Motel,' ' Planet Bar,' ' Mercury Motel.' Hiding behind them, they reached the scrub-covered dunes on the edge of the town, then picked up one of the trails that led away among the sand-reefs. There, in the deep grottos of compacted sand which hung like inverted palaces, they waited until the storm subsided. Shortly before dawn the wardens abandoned their search, unable to bring the heavy sand-car on to the disintegrating reef.

Contemptuous of the wardens, Travis lit a small fire with his cigarette lighter, burning splinters of driftwood that had gathered in the gullies. Bridgman crouched beside it, warming his hands.

" This is the first time they've been prepared to leave the sand-car," he remarked to Travis. " It means they're under orders to catch us."

Travis shrugged. " Maybe. They're extending the fence along the beach. They probably intend to seal us in forever."

" What ?" Bridgman stood up with a sudden feeling of uneasiness. " Why should they ? Are you sure ? I mean, what would be the point ?"

Travis looked up at him, a flicker of dry amusement on his bleached face. Wisps of smoke wreathed his head, curled up past the serpentine columns of the grotto to the winding interval of sky a hundred feet above. " Bridgman, forgive me saying so, but if you want to leave here, you should leave now. In a month's time you won't be able to."

Bridgman ignored this, and searched the cleft of dark sky overhead, which framed the constellation Scorpio, as if hoping to see a reflection of the distant sea. " They must be crazy. How much of this fence did you see ?"

" About eight hundred yards. It won't take them long to complete. The sections are prefabricated, about forty feet high." He smiled ironically at Bridgman's discomfort. " Relax, Bridgman. If you do want to get out, you'll always be able to tunnel underneath it."

" I don't want to get out," Bridgman said coldly. " Damn them, Travis, they're turning the place into a zoo. You know it won't be the same with a fence all the way around it."

" A corner of Earth that is forever Mars." Under the high forehead, Travis's eyes were sharp and watchful. " I see their point. There hasn't been a fatal casualty now—" he glanced at Louise Woodward, who was strolling about in the colonnades "—for nearly twenty years, and passenger rockets are supposed to be as safe as commuters' trains. They're quietly sealing off the past, Louise and I and you with it. I suppose it's pretty considerate of them not to burn the place down with flame throwers. The virus would be a sufficient excuse. After all, we three are probably the only reservoirs left on the planet." He picked up a handful of red dust and examined the fine crystals with a sombre eye. " Well, Bridgman, what are you going to do ?"

His thoughts discharging themselves through his mind like frantic signal flares, Bridgman walked away without answering.

Behind them, Louise Woodward wandered among the deep galleries of the grotto, crooning to herself in a low voice to the sighing rhythms of the whirling sand.

The next morning they returned to the town, wading through the deep drifts of sand that lay like a fresh fall of red snow between the hotels and stores, coruscating in the brilliant sunlight. Travis and Louise Woodward made their way towards their quarters in the motels further down the beach. Bridgman searched the still, crystal air for any signs of the wardens, but the sand-car had gone, its tracks obliterated by the storm.

In his room he found their calling card.

A huge tide of dust had flowed through the french windows and submerged the desk and bed, three feet deep against the rear wall. Outside the sand-break had been inundated, and the contours of the desert had completely altered, a few spires of obsidian marking its former perspectives like bouys on a shifting sea. Bridgman spent the morning digging out his books and equipment, dismantled the electrical system and its batteries and carried everything to the room above. He would have moved to the penthouse on the top floor, but his lights would have been visible for miles.

Settling into his new quarters, he switched on the tape recorder, heard a short clipped message in the brisk voice which had shouted orders at the wardens the previous evening. "Bridgman, this is Major Webster, deputy commandant of Cocoa Beach Reservation. On the instructions of the Anti-Viral Sub-committee of the UN General Assembly we are now building a continuous fence around the beach area. On completion no further egress will be allowed, and anyone escaping will be immediately returned to the reservation. Give yourself up now, Bridgman, before—"

Bridgman stopped the tape, then reversed the spool and erased the message, staring angrily at the instrument. Unable to settle down to the task of re-wiring the room's circuits, he paced about, fiddling with the architectural drawings propped against the wall. He felt restless and hyper-excited, perhaps because he had been trying to repress, not very successfully, precisely those doubts of which Webster had now reminded him.

He stepped on to the balcony and looked out over the desert, at the red dunes rolling to the windows directly below. For the fourth time he had moved up a floor, and the sequence of identical rooms he had occupied were like displaced images of himself seen through a prism. Their common focus, that

elusive final definition of himself which he had sought for so long, still remained to be found. Timelessly the sand swept towards him, its shifting contours, approximating more closely than any other landscape he had found to complete psychic zero, enveloping his past failures and uncertainties, masking them in its enigmatic canopy.

Bridgman watched the red sand flicker and fluoresce in the steepening sunlight. He would never see Mars now, and redress the implicit failure of talent, but a workable replica of the planet was contained within the beach area.

Several million tons of the Martian top-soil had been ferried in as ballast some fifty years earlier, when it was feared that the continuous firing of planetary probes and space vehicles, and the transportation of bulk stores and equipment to Mars would fractionally lower the gravitational mass of the Earth and bring it into a tighter orbit around the Sun. Although the distance involved would be little more than a few millimetres, and barely raise the temperature of the atmosphere, its cumulative effects over an extended period might have resulted in a loss into space of the tenuous layers of the outer atmosphere, and of the radiological veil which alone made the biosphere habitable.

Over a twenty-year period a fleet of large freighters had shuttled to and from Mars, dumping the ballast into the sea near the landing grounds of Cape Canaveral. Simultaneously the Russians were filling in a small section of the Caspian Sea. The intention had been that the ballast should be swallowed by the Atlantic and Caspian waters, but all too soon it was found that the microbiological analysis of the sand had been inadequate.

At the Martian polar caps, where the original water vapour in the atmosphere had condensed, a residue of ancient organic matter formed the top-soil, a fine sandy loess containing the fossilised spores of the giant lichens and mosses which had been the last living organisms on the planet millions of years earlier. Embedded in these spores were the crystal lattices of the viruses which had once preyed on the plants, and traces of these were carried back to Earth with the Canaveral and Caspian ballast.

A few years afterwards a drastic increase in a wide range of plant diseases was noticed in the southern states of America and in the Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan republics of the

Soviet Union. All over Florida there were outbreaks of blight and mosaic disease, orange plantations withered and died, stunted palms split by the roadside like dried banana skins, manila grass stiffened into paper spears in the summer heat. Within a few years the entire peninsula was transformed into a desert. The swampy jungles of the Everglades became bleached and dry, the rivers cracked husks strewn with the gleaming skeletons of crocodiles and birds, the forests petrified.

The former launching ground at Canaveral was closed, and shortly afterwards the Cocoa Beach resorts were sealed off and evacuated, billions of dollars of real estate were abandoned to the virus. Fortunately never virulent to animal hosts, its influence was confined to within a small radius of the original loess which had borne it, unless ingested by the human organism, when it symbioted with the bacteria in the gut flora, benign and unknown to the host, but devastating to vegetation thousands of miles from Canaveral if returned to the soil.

Unable to rest despite his sleepless night, Bridgman played irritably with the tape recorder. During their close escape from the wardens he had more than half-hoped they would catch him. The mysterious leg cramp was obviously psychogenic. Although unable to accept consciously the logic of Webster's argument, he would willingly have conceded to the fait accompli of physical capture, gratefully submitted to a year's quarantine at the Parasitological Cleansing Unit at Tampa, and then returned to his career as an architect, chastened but accepting his failure.

As yet, however, the opportunity for surrender had failed to offer itself. Travis appeared to be aware of his ambivalent motives ; Bridgman noticed that he and Louise Woodward had made no arrangements to meet him that evening for the conjunction.

In the early afternoon he went down into the streets, ploughed through the drifts of red sand, following the footprints of Travis and Louise as they wound in and out of the side-streets, finally saw them disappear into the coarser, flint-like dunes among the submerged motels to the south of the town. Giving up, he returned through the empty, shadowless streets, now and then shouted up into the hot air, listening to the echoes boom away among the dunes.

Later that afternoon he walked out towards the north-east, picking his way carefully through the dips and hollows, crouching in the pools of shadow whenever the distant sounds of the construction gangs along the perimeter were carried across to him by the wind. Around him, in the great dust basins, the grains of red sand glittered like diamonds. Barbs of rusting metal protruded from the slopes, remnants of Mars satellites and launching stages which had fallen on to the Martian deserts and then been carried back again to Earth. One fragment which he passed, a complete section of hull plate like a concave shield, still carried part of an identification numeral, and stood upright in the dissolving sand like a door into nowhere.

Just before dusk he reached a tall spur of obsidian that reared up into the tinted cerise sky like the spire of a ruined church, climbed up among its jutting cornices and looked out across the intervening two or three miles of dunes to the perimeter. Illuminated by the last light, the metal grilles shone with a roseate glow like fairy portcullises on the edge of an enchanted sea. At least half a mile of the fence had been completed, and as he watched another of the giant prefabricated sections was cantilevered into the air and staked to the ground. Already the eastern horizon was cut off by the encroaching fence, the enclosed Martian sand like the gravel scattered at the bottom of a cage.

Perched on the spur, Bridgman felt a warning tremor of pain in his calf. He leapt down in a flurry of dust, without looking back made off among the dunes and reefs.

Later, as the last baroque whorls of the sunset faded below the horizon, he waited on the roof for Travis and Louise Woodward, peering impatiently into the empty moon-filled streets.

Shortly after midnight, at an elevation of 35 degrees in the south-west, between Aquila and Ophiuchus, the conjunction began. Bridgman continued to search the streets, and ignored the seven points of speeding light as they raced towards him from the horizon like an invasion from deep space. There was no indication of their convergent orbital pathways, which would soon scatter them thousands of miles apart, and the satellites moved as if they were always together, in the tight configuration Bridgman had known since childhood, like a lost zodiacal emblem, a constellation detached from the celestial

sphere and forever frantically searching to return to its place.

"Travis! Confound you!" With a snarl, Bridgman swung away from the balcony and moved along to the exposed section of rail behind the elevator head. To be avoided like a pariah by Travis and Louise Woodward forced him to accept that he was no longer a true resident of the beach and now existed in a no-man's land between them and the wardens.

The seven satellites drew nearer, and Bridgman glanced up at them cursorily. They were disposed in a distinctive but unusual pattern resembling the Greek letter *khi*, a limp cross, a straight lateral member containing four capsules more or less in line ahead—Connolly, Tkachev, Merril and Maiakovski—bisected by three others forming with Tkachev an elongated Z—Pokrovski, Woodward and Brodisnek. The pattern had been variously identified as a hammer and sickle, an eagle, a swastika, and a dove, as well as a variety of religious and runic emblems, but all these were being defeated by the advancing tendency of the older capsules to vapourise.

It was this slow disintegration of the aluminium shells that made them visible—it had often been pointed out that the observer on the ground was looking, not at the actual capsule, but at a local field of vapourised aluminium and ionized hydrogen peroxide gas from the ruptured altitude jets now distributed within half a mile of each of the capsules. Woodward's, the most recently in orbit, was a barely perceptible point of light. The hulks of the capsules, with their perfectly preserved human cargoes, were continually dissolving, and a wide fan of silver spray opened out in a phantom wake behind Merril and Pokrovski (1998 and 1999), like a double star transforming itself into a nova in the centre of a constellation. As the mass of the capsules diminished they sank into a closer orbit around the earth, would soon touch the denser layers of the atmosphere and plummet to the ground.

Bridgman watched the satellites as they moved towards him, his irritation with Travis forgotten. As always, he felt himself moved by the eerie but strangely serene spectacle of the ghostly convoy endlessly circling the dark sea of the midnight sky, the long-dead astronauts converging for the ten-thousandth time upon their brief rendezvous and then setting off upon their lonely flight-paths around the perimeter of the ionosphere, the tidal edge of the beachway into space which had reclaimed them.

How Louise Woodward could bear to look up at her husband he had never been able to understand. After her arrival he once invited her to the hotel, remarking that there was an excellent view of the beautiful sunsets, and she had snapped back bitterly : " Beautiful ? Can you imagine what it's like looking up at a sunset when your husband's spinning round through it in his coffin ?"

This reaction had been a common one when the first astronauts had died after failing to make contact with the launching platforms in fixed orbit. When these new stars rose in the west an attempt had been made to shoot them down—there was the unsettling prospect of the skies a thousand years hence, littered with orbiting refuse—but later they were left in this natural graveyard, forming their own monument.

Obscured by the clouds of dust carried up into the air by the sand-storm, the satellites shone with little more than the intensity of second-magnitude stars, winking as the reflected light was interrupted by the lanes of strato-cirrus. The wake of diffusing light behind Merril and Pokrovski which usually screened the other capsules seemed to have diminished in size, and he could see both Maiakovski and Brodisnek clearly for the first time in several months. Wondering whether Merril or Pokrovski would be the first to fall from orbit, he looked towards the centre of the cross as it passed overhead.

With a sharp intake of breath, he tilted his head back. In surprise he noticed that one of the familiar points of light was missing from the centre of the group. What he had assumed to be an occlusion of the conjoint vapour trails by dust clouds was simply due to the fact that one of the capsules—Merril's, he decided, the third of the line ahead—had fallen from its orbit.

