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No. 23

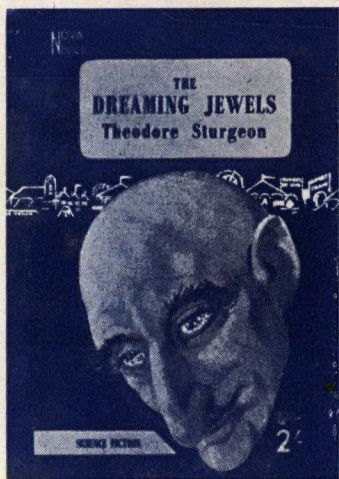
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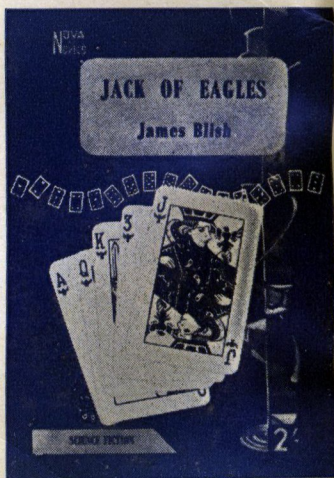
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Today and Tomorrow always appear to be normal days in our orderly Universe, but when Tomorrow comes what actually has happened to Today in terms of Space and Time? In this rather unique story, Peter Hawkins presents the Daymakers—the people who shift our everyday scenery from one day to the next.

THE DAYMAKERS

By PETER HAWKINS

I.

His own mind had been Trevor North's judge and jury ; the evidence his thoughts had provided lay in the two buff folders atop the Polaris Chocbox tape recorder on Christopher Purdy's desk, only a few feet from the couch on which Trevor lay. He could easily have risen, picked up the folders and ripped their contents to shreds, distributing the pieces of paper over the busy traffic of afternoon Kingsway. He could have done, but the action would serve no purpose. His mind—such as it was—had revealed all its secrets to his one lifelong friend and Christopher Purdy, now his psychiatrist, had presented the findings carefully, considerately and with sympathy for him. Stripped of Purdy's euphemisms the verdict was that passed on many ; ambition exceeds ability.

There was nothing at all wrong with Trevor North except that. Polaris Electronic Engineering, created by his father and

now directed by Trevor presented no problems ; in fact the company almost ran itself. Trevor's personal hobby of poetry-writing, a strange companion to his considerable electronic and economic attainments, provided him with a little relief from his business obligations and in common with them gave him small personal satisfaction, although the poems gained good reviews when published. He reworded the verdict in a more acceptable form, laughing at his attempted self-deception. *If I'm not a man of genius, I am a man of talent*, he thought. Well, by any standards he was, but at the moment he'd dispose of all his talent for one solitary hour of satisfaction from doing even the most menial job.

He phrased the verdict yet differently. *I know all the words but none of the music*, he thought. That wasn't strictly true ; music didn't click with him but appealed to the part of his nature which was poet. He raised his wrist languidly to glance at his watch. Purdy had been gone five minutes in response to a call over the intercom, leaving by the door through which Trevor had never been, which led through his two personal rooms and presumably out some back way of the building.

There were two courses of action open to him suggested by Purdy, both of which Trevor North had worked out for himself long ago. He had either to increase his ability or live within his intellectual means. Purdy had also suggested marriage but, despite a few thoroughly bohemian years, Trevor retained too many youthful ideals to be attracted by the psychiatrist's somewhat earthy theories. He looked at his watch again, reflecting that a minute took a damn long time to pass. He glanced around the familiar room, with its rows of book-heavy shelves, thick wall-to-wall carpeting and contemporary furniture, all visible in a dim, hazy way by the light which filtered through the plastic venetian blinds at the windows. A faint rumble, reminder of the world passing some six—or was it seven?—floors below filtered up to him. Another glance at his watch told Trevor that only another minute had passed ; impulsively he rose to his feet and strode over to the door through which Purdy had gone. He pulled open the door and stopped in mid-stride, frightened, half-sick and shivering.

Beyond the door was blackness, utter incredible blackness, against which floated myriads of hair-fine threads of literally thousands of colours and shades, some bold, some pastel, some phosphorescent, some satanically dark, others glowing with almost saint-like purity. They whirled and undulated gently,

never entwining, never touching. At his feet was a drop of some fifty feet, to a grey formless platform, like a bed of fog, which boiled and stirred restlessly, something like men's shapes issuing from it carrying nothing more or less than ghastly building materials.

Trevor's mind refused to accept anything further ; it quietly folded itself up and with increasing velocity pulled Trevor towards the bed of grey and the half-formed men. Somewhere he stopped falling and unconsciousness overtook him.

When he recovered he was laying tieless on Purdy's couch once more, his shoes off, his shirt-collar ripped open, cuffs unfastened and Purdy anxiously holding a glass of water to his lips. Some of the liquid ran down Trevor's chin as he tried to rise but Purdy easily held him down. Purdy's eyes snapped anxiously behind his horn-rimmed bi-focals and with his right hand he waved away the hovering receptionist who was just on the edge of Trevor's field of vision.

"Looks as though you fainted, Trevor," he said, in the softest whisper his resonant foghorn voice could manage. "I suggest again that holiday in the Bahamas or a long cruise."

Despite Purdy's pressure Trevor forced himself into a sitting position and took the glass of water from the psychiatrist's hand.

"I suppose I did faint," admitted Trevor. Quietly he told of his experiences when he opened the door. Purdy seemed, or tried to seem, knowing, as the information came to him.

"I don't quite know what to say about that," he said, "at least, not at the moment." He looked pensive.

"Can I go through that door?" asked Trevor.

"Of course. It leads to a couple of rooms I rent and you can get out into the street."

Trevor didn't doubt it but he wanted to kill the illusion immediately. He opened the door. As Purdy had said there was a short corridor, marble-floored, walls painted hideous pink, off which were two wooden doors and one half-glassed which obviously led into another passage. Gently Trevor closed the door and sat on Purdy's couch, adjusting his dishevelled clothing. He partly surprised himself when he said :

"I think I'll take your advice, Chris, and have that holiday, although I certainly don't need it . . ."

"I think you do," interposed Purdy. "I want you to break out of the straight-jacket that's fastening itself round you. You've got a routine—I know you're busy—but you needn't

always be behind the boss' desk, even if you do think it sets the staff a good example." He smiled paternally.

Trevor laughed.

"Good to hear you laugh, Trevor," said Purdy. "What caused it?"

"You—metaphorically patting me on the head. You're three months younger than I am."

They laughed together and shook hands; Trevor collected his hat, took the lift to street level and stepped into bright sunlit Kingsway, packed with cars, friendly red buses and crowds of hustling noisy people, a world far removed from strange hallucinations and the ghostly chambers of the sub-conscious mind. He walked slowly towards Bush House, halting irresolutely before the giant pillars for a second or two before descending the flight of steps leading to the Strand. There, hesitating again, he eventually turned eastwards, still without purpose. He felt he needed somewhere quiet where he could think and in an instant he knew where to go.

Briskly he turned down Arundel Street, walking past the offices of Nova Publications to sit on one of the seats on the roof of the Temple underground station. To his right, out of his sight was Brunel's statue, ahead of him Scott's *Discovery*.

The warmth of the afternoon sun and the familiar passing traffic soothed Trevor further. People walked past him intent on their own affairs; a tanker and a police patrol boat followed each other closely down-river. Suddenly the fear of the dark doorway with its intertwining strands of colour overwhelmed Trevor again. Whatever the phenomenon was, however it originated, he knew, with a cold incredible certainty that it was horribly real.

He rose to his feet and hailed a passing taxi, ordering the driver to take him to his Chelsea flat. During the journey he considered the verdict his mind had passed on itself and tried to forget the dark doorway. He paid the driver and turned to enter the block of flats.

"Excuse me, sir," called the taxi-driver.

Trevor looked back, surprised.

"Sorry, didn't I give you the right fare . . . ?"

"Yes, thanks. But are you feeling all right? You look a bit under the weather."

"I'm all right, thanks," smiled Trevor. "I've had a pair of nasty shocks this afternoon but nothing a couple of aspirins won't cure."

"That's good, sir. Hope you're fighting fit in the morning."

"Thanks again," smiled Trevor as the taxi started. He caught a glimpse of the driver's face, small, wizened and lined. He had a parrot's beak of a nose, an unkept moustache and, somewhere under his thick coat, a kind heart. Trevor noticed the taxi's number as it sped off in search of another fare.

Once in his flat he treated himself to the aspirins and phoned his office. He told his secretary not to expect him back that day and instructed her to get him a seat on a Paris plane as early as possible next day. He said he'd contact the firm through the French subsidiary for anything he wanted, smiling a little at the thought that within minutes a wire would be despatched informing the Paris Manager that the boss was on his way. Just after four-thirty Miss Blane phoned back to say he had been booked a passage on an Alitalia plane leaving at three-thirty next day and that his passport and other travel documents would be brought along by the chauffeur when he came to take Trevor to catch his flight. He cut out the alarm from his bedside clock radio, took two more aspirins for good measure and resigned himself to a night of drugged sleep.

II

Trevor awoke late next morning and breakfasted in solitary comfort. He tossed a few clothes into his case and spent the rest of the morning reading newspapers, while his Polaris "Bedside Companion" dispensed soft music. Soon after an early lunch Wylie, his chauffeur, arrived and presented him with an envelope containing all his documents. Within minutes the car was on the road to London airport. Lulled by the smooth purr of the car and not feeling disposed to talk to Wylie, Trevor dozed, certain that by the time he had been in Paris a couple of days he would be itching to return. Getting out of the enclosing strait-jacket of routine by random jumps wasn't the way for him. He would have to do things methodically.

Suddenly the brakes squealed and the car lurched on to the pavement, throwing Trevor against the door as it tilted over. Fragments of glass tinkling to the pavement and the sound of metal reached his sleep-dulled brain. For a moment or two he lay against the car door before struggling upright and opening it, only his pride hurt that Wylie wasn't helping him to his feet. The chauffeur was wriggling out from behind the wheel.

"Sorry, sir!" he apologised. "A taxi . . ."

"You're all right, Wylie?"

"Yes, thank you, sir . . ."

"Good," he gasped and forced his way through the crowd that had gathered magically from nowhere.

The taxi, the number of which rang a bell in his mind, had thrust its bonnet into the window of a dress shop, flinging the display in all directions. That was no worry to Trevor; he pushed and pulled people out of his way to reach the driver. It was the same wizened little man who yesterday had wished him better health for the morning.

"Do you know him?" asked a voice in Trevor's ear.

"No. I recognized him; I rode in that taxi yesterday."

"A bit of a shock for you. May I look at him? I'm a doctor."

"Of course," muttered Trevor.

He rejoined Wylie, who by now was talking with two policemen.

"He just swung across the road," Trevor heard him tell them. "I'd say he either had a heart attack or the steering went."

