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MISSION to a DISTANT STAR

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A dramatic new science fiction novel

By FRANK BELKNAP LONG

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SATELLITE science fiction

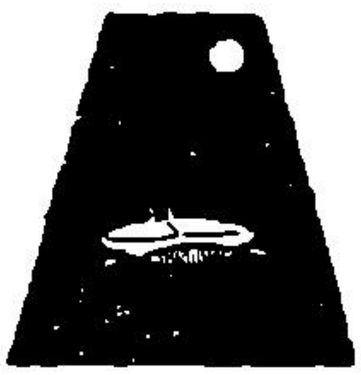
FEBRUARY, 1958 Vol. 2, No. 3

A COMPLETE NOVEL

MISSION TO A DISTANT STAR

by FRANK BELKNAP LONG

The Scorpions had conquered space on so vast a scale that they could see little difference between an Earth satellite and a high-flying kite released by a wide-eyed child. But that shining victory had a darker side.



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FEATURE

SATELLITE SCIENCE FICTION, Vol. 2, No. 3. Published bi-monthly by Renown Publications, Inc., 501 Fifth Avenue, N. Y. 17. Subscriptions. 6 issues $2.00; 12 issues $4.00; single copies 35¢. Entered as second class matter at the post office, New York, N. Y. Additional entry at Concord, N. H. Places and characters in this magazine are wholly fictitious.

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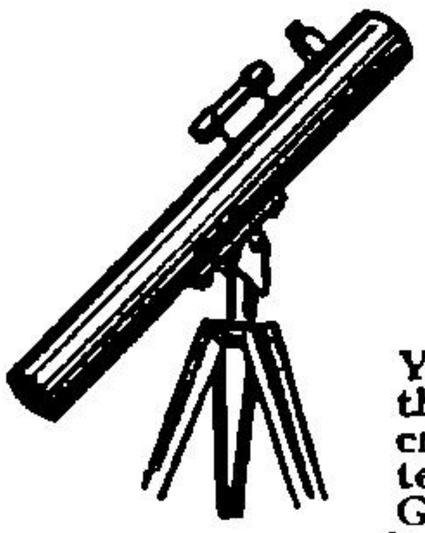

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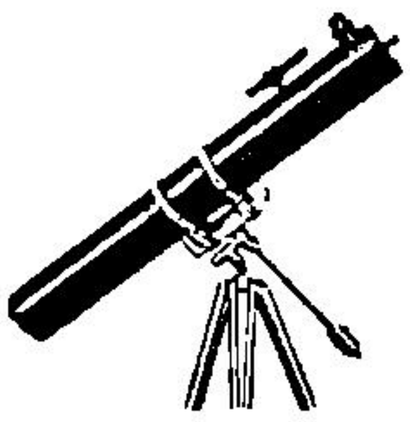

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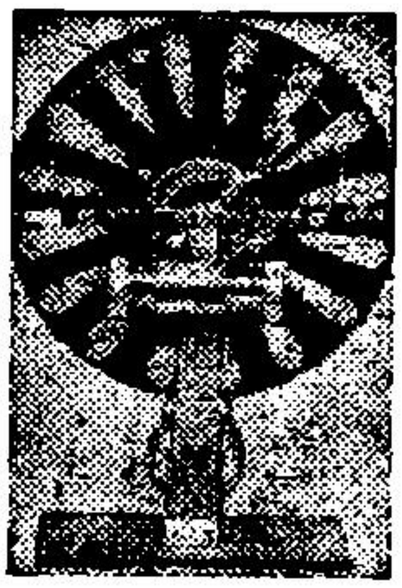

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The Scorpions were a very old,
a very wise race. The secret they
sought in space was older than mankind.
But only Man himself knew the whole answer.

A COMPLETE SCIENCE FICTION NOVEL

Mission to a Distant Star

by FRANK BELKNAP LONG

Prologue

THERE WAS A strange, unnatural, almost frightening silence in the great hall as the tall visitor arose to speak. His voice was calm and assured, his manner completely relaxed. He made no attempt to be oratorical but spoke with measured accents, as if he were addressing an assemblage of old and trusted friends. But there was something about his grave and thoughtful countenance that commanded instant respect.

The United Nations were in full, plenary session, summoned by an emergency far transcending in gravity the most critical of international crises, and there was no clamor on the part of anyone to take the floor in defense of national interests and national rights.

The tall figure said, "You have asked for proof that we are a responsible and enlightened race. There can be no wisdom without strength, no true enlightenment unless the power to work immense harm exists and is deliberately renounced. Violence is in itself the greatest of all crimes against intelligence everywhere in space.

"We have come to Earth on a scientific mission solely, just as you will someday travel to the stars to—If you will permit me I should like to quote from one of your greatest poets. 'To follow knowledge like a shining star be-

yond the utmost bounds of human thought.'

"We ask only complete freedom . . . your friendship, trust and understanding for as long as we shall choose to remain.

"We abhor violence in any form. But since you feel that a demonstration is called for—a demonstration you shall have. Select an island—any island—well outside your ocean trade routes. Be prepared to observe, at a safe distance, the power which we shall unleash. Set a time, a date. That is all we ask of you."

For a moment silence returned to the great hall. Then the Director General arose and said slowly, as if carefully weighing each word, "There is no need for us to put your proposal to a vote. We accept it, unconditionally."

Two weeks later a dozen auxiliary naval cruisers under United Nations mandate stood several miles to leeward of a small coral island in the South Pacific, its precise location veiled in secrecy. Thin shafts of sunlight slanted down over the palm trees through a rift in the gray overcast and a gentle breeze sent small waves rolling up a pebble-strewn beach.

Suddenly high above the island a long, cylindrical shape emerged from the clouds and encircled the palm-fringed atoll twice.

For an instant the Scorpion spaceship seemed to shudder along its entire length. Then a blinding burst of incandescence came from it, sweeping outward and downward until the entire island was enveloped in a bright, steady glow.

When the glow vanished the island was gone.

I

THE GAUNT MAN was running. His footsteps echoed hollowly on weed-grown stretches of sunken masonry, and his breath came in long, wheezing gasps. He was running across a lakeside pier, his hands pressed to his face as if to shut out some intolerable sight. The pier was abandoned, old, crumbling at its base.

The fleeing man was old, too. His long white hair and beard streamed in the wind, and there was a stiffness, a crookedness, in the slope of his shoulders as a spasm of terror caused him to swing abruptly about, and lower his hands for the barest instant—a figure of madness poised for a leap.

He turned and ran on again for a few paces. Then he was at the edge of the pier and he *did* leap—straight out from the side of the pier with a scream that echoed loudly through the night. He landed on his feet in a tangled morass of weeds and marsh grass and went floundering onward, the breath whoosing from his lungs,

his blue dungarees gleaming wetly in the moonlight.

He continued his headlong flight, sinking almost knee-deep in mud at times, but defying the impediments in his path—a rotting log which he straddled, a clump of cat-o'-nine-tails which he beat down with his hands, clawing aside the long stalks, fighting his way clear.

He was still within sight of the pier when the moon passed behind a cloud, and from the depths of the marsh a giant bullfrog set up a doleful croaking. It was joined by others of its kind—a chorus of croaking from long-legged male animals almost manlike in aspect.

Manlike, too, perhaps, in that awareness of peril which seems at times to spread throughout the whole of animate nature like an engulfing wave, breaking down and dissolving the barriers between man and the lower animals in the blinking of an eye—an eye frozen with terror, paralyzed in its socket, white and motionless in the still night.

Only—the night wasn't still. Other voices joined the chorus. From the deep woods lining the shore a great horned owl hooted, a red squirrel started chattering, and a heron went flapping skyward. A cricket sound seemed to rise above the din, but it could just as easily have been the ringing in the gaunt man's own ears as, in a desperately frenzied state now, blind with panic, he found himself bogged down.

He began to moan, to mutter aloud to himself. "Went too near their ship. They must have just wanted to—scare me away. That's it, sure. That *must* be it. Take it easy now. How do you know they're still after you?"

Sweat oozed out under his armpits, chilling his back and groin, mingling with the silt-wetness of his gray flannel shirt.

"Could have been—a man like me. Not even a Scorpion. Just glided toward me. Didn't run—just glided. But I could have been mistaken about that. Suit, shirt, hat—he was dressed ordinarily enough. If it hadn't been for his face—God Almighty, his face! If ever there was death in a single glance. And that weapon—" A look of horror came into the old man's eyes.

"Nothing I can do. Can't get away—not if they're really after me. Scorpions never make an unfriendly move—never anything so far to make us afraid of them. Seems like they was always telling us: 'We'll go away if you like, never come back. If that's what you really want, just say so."

"Oh, God, why couldn't we have just said so? What was it stopped our tongues, made us afraid to speak our minds? Afraid? There was no fear. I wasn't afraid. Talked to dozens of

them. That one at the hotel—Duke. If he was a man you'd say he was—a nice guy. An all right guy. And Scorpions *are* men, in a way—no different from us outwardly.

"Maybe, though, it was fear where it counts most—high up. Not only the Big Brass in Washington, but the Big Brass all over Earth. Hydrogen bomb fear—only a thousand times worse. The Scorpion spaceships. Sure, that's probably it."

The gaunt man raised his eyes. The dawn was just breaking above the trees by the shore and suddenly as he stared a golden-crested bird—invisible to him—burst into song. And almost at the same instant an incredible thing happened.

All of the fear went out of the gaunt man's eyes. He leaned back with a sigh and let the beauty and the freshness of the just-beginning dawn take complete possession of him. He could no longer remember why he had allowed himself to become frightened—could not even recall his flight across the wharf, his desperate leap, his mounting terror as the marsh grew constantly more threatening, and the blind panic which had finally come upon him. Concerning all of these things—he could remember nothing.

He forgot how it felt to be old, remembering only a song played on piano keys by fingers that would never grow cold in death, and white sea-cliffs in the dawn, with gulls wheeling and dipping above the shining tides and the trade winds tossing free.

Miraculously joyful thoughts, thoughts which death could not touch, could not hope to wound. Like high, imperishable galleons they sailed across the calm waters of his mind, casting their shadows on hills where men and women, lithe-limbed and untouched by sorrow, gathered purple grapes.

And when he groped backwards in his mind for a more complete understanding he discovered to his astonishment that everything that had gone before was enveloped in complete darkness.

II

THE MAGNIFICENCE of the corridor which led to the Bureau Chief's office never failed to awe Jim Lawrence. There was something hushed and resplendent about it, like a big, Fifth Avenue jewelry store after closing hours, with the clerks tabulating the day's receipts, and the diamonds sparkling under glass.

It was ridiculous for Jim Lawrence to feel apprehensive, for his job even permitted him to feel important. He was one of the ablest political correspondents in Washington. He could walk right

up and talk to the President, if he felt so inclined—just a simple phone call would get him past the Secret Service barriers. Yet—

Jim Lawrence was remembering: nothing on Earth was securely entrenched, solid, massive, or ever would be again. He was no longer Jim Lawrence, expert news gatherer; he was a member of the human race and as such, a tragically divided, inwardly tormented man at the mercy of the *Great Change*. His lips tightened, and he quickened his step.

A line from a very great poet flashed across his mind. "No man is an island, entire in himself." At one time he'd have scoffed at the suggestion that he couldn't build walls around his own ego high and broad and impregnable enough to make him something of an island, at least.

But now he knew better. Just thinking about the *Great Change* now, just remembering it, drove the blood in torrents from his heart.

He knocked gently, then halted with his hand on the door of the Chief's office, feeling as if someone were threatening his life, his normally handsome face set in haggard lines. How could he have forgotten, even for an instant, the coming of the Scorpions?

True, the Scorpion ships nestled quietly enough in pleasant green valleys all over the Earth. And the Scorpions hadn't committed a single hostile act. They were friendly people—almost too friendly—and it was difficult not to like them.

But the fact remained that the Scorpions were everywhere the conquerors, the overlords—no matter how soft and considerate their tread. Man now existed on his own planet by sufferance only and that fact alone could kill. In a thousand insidious ways it could diminish the human race and reduce the human individual to a pawn.

How far in the past it all seemed now—the beginning, the first sighting of the Scorpion ships in the new, 400-inch reflecting telescope on Mount Palomar. How far away still seemed the Star Antares, blazing in solitary splendor in the night sky—when men still had the courage to stare skyward—the seventeenth brightest star in the sky, with a diameter almost five hundred times that of the Sun.

Antares in the Constellation Scorpius—eighth constellation in the Zodiac, a Scorpion-shaped spiral of fire weaving down the sky. How far in the past it seemed, that beginning, that first sighting. An eternity had passed, surely—an eternity of seven long years. Seven years, a lifetime of shock, bewilderment, slow acceptance as the Scorpion ships took up their stations on Earth. A seven-year lifetime of bowing

to the inevitable, a lifetime of change.

Someone was talking so loudly in the Chief's office he could hear the man's voice through the door and that snapped him out of his momentary trance. Lawrence turned the knob, threw open the door and walked into the office feeling suddenly almost normal again.

The Chief was sitting at his desk shuffling through some papers. He said without looking up, "Shut the door, Jim."

Lawrence nodded, and started to swing about. Then he saw that there were two other men in the office and that the door was being shut for him. One of the two was a calm, efficient-looking man in a gray business suit and he had leapt up instantly to close the door before Lawrence could turn back to it.

The second man was very old and very bent. He had snow-white hair and a long beard and looked—well, close to eighty. He sat in a straight-backed chair a little to the right of the door and in his eyes was a strained and watchful look that gave Jim Lawrence a jolt.

His rigidity, his outward composure, were quite obviously only skin-deep. Muscle-deep at most, and Lawrence got the impression that his nervous control was in such an advanced stage of deterioration that he might at any moment leap from the chair with a wild shriek.

The Chief raised his eyes then, and looked at Lawrence and said, "Draw up a chair, Jim. We've got something important to discuss."

The man in the gray business suit nodded. "We're in trouble, Mr. Lawrence. We're hoping that you can help us. I'm Dr. Crawford, Psychiatric Division, U.S.I."

Lawrence acknowledged the self-introduction with a quick, firm handshake. He wondered for a moment why the Chief was letting the Intelligence officer do the talking, and then decided that he was jumping to a premature conclusion. Bureau Chief Harvey Jordan believed in delegating authority to specialists in moments of crisis as firmly as the next man, but he had little inclination to play second fiddle to anyone in his own office.

He said, "I'll do the explaining, John, if you don't mind."

Dr. Crawford grunted and sat down.

The Chief shifted around impatiently in his chair, regarding Lawrence with a look of somber appeal. "I must ask you not to interrupt me, Jim—until I'm through. You're a highly intelligent man and not likely to dismiss as bewildering and incomprehensible a danger that could kill us all."

Lawrence edged his chair a lit-

tle closer to the Chief's desk. He knew from experience that Jordan was not an alarmist. If anything, the Chief erred by showing no inclination to succumb to bleak despair when he contemplated the Scorpion threat.

The Chief started to speak again, then stopped. The old man had half-risen from his chair and was muttering audibly. The words which poured from his shaking lips startled and disturbed Lawrence, so shocking were they in their irrelevancy.

"It was a glory, I tell you . . . a glory. I was just sitting there looking up at the trees when there was no fear at all in me . . . I can't remember why . . . no need to remember, don't want to remember. Just the glory."

The old man's talk had been wild enough, in sober truth, but for a moment at least there was no hostility in his stare. Then suddenly he was on his feet, his face convulsed with a fury so intense that it gave him the aspect of a madman.

"You tried—to make me remember! You had no right. You tried to bring it all back. I can't remember what I told you. But it was an agony. It was like dying—over and over."

"Be quiet, Gillings," Crawford pleaded. "Be quiet, man. We need your help. You haven't been harmed in any way. I brought you here because I wanted you to meet and talk with Mr. Lawrence as you are. We're all your friends."

He turned suddenly and gestured toward Lawrence, and Jim's jaw fell open at his next words. "This man is from your own home town, Gillings. Do you understand? Your own village—Quarry Hill—in Vermont."

Lawrence remembered him then. Through the blue haze of a very great distance—his own adolescence—the memory of a younger Gillings returned, so sharply and distinctly that the man himself seemed to come striding toward him along a pier. The younger Gillings had been a carpenter with a small farm of his own and had later turned to renting rowboats and canoes to fishermen at the lake.

Quite a character he had been, and Lawrence could remember the man's friendliness and his wit, and even the tattoo marks on his arm—two big blue-and-yellow dragons and an arrow-pierced heart.

There were seamen in Vermont now who had scorpions tattooed on their arms—only a few, fortunately, and they were callow young fools too stupid to realize that they had turned themselves into symbolic robot-slaves. Still—

The old man had slumped despairfully forward in his chair, his hands on his knees, his gaunt an-

gularity very much in evidence but lending him no strength.

"We're wasting a great deal of valuable time," Dr. Crawford said quietly. "I've got to get Gillings back to the hospital and . . . well, suppose you let *me* tell Jim Lawrence about Gillings, and the Scorpion Ship."

To Lawrence's amazement, Harvey Jordan acquiesced. He seemed unhappy about it and had gone a little pale, but all he said was, "All right, go ahead."

"Gillings was in a state of absolute amnesia," Crawford said. "Couldn't remember why he had gone into the marsh, couldn't remember a thing. He was brought to us simply because—well, there are twenty-seven Scorpion ships in all and only one was wrecked beyond repair. I mean, beyond repair from our point of view. I've no doubt that the Scorpions will eventually repair it. The ships in England, France, Germany and the Soviet Union could take off tomorrow, but one of the ships that landed in America seems to be permanently berthed here."

"I know," Jim Lawrence said. "I also know that it put my native town quite definitely on the map, and that Quarry Hill has made a tourist attraction of what's left of it. With the cooperation of the Scorpions, of course. Apparently they want to make their grounded starship look impressive to the natives."

"There's no need for them to make it look impressive," Crawford said. "It would be impressive if it contained only one battered navigational instrument, half a rocket-tube and a few skeleton props. Actually, it's nine-tenths intact. Harvey will tell you after I've taken Gillings back to the hospital just why that ship has become so important to us and what you can do to help. We're concerned right now with what happened to Gillings—and just why he was flown to Washington so fast."

"Well, why was he?" Lawrence asked.

"Simply because he was found dazed and wandering helplessly through a swamp a half-mile from that Scorpion ship. I have seldom seen a case of amnesia so complete and—yes, terrifying. It's one thing to have a few years blotted out—quite another not to be able to remember a single place, name, face in your past from infancy onward."

Lawrence looked concernedly at Gillings, but the man seemed completely unaware of what was being said.

"It was no ordinary case of amnesia," Crawford went on. "There was no *educational* blackout. By that I mean that he remembers everything he learned at school—like grammar and history. His speech is unimpaired. All right. You'd think if he could

remember his history lessons at school he could remember the face of his teacher, his own name. Well, he can't remember a single thing that ever happened to him personally. His mind has become a kind of selective sieve. The educational process has seeped through, but the rest has been blacked out. And of course the human mind just isn't made that way."

"It's impossible—but it happened," Lawrence said. "Is that what you're trying to say?"

"It's what I *am* saying. I spoke of a sieve. It's more as if some tremendous mechanical intelligence—I'm thinking of a giant computer or cybernetic brain a million times as complex as the ones we're familiar with—as if some tremendous intelligence had gotten inside his mind and was carefully guarding it, pruning away the personality circuits, to prevent any *self*-memories from taking command."

Lawrence nodded. "I think then your first problem would be to convince him that you were his friend," He looked at the old man as he spoke, but Gillings seemed completely lost in his own thoughts.

"We did our best in that respect," Crawford said, "but he resented the slightest probing. It was as if—well, as if we were desecrating some inner glory that was more precious to him than awareness of self.

"We tried the so-called 'truth-serum' drugs—sodium amytal, sodium nembutal and finally, sodium pentothal. Of the three, sodium pentothal is the most powerful, but it is also the most unpredictable. It simply made him retreat more completely into himself. And actually, he had no self to retreat into—in the customarily accepted sense. Just—the glory."

"But you didn't stop with the drugs," the Chief said, emerging rather abruptly. "You tried hypnosis."

Crawford nodded. "We did and —miracle of miracles—it worked. Any reasonably unbiased psychologist will tell you that hypnosis is the most unpredictable technique of all. Gillings may or may not be an hysteric in a strict sense. But a terrible, mind-numbing fright is usually at the root of an hysterical neurosis with its almost inconceivable phobias. We were groping, understand, but we did have a pretty strong hunch that Gillings had been frightened in some terrible way. We gambled on that and it paid off."

The Chief started to speak again, but Crawford silenced him with an impatient gesture. "Suppose we put it this way. You can't force a man under hypnosis to do anything he doesn't really want to do, anything that goes violently against his basic conditioning.

But somewhere, deep down in Gilling's mind, he *wanted* to remember, *wanted* to talk. There was some unnatural influence holding him back; something, we think, that had been artifically introduced into his mind. We'll call it the 'glory' block—the personality blackout.

"You see, the personality hook-ups—or neural synapses, if you want to be technical—hadn't been totally obliterated. The giant computer I used as a far from exact illustration had gotten inside his mind, all right. It had done some short-circuiting, but apparently wasn't quite complex and efficient enough to bring about a complete amputation.

"In fact, the memories we wanted to activate were probably all still very much alive—just playing possum. Under hypnosis part of his mind—the victimized part—resisted, even fought us violently. But another part yielded and wanted to *talk*. Part of his mind remembered."

"What—did he remember?" Lawrence asked, aware of a chill prickling at the base of his scalp.

"He remembered the wrecked Scorpion spaceship. Everything that happened to him when he saw a strange light playing over it and went close to investigate."

Lawrence turned quickly, staring in concern at the old man. But Gillings' face was now a complete blank. If Crawford's forthright statement had impinged on his consciousness in any way, he gave no sign.

As if aware of Lawrence's thoughts, Crawford said, "Don't worry. He doesn't know what we're talking about. His outward orientation is almost hallucinatory, as I've told you. If anything sets him off it will come from within himself. Naturally, I'll feel relieved when he's safely back at the hospital. But now suppose we talk about what he saw. He saw something—pretty ghastly."

The Chief said, "Let me tell him . . . Jim, when he went close to the Scorpion ship a Scorpion—or a man—came out of the ship with a very strange weapon in his hand. It was a kind of—well, a machine-pistol, with a very long barrel. We've never seen a Scorpion weapon, remember—but what they did to that South Pacific Island and their technological achievements in all other respects would make their possession of many powerful small weapons a certainty.

"But Gillings was the first man ever to actually see a Scorpion weapon. That, in itself, gave him a jolt. There was something about that long, pistol-like gun that held him entranced for a minute. Then he began to shake. A *feeling* came upon him he couldn't throw off—a feeling of *deadliness*."

"His terror when he described it was unnerving to watch,"

Crawford interposed, leaning sharply forward in his chair. "He turned deathly pale, shook and thrashed about. Sweat came out on his forehead. It completely demoralized him."

"That isn't all, Jim," Jordan said. "The figure itself was even more terrifying. It moved toward him in a kind of snakelike glide. For a moment it seemed almost to rise from the ground, to be spread-eagled against empty air. Then it came nearer and he saw its face. You'd better describe it, John."

Crawford smiled thinly. "I can describe it calmly only because I wasn't standing there looking at it. If I'd been in Gillings shoes I doubt if I could have described it at all, even under hypnosis. As near as I can judge from what Gillings told us, it was a Scorpion face. You know how their features differ from ours—much higher cheekbones, as a rule, and a comeliness that puts us in the shade."

"I know," Lawrence said.

"Well, the comeliness was there structurally. But the expression distorted it. Rage. A cold, merciless rage that seemed to seep into Gillings' bones, chilling him to the core. Or perhaps—it wasn't rage. From what Gillings said we can't be completely sure. It could have been—simply a cold determination *not to be interfered with.*"

"Whatever it was, it frightened him enough to administer a psychic trauma," the Chief said. "He screamed in terror and ran, his only thought to escape. Minute by minute the terror kept getting worse. It was so bad that—well, it might in itself have given him amnesia."

"But it didn't," Crawford interrupted quickly. "Something else caused the mental blackout. He was bogged down, deep in the marsh, when it happened. Quite suddenly—he couldn't remember what had caused him to flee from the wreck in blind, unreasoning terror. He couldn't even remember where he was, how he had clawed and fought his way deep into the marsh. A great peace came upon him, a calmness, majestic and beautiful—like a dream of paradise. And when they found him—he was still like that."

III

GILLINGS STILL sat in his chair, passively listening, but saying nothing. His utter calmness, his impassivity, right up to the instant when Crawford stopped speaking was what made his violent outburst seem so unnatural.

He made straight for Crawford, his heavily-veined, clawlike hands reaching out for the startled medical officer's throat. Crawford upset his chair in a frantic effort to escape from the

maniacal fury he saw in the old man's eyes. He went back so far he collided with the wall and was unable to regain his equilibrium fast enough.

Abruptly Gillings was upon him, clutching his throat in a strangling grip, squeezing, refusing to let go.

"You had no right to make me remember," he muttered, his voice guttural, harsh, as if each syllable had been wrenched from him by an inner agony that could no longer be endured. You've never been there yourself—so you don't know."

The old man's thumbs were pressing cruelly into the soft flesh above Crawford's windpipe when Jim Lawrence got to him, gripping him relentlessly by the elbows, permitting Crawford to break free.

Lawrence struck him then, sharply on the jaw, hating to do it, but knowing that it was sensible, necessary, wise—that the old man must be dropped to the floor as quickly as possible, if only to prevent him from injuring himself.

But Gillings didn't drop to the floor. He reeled a little and shook his head but he didn't go down. Instead he swung about and faced Lawrence and started fighting back, furiously, crazily, not seeming to care where his blows landed. He scratched, kicked, beat with his fists on Lawrence's chest, thrust upwards with his elbows, dodged and weaved about.

It was the kind of struggle that would have seemed grotesque, almost farcical on the screen, but to Jim Lawrence it was deadly dangerous. Superior strength, youth even, is seldom a match for a maniac, no matter how advanced his age.

The old man was fighting silently now, making no sound at all. A strange feeling had settled over Lawrence's mind—half inertia, half panic. The whole ghastly situation seemed a little unreal. Why should Gillings put up so fierce a resistance when he had sat impassive for so long? What word, inflexion, disembodied thought had set him off?

Jim Lawrence had no way of knowing that it was a *presence* which had set Gillings off. The presence was not there in the room with them, he couldn't see it or hear it yet and so his utter incomprehension made sense.

It made perhaps more sense to the Scorpion who at that moment emerged from the elevator at the end of the corridor and advanced with unhurried steps toward the office, but Lawrence had no way of knowing that either, no opportunity even to speculate about it. Only gradually did he become aware that he was no longer in danger, that both Jordan and Crawford were advancing on Gillings with a grim confidence in

their eyes which left no doubt as to their ability to subdue him.

There were perhaps ten seconds more of unreason in the saddle, of a madman's futile struggles to remain destructively at large. Then Gillings was gripped by strong arms and held in a rigid straitjacket of bone and sinew that permitted him no freedom of movement at all.

"I'll need assistance in getting him back to the hospital now," Crawford said, his voice so decisive and professional that it grated on Lawrence and made him angry.

"Let up on him a little, can't you?" he protested. "You're hurting him."

Crawford shook his head. "No. I'm not hurting him at all. Let me handle this, please. It's a necessary part of my job."

For what could only have been the fraction of a minute a heavy silence brooded in the room, while the Chief returned to his desk. He had picked up the phone and was just starting to dial the hospital when the door opened and the Scorpion stepped into the room.

The Scorpion looked surprised. His heavy eyelids lifted slightly and he said with the slight, peculiar accent that is inseparable from the Scorpion tongue, "I beg your pardon. I'm afraid I'm in the wrong office. I wonder if you could direct me to—"

He paused, as if seeing Gillings for the first time—taking in at a single glance the old man's rigidly straining body and the strong, firm hands that held him pinioned in an iron clasp.

"Why," he said, "something pretty serious seems to have taken place here. Can I be of any help?"

Crawford made no reply. He simply stared, a look of stunned incredulity in his eyes. Quite obviously the Scorpion's unexpected appearance at precisely that moment had unnerved him. And though his brain worked fast and he fought inwardly to fortify himself against the shock and to keep stark fear at bay, fear was there, in a darkly shuttered part of his mind.

It was no good telling himself that Scorpions frequently visited Washington—visited every Government building, walked in and out of the echoing corridors with as much freedom and independence as the average American citizen enjoyed. It was their privilege, their right. It had been bestowed upon them as a privilege and a right by the American public at the polls, confirmed by an act of Congress and signed into law by the President.

A Scorpion, appearing suddenly in the doorway of a Government office, would ordinarily have been too normal and natural a sight to evoke the slightest alarm.

In all likelihood this one had come to consult a vacation folder put out by the Department—an ordinary news' information service available to anyone—or to question a meteorologist about weather predictions for a New England state.

What reason could Lawrence advance for this particular Scorpion's arrival? What reason beyond the fact that he had appeared at the precise moment of a tragic struggle between a mentally unbalanced old man and three Government employees in a highly agitated state?

Certainly there was nothing unusual about the Scorpion's aspect or attire. He wore a handsomely tailored gray business suit and a gray knitted tie, for Scorpions liked to dress conservatively when they abandoned the attire natural to them for garments which they seemed able to wear with a more than terrestrial dignity and grace. There were never any bulges, any ill-fitting shoulder pleats, despite their muscular build and the boniness of their broad, firm-fleshed chests. On a Scorpion even a modestly priced suit would have looked good.

The Scorpion's eyes were bland and green-yellow and they gleamed with sympathetic concern as he waited for Crawford's reply. They shifted once to Lawrence and then back again to Crawford. But their owner showed no excitement as a man might have done on coming unexpectedly upon a scene of unusual violence and finding the participants incapable of speech, frozen in their tracks, and by their looks and gestures seeming to accuse him of being a monster, a fiend . . .

Crawford found his voice at last. "This is a Government matter," he said. "It concerns nobody but these three gentlemen and myself."

"I'm truly sorry," the Scorpion said. "It was not my intention to intrude. As you are acting as agents of the Government there must naturally be many ramifications involved here about which I have no right to inquire. All of them," he added seriously, "entirely creditable to you. Of that I am sure."