Head raised, he side-stepped slowly across the roof, avoiding the pieces of rusting neon sign, following the convoy as it passed overhead and moved towards the eastern horizon. No longer overlayed by the wake of Merril's capsule, Woodward's shone with far greater clarity, and almost appeared to have taken the former's place, although he was not due to fall from orbit for at least a century.

In the distance somewhere an engine growled. A moment later, from a different quarter, a woman's voice cried out faintly. Bridgman moved to the rail, over the intervening

roof-tops saw two figures silhouetted against the sky on the elevator head of an apartment block, then heard Louise Woodward call out again. She was pointing up at the sky with both hands, her long hair blown about her face, Travis trying to restrain her. Bridgman realised that she had misconstrued Merril's descent, assuming that the fallen astronaut was her husband. He climbed on to the edge of the balcony, watching the pathetic tableau on the distant roof.

Again, somewhere among the dunes, an engine moaned. Before Bridgman could turn around, a brilliant blade of light cleaved the sky in the south-west. Like a speeding comet, an immense train of vapourising particles stretching behind it to the horizon, it soared towards them, the downward curve of its pathway clearly visible. Detached from the rest of the capsules, which were now disappearing among the stars along the eastern horizon, it was little more than a few miles off the ground.

Bridgman watched it approach, apparently on a collision course with the hotel. The expanding corona of white light, like a gigantic signal flare, illuminated the roof-tops, etching the letters of the neon signs over the submerged motels on the outskirts of the town. He ran for the doorway, as he raced down the stairs saw the glow of the descending capsule fill the sombre streets like a hundred moons. When he reached his room, sheltered by the massive weight of the hotel, he watched the dunes in front of the hotel light up like a stage set. Three hundred yards away the low camouflaged hull of the wardens' beach-car was revealed poised on a crest, its feeble spot-light drowned by the glare.

With a deep metallic sigh, the burning catafalque of the dead astronaut soared overhead, a cascade of vapourising metal pouring from its hull, filling the sky with incandescent light. Reflected below it, like an expressway illuminated by an aircraft's spot-lights, a long lane of light several hundred yards in width raced out into the desert towards the sea. As Bridgman shielded his eyes, it suddenly erupted in a tremendous explosion of detonating sand. A huge curtain of white dust lifted into the air and fell slowly to the ground. The sounds of the impact rolled against the hotel, mounting in a sustained crescendo that drummed against the windows. A series of smaller explosions flared up like opalescent fountains. All over the desert fires flickered briefly where fragments of

the capsule had been scattered. Then the noise subsided, and an immense glistening pall of phosphorescing gas hung in the air like a silver veil, particles within it beading and winking.

Two hundred yards away across the sand was the running figure of Louise Woodward, Travis twenty paces behind her. Bridgman watched them dart in and out of the dunes, then abruptly felt the cold spot-light of the beach-car hit his face and flood the room behind him. The vehicle was moving straight towards him, two of the wardens, nets and lassoes in hand, riding the outboard.

Quickly Bridgman straddled the balcony, jumped down into the sand and raced towards the crest of the first dune. He crouched and ran on through the darkness as the beam probed the air. Above, the glistening pall was slowly fading, the particles of vapourised metal sifting towards the dark Martian sand. In the distance the last echoes of the impact were still reverberating among the hotels of the beach colonies further down the coast.

Five minutes later he caught up with Louise Woodward and Travis. The capsule's impact had flattened a number of the dunes, forming a shallow basin some quarter of a mile in diameter, and the surrounding slopes were scattered with the still glowing particles, sparkling like fading eyes. The beach-car growled somewhere four or five hundred yards behind him, and Bridgman broke off into an exhausted walk. He stopped beside Travis, who was kneeling on the ground, breath pumping into his lungs. Fifty yards away Louise Woodward was running up and down, distraughtly gazing at the fragments of smouldering metal. For a moment the spot-light of the approaching beach-car illuminated her, and she ran away among the dunes. Bridgman caught a glimpse of the inconsolable anguish in her face.

Travis was still on his knees. He had picked up a piece of the oxidised metal and was pressing it together in his hands.

"Travis, for God's sake tell her! This was Merril's capsule, there's no doubt about it! Woodward's still up there."

Travis looked up at him silently, his eyes searching Bridgman's face. A spasm of pain tore his mouth, and Bridgman realised that the barb of steel he clasped reverently in his hands was still glowing with heat.

"Travis!" He tried to pull the man's hands apart, the pungent stench of burning flesh gusting into his face, but Travis wrenched away from him. "Leave her alone, Bridgman! Go back with the wardens!"

Bridgman retreated from the approaching beach-car. Only thirty yards away, its spot-light filled the basin. Louise Woodward was still searching the dunes. Travis held his ground as the wardens jumped down from the car and advanced towards him with their nets, his bloodied hands raised at his sides, the steel barb flashing like a dagger. At the head of the wardens, the only one unmasked, was a trim, neat-featured man with an intent, serious face. Bridgman guessed that this was Major Webster, and that the wardens had known of the impending impact and hoped to capture them, and Louise in particular, before it occurred.

Bridgman stumbled back towards the dunes at the edge of the basin. As he neared the crest he trapped his foot in a semi-circular plate of metal, sat down and freed his heel. Unmistakeably it was part of a control panel, the circular instrument housings still intact.

Overhead the pall of glistening vapour had moved off to the north-east, and the reflected light was directly over the rusting gantries of the former launching site at Cape Canaveral. For a few fleeting seconds the gantries seemed to be enveloped in a sheen of silver, transfigured by the vapourised body of the dead astronaut, diffusing over them in a farewell gesture, his final return to the site from which he had set off to his death a century earlier. Then the gantries sank again into their craggy shadows, and the pall moved off like an immense wraith towards the sea, barely distinguishable from the star glow.

Down below Travis was sitting on the ground surrounded by the wardens. He scuttled about on his hands like a frantic crab, scooping handfuls of the virus-laden sand at them. Holding tight to their masks, the wardens manoeuvred around him, their nets and lassoes at the ready. Another group moved slowly towards Bridgman.

Bridgman picked up a handful of the dark Martian sand beside the instrument panel, felt the soft glowing crystals warm his palm. In his mind he could still see the silver-sheathed gantries of the launching site across the bay, by a

curious illusion almost identical with the Martian city he had designed years earlier. He watched the pall disappear over the sea, then looked around at the other remnants of Merril's capsule scattered over the slopes. High in the western night, between Pegasus and Cygnus, shone the distant disc of the planet Mars, which for both himself and the dead astronaut had served for so long as a symbol of unattained ambition. The wind stirred softly through the sand, cooling this replica of the planet which lay passively around him, and at last he understood why he had come to the beach and been unable to leave it.

Twenty yards away Travis was being dragged off like a wild dog, his thrashing body pinioned in the centre of a web of lassoes. Louise Woodward had run away among the dunes towards the sea, following the vanished gas cloud.

In a sudden excess of re-found confidence, Bridgman drove his fist into the dark sand, buried his forearm like a foundation pillar. A flange of hot metal from Merril's capsule burned his wrist bonding him to the spirit of the dead astronaut. Scattered around him on the Martian sand, in a sense Merril had reached Mars after all.

" Damn it !" he cried exultantly to himself as the wardens' lassoes stung his neck and shoulders. " We made it !"

J. G Ballard

In reverse order to Philip High's story "Dictator Bait," last month Mr. Rayer's intelligent alien is to known everyone. The problem remains the same, however — how to beat it—but is solved in a completely different and ingenious manner.

SACRIFICE

by FRANCIS G. RAYER

The hill wolf paused on the rise behind the thatched cottage, its grey, fanged muzzle pointing away across the long slopes. Its golden eyes shone with more than animal intelligence, but the demands of the brute creature could not be ignored. Carnivorous, it hungered.

The previous fish host had never experienced this urgent desire for food, the mindorm thought. The small lake had never lacked fry easily overtaken with a flurry of fins, but a few days had shown the habitat of the fish was too limited. Swimming close to the shore, the fish had evaluated all it could see. The decision had not been easy. There was always this difficulty, on a strange planet, when changing hosts might bring disaster. A rodent had come out of the herbage, creeping down to drink, and the fish moved closer, very slowly, tail driving it languidly. The mindorm estimated the distance, saw it was near enough, and rose from the fish like a small, brilliantly silver wasp. The rodent lacked time to run, even if it sensed danger.

The world changed, became a place of air-borne sounds, and sharply seen pictures. On the lake a large fish floated, dead. The rodent moved back into the herbage, listening, judging the dangers and advantages of its new habitat.

The rodent had lived several days. Then, investigating on open ground, it heard a flurry of heavy paws. The mindorm had left the rodent before the jaws of the racing hill wolf had gathered up the tiny creature, and out of the hill wolf's eyes it saw the small animal's brown coat, and felt the warm blood.

The hill wolf was a useful host. The mindorm ranged for miles along the hills and through the straggly woodland. It soon found a small village, and its interest quickened. Clearly the planet had more advanced creatures than the hill wolf.

During many weeks the hill wolf tried to come near one of the village inhabitants, but always failed. By day, they shouted, waving sticks, brave because not alone. At night, they had guards, and fire. Some primitive, unquenched fear made the wolf keep clear of the flames.

The mindorm knew that the hill wolf must eventually be abandoned. But it would be fatal to leave until a new host was very near. The new host should also be a higher life form, if possible. For long weeks the wolf skulked round the village, or watched it from the slopes, a haunting shape seldom far by day or night.

Thick brush beyond the empty thatched cottage became its sleeping place. The few miles from the hut to the village were easily covered at a fast, loping trot. But extreme caution was essential. When the mindorm adopted a host, the host's native intellect withered and died, and the mindorm was physically fragile, able to survive only for a few seconds outside the host's protective environment. Thus there was always danger, when changing hosts. The new host must be near, easily caught or approached.

Bright afternoon sun was hot on the slopes near the little Rim village when Ruth bumped towards it in the wide wheeled runabout. Dust rose, suspended in a windless sky, and the suitcases at her side bounced, the road surface worsening.

The driver guided the vehicle across a narrow bridge, and the road sloped up. Ahead was the village. Five miles beyond it was the thatched cottage. There, she would paint detailed, wonderful pictures of indigenous flowers, grasses and plants.

This far out in the Pleiades abounded forms of life such as people on Earth never imagined.

The runabout slowed, bumping between houses made from some smooth, reddish stone. The driver stopped, looking back.

"I don't go any farther, miss."

Ruth nodded. "My cottage is five miles on."

"So I gathered, miss. Someone will take you."

He removed her cases, helping her down. She limped—had always limped, and moved slowly, with difficulty. He seemed to avoid her eyes.

"You've been here among the Outlanders before, miss?"

"No. A man in the village told someone I know about the cottage. It seemed perfect."

He looked past her, over the hills. "Bit of a sacrifice, a bright young woman like you living there, miss?"

"Not really. I paint."

She watched him get in, and drive away. Near the bridge, the runabout slowed, as if its driver would return. But it started on again, vanishing.

Behind a house children sang. Four little girls came from a gate, grubby, carrying chains of flowers. They encircled Ruth, throwing the loops over her head, clapping. She smiled, surprised, not knowing what to say, touched by their action and small, sad faces.

A cart came round the end of the tiny houses, pulled slowly by a shaggy type of horse. Five men stood in the cart, balancing to its motion. She moved aside, but the cart stopped and a man sprang over the swinging tailboard.

"We'll help you take your things to the cottage, miss," he said quietly.

She examined him. Tall, angular, thin, like all the men on this planet, and especially Outlanders. Almost a native, though having ancestry linked by a colonisation ship, long before, to Earth.

They were watching her carefully, as if a lot depended on her reply. All were strong, wiry muscled. There could not have been ten years between them. If selected for some physical marathon, the choice could not have been improved. All held thick, strong sticks.

"That's kind," she said.

The men helped her up, not looking at her. "I'm Jim," one said. "We took your heavy things last week, when they arrived."

They lifted up the cases. Somehow, they all strove to avoid her eyes, gazing at the cottages, the horse, and each other. She took a board seat near one wheel.

"It'll need an hour to reach your place, miss," Jim stated.

The driver drew the horse round on a tight rein. Ruth tried to look more relaxed, less rigid. Not far now, she thought. It would be nice to examine the cottage, until night came.

As they passed along the narrow, short street, curtains moved at small windows. Once a young woman was visible, dark-haired, round-eyed, she seemed intent, as if watching some forbidden rite. The children followed a little way, throwing wild flowers up into the cart. Tears stood on the cheeks of one tiny girl.

Ruth moved awkwardly, facing ahead again. The men rode standing, moving easily to the motion, resting each on his stout stick. They looked everywhere except at her.

"Why has the cottage stayed empty?"

The men looked at each other, oppressed. They seemed unable to produce any explanation, and licked their lips, features heavy with thought.

Half a mile beyond the village four small animals resembling goats were tethered. A curious expectancy crept over the men. Beyond the four goats was a fifth peg, and a cord, now broken, stretching like a pointer the way they must go. An audible rustle of expelled breath sounded over the creak of harness.

"One goat's been taken," a man in the corner of the cart said uneasily.