When the policemen turned their attention to him Trevor told them what little he could—which was merely that he had been dozing at the time. He added details of yesterday's encounter with the taximan and that he appeared to be in good health then. After taking his name and address the policemen dismissed him. The crowd around the two damaged vehicles and broken shop-window had grown denser; the silvery trill of an ambulance bell drowned its murmurings and the people parted to allow the ambulance men to pass through. Trevor discovered the taximan's name was Hugh Rogers and that he lived in Shepherd's Bush. He gave his private address to the ambulance men and asked that he be kept informed of his condition.

"I'm going to phone the office, sir, and get another car sent out for you," Wylie told him.

"Yes. Tell Miss Blane, will you, that I shan't be going on this trip and ask her to cancel everything."

On his return to his flat Trevor felt singularly lonely. He had never been a man who had deliberately sought out company and consequently company had never sought him. He was popular in his immediate business circle but generally speaking he refused the invitations which came his way from business acquaintances. Right now, though, he felt he needed someone really close to him with whom he could talk. It came as a distinct shock to realise there was no one to whom he could turn.

The business associates would listen if he dared tell them, and try to cheer him up ; the office staff, similarly, would be attentive because their bread and butter depended on listening when the boss spoke. Trevor regretted that thought ; he knew he was quite popular with the staff. His one life-long friend, Christopher Purdy, was a professional listener to troubles and as such couldn't be relied upon to give sincere comments and suggestions. Trevor read an early edition of an evening paper over tea and afterwards managed to book a seat for the musical at Drury Lane, an outing he'd been planning for a long time. He retired to his room after tea and read through a file of company material which he'd intended to study today had not Purdy almost got him off to Paris. Resolutely he closed his mind to Purdy and his findings, the fainting fit and the coincidence of the taxi-driver.

He felt a little more cheerful for a shower and took more than his usual care with his dressing. He phoned for a taxi and, arriving early at Drury Lane, took a stroll through the crowds around the theatre, suddenly realising with an unpleasant shock that Drury Lane was only a matter of yards from Christopher Purdy's consulting room in Kingsway.

As Trevor made his way back to the theatre he paused on a corner to allow a car to pass. A chalk-scrawled newspaper placard attracted his attention ; it said simply :

“Plane crash at Orly. Many killed.”

Trevor hurried across the road, added two pennies to the pile of small change by the papers and took a copy. There, smudgily printed in the stop-press column, were the barest of facts ; the only details the placard hadn't given were that the plane belonged to Alitalia and had left London airport at three-thirty. Trevor felt cold ; that was certainly the flight he would have taken had it not been for the accident this afternoon. He shoved the paper in his pocket and joined the throng outside the theatre. He collected his ticket and went to his seat, surveying with slightly cynical detachment the audience anticipating the performance.

Below and above, somewhere among the crowd, it was possible there was just one person who had read some of his poems ; also it was certain that a considerable percentage of the people around him used one or more Polaris products in their homes. No feeling of achievement or satisfaction passed through him with that knowledge ; it seemed as if he had taken no part in it whatsoever, indeed almost as if someone other than himself had accomplished it and he was merely aware of the fact.

He glanced at the person sitting to his right ; she was elderly, held a rustling box of chocolates on her lap and was talking animatedly though quietly to the man on her right, whom Trevor decided was her husband. The place to Trevor's left was empty ; he ruefully considered it a symbol of the life he had suddenly discovered was friendless. Eventually the show started, the curtains rising on a blank, empty stage against the backdrop of which whirled and twisted a multi-coloured skein of hair-fine threads. Trevor drew in a deep breath and grabbed the arms of his chair ; he felt the eyes of several people near-by focus on him and was aware that someone had occupied the vacant seat to his left. The illusion of the lines faded into a dim street-scene. Quite under control but very tense, Trevor glanced around ; now nobody except the woman to his right was looking at him and the man who had just sat down was alternating his attention between the dimly lighted stage and his programme. In what little light there was Trevor studied his neighbour and with a start that knotted the muscles in his stomach realised that he was the identical twin of Hugh Rogers, the taxi-driver. That was, if Hugh Rogers possessed a twin brother.

Suddenly, with murmured apologies to the people he disturbed, the man got up and walked out. By the end of the play he hadn't returned.

III

The next morning, after a night of troubled sleep, Trevor phoned his secretary and told her not to expect him until she saw him. Then he took a taxi to Christopher Purdy's consulting room in Kingsway and encountered Purdy waiting for the lift. Purdy deliberately maintained the conversation on the level of the weather and recent TV programmes until they were safely in his consulting room. He waved Trevor to the couch.

"Now tell me why you're not in Paris," he ordered.

Trevor did so, in detail, stressing the coincidence of the taxi-driver, the chance that had made him miss the plane-crash and the simultaneous appearance of, apparently, Hugh Rogers' twin brother and the illusion of the hair-fine lines at Drury Lane.

Purdy nodded impatiently from time to time as Trevor told his story, almost as if he knew what was coming. As Trevor finished Purdy nodded more emphatically and reached into a drawer of his desk.

"This will surprise you Trevor, but I want you to consider how it fits in with what's been happening to you lately." He

walked over to Trevor and handed him a glossy reproduction of a painting showing a cluster of multi-coloured hair-fine lines. Movement was inherent in the lines and although they were but a photograph of pigments on canvas Trevor almost felt himself falling through the door in the opposite wall. Anxiously he glanced at it ; it was closed.

"It's locked, too," confirmed Purdy.

"That's just as I saw it, but . . ."

"Like to meet the artist?" asked Purdy.

"But of course." Trevor sat upright on the couch. "What's his address? I'll go along and see him."

Purdy shook his head.

"His name's Adrian Hammond. His address—when he has money—is somewhere in Earls Court or Bloomsbury, or if he's broke it's the Embankment . . ."

"Where is he *now*?" demanded Trevor angrily.

"He's here. Your description of these hair-five lines triggered off something I'd seen. That reproduction was it. I traced him through a friend of mine last night and found him. He'd made a sale, had a couple of rooms in Bloomsbury and was drinking himself stupid . . ."

"Has he done anything else like this? Has any other painter?" asked Trevor.

"Yes, plenty of them. Nash's *Landscape of a Dream* is one which springs to my mind, although the subject matter has little in common with this. Adrain—always call him Adrian, by the way—entitles this *World Without Beginning* although I see it merely as an excellent exercise in balancing colours with a little touch of talent in it." Purdy walked from his chair to the locked door and unfastened it.

"Adrian," he called, standing back to allow one of the most pitiable specimens of humanity Trevor had ever seen hobble into the room. He tried hard to control the expression of distaste forming on his features as he extended his arm and felt Adrian Hammond's effeminate hand rest like a shy butterfly in his. Amongst other things it was obvious that Adrian hadn't taken a bath for a long time ; he certainly hadn't shaved for several days and even if he had his features, white and pale, would have looked ugly beneath straggling sideburns. Both eyes were bloodshot beneath almost non-existent eyebrows and a nervous tic flicked the lower lid of the left. The hand slipped from Trevor's grasp, and Adrian's thin lips parted slightly, blowing an alcoholic breeze over Trevor's face.

"I'm pleased to meet you, Mr. North, especially as I understand you've had an experience similar to mine."

"I—think I have," agreed Trevor.

"Sit down, the pair of you," ordered Purdy, professionally cheerful. He brought a chair for Adrian and waved Trevor to the couch. Adrian sat down, eyes firmly fixed on Trevor. "Tell me about it, please?"

"I've seen it twice," said Trevor, smiling slightly at the expression of eagerness which spread over Adrian's face. He proceeded to describe the occasions as best he could.

"But the colours, the colours!" breathed Adrian eagerly.

Trevor shook his head.

"You've described them with your brush better than I could with words," he said.

"The colours strike a poet powerless? Then they were infinitely more wonderful than my brushes painted them."

"They were," admitted Trevor reluctantly, feeling a liking for Adrian growing inside him despite the man's unpleasant presence. "How did you come to see the lines?"

"I was without money and worse—there was nobody from whom I could borrow. I saw a man I once knew going into an expensive hotel and I went after him. Because of my leg I couldn't catch up with him and when I entered the hotel's swing doors it was then I saw—that vision. I ran out immediately and painted the picture while it was still fresh in my memory. Two days later I went back to the hotel and was thrown out by the doorkeeper, but I saw beyond the doors into a perfectly ordinary lobby."

Trevor's pity for Adrian deepened. Here was a man who would certainly inspire no emotion other than distaste at first sight yet who, once spoken to, commanded respect for his unswerving inner calmness.

"Well, what do you make of him?" asked Purdy when Adrian had hobbled from the consulting room.

"I don't know," admitted Trevor. "What's your opinion? You're a professional assessor of humans."

"I'm saying nothing until I know a great deal more about him. Right now I want to talk about you. You've been overworking." Purdy raised his vibrant voice slightly, "and you refuse to pay any attention to my advice. All your life you've been working at a gradually increasing tempo, never slackening off for one moment. Even when you play, your head, not your heart,

directs you. Do you wonder you never gain any satisfaction from anything? Of course there's nothing organically or physically wrong but merely you have an exceptional—call it a battery—which has kept you going. Now that battery is very nearly exhausted and it needs re-charging, always assuming that it's not too late."

Previously Purdy had never lost his temper in a professional discussion ; even now it was hard to say he had actually done that, rather he allowed his personal feelings in the matter to come too prominently to the fore. He could see his words had impressed Trevor and he leaned back in his chair.

"In other words I've got to learn to find satisfaction in what I do or take the consequences, whether they be mental, physical, or both," observed Trevor.

Christopher Purdy nodded, a smile spreading across his affable features.

"It's taken us a long time to come to an agreement," replied Purdy. "Now, Trevor, leave this with me. I've got your interests more at heart than you realise ; I want to see you set up and without any worries. I've a friend in a travel agency who'll fix you up a whale of a tour and you'll thoroughly enjoy every minute of it. I'll phone you at your flat and I'll arrange lunch for the three of us. All right?"

Trevor smiled agreement and after some small talk with Purdy left in a taxi for his Chelsea flat. The taxi reminded him of Hugh Rogers and on entering the flat he called the hospital. Hugh Rogers had apparently undergone a heart attack—he was in his sixties—but would be quite well in a few weeks. After lunch Trevor made notes of some new designs he wanted made in domestic equipment, unaware of how quickly the time was passing until he realised he was hungry. After a hurried evening meal he took a bus to Hyde Park corner and walked slowly along Piccadilly and up Regent Street, mingling with the window-shopping evening crowds. He passed an hour at a news-theatre and took a few drinks in an almost deserted bar, both things he hadn't done for a long time. Feeling almost at peace with the world he took a taxi home and went to bed pleasantly anticipating Chr.s Purdy's phone call for lunch with his travel-agent friend.

Trevor awoke with a feeling that something was wrong. His mystification lasted a second or two before he realised what it was. The Polaris "Bedside Companion" alarm clock had stopped at exactly midnight ; he assumed a fuse had blown

somewhere in the hotel power circuit and it had stopped because of that. Yawning, he stretched out a hand to switch on the radio part of the instrument. To his surprise the knob fell out of the set. He got out of bed, found a nailfile and used it as a screwdriver to fasten the tiny grub-screw on the switch. He turned it on, annoyed when the set gave out no sound. It was a Polaris "Bedside Companion" printed-circuit job, production line model, cream plastic case, the Polaris shield—a silver star on a black background—on it. Mildly exasperated Trevor flicked up the main light switch but the bulb in the centre of the room emitted no light. Daylight was filtering through the curtains, so he picked up his wristwatch from the dressing table. That too, had stopped at precisely midnight and seemed to be overwound. His feeling of unease mounting, he ripped back the curtains and looked out on to the street below.