He nodded, inclined his shoulders slightly, and turned back toward the door through which he had so unexpectedly stepped an eternity ago. At least, it seemed that long to Lawrence and in all probability to Crawford, whose face had turned as white as the piled-up documents on the Chief's desk. As for Jordan himself, he seemed incapable of speech, too appalled and shaken to do more than nod.

The Scorpion smiled slightly in return and, the great muscles of his shoulders seeming to ripple a little under his coat, went out of

the door without a backward glance. His footsteps receding down the corridor could be heard clearly for eight or ten seconds.

There ensued a silence. It was not entirely absolute, however, for it was broken at intervals by Gilling's harsh breathing. Then, all at once, the breathing stopped.

From the instant of the Scorpion's shockingly-timed appearance to his unnervingly courteous departure neither Lawrence nor Crawford had paid much attention to Gillings. Beyond retaining his grip upon the man, Crawford had ignored him completely.

Had he not done so he would have noticed the unnatural pallor and the slowly advancing paralysis which was causing the old man's features to relax. He would have noticed the gaping mouth, the glazed and unseeing eyes, the forehead drenched with sweat. But his gaze had been elsewhere and, having failed to notice, his shock was on that account now more extreme.

Lawrence shared it to the full,

seeing Gillings grow completely limp and helpless, watching him become first a sagging, intolerable weight in Crawford's clasp and then a still form stretched out upon the floor.

Wordlessly, his lips twitching a little, Crawford knelt and took the stricken man's pulse, gripping his right wrist so vigorously that it seemed improbable that the beats would register at all. It was a mistake and Crawford quickly rectified it by relaxing his fingers a bit, and forcing himself to remain calm.

Apparently there *was* a pulse, for Crawford removed a tiny physician's flashlight from his inner coat-pocket, and played it over Gillings' pupils, carefully raising first one eyelid and then the other.

He said, in a stern whisper to himself, "Must be careful now. Slow—go slow. No conclusions. Test first for congestion; cyanosis. No blood on lips. . . . May not be too serious. We'll see, we'll see."

"Good God!" Jordan exclaimed, crossing to Lawrence's side and giving Crawford a searching look. "Stop mumbling to yourself, can't you?"

The searching look became tinged with a fierce impatience. "Why did you say—about its being serious?"

Crawford looked up quickly, his eyes innocent of anger or resentment. "Can't be sure about anything—until we get him to the hospital. Phone for an ambulance. Hurry, man. Don't just stand there."

His lips tightening, Jordan returned to his desk and started to dial.

IV

THE SCORPION waited patiently for the elevator at the end of the corridor to ascend to the tenth floor. He looked neither to the right, nor to the left. There was a withdrawn, profoundly thoughtful expression on his face, and even when the elevator door swung open and he stepped into the narrow cage and was carried rapidly to the street his aspect of intense preoccupation did not change.

He walked swiftly along the street which ran parallel to the building's massive graystone facade, crossed at the first intersection, and continued on for several blocks without moderating his stride.

He had crossed the street a second time, and was passing the lighted windows of a large department store when he was startled to see the girl. She had moved very quickly out into the street from the store's main entrance, which was crowded to capacity with men and women shoppers, and was now almost running, the heels of her shoes

clattering sharply as she darted past him.

There was a look of stark terror in her eyes. All of the color had drained from her face, and she was clutching a large, black-velvet handbag so fiercely to her breast that her hands seemed like claws, despite their slender, tapering beauty. As he had suspected she'd be from the photographs he had seen, she was a very pretty girl—beautiful, in fact—a little above medium height and with the carriage and perfect physical proportions of a professional model. Her lips were full and curving and almost sensuously over-ripe, suggesting faintly the enticing Scorpion norm in that respect—although she was quite obviously not a Scorpion woman.

She wore no makeup and her hair descended to her shoulders in a tumbled, red-gold mass. As the Scorpion stared she cast a quick, terrified glance over her shoulder and darted closer to the store window, the clattering of her heels on the hard pavement pointing up her fright as nothing else could have done.

Someone shouted at her from the store entrance, but she did not stop. Then a man came into view, heavyset, hard-eyed, with a commanding air of authority about him. He broke into a run even before she did, waving one arm in a peremptory gesture, the muscles of his neck bulging under his too-tight collar, his face turning brick-red in the steady neon glow.

"You won't get away, you—" he shouted. "I saw you lift that bracelet! It'll go easier with you if we talk it over! You hear? I'll catch you anyway—"

The Scorpion moved then. Not to intercept the girl, but to put himself at her side. She was running frantically now and he had to run, too, to keep up with her, despite the length of his stride. She gave a little gasp of horror when she saw him so close to her. She veered sharply and would have dashed out across the street if he had not quickly placed a restraining hand on her arm.

His voice was assured, calm, friendly, despite the urgency of his words. "I'll help you get away," he said. "Just stay close to me and keep running. There's nothing to fear."

For an instant the terror in her eyes seemed to increase rather than diminish, to glow with a taper-flame brightness that gave her almost the look of a marionette dangling from a wire—a puppet woman without volition moving jerkily across a night-black stage, her face illumed unnaturally by light from above.

For an instant she stopped moving, stood motionless in the neon glow. Then a shudder passed over her. The fear did not

leave her face, but some of the taper-glow departed. She let the Scorpion guide her, making no attempt to jerk her arm free. Together they darted out from the curb, dodging a passing truck, and pausing for an instant in the middle of the street.

It was the Scorpion who insisted that they pause—he wanted her to regain her breath, to calm down a little more.

The heavyset man was just leaving the curb in pursuit when they broke into a run again.

The opposite side of the street was in striking contrast to the store side, lined with small, three-storey office buildings and lighted bars that appeared to be doing a thriving business. A drunken man lurched along the pavement a yard or two in front of them, and from one of the taverns came a loud blare of progressive jazz.

In some strange, difficult-to-explain way the familiar, raucous music seemed to lessen the girl's terror. She turned her head quickly to look again at the Scorpion and the calm assurance in his eyes seemed also to have an effect upon her—a stabilizing effect this time.

He was still holding her arm firmly, but now she seemed grateful for his nearness. As if to make certain that he would not desert her she pressed closer to him.

That simple, instinctive gesture of trust—so natural to a woman in need of masculine protection—seemed to please the Scorpion. For the barest instant a look that could not have been separated by more than a hair's breadth from human warmth appeared in his eyes.

Then the swift approach of the heavyset man brought a sudden change to his expression.

"There's an alleyway just ahead," he whispered. "Two doors beyond that bar. I saw it when we crossed the street."

For the first time she spoke to him. Her voice was in harmony with her face and figure, warm, beguiling, with no fear in it at all now.

As they sped past the tavern the lurching drunk almost collided with the Scorpion but swung about just in time. For a moment his anger flared. "Why don't you look where you're going!" he muttered belligerently. "Shush who d'you think you are?"

The Scorpion paused for the barest instant, looking the man calmly up and down. "You know very well who I am," he said.

The drunk's eyes widened and for an instant his features seemed to come apart. "God, God," he mumbled. "It's one of them. A Scorpion! Mister, I didn't mean—Mother of Mercy, what am I sayin'. You're not a 'mister.' You never could be a 'mister.' There's a big difference between every

one of us an' every one of you. We ain't big clocks chimin' out the time until it's too late for any help to come. *You're* big clocks . . . bang, bang, bang—standing in the hallway . . . tellin' us our time's about up."

"You should be grateful that time moves very slowly," the Scorpion said. "And it may not be so late as you think. Bear that in mind, my friend."

Abruptly they were moving forward again, the heavyset man almost at their heels now, the blare of music from the bar so loud it drowned out all other sound.

They reached the alleyway and moved swiftly into its deep, enveloping darkness. The Scorpion released his grip on the girl's arm and spoke with quiet confidence, his wide shoulders held very straight.

"You'll be in no danger. Stand well behind me. There is no way I can overcome him with my mind. The time is too short. A mental blow would take minutes to prepare."

Her only reply was a swift intake of breath. He stood as though listening, perhaps to the soft rustle of her dress as she moved further into the darkness, perhaps to the heavyset man's swiftly oncoming footsteps. His face showed no visible emotion beyond a slight tightening of the muscles of his jaw and an increased levelness of gaze which made his large green-yellow eyes seem like the stationary, brightly-burning visual organs of some great alien beast.

The heavyset man was so close now his breathing sounded like two sheets of sandpaper being rubbed together. He was cursing under his breath, and the words he was using seemed to displease the Scorpion, for a flicker of distaste passed evanescently over the alien's face.

He waited patiently, however, until the man had entered the alleyway and was almost at his side.

There was just enough light for the store detective to see the outlines of the Scorpion's face—the eyes certainly—and the formidable bulk of the broad, straight shoulders. He just stood there, breathing harshly, until the Scorpion raised his hand and took a slow step backwards.

Something flashed in the Scorpion's hand. There was a momentary flare, bright, half-blinding, lighting up the alley throughout its entire length. For an instant the detective's features stood out in stark relief, the eyes wide with horror and shock, the jaw sagging as if the ligaments supporting it had been abruptly severed. Then the light went out.

In the returning darkness no darker shadow marked the spot where the startled man had been

standing. All that could be seen was a deep shadow at the Scorpion's feet where the detective lay sprawled, his body gone completely limp.

The Scorpion did not move until the girl swayed and clutched at his sleeve. He started then, and looked at her and smiled, and although she could not see his smile his thoughts seemed to wing toward her like slender birds of the night, white-plumaged and swift of passage.

"Is he—badly hurt?" she whispered, her shaken voice barely audible despite the stillness, and the sudden lessening of tension which the Scorpion's utter calmness seemed to turn into an actual bond of strength uniting them, a bond almost physical in its reassuring warmth.

"No—he will recover," the Scorpion said. "I am very glad—that we have met."

The girl's hand tightened on the Scorpion's arm. She said, "If it hadn't been for you—" She stopped, then went on with a sudden, wild outpouring of emotion, "I couldn't help taking that bracelet. I couldn't help it, couldn't, *couldn't*. It's an impulse that comes over me. I've been to psychiatrists. They use important-sounding words that mean very little—anxiety neurosis . . . compulsion . . . childhood trauma. Something terrible happened to me when I was a child. That's what they'd *like* me to believe.

"But remembering back—even remembering the things I'd much rather forget—doesn't help me at all. Perhaps I wouldn't go into a store at all if I didn't *want* it to happen, if deep down in my mind there wasn't something at work that keeps trying to destroy me."

The Scorpion was gripping her arm now, very tightly, shaking her a little. "You'll be all right now," he whispered. "You're safe now. There's nothing to fear. Believe me, the living can be safe too. Men and Scorpions and every living creature throughout the universe of stars. We're still searching for the complete answer . . . someday we'll know. We have a part of the answer, and I think . . . the human race has a part. If we fitted the two parts together . . . who knows? Jagged edges, parts that don't fit exactly, can be smoothed off or replaced . . . if you've a craftsman's skill."

The Scorpion studied the girl with admiration in his deep eyes.

"Do you know," she said softly, an accent almost of light-heartedness in her voice, "you have reassured me, far more than anyone ever has."

"You have a certain proud independence, a capacity for deep and creative emotion which I like. You were fleeing from something ugly you could not hope to understand. But in every move-

ment of your mind and body I saw—exposed completely in a way that you would not understand—a capacity for light and life and joy."

"Every movement of my *mind*. Surely—"

"Wait, let me finish. Do you know what joy is, in your conscious mind? Can you analyze it, explain it. I doubt if you can. It is something the human race fears, and puts foolishly aside like some frayed and tattered cloak that only a fool would wear. The so-called lower animals know joy. Birds know it, as they mate and burst into rapturous song. They are hot-blooded, intense, eager—tiny bundles of living flame.

"Only Man turns his face from joy. He talks of other things . . . peace, contentment, hard work, duty. He does not even like to think about joy. But joy alone unites man with the Eternal. In a deep and truly spiritual sense joy is the only human value that enriches human life at every point, and makes intelligent life everywhere in the universe meaningful and—yes, and these are words that I am unashamed to use—noble and creatively justified."

For a long moment there was silence between them. Then the girl said, "You know, you haven't told me your name."

"D'Qy," the Scorpion said.

"Dee-Kee? Dee—"

"No—in English it would be pronounced 'Duke.' That, at least, would be a close approximation. Whenever a man or woman asks me, I say: 'Duke.' But you asked me and I said: 'D'Qy.' Why, I wonder?"

"Perhaps I know why," the girl said.

"Perhaps you do. If you truly do, I am glad. A birth-name has a very special meaning which one likes to keep intact."

The girl said, "I am Ruth Fraser."

"Yes . . ." the Scorpion said. "Ruth—it would be Ruth. 'She stood in tears amidst the alien grain . . .' Life has a strange way of bestowing upon each of us a profoundly meaningful name."

The girl's fingers tightened around his hand. "You said just now . . . you said . . . you could read my mind."

"No, I said I was aware of the movements of your thoughts. There is a difference, at times rather subtle, and difficult to explain. If you are at all withdrawn from me, or if your thoughts are very important to you and you want to keep them secret, I could not pry if I wanted to. It would go too deeply against the grain."

"Then you are not reading my mind now?"

"No, I am not even making the attempt. If some great emergency should arise Scorpions

could get inside human minds. And once or twice we have. In fact we could, if threatened with destruction, read the minds of every man, woman and child on Earth. But certain conditions must be present—a life-or-death urgency—a deep-seated, almost compulsive need. And we must have time. It cannot be done on the spur of the moment."

The Scorpion looked away for a moment.

"Between Scorpions the *rapport* is stronger. Even then we must have time, but I have now had sufficient time. The car is at the end of the block. It will be here in a moment."

Ruth Fraser started and released his hand, drawing a little away from him. "The car? I don't understand—"

"If you are frightened . . . you have only to tell me and I will get into the car alone. You have absolute freedom of choice. The thought of forcing you to do anything against your will would be intolerable to me."

"You mean—you want me to go with you?"

"Yes," the Scorpion said. "If you are not afraid, if you completely trust me. Not otherwise."

"But why? Where are you taking me? What . . . will happen to me?"

"Nothing you need fear. I am going to try . . . to set you free. You are imprisoned in a cruel web. The psychiatrists you went to couldn't help you because they are themselves imprisoned. Their science is worthy of respect, precisely as the smooth, skillfully polished flints of the caveman are worthy of respect. But polished flints cannot unlock the energies of the atom, and are best looked at in museums. Modern psychology here on Earth cannot unlock the massive doors the human mind has built up around itself through a thousand generations of groping in the dark."

There was a sudden flicker of light opposite the alleyway, a dull, steady droning. The long Scorpion car had glided so smoothly in toward the curb that it seemed almost to materialize out of the darkness, its brightly-polished hood mirroring the tavern lights as it came to a full stop directly in front of them and abruptly ceased to vibrate.

The door of the driver's seat opened and a Scorpion got out. He was taller than Duke—and leaner, more methodically light-footed, and agile in aspect. His face was heavily lined but he moved with the spryness of a young hawk trained to descend with a lightning-bolt efficiency upon its prey.

But as he crossed the pavement in three short, swift strides Ruth Fraser did not draw back. Miraculously, all of the fear had left her. The Scorpion's eyes were

level and kind—there was no threat in them, no menace.

Duke moved quickly forward to greet him, clasping his hand in a completely traditional human manner, and then slapping him lightly on the shoulder in an equally comradely way.

"We're going to have a guest for a few days," he said. "This young lady needs help—needs it desperately. She can help us immeasurably . . . in ways that are more important to us now than ever before. We still do not know . . . *why human beings behave as they do.* It's as simple as that. And she's as tortured inwardly as any human woman I have ever talked to—more tortured."

The Scorpion from the car looked at Ruth steadily for a moment. Then he nodded, and said enigmatically, "Perhaps we can help her. Perhaps she can help us."

V

THE WALLS WERE as smooth as the walls of a stone prison, the windows as high and narrow. But it was not a prison and could never be.

Duke paced the floor of the high-arching meditation cell, drawing strength from its severity, its bareness. There was no furniture at all in the cell, not even a chair. The walls mirrored Duke's image as he paced and the image seemed almost to become momentarily that of a human monk, dedicated to austerity.

Nothing carnal can into this high sanctuary intrude . . .

The balance, he thought, the occasional swing of the pendulum from joy to complete austerity. Yes, it has its therapeutic value. But we are not foolish enough to regard it as an end in itself. What it does is strip the mind bare, harden and toughen the will. But there are other, better ways . . .

He remembered a human fable, amusing now because it seemed so apt, so completely in accord with his present mood. A man hits himself on the head with a hammer, over and over again. Then he stops. "Why did you stop," someone asks. "Why? Because it feels so good when I stop."

Could austerity increase joy? Could it lead to a heightening of joy when you stopped?

There were men and women of his race who thought so, and the educational theory had been allowed to creep into Scorpion culture to this very slight extent. There were and probably always would be meditation cells.

She would be under hypnosis now. Truth serums first, and then hypnosis. And they'd probe deep.

Why, why, why? The simple question—why? A woman so beautiful, so young—why wasn't

she filled completely with the joy of life? Why did she inwardly torment herself? Why did all human beings torture themselves?

From birth to death, never a moment free from inward torment.

The psychology of the criminal act. Not the thought, but the act. Consider that for a moment. No man would commit a crime if he was completely happy. Yet all men commit crimes in their thoughts. Scorpions do not, but men do.

Frustration? A shallow Earth term, lacking breadth and vision. It went deeper than that—

Ruth Fraser moaned and opened her eyes wide. The first object she saw was the metal headrest of the couch, curving out so far on both sides of her head that its gleaming upper portion was visible to her.

The bright shimmer of light on the surface of the curving, wedge-shaped prongs dazzled her eyes for a moment. Then her vision grew accustomed to the glare and she could make out the broad, straight outlines of the Scorpion's heavy shoulders, and even the outlines of his face, which had seemed at first a part of the dazzle. The Scorpion was not Duke.

Gradually as she stared up the Scorpion's face assumed firmer contours. The high cheekbones stood out prominently, like a miniature mountain range on a broad expanse of very wrinkled flesh. The deepset eyes grew darker and more piercing and the mouth took on an aspect of sternness.

Then, abruptly, the Scorpion was smiling at her—nodding his head and smiling. "We have made considerable progress," he said, reaching out to pat her on the arm. "I believe we are getting somewhere."

Ruth gasped and started to rise, but the Scorpion took her firmly by the shoulders and eased her head back upon the bedrest again.

"You mustn't try to get up now," he cautioned. "You'll feel dizzy if you do. Suppose you just rest and let *me* talk to *you*."

She could see the far wall of the room now and the strange and alien-looking instruments of science which were ranged along it. She was almost sure that they were medical instruments, but she could not be entirely sure. They were certainly quite different from ordinary human hospital equipment or the equipment she'd seen in doctors' offices as a child, and later, as a desperately troubled and ill—quite ill—adult.

The Scorpion was speaking to her now. He seemed neither young nor old, but in some strange way almost ageless. His eyes were trained steadily upon her but there was nothing frightening in his gaze. On the contrary, there was in the warmth

and sympathy of that steady regard something that seemed even more than reassuring.

"You told us a great deal that we needed to know about you," he said. "As a child you thought and felt very intensely. We have our own techniques for measuring intelligence, but the human ones are accurate enough as far as they go. By human standards you have an I.Q. of one hundred and forty, which is just comfortably below the human genius level. But feeling—aesthetic and emotional sensitivity, that's the important thing. Imagination, intellectual daring.

"Let me put in this way. On Earth we've discovered that genius-level I.Q.'s—one-fifty to one-seventy—are a drug on the market. I'm using a terrestrial colloquialism, but I'm sure you'd understand it quite as well as we do, even if I put it in slightly different terms.

"It's what a capacity for intense feeling can do to those I.Q.'s that's important. Any human being—man or woman—with an I.Q. of one-seventy who's also emotionally dead, a cold fish, a clod—just isn't great as we would define human greatness. He does not increase the amount of joy in the universe by one iota. But a man or woman with a very modest I.Q.—say one-twenty, or even one-ten—can be one of the shining ones of Earth."

The Scorpion's expression grew more intense. "If he or she is abnormally sensitive and emotional the I.Q. can be set aflame—can glow with ten thousand new and daring colors. We have studied human greatness on Earth very painstakingly. One of the greatest of your painters—a Frenchman—was actually only one stage removed from an idiot. But the joy in his canvasses made him immortal."

The Scorpion's eyes were glowing now. "You—as a child—were abnormally sensitive, imaginative and emotional. And because Man fears joy—you were condemned from the day of your birth to be an outcast."

"Then that—"

The Scorpion nodded. "Yes, that is the reason. You were different and from an early age you found all hands raised against you. Even a strong man would have been hard put to defend himself, to retain his sanity. You were a woman."

"I see . . ." the girl murmured. "At least . . . I think I do. But why did I always feel so *guilty*. And why did I want to do —hateful things?"

"Because you are human. When a man or woman can not give creative expression to the joy he was born with his thoughts turn to destruction. It's as simple as that. If you build something joyous and beautiful and every-

one ignores it and in addition, accuses you of being a fool, or a criminal, you will become a criminal."

"And you . . . can cure me. If I stay here with you I will be cured?"

"We have laid the foundations, my child. There is much that we do not know, vast, uncharted areas which we must still explore. But . . . yes, I think we can help you."

Ruth Fraser turned her head then, quite suddenly, and saw that another Scorpion had entered the big, quiet room with its many alien instruments, and flame-strange brightness.

For an instant she did not recognize him, so bright was the flare of light at his back and so unfamiliar and unusual his garb. He was dressed entirely in black, in a garment that resembled a monk's cassock, close-fitting and reaching almost to his feet. It was belted in tightly at the waist and flared at the shoulders, which were additionally draped with a more abbreviated, circular garment which enveloped the back part of his head and spread out over the upper part of his back very much in the manner of an ample, loose-fitting cowl.

For a moment his gaze rested upon her, while he held himself very straight, his eyes considerate, solicitous, his arms folded on his chest. He seemed to be awaiting her recognition, his whole attitude that of a concerned onlooker who admits to being deeply involved and does not wish to intrude at the risk of administering the slightest additional shock.

Suddenly the anxiety left his face and he nodded. "Yes, I can see that you are quite all right. The hypnotic techniques we decided on are not dangerous in themselves, but there are occasionally temporary side effects which take hours to vanish."

"D'Qy, there are no side effects that this young lady could not cope with," the other Scorpion said, his grave, kindly countenance breaking into a smile. "She has done splendidly. And we've learned a great deal about her childhood that we needed to know."

Duke nodded and drew closer to the couch. The girl returned his stare with a fragile eagerness.

"Duke," she said, and the words sounded perfectly natural on her lips, as if she were addressing some old human friend who, almost overnight and through some bright miraculous sharing of a secret known only to the two of them, had become most precious.

He bent closer to her, his hand going out to grip her shoulder with firm reassurance. He felt suddenly very happy. There was the fragrance of a summer garden on his home planet, the bursting of

purple seeds, the unfolding of petals, the smell of newly-turned earth. Far off the sea thundered, its high bright surges loud in his ears.

"I am quite all right now, Duke," she said. "I have begun—to understand why I am as I am. Deep down in my mind the guilt feeling, the torment, is still there, but it does not seem nearly so bad now. I can endure it because I know . . . there is hope for me."

"More than hope," Duke said, his eyes very steady.

Ruth Fraser rose from the couch. She was surprised by her own calmness, the ease with which she descended to the floor and stood facing Duke and the other Scorpion.

"I'm quite all right," she said. "There is no dizziness."

Duke looked at his companion, and his voice was low when he asked, "Would it be safe—to show her Base Unit Seven? I should like her to see a few projections, the general scope and groundwork of our plans. I think it will reassure her. There's an Earth expression I've always rather liked. 'At home.' I should like her to feel completely at home with us."

The other Scorpion nodded. "She may find it difficult to remember she is still on Earth. You may have to keep reminding her that nothing has changed—that outside this building the cherry trees of Washington are still in bloom and that men and women are still walking in and out of the Government buildings carrying briefcases.

"She knows nothing of large-scale interstellar projection. She has never seen Scorpions, moving vehicles, vessels at sea, spaceships in a thousand-foot vault—a projection composed entirely of light-transmitted energy and yet as real in aspect, as three-dimensional, as the objects themselves. She has never moved in and out of a light projection and become a part of it, a woman of flesh and blood moving in another world, another universe.

"She may become frightened, stunned. She has never walked through the rooms of a completely transparent dwelling, descended a flight of stairs as firm in structure as the floor of this room, and stared out through a pane of glass-simulating energy at a landscape on another planet, projected across thousands of light years.

"She will need to be reminded that the building itself is no more than a projection, matter-energy in flux, and that the breeze which is stirring the trees beyond the window has never blown over the green hills and valleys of Earth and that the trees themselves have not grown like an oak from an acorn but have reproduced

themselves by a process unknown on Earth. The trees, rivers, valleys, cities will chill her with their strangeness, terrify her perhaps.

"Her mind has not been properly prepared, so it will be a risk. Are you prepared to take it —on your own responsibility? I have no power to command you. You are your own master. You must decide for yourself. As your friend I can only advise, urge caution. Young and inexperienced eyes have looked before now on wonders too deep and vast for the star's cavern of young minds to grasp."

Duke said, "I think that she will have the courage to look calmly across space at our world and accept what she sees there without becoming in any way disturbed. All life is strange. That life should have come into existence at all on a spinning mote of mindless matter in space is strange beyond belief. That it should exist on ten thousand planets throughout the universe of stars is even stranger. The simple fact of birth prepares every human being for a life of exploration, of uncertainty, of fearful risks undertaken with a stout heart.

"If some of us recoil before the challenge—others do not."

He was looking at Ruth Fraser now, an apprehensive expression on his face. "Will you trust me and take the risk? Scorpions are completely human, even though we have been called aliens, visitors from beyond the stars, even —invaders. Even though we have been called *creatures* . . . we are men in the fullest sense. We take pride in the fact that we can think, feel, act in such a completely human way . . . and that even our blood types are similar to yours. Parallel evolution is no myth. Creative intelligence has everywhere in the universe clothed itself in much the same garments.

"The lower forms of life may differ slightly, on every inhabited planet throughout the universe of stars, but the evolutionary process has everywhere culminated in a big-brained biped with almost godlike gifts of intelligence —a fragile, almost hairless biped with the lightning at his fingertips, and an ability to transcend his immediate environment in ways that are strange."

Ruth's hand crept into his. "I am not afraid," she said. "If you have an unknown world to show me, let us go and look at it together."

VI

JIM LAWRENCE sat alone with the Bureau Chief in the big silent office, a gray light at his back—the light of dusk, undoubtedly, but somehow more un-

nerving than any such light had a right to be, more *coldly* gray and unnatural looking.

The ambulance had come and gone, but the departure and hospitalization of Gillings had not diminished the tension in the least. If anything, the horror and uncertainty had grown.

"Gillings must have started sagging the instant the Scorpion stepped into the office," Lawrence said. "I'm quite sure he didn't say a word after that. I wasn't watching his face at the time, but we hardly need a diagram. That Scorpion *did* something to his mind."

"Isn't it just barely possible that the blow you struck him—"

Lawrence shook his head. "A delayed concussion? No. If I seriously thought that I'd go out and shoot myself. But I refuse to believe it. I struck him on the jaw for his own protection, because I had no alternative. But it wasn't a brain-injuring blow. A man has to jar his skull pretty hard to produce even a light concussion, like—well, falling against a curbstone."

Harvey Jordan nodded. "I never really doubted it. I just wanted your opinion."

"Here it is, then—in full. The Scorpions, as far as we know, have never before attempted to influence the human mind telepathically. We had no reason to believe they possessed ESP powers at all—certainly not to a dangerous degree. But what happened to Gillings seems to prove otherwise. I believe that two separate attacks were made on Gillings' mind, in an effort to silence him.

"The first attack, in the swamp, produced amnesia—the peculiar mental state of 'glory' Crawford described. But under hypnosis a part of that mental block was stripped away. Gillings remembered, and talked. But I'm almost certain Gillings didn't remember and couldn't inform us of *everything* he saw when he approached the wrecked Scorpion spaceship. And that's why a second attack was made upon him—a half hour ago in this office."

The Chief was staring very intently at Lawrence now. "Yes," he said. "I'll buy that."

"The second attack was made because the Scorpions realized that the amnesic block had broken down. Another exposure to hypnosis, and Gillings revelations might have become complete enough to seriously endanger their plans."

"I'll buy that, too," Jordan said. "We've done some speculating about those plans, and added it to what we know. The sum total was frightening enough to justify our sending for you. But before we talk about that, I'd like to ask you one more question."

The Chief's lips curved slightly upward, but there was no real

mirth in the smile. "You had the look of a wide-eyed schoolboy while Crawford was talking, but you didn't deceive me for one moment. I happen to know you could talk circles around him when it comes to psychology. You know a hell of a lot about medical diagnosis, too."

"Just from reading," Lawrence said. "Just as a layman, I assure you. The average pre-Med student could talk circles around me if I—oh, well skip it. Just one thing, though. The correct term is *physical* diagnosis."

"See what I mean? Well, anyway, there's something that puzzles me. I thought extra-sensory perception *wasn't* inverse to the square of the distance. I mean—if the Scorpions actually can get inside our minds and produce paralyzing changes why couldn't they do it just as well from a distance? I'm thinking specifically of the *second* attack on Gillings. Why did that Scorpion have to come here in person?"

"Well, for one thing, it would take a very powerful ESP impulse to influence or damage the cranial nerves at the base of the brain and produce an actual paralysis. The cerebral cortex itself is a quite different matter. ESP, as we've observed its manifestations in men and women, seems to function through some kind of super-dimension, independently of space and sometimes of time, directly on the higher centers. But even there, where the nuclei of the motor nerves and the nerves of special sense originate, not strongly enough to produce any pronounced physical trauma.

"Further down, below the cerebral hemispheres proper, in the cerebello-pontine angle,, the nerves are infinitely more robust and resistant. To produce an actual paralysis of the nerves at that point the ESP potential would have to be tremendous. And Gillings apparently suffered the kind of 'stroke' that goes with severe cerebral nerve damage—or, at the very least—temporary paralysis. Crawford wasn't sure. But I was almost sure, just from looking at him."

Jim Lawrence's expression became more somber. "That brings up an even more important point. We don't know precisely what kind of ESP ability the Scorpions may possess, or just how it functions. It may be quite different from the rudimentary human ESP faculty."