They exchanged glances. Their grips tightened on the sticks, and Ruth thought they looked pale. Evaluating them, she decided they had a level of culture and belief similar to that of the old Anglo Middle Ages.

Hill slopes moved slowly by. Ruth watched them, translating hues, light and shadow mentally into pigment. The men were studying her, while not appearing to look. Their eyes were veiled, their brows hooded. They seemed somehow helpless, yet determined, as if impelled by circumstancs beyond control. One fingered a gold hued ring that could

have been a lucky charm. Definitely not far removed from primitive culture levels! Ruth thought. It was odd how settlers often drifted temporarily back, then pressed on again, into a new, yet related, civilisation of their own.

The cottage was exactly as it had been described to her. Two downstairs rooms, two very tiny bedrooms under the thickly thatched roof. The straw was dull gold in the glancing sunlight. Beyond was a rising slope, wooded higher up. The front door was surrounded by strange flowers.

The man called Jim fiddled in his coat. "I kept the key for you, miss."

She took it. The five got down, moving warily, as if on dangerous or strange ground, carrying their sticks with them as they took her cases indoors. The horse was very restless, facing home, moving its head as if scenting danger. Its ears were low, its eyes red. Ruth found a tip, thanking them.

Jim hesitated. "It—it's been nice meeting you, miss."

"You've all been kind." She smiled. "I may walk as far as the village the day after tomorrow." She would take sandwiches, spending half the day on the way, liking it.

They all gazed at her, not speaking, then got up into the cart. They faced outwards, one in each direction, watching the hills.

"We'll be waiting to see you come, miss," one man said gruffly.

They licked their lips. Their faces were worried—bleak with fear, yet anxious, as if they did something evil, yet wished to avoid danger for themselves.

"What good will this be?" Jim demanded abruptly, vehemently. "It'll come back again. It's crazy, but so clever! We'll never be rid of it."

The driver gripped his arm. "We've got our own wives and kids to think of, haven't we. We've been into it all. The thing now is to see it through—"

He flipped the reins, and the cart moved away. They all stood in it looking back at her. Once, while still in view, they stopped, and there was some argument. But the driver went on again, and the cart went down the slope, round a curve, and from sight.

Ruth went to her front door. She realised that the chains of flowers, now faded, still rested round her neck. The early evening was wonderfully quiet. Colours were clear, shapes

sharply outlined, except where the remote slopes faded into blue haze. Coming from a busy Earth city, out here to this Rim village, had been something of a sacrifice, Ruth thought. She loved city life. But it would be worth it. Though never able to run, she loved to walk, and new flowers and plants would make every step wonderful with discovery.

She went in, unpacked, then sat on the red front stone step. Earlier, everything necessary had been brought. Her needs were not great. It would be nice, later, to walk up across the hills, she thought. With evening, the scent of strange flowers came to her.

There was a secondary task, one less pleasing, but perhaps fairly easy—to write a report on the customs and development of the villagers. She could begin in a few days, she thought, and probably get an initial outline ready to send back to be picked up by the spaceship *Musa,* which had brought her out here to the Pleiades. A more detailed report could follow later, to be examined and analysed back on Earth.

She left the cottage and walked up the slope towards the clumps of trees. She moved slowly, limping. Flowers with a scent like mignonette, but resembling small roses, crowded at her feet. She picked one. It was pink edged, fading to blue near the centre.

She rested on the slope, looking back at the tiny house, now far away and below. Many scents came on the evening wind. She turned, moving on, her steps mechanical on the soft turf. Near a stone outcrop was a piece of rope, attached to something that made her shudder. Once, that rope could have secured an animal like a small goat, one of those this side of the village. It was almost as if the goats had been tethered there to satisfy a predatory animal that might otherwise come into the village, she thought. There might be interesting side lines to discover, here, and put in her report. Not much was known of Outlander development, and this Rim village had been seldom visited.

She went on along the hill. It was interesting to observe the primitive mind, and the very primitive actions of peoples who had only become removed a few generations from a highly civilised Earth. There was slipping back towards magic, towards appeasing the unknown powers of darkness. Primitive peoples observed, feared, but did not understand. Forced to some action, their action was often strange, yet often had a deadly logic, hard to refute.

The cottage was gone from view when she heard the movement behind her, the scamper of heavy pads, the rapid breathing. She turned quickly, most weight on her better leg.

A wolf was within ten paces, slowing now, temporarily cautious. Its grey, fanged muzzle pointed at her. In its golden eyes was a strange, almost uncanny intelligence. Its sides were full, as if it had eaten. But something more than mere hunger seemed to drive it nearer.

It was examining her clothing, almost noting the obvious artificiality of the materials, as it crept closer. She shivered. Now, it could spring, reaching her with a bound.

Ruth felt primitive fear, impossible to quell, born of an ancestry when men had been hunted, weak, vulnerable. The wolf drew closer, closer, golden eyes shining, must now spring . . .

Its body grew rigid. Then there rose from it a tiny silver spark, like a quick, vividly brilliant wasp. It was a minute, exposed naked thing, but vitally quick, stabbing across because its life depended on speed—had always depended on speed, at this vital instant. The mindorm was triumphant. This being was so obviously from a civilised community. With this new host, the mindorm could seek out that community, then be concealed for ever in the multitude.

The rigid body of the hill wolf was collapsing, dead, a creature from which all life and purpose had been abruptly removed. Its eyes were closing, its mouth sagging. Already its extinguished brain was dark for ever to all consciousness.

The mindorm reached Ruth, a vivid, silvery wasp, diving towards her, longing for the enfolding comfort of this new host. The touch of air was as a terrible dryness on it, the glancing sun was a torment of radiation, but it knew it had judged well. The new host was obviously slow, and very near. The safety factor, before leaving the hill wolf, had been very large indeed.

Ruth was motionless, frozen as by panic, never knowing she could feel such terror. There was a deep, instinctive reaction against the sudden appearance of the mindorm, as it arrowed towards her. She would have run, if her feet could move; would have screamed, if horror had not also frozen her tongue.

The mindorm struck her forehead like a wasp flying against a window. Her consciousness went, submerged in fear.

The unconsciousness was momentary. It lasted seconds only, then Ruth was again fully aware. Around her was the hum of a great ship—comfort unspeakable, the *Musa* on her course, standing off the planet. Her heart pounded, sweat beaded her brow. She had never felt so keenly, feared so greatly, though any good simulacrum robot could put its controller through a tough time.

Her consciousness spread, including the slopes beyond the cottage. The mindorm was circling like a mad thing, recoiling from the cold, plasti-covered steel of the simulacrum. If it could gain entry, there was no mind there, only a complex of receptor and sensory transmission equipment offering it no refuge.

The tiny, silver wasp sped in a circle, back towards the hill wolf. It vanished, reappeared, more urgent still in its motion. Like a silver spark, it sped towards Ruth, faltered, visibly shrivelling. It circled her once, losing height, dropping like an insect shorn of wings.

Ruth was briefly aware of two worlds, overlapping, impinging one upon the other—the quiet hillside, and dead wolf; the hum and comfort of the *Musa*. That temporary retreat to the ship, to safety, had been needed. Here, a man was sitting very near her side.

"It was bad—that bad?" he asked.

"Very bad." Half her mind spoke, as beyond a veil. "But it seems to be about the only way to get them. The moment the report came back from the Rim village we knew I'd have to go."

"We'll be calling for you—for the simulacrum — in a couple of weeks—"

His voice faded, and the hillside was real. The odours of flowers were in Ruth's nostrils. She walked a trifle stiffly down towards the hut, enjoying it, experiencing, feeling, motivated over thousands of miles of space. She did not look back towards the dead hill wolf.

Francis G. Rayer

Overcoming the difficulties of understanding an alien language would be impossible at a first meeting. Necessity being the mother of invention —how about numbers as a form of understanding ?

SIX-FINGERED JACKS

by E. R. JAMES

Black and enormous, the disc of the approaching spherical ship spread outwards over the stars which showed in the field of the prospecting Earthship's periscope.

" They've seen us, damn them—whoever they are . . . or whatever they are !" muttered Turco, the engineer, scowling up at the relay screen in his silent engine room. He shifted his short bandy legs further apart on the bare metal deck. His big fists clenched involuntarily, as though he might actually try to punch away the monstrous thing coming " down " on to them. His thick neck swelled as his cropped head sank into hunching shoulders.

He glanced to the left. On the standard instrument array, which was repeated in each part of the ship, proximity dials registered the nearness both of the terrifyingly unfamiliar ship " above," and the surface of the small unexplored moon on to which they had been trying to sink unobtrusively.

" I said we should have beat it to hell out of here !" he grumbled and swung around to one of the lighted screens on the bank of communicators. " You detected the swine too late for us to hide."

In the electronics room, " Radio " Abbey did not pause in his delicate fingering of dials. " You know very well I was absorbed in beginning a spectrum analysis of the moon below

us now. Why didn't you notice something? The blighter's big enough, even for a blind engineer."

"Now how could I look out at the same time as I got the ship stable enough for you to use your spectroscopes? You know how blasted fussy you are."

"Fussy? Huh! You seem to think it's easy to say what a big mass of rock is made of from a distance—"Abbey broke off, leaning closer to his complex equipment and then murmuring, tensely, "Well, anyway, now we know how feels the ant when it senses the boot of a human being coming down on top of it. . . "

"Well, and damn you too for that sweet thought—" snarled Turco and glanced longingly at the controls of his beloved engines before staring once more at the view of space being relayed to him from the Captain's periscope.

Wisps of smoke came acrid through the ship's communicator system, and both the engineer and electronics man looked sharply at the screens connecting each with their captain.

Januar was burning papers, hard-to-replace maps and position calculating data. Sensing their almost simultaneous movement, he turned, his normally lean face more hollow cheeked than ever, his dark eyes looking from one to the other of them from beneath lowered black brows. "Well . . . supposing that thing's come from across nowhere into our Galaxy, I don't see why we should be the ones to give it a ready-made plan of the inhabited planets in the Terran Empire." He grinned wolfishly, without humour. "Anyway . . ." he stirred the blackening ashes on the table before him, ". . . this is a lot of junk—only tells us where not to lay claim to—not a single planetary body where there's anything worth mining right out here in this cursed emptiness on the edge of the Galaxy—"

"That's not what you said when you talked us into being partners prospecting out here," murmured Abbey. His soft voice and pale face with its dark-beard shadow almost but not quite hid his tautness. "But we're here," he went on, "and there's about sixty different sorts of radiation showering down on us out of that stranger up there, and none of it makes sense."

"We can't expect it to. It won't be easy to make contact with complete aliens. But at least they've not offered us any violence so far."

" Not so far—true !" broke in Turco, belligerently. "Maybe there's reason in their actions. Don't you try to tell me that any purely exploratory ship won't have some sort of plan of action all worked out ready to meet the time when it bumps into representatives of some other culture, such as us !" He actually gritted his big teeth. " Now there's no doubt they're after us, why don't you let me put a force screen envelope round our miserable little tub ?"

" Do you think it would do any good ?" asked Januar.

Turco shrugged. " It'd be doing something to show 'em we've got a sting, puny as we may be."

" All right then."

Turco bit his lip. " Yeah. Ordinary weapons won't be much good when that fifty mile wide monster shows its teeth. But maybe I can cook up something that'll shake the swines."

Januar watched the engineer turn away from the screen and then turn back to cut the communicator. At this loss of contact the Captain frowned, hesitated, then shrugged and looked at Abbey's thoughtful, pallid features. " Doing something'll keep him happy, if nothing else. I'm coming down to your room."

Abbey turned back to his mass of equipment. It had always played such a big part in his life. Some of his instruments dated back to when, in his early teens, he had become a fully fledged " ham " by winning his licence to have his own radio on the planet of his birth. He had brought them with him into the ship. At each port of call some of his free money went into the pockets of secondhand dealers for electronic gear from wrecks or government surpluses. It was his dream to invent a really speedy method of communication over the vast interstellar void. Radio waves and light beams were still only useful over interplanetary distances ; such radiation took years to travel between even the nearest stars. The only way to see what was happening to one ship on interstellar drive was to search for it in another ship . . . until the two ships were close enough for radio signals to have had time to reach between them.

Abbey's whole being concentrated on his beloved equipment. Each section of it seemed to be trying to communicate with him. Every dial and every quivering needle spoke to him of part of the truth of what was happening. He did not have to look at the picture coming in from the periscope nor

even at the proximity gauge to know that the enormous ship was gradually closing the gap.

And his mind moved with the logic of electronics. Even though the mysterious ship might contain creatures quite alien to humanity, such creatures would still have to make use of the same laws of nature as he did himself. Back on Earth, the cradle of mankind, long distance speedy communication had not become possible until there had been some understanding of radio waves. It seemed likely that there must be a kind of evolution of communication. He had thought something like this before, many times.

First communication would come when organisms of any kind made signs to each other. Later they would develop speech. Then more formal means. Signalling with flags, semaphore. Morse code or something like it would precede speech over telegraph cables. Then radio would bring its refinements. Until VHF could be used, television pictures were hardly practical.

But with TV they in their ship might be able to go back to the ancient way making signs to the occupants of the other ship.

Contact with a really alien and obviously highly cultured race—who could tell what benefits that would bring?