It took him a second or two before he realised the awful difference there was between this and every other morning. There were no cars, no buses, no people on the streets, not even a stray cat or dog. Worse, there was no sound of any traffic at all. Anxiously Trevor looked up at the sky; it was a clear, pale blue and the sun shone from it, if not as usual, then at least as normally as it ever did. Trevor shivered and dressed; at least there were no multi-coloured threads to be seen. Perhaps they would appear when he opened the door.

He took a firm grip on himself; things, he reasoned, were very queer indeed but perhaps he was better equipped than many to deal with strange happenings. His electronic engineering achievements gave him reasoning power, his economic attainments power of prediction, his forays into the arts with poetry had developed his sense of wonder and made him appreciative of other artists' attempts in similar fields. If some unusual phenomenon had occurred surely these three facets of his character could at least attempt to cope with whatever had happened but—where was everybody?

Trevor's Polaris electric shaver didn't work of course, and the tap yielded no water when he twisted it. For a few seconds panic overwhelmed him; without water he could live only about two or three days and suddenly he felt desperately, incredibly thirsty. Gradually reason re-asserted itself; with a little luck there would be plenty of liquids—everything from beer to tinned soup—lying around somewhere, if only he could find where. Trevor dressed, put on a stout pair of shoes and, bracing himself

pulled open the door. As it opened on to a familiar though, as often deserted passage he breathed a sigh of relief.

He couldn't hear the slightest of sounds from anywhere ; his own footsteps made no noise on the thickly-carpeted floor. Feeling foolish he raised his voice and shouted loudly. Only echoes replied as they did to two more shouts. When he reached the vestibule Trevor lifted the receptionist's telephone, expecting only silence in the earpiece. His anticipation was correct.

The part of his mind which dealt with the " why " and " how " of things sealed itself off from the part which merely recorded events. In that action, Trevor knew, lay sanity—unless he was trying to remain sane within a framework of insanity. The first things anybody looked for were water, food and shelter. Of the last there was plenty ; to see about the others Trevor made his way to the kitchens, finding no fresh food in the larders and none in the—of course, not functioning—refrigerators. There was an abundance of canned and bottled food and without thinking further Trevor pulled a tin of grapefruit juice from the shelf and punched two holes in it with a can-opener. After two mouthfuls he placed the can on a ledge and put the opener in his pocket. He shouted again, half-heartedly, for he was certain there would be no reply. There wasn't.

IV

Refusing to allow himself to speculate on what had happened Trevor mounted the stairs and walked out into the utterly deserted street. He wandered along for a while without seeing the slightest sign of life, his footsteps sounding unnaturally loud on the pavements. Quite unintentionally he found himself by the river, just by the Albert Bridge.

The Thames had dried up. The shock left him numb for several moments while his muddled brain fought to rationalise what his eyes told him was, or rather wasn't there. Not the slightest pool of muddy water lay in the river bed, its only inhabitants boats lying at helpless angles where the vanished waters had deposited them.

Trevor sank to the pavement and lay there, supine, for a long while. Eventually he forced his mind to accept the evidence of his eyes and made his unwilling body stand upright. Slowly and without feeling he stumbled eastwards, a little living part of his mind telling him to get to Christopher Purdy's consulting rooms. Purdy probably wouldn't be there but among his books

and papers Trevor felt there might be a hint as to what all this was about.

No further improbability inflicted itself on his senses before he reached Lambeth Bridge. By then, very hungry, he had reconciled himself to the fact that the oddest things might happen and that he might as well be prepared for anything. A car would be very useful, except that he hadn't seen one anywhere. His slow thoughts suddenly halted, registering the fact that a pedal cycle was propped against the pavement on the other side of the road. Without wondering who the owner had been, or whether he might want it again Trevor sprang into the saddle and peddled along Millbank, past Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament on to the Embankment. Scotland Yard, he noted with a qualm of fear over his stolen bicycle, was still there, but as he passed under Hungerford Bridge he realised three things had vanished. There was no RAF memorial, no Cleopatra's Needle, and above all no Waterloo bridge.

Waterloo bridge gave his mind a chance to exercise his deadened faculties. It seemed as if the great bridge had been cut away cleanly and neatly by some machine beyond his knowledge, leaving all the details of the construction visible in cross-section.

He lingered a few moments, first throwing a penny against the cross-section and when it fell to the ground, undamaged, recklessly fingering the shorn, glass-smooth surface of the bridge. It tingled slightly which, by nature, reinforced concrete didn't. Trevor stored away the knowledge, the first piece of information which had come his way.

He cycled slowly along the Embankment, noting that Scott's *Discovery* had gone but Brunel still stared across the Thames. Beside the statue of the great engineer he dismounted and walked his machine up the hill to the Strand, proceeding against the One Way signs when he remounted and turned from Aldwych into Kingsway.

Trevor felt no comfort or relief when he entered the building where Purdy had his consulting room. If anything he felt uneasy, anticipating a further shock. He had first seen the hair-fine lines here; would he open some door and fall into a greying, bottomless pit? It took him all his fast-vanishing courage to open the door to Purdy's suite.

No hair-fine lines manifested themselves and everything seemed normal. Trevor opened the door to the consulting room itself, drawing in a deep breath as he saw Christopher Purdy sprawled across his desk. Trevor dashed to him, just a finger's

touch telling him Purdy was dead. The little clock on Purdy's desk had stopped at exactly midnight.

Again Trevor forced down the questions rising within his mind ; sanity, he was certain, lay in accepting facts and going along with events, not in trying to work out their purpose or how they occurred. He accepted the fact of Christopher Purdy's death, considering it for a brief second as a personal loss and then as another tragedy in the whole tragic pattern which surrounded him. He pulled Purdy upright and without success tried to diagnose the cause of death ; from his expression alone Purdy might have been sleeping. A cursory glance at the dead man's watch, which had stopped at midnight, revealed two things. As Trevor lifted Purdy's arm a tiny microphone fell from his hand and beneath his forearm, scrawled on the blotter were the enigmatic, melodramatic words :

"I can't stay much longer. Time's short. Try the Chocbox."

With acceptance still his motto Trevor decided to play the game to which he thought Purdy was alluding. Whatever it was it was dangerous, because Purdy had died ; time was certainly short because it had finished at midnight and the tape-recorder was a total loss because whatever Purdy had put on the reel was as useless, for the moment, as if it had been written in Sanskrit. Trevor switched on the machine, not disappointed when the little pilot light on the cream plastic case failed to glow.

"Thanks, Chris," murmured Trevor. He patted the dead man's shoulder and picked up the little machine. He looked around the office and walked out, down the stairs to his bicycle in deserted Kingsway. Carefully he placed the tape-recorder in the saddle bag and set himself to thinking where there was a shop which sold torch batteries. As long as he could get twelve volts DC from somewhere he could plug the power source into the sockets for car-battery operation.

That, suddenly, was no problem. He recalled the many little side-streets just behind Leicester Square Underground Station where he knew for a certainty there were several electrical shops. He pedalled through deserted side-streets and into Long Acre ; just off it he found what he was looking for. He removed the Chocbox from the saddle bag and, without thinking twice, lifted up his cycle and threw it bodily through the plate-glass window into the display of radios, TVs and miscellaneous electrical goods. As the plate glass crashed and tinkled and clattered to the display floor, Trevor muttered an apology to his rivals and to the men in his own factories who made the contents.

Suddenly, while the glass was still falling, he started to curse himself for being an absolute fool ; if his cycle tyres had been punctured he was without means of transport other than by foot. He stepped gingerly through the shattered window and amid the wreckage of several TVs. As if he were comforting a dying man he eased his cycle upright and felt the tyres. Both, miraculously, were still hard. Trevor breathed a sigh of relief and, by association because there was no water to seek out punctures, felt thirsty and as an afterthought, very hungry. He looked at the display of radios and, feeling pleasantly partisan selected a set made by his fiercest competitor, walked a few yards along the street to a grocery shop and heaved the radio through the glass front door.

The crash was much less spectacular than throwing the cycle through the radio shop window but what followed was infinitely more exciting. From a distance, a long way away, thin and faint, came an unmistakable human shout, a long, drawnout reverberating "Halloo," which echoed waveringly among the deserted buildings.

Trevor waited until he was certain the last shreds of sound had vanished and decided the hail came from westwards. He shouted a reply, more than pleased when an answer came, certainly from the west. He forgot hunger tearing at his stomach and returned for his cycle, pedalling as far as the A.A. offices in Leicester Square before halting and shouting again. *Surely*, he thought, *the caller can't be very far away*. He shouted again, overjoyed when from the echoes he deciphered the words, "Where are you ? I'll find you."

Trevor called out his location, jubilant when he received the reply,

"I'll be with you in two minutes."

It was just under two minutes, the longest time Trevor had ever known, before a man on a bicycle came into view incongruously wearing a Homburg and a blue business suit, trouser legs tucked into tartan socks.

He was pedalling rapidly and braked his machine just in front of Trevor.

"God, it's good to see someone," he panted, red-faced, as he dismounted. "What the devil's happened ? Am I going crazy, or have I gone already ?" He had a slight Liverpool accent.

Trevor hardly heard the words ; he was staring disbelievingly at the man's face. The sound of the voice told him that the man before him certainly wasn't taxi-driver Hugh Rogers but was in all probability the man who had sat beside him at Drury Lane—how long ago ?

“ You don't look too well ; I don't feel very happy myself.” He extended his right hand. “ My name's Kenneth Shore.”

Trevor clasped the hand in his and introduced himself.

“ Of Polaris Electronic Engineering ? ”

Trevor nodded. Considerable respect warmed Shore's tones as he observed,

“ Glad one of us has some brains, then. But what the devil's happened ? ” he reiterated.

“ I wish I knew,” admitted Trevor. He paused for a moment or two, deciding to discover what Shore had experienced before telling his own unlikely story. “ I've located a good grocery shop just up the road,” he said. “ Perhaps you'd like to share my find with me.”

“ Certainly,” agreed Shore as they walked off. “ We've got to live, haven't we ? ”

“ You're taking it all very calmly,” observed Trevor.

“ No option, really,” was the reply. “ Something utterly cock-eyed has happened and until it's put straight we shan't know what it is—if then. Judging from the clocks I've seen and my watch everything stopped still at midnight and everybody and a lot of things vanished. You know, Cinderella at the ball.”

He broke off as they passed the Underground Station.

“ It's no use being flippant, is it ? I've had a couple of other queer experiences in the last few days that I just can't explain. Like to hear about them ? ”

“ Please,” said Trevor.