"So the Scorpion had to be near Gillings to throw him into a coma," Jordan said. "Is that what you mean?"

"Yes—in a general way. Quite possibly Gillings had to come close to the wrecked Scorpion spaceship before even the amnesic block could be imposed. We've no *absolute* assurance that tele-

pathy on any level is completely independent of space and time. In the early Duke University ESP experiments considerably better results were obtained when the sender and the receiver of the messages were in fairly close proximity. In the case of more highly developed telepathic faculties close proximity could be even more important. The more advanced and specialized a faculty is—the more limited it often becomes in general scope."

"Sounds logical," the Chief said. He stood up. But he did not move away from the desk, simply drew a little back from it as he pulled open one of the spacious drawers. From the drawer he took a small, camera-like instrument and placed it on the desk.

The instrument was less than eight-inches square, compact and very beautiful. It was a man's delight in aspect—an artist's delight, a skilled mechanic's delight. The male human animal likes to tinker, likes marvelously constructed mechanical parts, gadgets that are a miracle of beauty and precision. This was such an instrument, blue-enameled, expensive looking, flawlessly assembled.

Lawrence could not tear his eyes from it. So absorbed, indeed, did he become that he was startled when the Chief clicked it on, and light and color flooded the desk.

Light and color, movement and sound. On the desktop the main street of a small country town stretched out, throbbing with all the vibrant hues and textures of life itself. Men, women and children passed up and down the street, crossed at an intersection, paused to window-shop. The curbs were lined with cars. From one of the stores a man emerged and drove off. Another man, in a gray business suit and a briefcase under his arm, entered a two-storey office building beneath a hanging sign which read: *John Jepson, Attorney-at-Law.*

A child clutched a bobbing red balloon, and turned to stare at a passing poultry truck. The heads of geese craned and twisted between the slats of a wooden crate, and there was a distinctly audible *honk*. A teen-ager in dungarees passed down the street whistling. Two girls stopped to stare after him, giggling. A wolf call came from the door of a poolroom. A gas station attendant paused in his high-octane labors to swab a perspiring brow.

Color, movement, sound and—familiarity. Lawrence caught his breath and his throat tightened with the wonder of recognition. There had been changes—many changes. But it was still *his* town. It was still the little Vermont town in the valley that had been his parents' home and his own

during all the years of his boyhood. Even some of the faces were familiar to him, despite the changes.

Even the Scorpions could not change the minds of men and women quite so appallingly. And yet the changes were not all for the worst. In some of the faces, where once he had seen only a dull lack of promise, there now shone forth dignity and strength and a fine glow of accomplishment.

Then Jim Lawrence saw the Scorpion. He was walking alone near the far end of the street, a strikingly handsome individual with dark hair and eyes, and an unusually slender build for a Scorpion just a little past his first youth—a Scorpion, in short, of about his own age.

As Lawrence stared down, still feeling the slight constriction at his throat, one of the passers-by turned and nodded at the stranger in their midst. Lawrence could hear the words of the greeting quite clearly. "Good afternoon, Duke."

"Good afternoon," the Scorpion replied and continued on.

"Gillings mentioned that one," Jordan whispered, his fingers nudging Lawrence's sleeve. "Apparently he's won a great deal of local liking and respect. At the very least—respect."

Lawrence turned, his lips white. "I don't understand. What *is* this? A three-dimensional projection of some sort, but Good God—I've never seen anything so lifelike!"

"I'll explain in a minute," Jordan said. "Watch!"

Almost infinitesimally tiny seemed the many hurrying figures, and yet each stood out distinctly, as did the miniature store fronts and parked cars. The illusion of immediate, flesh-and-blood reality was so complete that Lawrence scarcely dared raise his voice for fear of being overheard.

The Scorpion woman appeared quite suddenly on the street, emerging from one of the stores only a few steps behind the solitary figure of Duke. She moved quickly forward to join him, nodding and smiling at him in a quite casual way, as if she wished it to be known that she was merely confirming the bonds of a valued friendship with graciousness and restraint.

She was barely more than a girl and her beauty was—breath-taking. Her eyes were large, lustrous and very dark, and shaded by long, curving lashes. Her high cheekbones gave to her face a slightly exotic cast, as did her over-full lips. But when she smiled that faint alienness of facial contours was forgotten and even when she didn't, it hardly seemed to matter. Far more would have been required to mar her beauty even slightly in Lawrence's eyes.

Another farm truck rumbled past, blotting the two Scorpions from view for an instant. When it had passed Lawrence caught a brief, final glimpse of them disappearing down a side street.

Almost immediately after that, people on the street began to waver and grow dim. A haziness enveloped the store fronts and spread out over the entire scene. It was accompanied by a stillness and a receding murmur of barely distinguishable voices and after a moment even that faint undercurrent of sound was gone.

The entire street vanished, to be replaced by a dull flickering that caused Jim Lawrence to look up quickly, dazed incomprehension in his stare.

"You'll see the ship in a moment," Jordan said. "Don't look so startled, Jim. We could never assemble an instrument like this, but we've come pretty close to it. It's simply a three-dimensional image projector—or rather, a camera and projector combined—that creates an illusion of reality with great depth and color and vibrancy to it. The sound synchronization may seem a little on the miraculous side, but apparently it's not beyond the scope of Scorpion technology.

"The voices are in some complex way magnified, each voice distinct in itself, impinging on the ear with an almost unbelievable sharpness and clarity. The images, too, are a little sharper than they would be in life, but that only seems to heighten the illusion. Their tininess is somehow made negligible. The scene grips and possesses you so completely that you become a part of it. You seem to be seeing and listening to life-size men and women. The human brain, remember—and this undoubtedly applies to the Scorpion brain as well—creates its own size orientations to fit the occasion."

The Chief nodded thoughtfully. "I'll give you an example of this. Wear very strong magnifying glasses for a time, and then take them off abruptly. You'll still see images which appear to be magnified, larger-than-life images. The brain has automatically made certain readjustments, ignoring the actual image flashed to it by the retina of the human eye."

Lawrence scarcely seemed to be listening. So extreme was his state of blindly groping bewilderment, amazement and shock that only one of Jordan's statements had registered with anything like a normal impact. That statement now occupied his mind to the exclusion of all else.

"You said . . .*we* could never assemble an instrument like that. Then this—*is not a human instrument.*"

Jordan shook his head. "No. It's a Scorpion instrument. I thought I made that clear. Right

after the Gillings' tragedy alerted us we threw all of the resources of three Government departments into the job of at least *trying* to get our hands on something concrete. Before the hypnosis experiment with Gillings was even attempted—while Crawford was experimenting with the truth serums. One of the Bureau's own men—Ralph Summers—lifted this camera-projector from a Scorpion who just happened to be dozing after a heavy meal in a roadside tavern. It was an almost incredible fluke of circumstance."

The Chief smiled grimly. "The Scorpions are human enough in a good many respects. I don't need to tell *you* that. I was watching you just now, when you saw that Scorpion girl." The smile vanished. "Scorpions, as you know, even get drunk, lower their guards, have at times an almost irresistible desire to be liked. Even by us—that's the strange thing. To be liked with an almost pathetic, childlike intensity at times—unbelievable in a race so advanced. Possibly it's because a desire to be liked is the most deep-seated craving of biological intelligence everywhere in the universe.

"Psychologists tell us that even hate—cruel aggression—stems from a frustration of that basic need, that overwhelming emotional craving not to feel rejected, or spurned. People hate because they are unable to make themselves liked. The roots of that need may lie even deeper than the simple phrase 'desire to be liked' suggests. It may go back to the first primitive beginnings of unicellular life—to the organism's need for security and friendship. But we needn't go into that."

The Chief's eyes hardened and at the angle of his jaw the small, mobile muscles bunched into knots. "But we must be careful. We'll be making a mistake if we lower *our* guards."

"They're being lowered—all over America," Lawrence said, a stunned shakiness in his voice. "Just why did they make a recording of that street scene? Have you any idea?"

"Well—we've given it a great deal of serious thought. Quite possibly they wished to make a special recording of their last days on Earth, as a kind of historical summation, something to refer back to a century or so from now. But it could just as easily have been made as a kind of—well, emergency test run. Something of great and urgent importance to them is going on near the wrecked spaceship.

"There was one ghastly accident, apparently, as you'll see in a moment. Perhaps they wanted to attach a street scene to it, taken at random in the immediate vicinity, to enable them to test out some special feature of

it. Or it may be no more than what a laboratory technician would call a 'precautionary control'—a manifestation of their extraordinary thoroughness in conducting any kind of experiment."

VII

JIM LAWRENCE suddenly found himself watching the flickering again, startled by the streaks of jet blackness which were creeping into it. As he continued to stare the streaks resolved themselves into trees, their enormous boles spaced at sentry-like intervals around a forest clearing. In the midst of the clearing the wrecked Scorpion spaceship leapt into sudden prominence, its long, cylindrical hull enveloped in slanting shafts of moonlight.

Lawrence had known the setting as a boy, and it took him only an instant to recognize it. Hillsdale Wood, the sloping stretch of dense trees and grassland a few miles to the east of the town. Only the ship was new, an intruder on the sylvan solitude. The descent of the ship had charred the great oaks close to it, and had channeled a deep crevice in the earth that was steep-walled around its entire circumference.

There was no stir of movement about the ship, no sound at all. Only absolute silence and stillness, as if some unseen presence had commanded the forces of nature to be silent. The very absence of sound was unnerving, so startlingly did it contrast with the hurry and bustle of the familiar street scene of a moment before.

The ship did not fade as the street scene had done, to be replaced by a new and completely different setting. The image simply shifted, as if the recording instrument had become an aerial camera. The trees changed, thinned and grew thick again, and the ship itself was quickly lost to sight in a vast sea of greenery.

It was not until then that Lawrence became aware that Jordan was standing very close to him, his breathing distinctly audible in the silence. "I told you there was—an accident," the Chief said, his voice low, oddly strained. "The first time I saw it I was pretty badly shaken up. You'll see it, too, in a moment. Just thought I'd better warn you . . ."

For a fleeting instant Jim Lawrence saw only the trees and another sloping expanse of charred earth. Then the camera-eye of the recording instrument seemed to shift abruptly, and a portion of the slope that had been invisible before came sharply into view.

Lawrence's breath caught in his throat. The slope looked desolate and bleak in the gray light, but the shape that towered there

was not a natural part of the desolation. The shape was that of a wildly rearing horse, its mane distended, its teeth exposed and gleaming in the moonlight. Its front hoofs were thrashing at the empty air, frozen to immobility and yet unmistakably thrashing, precisely as a figure carved in stone by a master sculptor may convey an illusion of constant motion despite its absolute rigidity as an object of art.

There is a marble stillness that lasts forever and yet is as short-lived as a dropped heartbeat, for the human imagination alone can endow cold stone with sudden, pulsing, vibrant life. But no imaginative effort was needed here, for the horse was—or had been —alive.

It was impossible to believe otherwise. Its straining flanks were ridged with a rippling interplay of muscles which no sculptor, however great, could have hewn from a block of stone with absolute, camera-like accuracy—even had he so desired. And what sculptor who was not also a fool would have attempted any such thing? The function of art was to interpret reality—not to copy it line for line, displaced hair by displaced hair.

All that flashed across Jim Lawrence's mind as he stared down at the rearing horse. Partly it was a protective rationalization, and effort to escape from the immediate horror of the scene itself, to blot from his consciousness, if only for an instant, the spectacle of a frenziedly trapped animal frozen to immobility in a wholly unnatural way.

The rationalization was logical enough and almost certainly true. But there was more to it than that. He was experiencing in addition the quite ordinary shock reaction which the human mind undergoes when it is unexpectedly confronted by an enigma, a challenge, a mystery almost beyond sane belief.

Was the horse still alive, or had it died before the Scorpion recording instrument had swept down over the hillside? It was difficult to tell. Possibly it was merely paralyzed with shock, held rigid by terror and might at any moment recover from its fright and go plunging on through the woods.

Could a dead animal maintain such a posture—upright, unmoving, its forelimbs rigidly extended? Could a dead animal still seem to be thrashing with its hooves at the empty air? Could rigor mortis be as sudden as that, as profound and all-embracing, all apart from the impossibility of rigor overtaking a man or animal in such a position?

It seemed impossible and yet —not only was the horse unnaturally rigid and unmoving. From its head to its tail it was enveloped

in a glow—a bright, steady radiance that clung to it like a shroud.

The scene was starting to flicker and grow dim, precisely as the village street had done, when Jordan spoke again.

"We've run that recording off at least a hundred times," he said. "We've studied it from every angle, speculated about it and reached a conclusion which seems inescapable. Something killed that horse with an almost lightning-like swiftness. Just before it reared up it may have had its neck bowed, pawing the earth. Fright alone may have caused it to rear up. But something more than fright killed it."

"Are you sure it's dead?" Lawrence heard himself asking. "For a moment I thought—"

The Bureau Chief gestured impatiently. "Wait, let me finish. There's only one explanation makes any kind of scientific sense. *Radiation.* Not the kind of radio-activity which would register on a geiger counter, perhaps, but radiation notwithstanding. You saw the glow!"

It wasn't a question, exactly, but the Chief paused as if expecting a reply. When none was forthcoming he went on quickly, "A strange, new, deadly kind of radiation capable of paralyzing or killing instantly, capable of turning a horse into a rigidly contorted, brightly glowing animal mummy. Statue of stone might be a better way of phrasing it. Figuring it out will be a problem for the experts . . . if it happens again and we find the animal."

Jordan was suddenly intense. "Do you realize what this could mean? You know what happened to that South Pacific island seven years ago. If what we suspect is true, the Scorpions may be experimenting with an even more dangerous kind of radiation—something they *can't* control—or can't be sure of controlling.

"It's a possibility we can't ignore. . . . It seems extremely likely that the horse was killed accidentally—by some kind of energy seepage from the wrecked spaceship, during the course of their experiments with a new fuel. Adding it to what we already know and suspect—the information we've gathered, the Gillings tragedy—we'd be justified, I think, in reaching such a conclusion."

The desktop scene had vanished completely now. The light had gone, and the small Scorpion projection instrument had again become an object of simple beauty with mirroring surfaces—blue-enameled, intricately compact.

The Chief's expression grew more decisive. "Look at it this way. That horse and the wrecked Scorpion spaceship were in close proximity—less than eight hun-

dred feet apart. The recording instrument moved from the wreck directly to the horse, as if the vicinity factor had an important bearing on what took place. Now —we have reason to believe that some very special kind of research activity has been going on board the wrecked ship. Doesn't it seem likely that an accident may have occurred, and that the recording was made—at least in part—to guard against similar accidents in the future?

"I'm getting back here to my test-run theory. The Scorpions probably make careful recordings of everything that takes place when they conduct an important research experiment."

"Yes," Lawrence conceded, his pallor still pronounced. "It seems logical enough."

"The horse may have been killed by a radiation seepage acting gradually upon it until it finally reared up and became rigid in that ghastly, unnatural way. But I believe that the end came more quickly . . . that it was killed by a single lethal shaft darting out from the wreck."

The Chief nodded, letting out a long breath, as though his mind had settled the matter to his complete satisfaction in at least that one respect.

"Whatever happened, it does have an accidental look about it. Call it a hunch, if you wish, an inspired guess. But what I'm going to tell you now lends a great deal of support to it."

Jordan returned to his desk and sat down. He gestured Lawrence toward the chair directly opposite him. "I'll give it to you straight, Jim," he said. "And I'll make it brief."

Lawrence nodded and sat down opposite the Chief, realizing that Jordan would not have spoken with such crisp deliberation if he had not been completely sure of himself.

Jordan began with a question. "Tell me, Jim. Just what do you know about the Scorpion spaceship? What *did* you know—before you listened to Gillings' outburst, and what I've just been telling you?"

Jim thought for a moment.

"Not too much. I knew, of course, that they had made a kind of tourist attraction out of what's left of it. Not the Scorpions, but the townsfolk, from the mayor on down. Visitors were at least permitted a fairly close look."

"Not any more," Jordan interrupted. "The Scorpions exerted pressure in a mild, friendly, local way. Just mild Scorpion pressure always seems to be enough. I don't know, exactly, what strings were pulled—because we've been deliberately holding off investigating that particular aspect of it. Asking questions in Quarry Hill will be *your* job."

Lawrence looked startled. "My job! I'm afraid I don't—"

"Forget about that for a moment," the Chief interposed sharply. "Pretend I didn't say it. I take it, from what you've just told me, that you knew nothing about the wrecked spaceship beyond the fact that it was a tourist attraction until about two weeks ago."

Lawrence nodded. That's right. My knowledge ends there."

"You didn't know, then, that the Scorpions put in a request for Sodium FE—438 with the Atomic Research Control Board right here in Washington. You know, the fusion element Scorpions use to fuel their stardrive."

"No, I didn't."

"At that time—it was about five weeks ago—they pretended to be in complete sympathy with the tourist attraction idea. They claimed they wanted to make their grounded spaceship look real for the yokels."

A slight smile flickered across Lawrence's face, but the concern did not leave his eyes. "I think I understand," he said. "The Scorpions get a few grams of FE—438, put it, shielded, into the fuel chamber, and let the sight-seers peep at it, through a ten-inch-thick quartz window. But then the A.R.C.B. turns them down and they use ordinary baking powder instead."

Lawrence's features tightened, and all of the levity went out of his voice. "I just don't get it, though—not any part of it. They have plenty of Sodium FE—438 fuel."

The Chief shook his head. "We don't think so. We think their fuel supplies may be running short all over Earth. They may not have enough to power the stardrive of a single ship for the long journey home. We think they may be experimenting with a *new* fuel—an atomic development that will enable them to use the small amount of FE—438 they can get from us in combination with some new fissionable product, a thousand times as powerful."

In every line of the Bureau Chief's body, in the way he spoke, was a desperate earnestness impossible to misinterpret.

Lawrence said, "You mean they're using that wreck as an experimental laboratory? In a larger sense—using *Earth* as a laboratory?"

"That's exactly what I mean," Jordan said. "Can you think of anything more potentially dangerous? Their own South Pacific Island demonstration would be a child's toy by comparison. And they'd just naturally be reckless with a planet that doesn't belong to them. As for blowing *themselves* up—well, we don't know enough about their psychology to be sure they can't take even self-

destruction in their stride. They may welcome it, glory in it.

"For all we know, they may have a suicide complex. Like—well, remember those Japanese fliers in World War II? The individual doesn't matter—only the race, the nation. An alien behavior pattern could be even more irrational."

"So they wanted some of our FE—438," Lawrence said. "But they didn't get it, did they? Frankly, it doesn't make sense to me. Why should they use such a flimsy, transparent excuse in an attempt to get it? To make the wrecked spaceship a more convincing tourist attraction? Why should they want to do that particularly, especially since they knew they'd have to keep all tourists away from the ship in another two weeks anyway? What high-placed Government official here in Washington would believe such a story?"

"Someone believed them," Jordan said. "A sentimental, civic-minded fool on the Atomic Research Control Board. I'm not at liberty to disclose his name, but they used just the right approach with him. They convinced him that making that wrecked ship a more realistic attraction would increase goodwill all around, and make the Scorpions seem more like public benefactors. We admire men of great wealth when they endow museums and restore historical sites, don't we?"

"Then they *did* get some FE—438?"

The Bureau Chief nodded. "They got it, all right. And it wasn't just a matter of a few grams, either. They probably still have a supply of the stuff themselves, in the other ships, but they apparently need more from us, as fast as they can secure it. Next time they'll think up some new excuse—or take it by force."

Jordan arose and walked to the window. For a moment he stood with his back to Lawrence, staring out over the city of Washington that somehow seemed imperishably beautiful in the deep purple dusk. He could not see the dome of the Capitol, only lighted buildings stretching away into the tremendous and onrushing night.

As he stood there he seemed for a moment one with the great multitude of men and women who had walked the streets of the city in generations that were now forever joined to yesterday's ten thousand years—no, to the billion years that had elapsed since the Earth had cooled and the still warm seas had given birth to life.

He returned abruptly to his desk, sat down and faced Lawrence. "You were born in that town," he said. "You were born in Quarry Hill, Vermont. You spent your boyhood there. And some of the men and women you knew as a boy would greet you if you returned almost as if you had

never been away. To most of them you would still seem a boy —older, taller, wiser but little different from your younger self.

"The years do not change us so very much, Lawrence. People we have known from birth become a part of our deep, subconscious selves, and remain always young in our eyes, always unchanged. And we in turn still seem young to them. I am glad that we do."

The Chief smiled. "Strange . . . that is not really what I intended to say to you at all. Wait, though . . . perhaps it is, in a way. There are thousands of trained investigators here in Washington. We could send them swarming over Quarry Hill with micro-film cameras and concealed notebooks, and a most persuasive disguise. They could become schoolteachers on vacation, tired business executives, high-pressure salesmen, clerks, with a genius for flycasting, golf-fiends, antiquarians.

"But they would not have the *feel* of the town, Jim—not understand its texture, the throbbing, tumultuous pulse of its inner life. They would be greeted by everyone as strangers, and in a small country town all strangers are suspect, even the most friendly and easygoing and likeable, even the hail-fellow-well-met. Do you understand what I'm driving at, Jim?"

Lawrence stood up. "I think I do," he said, remembering back. Remembering the gray Victorian house which his grandfather had built for three generations of Lawrences, and the well in the back yard and the winding country road just beyond. Remembering his first day at school, the tears, the sadness, the storm that came up, darkening the panes of the schoolroom, remembering Molly Rubeck.

Remembering as well the frog in the lunchbasket, the picnic table gaily spread, the grammar school diploma he'd clutched so proudly, the hard-knuckled fist fight with the town bully, the cokes in the drugstore, the high-school swing orchestra, and the flat-brimmed sailor straw with its blue and orange band.

And now everywhere across the land it was still happening and the world of the very young remained unchanged—despite the coming of the Scorpions and the fear and the dread in the eyes of the not-quite-so-young and the middle-aged and the very old.

Jim Lawrence knew then what the Chief expected of him and what his answer would be.

VIII

DUKE LOOKED thoughtfully at the woman who was walking with him across a room that had ceased to frighten her—away from the couch where she had reposed and

been helped by the silent Scorpion healer.

"If you have an unknown world to show me, let us go and look at it together."

He seemed to be turning the words over in his mind and suddenly he said, "For months now we have been conducting tests—screenings—to determine what men and women have the vision, the endurance, the strength of purpose to help us in the great task we have undertaken. Perhaps 'search' would be a better word. We have searched far, and now at last we have found the right kind of human material. Human nature is very much the same everywhere on Earth. But we thought it best that the men and women we select should each have a different heritage. You, too, are one of the strong ones."

Ruth Fraser turned and looked at him, her eyes wide, incredulous. "Strong? After all that I told you about myself—"

"Yes. Your great imagination, your capacity to feel deeply and intensely—are in themselves manifestations of strength, the only kind of strength that is important. I have decided to trust you completely. You will be the first—to see what the Scorpion civilization is like.

"We have selected, from many nations, a small group of men and women—unusual in every respect. One is from a little town in Vermont called Quarry Hill. Another is from England, another from France, another from the Soviet Union. There is a South African pygmy, and a Chinese explorer in the group. The selected men and women are unusual in almost every respect—intelligent and imaginative beyond the average, with a deep capacity to *feel*.

"You, too, have been selected. We have been studying you, observing you closely, for some time. I came to Washington for two reasons. One concerns our immediate security and does not involve you. The other was—*to contact you*.

"The contact came a little sooner than I expected. I was approaching the store because I knew you were there. If I had not encountered you as I did I would have sought you out in your lodgings a few hours later. But I did not know—before I met you—that I would be so instantly drawn to you. The rapport between us appears to be even deeper than I had thought it would be."

Ruth was astonished to learn that she had been singled out by the Scorpions—but was no longer startled by anything Duke might choose to reveal.

Together they walked across the room and out through a door that opened silently at their approach. They moved down a long, blank-walled corridor, and de-

scended a flight of narrow stairs lighted from above by circular lamps that glowed with a pale blue radiance.

The stairs were very steep, lined by handrails that mirrored the lamps in a quiet astonishing way. Like stars the lamps seemed, glimmering in the constantly deepening shadows—stars that seemed almost to be following them as the long, crystal-bright rails guided them past convolutions as intricate as the interior structure of some vast seashell, opalescently gleaming in a cavern measureless to man.

Down and down they went, Lilliputian figures descending through a Gargantuan whelk's-house of lime and star-mirroring crystal, their steps echoing hollowly as they passed from light into shadow and then back into light again.

There were brief intervals when dazzling light seemed completely to envelop them, and yet the darkness remained in the ascendant—so much so, in fact, that the shadows seemed almost to have a strange, greedy life of their own, darting toward them from all angles even when the light half-blinded them and feeding, leechlike, upon the light, absorbing it until only a dull gray flickering remained.

Down and down until, finally, the stairs leveled off and they were walking straight out across the floor of a completely featureless vault more terrifying in its immensity than the whelk's house of descending convolutions had been.

The floor of the vault was translucent and it shimmered with a rainbow iridescence, each spectrum hue separate and distinct. There were banners of red, green, blue and a dozen colors that were either neutral or achromatic—not just white, black and gray but seemingly a blend of each with something new and strange added —a brightness such as neutral colors were not supposed to possess.

It was almost as if the light that never was on sea or land, the incredible light of the poets—of Wordsworth and Coleridge and Blake—had crept into the vault and suffused it, turning even the blacks and grays prismatic, and giving to even the light-diffusing colors the aspect of a lens that was also a wheel of fire.

So immense was the vault that Ruth could not see across it. And when she raised her eyes the roof was swallowed up in a flickering emptiness, consisting of shadows perhaps, or consisting of no more than the nebulously weaving obscurity which great height and distance imposes on human sight.

Then before her eyes an object took shape. It was white and circular and of no great height and she could see at once that it was

a building with windows and a doorway and that on its sloping roof there had been erected what appeared to be an aerial transmitting instrument of some sort—an intricate network of wires and gleaming metal rods supported by a sturdier and starkly simple framework of forked metal poles.

The Scorpion spoke then for the first time. "We will walk together into the house," Duke said. "It is really a house of a thousand windows, because the view beyond the one window will change constantly. The house will travel, it will move from place to place. It was not built on Earth and it is not on Earth now. What you see is a light-projection, transmitted from my home planet across space.'

He nodded, his fingers tightening on her hand. "It is a house of light and yet it is three-dimensional, substantial, as firm as the flesh of my hand. The walls are constructed of energy-matter in flux, and as you move through it, energy that has not quite become matter will make solid the floor beneath your feet."

The interior of the house did not even seem alien. It was too completely featureless in every way, the lower-floor rooms opening directly on a terrace which was enveloped in a swirling iridescent mist.

"Duke—" the girl said, and stopped.

"Yes." Duke looked at her.

"You spoke of a window. What does that terrace open on?"

Duke smiled and said, "On nothing at all. The house is in stasis now. It is not moving yet . . . The room and window are upstairs. Come."

The stairs were narrow, firm, compact—not at all like the whelk-shell convolutions that had made Ruth's temples throb and fear to increase within her until she had almost succumbed to an impulse to cry out and turn back. There was security here—of a sort. The very smallness of everything, the blank walls, the solid cornices, the total absence of furnishings of any kind made it seem like a doll house enlarged just sufficiently to accommodate adults —a trim dwelling fresh from the carpenter, uncompleted as yet, with a fireplace that lacked a flue and with wood shavings on the floor.

The upstairs room was astonishingly small. The ceiling was low and the walls less than ten feet apart. It was a completely square little room and the one small window was also square. It appeared to be paned with glass which had an almost fragile look.

Beyond the pane there was only a swirling grayness, no different from the mist which had enveloped the terrace on the floor below.

The Scorpion still held firmly

to Ruth's arm. Without a word he drew her toward the window and said, simply, "Look."

Slowly the mist began to dissolve. Rents appeared in it, weaving patches of light brighter than the iridescence.

Gradually as Ruth stared the bright patches widened, dispelling the mist on both sides of the pane, rolling it back in luminous bands.

Beyond the pane stretched a terraced garden, purple-garlanded, beautiful beyond belief. Tall, violet-red plants, their stamens tipped with radiance, marched in double file across a snow-white stretch of masonry, and descended a moss-covered slope to a fountain with seven jets, each golden and shaped like a flamingo in flight.

In the middle of the terrace, between the tall flowers, two Scorpions were walking slowly back and forth. One was a male, a little younger than Duke and the other was a slender, dark-haired woman, her eyes languorous and golden in the waning sunlight.

"They are very happy," Duke whispered. "Completely relaxed. They are in love, you see, in a quite simple way. There is no need for them to torment themselves, as men and women in love must always do on Earth. They are not torn by indecision, by jealousy, by fierce doubts. They do not have to ask themselves, 'Is this really love? Will it last? And where will my beloved be a year from now? In the arms of another man?'

"They are completely sure of each other, completely sure of themselves. They are sure because the fire within them burns so brightly and steadily. They are consumed by it, although you might not think so to look at them. They seem to be in love in a completely passionless way, but that is not really true at all. The opposite is true. They do not need to embrace with an outward display of passion because the joy which unites them is a living flame. It is all-consuming. It cannot be fanned to a greater brightness and any attempt to do so would be fraught with danger."

"Danger?" Ruth whispered. "I don't understand—"

"There is always danger in exhausting an emotion, in trying to pass beyond it," Duke said. "Joy itself—free and unconfined as it is—is hedged about with explosive tensions. When the cup is full to tamper with it is always dangerous."

"And we on Earth—you think we have tampered too recklessly?"

"I do not know. We would not have remained on Earth if we had been completely sure of the answer. There is perhaps some one thing you can teach us—a way, a means, a salvation. For at one

vital point we are grievously stricken, and facing possible annihilation."

"You—the Scorpions?"

"All of us, yes. Watch now. The house is moving. You will see that all joy on my home planet is not the quiet, self-contained joy of two lovers walking together in a garden. There may be more symbolical truth than you think in the primitive terrestrial folk-myth of the serpent and the garden. They partook of the forbidden fruit and a new world of joy unconfined burst upon their startled vision. Lilith, remember, was also in that garden—the sweet soft woman who entwined herself about Adam and then gave birth to demons."