Abbey sucked in a deep breath. Right from the first awareness of the spherical ship he had not been frightened—unless it was fear that he might make a botch of opening first communication.

This fear increased to something like cold terror as he studied his dials; yet as the technical problems took shape in his mind his pale face dewed with sweat, his large, dark eyes narrowed in concentration, and his short but tapered fingers ceased their nervous twitching as he picked up a pencil and started to trace out the circuit of a receiver that was like and yet unlike any other television he had known.

His soft voice was murmuring the language of ohms and transistors when Januar pushed open the door and came into the small space not yet filled with equipment cannibalised from more than a score of breaker's yards.

Neither did the captain interrupt. He knew his men. He seated himself on a disused packing case, and, knowing himself unobserved, let his shoulders droop and his mouth open slackly, and his thoughts move into a blank limbo.

Every nerve and instinct in his body cried out for action ; to do nothing was often the hardest thing for any leader of men to do. Yet Turco needed no help to rechannel the little ship's power to defence and possible offence, and Abbey must be left alone to struggle with the problem of communication. To interfere, even to speak to either would only delay them.

With a small part of his mind alert in case he might be needed, he stared at the enigmatic globe still coming closer to them. Nearly covering the periscope screen, it showed as a circular darkness over the stars. Januar wished that the darkness of the Galactic rim had been less severe just here. There were plenty of bright stars, even though they were so far apart ; yet the encounter with this unfamiliar ship had had to take place near the dead moon of a dead planet around a dark star.

Turco had put it down at first as a tiny planet belonging to the dark star, or a small moon, companion to the one that had attracted them. Abbey had been concentrating on his spectroscopic analysis as they'd closed down on the real moon. Both had been anxious to waste as little time here as possible, if there was no chance of any profitable mining.

But something had seemed to tell Januar that this was something quite new to mankind. He had sensed that—and still felt somehow quite convinced that this was a visitor from another Galaxy. And the more he thought of the meeting, the more he felt that his instinct was right. There were plenty of stars in the Galaxy that had not been visited by man, but, in the centuries since interstellar travel had become practicable, no other space-going race had been encountered.

Until now.

He wondered how the occupants of the spherical ship were reacting to having found an intelligence of a different origin to their own. Did they feel as excited—and yet as apprehensive as he did ? So much always depended on first impressions, first actions.

The cabin light flickered. Every tiny hum and each electronic sound either hesitated or altered its note, briefly.

Januar tensed. The stars still showing around the black disc of the alien had lost something of their clarity. He licked his lips, releasing his held breathing. Turco had just switched the ship's power into the making of the force screen envelope. Normally it was designed to come into operation

briefly and automatically to deflect meteors and the like. To maintain it in place for more than a few seconds necessitated diverting the entire power production.

Januar glanced at the screen showing his own quarters. Yes, the emergency lighting was on in there. It was a good thing Abbey had long ago arranged a separate emergency supply from batteries of his own.

The periscope screen brightened. Januar's eyes narrowed. Tit for tat. If the small ship could have a force screen protection, so could the larger ship. Couldn't blame them. The shimmer of the pure power making an extra skin around the alien showed some of its features. Distance still made detailed examination impossible, but there were many clusters of recognisable radio aerials.

Abbey did not seem to have noticed either the power change nor the alteration in the appearance of the other ship. Bent over his circuit diagram, he scratched his pale cheek with his pencil.

Suddenly he nodded to himself. He reached towards the exterior TV equipment. Its screen went dead as he knocked off power. He stood up and began to disconnect sections. Referring periodically to his pencil drawing, he worked in silence.

Januar felt a conflict of emotion. Until Abbey made contact, there was no telling whether the present stalemate between his ship and the alien ship was to be preferred to whatever was in the future. Life was sweet. Imagination could picture both good and bad ; reality was often uncompromisingly harsh. Yet there would be a relief when even the worst was known.

The engine room screen came on, weakly under the emergency power. Turco's square face grinned out.

" That's shaken the swine !" He lifted a big fist. " Now I'm going to work on something that'll bust them wide open if they try anything."

" Wait !" Januar ordered drily. " I'm not saying you're doing wrong, but don't go off half cocked. We aren't fighting them yet."

" Maybe not," admitted Turco, grudgingly. " But listen to what I think." He held up his right hand, fingers apart. With his left hand he folded over the little finger. " First of

all, they aren't here for fun. If they have come a colossal distance, they'll be looking for a colossal return for their time and trouble."

" Steady," cautioned Januar. " One ship doesn't make an invasion fleet, but damage to it might start a war."

Turco did not seem to hear. He folded over the next finger. " Second, we don't know how good these invaders are. Maybe they can detect the ship's intercommunication system. So I'm going to cut this link with you and work on my own. If they do try anything "—his tone suggested that it was inevitable—" I'll give 'em something back that'll make a fifty ton meteor look like a kid's toy."

He grinned like a man looking along the sights of a high velocity gun at a bogged down tank.

" Third," he said, and folded over his middle finger, "when Abbey makes contact they might hypnotise you into believing them, no matter what guff they give you. I think this is a time for every man of us to make his own decisions."

Januar frowned, his cheeks seeming more hollow than ever, but he did not interrupt.

Turco folded over his fourth finger. " Fourth, it depends on the size of their heads. They made contact with us first. They may even want us as specimens. I've no desire to be dissected, mentally or physically. I'd rather shoot first and ask questions afterwards if there's the slightest hint of funny business."

Januar licked his lips. Turco might be a hothead, but there was a lot in what he said.

The engineer folded over his thumb. " Lastly, maybe we ought to take the initiative. If they were really clever they'd have done something already. Maybe we could do with a few specimens of them."

" No !" Januar burst out urgently. " You must not—"

And he found he was addressing a dark screen. Turco had switched off, as he said he would.

Januar stood up.

At that moment a shock ran through the ship. Januar's blood ran cold. Then his reason told him that they must have landed on the moon. He turned to the proximity gauges. Yes. Below them was the solid surface of the moon . . . and above them, the alien ship had halted its descent.

On the periscope screen lights were flickering hazily through the mist of power, as though the monstrous ship was re-

doubling its effort to contact them, or was preparing for the sort of action that Turco seemed so sure was coming. Januar pictured a landing party coming down, a ring of steel being set up all around the little Terran ship.

Abbey said, " Maybe this is it."

He tripped a switch and took a pace back. Januar, heart beating wildly, moved to one side to get a better view of the TV screen

It glowed. Lines formed rows. An image pulled itself into recognisable shapes.

The two humans looked into a big room and saw general activity of a score or so of fairly human-looking shapes all busy on different kinds of recognisably electronic equipment.

A round, hairless white head turned to glance straight at them, began to look away and then looked back.

" He's seen us," said Abbey in triumph, " it's two-way."

" My God, yes." Januar licked his lips.

Arms were raised, slit mouths without lips opened and all the figures clustered to stare into the little ship. But then two new arrivals seemed to restore order by their mere presence. Everyone else backed away.

Januar stared back as these two stared at him. He tried not to frown at their blank faces. How did one demonstrate a desire to be friendly to a creature with whom one had only one thing in common—intelligence.

He found himself thinking that all living things in the other ship seemed identical duplicates. But then hadn't he read somewhere that all monkeys looked alike until one could learn to pick out differences. Perhaps the aliens were thinkin g the same of him and Abbey.

The creatures lifted long fingered arms and made gestures. Their faces grimaced. Quite meaninglessly to Januar and Abbey, who looked at each other blankly.

The creatures made signs and mouthed at their fellows. The scene swung dizzily and stopped, showing a blank, black wall. One of the aliens walked into view before the wall and began some kind of pantomime of signs.

" Looks like Turco was right in one point," said Abbey. " They do seem to have had ready some kind of standard procedure for making contact with any other intelligences."

Januar was frowning in thought. He had stopped trying to keep a blank face. The facial contortions of the occupants

of the other ship were so meaningless to him that he realised his own expressions could mean nothing to them until they had learnt to associate his reactions with his actions.

The alien's somehow odd hand came up into view holding a white stick. He dabbed this at the board, leaving a bunch of white dots. He made another bunch of white dots and, returning to the first, drew a line from it to the second dots. Then, as though as an after thought, he made a sort of spiral in both the groups of dots.

" From one galaxy to another," murmured Abbey, voicing Januar's thoughts.

The alien looked to his left and seemed to enter into some kind of important conversation with more than one of the others out of view.

Januar took the opportunity to study him. The creature's movements were quicker than they had been at first, but they were still slow and methodical by comparison with human standards. His body and limbs were slender, yet seemed from the muscles showing below the short sleeves and trunks to be strong enough. Whereas at first Januar had thought him hairless, now he realised that every bit of exposed skin except the palms of the long fingered hands (and, he guessed, the soles of the feet) was covered with very short, close, white fur.

The blank, round face with its huge eyes turned back to look out at the humans. Arms made an unmistakable beckoning gesture and the creature went again to the black wall.

Another humanoid also came into view and stood to the other side of the picture and held up his hands, palms facing Januar.

Januar blinked. The hands were different. There were six fingers on each hand, divided in the centre into two sets of three that had every appearance of being able to be opposed to each other. That was it. Instead of four fingers and a single thumb as with the human hand, there were three fingers and three thumbs. It was a gripping tool ideal for climbing . . . a legacy, most likely from tree living in their evolutionary past.

But the humanoid with the chalk was pointing to the end finger of the other's strange hands. He then turned to the black wall and made a symbol on it " I." He touched the

middle finger and wrote " V." He did not pause to see how his audience was reacting but continued to touch each of his companion's twelve digits and to write on his board until with the last he had put two symbols instead of a single one. Then he hesitated, and closed up the open hands into fists and wrote a single symbol " — " in front of the previous first one.

His board then read.

— I V W X H T F E P B I —

He looked hard at Januar and then wrote :

FE

and underlined it with such emphasis that his chalk broke in his strange hands.

Januar felt this was supposed to mean something to him. But his mind seemed so absorbed in the new things that were happening that it meant nothing.

" Evidently," said a voice suddenly, and Januar started violently, not knowing what to think of it, until he realised with a shock that it was Turco speaking to them over the intercom. " Evidently those damn' six-fingered jacks you've got looking at you aren't any cleverer than we are. They certainly don't seem to be able to detect me now I'm not using the screen to you. You go ahead and distract them as long as you can while I finish constructing this little beauty of a bomb down here. It'll leave us a bit short of fuel, but it'll at least give us the chance to escape."

" Turco !" shouted Januar. " Now listen ! You are not to use that bomb—or any weapon without orders from me."

Turco laughed. And Januar realised with a shock that he was running with sweat himself. It was true that there had been dreadful stories written around the bogey of invaders from outer space. There was that in Turco's laugh which spoke of those half-forgotten juvenile terrors to which all human beings were prey.

The unknown.

It was human to fear the unknown.

Logic. Kill the unknown and one killed the fear. Januar closed his eyes. Turco had always been more emotional and more governed by his emotions than the average human of the era.

But Turco was also cleverer than average and brave enough to face any danger he understood. He would not hesitate to dismantle the engines to get H bomb material—or worse.

Januar licked his lips. Turning to the repeater dials below the communicator screens, he flipped switches. Because of the low power in the circuits, needles rose slowly where they should have jumped, but he soon knew that, whatever Turco planned in his pig-headed terror, there was certainly more dangerous radiation loose down below in the engine room than was normal.

" The idiot !" he said. And yet a small voice in his own mind kept repeating that very same sort of fear Turco felt. The alien ship was so big, and they so small. If it did suddenly show its fangs at them, even big bombs, driven at it at the greatest velocity possible, might seem mere gnat bites to it.

He turned. Abbey was still staring at the TV screen and the humanoid was going through the pantomime of touching each finger in turn and indicating a symbol.

Januar's mind whirled. Thoughts chased each other through his brain. The humanoid up there seemed to be trying to give an impression of urgency. Little did the creature know how urgent Januar knew things were. If there was only some means of communicating quickly. If he had only been some famous thinker instead of a mere captain of a tiny prospecting vessel.

Eleven symbols. Eleven letters ? What kind of alphabet was that ? The English alphabet had 26 letters, the Russian had 32, Chinese heaven knew how many.

The humanoid finished a run through his routine and started all over again. No fingers.

One finger I
Two fingers V
Three fingers W

Januar began to grin. It wasn't an alphabet. Fingers. Men had long used their fingers for counting. These other creatures did the same. Nothing 0, to 9 nine. Ten symbols. Ten fingers. With these aliens and their six-fingered hands there would be twelve symbols.

Januar grabbed a pencil from Abbey's nervous hands, turned over the TV circuit sheet of paper and wrote on its back.

English :	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Alien :	—	I	V	W	X	H	T	F	E	P	B	O	O —

He slapped Abbey on the back in his excitement. " How old are you ?"

" Uh ?" Abbey blinked. " Er—twenty-nine standard, if—"

" Twenty-nine. Figures 29. And those figures are short for two tens and nine. Look at the numbering system of those lads up there. They don't work in tens, but in dozens, so that according to their way of thinking your age is two dozens and five. Now look at their scale and ours. Two dozens would be V, and five would be H. So they'd think of you as being VH years old !"

Understanding began to dawn in Abbey's large dark eyes. He began to grin. " It's the fingers that count !" He gave a sort of giggle which he cut off short as though thinking that it didn't become him.