“ I was going to fly to Paris on business a couple of days ago. Fortunately—I think—the deal I was going to clinch fell through, so I cancelled my flight. The plane crashed at Orly on landing and all passengers were killed. You read about it in the papers, perhaps ? ”

“ A paragraph in the stop press,” admitted Trevor.

“ Before going back to Liverpool I had a couple of days to kill. I wandered here and there, looking around and when evening came I found myself at a loose end. This is where things get—a little confused.” He hesitated, continuing as Trevor gave him a sympathetic nod. “ I heard a voice, vibrant

and very distinctive, telling me to go to Drury Lane. I went, because I *had* to, although I'd seen the show only the night before. I bought a ticket, sat down and immediately the compulsion vanished. So I got up and left. The people around must have thought me completely crazy. Then I discovered the news of the plane crash."

Confusion reigned supreme in Trevor North's thoughts. Should he match his own experiences against Kenneth Shore's and have his words taken as a sop to a so far harmless lunatic, or should he say nothing? Suppose, if he took the latter course, Shore were part and parcel of the change which had overwhelmed the world . . . but if Shore knew the whole story, why tell him what he already knew? Trevor kept silent, other than for a few words of sympathy over Shore's strange experiences.

V

At the electrical shop they parted, Shore to get some food and Trevor to rig, hurriedly, a group of torch batteries to run the tape-recorder. He glanced out of the window as he made the final connection, having no desire to have Shore burst in on the words Christopher Purdy had recorded on the tape. Shore was not to be seen.

Trevor switched on anxiously, remembering the grub screw which had fallen out of his radio this morning. The indicator light glowed red and Trevor flicked from neutral to playback. Purdy's resonant voice issued from the tiny speaker.

"Trevor, I've very little time and if you're hearing this you'll certainly have undergone some unpleasant experiences, probably including finding my dead body. I have so much to tell you I don't know where to start . . ."

At the sound of a foot crushing broken glass Trevor lowered the volume and turned to see Shore standing over him, a wooden stave in one hand and a bottle of orange squash in the other.

"What's that?" he demanded, tension thickening his Liverpool accent. He pointed the stave at the whispering Chocbox.

"A friend and I gossip by tape recorder. I got it from his place to see what he said . . ."

"Not good enough," snapped Shore. "'That's the voice that made me go to Drury Lane last night.'"

The stave descended on Trevor's head with a crack that seemed to split it open and sent him whirling into unconsciousness amid a flurry of multi-coloured lights.

When Trevor recovered he found he was unable to move his arms or legs. The brightness of day was sinking into twilight and already the narrow street was quite dark. The Chocbox was still switched on and presumably Shore had heard through the information Christopher Purdy had put on the tape. Of Shore there was neither sight nor sound ; he might never have existed had he not battered Trevor's head and bound his arms and legs with insulating tape.

After a while hollow, echoing footsteps, like those of an actor walking across the stage of an empty theatre, sounded in the distance.

"Shore," shouted Trevor.

"Coming," was the reply. He didn't sound perturbed ; like Trevor, early on, he must have determined to accept and not probe.

A minute or so later he clambered through the debris of the window display, still wearing his Homburg. He took it off and hung it on the shop's door handle.

"Sorry I clouted you like that ; I hope it doesn't hurt too much. I've been looking round for something to bathe it with but once water's gone there doesn't seem to be much else left . . ."

"Take off this insulating tape, will you ?" demanded Trevor. Shore looked doubtful.

"I listened to what your friend had to say on that machine." He indicated the tape recorder. "I didn't like it."

"Look," protested Trevor, "we don't know what he went through. We missed it all . . ."

"Yes, we did," snapped Shore. "He didn't though. He knew what was coming, if what he says is true and if he's not a raving lunatic . . ."

"He was a psychiatrist," smiled Trevor.

"Then he probably was a lunatic or he wouldn't want to look into people's minds. I've never had any time for the breed."

Trevor saw he was getting nowhere.

"Will you take off this insulating tape so I can get some food."

Shore hesitated, and was lost.

"Give me your word you'll not retaliate in any way ?"

"What's the point ?" asked Trevor. "You hit me with that piece of wood because you thought I was partly the cause of what's happened. If you'd wanted you could have killed me while I was out." Suddenly Trevor switched to the attack. "Or did you keep me alive because you're afraid of the dark ? Night's coming, there's no electricity, the moon and stars may

not shine and the devil knows what might come creeping out of the shadows."

He felt a little afraid of the picture he had painted : the words had just flashed into his head but they represented an awful possibility.

"Look, North, I'm sorry I attacked you. I was overwrought, especially hearing that voice. I wanted you quiet when I returned, that's why I tied you up . . ."

"Then untie me."

Shore hesitated again before peeling off the insulating tape. Immediately he had finished Trevor went to the Chocbox. The machine was switched on but no sound came from it.

"The batteries ran down," informed Shore.

"I'll rig some more after I've eaten," said Trevor.

"You won't, North. I'm not listening to that madman again." As he spoke Shore picked up the wooden stave.

"As you wish," shrugged Trevor. "I'm going to get some food. Coming?"

After they'd returned to the electrical shop Trevor connected up some batteries to give light from a twelve volt bulb and set about fixing some more for the Chocbox. As he made the final connection Shore returned from exploring the shop's living rooms.

"You said you weren't going to play that tape through."

"The man was a friend of mine and I intend to hear what he has to say. Go into one of the living rooms so you won't hear the voice . . ."

"It's too much knowing it's speaking . . ." began Shore. Suddenly he leapt at Trevor, no intention of his action showing by tensing of muscles or widening of eyes. Trevor dodged and, disregarding any injury he might do Shore, punched him violently in the kidneys, swiftly following it with a blow behind the ear. Shore collapsed over the counter, moaning softly. Trevor dragged him to the floor sought out the insulating tape and bound his hands and feet together. He carried Shore, still moaning softly, into a bedroom and laid him on the bed.

"It's a bit better than you did for me," he snapped as Shore protested weakly at being left.

From now on he had Shore to worry about ; the man, despite his outward acceptance of what had happened, was obviously very deeply disturbed and frantic at the thought of hearing Christopher Purdy's voice. Trevor brought a chair from one

of the rooms and sat beside the tape recorder. He switched it to playback with the volume turned down so as not to disturb Shore and listened, at times uncomprehending, at others amazed and often thoroughly bewildered, to Christopher Purdy's tense and undoubtedly sincere words.

"Trevor, I've very little time and if you're hearing this you'll certainly have undergone some unpleasant experiences probably including finding my dead body. I have so much to tell you I don't know where to start except that to tell you the world just isn't what it seems. It begins and ends at midnight ; it lasts twenty-four hours, with some addition or subtraction of minutes where necessary. In fact, each day is like a set for a play, is used once only, and is dismantled after use, parts of it being salvaged suitably grimed or weathered according to Man's ideas, for the days ahead. Plants and vegetation are all grown, for each day too. By now I'm certain you will have asked yourself why is this so and why science has not detected the changes which go on. That is comparatively simple ; the whole universe is quite different in construction from any theory that has been put forward but it just so happens that at a considerable number of points the pattern philosophers have worked out actually fits the pattern of events and things as they are—rather like putting the wrong piece in a jig-saw puzzle. Remember, though, that is only a comparison and in no way a true picture of affairs.

"Next, each day exists for two years ; it is built, interleaved like the pages of a book, made up from new pieces of scenery or parts and pieces used on previous days. During the next year it is demolished, pieces are removed and used to make up other days coming along. Ever mislaid—say a pen—and found it the next day ? That was one of our clerical errors. Remember the multi-coloured lines you saw and the men boiling out of a grey mist carrying building materials ? Well, only I was ever supposed to look out of that door so you saw some communications equipment—the multi-coloured lines—and a gang of workers trying frantically to catch up with your sudden impulse. They were too late ; I couldn't get the order through in time to have the passageway built up for you.

"Now let's get to you. You never found satisfaction in the achievements in your career because you never did work for which you are suited. Your ability lies in coping with a multitude of organisation and supply problems, making the policy decisions and, in short, ensuring no pens are mislaid. Remember when

you re-organised Polaris factory production, opening those two new factories? Wasn't that the happiest time of your life? Couldn't you have gone on doing that for ever? Placing something here, something there, bringing in this at just the right time . . . wonderful, wasn't it? Well, that's what you'll be doing before long, when the Daymakers find you. The Daymakers have decided Human technology is outstripping their ability to duplicate it and consequently are seeking suitable recruits from among humans. You, Trevor North, have been selected."

Then came the first pause in Christopher Purdy's words, followed by a short bitter laugh.

"You were recommended as a Co-ordinator regardless of one thing. If for some reason the Daymakers can no longer keep pace with building your world for you each day, then surely they shouldn't carry on with doing it. Surely it would be better for Humanity to endeavour to work out its own salvation. The lines which carry instructions and messages—the hair-fine, multi-coloured lines you saw—are at best a stopgap; they just haven't the capacity to carry all the instructions which replace either your expanding life and economy or your technical achievements. In the year nineteen hundred the task was simple; now it's a nightmare rush which has divided the Daymakers into two parties, those ostrich-like individuals who hope something will turn up and a small minority which say men must live in reality and not the artificial environment created for them.

"And that brings us to me. 'One man in his time plays many parts' and superficially they suspect me of being what I am, a cuckoo in their nest . . ."

Again Christopher Purdy started to laugh in a harsh, bitter manner but this time didn't finish; the laugh was cut off, followed by the not quite empty silence of the tape running without sound on it. The last midnight had come for Christopher Purdy.

VI

Trevor, engrossed in Christopher Purdy's words, hadn't noticed night fall. In the darkness he sat beside the Chocbox, eyes on nothing, thinking furiously. There was the pattern, barely; Christopher Purdy, his lifelong friend, had sacrificed him on the altar of some personal, alien ambition. But, Trevor had to admit, he fancied the organisational problems attached

to such a job and, after all, he *had* been at a loose end. He chuckled ; if he'd been selected and approved by the Daymakers he certainly wouldn't be permitted to go back to being Trevor North of Polaris Electronic Engineering.

He found an electric torch and went into the room where he had lain Shore. Shore watched him enter, glaring sullenly.

"Have you heard it through?"

Trevor nodded.

"What do you make of it?"

"No more than you did, but . . ."

"That's an unsatisfactory answer," snapped Shore.

"The whole thing is very unsatisfactory," replied Trevor. He hesitated, continuing, "We're in a nasty spot and being unpleasant to each other won't help at all. Night's fallen, I'm damn tired and I've no doubt you are too. Each of us has attacked the other, so shall we call it even?"

Shore was evidently doubtful, fearing Trevor's complicity in the strange events. Equally Trevor feared assaulting him again. Eventually, with considerable ill-feeling, he growled.

"Very well," and held up his hands for Trevor to remove the insulating tape.

Both Trevor and Shore slept only fitfully throughout the dark night, usually comforted when each awoke by finding the other also awake and by shining a torch beam around the small room in which they lay. When the first gleams of sunlight penetrated the window they both relaxed and fell into deep sleep.