The scene beyond the window was changing rapidly now. The terrace had vanished and a shining road appeared, wider and more resplendent than the roads of Earth and so flawlessly integrated into the landscape that it seemed a miracle of engineering genius—a construction feat, indeed, that defied analysis.

It stretched away into purple distances, across miles of virgin forest and gleaming silver lakes, its every elevation a harmonious curving. Like a dancing note on a musical score it seemed as the house followed it, leaping in sonic joy over all obstacles, rising to a crescendo of onrushing hills and descending with an arrow's swiftness into deep purple valleys.

Presently a city came sweeping toward them, its spires golden in the purple desk. Into the city the house passed and down a street lined with white stone dwellings with oval windows and wide, high-arching doors.

Male and female Scorpions moved in and out of the houses, crossed the street singly and in pairs, stopped to exchange greetings, and to watch children at play. They looked up at the sky as if fearful of a storm. Some of them paused to pat small, furry, large-eared animals whose exuberance, shown by their wagging tails, seemed to match the man-loving friendliness of the dog.

The Scorpions moved with great animation. their faces radiant, as if just being alive was the rarest of privileges and a source of never-ending joy. Every movement they made seemed to give them pleasure, every word they spoke to increase that strange fellowship of intense inward happiness—a fellowship as strong, certainly, as the bonds of human friendship but more abounding in carefree give-and-take, more completely the servant of joy.

The window seemed to mist for an instant, to become almost opaque. Then the street scene vanished and the dazzling whiteness of a great stadium swept into view, causing Ruth Fraser to draw

back and stare at her Scorpion companion with a swift intake of breath.

In the midst of spiraling tiers of Scorpion spectators five separate athletic contests were taking place. Could that vast amphitheater have been transferred to Earth it would have made the Roman Coliseum seem like a midget ruin unworthy of a second glance, the Yale Bowl a toy structure. But it was not so much the size of the building, but the games, the contests themselves, which widened the girl's eyes as she stared.

Never had human prowess on Earth displayed such strength and endurance, such resilience and bodily grace. Never had the surrender to the physical been so complete, so absolute, never had skill pitted against skill, agility against agility, experience against experience scored triumphs so spectacular, a joy so all-embracing, a satisfaction so miraculous.

Naked youths and maidens raced shoulder to shoulder across a white stone track, hurled discs with more than Grecian grace, high-vaulted with the soaring ease of birds in flight. Lithe-limbed youths in the lightest of armor fenced and sparred with rapiers that glittered like diamond-studded scimitars in the downstreaming light. Others batted brilliantly colored balls into basket-shaped nets, leapt over hurdles, dived from a high platform into a rectangular pool and swam with vigorous, overhand strokes toward an illuminated victory-marker, which glowed blue and ruby-red.

It was a spectacle that dazzled the eyes, bemused the senses, a paean to joy and victory acted out with ten thousand bodily movements, perfectly coordinated, lightning swift. Applause thundered between the tiers, penetrating the thin glass pane, echoing throughout the house.

Louder and louder it grew until, abruptly, all sound ceased. The pane clouded again and the bright, stupendous vista was gone.

Ruth Fraser was afraid now. She dreaded what she might see next, as if obscurely aware that her human brain could absorb just so much bigness, vastness, splendor and must recoil in bewildered torment if the newness and the strangeness became too great—became, in fact, an act of outrage.

Duke seemed to sense this fear in her. He seemed to understand how it was that she could tremble and turn pale when she had remained a spectator solely, and when he spoke again his words were tinged with solicitude.

"You must not let the Scorpion way of life frighten you," he said. "We live with both our bodies and our minds, in a harmonious worship of joy. All experience is to us a living flame that takes complete possession of us in early childhood—almost, in fact, from

the moment of our birth. We are taught in the nursery to rejoice in the great gift of life itself, to hold everything else secondary.

"Because we have been so taught, we are a deeply reverent people. We have a deep reverence for all life and yet a great tragedy has come upon us. We do not know why. We are still seeking an explanation. You have seen what joy can mean when it has been accepted by an entire race as the greatest of life's gifts. Now you will see the other, darker side of the coin.

"You will see our stricken villages. You will see listlessness, hopelessness—a melancholy and a black despair so inexplicable that we can hardly reconcile it with what we know of reality. It has descended upon us like some great, rapacious hawk of the night. It is an illness of the spirit, a plague of the mind that has spread from village to village and left a third of our people desolate."

The window was becoming bright again. There was a stir of movement, a shifting of perspective, a change in the gradations of light and shadow just beyond the pane.

A village street came slowly into view. It was lined with low, conical buildings constructed entirely of stone, but looking more like igloos in their architectural symmetry, their monotonous uniformity of design. The buildings ran parallel for perhaps three hundred feet, and then branched and dwindled as the street itself forked.

Before several of the dwellings gaunt skeletons sat—Scorpion men and women so emaciated they seemed little more than mummies sitting upright in the sun. Their eyes bulged glassily and from their ash-gray faces, deeply lined with wrinkles, most of the expression had departed, leaving only a kind of grooved-in apathy, a frozen despair.

Even when one—a male—arose and tottered a few paces, as if the weariness and life hatred which rested upon him had become a burden too intolerable to be endured, there was no change in his expression, no animation in his dully roving stare.

Almost immediately he sank down again, and another mummylike figure struggled to its knees, stretching forth a skeleton-thin arm for a bowl of food which rested on the discolored paving stones at its side.

"They have lost all desire to go on living," Duke said. "They have food in abundance but they seldom eat and they could not be worse off if a famine had descended on the village. They sleep only when absolute exhaustion overcomes them. A fever consumes them but it is not the fever which living imparts. For them

life has lost its meaning, its savor. They are like dispirited children in a dark room, forever cut off from the light. They are the living dead and we can do nothing for them. All joy has vanished from their lives and we do not even know why."

For a moment there was a strange, brooding stillness up and down the street. Then the sunlight shifted a little and one of the half-somnolent mummies came to life again. Energetically to life this time, leaping to his feet with a grimace so tormented, so despairing that the girl at the window was filled with an instant foreboding, a conviction that something terrible was about to happen which she would be powerless to prevent.

Ruth Fraser could not tear her gaze from that tortured Scorpion figure, even when he whipped a knife from his belt and held it upraised for a moment, steady and gleaming and with the blade pointed directly at his chest.

He brought the knife down with a single, violent contraction of his arm, almost as if some invisible force had taken possession of him, steeling his muscles and his will and committing him irretrievably to an act of violence that would put a swift end to his wretchedness.

For an instant he swayed with the knife buried deep in his chest, his lips trembling, shaking, as if he were summoning his last reserves of strength for a final outcry, a malediction directed against life itself, a curse that would linger on after his own passing and be taken up by more and more of his people, until the last Scorpion city had crumbled into dust. Then the glaze which sheathed his eyes deepened and a dull red stain overspread his chest. His knees sagged and he fell and lay prone, with one thin arm outstretched as if at the very last he hadn't really wanted to die.

Ruth Fraser covered her eyes with her hands and screamed.

IX

"WALK THE HILLS, Jim. Tramp the valleys. Renew old acquaintances, seek out old friends. Be completely yourself. Do not hurry like a man rushing to catch a train, or a man in love late for a date. This is too important, too urgent. If the enemy is coming at you, laying down a steady barrage, you must be very calm and relaxed. Otherwise you will not move nearly fast enough."

The Bureau Chief's words echoed in Lawrence's mind as he descended from the train at Quarry Hill, walked with him across the crowded station, and hovered persistently at the edge of his consciousness as he tipped a redcap to retrieve his luggage and was driven in a ramshackle, 1987-

model coupe to the River View Inn.

He registered for a single room with running water, large, airy and sunny, and went to bed the first night without announcing his arrival to anyone.

At cock's crow the next morning he was up and about, and events moved rapidly after that.

The friends of his boyhood were the first to welcome him, but there were many others who wanted in on the act, for a native son does not return every day in the week.

He soon got to know the town's leading citizens and some who were not so leading and a few who were furtive and difficult to know and a few who fraternized with Scorpions and spoke to them perhaps more frequently than was deemed wise by the majority.

He even struck up a nodding acquaintanceship with three Scorpions—it would have seemed strange if he had not done so—and was a little surprised to find himself being greeted by them with a pleasant nod when he went walking along Main Street, his eyes squinting against the bright New England sunlight.

Day by day his contacts and his interior wisdom grew. Old folkways came rushing back to surround him with a warm glow.

In no time at all he was a bred-in-the-bone citizen of Quarry Hill again, privileged to go into a hardware store and purchase a fishing lure from a frog-eyed little proprietor who could have himself passed muster as a lure for a very big pike, privileged to exchange church gossip with Miss Brooks and Miss Lucy White. And not forgetting, of course, that he was not a church-going person himself, privileged to greet Judge Hawkins in a busy tavern taproom with a "How'ya, Dick," and even to drop in at the Sheriff's office and ask Deputy Bill Ragout precisely what he thought of big city dicks.

"Don't think much of them," had been Ragout's answer. "Don't think too much of you snooping newsmen in Washington either. In this town it's the Scorpions, though, who do most of the snooping. Don't see why we'd need a detective, big city or small town, to come here and tell us how to run things—if we ever *did* have a murder, or anything really serious."

It was that conversation which led to Lawrence's first important lead—and his last lead of any kind on Earth. Yet it began casually enough, with Ragout's big, bony frame silhouetted against a sun-dappled windowpane, his brown hickory features drawn together in a scowl that seemed, somehow, distinctly amiable.

So pronounced, indeed, was that amiability that it was impossible for Lawrence to take Rag-

out's comment seriously. From the first there had been a humorous twinkle in the man's eyes, a satiric twist to his lips. Quite obviously he did resent out-of-town snoopers. But not to a really serious extent and he was clearly willing to waive the way he felt to put Jim Lawrence at his ease.

"We haven't had a murder in this neck of the woods for ten years," he said. "Forget I even brought the matter up."

"I was the one who brought it up," Lawrence said, quickly. "Do you mind if we carry it a step or two further—in a more realistic direction. I've been puzzled by one or two things that seem to be happening here with the full knowledge of everyone—things that are disturbing enough to cause a great deal of uneasiness.

"But no one seems to want to talk about them. At least, they won't come right out and talk about them, won't volunteer information. You can understand my position. I'm as much of a native son as anyone could be, but I also happen to work for the Government."

"None of us hold it against you," Ragout said. "Even a village sheriff works for the Government. We'd all be in a bad way if we didn't."

"That I can understand. But I'm supposed to be here on vacation. And I *am* here on vacation. I came back to relax and have fun. I came back because I was born here. Isn't that easy enough to understand? Why should the whole town be suspicious of me?"

"They're not, Jim. No one is suspicious. But when you ask too many questions you rub people the wrong way."

"I see. Well, that's what I want to avoid. Being human, I have a certain natural curiosity. I can't completely repress the way I feel. I wouldn't have any fun at all here if I tried to. It's one thing to vote with the town, to go along—quite another to realize everyone you meet knows something you don't."

"I wouldn't put it that way exactly, Jim."

"How else can I put it? Look, I'll give you an illustration. Say you're a popular guy, you're invited to a party. Someone comes up and gives you a glass of sherry. Someone else hands you a sandwich. You have the sandwich in one hand and the wine-glass in the other. Then a big blue-bottle fly lands on the back of your neck and starts to annoy you. What can you do? You can't so much as raise your hand to flick the fly off."

Ragout sighed. "Okay, Jim. You win. What is it you'd like to know?"

"The Scorpions don't actively interfere with law enforcement here in the village, do they, Bill?

Actually pull wires and that sort of thing?"

"Not directly, no." Ragout's expression became abruptly thoughtful. "Not directly—but they do exert influence. The Sheriff knows more about that than I do. I'm just a deputy, remember. My job doesn't take me too far afield. I've never had a private session with the mayor, let alone the governor."

"But you do know that the Scorpions exert influence. Quarry Hill's chief pride and glory was that wrecked Scorpion spaceship. It brought tourists here in droves, gave a tremendous shot in the arm to local business. But now the Scorpions have taken it back again. They've—well, roped it off. To all intents and purposes they've attached a sign to it labeled: *No trespassing. This ship is Scorpion property.*"

Ragout's lips tightened. "That's true enough," he said. "But after all, the ship *is* their property. They've let it be known that they've taken it back only temporarily."

"But why isn't there more indignation, a bigger protest? Why is everyone so afraid to even discuss it?"

"Why don't you ask Washington that, Jim? It's something that concerns the entire nation. That ship was a tourist attraction, in a way, for every man, woman and child in America. Even when they couldn't come here and look at it they could think about it."

"I understand all that. But right now I'm chiefly puzzled by what's going on right in Quarry Hill. Why the evasiveness, the refusal to— Oh, well, you know what I mean. I've met several Scorpions since my return and talked with them. They're more open and above-board about what's going on here than the men and women I knew when I was a kid. They didn't tell me anything I didn't know—just that they were planning to ship some of the wreck's damaged instruments to their base in England, and needed elbow room while they worked on the job of dismantlement. Hence the 'no trespassing' move.

"That's understandable enough. It made sense to me. What didn't make sense was the fear in the eyes of every native son I talked to about it. I can recognize fear when I see it, especially in the eyes of a Vermont-born man. We're not the kind of people who frighten easily."

Ragout looked at Lawrence steadily for a moment before replying. Finally he said, "Would it surprise you if I told you that ship isn't quite as 'roped off' as you seem to believe? I've never had any desire to visit it myself. I could give you several names, though, of people who feel very differently about it, who have

been willing to take the chance. The Scorpions invited them and they went. They've returned safely to their homes, and there's no longer any fear in them."

Lawrence was too startled to say anything.

Ragout regarded him speculatively for an instant, then went on, "I guess the man you should see and talk to is Mark Whitsun. He's fairly new to the town—came here about six years ago. He manufactures antique reproductions—has a little factory just the other side of the railroad tracks. He's closer to the Scorpions than six or seven others I could mention. And those others have been close enough. He doesn't fear them at all, and if he doesn't think you've an ax to grind I'm pretty sure he'll take you into his confidence."

Jim Lawrence stayed in the Sheriff's office for only a minute or two longer. He knew he'd have plenty of time to think over what Ragout had told him during the ten or fifteen minutes it would take him to drive across town to where Whitsun's business sign swung to and fro in the breeze, and he didn't want the deputy sheriff to regret his startling candor and become evasive again.

He could visualize Whitsun's sign before he saw it, perhaps from memory, for he had walked more than once up the narrow street where the furniture factory was bringing the past very colorfully back to life. MARK WHITSUN —ANTIQUE REPRODUCTIONS.

A big, rusty sign, swinging in the breeze, the lettering slightly chipped. Yes, he could remember it, all right. But when he actually arrived before the low stucco factory structure he was surprised to discover that someone had scrawled in colored chalk beneath the old English lettering: *Scorpions Welcome*.

It was quite obviously a schoolboy prank—too malicious to be in the least amusing. Obviously, too, it was of very recent date, or Whitsun would have discovered and removed it.

Lawrence descended from his car, and walked swiftly up the graveled pathway to the factory door. The Mark Whitsun who came briskly into the small reception room a few minutes after Lawrence had given his name to the receptionist looked very much like—an antique manufacturer.

He was below medium height, and his chestnut-colored hair, which was thinning on top, half-covered his forehead in a circular, antiquated bang. He wore a stained brown smock, and had the long-fingered, sensitive-looking hands of a skilled craftsman. His eyes were blue and very piercing, his mouth in character, being large, and relaxed, but purposeful, as if at a moment's notice it could become tight-lipped and in

entire conformity with the owner's sharpness of perception as he concentrated on some difficult task.

He said, "Good afternoon, sir. I don't believe we've met, but I do know who you are. Jim Lawrence, isn't it?"

For an instant a disturbing thought flashed across Lawrence's mind. Had the little antique manufacturer been expecting him? It seemed unlikely and Whitsun's next words dispelled all of his doubts on that score.

"You can't return to the town where you were born without creating something of a stir, particularly if you've been away for a good many years. I've passed you on the street perhaps a dozen times but I doubt if you so much as noticed me. I noticed you, however, because your name was on everyone's lips. You must have been a very popular youngster and spent a very happy childhood in this town."

Despite the seriousness of his mood Lawrence's features relaxed in a responsive smile. The little man's friendliness seemed completely genuine and would have been a difficult thing to counterfeit.

"Well, I did spend a happy childhood here," Lawrence said. "As for being popular—I'm not so sure. I was a sensitive, rather withdrawn youngster, although perhaps you wouldn't think so to look at me now. I can still recall a fight I had with the town bully. I more than held my own, but I didn't enjoy it. I was a reader and a brooder—a dyed-in-the-wool introvert until I became a Washington newsman."

"We all change," Whitsun said, his eyes sparkling as he returned Lawrence's smile. "When I was a youngster antiques were dusty, unpleasant objects stored away in my aunt's attic. I avoided the slightest contact with them. I was something of a hellion, I'm afraid. Enjoyed getting into scraps and—yes, scrapes. Took Dutch leave from school whenever an urge to go fishing came upon me. Probably broke a half-dozen windows with carelessly hurled baseballs."

He nodded and the sparkle in his eyes became a steady, bright taper glow, as if just thinking back was a joy and a solace to him.

Then, all at once, the sparkle vanished and he looked at Lawrence very earnestly and inquiringly. "Just what did you wish to see me about? If you're interested in my reproductions I'd be delighted to show you through the factory."

Jim Lawrence shook his head. "No, it isn't that. Frankly, I don't know just how to begin. In some ways I feel like a fool."

The sparkle was back in Whitsun's eyes again. "Don't begin then. Just tell me. Plunge right into the middle of things. There's

a Latin phrase for it. *In res media* —or something of the sort. I never was much good at Latin."

The little man's amiability was so contagious that Lawrence relaxed a little. "Okay," he said. "Perhaps that *is* the best way. It concerns the Scorpions—their influence in Quarry Hill, their completely unpredictable behavior. Bill Ragout told me you're on very friendly terms with them. To put it bluntly—he told me you know quite a few of them and feel completely relaxed and at ease in their presence."

Whitsun did not seem in the least disconcerted by the statement. "And why should I not feel at ease," he said. "I'm convinced they wish us well. They are more human and downright friendly than most people realize. I've enjoyed talking with them, getting to know them better. They trust me completely because they know I've no particular ax to grind."

Lawrence hesitated for an instant, as if fearful that Whitsun might think that exactly the opposite was true in his own case. The fact that he had a very sharp-bladed ax to grind must, at all costs, be kept carefully concealed.

"I suppose I may as well be completely frank," Lawrence said. "I'm such a curious-minded jackass that I could lose my job by over-reaching myself. I didn't come to Quarry Hill on assignment. I've no license to meddle. But just as a human being, as a native son, I feel cheated, left out of things. The Scorpions have denied access to the wreck to everyone—or almost everyone.

"Bill tells me you've actually visited the ship in the company of Scorpions. Quite obviously you didn't see anything there of a very disturbing nature, or you wouldn't be standing here now defending the Scorpions.

"Just what did you see—and why did you go in the first place? If you don't want to tell me I'll understand. I've no right to ask. I'll say that again. No right at all. No one in Washington is standing behind me. But I would like to know. Does that make any kind of sense to you?"

Whitsun looked at him very steadily for a moment, running his fingers through his thinning hair, disarranging the bang. Finally he said, "It makes a great deal of sense. Intellectual curiosity for its own sake is the rarest of human gifts. I admire a man in whom it flames strongly and brightly."

"Thanks," Lawrence said. "I *am* curious, believe me."

"And experiencing something very close to mental torment because there is a big, disturbing, unanswered question in your mind. Don't imagine for a moment I can't understand that. I experienced the same kind of inner torment myself until the Scorpions

decided to be completely above-board with me."

"Then—"

Whitsun nodded. "You've asked me a question. I'm going to answer it in a very direct way—without hedging or keeping anything from you. There is nothing in that wreck we need fear."

Lawrence made no reply. He merely waited, sensing what Whitsun had not finished, that he would have to go on. If he failed to do so he would lay himself open to a charge of evasiveness, the very charge he had taken great pains to deny. He would be in the position of a man who has promised much, and in almost the same breath refused to divulge anything at all.

"You look disappointed," Whitsun said, as if aware of Lawrence's thoughts. "I assure you I've no intention of misleading you. You want proof and you shall have it. Right now, this very moment—if you're prepared to put aside certain misconceptions you seem to have regarding the Scorpions. If you can overcome your perhaps understandable dread—or, at the very least, hold it in abeyance—I'll take you to the Scorpion ship. I'll take you there and you can see for yourself."

"Good Lord!" Lawrence heard his own stunned voice as though from a distance, remote, incredulous. "How can *you* take me there? Everyone in Quarry Hill has built up a great wall of mystery about that ship—for two or three weeks now. You mean . . . we'll just walk up and go inside, as though we were out for an afternoon stroll?"

Whitsun nodded. "Exactly. A stroll—or two glasses of nutbrown ale at the Quarry Hill Inn, unless you prefer whiskey-and-soda. There's a tang in the air, the foliage is at its best, and it's a fine day for a hike. It will be as simple as that. The Scorpions will be most unlikely to undermine a trust they've built up with patience and forbearance and a great deal of give-and-take on both sides.

"They trust me and are justified in doing so. They'll trust anyone I may choose to bring with me. And I—well, I happen to like you, Jim Lawrence. I like the cut of your jib. I like you and I believe in your basic integrity. I know you wouldn't lie to me."

For an instant Lawrence had an impulse to blurt out, *But I am lying to you. Damn it all, can't you see that? It goes against the grain, but I've no alternative. The security of our world is at stake. If you knew you would understand.*

He conquered the impulse before Whitsun made it a dead issue by affirming in a matter-of-fact voice, "I won't be a moment. I don't want to walk through the village in this smock. They have me tagged as pretty much of an

eccentric as it is. No sense in adding fuel to the flames."

IN THE BRIGHT, early afternoon sunlight the scarred and blackened earth immediately surrounding the Scorpion ship did not seem quite so much of an alien desecration as Lawrence had imagined it would become when the distance factor had been removed, and he found himself within thirty or forty feet of it.

He was walking now over the very ground he had traversed a hundred times in imagination and had looked down upon from the high, rocky slope above a half-dozen times in reality. Always by moonlight and with a frightening sense of *aloneness* and encroaching peril urging him to take no chances, to turn about and beat a hasty retreat before it was too late.

Curiously enough, he experienced no such dread now as he approached the ship with Whitsun at his side. Even the towering bulk of the long, cylindrical vessel, with its blue-gray, dully gleaming hull and shark-finned side vanes, did not cast a pall upon his spirits. The ship's nearness and its structural alienness seemed somehow integrated into his experience. There was no fierce tempest of dread and uncertainty, only awe and the feeling that something tremendous was about to happen.

Not even Whitsun's somewhat hesitant manner caused him any alarm. That his companion should approach the ship with caution seemed entirely natural, for was he not putting an incredible friendship and trust to the severest of all possible tests? An uninvited human guest was bound to arouse concern in an alien mind, no matter how far the barriers had been lowered, the difficulties smoothed over.

He was not surprised, therefore, when Whitsun said, "Walk slowly, keep close to me. They know we are here but we must not seem to hurry. They must not be allowed to think that you have influenced me in any way. We must seem to be approaching the ship together, as old friends, in a perfectly casual, unhurried way."

"Sure, I understand," Lawrence said, and moderated his stride accordingly, looking up with admiration as they approached the cylindrical vessel.

It was his last conscious act on Earth.

X

SOMETHING INCREDIBLY bright and shining seemed to rise up directly in Jim Lawrence's path and hover for an instant before his dazzled vision. Then it swept down upon him, enveloping him in a steady, gentle warmth, irradiating him from head to foot. The

sensation would have been a comforting withdrawal of all tension from his body, a radiant enfoldment no more harsh than a caressing wind if it had not robbed him at the same instant of all capacity to feel.

For a very long time Jim Lawrence felt nothing at all. And with the departure of all sensation from his mind and body his human awareness flickered and went out. The cells of his brain suffered no damage, but they ceased to transmit thought impulses from nerve ganglion to nerve ganglion, and he did not even dream.

He remembered nothing, *was* nothing.

To emerge from a deep, dreamless sleep to light and sound and color, to experience, even before awakening, an awareness of self, of identity, to recapture, even in the distorted mirror of some almost intolerable nightmare, one's own very special and precious identity can be—is, in reality—an act of creation.

The sleeper awakens and recreates himself.

To Jim Lawrence the process was a long and agonizing one. At first his mind seemed to have been split up into a million pieces, each one limitless in extent and having no definable gradations. Each fragment seemed to flow, to stretch out endlessly. Each fragment was a sea without a shoreline, with no jetsam on the tossing waves, no buoys to make the channels, the deeps, the shark-infested shoals.

Then each fragment became an exploding and expanding universe. Slowly from the arms of spiral nebulae individual suns split off, coalesced into a single bright star cluster, and filled all space with a steady, downstreaming radiance. Even more slowly the radiance became the mind of Jim Lawrence, his consciousness, his restored awareness of self.

He sat up and looked about him. He felt no dizziness, no shock reaction at all. His mind was clear, his perceptions unimpaired.

He saw at once that he was in a small, square compartment, blank-walled and completely featureless, except for a twelve-inch circular window which glimmered in the light of a somewhat smaller overhead lamp, also circular. Both the window and the lamp were embedded in the interior structure of the room, the lamp directly overhead and the window at shoulder-level in the metal wall surface directly opposite him.

With a shock he realized that the walls were vibrating.

The throbbing was so low, steady and continuous that for an instant its significance did not dawn on him. He simply arose, experiencing no vertigo, walked to the window and stared out, still under the spell of his first,

almost automatic survey of his surroundings. The solidity of the compartment and its imprisoning smallness were clear in his mind. The rest remained hovering on the edge of his consciousness until—

He saw the stars! Through the window they gleamed—pinpoints of shimmering radiance in an ebon vault. In one corner of the sky they swarmed together like golden bees but there were solitary wanderers, too, and one so large that it dwarfed all the others, a stellar giant with a visible corona and prominences that reached hungrily out into space—a stellar giant that could only have been the Sun.

Lawrence's shoulders jerked and he took a faltering step backwards, a great, despairing cry welling up in his throat. And at that precise moment a panel in the wall opened, and a Scorpion stepped into the room.

For a moment the Scorpion stood motionless, his eyes on the window and the stricken man whose head was framed in profile against its dull surface glow. Then he stepped quickly forward and grasped Lawrence by the shoulders.

"There is nothing to fear," he said. "We are in space but we are in no danger. We have taken the first, important step by perfecting a new fuel. Our supply was running short, all over Earth. But now we have enough new fuel to take this one ship back to our home planet. Do you understand? We bear you no ill will. And the ship is safe . . . *safe*. It has been completely repaired. The success of the journey is assured."

Lawrence turned slowly, his first shock already eased, but willing to let the Scorpion think that his words of reassurance had accomplished their purpose. Let the Scorpion take the credit. Pride, standing on a minor point of human prestige, no longer seemed important somehow. There was too much at stake, the blow that had been dealt him was too terrible and irremediable.

In some obscure way he even felt grateful to the Scorpion, though he should have felt only bitterness and rage.

"You have not been harmed in any way," the Scorpion said, his voice earnest, compelling, deeply sympathetic. "We simply made you lose consciousness with—well, a technique we have. Just one of several minor medical techniques for producing complete anaesthesia. We knew that you would not come with us willingly. So we implanted in your mind a suggestion, a hint. Because of that suggestion you called at the Sheriff's office and talked with Ragout.

"Ragout's mind, you see, was also prepared, made receptive. We instructed him to refer you to

Whitsun. Our influence over Whitsun was even more pronounced. He did not lie to you. We have taken him completely into our confidence because we found him unusually receptive and a quite remarkable man in a good many respects."

"Remarkable," Lawrence heard himself protesting. "You mean—as a *slave?*"

The Scorpion shook his head. "No, he is not a slave. Just a clear-thinking, highly intelligent man whose mind happens to be exceptionally accessible to us. We can influence all human minds if we have to—but it is very difficult in some cases and takes a great deal of time. Whitsun was responsive from the first. Just as Gillings was responsive. But even Gillings we could not silence from a distance. He caused us trouble, even after we imposed the memory block. I had to take a more drastic step."

"Gillings! Good God— Yes, I remember now. You are the one who appeared just when we were making progress with Gillings and struck him down. I saw you only for a moment, but I doubt if I'll ever forget how you looked at that moment—poor Gillings . . ."

"No, you are mistaken. You do me an injustice. Gillings will recover . . . completely. It was a necessary act. We had to do it to protect ourselves. He saw too much in the vicinity of the ship that night. We had to complete our new fuel research as quickly as possible, without interference from Washington. It is done now . . . it is all in the past. We have harmed no one seriously."

"I have only your word for that. Is taking a man out into space against his will your way of *not* harming him seriously? If it is, I don't think too highly of it. And your research with the new fuel. You had an accident and some energy seeped out. You might have even been forced to destroy the Earth. That's what we thought in Washington, anyway. Is it true? Was there *that* much danger?"

The Scorpion hesitated a moment, then said with complete candor, "Possibly. But it was a risk we had to take."

For the first time then Lawrence saw the Scorpion in depth, as a strong-willed individual in his own right, distinct from the chill gray anonymity of his race. He stood out clearly, wearing his native costume as gracefully—but not more gracefully—than he had worn the clothing of Earth. But there was a resplendence in his attire now that had been lacking before.

His jacket-like upper garment was silken-textured and midnight blue in color, but when the light struck it it glimmered with an almost iridescent sheen. From his waist to his sandaled feet the

cloth of his trousers seemed molded to his limbs, surpassing in their skin-tight flexibility the tights which athletes wore.

The trousers, too, were of a deep, midnight blue, and were set off by a red-gold sash not unlike a cummerbund. Such a costume might have evoked insulting innuendoes on Earth, but the dignity and assurance with which it was worn dispelled in advance any doubt as to the Scorpion's masculine pride in the wearing of it.

"My name," the Scorpion said, "is D'Qy—Duke. It is always a mistake to dwell with anger or resentment upon the past. What is done is done. We all make mistakes—and the past is a vast graveyard of blunders that can never be repaired. It is a shining storehouse, too, pointing the way to a future that *can* be changed. Nothing in the universe is so unalterable as the past or so plastic and bright with promise as the future."

"I can believe that," Jim Lawrence said, with sudden, rising bitterness. "The future can be very bright if you are in the saddle. Right at the moment, I don't happen to be."