But Januar was not listening. He was bending over his transposition scale. " Now what it is George up there is trying to tell us . . . ?

" FE . . .

" F is seven, so that's seven dozens and . . .

" E is eight.

" Seven dozens and eight. Seven twelves are eighty-four in our arithmetic and eight . . . that's 92. 92 !"

There was no need for prospectors in space to ask each other the significance of that figure. Even schoolboys in an atomic age knew that there were ninety-two protons in the nucleus of a uranium atom matched by the same numbers of electrons rotating around that nucleus if the atom was neutral. 92 !

Uranium was still a very important source of power to the human race.

There was none in the ship—which used a more concentrated power source. " You never finished that spectrograph, did you, Abbey ?"

" No—" Abbey started to search amongst his litter of equipment, but gave up suddenly. " Jan, what's the radiation count in the base of the ship ? We aren't equipped to seat her down on ground that's too hot."

And a voice from the engine room said, " You're too right, pals. I'll have to kill the force screen to feed power in to lift us off this hot seat. But perhaps we won't need protection after all. It seems we're amongst friends."

Turco's communicator screen lit just as he finished speaking. To the others he said, " Boy we've struck it rich at last."

They all grinned at the aliens, who made their own kind of facial contortions back in return.

E. R James

The one real thing Mankind desperately wanted was a faster-than-light drive to the stars—until the first alien visitor arrived. Then the problem was solved.

BIRTHRIGHT

by LEE HARDING

Roul's first impression was that for all it's visual accuracy, the video had been unable to capture the overpowering nobility of the stellar visitor.

He was lounging quietly upon a divan, his attention cradled by the atonal chords of Stravinsky emerging from the speakers in the far wall when Roul entered. He turned his head around and acknowledged his visitor and then unfolded his tremendous body and stood up, so that he towered fully three feet over Roul's six-one.

"Mister Kinnear?" he enquired, affably, his English near perfect in pronunciation. "I have been expecting you. Won't you sit down?"

Nodding, Roul accepted the invitation and seated himself in a lounger. His alien host flicked a switch on the table beside him, stilling the cacaphonic din of Stravinsky, and resumed his position on the divan.

In this fraction of a second Roul had absorbed the impact of his first encounter with an alien life form and his mind was still a little numbed by the shock of the similarity between them. No octopi-inspired monster this, but a noble being who carried his very existence like a proud heritage, who seemed to know pride in every inch of his superbly muscled, grey-tinged body and who regarded him with eyes devoid of deceit and possessed only of an open curiosity. And in that

moment he knew what Carlson had meant when he spoke of having his mind *stirred* whenever he was in the presence of the alien. It was, Roul decided, rather like having the inside of your skull brushed very softly with the lightest of feathers, making you aware by some devious empathic means that this creature called Arl was incapable of deceit, that he spoke the literal truth and that the concept of lying was alien to his way of thinking. Unquestionably.

Still awed by this preliminary sensation, Roul said : " I suppose they told you why I'm here ?" and he felt uncomfortable, despite the moulded contours of the chair hugging his buttocks.

" Mister Carlson explained to me that you were from a department known as ' DEEP FREEZE,' and wanted to talk with me for a little while. Is that correct ?"

Roul nodded. " That's right. ' Deep Freeze ' is the code name adopted for our stellar colonization scheme."

The alien's brow-less forehead furrowed with interest. " I see. Perhaps you could tell me a little more about this operation . . . ?"

Roul explained how it had been their robotic Outpost buried deep within the frozen mountains of Pluto that had first detected his ship wandering in from Outside.

" At first we thought it was one of our own Deep Freezers returning for some reason or other, although such a happening would have been quite unprecedented. Later, of course, we discovered that the ship wasn't one of ours, and well—you know the rest."

Arl nodded understandingly. " Tell me," he asked, " this process of yours, whereby you send your people to the stars."

Roul said : " I'd better go back a little way before I do that, just so you can get an idea of what made us adopt this particular scheme."

And he told the alien how, after three successive atomic wars and three successive climbs back to sanity, mankind had finally won the right to colonise the solar system. Two hundred years after the development of atomic power found the human race transforming the arid deserts of Mars into a fertile, breathing planet again. The process took time—at least three generations—but the reward was a fresh young world for the taking, a world capable of siphoning off the excess population pressure of an overcrowded Earth screaming and

howling for room to live and procreate like normal human beings. And afterwards there were the moons of Jupiter and Saturn to terraform, as well as the howling dust-bowel of Venus.

All this they had eventually accomplished. But the stars remained forever beyond their reach.

" You see," Roul went on, " we have been shackled to our system by a man called Einstein. He developed a series of mathematical equations which seemed to prove that the speed of light was the limiting factor in stellar travel. In three centuries our physicists have found no way of releasing us from this bondage, so we had no alternative but to resort to the discarded idea of the Long Trip.

" We assembled vast, self supporting cities far out in space. We wove protective shells around them to keep out the killing radiations. We fastened the most powerful nuclear engines man has ever devised to their tails and sent them swimming off into the great night, without even knowing for certain if any of them would ever survive the long flight and see a habitable world again.

" We called it Operation Deep Freeze. We put a hundred thousand human beings into suspended animation and installed robotic keepers to monitor the long journey to another star. We arranged for carefully selected Guardians to be awakened at calculated times during the voyage to see that everything within the great ships were functioning smoothly, before their Keepers returned them to sleep again. In this way we hoped that mankind would manage to reach the nearer stars, and perhaps spread our seed further on through successive generations."

" But when did you begin all this ?" the alien asked.

" A little over fifty years ago. Quite recently, really, when one is using galactic time as a measuring stick." There was a note of bitterness in Roul's words as he finished the sentence. He had worked hard to become Director of the Deep Freeze project and had been riding that particular taskmaster for eighteen years, squarely and unruffled in the saddle of middle age. But his was a job without reward. He would never live to see the fruits of his labour. He would never know whether he were part of mankind's grandest dream or its greatest folly. He might be a benevolent visionary or an executioner. Only future generations would be able to judge

the worth of his work. For the moment, he could feel nothing more than a mother hen watching helplessly while her chicks fled the nest to some undreamed of destiny

Ironical, wasn't it, that Mother Earth of legend had now reverted to the law of survival that ruled the world in the dawn of history, before man brought his concept of ' family ' and thrust it upon creation, and which only the lesser animals despised ? Instead of huddling her chicks to her bosom and binding them with the invisible threads of love, devotion and selflessness that would dog them to their grave, she now found herself one with the beasts of the field. She must now cast her children from her and leave them to take care of themselves in the vast reaches of the galaxy, forever away from her influence.

Mother Earth, Roul thought, seeding the Galaxy with her spawn, like a monstrous pollen box.

" We've sent off a total of eighteen ships," he went on, " with an average of a hundred thousand people on board each one." He didn't mention that *Endeavour* 18 had sailed off into the great unknown only two months ago and that, with a little luck, *Endeavour* 19 might be assembled and ready to move beyond the orbit of Neptune sometime next year. The project was accelerating smoothly now that the first reluctance to the project had been suppressed and mankind was crying out for a New Frontier to replace the old ones.

Arl seemed to be a trifle bewildered by all this. He shook his head and Roul watched the play of tiny muscles move across the sharply chiselled bone structure of the alien's face. " You are a complex, puzzling race," he observed, without any trace of humour, only bafflement. " Just what are you trying to achieve ?"

The question caught Roul off guard. He hadn't been expecting such a direct interrogation of racial motives at this stage of the conversation. But his reply sprang ready to his tongue. " Fulfilment, I suppose. Isn't that enough ? Can you people understand that concept ?"

" I think we can ?" Was there just a suggestion of mockery in his soft answer ?

" Then you must see why a young race such as ours desires a *goal*, something beckoning beyond even the most distant horizon, something to *work* towards. Otherwise there is only anarchy and repetitious wars. Our curse, unfortunately."

" A strange philosophy. And tell me, have you heard from any of these ships you have sent on their long journey ?"

Roul almost laughed. " Not a chance. Why, *Endeavour One* wouldn't even be one quarter of the way to Centaurus by now. If ever a ship *does* attempt a return journey then we certainly won't hear from them for at least a thousand years."

Arl seemed to mull this over for a few moments. " A thousand years," he repeated, wonderingly. " And in that time . . . ?"

" I'll have been dead a mighty long time, even if I do live to be a hundred and sixty, which is about the maximum I can expect in this sort of a job. But that's not important. We've come to accept the Long View in relation to our stellar colonization. We plan not for today, not even the next century, but for generations unborn in some distant millenia on some unknown star system. That is the burden we Terrans have usurped, the task of spreading our race and, more important, our cultural ideas, throughout the galaxy. And we are doing everything within our power to send as many of these great ships as we can out into the endless reaches of interstellar space, just so we can hope that the half of one per cent we predict will survive will manage to sink roots into some habitable alien soil."

" Then the odds are that small ?"

Roul nodded. " That's what we've computed. There's so many variables, though, to make really accurate calculation difficult. For instance, although we possess a highly advanced technology, we are not infallible. A million and one things could go wrong on board our Deep Freeze ships. A drive might go haywire, despite the hundreds of built-in safety devices, not to mention the highly-skilled robot attendants standing guard over them, and a whole ship might be vaporised into interstellar dust. Then again, something might go awry with the refrigeration equipment keeping the thousands of sleepers in suspended animation, and the entire ship-load of colonists might arrive at their destination as rotting, decayed corpses.

" So you see, we must send as many ships as possible, *and keep on sending them*, so that somewhere along the line sheer weight of numbers will iron out the difference between death and survival, and some of our children will find homes on alien worlds."

The alien looked across at Roul with an expression remarkably akin to admiration. "As I said, you are a complex, bewildering race, but you are remarkable as well."

"*Remarkable*? I don't understand."

"To even *attempt* such a scheme . . ." The alien rose and walked slowly over to the great expanse of windows along one side of the room, and stood there with his arms crossed over his bare chest in a typically human gesture, and stared out at the world outside.

Roul was silent, his eyes studying the massive back of the creature across the room, marvelling at the exquisite quality of the brownish garment enclosing his immense thighs and legs and the narrow strip of the same material rising over his chest and down his broad back to join the trouser garment at his waist. The subtle use of this glorious material complemented the stature of the body it contained.

When no further comment was forthcoming, Roul gave a short little cough and said: "I suppose Carlson has told you most of this already?"

Without turning, the alien replied: "In essence, yes. But I must confess that it is only since my conversation with you that I have been able to understand it completely. Everything seems to have fallen into an easily clarified perspective." He turned around and looked Roul calmly in the eyes. "And I think you have been sent here for something. Is that also correct?"

Roul stared back into the marble depths of the alien eyes and felt a chill slap at his heart. Carlson had also warned him about the alien's uncanny intuition, an ability that enabled him to almost pluck a question out of the air before it was asked. Not telepathy, Roul realised. Something vastly more subtle than the half-mythical Terran substitute. More than ever he felt convinced that Arl's senses operated on a different level entirely to his own. There seemed every indication that the stellar visitor was accustomed to functioning with more than the usual complement of five senses.

"Yes," he said, breathing deeply, "they *have* sent me—for something."

He rose from under Arl's stare and walked slowly over to join his host by the window, giving himself a few moments to assemble the chaotic mess in his head into sensible proportion. Outside the lush greenery of the reclaimed Nullabor Plains

leant a cool stroke to the air of tense anticipation in the room. Away in the distance the egg-shaped blob of the alien's ship rested quiescently upon the grass outside the Woomera Administration building, surrounded by an impressive retinue of armed might.

I wonder where his mate is today ? Roul wondered. Probably back in the ship, doing whatever a Mrs. Arl busied herself with. For the last two days Arl himself had been deeply immersed in Terran music at the expense of everything else. It was only with difficulty that he had finally consented to see Roul Kinnear.

Earth held her visitors in great respect. There was really nothing else for them to do.

Roul let his eyes turn until he could see the other's face, and was astonished to see that the alien appeared almost to be sad as he gazed out wistfully—yes, wistfully !—at the panorama of green and blue beyond the window.

" Two of your weeks ago," he said, quietly, " my wife and I arrived upon your world and asked permission from your government to stay a while and study your civilization. Within a matter of days that permission was granted, and after the minor difficulties of your language are overcome, your people managed to accept us for what we were—just a couple of galactic tourists curious about your planet and your unique civilization. I say unique because for such a short-lived race you have managed to create an astonishing amount of lasting art.

" Although both of our races must have originally sprung from identical galactic stock, as have several other races in the galaxy, you will be surprised to learn, you seem to have pursued remarkably original paths. I speak not only of your tremendous accomplishments in the field of science, but of those in your arts. Your paintings, your drama, are equal to anything in the known universe. But your *music* . . . that is your supreme creation. Believe me, Roul Kinnear, I have travelled a great deal throughout the galaxy and nowhere have I heard music to equal that of your greatest composers. It seems all the more unjust that with all these great accomplishments you have been denied the gift that would have made you truly great, and carried your creations to the far corners of the universe. But then, not really denied, only inexplicably lost somewhere along the line."

He dropped his eyes from the window and his voice sounded genuinely sorry as he added : " It is a great pity. I would have liked to have stayed a little longer on your world."