Trevor awoke first, hungry and thirsty. Without rousing Shore he walked to the grocery shop and selected some tins and bottles of food. As he re-entered the radio shop he heard Shore bellow :

"North, where are you? North! North!" The panic-stricken shouting died into a little sob of relief as Trevor came into the room.

"Just been fetching some food," said Trevor.

"I thought you'd vanished, like everyone else." Gratefully he accepted Trevor's tin-opener and started removing the lid from a can of soup.

"Tastes a lot better like this than I thought it would," he said, after two mouthfuls. They conversed desultorily while eating neither speculating about the strange circumstances which had brought them together. After a long silence Shore suggested they take their cycles and look around. Trevor agreed, pleased that the idea uppermost in his own mind had also occurred to

Shore. Trevor wanted to get about to see if he could find any indications of what was happening. By way of answer he got to his feet and said,

“I feel like some exercise.”

They mounted their cycles and headed towards Trafalgar Square. Before they reached the square itself Trevor realised that Nelson's Column had gone, undoubtedly the same way as the other missing monuments, Scott's *Discovery* and Waterloo Bridge. Just beside the National Gallery they dismounted, Shore laughing hysterically until Trevor slapped his face.

“Sorry,” apologised Shore, wiping tears from his eyes with grimy fingers, “but although I've been to London dozens of times on business, yesterday was the first time I'd seen Nelson's column. And today it's gone—and look, two of the lions have gone. Why two?”

Trevor shook his head, strictly for Shore's benefit. Christopher Purdy had said that parts of the stage-set were used and re-used. Very well, then, some day probably not very far in the future had need of lions, stone, two, Nelson's column for the use of. He chuckled, too loudly, stopping suddenly when he saw Shore lift a hand to strike him. In his turn he apologised to Shore.

“Let's carry on looking,” he suggested.

Shore agreed and followed the traffic signs to go under Admiralty Arch and along the Mall towards Buckingham Palace, Trevor a couple of yards behind him. Without warning Shore's machine fell from under him. Astonished, Trevor braked and jumped from his cycle, eyes starting from their sockets as he watched the screaming Shore slowly fall *up* unto the sky, tumbling over and over, his Homburg off his head and gyrating around him like an eccentric satellite about its primary.

Trevor still hadn't recovered from the shock when Shore was a speck against the blue of the heavens and his wildly flapping arms and legs were no longer distinguishable. He lowered himself gently to the pavement and fell asleep, his head propped against a Belisha beacon.

When he awoke he recalled the incident in a dream-like unreal way, not altogether certain that he had ever met Shore. He took hold of his reeling senses and supported them on the foundation that the unlikeliest things had happened, were happening and were going to happen. On that premise alone he knew he could retain his sanity. He raided a chemist's shop

for sleeping tablets and as an afterthought took a clockwork shaver. When he got back to the radio shop he found the shaver wouldn't work any more than his watch would and he amused himself by dismembering both of them.

Surprise overtook him again when he found several wheels and bearings were missing from each item. Then he recalled the loose grub-screw on his radio. *Well, the thought, that followed through. If the world were being taken apart to build a fresh day, clockwork shavers and watches would need parts just as Nelson's Column needed lions.* But—who would be wearing his watch on the day for which it was being re-constructed?

He placed the watch on the shop counter and permitted himself to wonder just a little about things. The situation Christopher Purdy had detailed seemed complicated and obscure but was it more complicated than many of the latest physical theories? Was it less likely that the world—indeed the universe—was rebuilt every day than that it should be composed of holes in space or vortices developing spontaneously in a vacuum? And then, suppose the stars weren't stars but merely holes in a black cloth behind which burned a few candles? As Christopher Purdy had suggested, what Man had deduced about his surroundings and their duration fitted what Man saw of them. How could he possibly know what went on any more than the audience knew what transpired on the stage between acts of a play when the curtain was down?

He listened afresh to Purdy's words on the tape and then, without being quite certain of his reasons Trevor erased the tape and threw the reel into a drawer of odds and ends. After that he moved his lodging place from the electrical shop to the grocer's just along the street. He made himself comfortable, surveyed the stock of provisions very thoroughly and considered that unless all food were transferred to a future day at one swoop he was well supplied for a long time. In the best traditions of castaways he commenced keeping a calendar and each night looked suspiciously at the stars, uncertain whether they existed according to the laws postulated for them by astronomers or by Fortean.

As he cycled around day by day he found more and more buildings vanished, gone like teeth from the jaw of the earth. On several occasions he saw them falling up into the sky with the same odd, tumbling motion as Shore. Trevor thought a great deal about Shore; what had happened to him, whether

he was wandering around the busy world of the day and puzzling about two lost days in his life, or whether he was in an asylum, or—what?

Then, after his calendar told him he had been alone for a fortnight, Trevor observed things began to happen faster. To his horror he awoke one morning to find his cycle vanished; stretches of road disappeared, complete with foundations, leaving the bare earth visible beneath where they had been. Faintly behind the pattern of stars in the night sky a thin tracery of multitudinous coloured threads appeared. The days seemed colder, the nights longer and suddenly, there was no paraffin. Odd articles of food, such as tea, pickled onions, tomato sauce and canned blackberries disappeared. Vast chasms appeared, reducing Trevor's walking range drastically. He could progress no further than the dried up river bed, now a cut across the earth of the same blackness as the darkness in which the stars shone. Near Euston was another, very long and very deep chasm. Soon, Trevor reasoned, the world would be cut up into sections; the cuts would become wider until there was nothing left between them.

The contents of the poison cupboards of chemists' shops became increasingly tempting. During one day, for nearly an hour, Trevor toyed with the idea of suicide until his circling thoughts brought him back to his original idea of the morning he had awoken in the deserted world. The password to continued existence was—accept. It didn't matter what happened, yet for even a person as habitually solitary as Trevor the loneliness was beginning to tell. He found he was talking to himself, telling himself that he'd come so far in this incredible happening that he was going to see it through.

Conditions weren't unpleasant; he had food, liquids of many kinds and although the weather seemed colder it was not unbearable. There was no physical discomfort, only lacking was the company of people and of entertainment. Books were available in their thousands but after a while Trevor could no longer concentrate on printed words. He made an occasional table from wood he found in a house and half-finished a book-rack. He constructed a model aeroplane and was very satisfied with its performance.

The weather was definitely colder and dryer; with the river gone and the seas drying up, or being transferred undoubtedly there must be pronounced climatic changes. Soon, of course, the air must go too, but he refused to think about that.

VII

Trevor selected an excellent overcoat from a shop one morning, intending to walk to where Charing Cross Station had been. Bare patches of land were on either side of him ; the stripping of the world to prepare it for some day hence was proceeding rapidly and Trevor found difficulty in remembering what had been where. Suddenly, for no reason, he felt as if someone were watching him. He looked around carefully and even ventured a cautious shout. It was possible, after all, that other people besides himself and Shore had somehow overstepped the boundary of that certain midnight.

The sensation of being watched increased. He forgot all his courage and dignity and started to run, blindly, back towards the little grocery shop. In a few seconds he realised his feet weren't touching the ground ; the world started to turn over and over, giving him alternate views of chasm-divided land and blue, featureless sky. As he tumbled upwards he caught a glimpse of buildings and objects falling end over end in the sky. Eventually he managed to get a rough idea of the part of the heavens to which he was heading, and remained steadily staring at it for a couple of moments. He started to laugh when he saw Adrian Hammond's face staring anxiously down at him through a trapdoor in the blue.

The room had all the attributes of an expensive private ward in a hospital. The bed was extremely comfortable ; a soft light glowed in the ceiling and, beside a neatly folded copy of the *Evening News*, a Polaris Sky Courier, covering all wavebands, long, medium, bandspread short and VHF, sat on the bedside table. There was a bowl of fruit as well and on the sill of the chintz-curtained window was a bowl of professionally arranged flowers. Several matching pictures of sea and rocks hung on walls completed the decoration of the room, apart from an occasional table in one corner on which rested an abstract ornament which seemed to glitter and undulate of its own accord.

Trevor levered himself into a sitting position and reached out for a bell push. He held it down for several seconds before picking up the *Evening News*. He looked at the date, a little uneasy when he saw the calendar he had constructed coincided to the day with the date of the paper. His unease vanished as he scanned the printed pages. There was nothing unusual about the news ; uproar at the UN over a Balkan crisis, a film star suing for divorce, another arriving at London Airport, the

Prime Minister leaving Number Ten for a weekend at Chequers. He lowered the paper to the bed and breathed a sigh of relief ; he'd had a nervous breakdown and any moment now he could expect Christopher Purdy to come in and say, ' I told you so.'

The door opened and a woman, dressed in a powder blue skirt and white blouse entered. She was tall, well-built and thirtyish. Grey-green eyes looked compassionately at him and her slightly too-large mouth parted in a rather sad smile.

" Hello, I'm Doctor Yvonne Shield. There's nothing to worry about," she said softly. " You'll be all right."

" Thank you," said Trevor, as she picked up his wrist and felt his pulse. He noticed she had left the door open and that as she relinquished his wrist she nodded her brown-haired head. Trevor twisted his neck to see who his visitor was. Adrian Hammond, a transformed Adrian Hammond, dressed for the evening with dinner jacket and black tie, entered. The straggling sideburns had gone, together with his limp and his other unpleasant characteristics.

He extended his hand.

" It took us a long time to find you, Trevor." His voice, confident and well-modulated, matched his exterior. " I hope you're feeling quite well despite your trying time."

The handclasp was a firm, man-to-man affair.

With his thoughts whirling, the realisation that what Christopher Purdy had told him was true, Trevor stammered something to the effect that it hadn't been too bad but what the devil was it all about ? Natural caution kept him quiet about Christopher Purdy's tape ; he resolved to know nothing of the reasons for taking the world apart like a stage set until Adrian Hammond had told his story.

Adrian produced a gold cigarette case and offered it to Trevor. He refused. Adrian lighted a cigarette himself and carefully replaced the gold case in his pocket before replying.

" We call ourselves Daymakers. Forget all you know about the properties of matter, the theories of scientists, and look at things this way. If you have a tank of tropical fish you coddle them, ensure the water's the right temperature, give them the correct food, make sure there's plenty of oxygen, the light's not too strong and generally take a great deal more care of them than most men do of their wives. Why do you keep tropical fish ? You call it a hobby, you say their movements are soothing, they occupy a corner of a room and make it pleasant.

"But in the final analysis, the only reason you can give for keeping tropical fish is that it gives you satisfaction."

Adrian Hammond paused, continuing,

"It gives the Daymakers satisfaction to make the world for you every day; we call it our hobby and if you ask why there are wars, pestilence, people killed in street accidents and mortality generally, recall the analogy of the tropical fish. The owner can't stop them fighting when he's not present, he can't prevent their getting fungus or the cat going fishing any more than he—or we—can create life. What you call life and the universe began in the far distant past, caused by what we don't know, any more than you do."

Adrian Hammond glanced at his wrist-watch. "I'm sorry I've tantalised you and haven't the time now to continue. If she thinks you're fit enough, perhaps Yvonne will tell you about the way things really are." He glanced at her and she nodded.