"You must not think of yourself as a victim, or even as a prisoner," Duke said. There was a grave, almost pleading urgency in his voice which gave Lawrence pause, making him wonder if he had not perhaps jumped to a premature conclusion concerning the Scorpion's character and intentions.

"I shall try to be brief," Duke went on, his expression so earnest it seemed almost guileless, child-like, in its probing intensity. "We have taken you out into space without securing your consent in advance, and that is certainly an encroachment on your integrity as an individual. I shall be quite frank. It is, in one sense, an act of tyranny.

"But even an act of tyranny can be redeemed by forgiveness freely asked and freely given. I come to you now as a petioner. I ask forbearance, understanding. We need your help, desperately. My race is facing almost certain destruction—unless you will consent to help us. For many weeks now we have been observing you, studying you. We know you to be a man of exceptional imagination and intelligence."

Lawrence was moved despite himself—not so much by the Scorpion's actual words as by the humility in his voice, his apparent absolute sincerity.

"Let me put it this way. Our race is facing a spiritual crisis. A third of my people have lost—all desire to go on living. And the disease—for it *is* a disease, a malady of the mind and spirit—is spreading. It is spreading so rapidly that in three or four years those of us who find life glorious

and rewarding will be in the minority. We will be wanderers and outcasts, hated and feared by everyone, our joy a mockery and a reproach. The living dead will turn on us in fury.

"They will use our joy as a scourge to destroy us—if we do not ourselves succumb to the ghastly malady. Eventually all of us will succumb, unless a cure is found in time."

"But what causes this—this affliction?" Lawrence asked. "You called it a disease. Have you any reason to believe that it is germ-carried?"

Duke shook his head, his lips tightening. "No. We are quite sure that it is not caused by any living organism. The victims are disturbed mentally, tormented, in a way that seems to me incomprehensible. To me—because I am not yet one of the afflicted. To them it seems perfectly natural to hate the joy that has made us great as a people. They cover their faces and refuse to speak to us—often even to eat.

"It is, in a sense, a turning away from all human fulfillment. Toward darkness, despair, life-hatred and life-rejection. And that is why we think the affliction is some way profoundly spiritual. It strikes at the very core of being."

"A psycho-analyst might disagree with you," Lawrence said.

"What you call psycho-analysis is to us a science in its infancy," Duke said. "We have explored all of its insights and extended them. We look further—toward eternal laws, universal verities. To us joy is such a verity. It is a biological constant throughout the universe of stars. To experience it in all its richness and fullness is to become almost godlike, and almost one with the eternal. We each carry within ourselves an image that is godlike and to shatter that image, that vision of joy is to do violence to the laws of our being."

"Why do you need *my* help?" Lawrence asked. "I am not a religious man. I do not even believe—"

"Wait, hear me out. There are many religions on Earth, all different, and I have often thought that each must contain within itself at least a tiny grain of truth, or they would give you no joy at all. Perhaps in one of those beliefs —alien to us—we will find the cure we seek. Perhaps in all of them combined. Or perhaps in what you call metaphysics. Perhaps that tiny grain—no, call it a spark—can be fanned to a healing flame.

"In some ways you are very similar to us. You are a scientific skeptic, and nature to you is a never-ceasing source of joy, the cells of life a mystery that fills you with a contemplative rapture that is not in any way basically

different from joy. Intellectual curiosity is the greatest of spiritual gifts, for it mirrors the eternal image I spoke of as clearly as it mirrors that image's counterpart on every planet of every sun.

"That is why we have chosen you. We have chosen five others —from all over Earth. One is an Englishman, a minister of a non-dogmatic, traditionally respected church, another a girl from Washington, the third—but you will meet them presently. I have only one thing more to say to you. Try to trust us, to believe in our good faith. Believe that we want only to—to study you, to observe your behavior closely as we seek from you more than we can ever hope to give in return. Be charitable, accept that unfair bargain and we will withdraw all of our ships from Earth and never case to be grateful to you."

"But why . . . why do you wish to study us?"

"Because we all have a reverence for life in our different ways. And the cure, if we find it, will be spiritual in nature. It will have to be. There are two sides to every coin. But our coin has developed a flaw. Part of one face is missing. Your response to our way of life may supply a clue. In your behavior under stress we may see reflected back the part that is missing, the image that must be restored."

Duke laid a firm, reassuring hand on Jim Lawrence's arm. "To you the long journey across space to our home planet will seem like no journey at all. For the light you saw when you approached the ship will gently envelop you again. As I've said, it is an anaesthetic technique, completely harmless, one of our more simple techniques for easing the strain of a journey across thousands of light years.

"You will simply fall asleep and wake up on our home planet. You will be in the midst of a world that will amaze you—a world of Scorpion activity wholly dedicated to joy, to life constantly and creatively renewed, lived to the full, made resplendent by joy.

"You will wake up in a Scorpion city. You will wake up as our guest. The ordeals which you will undergo will be willingly accepted by you . . . of that I am convinced. We will exert no compulsion. You will see . . ."

"Duke's hand tightened on Lawrence's arm. "Come with me. It is time that you met the others. There is another American . . . a young lady I met in Washington. She, too, has agreed to help us. Come . . ."

XI

LAWRENCE OPENED his eyes on a brightness that half-blinded him, a glimmer so immense that

it seemed to fill all space around him. For a moment it remained diffuse, flickering like a Gargantuan candle flame, soaring to the perimeter of his vision with darting tongues of blue fire.

Then colors coalesced out of the glare, blues and yellows and purples, melting, running together to form a gigantic semi-circle of wildly shouting men and women —Scorpion men and Scorpion women. Tiers upon tiers of them, extending vertically above him for three hundred feet and then falling away in a sweeping downward curve.

He was in the midst of three hundred thousand spectators, with a frightened Ruth Fraser at his side. She was clutching his arm and staring and he could feel her shivering against him as the shouts rose to a deafening crescendo.

"It isn't a bullfight," she gasped. "It's a slaughter. Each of those Scorpions are walking to their death. They're doing it deliberately. They're hoping to be gored."

"No!" Lawrence scarcely recognized his own voice, so taut was it with emotion and shock. "They can't be that insane."

"But they are They are, I tell you. Just look at them."

He stared down into the white, circular arena where eight Scorpion matadors were converging on two enraged bulls. They carried no weapons; their breasts were bared to the charge. The bulls were enormous, twelve feet in height, with curving horns that almost met high above their heads.

No such bulls had ever been sired on Earth, or could have survived in competition with the smaller and more agile beasts of a Spanish bullring. But they were agile enough and what they lacked in ground-covering maneuverability they made up for in ferocity and size.

"We were both unconscious when they brought us here," Ruth Fraser whispered, her voice harsh with desperation. "I came to before you did. I saw it all. At first the matadors were armed. They went at those bulls with swords, singing, shouting with joy. They administered a hundred stab wounds and yet the bulls did not go down.

"Now the bulls are at bay, raging, eager to kill. If they wished to live, those matadors should have approached them armed with swords."

"Lances," Lawrence said.

"What?"

"Lances—not swords. They'll be killed, all right. They're not shouting with joy now. Their faces are harsh, fanatical. The life hatred must have come upon them."

Lawrence swayed, running the back of his hand across his forehead, wondering just how much

more of this he could stand. The games had been bad enough—the wrestlers, the pole-vaulters, the disc-throwers, the runners, the rapier-parrying youths bent on inflicting a crippling wound.

The spectator sports and the spectator dances. All in the open, under the blazing sunlight—hour after hour, with no rest, no letup. A week of it, under Duke's tutelage. The whirling dances and the community dances, youths and maidens in a frenzy, pirouetting wildly and ever more wildly.

The strain on the spectators was as bad—perhaps worse—than the strain on the contestants themselves. But the Scorpions never seemed to tire of it. They shouted—screamed with joy. With joy, *joy*— How often he had heard that word, what an intolerable mockery it had become.

Was there any joy in watching men die, as the matadors far below were about to die, and even as some of the joyful ones had died, dropping in their tracks from sheer exhaustion and never waking up again.

Was there any joy in surrendering to joy until it killed you?

Someone far below shouted, "The bulls are pain-maddened!"

But Jim Lawrence scarcely heard. He was still in a trance, thinking back, remembering—the lovers. Yes, he had observed them too. All five of the weary, stunned men and women from Earth had been forced to watch the lovers. He had seen the lovers strolling together over garden terraces until they must have grown to hate one another and yet dared not show it, dared not cry out in protest when love had passed its zenith.

He was with Duke again, reliving it all, the days and nights of furious activity. The spectacles, the sports—and the over-crowded living conditions of millions of Scorpions. He could still see their hutlike dwellings in his mind's eye, tucked away in mountain crevices where they could creep out at dawn and welcome the returning sun with shouts of joy, could dance and weave about in circles, arm and arm, until their limbs grew weary and they sank down with the flame of joy extinguished.

"They are merely resting," Duke had assured him. "They will be summoned at noon to the arena or at night to the dances to engage in a further display of joy."

The spectator sports were exhausting, but the participation sports and games were worse. The ten-day bicycle races—and what did it matter if the vehicles were gyroscopic and quite unlike bicycles on Earth—and the wrestling matches that went on for hours and the wild animals baitings, too cruel to have been tolerated on Earth, even if the animals were anaesthetized in the end.

"You will find the hunt exhilarating," Duke had assured him.

The chase, the hunt. There was joy in that, too, beating through jungle brush in pursuit of sabre-toothed cats, with dun-colored flanks and huge, bushy manes. Day after day, night after night, a month of hunting, while the participants sat around campfires singing joyful songs until their voices gave out.

"I did not enjoy it," he had told Duke. "I am glad that it's over."

In a desperate effort to throw off the coiled-spring feeling that was growing, expanding inside his head, pressing outward against his temples, Lawrence forced himself to remember less immediate aspects of the Scorpion civilization—the museums of science and art which he had seen, the schools, hospitals and playgrounds, the bridges and roads, the spaceports, and the vast industrial construction plants.

He recalled the sympathetic eyes of a dark-haired Scorpion woman who had smiled and said, "I doubt if you will ever truly understand us."

But the coiled-spring feeling remained. Everywhere there was a too great brightness, a too complete surrender to joy. Even the sick in the hospitals seemed like joyful children about to be released from school, about to go romping over dandelion-bright meadows the instant the dismissal bell sounded or the teacher turned her back. And the Scorpions in the laboratories and the factories worked without letup, singing, shouting as they labored, giving themselves so exuberantly to their tasks that they wore themselves out.

He could still hear Duke saying, "We do not work to increase wealth. To us work is a creative joy. We would be lost without it."

Everywhere on the planet work had become a creative necessity, work joyfully embraced, but so demanding that it could drive Scorpions—as it certainly would have driven men—to their death. Sports had become a necessity, singing, dancing, the excitements of the chase, taking risks, 'living it up'—and now far below eight Scorpion matadors were walking to their death. The most horrible of deaths—self-impalement, self-immolation—on the horns of enraged and savage beasts.

"The beasts are pain-maddened!" came again from below. "Their charge will be deadly."

From the eight matadors all joy had departed. But for that very reason their self-imposed martyrdom seemed inhuman, unnatural, monstrous and a frightening thing to watch.

Jim Lawrence did not want to watch the matadors die. He covered his face with his hands, and heard only the shouting for a mo-

ment, becoming louder and louder. The shouting was no longer joyful. The spectators had become aware of what was taking place and were pleading with the matadors to withdraw before it was too late, to become joyful and exuberantly audacious again.

But even as they shouted they must have known that their pleading would be in vain. There could be no recovery from the blight, the affliction, the life-hatred. When once it took complete possession of a Scorpion there could be no turning back. The arrow of his destiny could point in only one direction—toward a despairing apathy, or self-destruction.

Apathy in some, a more violent urge in others. Not even apathy was completely negative. It could not be sustained without an effort of will—the will to turn one's face resolutely against all joyful effort, all hope, to surrender utterly to despair. Apathy was life-rejection in its simplest form. Self-destruction was its monstrous flowering, the urge full-blown.

"I have been waiting for a moment like this," a calm voice said. "Look down into the area, Jim Lawrence. You are about to witness a tragedy that will seem intolerable to you. But you must look. Unless you do, we will have made no progress. How can I ever hope to understand you as an individual if you are not put, once or twice, to a test such as this? Just how much can you endure? *I must know.*"

Lawrence uncovered his eyes then. But he did not look downward into the arena. He looked instead at the familiar, unbending figure who had materialized out of the shadows at his side.

He said nothing, but his lips tightened and a look of anger—dangerous in its intensity—came into his eyes.

It was Ruth Fraser at his side who spoke. "It is more than I can endure," she said. "Duke . . . Duke . . . did you bring me here to make me suffer?"

The Scorpion's hand went out to clasp her arm in a firm, reassuring embrace. At least, it seemed like an embrace, as complete as if he had put his arm around her and drawn her gently to him.

"I would spare you all suffering if I could," he said. "You have suffered too much on Earth. But you two have more inner strength than the others. The five from Earth have collapsed. They have reached the end of their endurance and have turned against me in bitterness.

"They have refused to go on. Each was imaginative and resolute, with great reserves of strength to draw on. But the ordeals they experienced gave them no new spiritual insights, nothing beyond what we already knew.

To find a cure we must seek further. We must seek it in you—or in Jim Lawrence."

"Seek it in me, then," Lawrence said. "Let her alone."

The Scorpion's eyes seemed to grow luminous as he returned Lawrence's accusing stare. "She knows that she is free to go," he said. He turned then and spoke directly to Ruth Fraser. "Do you wish to go?"

She shook her head. "No," she said. "I'll stay."

"Watch then. Look down—both of you."

The matadors were within thirty feet of the bulls now, with purple and orange challenge-cloths flung over their arms—colors which, on a planet where bulls grew gigantic in girth, seemed to have a strange power to excite and enrage.

To send a bull charging with a red cloth on Earth was, in itself, no mean feat—for there is nothing in red which excites a bull, if animal psychologists are to be believed. It is the movement, the brightness alone which excites. But here the colors themselves were danger-signals, and when carried by a man or a Scorpion straight toward an already wounded and enraged beast a charge was certain to ensue.

The matadors had spread out a little and were converging in a semi-circle and the foremost was already so near to the most formidable-looking of the two bulls that the animal's wild snortings must have been loud in his ears, the vapor from his breathing a thin spray enveloping him.

Suddenly the bull charged. It pawed the ground once, lowered its head and plunged toward the unarmed, completely defenseless Scorpion, with a bellowing so loud that it could be heard on the highest tier.

The great, almost interlocking horns struck the matador full in the chest. He was lifted up, hurled high into the air and came down with a sickening thud thirty feet from the beast's wheeling bulk.

He lay motionless, his arms outspread, a red stain spreading slowly over the pumice-white arena floor. A shout that was half a groan, full-throated, deafening and incredible in its volume, came from the crowded tiers. It rose and fell in three successive waves, with the almost rhythmic regularity which mass hysteria alone can impart.

And when it dwindled to an agonized murmur the voices of individuals could be heard—Scorpion women screaming from tier to tier, Scorpion men shouting to quiet them, or voicing their own horror in stifled moans and barely audible sobs.

"Stop them!" a Scorpion woman screamed. "It isn't too late! *Kill the bulls!*"

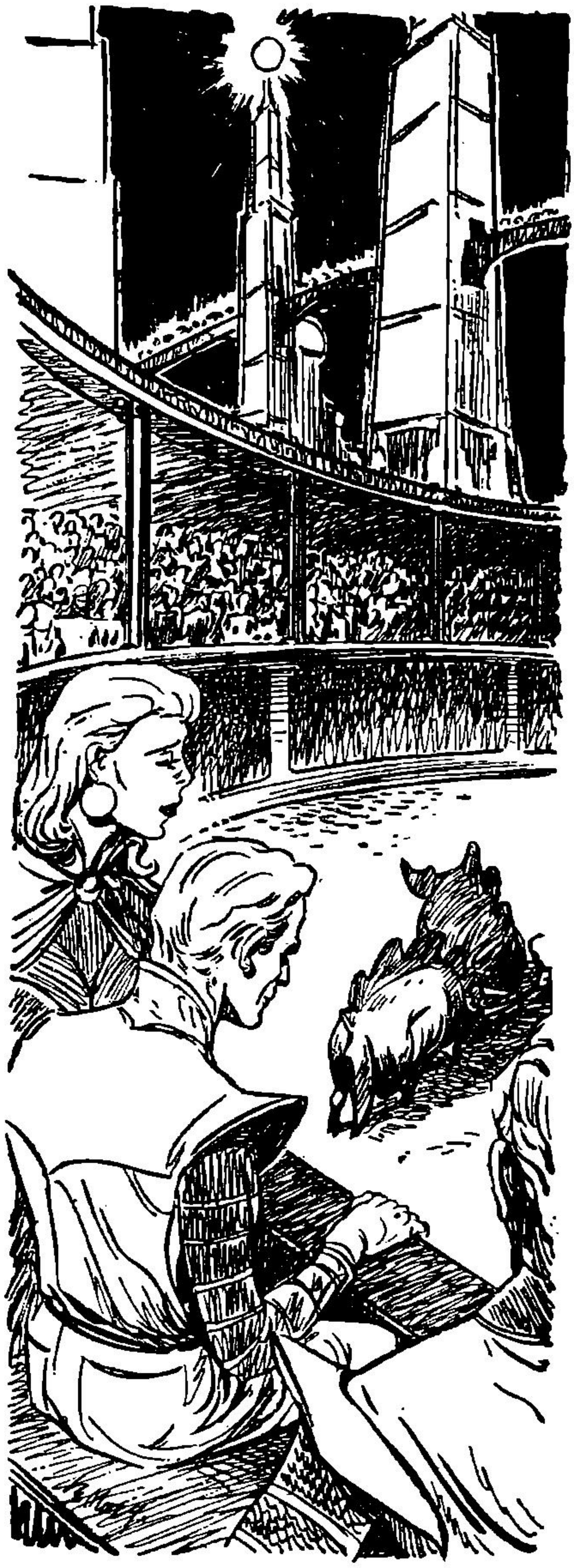
The plea was heeded by someone in authority. A shot rang out, sharp, almost deafening, and one of the bulls toppled to its knees and collapsed forward, its flanks streaked with crimson. But rescue came too late to save all the matadors. Two more were savagely gored and hurled high into the air by the second bull before another bullet could be fired.

The surviving bull's vitality seemed almost beyond belief. Three shots failed to halt it as it charged for a second, and then a third time. It trampled underfoot a matador who had hurled himself toward its lowered horns, ripping the purple-and-orange challenge-cloth to shreds and goring still another Scorpion as it charged straight across the arena toward the spectators in the lowermost tier.

It thudded against the guard rail and recoiled, its horns splintered and dangling, its right leg pawing the ground. It was starting back toward the center of the arena when a barrage of shots brought it down.

Jim Lawrence stirred then for the first time. He had watched the tragedy in complete silence, unable to move or rise, sharing the agony of the matadors, hurt by the cruelty to the bulls and yet realizing that human life came first.

He had watched with a kind of hypnotic detachment, and yet he



had felt the terror, the outrage, almost as an affront to himself. His every civilized instinct had been outraged, and he experienced resentment and a desire to forge his indignation and rage into a weapon which he could hurl straight at Duke.

He became aware suddenly that Duke's eyes were upon him, that he was being observed, studied, watched.

"It gave you a great deal of pain, did it not?" Duke asked, in a voice that hardly rose above a whisper. "Pain—and shock. Empathy. You have a great deal of it. You are a man of kindly instincts—you can suffer, feel with and for others. But just knowing that will not help us. There has to be something more."

"Good God!" Lawrence murmured, feeling almot physically ill, his anger ebbing away. "What more do you want? What more could you ask of me?"

"The answer—the cure. I had hoped that in some way you would reveal a *new* emotion . . . a behavior pattern which only the men and women of Earth would be capable of. There is something we lack and which we hoped you might possess. But I fear our search is to be a hopeless one."

Before Lawrence could reply he became aware that Duke was no longer looking at him, but beyond him. He was staring down at the still form of Ruth Fraser, lying slumped on the cold stone of the tier just beneath the seat which she had occupied with more courage than bodily strength.

"She has fainted," Duke said, bending and gathering her into his arms. "I'm afraid that she, too, is at the end of her endurance. We are alone now, you and I—alone in our search of wisdom, our struggle to solve a dark and almost impenetrable mystery. If we do not solve it the Scorpion image will dim and fade. The mirror of eternity can never grow completely dark, but of the Scorpions . . . there will be no trace."

XII

THE SCORPION meditation cell was monastic in its simplicity. It contained no furniture and the occupant sat—if he sat at all—upon a stone bench projecting from the wall. He paced—and he usually did pace—across a twelve-foot expanse of weathered stone.

There was one window, very high up in the wall. Beyond it stretched a gray patch of sky. There were no weaving boughs beyond the window, only another gray wall a hundred feet away and splotches of sunlight on that wall.

No snatches of bird-song came from beyond the window, no voices raised in gaiety or made somber by sorrow.

But it was not the silence which made Jim Lawrence bow his head in torment and beat with his fists upon his chest. It was not the silence—but rage.

He had spent less than ten hours in the cell, yet it seemed to him that a lifetime had passed. Not a human lifetime on Earth but the few months that were a lifetime on this planet of no return.

How many questions dared he ask himself, he wondered—how much freedom could he allow himself in his thoughts without running the risk of going stark, raving mad?

Well . . . he had to make a start. He had to begin somehow, to experiment, to analyze and dissect and define.

Define. Yes, that was a good word, a sound word, a word with a fine, scalpel-like incisiveness to it. Dissect . . . and define.

Why not start by defining the exact meaning of such semantic imponderables as "civilization"—"progress"—"achievement" and —yes, "endurance."

Start with "endurance"—a word frequently on Duke's lips. What had enabled him to endure? All of the other words would fall into place, would take on very definite and rewarding meanings if he could answer that one.

What had enabled him to survive, to grip the handrails and hold on? He had watched all of the spectator sports and he'd participated, and the increasing agony of participating, the tension, the whipped-up aliveness, had nearly driven him mad. Yet somehow he'd managed to hang on. How? Why?

Answer that one and you've got the answer to everything, boy.

Think, think hard. Think back to that hunt that was intolerable to you, trailing the beaters, knowing that at any moment a sabre-toothed cat might leap from the underbrush and rend you tooth and claw. The bearers were chanting and singing with joy and you had to pretend to be joyful too. But you were actually as mad as hell.

Why were you mad—so furious? Injustice? Wait now . . . hold fast to that word. Injustice. The absolute injustice of the hunt in the first place, the unnecessary cruelty of it, its basic absurdity as an outlet for joy.

Defects. There were defects in —hold on now, take a firm grip on that one. There were defects in the whole Scorpion attitude toward joy.

They overplayed it. They forced themselves to be joyful even when they were in danger of losing their lives. They took unnecessary risks to keep that whipped-up emotion always at white heat. The Scorpions had a secret that enabled them to enlarge and enrich human experi-

ence beyond anything that had ever been attempted on Earth.

The worship of joy—yes, that was sound, glorious even, as far as joy itself went. But there was another side to the coin. When joy was carried to excess it exhausted itself. There had to be something else—something you could put in its place.

No—that wasn't it, exactly. Not in its place. Something rather that would round it out, supplement it, give it greater scope. Something that would complete the circle, point the way to complete fulfillment. When joy exhausted itself and there seemed to be nothing left—the self-destructive, the life-hating impulses took over.

The Scorpions were an old race. It had taken them perhaps a half million years to exhaust the joy impulse—rather, to carry it to excess and beyond, to complete sterility.

Now the great discovery had lost its savor. It was breaking down everywhere, in the villages, the ten cities, everywhere. All over the planet, life-hatred and apathy and rejection were manifesting themselves.

Duke was, almost certainly, a genius. Was he the guiding intelligence behind the long journey to Earth, in search of an answer—a cure? The missing part of the great, unresolved enigma? It was not too important. Possibly Duke and a dozen other Scorpions. Search the universe. Find a race a little different from ours—a race that may have the answer.

Jim Lawrence imposed a stern discipline on himself, on his thinking. His thoughts were leaping ahead of a most important word, a word that he had gripped firmly for a moment and then released, which was semantically inexcusable.

That word was—*endurance*.

What had enabled him to hang on when the Scorpion worship of joy had seemed to him intolerable? He must think carefully now, analyze his emotions. Wasn't it—anger? Not just ordinary anger, but a burning indignation because the Scorpions seemed to be wearing a blindfold and forcing him along a path that he did not want to take.

Wasn't it because the Scorpions seemed completely unaware of how defective their civilization was in some respects?

All right now. Take a long, steady look at the Scorpion civilization. Its scientific achievements were prodigious, putting to shame the scientific achievements of Earth. In refusing to adopt a routine, utilitarian attitude toward daily living the Scorpions were centuries ahead of Earth. There was no Puritanism in the Scorpion culture, no stiff-necked bowing to taboos.

The Scorpions had the courage to look upon pleasure as a posi-

tive good, and love as a positive good—the best things in life. What then was wrong with the Scorpion civilization? In the first place, they did not come to close grips with the more intolerable aspects of community living in a society that was far from completely just.

Why shouldn't the Scorpions be more indignant, angry, disturbed, rebellious? There were intolerable living conditions on the Scorpion planet. The worship of joy, when allowed full scope, resulted in a slave economy. No Scorpion even attempted to be his brother's keeper when all human experience, on an outward plane, at least, seemed dedicated to an almost corybantic abandonment to joy alone.

And there were times when it was necessary for all men—and this applied to Scorpions surely—to be their brother's keeper. Unless they accepted that responsibility all generous emotions, all human compassion, vanished from human life. And the Scorpions were human. Lawrence thought that they were.

And suddenly, in a blinding flash of intuition, he believed he must have the answer. It *was* the answer.

In his wild elation he could scarcely control himself.

Jim Lawrence went to the wall and beat upon it, beat upon the hard stone until his knuckles bled.

"Duke!" he shouted. "Come, let me out. I have the answer, I have the cure!"

XIII

THE VILLAGE street was completely silent, the small white huts reflecting back the sunlight in thin, wavering shafts that illumined first one despairfully staring Scorpion face and then another. Lawrence and Duke cast long shadows. The instruments they were erecting caused them to intercept the downslanting radiance at a dozen points.

A twenty-foot projection screen had been set up in the middle of the street. Opposite it, on an elevated platform, Lawrence and Duke had erected a complex and elaborate audiovisual instrument which would throw a series of three-dimensional images on the screen for everyone on the street to see.

The living mummies sat huddled in doorways, not moving at all, their faced blanched, shrunken masks, their eyes glazed and apathetic and not even turned toward the screen.

For fifteen or twenty minutes, while Lawrence and Duke labored to complete their preparations, no one moved or spoke. Then an aged Scorpion—a male—struggled to his feet in one of the doorways and cried out, "Go away. Why did you come here to torment us? This alien is no friend

of ours. Why have you brought him here? For us there is nothing new under the sun . . . nothing we care about. Go away, depart!"

Duke turned slowly and looked for a moment at the old Scorpion with compassion flaming in his yellow-green eyes. He spoke without raising his voice, and yet his words seemed to carry to the far end of the village street.

"Please be patient," he pleaded. "We have come to help you. We will make no demands upon you. You will see with your own eyes why we have no right to make demands. You will see how blind, self-centered, short-sighted and cruel we have been. Cruel and unjust. What you are about to see is a great evil. We will need your help in correcting that evil. We must all work together to correct it."

He turned back toward Lawrence, who was standing in tight-lipped silence by the projection instrument now, his hands busy with the controls.

"All right," Duke said. "We are ready."

Lawrence clicked the instrument on. For a moment there was only a steady, humming sound. Then the great screen became flooded with light and sound and color.

A Scorpion cliff village came into view. For a hundred feet in a vertical direction the sunlight glowed brightly on small, circular huts perched precariously on jagged granite outcroppings that conjured up an image of cruel fingers pointing toward an abyss of emptiness and utter desolation.

A brightness filled the hollows between the dwellings, but beyond there loomed only the gray sky, and a wilderness of rocks and spiny, cactus-like growths that arose starkly from the lengthening shadows.

Then a hut interior came into view. Two young Scorpions lay asleep on a mat of straw, their faces drawn and haggard, their small bodies undernourished. An adult Scorpion came into the hut. He seized the children by the arms and began to shake them. He slapped the face of the male child until his eyes opened in dazed bewilderment.

The two children were taken out of the hut to the edge of the cliff. There they were joined by additional children and other adults. The Scorpions joined hands and began to sing and dance, to weave about in the sunlight.

But there was a weariness on all of the faces, a resentment at being so rudely awakened, and all of the dancers seemed undernourished. The dance became wilder, a torturing nightmare, and suddenly one of the children was screaming.

Jim Lawrence spoke then, for the first time since the screen had

taken on the almost frightening aspect of a reality that seemed somehow even larger and more immediate than life itself, a reality so selective that it resembled more the interpretive vision of an inspired and gifted painter than it did a mere photographic recording in light and sound and color.

"Selectivity is the key," Lawrence whispered to Duke. "A photographic recording can be a work of art, with emotionally shattering overtones. In a moment they should begin to see and to *understand*. Before they merely saw—intolerable living conditions, deprivations, a harshness and an injustice that no one should be called upon to endure.

"The injustice was subconsciously denied or ignored. It was obscured and made to seem sporadic, and almost accidental by the greatness of Scorpion civilization on the positive side—its scientific achievements, its attitude toward daily living."

"Yes . . ." Duke said. "Yes, I know. And it is a society I still believe in because I know all life is imperfect and that the greatest of wrongs can be set right."

"They can be," Lawrence said, "if emotional shock, the emotional awakening, can be made profound enough. That's my sole purpose now and why we've worked so hard these past few days together. I hope this presentation awakens your people. I must rip away the blindfolds they have drawn over their eyes. It's only human not to want to understand anything that seems too frightening. We all seek to hide truths which will shatter the belief in social justice instilled in us in our infancy . . . our faith in the complete goodness, the complete rightness, of our own way of life.

"They've never before had the darker side of Scorpion society presented to them in quite this way, as a dramatic human tragedy unfolding directly before their eyes, stripped of all non-essentials, made compelling and selective by deliberate design. Earth's greatest playwrights—Sophocles, Shakespeare—had the genius always to create such an illusion. They knew how overpowering a performance on a lighted stage could be . . . how in the theatre each actor becomes an eloquent and moving figure, enlarged by spectator identification far beyond the dimensions of ordinary life.