There was a thunderclap of surprise inside Roul's skull. It reverberated with the rapid thrust of panic reaching up from his subconscious. " I had no idea you were leaving so soon," he said

" Neither did I or my wife. But I am afraid that you leave us no choice in the matter."

" No choice ? But what do you mean . . . ?"

He turned and looked dispassionately at Roul's anguished, upturned face. " Because you must ask something of me, Roul, something that is not within my power to give, because if you did not ask it there would be no need for us to leave, but because you are a man and because you represent the hopes and dreams of your kind, you *must* ask me."

Roul felt his arms sag helplessly at his sides. " But how could you know ?" he asked.

"Are we really fools, Roul Kinnear ? We have both willingly let ourselves be subjected to a series of examinations by your learned doctors so that they might understand the workings of our bodies. Our brain cases have been x-rayed and probed with a seemingly endless amount of electronic equipment. We have been metaphorically turned inside out to satisfy this insatiable curiosity of yours. We have attempted to explain, unsuccessfully, I must add, the way our senses work, how we can sense the feelings and emotions of those present, how we use this ability to ' punctuate ' our verbal speech, how we can intuitively divine the intents of others, often long before they are aware of their own decisions. What else is left ? I could only assume that sooner or later you would get around to seeking an explanation for that which is closest to your desires."

He looked away as he finished. " You have come to ask for the secret of our space drive, haven't you ?"

Roul could only reply in a dull, defeated voice. " Yes, you're right. I suppose it must have been easy to guess we'd come crawling for it in time." It was difficult to keep the note of bitterness from over-riding the defeat in his words.

Arl faced him again, his eyes liquid pools of despair. " *Why* do you want it ?" he asked. " So you can go galloping off amongst the stars ? What about all those people you've

sealed up in their nice shiny coffins and cast adrift amongst the stars ?"

" We would find them somehow," Roul replied, defensively. And then, in a sudden burst of honesty added : " No, that's a lie. We wouldn't really care if we didn't find them. They'd turn up in good time somewhere in the Galaxy. After all, what are a few million lives, even, when measured against the future of a whole race ?"

" It is just this disregard of life your people possess that forces me to be disgusted in a small way. Were it not for your creations in the world of art I suppose I would dismiss you as a pretty worthless race."

He raised one gigantic hand to wave aside a sudden defensive outburst. " Please do not misunderstand me. I reserve the right to be repulsed by any form of barbaric behaviour I may encounter, and any race that ceaselessly exploits its own kind towards a given end is, by our standards, barbaric."

Hollowly, Roul said : " I said we were a young race. You must expect some barbarism from the young."

" Granted. But you are older than you think, and I am not attempting to demote the achievements of your people in any way. In this proud, grand dream of yours to spread your seed through the galaxy I can detect elements of great humility and sacrifice, as well as the baser motives of greed and lust. Your paradox is that you can be so uncommonly cruel and yet attain such noble dignity in your creative efforts."

" When we are good, we are very, very good," Roul observed, wryly, " but when we are bad we are *awful.*"

Surprisingly, a suggestion of a smile tugged at the lipless mouth of the alien. Humour, Roul was rather pleased to discover, wasn't mankind's monopoly after all.

" That has all the flavour of a very nasty quotation," Arl suggested

" You're so right. I think it sums us up rather succinctly. If you expect me to defend what you've just said then you're wrong. I stand accused on behalf of the human race of all you have said. I offer no defence and await your verdict."

" Verdict ? Do you think we take it upon ourselves to mete out punishment to all the backward races that inhabit the galaxy ?"

" Then why do you withhold the secret of your drive ? Is it because we are what we are that you refuse to give us the means of carrying our pestilential civilization to the stars ?"

" You are becoming bitter, Roul Kinnear."

" Do you blame me ? Haven't you just given me enough reason to be bitter for the next thousand years ?" He began a nervous pacing up and down the length of the room, punctuating his feverish words with vague gestures from his white hands. The alien watched him with an almost pitying look in his deep, soulful eyes.

" Look," Roul persisted, " we want this drive, we *need* this drive you have. How do you think we feel, sending all those Deep Freeze ships off to God knows where and not even knowing what will happen to them. Long view—hell ! You couldn't even begin to know what it's like. And here you arrive on our planet, in a ship no bigger than a medium size inter-continental stratocruiser, and inform us that you have come from the stars. So *easily*, so *casually*, as though it is the easiest thing in the galaxy to accomplish a trip like that."

He stopped pacing and faced the alien earnestly, one hand outstretched. " Look, it is in my power to offer you anything, *anything at all* that it is in our capabilities to give, in return for which we would like to know the method by which your ship travels between the stars. Somehow your race has discovered a way through the Einstein curtain. All we ask is the right to share this privilege. We are not monsters, we are not murderers that we would rape the galaxy with this drive in our possession. Why, your weapons and forces alone make our own seem puny in comparison."

The alien was fully aware of this, and he knew that the Terrans were powerless to try and wrest the secret from himself and his mate. The egg-shaped ship outside was surrounded by an impenetrable shield of force that could repel even the most powerful of nuclear weapons, around his waist was a miniature replica of the same machine that could encircle his body in a millionth of a second with the identical shield.

No, the Terrans could not fight for what they desired. They could only ask.

" You would give me *anything* ?" he repeated.

" Anything."

He regarded Roul with mocking eyes. " Could you give me the mind of Bach, the soul of Beethoven, the essence of Wagner, the brain of Schoenberg or the talent of Picasso ?" He shook his head, as though in anguish, and added : " Ah, if only we had come *sooner* !"

Roul could feel the burden of defeat heavily around his shoulders and he wondered what the President would have to say when he brought the alien's answer for him to study. " Then you will not permit us to study the workings of your drive ?" he asked, calmly now that the interview seemed to be played out.

The alien shrugged. " Your scientists have my permission to study it for a day if they wish—but no longer. My wife and I are anxious to depart."

Roul looked at him stupidly. " You mean . . .?"

" One moment. Please do not misconstrue what I have just said. I am not offering you any secret, as your scientists will discover when they have examined this mysterious drive of ours. That is, if they will *want* to after I have explained something to you. But I suppose that insatiable curiosity of theirs will insist that they check up, just to be sure.

" You see, Roul, there is really no great difference between the engine that powers our space craft and those inside the great ships you have sent out into the great darkness. At the most they offer an improvement of perhaps three times the acceleration of your own engines, and this secret we are quite willing for you to have. It will at least cut off several hundred years from your project voyages."

" But your stellar drive," Roul insisted. " Your means of accelerating beyond the speed of light. What of that ?"

Arl again shook his head and he looked for all the world as though the weight of the universe was bearing down upon him. " My friend, there is *no* stellar drive. Like yourselves we are bound to the reality of this universe by a series of equations compounded millenia ago by one of our own scientists. But they have not caused us the discomfort that your own people have endured.

" You see, the difference is not in the engines that power our ships, but in ourselves."

A creeping, tortuous paralysis seemed to suddenly move over Roul's body as the first inkling of implication behind the alien's words crept up upon him.

" Now you must understand why we cannot stay upon your world. We do not fear your people—as you have already pointed out, your most powerful weapons would have no effect on us whatsoever—but we do fear your hatred, Roul Kinnear, the hatred we shall sense as soon as your people discover the truth about us, that we possess no Rosetta stone to the stars, no magic formula that negates the speed of light, only this harsh truth I have just thrust upon you.

" The stars are just as far away as they have always been—for *you*."

Roul still stared with mounting horror as the alien's last words struck a death knell to his dreams, to everybody's dreams, and brought the door of the universe closed against their scrabbling fingers.

" Now you must know how we feel, to be witness to a race that has achieved so much in such an infinitesimal time, a race that struggles against an overpowering birthright to attain the glory of the stars and whose individuals are born, breathe, live and die in a period of time that is but comparable to an hour in the life-span of my people."

And then Roul knew the pity in the eyes of the alien for what it truly was, and also saw the compassion lingering within the thoughtful depths of the understanding eyes. Compassion for the little animal proudly doing its best to raise itself bodily by its bootstraps towards a heritage in the stars and living out a lifetime while Arl's people wandered casually from star to star on journeys that would approximate those of a few weeks for an Earthling.

Arl's people had won the stars by birthright. Perhaps once the people of Earth might have possessed the same immeasurable immortality, but as the alien had sadly observed, the gift had been lost ' somewhere along the way,' and now humanity could never be more than a bustling little insect spreading its seed across an uncaring galaxy and living and dying like a galactic May-fly.

The intolerable pressure of mankind's defeat collapsed into a knotted, bitter lump inside him as he realised the extent of their disastrous destiny. Blind, unreasonable panic swept over him and blurred his senses, so that his one desire was to flee the

room and its soulful, frightening executioner and share his burden with the rest of humanity.

He excused himself and made for the door. The alien watched him go with the same wistful, compassionate expression in his eyes that had puzzled Roul so much during the interview. Now, of course, he knew the reason for it.

And then he was standing outside with the warm sun beating down on his head, one hand raised to his eyes in an effort to dispel the dizziness swirling around him, and the other supporting his weak body against the side of the building.

His vision cleared momentarily, and he found himself staring fixedly at the egg-shaped spaceship squatting innocently outside the Administration building. Inside those grim white walls the President and his retinue of officers would be patiently waiting for the answer they had sent him to seek.

A couple of galactic tourists, he thought, and shook his head, puzzled by the incongruity of it all. He squinted the film of tears from his eyes and glared angrily at the invincible spaceship, feeling the fetters closing irrevocably around the last hope of man.

His right hand curled into an angry fist that was raised briefly, against the uncaring sky. Then his shoulders sagged, and he began walking across the smooth concrete towards the Administration building, moving like a sleepwalker and carrying the heavy burden of his Answer.

Lee Harding

THE LITERARY LINE-UP

Story ratings for No. 114 were :

1. Basis For Negotiation - - Brian W. Aldiss
2. Field Hospital (Part 1) - - - James White
3. The Psi Squad - - - - Philip E. High
4. Little Horror - - - - - Bill Spencer

Practical jokes often have a habit of misfiring. In this particular case it also produced something unusual.

VISUAL AID

by STEVE HALL

The group of six girls, six boys and their school-teacher, clustered attentively around the controls of the hyperspace ship, the children hero-worshipping the tall pilot who had been showing them over the vessel, the teacher thankful that someone else was holding their attention for the time being.

It was the end of term and the day of the annual visit to the interstellar field, and as such, it formed part of the series of general interest visits for twelve-year-olds.

Their guide gestured at the impressive-looking panel. " This is the Master Course Computer." He patted its gleaming, anti-static surface familiarly. " We'll pretend we're about to go on a journey, and I'll show you just how everything works." He pointed at one dark-haired boy. " You be the pilot and set up your destination co-ordinates on these dials."

The boy stepped forward and spun all three of them haphazardly.

" And now," continued the pilot, " you insert your master key here," he pointed to a shining slot, " and that makes the control board ' live.' "

The boy mimed this action and waited for further instructions.

" Finally," went on his mentor, " the captain gives the order to take-off, and you press this red button, which starts the whole sequence."

Again the lad obeyed, and operated the red-tipped push.

Nothing should have happened, and nothing would have but for a trail of metallic particles worn away during past insertions of the master key. They effectively ' short-circuited ' the switch so that the board was fully operational.

The ship lifted smoothly and rapidly during the few seconds of paralysed silence which followed.

At first, the children took their unexpected trip calmly, thinking that this was something extra-special laid on for their benefit.

The starship cleared atmosphere on its Null-Grav field and automatically switched to hyperdrive.

Its pilot drew the school-teacher to one side, explaining in rapid whispers that the whole thing was due to a mal-operation. " However," he finished, " as soon as the jump through hyperspace is completed, we'll reverse everything and go right back."

It was two hours before they emerged into normal space, and the children were becoming restless.

The pilot scanned the dials and hastily reset them for the journey home. He depressed the red button—nothing happened. Swearing quietly to himself, he tried using his master key. Again there was no result. Grey-faced with sudden suspicion, he checked the fuel guage. It pointer rested hard against the zero—the vital neutrium was exhausted—there was no way back. Desperately, the pilot searched his mind for a solution to their dilemma, and finding none, decided to tell the truth.

" Children, said the pilot, " this ship should never have left the ground. She was waiting for routine maintenance before provisioning for her next voyage ; the fuel that was in the tanks has been used up. There's no hope of signalling for help, as we are many light-years from home." He paused for a moment before betraying the last nerve-shattering fact : " And we've no food on board."

A few of the children were tearful, but for the most part, the shock news was still too recent to register.

The pilot moved across to the view-screen and took his first look at the region of space in which they were adrift : the constellations were utterly alien. He continued to sweep and examine the full sphere of vision—abruptly, the huge, misty edge of a planet with an atmosphere swam into view. Hardly daring to hope, he stepped up the magnification until continents

cities, then native humans could be seen on the screen. The planet was near and had all the characteristics of an oxygen water world—all the tests he ran through confirmed it. The crippled starship was moving on a course that would take it near the atmosphere before an eager sun drew it into its fiery embrace.