As he rose from the bed Adrian Hammond said:

"By the way, we live in the aquarium. In a building, where you are now, situated in Hyde Park, which is neither visible nor detectable to any but us. Now, I have a dinner engagement in Soho. Good night."

For a few seconds after the door closed behind Adrian there was silence. When Trevor asked if he was fit to hear more about the way things were, Yvonne smiled again, still sadly.

"Of course . . ." she began.

"Then tell me how I fit into this scheme of Adrian's and whether or not you think I'll like the idea."

"You'll have to like it as you can't go back now . . ."

"Adrian's just gone to dinner in Soho—he says."

"He has. By tomorrow you should be able to go anywhere you like, only you won't be recognised. You could walk into your office and everyone from the doorman to your closest associates would have the feeling that they'd seen you somewhere but wouldn't be able to say just where."

"And what about me? What's the situation in Polaris?"

"We manufacture a human being in your likeness and he replaces you. He's not quite the same as you but nobody worries about that because they think your overwork and just missing that plane crash upset you a little. In due course you will take Christopher Purdy's surface advice and marry—your secretary . . ."

"Then they'll know I'm crazy!" exploded Trevor. "She's a damn good secretary but her private life, if it can be called that . . ."

"We know," interposed Yvonne.

Trevor lay back against the pillows. He thought a little while before saying, "Are you of the same race as Adrian?"

"No. I have aptitudes similar to yours and I'm an assistant co-ordinator. I'm an ordinary human being; one morning I woke up in a room like this instead of my own. You suffered your unfortunate experiences because somehow Purdy managed to conceal you from Adrian at the midnight you should have come over to us.

"Tell me more about the mechanics of this business," demanded Trevor.

Quietly Yvonne told him all that Christopher Purdy had about re-making the world every day and giving him the additional information explaining Trevor's own predicament. Christopher Purdy's ideas had differed considerably from those held by his high authorities and Trevor had been his white hope for furthering his plans, whatever they were. Yvonne had no knowledge of them and said that Adrian was pleased that Purdy hadn't progressed sufficiently far to pass them on. She suggested that probably Adrian would tell him in due course.

Then, for a while, they talked generalities and eventually Yvonne departed, leaving Trevor alone in the darkness to sleep. He'd pleaded tiredness and, although he liked Yvonne's presence, he wanted to get some of his thoughts in order. Eventually he resolved them, deciding that Adrian represented orthodoxy and Purdy unorthodoxy. For the present the old ways had won, but if Purdy were right then the situation of the aquarium builders was desperate. New techniques, which were inadequate, were being used to maintain the status quo when a new approach such as Purdy's was needed. Evidently his theory was too radical for the old guard, a situation which, thought Trevor, was not new. Presumably, Christopher Purdy's ideas had included using humans, such as Hugh Rogers and Shore, to further his plans, although neither Yvonne nor Adrian had suggested anything to support that idea.

Sleep came suddenly to him and he awoke next day to the sound of the curtains being drawn by a nurse. She wished him good morning and a few minutes later brought him breakfast. Shortly after he finished eating Adrian entered and sat on the bed. He talked about the news of the day, gradually turning the conversation to Trevor's purpose. Life, it appeared would be similar to Trevor's previous hotel existence; his work of co-

ordination would be done in a room in the same building ; and he would have a considerable amount of free time in which to do exactly as he pleased, with the suggestion, not instruction, that he left behind all his previous life. Trevor expressed regrets about forgetting Polaris Electronic Engineering but Adrian comforted him by saying that although the substitute Trevor North wasn't much good, the indications were that Miss Blane, moral tramp though she was, would guide Polaris to great achievements through her husband.

Adrian then explained the unfortunate affairs of the lines, the plane-crash, Hugh Rogers and Kenneth Shore as plan and counterplan between himself and Christopher Purdy, Adrian trying to maintain things at their normal level, Purdy trying to conceal Trevor from Adrian. As he left Adrian told Trevor he could get up and wander around town ; in the afternoon he would be wanted for instruction in co-ordination. Suddenly Adrian asked, his mask of pleasantness slipping from his face like the flashing blade of the guillotine,

“ Why haven't you asked how plants fit into the scheme ? ”

For a moment Trevor was uncertain ; evidently everybody demanded to know about them, seeking a possible loophole in an increasingly difficult situation. From it had Adrian deduced that somehow Christopher Purdy had managed to get a message to him ?

“ The world as I know it is still the same, and I assume you have vast hot-houses where you grow plants. Does it matter that each is not the same one every day as long as continuity is preserved ? ”

Adrian's smile returned.

“ It takes ages for most people to come round to that viewpoint. Certainly I'm glad you're with me instead of with Christopher Purdy.” Adrian paused. “ There's been an error somewhere which worries us. There's a Polaris Choibox tape missing from Purdy's office. Did he mention anything about it to you ? ” Trevor shook his head, not trusting himself to speak. He knew exactly which tape was missing.

After Adrian left Trevor discovered London was the same as ever it was ; he explored parts of the city familiar to him by taxi, bus, underground and on foot ; nowhere was there indication of the transient nature of the world. He lunched at a favourite restaurant, not surprised when his usual waiter failed to recognise him. He returned for his instruction in co-ordina-

tion to the giant building which occupied Hyde Park and which, from outside, appeared like an immense fairy tale tower of translucent concrete and glass wrapped in a dim, blue haze.

The lesson in co-ordination, with Adrian as his instructor, was curious. In a sumptuously-furnished, windowless room, on the door of which his name was painted in gold letters, he leaned back in a most comfortable armchair and placed his hands on the chair's arms. It seemed he had only been seated a second before Adrian asked him to get up again, a second in which thousands of tiny doors seemed to open and close in his mind with a most pleasing sensation. The lesson, with its duration of apparently only a second, had lasted three and a half hours. After it Trevor felt better than he had done for years, even after a vigorous Turkish bath.

Over a period of several weeks the pattern became quite plain; it was a piece of colossal organisation, drawing on the factories, warehouses and mist-enshrouded towers of translucent concrete and glass of the Daymakers and ensuring the materials be at a certain point in time for the builders to put them together.

More weeks which became months went by and Trevor North settled gradually into a routine which he found most pleasant. He found time for feeding ducks on the park ponds, for reading books he had never expected to read and for the unexpected and wholly delightful pleasure of finding satisfaction in his achievements.

It was an awful shock to him when he awoke one morning to find both his watch and bedside clock stopped at midnight. It was an even bigger shock when Christopher Purdy walked into the room and sat on the bed. He extended a hand, which Trevor clasped like a shipwrecked sailor grasping driftwood.

"Chris, what . . . ?" he began anxiously.

"Don't worry, Trevor. It would take a better Daymaker than Adrian to put me out of circulation, but I admit he had me worried for a long time when he managed to keep you so well hidden." Purdy paused, his eyes anxious behind his horn-rimmed bi-focals. "You understand what, if not how and why the Daymakers do what they do?"

"Yes . . ."

A slight smile of relief flitted across Purdy's face.

"Good. I hate doing this to Adrian because a man of your capabilities would be a tremendous buttress to his failing cause."

Unease began to creep over Trevor. He swung himself out of the bed and moistened his lips preparatory to speaking. Christopher Purdy was quicker.

“ I quoted to you that ‘ one man in his time plays many parts ’ — I hope you heard that much of my tape before midnight came. Adrian was so close to me and certain I was dangerous to his plans—as I am, but in a way in which he cannot conceive—that I had to desert you. I knew you’d come to no harm in his hands.” Purdy paused, glancing at his wristwatch. “ I do play many parts. I’m not of what you’re pleased to call Earth, nor am I a Daymaker, and all my efforts have been directed to keeping you out of Adrian’s ken. Adrian, by the way, has as much knowledge of reality as one of those tropical fish he’s always talking about. The latent capabilities you possess are far in excess of the Daymakers’ needs for their childish games. Those so far unused capabilities—without using which you can’t achieve the mental satisfaction you desire—have strange concepts to master and incredibly important work to do. Your talents, Trevor North,” Purdy slowed his speech and stressed every word, “ make you the moulder of the final, absolute Reality.” He paused, transforming himself in an instant from a confident, resourceful individual into a quiet, respectful servant. Almost reverently Christopher Purdy asked, “ May we go now, sir ? ”

—Peter Hawkins

 **
 ** *‘Gone Away—No known address’* **
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Subscribers are reminded to keep us informed of any change of address to ensure the safe delivery of their copies as far too many issues are returned by the Post Office marked as above. Overseas subscribers are particularly requested to let us know in good time.

Back in the early 1930's there was published a fascinating serial entitled "The Death Of Iron," its title speaking for itself. It is certain that author Ballard has never read that story, yet by a reverse process he has produced as delightful an idea—sentient, growing metal. Written with a freshness and with touches of humour that typify the modern trend of fantasy writing.

By J. G. BALLARD

As we drove away Carol said : " I suppose you realise what a fool you've made of yourself ? "

" Don't sound so prim," I told her. " How was I to know Lubitsch would produce something like that ? "

" One thousand dollars," Carol said reflectively. " It's nothing but a lot of old scrap iron. Didn't you look at his sketches ? What's the Monuments and Public Works Committee for ? "

I stopped the car under the trees at the end of the square and looked back. The chairs had been cleared away and already a small crowd had gathered round the statue, staring up at it curiously. A couple of louts were banging one of the struts and the thin skeletal structure shuddered heavily. Somewhere there was supposed to be a guard on duty.

" Jim Halliday is having it dismantled this afternoon," I said. " If it hasn't already been done for us. I wonder where Lubitsch is ? "

Carol snorted. " Don't worry, you won't see him in Murchison again. I bet he's half-way to Rio by now."

I patted Carol on the shoulder. "Relax," I said. "You looked beautiful in your new hat. The Medicis probably felt like that about Michelangelo. Who are we to judge?"

"You are," Carol said angrily. "You were on the committee, weren't you?"

"Darling," I explained patiently. "Neo-Futurism is the thing. You're trying to fight a battle the public lost thirty years ago."

We drove home in a thin chilly silence. Carol was annoyed only because Margot Channing, the epitome of local chic and power over our body social, had started to giggle in the middle of my speech at the unveiling, but even so the morning had been disastrous on just about every count. What might be perfectly acceptable in Rockefeller Plaza, the Festival of Britain or the Venice Biennale was all too obviously a long way ahead of Murchison Falls.

When we'd decided to commission a statue for the square over the new car park in the centre of Murchison, Jim Halliday, Bob Summers and myself had agreed that we should patronise a local artist. There were three professional sculptors in or near Murchison; the first two we saw were heavy talkative men with enormous red fists and monumental schemes—one for a 100-foot high aluminium pylon and the other for a vast family group that involved over fifteen tons of basalt mounted on what was virtually a megalithic step-pyramid. Each had taken an hour to be argued out of the committee room.

Lubitsch's tender was the lowest: 1000 dollars. He was a small wiry man of about forty, subdued and distant—subdued, as we now knew, only because he was still recovering from his first traumatic encounter with Neo-Futurism. He had lived in Murchison for three months, arriving via Berlin, Santiago and the Chicago New Arts Centre. He'd brought along a few models and shown us his sketches, interesting geometric constructions that compared favourably with the run of illustrations we'd seen in the latest art magazines. We'd drawn up a contract there and then.