"Have patience now, wait. These recordings should be cumulative in their emotional impact. In a moment they should begin to experience the first stirrings of understanding, of anger. And when they do—"

The cliffside scene had faded from the screen and another was unfolding. A dozen Scorpion adults were laboring over complex-looking tools and instruments in an industrial assembling plant.

They were singing as they worked, but they did not appear to be singing inwardly. Their faces were as drawn and haggard as the faces of the sleeping children had been.

Suddenly one of the Scorpion workers bent and set in motion an odd-looking instrument with a projecting metal hood that gleamed dully in the overhead light. Beneath the hood there was a bright and continuous flashing. The Scorpion adjusted the instrument carefully while he continued to sing, regulating its power-flow, slowing it down and speeding it up. Then something distracted his attention for a moment. He looked up quickly, and as he did so his hand moved dangerously close to the flashing.

He leapt back with an agonized scream and then stood utterly motionless, staring down in horror at the gleaming red stump where his hand should have been. The instrument slowed and the sharp, scissor-like blades that had taken away his hand ceased to rotate.

Instantly everyone in the plant stopping singing.

The scene vanished and the bullfight which Lawrence had witnessed filled the screen . . . The deafening shouts, the gored matadors, the enraged and charging beasts—came into the village street, and remained for ten full minutes. It was brighter, more terrifying than the original spectacle had been. After that—silence.

The screen went blank and no one spoke for a moment.

Then the Scorpions who sat huddled in the doorways began to whisper among themselves. It was a low murmur at first, a barely audible undercurrent of sound on cracked and shriveled lips. Then, quite suddenly, a Scorpion woman cried out in torment. She had visualized torment and tragedy. She was feeling resentment, anger—for the first time.

The words were almost a scream, high-pitched, trailing off into unintelligibility. "Don't know how I stood it . . . don't know . . . don't know . . ."

Another woman's voice arose in bitter protest. "Those poor children! Did you see their faces—the wretchedness in their eyes? They were forced to dance and sing when they were weak with hunger. Hunger or neglect—a cruel indifference. They wanted only to sleep. You could see that."

A male voice demanded, "How could we have been so blind? Where were our eyes? We have laws which prohibit children from working in industry. But there is little joy left in any of our children. We force them to be joyful when they wish only to play simple games, wish only to be carefree and well-nourished. You cannot force joy upon children. They

are naturally joyful, if you are not cruel to them.

"It was *there, all the time*—this cruel thing, this injustice. But we did not see it. Why did we not put an end to it? Why did we not walk the roads in protest? We turned our faces from joy because we were weak, and blind and afraid. We gave up the struggle, we buried ourselves alive. We could have protested, but we did nothing."

A young male Scorpion, so gaunt and emaciated that his body seemed a mere shriveled husk over protruding bones, cried out in bitter self-reproach, "Yes, yes —that is true. We did not want to go on living. But we had no right to make such a decision when there were so many who needed us, so many who lacked even our inner strength . . . the wretched and the helpless."

A young Scorpion woman whose face, despite its gauntness, still retained a vestige of youthful beauty, rocked slowly back and forth, sobbing, "I could not look at those charging bulls. The cruelty . . . the brutality was more than I could bear. We are all guilty. We allowed ourselves to become callous, we accepted without question the cruel lies we had been taught to believe. I wanted to tear my garments in shame. I only saw the joy before —now I know it was destruction."

The old Scorpion who had spoken in anger while Duke had been assembling the projection instrument had sat tight-lipped in the doorway of his hut and refused at first even to look at the screen. But during the bullfight scene he *had* looked, and now he arose to speak again.

"We must put an end to the cruelty," he said, with a different kind of anger. "We must work together to build a better world."

Up and down the streets his words were caught up and repeated. From lip to lip the defiant cry passed . . . from living mummy to living mummy. But they were no longer mummies now. Their lethargy, their life-hatred, was gone.

There was silence again for a moment. Then Duke spoke without raising his voice and yet his words were heard distinctly by everyone.

"Yes . . . I think we have found the answer we have been seeking. I think we have found the cure. You have something to live for now, something to replace the bleak emptiness and give new meaning, new direction to your lives. But the struggle will not be easy and it will go on for as long as we exist as a people. We have not yet, despite all of our gains, conquered poverty, disease, human ignorance and stupidity. There will be more schools to build, more research to conduct,

more battles to be fought with those who have set their faces resolutely against change.

"We must be fearless in our search and when joy exhausts itself and becomes an intolerable burden we must put it aside, knowing that you do not destroy a shining garment when you take it off and place it, neatly folded, in a chest.

"There is another garment which we must wear at times and rejoice because we are privileged to put it on. It is the garment of social justice and social change, and it must be spread wide enough to cover everyone, to cover all of the growing needs of a growing society until we stand together in complete solidarity under the stars."

He turned to Jim Lawrence then and said, quite simply, "You are a very good diagnostician. But I'm afraid that I cannot repay you as you would repay a wise physician on Earth. When the services rendered are very great . . . repayment becomes impossible." He nodded, standing very still . . . very straight.

"I don't think your hypothetical physician would mind at all," Lawrence said, warmed by the radiance of Duke's smile. "All I ask is to be taken back to Earth."

Duke said, "Yes, I thought you would make that request. Well . . . there is one who is staying because she wants to stay. I am hoping that she will never change her mind."

"I don't think she will," Lawrence said.

EPILOGUE

THE SCORPION SHIP passed slowly above the golden dome of the Capitol, encircling the long avenues of cherry trees in bloom and the crowds who had assembled without fear to watch its almost miraculously maneuvered descent.

It came to rest on a level lawn close to the Lincoln Memorial and from the shining central port a Scorpion and a man emerged and stood quietly awaiting the arrival of the delegates from the Great Powers and the small nations.

The long journey through space had not even dulled the glimmer on the smooth, cylindrical hull. And the messages sent ahead during the last stage of the journey seemed to blend with that glow and become a part of it . . . so that no one doubted the words that had come winging through space a week before the returning ship had been sighted on Mount Palomar.

"We will share with you all of our knowledge . . . all of our gains. Before we depart your technology will equal ours and there will be a free interchange of ideas between us. All barriers

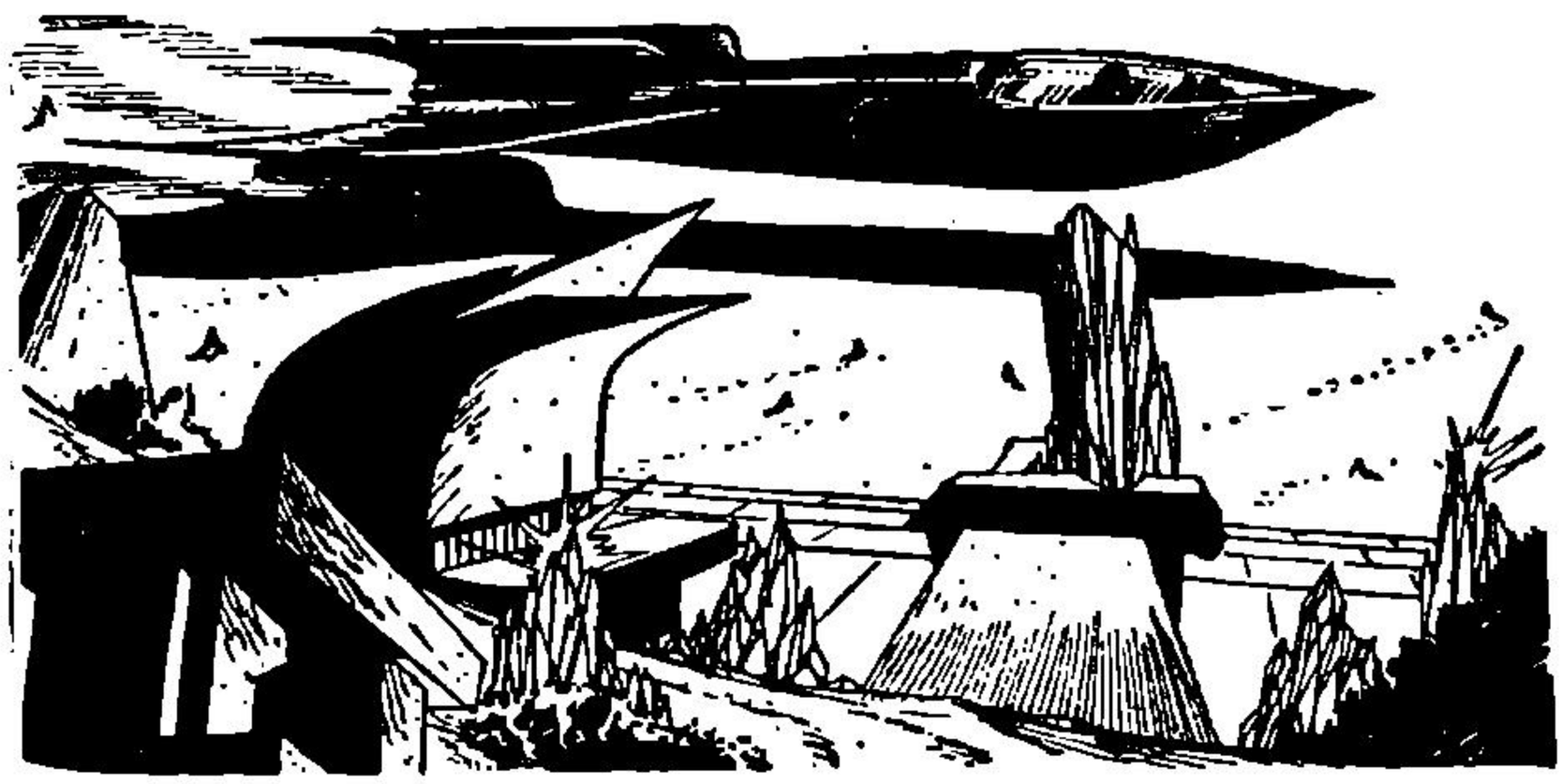
will be dissolved. For as long as you wish we will communicate freely together. Our mission on Earth has been successful and there is no need for us to search further. All of our ships will be withdrawn.

"We will not return unless you request us to do so . . . as freely invited guests and goodwill ambassadors, as journeymen scientists, as fellow-wayfarers on the long journey . . . 'to follow knowledge like a shining star.' And you will be warmly welcomed, always, when you visit us in return."

On the wide, green lawn, between the stately trees, a strange peace and serenity seemed to filter down with the sunlight, touching each bough in a subtle and gradual way, until all things grew quiet. It was almost as if in some extraordinary manner, the ship itself had become enveloped in a phantom aura of green.

Beneath the central port Duke turned to the man at his side and said: "When I address the United Nations I will feel a little more at ease if you are on the platform beside me, Jim Lawrence. Will you be?"

The quick, reassuring response in the level eyes confronting him left no room for doubt on that score.



A NEW COMPLETE MURRAY LEINSTER NOVEL NEXT ISSUE

Strange things can happen when the hot trumpets blow. But this was real cool music and the aliens were cool too—in a kind of darkly frenzied sort of way.

by WALT SHELDON

That Real, Cool Madness

THERE WEREN'T many customers, so I wasn't up there in front of the band. They play fine without me—better, maybe. The pianist taps off to give the beat and they hold it solid all the way through.

Right now they were playing one of my own compositions, "Bright Stars and Goofbutts" and my brother Oliver had a funny looking machine the size of a suitcase on the table and was trying to make like scientific with me and Carla Wilson, who is our canary.

"Now," said Oliver, who is big, heavyset and slow moving. "Look. Just look what that crazy music of yours looks like on the 'scope."

Carla giggled.

I guess I better explain about Oliver and everything before I go any further. He wouldn't have been in the *Hot Lick Club* at three a.m.—he's the type who has warm milk and crackers and goes to bed early—if it hadn't been for Carla. He's an inspector for the Public Safety Commission, which means he's sort of a detective. Anyway, that's about what he looks like—a big, gray, dumb dick. He's five years older than me. For almost thirty years he's disapproved of me, and me of him. An armed truce, I guess you'd call it. There aren't too many who know that Inspector Oliver Julius Green is brother to Rich Green, bandleader, like they say in Shakespeare.

Even at that it wouldn't have been so bad if I was just a respectable, garden-variety bandleader. You see, the whole trouble is I play what some people call progressive jazz and others call noise. Don't ask me for a long hair explanation why—I just got to do it that way. If I don't it burns, inside.

It burns and it bothers. In a dif-

ferent way it bothers Maury Peel, who runs the *Hot Lick Club* and complains we keep the customers from coming. Only he gets us for peanuts, so what right has *he* to squawk? I'm the one who should squawk. Making peanuts, and being, as you might say, on the bottom of the ladder of fame, I haven't even dared pop the formal query to Carla—though I think she knows what's on my mind about her. She's a pineapple blonde with blue eyes bigger than Rajah's jewels. She's gone, cool, terrif, sensational, and real, man, real.

So now Oliver pointed to this silly-looking machine of his which had a screen, like on television, and said, "See? *That's* what your music is. Real good music—it wouldn't look all squiggled and complicated like this."

I snorted. Oliver couldn't tell Jascha Heifetz from Sidney Bechet, and couldn't pronounce either properly. The first triumph I ever had over him when we were kids was getting into the choir. He couldn't make it. The choirmaster looked at him and said I heard of people sing sharp, and people sing flat, but you're the first one I ever heard of sings *sideways*.

That's an honest fact. He had to be *told* my music wasn't for the ordinary ear, because by himself he wouldn't have known the difference.

This goofy machine he brought along—he just did it to get a dig in at me and impress Carla. I wasn't worried. I leaned back, noticed a round little drunk staggering across the dance floor toward our table, but didn't pay much attention to him right then.

I said to Oliver, "What do you call that gadget again?"

"Oscilloscope," he said. "It tests traffic noises. Dr. Maveris from the university lent it to us. And you know what he says? It's not the actual volume of the noise gets on your nerves. It's the frequencies and overtones. For instance, somebody scraping his nail down a blackboard can bother you more than a dynamite explosion."

"A machine you need to find that out," I said contemptuously.

At this point the round little drunk I'd noticed bumped into the table. He blinked at the machine and said, "Hey. Where's Wyatt Earp?"

"Beat it, chum," said Oliver mildly.

"Aw go 'head, get somethin' on the television. Better'n this crazy music." He hicced loudly.

"Friend," said Oliver, taking a badge out of his pocket, "kindly scram."

The drunk stared at the badge, blinked again, then said, "Awright. I know when I'm being persecuted." And staggered off. That was all there was to it—right then.

So Oliver continued to explain

the oscilloscope to Carla, shouting over the noise of the band when he had to, and she sat there listening with her great big eyes like she always does. And I sat scowling and digesting worms. This went on for exactly two and a half choruses of "Bright Stars and Goofbutts." Now the band came to the end of the thing, a fanning out progression to an augmented thirteenth chord with two suspension points, all in broken rhythm against the long blast of the trumpets—*Vrray! Bra! Bra!*

Then that echoey silence the instant after it all ends.

And in that silence a terrible, sudden screaming. Terror, boiled down. It was the little drunk. He was staggering out of the corridor that led to the washrooms, and his face was a flat, dead gray. He had his palms hard to his temples and he kept screaming.

There were a few wild words too. *"The music! I hear it—the music!"*

He started a strange, clumsy jitterbugging all by himself out there on the dance floor. Like a rat—crazed, running around in its cage.

Oliver, of course, was the one who took over while everybody else was still staring. He got up slowly, ambled toward the little guy, then got him in one of those trick grips policemen always seem to know. He called to the bar in an easy voice. "Call an ambulance." And then he moved the drunk—or maybe he wasn't so drunk now—into a corner and held him there gently.

I only half-noticed all of this. I was staring at a lean guy with sharp cheekbones I just this minute saw at the bar. The lean guy had an interested look in his eye. And that figured, because he happened to be a reporter for the City News Bureau that all the papers in town get their local news from.

And so, the next morning, there it was—on the front page. I sat in pajamas in my little apartment —about eleven-thirty, it was— and stared at it. MODERN MUSIC DRIVES LISTENERS MAD, was the headline. Only, as I read on, I saw that it wasn't just *me* they were picking on. The Municipal Hospital had admitted six cases of the same kind from various places in the city the night before! A truck driver hauling produce—he'd had a radio in the truck. A housewife. An engineer at an all night radio station. A bowling alley pin-boy. Always, they'd been listening to music. The hospital wouldn't say much about their condition, except some gobbledygook about the symptoms resembling schizophrenia.

The doorbell rang, popping me three feet out of the sofa. I answered it and stared down at a little, broad-shouldered guy with a broken nose and an old-fash-

ioned, handle-bar mustache. He had a deep voice, and an almost-English accent, like from Harvard. "Mr. Green? John Maveris is my name. I'm in the physics department at the university."

"Oh, sure," I said. "You're helping with this anti-noise campaign. My brother mentioned you. Come on in, Doctor. Coffee?"

He said yes, quite—and I got him some. Then we sat, facing each other in the living room. He supplied cigarettes. Turkish. He took a deep drag, frowned, and finally looked up. "Mr. Green," he said, "I perceive from your manner of dressing, general demeanor and so forth—no offense, now—that you are of a type generally regarded as cynical. At least outwardly."

I said, "Yeah?" and looked at him flatly, which, of course, was exactly what he meant.

"Nevertheless," he said, "you are regarded as something of a fine musician by some who should be authorities. The head of our music chair at the University, for one. This would seem to indicate that your outlook cannot be entirely shallow."

I still couldn't tell if it was compliment or dig. I said, "Keep talking."

He did. He was the kind who would. He thumbed his mustache and went on. "For some time I've been interested in the effect of the representation of energy we call sound waves upon the human mind. Since sound is, in effect, movement of the air and air does not reach the hearing centers of the brain, nor does the brain itself necessarily vibrate by conduction, being well-insulated, damage cannot in all cases be ascribed to physical effect.

"Besides there is too much evidence—such as the tarantism of the sixteenth century, when people heard strange rhythms and danced to death—that other factors are at work. Simple fatigue from everyday noises is itself more than physical."

He took a deep drag from the Turkish job and in the pause I let the meaning catch up with me. Then he continued. "I won't recite my case histories for you now. Later, perhaps. At any rate, for many years I have been interested in the propagation of sound waves and their effect on the mind; I call my own little corner of science *psychosonics*. Now in the study of this thing some curious evidence has come my way. It's startling how many so-called normal people become anything from neurotic to downright mad from sound. It's amazing how many mental cases have auditory hallucinations —much more than visual or tactile. You follow me, Mr. Green?"

"I'm afraid I do," I said, not wishing to give him the satisfaction of thinking otherwise.

He nodded. He leaned forward.

He looked straight at me, and I noticed for the first time that his eyes were a bright blue—a very bright blue. You might even say they shone. "I am convinced that something—some alien form of life, or some unknown creature or force—is *deliberately creating all of these cases of auditory hallucination.*"

I cocked my head. I hadn't expected the guy to be a crackpot. I couldn't think of anything else so I said, "Yeah?" again.

Maveris said, as if he hadn't heard me, "By carefully charting the sound conditions in each case of what we might call sound madness characterized by auditory hallucinations I believe I can predict the conditions under which the phenomena will recur. My studies lead to one very definite conclusion. A kind of rule of thumb—" he cleared his throat—"it may be known as Maveris's law some day. At any rate, the more cacophonic, *yet rhythmic,* the sound, the greater the incidence of madness. This points directly to what I believe is called—er—progressive jazz as the ideal catalyst in the matter. And you, Mr. Green, are probably the foremost purveyor of progressive jazz today."

"That's what they tell me."

"Mm. Very well. You can help me then. I've already communicated with a distinguished group of scientists who, like myself, are interested in sound. I've arranged for the use of the Heaslip Memorial Chapel as a kind of laboratory. We can have your orchestra on the stage. We can, for an indefinite period, play your sort of music several hours each day, bring what apparatus we need to bear upon it, and of course some of the finest minds in the country. We could begin—oh, I think Friday perhaps. Enough should be here by then. Naturally, all of us would be donating our time to this cause."

The word donating came out in red letters. As far as I was concerned, anyway. "Whoa," I said. "Wait a minute. The union wouldn't allow us to—"

"I already have the consent of the union, Mr. Green."

I scowled. "Yeah. But not mine. Or the boys in the band. Look—we work for peanuts at the *Hot Lick Club* as it is and we put a lot of time in rehearsal. We'd lose an hour on either end of your little concert getting our instruments back and forth. Besides—and it's time people realized this—playing music isn't all fun—something to be done just so we should be polite and charitable."

"Now, Mr. Green," he said.

But it was no dice. He talked for another half hour, and he did a selling job I wouldn't have thought a scientist capable of. A whole string of benefits for an in-

definite number of weeks I just couldn't go for.

He said something about I should be sure to get in touch with him if I changed my mind. He even left a card.

That night the *Hot Lick Club* was jam-packed. Before we got to the end of our first set there wasn't room on the dance floor to fumble for a pack of matches. Maury Peel managed to shove his way through the mob, though. He came up to the bandstand beaming. He was a dark little guy with a bald head and hands that flitted here and there like hummingbirds whenever he talked.

"Sensational, Rick," he told me. "Very sensational. That morbid bunch of smohs out there are all here to see somebody go nuts. I'm having the marquee changed outside—*Rick Green's Music of Madness*. Good, huh? And I got four extra bouncers on to handle the mob."

I glowered at him. "Yeah. Only there's something you forgot."

"What?"

"Our raises."

"Now, Rick, you understand I'm just starting in business on a shoestring, and can't afford to—"

I named the new figure.

He sighed as if he'd just been sentenced to death, said, "Okay. You win. I never thought I would get a bandleader with all the instincts of a bank robber."

I laughed at him. He was still getting us dirt cheap and he knew it. He shuffled off then, to order more whiskey or something, and I stepped off the stand to take a quick smoke, and in the wings Carla stopped me.

"Rick," she said, "I don't like it." Her big blue eyes seemed to be looking right through me. There's something about Carla. You always feel those big blue eyes can look into the air and see things you can't see—things maybe you aren't supposed to see, like flitting shades and vibrations and spirits that move into the night.

I said, "Don't like what? The mob? You got to get used to mobs—you'll be seeing 'em from now on, sweetie. We're on our way up. This is our first decent publicity break. And we just got a raise." I told her how much.

She said, "I still don't like it."

I took her by the waist suddenly. Now, with success a little more probable, I could get down to cases. "Listen, baby, you worry too much. What you need is somebody to take care of you. How would you like to—"

"No, Rick, no," she said. "Don't talk about that now."

"You're in love with that big gook, Oliver," I said.

She shook her head quickly. "I like Oliver. You know that. But I'm not in love with anybody. Not yet. That's the trouble, Rick. When I take a definite step I've go to be *sure*."

Out on the stand the pianist went *bum-tee-dum-dum-dum,* which meant it was time for another set.

So the next few sets went fine. Just fine. You know how people are; let them think everybody else thinks something is good and they'll applaud and whistle and stamp like crazy. That was what the mob did. None of them out there knew the difference between Jellyroll Morton and Guy Lombardo, but they danced, and bought drinks, and listened, and grinned and punched each other and called for more.

Mid-evening now. We were just starting to feel ourselves. There's this about progressive jazz: you got to work up to it. "Let's *really* give 'em one, fellas," I said to the band. "Number forty-three—'Bright Stars and Goofbutts.' "

We went into it. It starts with a drumbeat, a kind of broken four-four Goodman drive, and in the last part of every fourth bar the trumpets go *blat blat!* and the reeds tag a funny little weird trill on to it. This keeps up for a while. Then a sudden chord knocks them out of their seats, like in Haydn's Surprise Symphony—only of course a lot different. Then that pattern of four bars, *blat blat* keeps up all through it, like in an eight bar base Chaconne, which they used to do way back in the seventeenth century, and everybody takes an alternating solo chorus, with band choruses in between. It's a pretty cool piece of music, even if I say so myself.

Just before the last chorus the trumpet takes his solo, and the boy was really gone this evening —he was hitting notes only the dogs could hear.

That was when it happened.

Quickly, and all at once, so the things I'm telling you about took maybe a second or less. A bunch of people started that wild screaming—just like the little drunk the night before. Maybe as many as a dozen out of the whole mob. Somehow, on the jam-packed dance floor they managed to start to run around in circles. The others kind of faded away back to the tables. Their eyes were all wild, these dozen people, and you had the feeling that even though they ran around in circles they were looking for an exit—an exit they couldn't find.

There was just a momentary glimpse of them out there on the dance floor, and also Maury's four new bouncers running toward them. Then the real riot started. A lot of the others started yelling and screaming. And pushing and running for exits. Only not in quite the same way as the first dozen—the rest were getting just a regular routine panic. I saw one guy fall and get trampled.

I whirled back toward the band. "Over the Waves! Key of

F!" I yelled. "Ad lib it, and corn it up but good. The old maizola. Piano take four bar intro—"

We schmaltzed into "Over The Waves" but it didn't do much good.

A moment later some of the mob surged toward the bandstand. The base drum went *crunch!* I heard what sounded like a police whistle from near the door. I glimpsed Maury Peel hopping up and down in the bar trying to shout above the din and trying to tear out the hair of which he didn't have any. Tables and chairs were being broken—windows. The sound of falling glass. . . .

Maury Peel sent me an official letter about how we were fired and everything. He also sent a letter to the union, but that was hardly necessary. We didn't even show up the next night. We *knew.* A bass drum and a bass viol had been broken and all the keys on nearly all the saxes bent. The band was in sad shape. We had a meeting at my place and I said, "Don't worry, fellows, I'll straighten everything out," and things like that. But I could tell from the way they looked at me that they didn't believe a word of it.

Carla didn't even come to the meeting. I called her later to ask if she'd have supper with me, but she said no, she already had a date with my brother Oliver. Sweetly, she said it. You know how women are.

I sat down that evening and thought about everything. For some reason the stuff that Dr. Maveris had talked about kept coming back to me. Goofy as his talk had been it was an explanation—or at least the beginning of an explanation—why progressive jazz, and especially mine, should drive people bughouse. Of course, if I could show some kind of an explanation that would be better publicity than ever, and wipe out the stigma, as you might say, of what had happened at the *Hot Lick Club.*

I dug up Dr. Maveris's card, called him, and we sealed the bargain right then and there over the telephone.

I had something of a hassel getting the band together again and convincing them they ought to do this. Everyone said it was against his better judgement. I told them they were musicians and weren't supposed to have judgement. It was a bad thing to say because they countered with how about me. I said that was a different thing entirely. Anyway, I got them together.

It took a week to get things set up at the Heaslip Memorial Chapel. In that week over a hundred people, in various places, went mad from music. Some of the first patients were beginning

to recover now, but some, said the medicos, were in an absolutely hopeless shape.

The Mayor had called an emergency. The Governor was going to get out the National Guard. Scientists from all over the world were flocking to the city. The papers were full of it. And, with the unpredictable public the way it is, the sales of my record of "Bright Stars and Goofbutts" had dropped to almost zero. Nobody would touch the thing with a ten foot needle.

There was one other thing. Some of the victims of this thing—whatever it was—had begun to report seeing strange creatures, like drunks are supposed to see when they have d.t.s. This angle wasn't played up too much, but after what Doc Maveris had told me, it made me think.

The big day finally came. The band came out on to the stage of the Heaslip Memorial Chapel and there was a sudden silence you could have wrapped up and taken home with you. Dr. Maveris was down in front, thumbing his mustache, and he was the only one who was smiling at us. Out of pity, I think. Altogether there were maybe two hundred others in the seats out there. The way I understood it, if a bomb dropped on the chapel today it would wipe out seventy-five percent of the country's brain-power. It would even have included me.

The boys started to set up their instruments and I ducked back into the wings for my usual quick smoke. I took one more glance before going off, at the sea of faces, and at all the instruments and machines they'd set up—the only things I really recognized were oscilloscopes like Oliver had brought to the *Hot Lick*.

Funny that I should think of Oliver in that minute. Because there he was in the wings, grinning at me. He had his arm around Carla's waist. Carla looked like a kid on Christmas morning. She glowed.

"Hello, Rick," she said. "We've got news for you."

I knew what it would be. I could feel it. But just the same I said, "What?"

"Oliver and I are engaged."

"Yup," said Oliver, looking like a St. Bernard dog.

Something snapped. I whirled on Oliver. "You big, dumb ox. You lousy double crosser!"

"Now, Richard," he said. I hate the name Richard, and he knew it.

"The minute I get down, you start rubbing salt in my wounds! The minute my back is turned you punch me in the nose!"

"Rick," said Carla, "I wish you wouldn't take it like this. I may be forced to—"

"I'll fix you, brother, dear!" I said, glaring at Oliver. I moved toward him. He's bigger, stronger —but I'm quicker. Maybe it would be even odds. He'd always whipped me when we were kids, but I was a lot madder and smarter today. And willing to try.

Carla said, *"No!"*

My first punch was already whistling through the air. Oliver half-blocked it, but not entirely. It slid off his forearm and caught him on the cheek. Not a lethal blow, but it stung. He staggered back, tried to counter, and I caught him a quick one in the midsection. He said, "Oof." By that time he'd regained his balance, though, and started punching back.

I couldn't hope to block his punches. They broke through my guard like an express train hitting a wagon-load of chickens, so I tried weaving and dodging instead. That worked fairly well. We had at it, like they say.

We slammed all over the place backstage, me ducking and dodging, Oliver trying to get one of his sledgehammer punches to land on the right place. Vaguely, during the course of all this, I saw Carla run out on the stage, and a second later I heard the band start its first number, without me. But it didn't do much good. Oliver and I just kept slugging away at each other.

Carla passed us again. I was slipping under a right cross as I glimpsed her. Oliver must have turned to look at her, too. I saw his guard drop: I saw his beefy chin hanging before me in mid air, an inviting target.

I let him have it. Not a hard blow, nor a long one—six inches was about all it seemed to travel. But it was timed just right, and it struck just right. The very point of his jaw—sending a nice little shock up into his skull.

His eyes rolled up in their sockets before he fell.

I didn't look at him a second time. I chased after Carla, whom I had seen running off the stage and into the halls that led to some classrooms connected with the chapel. Okay, so she could be engaged to Oliver if she really had to. But above all things I didn't want her to quit the band, which was what it looked like she was doing.