A decision had to be made in the next few hours before it was too late. Again the pilot spoke seriously to his passengers, making clear to them the issues involved. Finally, he took full advantage of the time available, to instruct everyone in the mastery of the simple controls of a powered space-suit, which was virtually a short-range, one-man space-ship. He warned them that during the trip to the planet, called Earth by its inhabitants, they would become separated. But he gave them encouragement and careful instructions as to how they should behave, and how they could conform.

The ill-luck which had placed them in their predicament, was balanced by their safely accomplished planetfall and the fact that they were scattered over Europe in the months immediately following the end of World War II. Amongst the thousands of other refugees, they were not noticed.

Simon Street looked at his watch, it said 4.30 p.m.

" One to go," he said to the room at large. He depressed the switch of his inter-office communicator. " Miss Medwin, show Mr. Howard in please."

" Yes, Doctor. Will you want me any more this afternoon?"

" I would like to see you for a few moments if you could wait—I'll be free in about twenty minutes."

" All right Doctor, would you like some coffee then ?"

" It would be very acceptable indeed."

Howard was an alcoholic. His case history was depressingly familiar ; too rapid promotion to executive level in his profession through a series of lucky breaks, the increasing feeling of inadequacy when making decisions, the growing cancer of lack of confidence, and the final, inevitable discovery of an antidote. It came in a bottle one could conceal in one's desk, or a flask in the hip pocket—and it soon became the puppet-master.

The psychiatrist jotted down all the details ; the man was not too far gone as yet. He had had sufficient sense to realise that he needed help ; that was a positive step in the right direction.

Simon handed over a small box of tablets.

" That will do for today Mr. Howard, take one of these four times a day, they'll help a lot."

The man shook his hand gratefully and walked out—already his shoulders were set at a rather more confident angle.

" And that's what I've got to do," mused Simon. " Build up his self-esteem."

Quite suddenly, weariness washed tidally over him. A full day of other people's troubles was like a mental blood-letting. He felt in need of a transfusion.

A light step in the next room, and a tap on his door provided a diversion for his train of thought. Laura Medwin entered bearing a tray of coffee pots and cups. She set it down carefully on a corner of the desk and poured out his drink in exactly the right proportions of black and white liquids.

He gestured at the tray. " Have one yourself while we talk. Would you like a cigarette with it ?"

They both lit up and sat silently sipping the steaming alkaloid

" You've had a pretty hectic week for your start here," he said. " How do you like the job ?"

Laura Medwin had all the promise of becoming a most efficient secretary/receptionist. Her showing in the few days since she had started work had been impressive. Simon was privately hoping that she liked her work and would stay. And in addition to everything else, he was becoming more than a little attracted by the dark haired girl's pleasant manner and looks.

She smiled warmly and sincerely.

" I enjoy it very much—it's busy, varied and interesting—never a dull moment. If you're satisfied with my progress, I'd like to think that I might become permanent."

The psychiatrist's tiredness was instantly washed away by the exhilaration he felt at the straight-forward answer.

" It's nice to know that you find it so interesting. I must admit there are times when I get frustrated."

" At not being able to do as much for some of your patients as you'd like to ?" she queried, with obvious appreciation of his meaning.

" Yes, you've grasped the point exactly. So often a patient tries to describe his feelings and hallucinations to me, and sometimes of course, he might conceal or distort the information. If I could only see what they can in their mind's eye, I

could really get some speed and action into diagnosis and treatment." He sighed in mock sorrow. " There's not much hope of that though, so I suppose we'll just have to do the best we can with the techniques we have."

Laura nodded sympathetically. " Maybe there'll be a breakthrough somewhere one day, and who knows, maybe you'll be the one to discover it."

Oddly, the idea didn't seem so far-fetched. Certainly he found her company stimulating. The old saying : ' Behind every successful man is a woman,' came unbidden into his mind. Previously, he had not given the idea much credence—right now, he wasn't so ready to scoff.

" We'll have to wait and see," he said, feeling a little inadequate at having used such a banal phrase. " Still, that's enough shop talk. You'll be wanting to get away for the weekend ; what's it going to be, a couple of days with mum and dad, or the boyfriend ?" He was fishing for information, and he knew it.

The girl seemed unaware of how transparent he felt.

" Neither, I'm afraid. You see, I'm an orphan—so there are no parents, and as it happens, no boy-friend."

Simon was both angry and pleased at one and the same time ; angry because of his clumsiness about her parents, but delighted that there was no prospective male in sight.

" I'm sorry to have blundered on to what might be a painful subject for you—I can appreciate how you must feel."

She smiled, " Not to worry, no harm has been done. It's quite a long time since I lost my parents ; I've got quite used to being a lone wolf, or should it be wolverine ?"

Simon shook his head. " I'm not sure, maybe ' lost sheep ' would be better ?"

" I hope I haven't strayed too far," she wisecracked back at him.

They both laughed at the implications which could be read into her last remark.

" Look Laura," said Simon, " it's past consulting hours now, and after five o'clock all men (and women) are equal. If you've nothing better to do, how about joining me for dinner ? I've got a few friends coming around tonight, and if you've any reservations about it, I'm being quite mercenary—you'd be a great help on the ' hostess ' side of things."

For the first time in the conversation, she hesitated.

" If you are quite sure," she began.

" I'm sure," said Simon briskly. " I'll go home now and get things organised. If you can make it by about seven, that would be fine. I'll take you back to your place afterwards, if you can find your own way around to mine on your own."

The time passed quickly for both of them until seven o'clock.

The door-chimes bing-bonged apologetically.

" It's all right Mrs. Evans, I'll go," called Simon to his housekeeper, guessing that it would be Laura. He opened the door. "Come in, you're right on time. Shall I take your coat?"

They both went into the room which had a table set for seven at one end, and a number of comfortable looking chairs at the opposite end, ranged in a semi-circle in front of a crackling log fire.

" How do you like it ?" said Simon, gesturing with a sweeping motion that included the whole room. " I know it's a bit ' olde worlde,' but the place was going at a reasonable rent when flats were hard to get, so I took it."

" I'd swap my flat for it anytime," replied Laura, " it's got a ' homey ' atmosphere that I like."

" Yes," agreed Simon, " that was what attracted me to it as much as anything. Still, we've got to get on—the others will be here in about ten minutes. Will you get the drinks and glasses out of the cabinet while I pile a few more logs on the fire ?"

They bustled about contentedly for a few moments.

" By the way," said Simon, " I'd better fill you in on who will be coming. There's Peg and Bill—they're an old married couple of three years. George will be bringing his latest girl-friend along—I haven't met her yet. He's an electrical engineer, met him about five years ago. Last, but not least is Frank Hennessy—he's our overage juvenile delinquent."

" What form does his delinquency take," queried Laura.

" The worst," answered Simon. " Practical jokes. We never quite know what's coming next."

Once again the door-chimes bonged softly.

" I'll go," said Simon.

Before he could get out of the room, the chimes went raving mad, bonging as if they had developed electrical hiccups.

" Frank at least has arrived," Simon observed. " He always does that if you give him half a chance."

Laura stood near the blazing fire. By the babble of voices coming from the hall, everybody had arrived.

Simon introduced Laura to the five newcomers. George was beaming expansively, obviously very pleased with his companion. She was a diminutive, blue-eyed blonde, who had a vaguely startled look. Frank Hennessy peered at everyone with a sly smile on his face. Laura was reminded of a vulture looking for a meal. He didn't look like a practical joker—more like the conventional idea of a professor, with his prematurely balding, half-dome of a forehead, and his slightly stooped shoulders. The eyes gave the game away however, they didn't have the benevolent kindness usually associated with older men of learning. Peggy and Bill were obviously a well-suited couple ; she was jolly, and he had a hearty, infectious laugh.

" Now," said Simon, " what would you like to drink ?"

" Beer," replied Frank and Bill. " Stout for me," said George.

Simon looked at the three girls. " What'll it be ladies ? Sherry, sherry, gin and bitter lemon." He ticked the orders off on his fingers : " Two beers, one stout, two wanting sherry, one gin and bitter, and a little of what I fancy for myself."

" You know, Simon," said Frank, " this place looks like a miniature, baronial hall. I suppose it's pretty old ?"

" About three hundred years I believe," replied the psychiatrist, busying himself with glasses and bottles.

Frank had selected his victim. Turning to George's girlfriend Betty, he said : " I should think a place as old as this could have a ghost or two, wouldn't you ?"

She murmured something inaudible.

" Nonsense," said Simon, " the only spirits here are in the bottles."

Frank was not to be sidetracked.

" It depends upon whether you're a sensitive or not. Some people can see these things, some can't."

A telephone bell shrilled in the next room.

" Damn," expostulated Simon. " Would you get it Laura—it's probably one of our patients—see if you can put them off while I pour these drinks. The phone is in there," pointing to the study door.

Laura went out to deal with the intruding call.

Frank returned to his theme. " I'm a sensitive you know, the seventh son of a seventh son. If there's anything of a psychic nature here, I should be able to detect it." His eyes swung leisurely around the room, and stopped abruptly at a point about twelve feet behind and to one side of the shrinking Betty.

A horrified look swept over his face, and the stare became frozen. Slowly, his head moved as his eyes followed an invisible something down the wall, and on to the floor. Betty cowered back into the wings of her chair. Hennessy stood almost as if carved in wood. The small eyes were squinting a little, and he held both hands in front of him, the fingers curled like claws. Just as the unseen object had apparently reached the foot of Betty's chair, a log in the grate exploded, showering sparks into the hearth. Betty shrieked in fright, and leaped into George's arms. Hennessy exploded also—into a gale of delighted laughter.

Laura returned to the room as George was soothing his still jittery, half embarrassed partner.

" It's Mr. Howard," she said apologetically to Simon. " He would like to talk to you if you can possibly manage it."

" All right Laura, I'll go—here's your drink. Watch out for Frank," he whispered, as she came near, " he's been up to his nonsense with Betty." Simon went into the study.

Hennessy's laughter had subsided when he saw Laura. His little eyes gleamed in anticipation of another victim.

" Just stand here, my dear, we were discussing the strange things sensitive people can see in old houses."

Laura regarded Hennessy warily—he was obviously unaware that she had been warned of his antics.

He babbled on : " I was looking at that spot on the wall a few moments ago. I could see something moving. It was quite horrible . . ." His voice trailed away, his stare becoming fixed as before.

Laura looked at him vacantly, as if hypnotised.

A deepening look of horror spread over Hennessy's face once again. His lips moved, but his voice was only a rustling croak. The eyes opened as wide as their tight lids would allow, and his face grew paler. The vulture-like head swung slowly, tracking something across the floor—it must have been moving towards him, because he started to retreat fearfully away, until the back of his knees caught a chair, and he fell over with a crash, mumbling incoherently.

The others roared with laughter at seeing the biter bit for once.

Simon came back to find Hennessy still curled up against the chair, his hands covering both eyes. Simon grasped his shoulder and shook it gently, " All right, Frank, it's time to stop play acting, we're just about ready for dinner."

Hennessy writhed away from the psychiatrist's touch and leapt to his feet, glaring suspiciously around. " I'm getting out of here," he said. Before anyone could remonstrate with him, he strode rapidly away. They heard the outside door thump with finality behind him.

" Well," said Simon, " what did you do to him to produce that reaction."

The upshot of the discussion which followed was that Frank had had some kind of hallucination and frightened himself with his own imagination.

The rest of the evening passed without further fireworks.

Thinking back over the events after he had taken Laura home Simon remembered that she had been rather noncommittal about the whole thing.

" I hope the idiot hasn't put her off my company," he muttered, as he closed the garage door.

Simon was having his breakfast in bed the next morning when Frank rang him.

" Hullo, Simon. I'm sorry about last night."

" I should damn well think so, going off like a bomb as you did, just because you were given the horse-laugh for a change."

There was silence for a moment, broken only by crackles on the line.

" Look," said Hennessy, " I didn't dash out because of what they did—*I saw something which scared the daylights out of me.*"

" Give over larking Frank, will you—you never seem to know when to stop."

" Simon," broke in Hennessy urgently, " I'm not kidding—there really was something—I'd like to talk to you about it."

" O.K. Come around in an hour or so."

" To your place ? Not likely—you come around to mine. I don't want to be anywhere near that room for a while."

" All right, Frank—but if you're still trying to have me on . . ."

" For God's sake, Simon—can't you tell when I'm speaking the truth ?"

The psychiatrist relented. " I'll be over shortly, but," he added warningly, " it had better be good."

Hennessy sat moodily in a chair, still wearing his pyjamas and dressing gown. Every light in the room was on in spite of the bright sunlight pouring in through the big window. He puffed at a cigarette, forgetting to offer Simon one.

" I haven't given it up, you know," said Simon sarcastically.

" Given what up ?" repeated the hollow-eyed man.

" Smoking, you foggy-brained so and so."

" Oh ; help yourself. Look, Simon, I believe I'm going ' round the bend.' What I saw in your room last night had no right being outside a nightmare."

" Just what did you see ?" Simon dropped straight into his professional manner and regarded the distracted man clinically. " Sit down and tell me all about it."

Hennessy had evidently gone over every detail of his experiences several times before Simon Street had arrived.

" I had pretended to Betty that I could see something frightening on the wall ; she looked like the type that would scare easily, so I acted as if it was moving towards her. Of course, the log popping at the crucial moment was pure, blind luck. Then Laura came back, and I decided to try the stunt on her. I could see that she wouldn't be fooled so simply, and I tried to act more convincingly."