I saw the statue for the first time that morning thirty seconds before I started my speech to the specially selected assembly of Murchison notables. Why none of us had bothered to look at the statue beforehand I can't understand. The title printed on the invitation cards—'*Form and Quantum: Generative Synthesis 3*'—had seemed a little odd, and the general shape of the

shrouded statue even more suspicious. I was expecting a stylised human figure but the structure under the drapes had the proportions of a medium-sized crane. Just before the unveiling Bob peeped up underneath the skirting, frowned and then shrugged hopefully at me.

What we saw after Carol pulled the tape I tried not to think about. With its pedestal the statue was a good twelve feet high. Three spindly metal legs, ornamented with a few spikes and crosspieces, reached up from the plinth to a flattened triangular apex. Clamped onto this was a great jagged structure that at first sight seemed to be an old Buick radiator grille. It had been bent into a rough U five feet across, and the two arms jutted out horizontally, a single row of barbs, each about a foot long, poking up like the teeth of an enormous comb. Welded on apparently at random all over the statue were twenty or thirty little abstract filigree vanes.

That was all. The whole thing was scratched and rusty and had a weird blighted look like a derelict radar antenna. Trying to get the hang of it I started on my speech and got about half-way through when I noticed Lubitsch stalking about behind the pedestal with an intense angry look on his face. I paused, looked round and saw that everybody sitting in the rows in front of me was laughing. Jim had gone over to Roger Channing and was listening attentively to him and nodding. I stuttered on to the end of what I was saying and then a hat sailed through the air over my head and landed neatly on one of the statue's spikes. Carol tugged me sharply by the arm, her eyes flashing at me like diamonds.

She softened a little as we neared home.

"Well, never mind," she decided. "A month from now it'll probably seem awfully funny."

It did, but not quite in the way Carol meant.

No-one else wanted anything to do with it so Carol and I finally got the statue. Lubitsch left Murchison the day it was dismantled. He spoke briefly to Carol over the phone before he left. I presumed he'd be rather unpleasant and didn't bother to listen in on the extension.

"Well?" I asked Carol. "Does he want it back?"

"No." Carol seemed slightly puzzled. "He said it belonged to us."

"You and me?"

"Everybody." Carol chewed her lip. "Then he started laughing."

"Good. What at?"

"I don't know. He just said we'd grow to like it. What's funny about that?"

I shrugged. "Some crazy joke of his own. Forget it."

There didn't seem anywhere else to put it so we planted the statue out in the garden on the edge of the lawn. Without the stone pedestal it was only six feet high and the tall privets shielded it from all but our immediate neighbours. I'd been so stampeded by everyone else that I'd never had a chance to see it and I thought it looked a lot better in the garden than it had done in Murchison, the struts and abstract shapes standing out against the shrubs and rockery like something in a vodka advertisement. After a few days I could almost ignore it.

About a week or so later we were out on the lawn after lunch, lounging back in the deck-chairs. The heat lay over everything like a heavy quilt and I was nearly asleep with a newspaper over my face when Carol said:

"Bill, I think it's moving."

I let the paper slide off my face.

"What's moving?"

Carol was sitting up, head cocked to one side. "The statue. It looks different."

I swung round slowly and focused on the statue twenty feet away. The radiator grille at the top had canted round slightly but the three stems still seemed more or less upright.

"The rain last night must have softened the ground," I said. I watched the metal vanes shiver brightly in the warm eddies of air circling the rockery and then lay back drowsily. I heard Carol light a cigarette with four matches and get up and pace off across the grass.

When I woke in a couple of hours time and looked across at her she was sitting straight up in the deck-chair, a light frown creasing her forehead.

"Swallowed a bee?" I asked. "You look worried."

She grunted and I got up and moved my chair round into the sun.

Then something caught my eye.

I watched the statue carefully for a moment. "You're right," I said slowly. "It is moving."

Carol nodded. The statue's shape had altered perceptibly. The grille had spread round into a sort of open gondola and the three stem pieces were wider apart. All the angles seemed different.

"I thought you'd notice it eventually," Carol said. She got up and we walked over to it. "What's it made of?" she asked.

"Wrought iron," I said. "I think. There must be a lot of copper or lead in it. The heat's making it sag."

Carol looked dubious. "Then why's it sagging upwards instead of down?"

"The stresses inside it are pretty complex," I explained. "Reversed arches and that sort of thing." I didn't know what that meant but it sounded as good as most of the explanations I gave Carol.

I reached up and touched one of the shoulder struts. It was springing elastically as the air moved across the vanes and went on vibrating against my palm. I gripped it in both hands and tried to keep it rigid. A low but discernible pulse pumped steadily against me, even when I was exerting all my force.

I let go and backed away from it, wiping the rust off my hands. Carol was standing next to it in her bare feet and I remembered that the height specification we'd given Lubitsch had been exactly two metres. But the statue was a good three feet higher than Carol, the gondola at least six or seven across. The spars and struts looked thicker and stronger.

I went back to the statue, bent down and tried to raise it. I wobbled the plinth slightly but got nowhere near lifting it off the ground. Yet when we'd brought it down into the garden I'd managed to carry it myself for a few yards.

"Carol," I said. "Get me a file, would you? There are some in the tool shed. Any of them will do."

She hurried over to the shed and came back with two files and a hacksaw.

"Are you going to cut it down?" she asked hopefully.

"Darling," I said. "This is an original Lubitsch." I took one of the files. "I just want to convince myself I'm going crazy."

I started cutting a series of small notches all over the statue, making sure they were all exactly the width of the file apart. The metal was soft and worked easily; on the surface there was a lot of rust but underneath it had a bright sappy glint.

"O.K." I said when I'd finished. "Let's go and have a drink."

We sat on the veranda and waited. I kept my eyes fixed on the statue and I could have sworn it didn't move. But when we went back an hour later the gondola had somehow swung right round again.

I didn't need to check the notch intervals against the file. They were all at least double the original distance apart.

"Bill," Carol said. "Look at this."

She pointed to one of the spikes. Poking up through the outer scale of rust were a series of sharp little nipples. One or two were already beginning to flatten out. Unmistakably they were incipient vanes.

I scanned round the rest of the statue. All over it new shoots of metal were coming through; arches, barbs, sharp double helixes, twisting the original statue into a thicker more elaborate construction. It was well over twelve feet high, nine or ten across the gondola. I felt one of the heavy struts and the pulse was stronger, beating steadily through the metal.

Carol was watching me with a pinched worried look.

I gave her a hollow grin. "Take it easy, darling," I said. "There's nothing to get wound up about. It's only growing." We went back to the veranda and watched.

By six o'clock that evening it was the size of a small tree.

"The strangest thing about it," Bob said the next morning, "is that it's still a Lubitsch."

"Still a piece of sculpture, you mean?"

"More than that. Take any section of it and you'll find the original motifs being repeated. Each vane, each helix has all the authentic Lubitsch mannerisms, almost as if Lubitsch himself were shaping it. The whole thing has multiplied itself but it's still '*Generative Syntheses 3.*'"

"'333,'" I said sourly. "I take it it won't go on forever."

Carol handed Bob another Scotch. "What do you think we ought to do?" she asked.

Bob shrugged. "Why worry?" he said airily. "When it starts tearing the house down cut it back. Thank God we had it dismantled. If this had happened down in Murchison . . ."

Carol sat forward. "Bill, maybe that's what Lubitsch expected. He wanted it to start growing and spreading all over the town, crushing—"

"Careful," I warned her. "You're running away with yourself. As Bob says we can chop it up any time we want to and melt the whole thing down."

"Why don't you then?" Carol asked.

"I want to see how far it'll go," I said.

I watched the statue reaching slowly across the lawn. It had collapsed under its own weight and lay on its side in a sort of huge angular spiral, twenty feet long and about fifteen high, like the skeleton of a futuristic whale.

I'd been up with it most of the night. After Carol went off to bed I drove the car up onto the narrow strip of lawn next to the house and turned on the headlights. The statue stood out almost luminously against the darkness, creaking away eerily, more and more of the vanes budding out into the yellow glare of the lights. Gradually it lost its original shape; the toothed grille enveloped itself and then put out new struts and barbs that spiralled upwards, each throwing off secondary and tertiary shoots in its turn. Shortly after midnight it was fifteen feet high, began to lean and then suddenly toppled over falling onto the soft grass with a dull clatter.

By now its movement was corkscrew; the plinth had been carried up into the air and hung somewhere in the middle of the tangle, revolving slowly, and the main foci of activity were at either end.

Bob and I stepped down from the veranda and went over to it.

The growth rate was accelerating. I watched a new shoot emerge. As one of the struts curved round a small pointed knob poked up through the rust half-way along it. Within a minute it grew into a spur an inch long, thickened, began to curve and five minutes later had developed into a smoothly-shaped foot-long barb.

As we walked back I noticed that Johnson next door was standing on the roof of his house, peering down at the statue through a pair of binoculars. On the other side the Freemans had moved a couple of ladders up to the hedge and were looking down over it.

Freeman signalled me over.

"Having trouble?" he asked when Bob and I strolled over to him. Mrs. Freeman peeked at me with beady eyes.

"Where?" I said.

Freeman jerked a thumb at the statue. "Have to watch it," he told me. Something tickled him and he guffawed noiselessly.

"It's the rain," I explained. "Just can't keep these things down."

"You should have offered him a cutting," Bob said as we walked way. "He could try grafting it onto his drain-pipe." He pointed up at Johnson. "Looks as if you'll soon have everybody in town round here. If I were you I'd throw a tarpaulin over it."

"Time we did something, anyway," I said. "You see if you can trace Lubitsch. I'm going to find out what makes this thing go."

Using the hacksaw I cut off a two-foot limb and handed it to Dr. Blackett. By four p.m. that afternoon the statue had added another ten feet to its length.

Blackett fingered the bar, bent it between his hands.

"What do you make of it?" I asked.

"Remarkable," he said. "Almost plastic." He stepped back and looked up at the statue. "Definite circumnutation there. Probably phototropic as well. Mmh, almost like a plant."

"Is it alive?" I asked him.

Blackett laughed. "My dear man, of course not. How can it be?"

"Well, where's it getting its new material from? The ground?"

"The air. I don't know yet of course but I imagine it's rapidly synthesizing an allotropic form of ferrous oxide. In other words a purely physical rearrangement of the constituents of rust." Blackett stroked his moustache and stared moodily at the statue. "There may be one or two other freak oxides as well."

"But why did it start in the first place?" I asked. "And for that matter—why doesn't all iron do this?"

Blackett shrugged. "I didn't see the original statue, but I'd say that the molecular stresses induced by its particular contortions were sufficient to initiate the allotropy. Just as enormous pressures exerted on carbon will produce the allotropic but chemically identical diamond. Here of course they are low shear stresses rather than high direct ones . . ." He stopped and frowned at me. "What are you smiling at?"