I saw her almost immediately as I ran out into the hall. Behind me, from the wings, and through the open door came the brassy strains of a souped-up version of "Royal Garden Blues." *Blat, blat,* went the trumpets—the saxes: *vroom!* I saw Carla, and I saw something else.

Don't ask me to describe these things. There were six of them. Carla was frozen in terror before them, her back turned to me. All I can say is that they were roughly man-size and they were

horrible—they were the essence of horror. They were iridescent and they shimmered, but they were solid enough. At least, you couldn't see through them.

They spotted me, then. I say that to mean they were aware of me, but actually they didn't have anything that looked like eyes. And the reason I knew they spotted me was this: I started to hear the emanations from them.

Again, this is going to take explanation. I *knew*, somehow, they were trying to communicate with me even though I couldn't understand it entirely. What they were sending into my brain—just like this mental telepathy stuff—was a kind of music. Only music like you never heard before. Or me, either. Talk about progressive. This was—well, what else? —it was out of this world. All kinds of intricate counterpoint that I could hardly follow, and I'm the guy who can hear a hundred piece symphony orchestra play a chord and tell you what note each instrument is playing. It all swirled in my brain like fog . . .

Carla had started to scream, I knew that somehow.

Then, with all this queer music sounding in my head there was a sudden understanding, like you sometimes have when you're just waking up and a lot of problems, all on the point of a second, seem to have clear answers. So I knew things. I knew suddenly about *them*, and what they were doing. In a dim way, of course, but enough for understanding.

They were from somewhere else. Another planet? Another star? Another dimension? I couldn't tell exactly, but they weren't of our world. And they were trying to establish communication. They were puzzled at the way we would behave whenever they sent the music into our brains. That was how they talked to each other. How had they come here? Music had brought them here—music of a certain intricate pattern; music with lots of overtones, and a definite rhythm. They derived their energy from it. They existed on another plane of vibration until the music sounded and nourished them and made them visible.

But I knew this, too: they couldn't exist here, or eventually they'd drive nearly everybody mad trying to get a message across. And I didn't know how to tell them this.

These thoughts in perhaps the space of a second, you remember.

And now suddenly I began to feel an uncontrollable impulse to escape the mad music in my head. To scream—to run around the room in circles. But I still had some reasoning power left, and I thought I knew why. This music

in the head would drive Mr. Average J. Citizen mad in just a few seconds, only I had a technical interest and even, you might say, a kind of *resistanc*e. I'd been listening to my own music for years. It's like someone who has already had measles, so he's immune.

I rushed the first of the six monsters. I threw a punch. My fist met soft, resistant stuff—like a wet pillow. He didn't try to do anything back to me. He didn't have any arms or anything to do it with, but the music became louder and more complicated in my head. He was probably trying to say, "Hey! What's the big idea!"

I knew I couldn't hurt these things, then. Not with my bare fists. I looked at Carla. She had stopped screaming, and she was trying to fight the thing—trying to hold on to herself. She'd been exposed to a lot of progressive jazz and she had a kind of resistance, too. I shouted to her. "Hang on! Carla! Don't let go!"

She dropped in a dead faint on the floor then.

Now, as far as I could decide, there was only one thing to do. A very risky thing, that would mean leaving Carla alone here in the hall with those *things* for a few seconds. But I just couldn't see any other way out. Even then, I wasn't sure what I had in mind would work. Only I had to try it. Nothing else left.

I dashed back into the wings of the stage. Oliver was just getting up with a dull look in his eye and shaking his head. He saw me—dimly. He drew back his fist again.

"No!" I yelled. "Come on!"

He could tell, I guess, from my look that there was no time to waste, and that I wasn't kidding. I turned, and he followed me into the hall. The things were still there. They were bending over Carla—

But now the music in my head was madder than ever. I couldn't stand it any longer. My whole skull seemed to be vibrating, my teeth buzzed, and all of it sang down my spine and into my toes. It was agonizing. Now I had to scream. I knew I had to. No other relief. I opened my mouth.

Shots sounded. They were unbelievably loud there in the bare hall. There were five, I think—a pause—and then six more. I remember realizing that Oliver must have emptied his gun, his first trigger pull being on the usual empty chamber, and then loaded again.

After that things swirled and I saw red, green and blue and couldn't think any more.

There was a great deal of confusion all around me when I came out of it. All these professors and things were there in the hall, and I was still standing. So was Oliver, and so was Carla.

A quick look told me Carla was more or less normal again. Oliver had his hands spread and he was saying to Dr. Maveris and the rest of them, in a desperate voice, "But I tell you I *did* see them—just as plain as I can see you right now!"

Dr. Maveris held a sharp eye on him and said, "Naturally, I'd *like* to believe you. But in view of the fact that there is nothing here—"

He gestured. I looked. He was right. There was nothing in the hall, nothing at all. I cleared my throat then and they all whirled toward me.

"Oliver's right," I said. "They were here all right. The three of us saw them. But you don't have to take my word. I can probably bring them back again just by having the band play some of our more complicated stuff."

"No!" Carla almost screamed the words. "Not again! I couldn't bear to see them again, and hear that music!"

"You won't," I said. "And I won't either. But Oliver and some of these other gentlemen will."

"What do you mean?" asked Maveris.

I explained some of what I'd grasped, then—some of the things

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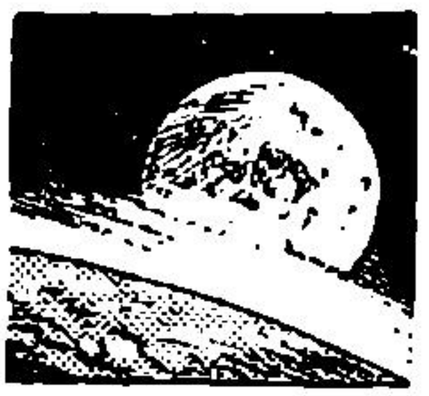

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the strange creatures had evidently tried to get across to me in their telepathic, rhythmic, harmonic language.

"That means," I finished, "there's only one way to hunt them all down. And hunt them down we've got to do, even if they don't mean to hurt us. They'll drive everybody nuts just trying to hold a conversation."

"And what's that one way?" asked Maveris.

"Well," I said, "you take a portable player and some of my recordings to bring them out in the open—give them energy. Then you have a bunch of good marksmen like Oliver here to shoot them down. Apparently a bullet does the trick."

"All very well," said Maveris a little stiffly, "but will you kindly explain how you keep the marksmen themselves from going mad before they have a chance to shoot?"

"Sure. Easy." I was grinning. "That music they send out didn't bother Oliver here, did it?"

Oliver looked surprised to realize this. He thought a minute, then said, "Well, maybe I'm just a little tougher than some people."

"Nope," I said. "That's got nothing to do with it. It's because you're *tone deaf*. Something like one in fifty people are. You don't even know a sour note when you hear it—let alone progressive harmony and rhythm!"

"By George, yes! Of course!" said Dr. Maveris. "That's our answer, then!"

And, of course, it was. About two weeks were spent playing music—the screwier the better—here and there and making the things materialize, then shooting them. They'd disappear again when they were shot—or whenever the music stopped, cutting off their source of energy. Then somebody came up with the simple suggestion to cut out all very complicated music, with lots of overtones and everything.

Congress passed the necessary laws. It was the death of progressive jazz.

Me? I do a nightly network program with the band these days and it's called, "Slumber Waltzes." The essence of corn. But a lot of people like it—don't ask me why—and we're even getting a sponsor next week. We'll be in the chips then.

Carla will wish she stuck with us. She's Mrs. John Maveris now and spends her dull afternoons giving bridge parties and things for the wives of the other professors at the university.

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Around the Worlds

Jules Verne was a literary giant in his own lifetime. But his influence on science fiction has made him an enduring, present-day immortal as well.

Jules Verne's tomb at Amiens, France, symbolizing his immortality and prophetic vision.

Reproduced by Frank R. Paul

With Jules Verne

by SAM MOSKOWITZ

EVERY FIELD of creative endeavor—whether in the arts and sciences, music, literature, architecture, engineering or business administration, can usually point to a single outstanding person who, in some uniquely individual fashion, made the single most important contribution to the field. In science fiction the man who occupies this exalted position is Jules Verne.

Jules Verne was by no means the earliest of science fiction writers, and it cannot be said that his ideas were particularly original; his literary gifts in any way exceptional. But he was the first author to consciously develop an approach to the genre which turned it into a specialized form of literature, quite distinct from fantasy, the gothic horror tale, the fictional political utopia, or the imaginatively embroidered travel tale.

Verne, with great deliberation, set the formula for science fiction by insisting, as a categorical imperative, that everything must be scientifically plausible. This principle he adhered to with strait-jacket rigidity to the end of his writing career.

Other writers, many of greater literary stature, had written science fiction before. They had utilized virtually every major idea that was later to appear in Verne's books. But none of them had made the effort to explain each departure from the familiar and the known on a consistently logical basis. They usually asked the reader to accept too much on faith and were impatient to get on with their major purpose,

which more often than not was a satire, a political utopia, a hoax or a preachment rather than a bonafide narrative. If the stories of his predecessors also entertained, it was almost inadvertently, since to write a tale of entertainment was rarely a part of their original plan.

During a period when popular entertainment was far more limited than it is today and life frightfully hard for the masses, the fiction of Jules Verne provided an escape which took his readers far from the uneventfulness of their daily lives—to such unlikely and romantic places as the South Pole; beneath the sea, out into space, into the bowels of the earth or aloft in balloons to stratospheric heights.

These voyages were invariably accomplished with such carefully-detailed adherence to known scientific facts that they never failed to produce a complete, and willing suspension of disbelief. And because their main purpose was to entertain, thrilling situation followed thrilling situation with such absolute persuasiveness that the readers were kept enthralled to the very end.

Previous to adopting the formula which was to bring him such brilliant success, Jules Verne—born February 8, 1828, son of a distinguished lawyer in Nantes, France—had been unable to gain any substantial recognition for his literary gifts. At the age of thirty-five he had succeeded only in putting off for an indefinite period the practice of law, for which he had been trained. He turned instead to the writing of plays—including two libretti for operas—and even collaborated with Alexander Dumas on a humorous comedy in verse. Though a number of his plays were produced, not one of them was looked upon with favor by the dramatic critics of the period.

However, the publication of a short story in 1852, *Master Zacharius,* convinced Verne's father that his son had real literary ability. Verne's father, a devoutly religious Catholic, was especially pleased because the story, which dealt with the changes which nineteenth century science was bringing to the orderly and logical development of man's thinking, seemed, symbolically at least, to lean strongly in the direction of religion. This story has since appeared in America as *The Watches' Soul* in a one-volume collection of short stories titled, *Dr. Ox's Experiments.* It was later reprinted in the December, 1933 issue of AMAZING STORIES.

There followed prolonged subsidy of his son by the elder Verne, a situation which, paradoxically enough, proved uncomfortable to Jules, since as the years passed, it became increasingly burden-

some for him to justify his father's confidence.

The works of Edgar Allan Poe provided Jules Verne with his initial inspiration. Though Poe's fame in the United States was slight at the time, his short stories and poems were widely read and admired in France. Many of Poe's short stories are, even in a modern sense, works of science fiction, particularly if we take into consideration the limitations which the science of the 1840 period imposed.

Jules Verne, by his own admission, read Poe avidly and with tremendous admiration. He was profoundly impressed by the precise, scientific details which Poe introduced into even his horror tales.

Poe's plots, characters, and settings seemed to him not only startlingly original, but genius-inspired. He never tired of re-reading the tales of a scientific nature. *Mss. Found in a Bottle, The Unparalleled Adventures of One Hans Pfaall, A Descent Into the Maelstrom, The Gold Bug, A Tale of Ragged Mountain, The Balloon Hoax, Mesmeric Revelation, The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade, Mellonta Tauta* and *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym.*

Yet his decision to adopt the methods of Poe resulted in a great inner struggle for Verne, for his early religious training made him see a conflict where none perhaps existed and to look upon the approach of Poe as too materialistic. In an essay on Poe, written shortly after the publication of his first successful science fiction story, *Five Weeks In A Balloon,* Verne noted: ". . . in spite of their other-worldly and super-human beauty, *The Tales of the Grotesque* remain materialistic in their conclusions. One is never aware of the intervention of Providence. Poe even seems unwilling to admit of its existence, and claims to explain everything by physical laws which, at a pinch, he is even ready to invent. One fails to detect in him an atom of that faith which his unceasing contemplation of the supernatural should have endowed him."

Before the essay was ended, Verne had obviously contradicted his earlier criticism and mentally resolved the emotional conflict for he utilized Poe's *Balloon Hoax* as the model for his own remarkable and completely scientific story, *Five Weeks In A Balloon*— which first appeared in 1863. Thirty-four years later he was still so much a disciple that he wrote a sequel to Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym—Sphinx of the Ice Fields* which was published in 1897.

Though in mood and style, there was no great similarity between Verne and Poe, in their approach to the mysterious and

the unknown they were very close indeed.

The influence of Poe is seen frequently throughout the whole range of Verne's works. His *Mathias Sandorf* contains episodes of hypnotism deeply suggestive of Poe's *The Facts In the Case of M. Valdemar*. Verne's *From The Earth To The Moon* parallels to a considerable degree Poe's *The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall*.

The maelstrom into which Captain Nemo's submarine, 'The Nautilus,' is drawn in *Twenty Thousand Leagues Beneath the Sea,* can be pinpointed to Poe's *A Descent Into the Maelstrom*. The idea of losing a day in the transit of the world, a pivotal plot device in *Round the World in Eighty Days,* is drawn from a story of Poe's in which a suitor is given the task of producing three Sundays in one week in order to win the hand of the girl he loves. He accomplishes this seemingly impossible task by having two travelers arrive on a Sunday, one from the east, for whom Sunday was yesterday, and the other from the west for whom Sunday will be tomorrow.

Verne, an unsuccessful playwright seldom praised in reviews, metamorphosed overnight into one of the world's brightest literary stars. This triumph he achieved simply by hitting upon the idea of stressing speculative scientific adventure in full-length novels which placed the strongest possible emphasis upon credibility.

The fact that Verne consciously set up and followed a pattern of writing calculated to win him the greatest possible popularity is nowhere better illustrated than in a letter to a friend at the Paris Stock Exchange, shortly after he completed *Five Weeks In a Balloon*.

"I have just written a novel in a new form," he wrote. "One that is entirely my own. If it succeeds I will have stumbled upon a gold mine. In that case I shall go on writing and writing without pause . . ."

Though a novel about a thousand-mile balloon voyage may not seem very startling today, in 1863 the mere description of such a voyage took readers as far ahead of the accomplishments of the times, as a story about a V-2 converted into an interplanetary space ship would do in 1958.

If there was the slightest doubt concerning the imaginative uniqueness of Jules Verne, it was dispelled by his second novel, *A Journey To The Center of The Earth,* which appeared in 1864. There has probably never been a finer novel of subterranean exploration. Verne did not originate the idea of another world at the center of the Earth. Lewis Holberg, writing three-quarters of a century earlier, conceived a land

at the Earth's core. His novel was called, *World Underground,* and rare copies occasionally crop up today. Holberg was strongly influenced by Jonathan Swift and cynically chronicled an underground land where females held the whip hand and males did all of the menial work.

Apparently, however, good adventure has proved more popular than social significance, since Verne's novel is still in print, and has been made into a motion picture, while Holberg's interesting little book remains a relatively rare collector's item.

With the publication of *A Journey to the Center of the Earth* Verne did not rest on his laurels. He followed the novel up with one even more imaginative, that prototype of the modern best seller, *From the Earth to the Moon.* Published in 1865, this novel received an overwhelmingly enthusiastic reception from the French public.

Today, a new 45,000-word novel devoted entirely to the construction of a gun which could fire a projectile around the moon would be greeted by a tremendous yawn on the part of the reading public, particularly if there was no strong human interest factor motivating the characters. However, the French of 1865 not only ate it up—they patiently waited another five years for the book publication of the sequel, *Tour Around the Moon,* which described the adventures of the space pioneers as they completely encircled the moon and fell back to Earth, with a great deal of exciting detail.

There can be no doubt at all that Verne would have liked to include an actual landing on the moon. But the method he selected for the firing of a projectile into space—a giant cannon—left no logical means of returning his characters to Earth.

Despite the mountain of mathematical data which Verne assembled to support his cannon hypothesis, we know today that the muzzle velocity of a cannon-projected shell designed to overcome Earth's gravitational pull would produce an acceleration so great that any passengers carried in the projectile would quickly cease to draw breath.

Despite this flaw, among others, the book continues to prove of historical interest today, and Verne's description of a Space Train, in which a group of space projectiles are linked together like sausages on a string, still intrigues those who read the book.

Additional proof that it was Verne's method of presenting his material that brought him such astounding popular success can be obtained by considering Crysostom Trueman's book, *A Voyage to the Moon,* published in England *one year earlier* than

Verne's novel. Trueman's narrative is today a literary curiosity, despite the fact it contained some unusual ideas on the construction of a space ship, including a mineral-repellant anti-gravity device, wood for material caulked with tar and airproofed with sheet metal. It even described a live garden of flowers and vegetation to replenish the oxygen for the voyagers. The predominant reason for the book's obscurity lies in the fact that Trueman is primarily concerned with his peculiar Utopian theories, whereas Verne is primarily concerned with narrative suspense and a sense of wonder.

Probably Jules Verne's finest all-around book, considered from all standpoints—careful plotting, above-average writing, outstanding characterization, and scientific ideas with a resplendent sweep—ideas which completely outdistance the commonplace—was *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea,* published the same year as *Tour of the Moon.* Verne has been accused by some critics of weak characterization, but the delineation of Captain Nemo, builder and commander of the marvelous submarine 'Nautilus,' is an outstanding literary achievement.

On other occasions Verne has created characters quite unforgettably three-dimensional, notably Phileas Fogg in *Round the World in Eighty Days,* and the title character of *Michael Strogoff.*

Is it not possible that poor human characterization is a limitation basically inherent in science fiction? Might not the unusual phenomena and special effects which play so important a role in such stories substantially diminish its importance? Outstanding human characterization is so rare in science fiction as to scarcely constitute a worthwhile field of exploration. Critics may be attributing literary shortcomings and limitations to Verne which he did not truly possess, and which is really the fault of the medium itself.

After all, in Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon,* aren't the space gun and the projectile actually the lead characters in the story? Certainly Verne exhausted every effort to depict a space gun effectively. In *A Journey to the Center of the Earth,* the strange land near the core of the earth is the focal point of the book's interest and not the characters. It is a case of the author and the readers being more interested in *what* happens than to *whom* it happens.

Similarly, the love story motif is almost entirely absent from Verne's scientific romances. Until recently this was true of ninety percent of all science fiction. Readers were more interested in

the theme than in the love life of the characters.

That Verne was able to create a three-dimensional a character as great as Captain Nemo against the tremendous competition of the marvelous submarine 'Nautilus,' which fights Captain Nemo page after page for reader attention, is the true wonder of *Twenty Thousand Leagues Beneath the Sea.*

Verne's success as a novelist, paradoxically, brought him the fame in the theatre which had eluded him as a playwright. Many of his novels were adapted to the stage, and turned into theatrical extravaganzas which made his name an international household word. One has only to recall *Around the World in Eighty Days,* and its current box office success, to realize how his world-popularity has grown.

Though *Hector Servadac* is one of Verne's most imaginative efforts—he has a group of characters tour the solar system as far into space as Saturn, riding on a comet—it is also one of his weakest stories of prophetic events to come. In previous novels, Verne had gone to fantastic lengths to make every future development scientifically plausible, but in *Hector Servadac,* people are snatched off Earth by a Comet and returned to Earth by methods so weak, obscure and absurd as to make sensible presentation a difficult if not impossible task.

With the entire Solar System to explore Verne succeeds in turning out a tale which can only be characterized as dull, and more than a little ridiculous. Yet *Hector Servadac* was popular when it was published, probably because it went a great deal further in the realm of interplanetary exploration than Verne's moon stories, and helped to satisfy the public's curiosity as to what was "out there."

It can perhaps be taken for granted that every science fiction writer will try his hand at general fiction at some time in his career —if only to prove his ability to turn out a smash hit without the sensational element that science fiction so often seems to thrive on. Noticeably after 1870 and overwhelmingly after 1878, Jules Verne turned his hand to such work. The most successful of these new, novel-length departures was *Around the World in Eighty Days,* which was published in weekly installments and aroused such world-wide interest that wire services flashed the plot to newspapers long before the slow moving mails of 1873 could bring it to them.

As the book progressed, several major steamship lines promised Verne fabulous sums if he would consent to send Phileas Fogg across the sea on one of their ships

in the closing chapters. Verne was said to have refused all such offers. The story was made into a play, which is still produced from time to time. And Mike Todd's motion picture production of this famous novel has become one of the great sensations of the screen.

Other non-science fiction novels also brought Verne critical and popular acclaim, notably *The Great Eastern*, which was an account of his trip to the United States in fictionalized form. And two other books—*Michael Strogoff*, a powerful novel of life in Czarist Russia, and *Mathias Sandorf*, his longest novel and a brilliant, ironic takeoff on "The Count of Monte Cristo"—were well received and also enjoyed phenomenal success when they were turned into plays.

Following his initial success in 1863, Verne religiously produced at least two novels a year. But after 1878 these were often not science at all, or science fiction through the courtesy of a very minor scientific invention or development introduced into the narrative artificially.

The almost clocklike regularity with which each of Verne's novels made its appearance and the relatively few fantastic ones in later years, eventually led readers to question whether Verne was still alive, and was actually the author of the many volumes bearing his name. Some of his admirers even made special trips to his home in Nantes to reassure themselves on that score.

During Verne's lifetime, many of his scientific prophecies became inventive commonplaces that ceased to astound, and praise for his perspicacity in that respect reached its zenith when Simon Lake, in 1898, builder of the *Argonaut*—the first submarine to successfully navigate the open sea—opened his autobiography with the lines: "Jules Verne was in a sense the director-general of my life."

Not satisfied with having written his version of Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo*, in *Mathias Sandorf*, and written a sequel to Poe's *The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym* in *Sphinx of the Icelands*, Jules Verne, in 1900, paid homage to another writer who had influenced him profoundly, J. R. Wyss. He wrote a sequel to *Swiss Family Robinson* entitled *The Second Fatherland*. In a real sense his *Mysterious Island* echoed Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*.

Jules Verne retained throughout his life a high regard for the inventive progressiveness of America and many of his stories featured American lead characters or American locales. Just when one might have supposed that the well was running dry and that Verne had abandoned the

world of probable invention, he produced a short story, *In the Year 2889*. It was as prophetic as any of his earlier books, with a colorfully detailed description of dozens of advances in the America of the future, such as moving sidewalks and photo-printing. A distinctive feature which made this story unique was the fact its debut was in America in English and appeared in the 1889 issue of THE FORUM. Later it was translated into French, and republished in Europe with numerous revisions and alterations.

Jules Verne's last story—a science fiction story written just before his death in 1905—bore the appropriately prophetic title *The Eternal Adam*. It boldly asserts, with a persuasiveness that seems almost more than fictional, that a great civilization of marvelous scientific advancement—apparently our present era—had flourished with splendor and then vanished from the Earth. And, amazingly enough, there is in this story a slight uneasiness about the misuse of science that does not seem at all characteristic of Verne. This feeling, coupled with the passing of loved ones and the burden of illness in old age, had given Jules Verne a pessimism he had never expressed in his work until the very end.

In many respects there is a similarity between the literary lives of the two greatest of all science fiction writers, Jules Verne and H. G. Wells. Both became famous in their younger years by writing science fiction. They turned to general fiction in their middle age and finally to science fiction again to express a note of disillusion and near-despair, because their shared dream —that the advance of science would automatically mean the creation of a better world—had dissolved before the wakefulness of reality.

As Verne approached the turn of the century, his style began to date. But his formula and method were still efficacious, not only for him, but for other new writers who were appearing on the horizon.

At first the general run of sophisticated continental writers had viewed Jules Verne as a nineteenth century freak, naively over-productive. But as novel followed novel, and his fame spread around the world, it was soon realized that he had stumbled across a *new literary form* that was not only different, but popular with the masses.

Science fiction novels began to appear with increasing frequency. In England, veritable giants were to rise in the field, men of the calibre of H. G. Wells, A. Conan Doyle and H. Rider Haggard. And while France never again produced a titan of Verne's stature, lesser men found a ready

market for science fiction in that country.

Some of the imitators were actually disciples and followers of Verne, like Paschall Grousset who wrote under the pen name of Andre Laurie and collaborated with Verne on a science fiction novel, *The Wreck of the Cynthia.* In *The Conquest of the Moon,* Andre Laurie avoided the problem of building a rocket to the moon by dragging it almost down to the surface of the Earth with magnets, and was thus enabled to supply readers with a great deal of information about its surface, quite outdistancing Verne in that respect. Laurie's novel was a great success, being reprinted abroad, and was followed by several other science fiction books—*New York to Brest in Seven Hours, The Crystal City Under the Sea,* and *The Secret of the Magian.*

An entire series of science fiction novels—at least fourteen in number—were written by Paul D'Ivoi in France at the turn of the century and published as VOYAGES EXCENTRIQUES, paralleling the term which Verne had used, VOYAGES EXTRAORDINAIRES. These volumes were enormous in size, weighing just a little under six pounds. They featured four color paintings printed on the cloth binding, and had sixty or more line and half-tone drawings, most of them strikingly like the illustrations of the science fiction artist, Frank R. Paul. One volume, *The Master of the Blue Flag,* contains some excellent illustrations of immense, full-wall television screens called *telephotes.*

Another writer, embarking on science fiction in what was apparently a series only a little less ostentatious in appearance than those of D'Ivoi's, was Georges Price, whose novel, *The Star of the Pacific,* dealt with a fantastic four-bowed ship, shaped somewhat like a star.

A bullseye in the direction of good solid prophecy was made in 1883 by the Frenchman, Albert Robida, who wrote, illustrated and published a book titled *Twentieth Centure.* In this volume he predicted, with appropriate illustrations, a fantastic number of scientific "miracles" which eventually came to pass, such as television, jet planes, anti-aircraft weapons, armored cars, gas, germ warfare, submarines, radio, and automats.

In all truth, most of these ideas were not original with Robida, but because of its number of accurate guesses the book is almost as impressive as Hugo Gernsback's fabulous, *Ralph 124C41 Plus.*

In America, Frank Tousey, a leading New York publisher, started the Frank Reade Library in September, 1892—a series of "dime novels" dealing with the

adventures of a daring, young inventor of mechanical robots, electrical flying devices, submarines and other marvels.

These novels so impressed Verne that he sent the author, Luis Senarens, a letter of appreciation, which remained unanswered for many months because the author feared his handwriting would give away the fact that he was only sixteen years old! Senarens eventually got in touch with Verne and a correspondence ensued between the two.

Jules Verne's example shaped the policies and contributed to the success of the world's first science fiction magazine, published in 1926 by Hugo Gernsback.

As a boy, Gernsback had read and been thrilled by Verne's science fiction, and when he began publishing science fiction material in his numerous magazines —*Modern Electrics, Electrical Experimenter, Science and Invention, Practical Electrics* and *Radio News*—he insisted that the Jules Verne formula of carefully and logically explaining every scientific departure be followed faithfully.

The stories were often enlivened by humor, since a keen and discriminating sense of humor was one of Gernsback's most positive characteristics as an editor. They carried the bylines of such authors as Jacques Morgan, who wrote *The Scientific Adventures of Mr. Fosdick*, Hugo Gernsback himself, with his famous novel, *Ralph 124C41 Plus*, and his quite flippant *New Adventures of Baron Munchausen*, Charles S. Wolfe, C. M. Adams, John Dequer, George F. Stratton and many others. The reception accorded these stories was so encouraging that Gernsback decided to issue a magazine made up entirely of science fiction.

The first issue of AMAZING STORIES, dated April, 1926, left no doubt as to the debt it owed to Jules Verne. The cover, painted by Frank R. Paul, depicted an ice-skating scene from Verne's *Off On a Comet*, as that body approached the orbit of Saturn. The novel itself was serialized, running as a two part story.

In his first editorial, Hugo Gernsback jubilantly announced: "Exclusive arrangements have already been made with the copyright holders of the entire voluminous works of ALL of Jules Verne's immortal stories. Many of these stories are not as yet known to the general American public. For the first time they will be within easy reach of every reader through AMAZING STORIES."

Though Gernsback did not publish all of Verne's stories, he did use a liberal selection of them, including *A Trip to the Center of the Earth, The English*

at the North Pole, Desert of Ice, Dr. Ox's Experiment, A Drama in the Air, The Purchase of the North Pole, and the two remarkable novels from Verne's later years, *Master of the World* and its sequel, *Robur, the Conqueror.*

These latter two marked a strong resurgence of the imaginative powers of Jules Verne, after a long period during which he had confined himself predominantly to straight adventure, only occasionally relieved by the inclusion of a minor gadget in one of his tales. The Robur stories saw the prediction of a combination submarine, automobile and airplane, motivated by jets as an integral part of the story.

Even after AMAZING STORIES had passed out of Gernsback's hands, it continued to publish a Jules Verne story from time to time under the editorship of T. O'Conner Sloane, including such novels as *Measuring a Meridian,* and *Winter Amid the Ice.*

Beginning in its first issue and continuing for many years, AMAZING STORIES carried on its title page a line drawing of Jules Verne's tombstone at Amiens, depicting Verne raising the lid of his tombstone as a symbol of his immortality. And in connection with the reprinting of *Measuring a Meridian,* T. O'Connor Sloane had Leo Morey do a painting portraying the actual tombstone, which appeared on the cover of the May, 1934, issue of AMAZING STORIES.

While in principle, Gernsback used Jules Verne's best science fiction stories as models for his authors to emulate, in practice he was astute in seeking outstanding stories which did not entirely conform to the Verne formula. He strove, in fact, to obtain stories that combined the scientific integrity of Jules Verne with the very human understanding of H. G. Wells.