He stared for a moment, and shuddered violently at his recollections of the incident.

" I imagined that I could see a big, black, hairy spider as big as a dinner plate on the wall—*and I could.* It was hanging there from a strand like a length of sash cord, staring at me. Then the foul thing scuttled down to the floor, and started sidling across to me. You can imagine how I felt—then, when I was on the floor, you touched me." Again he shuddered. " I thought the damn thing was on my arm. If that's what the D.T's are like, I'll never touch a drop again."

" You really thought you could see the thing ?" asked Simon pointedly.

" I did see it, exactly as I'd imagined it—it couldn't have been more vivid."

" Take it easy, Frank," the psychiatrist said soothingly. " Keep off the bottle for a bit, and if you can manage it, get away for a few days. And no more practical jokes, especially of the acting variety. Try and get a bit of light reading in, something like Thorne Smith. If you feel queer at all in the next few days—let me know, and I'll give you a good check over."

" You think I'm O.K.?" asked the still doubtful, ex-practical joker.

" Yes. You're O.K.; the ones who are really mentally sick will hardly ever admit it. Now don't worry." Simon got to his feet punched Hennessy lightly on the arm, and headed for the

door. " I think I can promise that you won't get any more ' daymares,' " he said, and closed the door behind him.

Simon thumbed Laura's doorbell.

" Who is it ?" her voice was slightly muffled by the intervening door.

" It's me, Simon," he replied. " Open up them pearly gates."

She opened the door and waved him in. " Excuse the deshabille, I've just come out of the shower. To what do I owe the honour of this early morning call—you don't want me for work do you ?"

Simon smiled faintly. " In a manner of speaking, yes. Although there is some pleasure associated with the business too."

"That answer is worthy of a T.V. private eye,' she retorted, wrapping her bathrobe around her. " Now what's it really about ?"

" I've just been visiting Frank. He's got the heebie-jeebies —convinced he's gaga because of something he thought he saw last night."

" Is he now ?" said Laura innocently.

" Did you have anything to do with it ?" shot Simon shrewdly.

" How could I make him see something that wasn't there ?" she asked demurely.

" How indeed ? Look, Laura, will you do something for me ?"

" That," she returned judiciously, " depends upon the something you want."

" Just describe yourself physically please."

She looked somewhat baffled, but decided to play it straight.

" I'm five feet six, vital stats about thirty-six, twenty-four, thirty-six, weight one hundred and twenty, hair dark, eyes brown, will that do ? Oh, and I've been told I have reasonable legs." The bathrobe fell open a little and confirmed the last statement.

" Repeat the last bit again," said Simon.

" I thought you'd be most interested in the legs," she said in mock disappointment.

" No, I didn't mean what you said about them, although," he added hastily, " I can think of better words than ' reasonable ' for a description. What I really wanted, was for you to repeat the part about your eyes."

" They're brown, and always have been."

" To me they are deep violet. Now tell me the colour of my eyes."

Laura hesitated. " They're blue aren't they ?" She came closer. " Yes definitely blue."

" Wrong," said Simon, a gleam of triumph shining from the subjects under discussion. " They are green. Now unless we're both suffering from some peculiar, localised kind of colour blindness, that only works when either one of us looks at the other, then there must be some other explanation." His final words were a statement rather than a question.

Laura fidgeted a little ; the bathrobe moved again, disconcertingly.

" I'll take a chance," she said. " Can you ' Visualise,' and enable people to ' see ' what they want to ? And are you an orphan ? And did you arrive here in a spaceship about sixteen years ago ?" Her eyes searched Simon's face for an answer, as the questions piled up almost visibly.

" Game, set and match," replied Simon moving nearer to her. " You could only have known about those things if you had also been on the same ship." Again, his words were a statement of facts.

Laura breathed a sigh of genuine relief. " Thank heaven for coincidence, I didn't think I'd ever meet one of my own kind again. It's a good thing, I couldn't resist giving Frank a dose of his own medicine last night."

" Say," said Simon with dawning inspiration, " I've just remembered that with both of us able to Visualise, my diagnostic problems are solved. If you concentrate on helping the patients to ' see ' what's in their minds, I can use my own power to tune it on things at the same time. I've always been annoyed that it wasn't possible to do the two things on my own."

" You're right," she replied. " I had almost forgotten just what two of us working together could do."

" How about becoming a partner ?" he asked, drawing her close to him.

She didn't resist. "Will the partnership be strictly business?"

" Not all the time," he replied.

Her eyes still looked deep violet.

Steve Hall

Guest Editorial (continued)

that matter—the area of the life and thinking of the humans (or, for Pete's sake, non-humans, too !) who are the hand-puppets in these pseudoscientific marionette shows.

In this they exhibit the thinness of their inspiration and the shallowness of their thinking. Not only are the scientific and environmental imaginings getting to seem old hat, but the characters themselves are more and more merely stick figures. (As for plots, I don't worry about them ; most of them are sheer nonsense ; but so, then, are all plots. Look at *Macbeth* ! Plots are necessary evils ; mostly they don't count).

One of the points of major importance that modern science fiction writers must begin to bear in mind is that any good story is and must be about people—or machines that really act like people—and that no matter how fascinating the scientific or technical apparatus of a story, its basic interest must revolve around *how interesting its people are.* We are—let's face it—pretty darn limited in the major areas of science and technology suitable for reasonably likely science fictional embroidery ; it would be difficult if not impossible, for example, to write a thrilling melodrama about the recent discoveries in ATP and DNA in biochemistry. Even Asimov hasn't tried that ! The truly unlimited and always-interesting material for fiction—*any* kind of fiction—is what the characters do (or what is done to them), and how and why they do or are done to, almost regardless of the bric-a-brac of technics or unusual environments that make the skeleton of the tale.

(Mentioning Asimov : Between the first and final draft of this piece, I read old-time, semi-pro " fan " Sam Moskowitz's profile of Isaac in the April, 1962 *Amazing.* I hope you all get *Amazing* in Britain ? In this issue, Moskowitz quoted the following from Asimov's magnificent *The End of Eternity,* never-serialized novel published in 1955 by Doubleday in the U.S.A.: " *Without the interplay of human against human, the chief interest in life is gone ; most of the intellectual values are gone ; most of the reason for living is gone.*" *And certainly,* may I add, **all** *of the reasons for science fiction are gone* !)

I rather think that this all fits well into the general concept that John Rackham was pursuing in his editorial. The world needs saving ; science can help ; but by the Lord Harry it's people who have to make science work ! It's people—and *only* people—who will save the world. And in science fiction

it is only people who can make the scientific extrapolations seem real and believable, and helpful (or not) for the future of the human race or any other race.

Obviously, I am not concerned with gadgetry, any more than Rackham was (or Arthur Sellings, too, for that matter). What science fictioneers need to push more, in my very external view as a pure consumer of science fiction, is the human nature of the humans operating the gadgetry—or, as some writers have done magnificently, the non-human nature of the non-humans operating the etc. ! Their ways, their motives ; their smartnesses and their stupidities ; their aspirations and their meannesses : these make good fiction. Sure, I know this takes thought and observation and experience, and a drop of inspiration and empathy wouldn't do any harm either, but that's what we need.

And it isn't at all important (to counter one of Rackham's minor but confoundedly irritating points) whether the story and its people are " far out in space, on a distant planet, or in a far distant future," to make good science fiction of *any* sort, satirical, utopian, or otherwise ; or that (as J.R. would seem to prefer) the events should take place in a contemporary here-and-now. I for one don't feel that *Gulliver's Travels*—or, to take another and almost as pertinent an example, Mark Twain's unsurpassed (for Americans, anyhow !) *Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*—fail today as satire because they happen to have a remote or an unreal locale in time or space. Read these books again, as adults, and see how vivid and to-the-point these old science fiction satires are right this very minute ! (And for the Love of Truth, stop spreading the canard that those books are juveniles !)

It seems to me, then, to close this rueful ramble through my prejudices, that the one thing that science fiction needs to maintain (or many might prefer to say *regain*) its stature and its excitement and its immediacy is a truly human quality —or, to be even more grumpy, *just plain quality* ! I don't care how old-hat an idea is, or how creaky its machinery, if it is about interesting matters dealt with by believable people. Message or no, science fiction or no, any story must stand or fall on those simple, elementary, schoolboy theses. It is by these measuring-sticks, it seems to me, that only too much modern science fiction falls short.

We need to regain an old level, not find a new one !

Groff Conklin

Things are looking up, for this month's shelf bears two novels, three collections (and a cheaper reprint) and two good juvenile science fiction adventures. In order then—**Time Is The Simplest Thing** by Clifford D. Simak (Gollancz, 16/-, SF choice for April)—serialised as " The Fisherman " last year in *Analog*. Mr. Simak is a mastercraftsman and story-teller of perennial excellence from way back, and now comes up with a new slant on esp, psionics or—if you like—mental magic. Postulating a world where physical science has stumbled as a cultural hero because of its final and irrefutable failure to get man bodily to the stars, the author sees in man's latent paranormal powers a way to explore the universe by his unfettered mind. However the material benefits serve to aggrandize the monopolistic organisation conducting this research, and it and its paranormal employees incur the hatred of normal mankind. Using one of the mental explorers who has " gone alien," as a protagonist and conflicting him with everyone else, Simak writes this one strictly for the dyed-in-the-wool reader to whom the more esoteric principles of the suspension of disbelief come easily, but which may prove a little too glib and uneven for some.

The other novel also deals with supranormality, but Poul Anderson's **Twilight World** (Gollancz, 15/-) shows the more serious side of his writing talent. He takes a sombre but highly logical view of the outcome of a third world war, when the survivors of nuclear holocaust face another threat to mankind —the rising tide of abnormal births. In a radiation-soaked and strife-torn world, the bitter struggle of reconstruction is mocked by mutation run wild. But with faith in man's adaptability Mr. Anderson says that life, of a type, will go on and by the efforts of the favourable mutations among tomorrow's children—the unwilling supermen—the continuing battle between irreconciliable philosophies is finally settled on another planet, and in that far future when Earth has died, a whole new race of

humankind has spread out through the universe. Always the born story-teller, Poul Anderson has excelled himself in this gripping story, filled with plausible speculation, convincing scientific detail, fascinating characters and dramatic action.

The first few stories in Alan E. Nourse's collection **Tiger By The Tail** (Dobson, 13/6d.) contrast refreshingly with that of his stable companion, Eric Frank Russell, who rarely fails to have the tables turned on cocky aliens. Mr. Nourse's gimmick is to have the humans make the fatal error, mostly of scientific judgment, as in the title story, and in " Problem "; even in " The Coffin Cure " a cold cure boomerangs catastrophically. However the unexpectedness of this excellent collection ensures that in three other stories, " Love Thy Vimp," " The Native Soil," and " Letter of the Law," man at least holds his own against extraterrestrial trickiness. There is a touch of humour and sober thought in " Family Resemblance," and a neatly executed psychological problem of space travel in " Nightmare Brother." But Nourse is at his best in dealing with a tremendous exploratory task, crossing the sunward side of Mercury at perihelion, in " Brightside Crossing," which is full of that old sense of wonder.

Making available for the first time in hard covers Arthur C. Clarke's collection of short stories, **Reach For Tomorrow,** is a service from Gollancz (15/-). These stories absolutely reek of that old sense of wonder, and I doubt if Arthur has done anything better since in this length. A round dozen gems, ranging from his first published story " Rescue Party " (17 years ago !) through practically the whole gamut of short story style—technicalities and fantasies, humour and suspense, wryness and shattering last lines. All of them were written before 1953 but their style cannot be faulted as " dated " anymore than the romances of Wells can be, and like the master's they will be evergreens for a long long time.

Erudite anthologist Edmund Crispin shows no lack of taste of percipience when he turns from science fiction to the genre of grue, and his **Best Tales of Terror** (Faber, 16/-), whilst including such names as Bradbury, Collier, Dahl and Rolt, does not consist only of the ubiquitous favourites, but more of the lesser known, though none the less entertainingly nasty, stories by these and other including, I am pleased to note, Jim Ballard's

"Manhole 69" from these pages. And of course, Mr. Crispin's usual introduction is, as always, as readable as any of the stories.

Another of his science fiction anthologies **Best SF : Three** has now been issued in Faber's paper covered editions at 6/- and now represents supremely good value (originally reviewed in *New Worlds* No. 76).

It has long been apparent that Robert Heinlein's series of space-adventures slanted toward to the younger age group, is well written, entertaining and educational, and exciting space-lore, written up, not down, to the young-at-heart of any age. One of the better titles **Farmer In The Sky** (Gollancz, 12/6d.) is published here for the first time.

The obvious success of a good-quality, semi-juvenile science fiction series is pointed by the fourth Chris Godfrey adventure, **Expedition Venus** by Hugh Walters (Faber, 13/6). The mixture is as before, plenty of science, uncomplicated characterisation, exciting adventure, and the whole well printed and produced. The locale has expanded to include Venus, whence an unmanned "space-probe" has returned contaminated by virulent fungus spores which threaten life on Earth, and the solution necessitates a flight to Venus to seek the antidote.

Leslie Flood.