In his desire to set a distinct pattern for science fiction, Gernsback was paralleled by a number of the German novelists of the day such as Otfrid von Hanstein, Otto Willi Gail, Bruno H. Brugel and Ludwig Anton, whose works he reprinted in his magazine, *Science Wonder Stories, Science Wonder Quarterly,* and *Wonder Stories.*

For ten years, Jules Verne, through Gernsback, remained a major influence in the science fiction magazine field. Gernsback battled constantly to reestablish certain, unwisely abandoned rules for the writing of science fiction. Just as Verne had achieved success with his formula, where other competent writers had failed, Gernsback found a strong reception for a similar formula, brought up to date—a formula in complete harmony with the latest scientific developments.

In this respect, the dramatic

figure of Jules Verne raising his tombstone and reaching aloft, was more than symbolic. It was prophetic, since in every sense of the word the original trail he pioneered with his remarkable tales, continues to be followed, as he figuratively still reaches from the grave and guides the minds of today's editors and writers.

BLUE MONDAY

by ROGER DEE

"We'll be seeing you," the Aliens said, "before Monday rolls around."

ONE WAS TALL and thin and the other was short and round, but both of them were out of this world.

I was having a couple of Saturday-afternoon beers at Jerry's Place when they came clumping past in their iron-soled boots. They looked hot and uncomfortable in their padded Buck Rogers space suits, and the green rubber masks glaring out of their fish-bowl helmets would have startled Karloff himself.

"Hey, what is this?" I said, making sure that Jerry saw them too. "Invaders from Mars?"

Jerry only grunted. "They pulled the same gag last week in Chicago, plugging that Moon picture," he said. "And before that they did it up in New Rochelle. Seems to me you newspaper guys would know what goes on, Chet."

I got it then, and it was a natural for a byline. "Read all about the public's reaction to men from Mars," I said, "in tomorrow's *Beacon*."

The story didn't look so good when I got outside, though, because the sidewalk crowd wasn't giving them a tumble. People made room, steering clear of their iron shoes, but the only real attention they got was from a pair of crop-haired kids who tagged after them, blowing bubble-gum and staring.

I fell in alongside and went to work. "I'm Chet Barker, with the *Beacon*. You the same boys who pulled this stunt last week in Chicago, or is this a local promotion?"

They goggled at me with round, red eyes. The tall one tried to scratch a ropy-looking ear, and swore in a muffled voice when his glass helmet got in the way.

"Aw, those guys were fakes," he said. "We're the McCoy."

"Yeah, I'm a gorgon in disguise myself," I said. "The cops given you any argument yet?"

He hitched at a little tank snapped to his belt. It was shaped like a GI canteen, and hissed like a leaky auto tire.

"No trouble," he said. "But I'll be glad when this shift is over. I'm stewed like a cauliflower."

We plowed through another block, getting the same reactions.

People stared, grinned, wisecracked. Once an old lady screamed and dropped her purse, and looked sheepish when she saw it was only a gag. Two bobby-soxers pretended to faint in each other's arms, and a passing Airedale sniffed at the short one's boots and decided not to. The cop on the corner gave them one weary look and went back to directing traffic. Two cabbies at a hackstand quit matching nickels to watch, and one of them called, "What, no ray guns?"

The tall one patted his belt tank. "We use germs nowadays, chum. You'll see nine days from now, when you turn blue and drop dead. Except, of course, a dead guy can't see."

What I had so far wouldn't coax a quarter-column out of my city editor, let alone a byline. People just don't seem to go for this Man-from-Mars stuff any more, not after Orson Welles and the saucer scares.

"Five-forty," said the short one, looking at a clock in a bakery window. "We've been out long enough. Let's knock off and go home."

We left the main stem at the next corner and headed down a side street, pulling up finally at an empty warehouse ten or twelve blocks further on.

"This is where you came in, Mack," the tall one said. "See you in the cemetery, through a telescope."

"Wait up," I said. "What picture are you boys plugging?"

They looked at each other and snickered.

"We're not picture pluggers," the short one said. "We're exterminators, spreading foolkiller. You monkeys down here have been tossing atom bombs and artificial moons around like coconuts, which makes you a menace to the rest of the universe. Wait nine days and—"

"I know," I said. "I'll turn blue and drop dead."

I was half a block away before it struck me that an empty warehouse was a queer sort of headquarters for these jokers to work from. I went back and pushed the door open, and nearly fell on my face when I saw the saucership inside.

Don't be a jerk, Chet, I told myself, working hard to keep my eyes in. *If these guys are from Mars, how can they speak English?*

The tall one put his head up through the ship's hatch to answer me. He had peeled off his goggle-eyed mask, but it didn't improve his looks. His real face was even worse.

"That's an easy one, Buster," he said. "We read minds."

And that's all. They didn't even try to hold me when I ran.

I found out why when I rushed over to police headquarters with my story. I got jugged for the night, and when the night sergeant checked with my city editor I got canned on the spot for drinking on duty.

But I'm not worried about a job. Nobody needs one any more, if they only knew it, because when next Monday rolls around nine days from now everybody on Earth will turn blue.

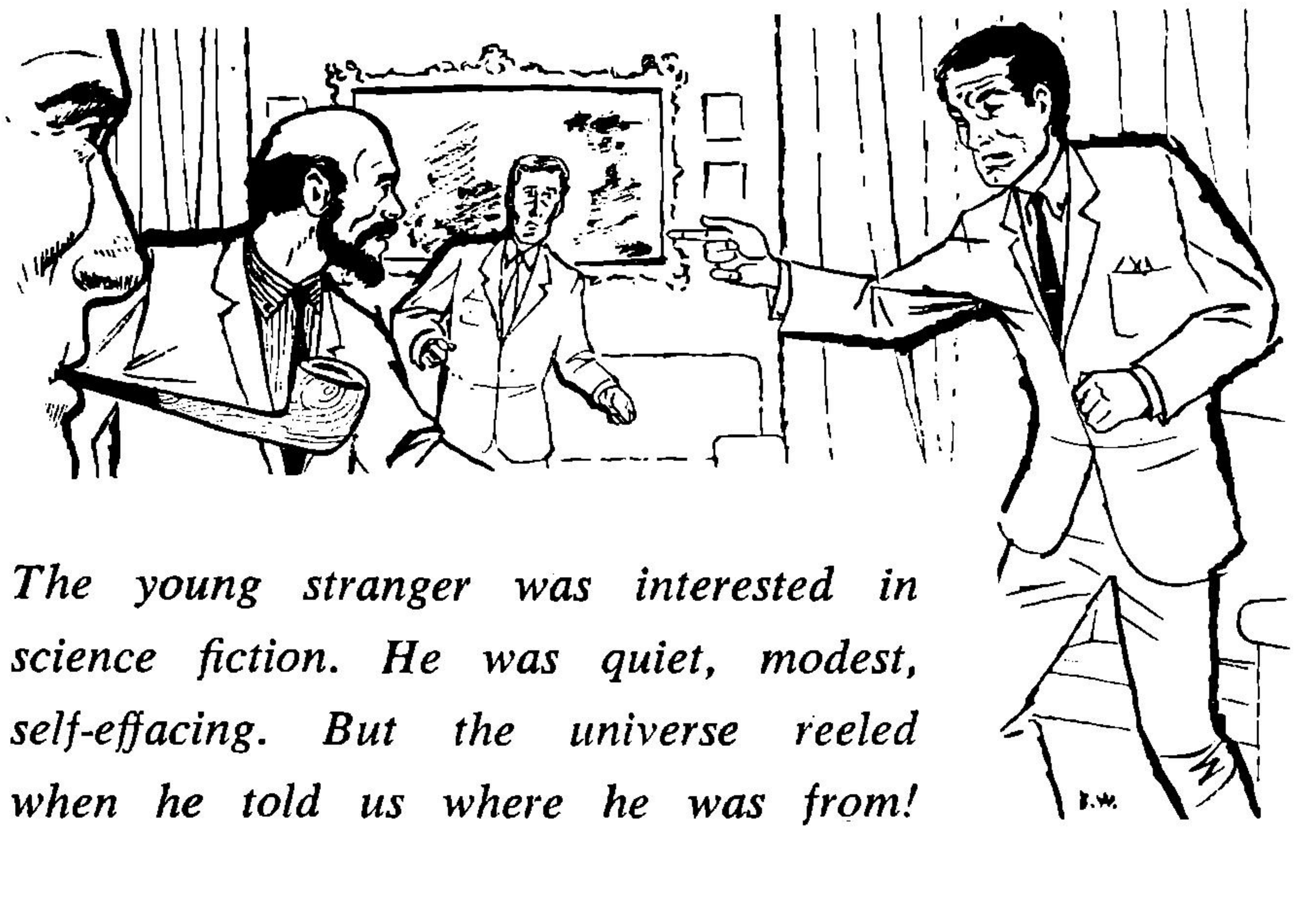
And then they'll drop dead.

next issue

THE WONDERS OF H. G. WELLS by SAM MOSKOWITZ

The Quiet Stranger

by JEROME B. CAPP



The young stranger was interested in science fiction. He was quiet, modest, self-effacing. But the universe reeled when he told us where he was from!

THE CLUBROOM was cheerful, comfortable. The evening had been as always, informal—a completely congenial gathering of good friends with common interests. And by the time the hour hand of the clock pointed to twelve, the group had thinned to only a few individuals.

Most of the members had said goodnight, and gone home. About a dozen of us, the old regulars,

remained in a closely-knit discussion group, relaxed and loquacious, but with no particular axes to grind. And that mellow state seemed only natural to the membership of a science-fiction writers' fraternity.

Our group had its own quarters, completely remodeled, in an old, late Victorian brownstone mansion on Park Avenue. It must not be supposed that we considered ourselves a very special or privileged group of writers. But Science Fiction is—at least, we like to think that it is—a rather important branch of imaginative literature.

At any rate, we were now a very comfortable group, much sought after and with a gratifying record of sales to our credit. The movies and TV liked the kind of writing we did—dynamic, fanciful, and scientifically prophetic. And the scientific aspect could with great justification be roundly stressed and "tooted up," because one of our most successful members, Bradburn, was well-known as a physicist. And Stevenson—you recognize the name, of course—was one of America's foremost bio-chemists.

And Finkelhoff. I guess if any man could be said to have written a wholly believable story about future warfare—a story which made even the hydrogen bomb seem a puny weapon—it was Finkeloff. Remember "The Martian Plunderers"?

Then there was Warburton. And even myself. I guess that's why we were—let's admit it—just a trifle snobbish about our particular estate, and preferred to meet together as a rather unusual group of specialists rather than as literary-review type professional writers.

As a matter of fact, the public seemed to think so, too. And we often amused ourselves with the idea of dignity in oak-paneling and otherwise humored ourselves.

So there we were, the Science Fiction Men, whose more or less creative ideas catapulted us into the centuries ahead—into space and time and the modern infinitesimal. Our quarters were comfortable, cushioned, deep-shadowed—well, to be completely frank about it—almost a carbon copy of the Yale Club. And I guess a little stuffy, too. But we found a good deal of solace and quiet and room for thought there.

We didn't talk too much about our own books and magazine stories. But we were all familiar with one another's writings, and there had grown up between us a bond of close good-fellowship which the general field of literature could not quite achieve.

In the main our talk was very much the same sort of talk you hear at golf clubs, the university forums, or, I suppose, anywhere

else where urbane, sophisticated men plentifully endowed with good humor and very little basic immodesty talk about whatever interests them most.

It's pretty much of a truism that ideas have a way of generating other ideas and a discussion that starts off with a simple comment about the weather may end with a round-robin analysis of almost every aspect of our changing civilization.

But to get back to that night. Another member was arising to take his departure when I turned to the youngish man next to me and asked, "Did you enjoy your evening?"

He said, "Oh, very much. You must excuse me if I seemed to stay a little on the sidelines. All this is so new to me."

He was most polite and quiet and I had also not failed to notice his eager, interested enthusiasm. I suppose I also noticed the special interest he appeared to take in my own favorite topics of discussion.

We had one evening a month, you see, when the members of the club were allowed to invite guests —one guest to a member. The guest had to be—well, he just had to be pleasant-mannered and fairly well-groomed—in short, an outwardly prepossessing person, and he was expected to be at least mildly interested in science fiction, and to know something about it.

And so this young man had been rather especially well-behaved. In fact, his appreciation and curiosity and alert, intelligent interest in everything that had been said marked him as a man of appreciation—even perhaps a man of exceptional sensitivity and special talents. Naturally we liked that sort of guest.

"Are you going to stay overnight?" I asked. "We have quarters here for guests, and it would be no inconvenience at all—"

"No," he said. "I live nearby. Just around the corner, in fact. I'll be on my way soon."

"Well, in that case— You did find the discussion entertaining?"

"I did indeed. Most entertaining. I would say entertaining if nothing else."

"Oh," I said, warming up. Here was something to keep the conversation enlivened. "Entertaining *if* nothing else," I said, loudly enough for the others to hear. It had been a slip of the tongue, I knew—a pleasantry. But I must confess I was in the mood to draw the man out.

The rest of the members had caught the "entertain if nothing else" part and they instantly brightened up.

I said, "Just entertaining and not perhaps instructive?"

Obviously the man was shy and just a little tongue-tied. Adequate

replies did not come easily to him.

Of course, you can't tell whether a man is a writer or an artist just by looking at him. He may not have an academic mind, but it was now rather obvious that our young friend was, shall I say, an orthodox representative of the inarticulate majority, and did not want to engage in any extensive conversation with us, perhaps fearful of being put in the shade.

But finally he did summon sufficient courage to say, "Oh, I found it quite instructive *as well* as entertaining."

"Did you?" I pressed. "Did you think that science fiction writers" —I smiled at him encouragingly —"talked this way normally, and without intellectual pretensions of any sort. You know what I mean —no higher mathematics, no astro-physics, no nuclear fission?"

He said, "Oh, yes. I thought so. I am familiar with most of your writings and I thought it would be mutually—well, beneficial—if I met all of you."

Again I took him on. "Mutually beneficial? Precisely what do you mean by that?"

"With your permission," he said, nervously. "You must not think I am confused or muddle-headed. It's just that I don't know you well enough yet—or how you would normally talk about certain things."

"I'm afraid I don't understand," I said.

"To be frank with you," explained the young man, looking about him, "this is my first meeting with *people*."

We stared at one another a little awkwardly, wondering whether the young fellow was being impish or droll or had simply escaped from a mental institution. He wasn't accustomed to talking with people!

I decided it would be the height of folly not to steer the conversation into saner channels. "Well, now," I said. "Where do you live?"

The young fellow said, "On Tetranus." And then he hastened to inform us that Tetranus was only 6000 light years from Mars.

Good grief, I thought, this conversation has certainly taken an unfortunate turn! He's just some kind of well-meaning oaf and to encourage him further would be really and truly to ask for it. And so I turned away from him and ordered a brandy and soda, hoping that he would take the hint and understand that the gracious thing for him to do would be to say goodnight and take his departure. His joke had simply failed to jell. He could try it elsewhere—perhaps with some Hollywood writers, or athletic pole-vaulters down at the gymnasium. In our club it was in extreme bad taste.

I wondered who had invited him anyway, and told myself that I would have to ask in the morn-

ing. But apparently the young man was not only insensitive, but stubborn. He just sat there, and continued to talk.

"We thought we would like you to know exactly how we felt about your stories on Tetranus," he said. "And let me say at once that we *are* enchanted by their imaginative qualities, the splendid literary style, and the talent that goes into them in general."

Bradburn, more impatient than the rest of us—and you could hardly condemn him for that—said: "Look here, my lad. Tetranus is not precisely six thousand light years from Mars. As a matter of fact, our more self-respecting astronomers have never made the acquaintance of any star bearing that name. Perhaps you could tell *us* exactly what goes on up there. Much more to the point, how did *you* get down here, huh?"

"Why, Mr. Bradburn. You know how. You don't have to ask. I believe you have written at least six or seven books which you would term 'best sellers' about the mathematical logistics of travel. And you are quite right, you know. You have done a splendid job—a most ingenious job.

"You have described with prophetic near-genius every conceivable method of true space travel. Mr. Finkelhoff has, too. Surely you must realize that your question is —if I may use a terrestrial slang expression—old hat. Unless you yourselves dispute your own inspired guesses."

The young fellow seemed to take on, I must confess, considerable stature as he recited book and verse to prove that he knew what he was talking about. He had not only read all of our combined works—he was familiar with science fiction from the days of Wells and Stapledon. For a moment we were carried away by his erudition and could only stare at him in admiration.

Except, of course, that it was manifestly ridiculous that he could have come from another world. Or was I completely wrong about that? He had even gone a bit further than most of us, and had worked out a number of theorems in higher space mathematics which progressively developed the cores of ideas we were only obscurely aware of.

Furthermore, I found myself not merely disturbed by the man and irritated by him. I was almost frightened. What I did not like was the smooth way he had of seeming to indulge us—his implied air of superiority. No, it couldn't have been superiority, because the man was as modest as a goat. But it was unnerving anyway.

He seemed to be so sure of himself that we all felt disturbed and apprehensive. And suddenly I heard myself saying: "Granting that you come from outside the

Solar System—you must have some very important reason for being here. Suppose you tell us what that reason is in your own words. The hour is late, but I believe I speak for all of us when I say that we really do want to know."

"Thank you," he replied. "I will tell you exactly why I came. May I have a drink first?"

He had not one drink, but two. Finally he set his glass aside, and began, leaning a little forward in his chair, and appearing to choose his words with exceptional care. "Here it is, gentlemen. I have traveled far, but I did not make the journey out of idle curiosity, I assure you. Let me say at once that your remarkable computations with the almost elementary material at your disposal has won our very great esteem and admiration. We think very highly of you, and want to establish a lasting, sound, friendly relationship with you. But you yourselves are preventing it."

The room was quiet now. The young man seemed to sense the startling receptivity which his words had conjured up and he took full advantage of it. It is quite likely that he had hypnotized us slightly, for his persuasiveness was extraordinary. But chiefly I think we listened because what he had to say stunned us.

"You have probed with a great deal of creative intelligence into the physical structure of the universe, and yet—you have failed us. You have betrayed us. You have maligned us. Frankly, gentlemen, while we bear you no ill-will for this betrayal, we think a general reminder is in order."

There was a long, hanging silence. Then the young man went on: "Our quarrel is not a quarrel of angry people in the face of a perverse minority opinion. For, gentlemen, human beings like yourselves *are* in the minority everywhere in the universe."

Bradburn suddenly sprang to his feet. "What nonsense is this?" he demanded. "What sort of lunatic talk—" His eyes gleamed darkly. "For a moment I listened to you with the amused tolerance of a very patient man about to witness some special kind of legerdemain, an interesting new trick, a unique twist. Well—you had an idea, son, but you overplayed it. It was a good first act but it peters out and dies on the second curtain. And an honest critic always has the right to walk out on a bad play."

"Please sit down," the young man said. "This is not a play. And I am not an actor. Perhaps you, Mr. Bradburn, will not admit that my presence here is anything more than a pretense, but I am not greatly concerned with what you may think, or believe in that respect. I'm simply asking you

to do me the courtesy of listening just a little while longer. I have something to say to all of you, and especially to you, Mr. Bradburn, because you have offended us more than the others."

The young man nodded. "Perhaps that is just another way of saying that you, Mr. Bradburn, are a highly interesting writer, and that your offense consists not so much in a lack of special talent as in brilliant imaginative gifts used perversely.

"Now then, gentlemen, I shall come straight to the point. You have envisioned the conquest of Space largely as a tremendous achievement in mechanics. You have stressed man's supremacy over nature, the supremacy of the machine. And in so doing, gentlemen, you have forgotten the lessons of your own great philosophers—Socrates, Plato, Spinoza, Kant, your humanists, your dualistic idealists. You have made mastery of the machine and of nature go hand in hand with the degradation and subservience of man's spirit. And that, gentlemen, is a crime of major proportions.

"How dare you so recklessly fly in the face of the best that has been thought and taught in your world? What makes you think that we in Space would go even further than you in that respect, and end by making man a robot, with nothing remaining of his human creativeness? What makes you think that mechanical mastery means only mastery over the bodies of robot-like men?

"Gentlemen, if what you have done was merely an aberration of your own minds we would ignore it and not interfere. But it is far more than that. There is a strong possibility that in the future all of the predictions of science fiction writers may be fulfilled, and become irreversible, accomplished facts. And since every step that you take brings you closer to us, proximity does more than merely endanger us. It may provoke us to deal very forcibly and determinedly with any hostile force that would turn men into robots everywhere in space."

Of course, everything he said was utter nonsense. It was the sort of immature reasoning that college sophomores resort to, or people with a crusade, or do-gooders generally. And it was obvious that his blue soapbox was just a trick in which he was transferring his juvenile resentment about our all-too-imperfect society to a larger frame of reference by shrewdly using for his own purpose the forum of Space.

Abruptly Bradburn pointed at him and said, "Young man, get out of here. You have been damn rude, and intolerable, and by God, if I don't think you're a subversive of some kind!"

"I told you that I had something special to say to you, Mr.

Bradburn," the young man affirmed. Calmly he walked over to Bradburn and sat down next to him in a relaxed and quite friendly way.

"You are a brilliant and exciting writer, Mr. Bradburn. But your Earth representatives appear by some divine right to have achieved a superior kind of hypocrisy and a gift for making it stick that in your stories, at least, makes them behave like Earth gods among Space savages.

"Have you thought about your own community, Mr. Bradburn? Your own country? Your own world? What right have you to distort your own reality? Have you on Earth done so well? Have you made any really enduring contributions to the community of fellowship throughout the universe of stars?"

We were stunned by his next statement. "I know," he said, "that you must all be skeptical enough. If I should ask a disbelieving scientist to come to an experimental laboratory to test a disputed theory I am quite sure he would do just that. If I asked a mechanic to test a highly complicated piece of machinery, he would in all probability be most eager to prove me either right or wrong.

"And so, gentlemen, anticipating that a profound skepticism would exist in your minds from the first I came prepared to invite you to accompany me back to Tetranus, where you can see and hear and judge and compare for yourselves. What a marvelous opportunity for a skeptic to set all of his doubts at rest. I must warn you, however, that while I can guarantee you a safe journey, I have no authority to extend to you any assurance of complete safety beyond that. But, gentlemen, think! What a magnificent opportunity! What an exciting experiment it would be."

We looked at one another, and although there was no undertone of mockery in the young man's voice, and the invitation seemed sincere enough, we each in turn shook our heads. And that was all. The invitation wasn't repeated and the opportunity was lost.

There is a sequel to all this, and it is perhaps the most astounding part of my story.

When the young man left our club that night, I arose and followed him.

I very foolishly allowed myself to believe that he did not know that he was being followed. He did not once turn.

I followed him to his apartment hotel in midtown Manhattan.

I told the doorman that I was an old friend of the young man who had just come in, and that I wanted to surprise him. The doorman smiled when I tipped him and held the door open for me. The young man was sitting in the

lobby and the instant he saw me, he said: "Why, Roger Nesbit! You know, I thought it would be you. Please sit down."

I sank into a chair at his side, too startled for an instant to say anything at all, or even to breathe normally.

He said, as though reading my thoughts, "Quite a performance, wasn't it? Frankly, I don't know how successful in jolting you out of your complacency I was. But you can't accuse me of not trying."

I said almost angrily: "You're not from Space, are you?"

The young man said, "Why yes . . . I am."

I said, "From Tetranus?"

He nodded. "Of course. I did not lie to you."

"Then how did you get that body, and what are you doing here?" I demanded.

The young man said, "Well, you see . . . I borrowed this fellow's body. Just a minute—I'll tell you his name." He looked in his breast pocket. "The name is Frank Smith. He has to drive a cab in the morning. I just had to borrow *somebody*."

Then the young man smiled at me and said, "You know, of course, that it is quite a simple thing. You have written about it. I have taken over Frank Smith's body. I am now speaking through him. And that is all."

Then the young man eyed me and said, "Goodnight, Roger Nesbit. The show is over. I hope you will think seriously about it. I've got to drive a cab in the morning. Goodnight—"

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of Satellite Science Fiction, published monthly at 501 Fifth Avenue, N. Y. 17, N. Y for October 1, 1957.

1 The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: *Publisher,* Leo Margulies, 24 Fifth Ave., N. Y. 11, N. Y.; *Managing Editor,* Cylvia Kleinman, 24 Fifth Ave., N. Y. 11, N. Y. 2. The owners are: Renown Publications, Inc., 501 Fifth Ave., N. Y. 17, N. Y.; Leo Margulies, 24 Fifth Ave., N. Y. 11, N. Y.; Cylvia Margulies, 24 Fifth Ave., N. Y. 11, N. Y. 3. The known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None 4. Paragraphs 2 and 3 include, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting; also the statements in the two paragraphs show the affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner. (Signed) Leo Margulies, *Publisher.* Sworn to and subscribed before me this 27th day of September, 1957. [Seal] Margaret M. White. (My commission expires March 30, 1959).

The Wife in the Flying Saucer

The extraordinary Mrs. Tiller just wanted to be a plain wife. But there were . . . obstacles.

by DAL STIVENS

IN THE TINY green airplane Mr. and Mrs. Tiller flew towards the sun. Below them, the river unwound like a silver thread and the hedged fields played hide-and-seek under the wings. The sun sang; the engine sang; and Mr. and Mrs. Tiller sang.

"It'd be funny if we saw a flying saucer!" said John Tiller.

"Wouldn't it?" said smiling newlywed Selda Tiller.

Mr. Tiller kicked the rudder control slightly. "I wonder what we'd do?"

"I wonder." Olive-skinned Mrs.

Tiller smiled again, and added, "I love you, darling. Don't let anything come between us, will you?"

"I love you, too," said John Tiller. "No one claims to have seen a flying saucer for weeks."

"I expect the last one has landed—should have," said Mrs. Tiller softly, closing her slanting black eyes.

"What makes you say that?"

"Say what?" said Mrs. Tiller.

"What you just said. You said that you expected the last one had landed."

"Did I?" said Mrs. Tiller.

"It seemed a strange thing to say."

"I suppose it was," said Selda Tiller. "I don't know what—what I was thinking of."

"Strange idea," said John Tiller. His hands moved the stick forward slightly and the plane dipped gently. In the same instant the right wing crumpled and fell away. The plane began tumbling over and over, down, down, like a gun-smashed bird. John Tiller jiggled the stick, cried to his pretty new wife, "Sorry, but it's no use."

"Oh, isn't it," said his wife, very casually. "If you're completely sure you'd better hand me that suitcase under your seat."

"If you wish," he said, surprised.

"You'd better hurry. There's not much time left."

Mrs. Tiller spread the suitcase on her lap. The ground was now very near. Blue sky and clouds, fields and hedges were kaleidoscoping past the windows.

Mrs. Tiller undid the suitcase. She clicked something with her fingers. Mr. Tiller suddenly saw the sky and earth stop playing their wild game of frog-catch-frog past the windows. The sky was above, the earth below, and the plane was flying horizontally in the centre of a shining silver bubble.

There was almost complete silence for a moment, while a faint, not unpleasant humming noise sounded in their ears. Mrs. Tiller was controlling the silver bubble with a gentle waving motion of her left hand, much like a conductor taking an orchestra without a stick.

Selda Tiller said smiling, "It would have had to come out sooner or later. I am a Sidonian from the planet of that name. And the object yonder"—she pointed—"is a flying saucer."

When Mrs. Tiller had repeated her statement in various forms, Mr. Tiller said, "But I still can't believe it! You are just like us."

"Of course," said Mrs. Tiller. "Sidonia is—was—a planet much like Earth. Its atmosphere is the same. Only the climate is a little hotter—or it was."

"You keep saying 'was'," said Mr. Tiller. "Does that mean—"

Mrs. Tiller nodded. "We—that is, Sidonia, blew up. Some of us got away and landed here. I expect the last of us landed about two months ago."

The silver bubble cocooning the wounded plane flew on gently.

"We won't land for a bit," said Selda Tiller, "because I expect we have a lot to talk over."

Ten minutes later, John Tiller was saying, "But if you have—had—all those things, space ships, cosmic power, longevity, and there are some two thousand of you Sidonians here on Earth, including leading scientists like yourself, then it is your duty to teach us."

"Perhaps."

"No 'perhaps' about it."

"Sidonia didn't blow up," Selda said, red-faced. "We blew it up."

"I see."

"So we are waiting to see how you shape—to see if you might be wiser with this knowledge than we were."

Mr. Tiller sat silent for two minutes looking ahead through the bubble that cradled them. "Do you think we would?" he asked presently.

Selda Tiller said, "I think you might."

"Then you can't keep silent. You—or the others."

"There was another reason," she said. And added very slowly, "You."

"I don't quite follow."

"I wanted to be a wife," she said. "A plain wife and not a scientist."

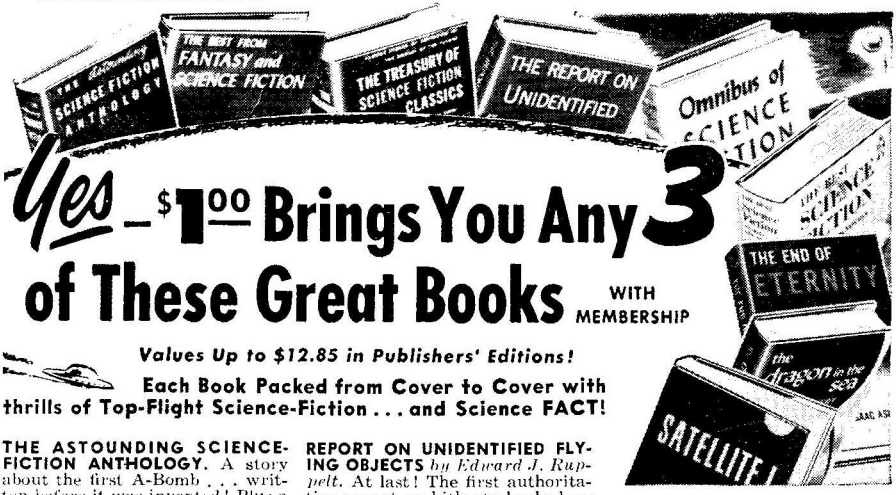
"You can be both," he said.

"No," she said, and pointed. A jet fighter was circling them, waggling its wings. "He wants us to land. He and the rest won't let me be a plain wife," Mrs. Tiller said.

Just how right she was Mr. Tiller realized three days later when he sat alone in his flat and read the newspaper headlines:

RUSSIA'S CLAIM: "SIDONIAN SCIENTISTS WORK FOR US"

—continued from Back Cover



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