"Nothing," I said, feeling rather pleased with myself. Blackett was one of the top physical chemists at the University and when I'd phoned him an hour earlier and described the statue he'd thought I was crazy. "Please go on. It's just that that's more or less what I told Carol. Only I thought I was giving her a bit of double talk."

Blackett smiled thinly. "Well, there'll be a critical threshold. Quite impossible to calculate but the original statue must have been exactly on it. This fragment is obviously well below it. You can see it's totally inert."

"So all we have to do is chop the whole thing up into a lot of two-foot lengths?"

"If it worries you. However it would be interesting to leave it. There's absolutely no danger of it going on indefinitely. There'll be a limit to its capacity for additional oxygen molecules, even in the allotropic form." He reached up and felt one of the spars. "Still firm but I'd say it was almost there. It'll soon start getting pulpy like an over-ripe fruit and begin to shred off and disintegrate." He smiled at me again. "Die, if you prefer it."

I got up at six the next morning, hurried to the window and looked down. The statue was now fifty feet long and crossing the flower-beds on either side of the lawn. On its way it had threaded through two of the primulas and uprooted them as it moved on. Underneath it the lawn was ripped and scarred. It was coming on fast and looked a long way from its limiting capacity.

I woke Carol and we had a quick breakfast.

"You've got to stop it," Carol whispered.

"Darling," I said, patting her hand. "It can't hear you. There's nothing to be frightened of."

I didn't go to the office that morning. We sat out on the veranda and watched it. The statue—if you could still call it that—was moving in a gradual curve. The far end had reached the rockery at the bottom of the garden, pushed over some of the stones and started winding round one of the poplars. The other end grazed the hedge and by the afternoon was bulging it out into Johnson's garden. I saw May Johnson running around in a flurry and about half an hour after lunch Johnson came home.

At two-thirty the nearest tendrils were about five feet from the tool shed. The largest limbs were over three inches in diameter and the pulse thudded through them like water under pressure in a fire-hose. The whole statue seemed to be flexing and a dull humming throbbled out into the air.

When the first police cars started cruising past down the road I went into the tool shed and got out the hacksaw.

The metal was soft and the blade sank through it quickly. I left the pieces I cut off in a heap to one side. Separated from the main body of the statue they were completely inactive, as Dr. Blackett had stated. By six p.m. I'd cut back about a third of the statue and got it down to manageable proportions.

Johnson came round and helped me disentangle his hedge.

"What's it for?" he asked, pointing to the statue. I could see he thought I'd built it.

"It's the latest thing," I told him. "The really smart people have them indoors, growing up the walls. This one's a little on the wild side."

The statue was twenty feet long when we'd finished.

"That should hold it," I said to Carol. I walked round and lopped off a few of the bigger spars, thinning it out. "Tomorrow I'll finish it off altogether."

I wasn't surprised when Bob called and said that there was no trace of Lubitsch anywhere.

At about two o'clock that night I woke up to what sounded like a couple of cats wrestling on the tin roof of the tool shed.

Carol sat up and switched on the light. "Who's that?"

I climbed out of bed and went over to the window. "Can't be our pet bean-stalk. Unless—" I pulled back the curtains and leaned out.

A half-moon was up, throwing a thin grey light over the garden.

The statue had sprung back and was twice as large as it had been at its peak that afternoon. It lay all over the garden in a thick tangled mesh, only ten feet off the ground but spreading out like an enormous creeper. Already it had cleared the hedge and the advance tendrils were two or three yards across the Johnson's lawn. Directly below me others had climbed the tool shed and were sprouting downwards through the roof, piercing the thin metal sheets and tearing them off their support beams.

All over the statue thousands of little vanes gleamed in the light thrown down from the window like phosphorescent fish in a huge aquarium.

I made Carol promise to stay in bed and went down and phoned Bob and Jim. They were both round by three o'clock. Bob drove his car up beside the house and turned the headlights down onto the garden. I climbed through into the tool shed, got the hacksaw and two of the heaviest files and we went to work.

The statue was growing almost as fast as we could cut it back but by the time the first light came up at a quarter to six we'd beaten it.

Dr. Blackett watched Cliff Harrigan slice through the last fragment of the statue with his acetylene torch and then turned to me.

"There's a section down in the rockery that might be just above the threshold," he remarked. "I think it would be worth saving."

I wiped the sweat off my face and shook my head. "No," I said. "I'm sorry, but believe me, I've been living with this thing. Once is enough."

Blackett nodded, pulled the collar of his overcoat round his neck and stared gloomily across the garden. Two news-men had just arrived and were taking pictures of the heaps of scrap iron which were all that remained of the statue. It was seven-thirty and a few people had started to look in from the houses down the street.

Carol, looking a little stunned by everything, was pouring coffee for Jim and Bob. They were slumped back in two of the deck-chairs, their arms and faces black with rust and metal filings, completely out. I reflected wryly that no-one could accuse the Monuments and Public Works Committee of not devoting itself whole-heartedly to its projects.

I went off on a final tour of the garden, collecting the section Blackett had mentioned and a few other pieces I wanted to take no risks with.

Harrigan chopped them up in a matter of seconds. Fortunately we hadn't had to call him in until we'd cut the statue down into three and four foot lengths. He was a dour phlegmatic man but he'd been quite obviously astonished by the sight that greeted him when he'd driven up with his breakdown equipment at seven o'clock.

It took him and his three men an hour to load the scrap—an estimated ton and a half—into a couple of trucks.

"What do I do with it?" he asked as he climbed into the cab.

"Anything you like," I said. "Just get rid of it."

When they'd gone Blackett and I walked round the garden together. It looked as if a shrapnel shell had exploded over it. Huge divots were strewn all over the place, and what grass that hadn't been ripped up by the statue had been tramped away by us. Iron filings lay on the lawn like dust.

Blackett bent down and scooped up a handful of grains.

“Dragon’s teeth,” he said. “You’ll look out of the window tomorrow and see an army of robots coming up.” He let it sift out between his fingers. “However, I guess that’s the end of it.”

He couldn’t have been more wrong.

Lubitsch sued us. He must have come across the newspaper reports and realised his opportunity. I don’t know where he’d been hiding but he materialized quickly enough, waving the contract and pointing to the clause in which we guaranteed to protect the statue from any damage that might be done to it by vandals, livestock or other public nuisance. In fact his main accusation concerned the damage he claimed we’d done to his reputation—if we had decided not to exhibit the statue we should have supervised its removal to some place of safe-keeping, not openly dismembered it and then sold off the fragments to a scrap dealer. This deliberate affront had he insisted cost him several large commissions to a total of fifty thousand dollars.

At the preliminary hearings we soon realized that absurdly our one big difficulty was going to be proving to anyone who hadn’t been there that the statue had actually started growing. Lubitsch naturally denied the possibility, and unfortunately none of us had taken any cine-shots of it. The stills the news-men had taken showed nothing but a few heaps of scrap iron that looked more like wood-piles.

With luck we managed to get several postponements and Bob and I tried to trace what we could of Exhibit A. All we found were three small struts rusting in the long grass on the edge of one of the local junk-yards. Apparently the rest of the statue had been shipped to a steel-mill fifty miles away and melted down again. However, even if we had collected all the fragments together they would have been inert and if anything only reinforced Lubitsch’s case.

Our case rested on what amounted to a plea of self-defence. Blackett, Bob and myself all testified that the statue had started growing and the judge, a crusty short-tempered old man of the hanging school, immediately decided we were trying to pull his leg. We were finished from the start.

The final judgement wasn’t delivered until about ten months after we’d first unveiled the statue in the centre of Murchison and the verdict when it came was no surprise.

Lubitsch was awarded \$10,000.

"Looks as if we should have taken the pylon after all," I said to Carol as we left the courtroom. "Even that step-pyramid would have been less trouble."

Bob joined us and we went out onto the balcony at the end of the corridor for some air.

"Never mind," Carol said bravely. "At least it's all over with."

Bob nodded gloomily. "Yes, all we have to do now is pick up the bill on the way out."

I looked down sombrely into the street, thinking about the \$10,000 and wondering whether we'd have to pay it off ourselves. Somehow I didn't think we could ask the taxpayers of Murchison to foot it.

The court building was a new one and by an odd irony ours had been the first case to be heard there. A lot of the floor and plaster-work had still to be completed and the balcony we were out on was untiled. I was standing on one of the exposed steel cross-beams supporting it; one or two floors down someone must have been driving a rivet into one of the upright girders and the beam under my feet vibrated steadily. It was a pleasant soothing motion and I let it play against me for a few minutes.

Then I noticed that I couldn't hear the sound of any riveting going on anywhere and that the movement under my feet wasn't so much a vibration as a low rhythmic pulse.

I stepped off the beam, bent down quickly and pressed my hands against it.

Sure enough I'd felt the pulse before.

Carol turned round from the rail and saw me.

"Bill, what on earth are you doing?" she asked.

Bob started looking up and down the balcony. "Dropped something?"

"Quiet," I told them. I felt the pulse thudding away. For the mass of metal it was low, hardly stronger than it had been through the most slender of the statue's limbs, but it was steady and I could almost feel it mounting.

Bob and Carol watched me curiously.

"What is it?" Bob asked when I stood up.

"Nothing," I said. I went over to the rail and stared out into the air, trying to think.

"Bob," I said. "How long ago did they first start on this building? The steel framework, anyway."

"Four months, I think."

"Four." I nodded slowly. "Tell me, how long would you say it took any random piece of scrap iron to be re-processed through a steel-mill and get back into circulation? The complete cycle, as it were."

"No idea. Why?"

"Two or three months?"

"Years, if it lay around in the wrong junk-yards."

"But if it had actually arrived at the steel-mill?"

"Just a few weeks then. Less."

I started to laugh. Bob peered at me. "Bill, what are you getting at?"

Laughing crazily I pointed to the girder.

"Feel that." I waved to them. "Go on, feel it."

Frowning at me they both knelt down and touched it.

"Get your hands flat," I said. "Press down hard."

Bob shook his head sadly. "Carol," he said. "I think your old man's cracking up." He pressed his palms onto the girder, shifted them around and then looked up.

I stopped laughing. "Got it?" I asked.

"Lubitsch," Bob said carefully. "The statue. It's here."

His voice rose. "My God, it can't be."

Carol was patting the girder and listening to it. "I think it's humming," she said, puzzled. "It feels like the statue."

I started laughing again. Bob grabbed my arm. "Bill, snap out of it. Don't you realize, the whole building will be sprouting soon."

"I know," I said weakly. "And it won't be just this building either."

I controlled myself and took Carol by the arm. "Come on, let's see if it's started."

We went up to the top floor. The plasterers were about to move in and there were big trestles and stacks of laths all over the place. None of the partitions were up and the walls were still bare brick, girders spaced at ten-foot intervals between them.

I pushed past the trestles and scanned round the ceiling.

I didn't have to look far.

Jutting out from one of the steel joists just below the roof was a long thin metal spike, curving slowly into a delicate abstract shape. Without moving I counted a dozen others.

"A real authentic Lubitsch," I said. "All the mannerisms. Nothing much to look at yet, but wait till it really gets going."

Bob wandered round, his mouth open. "It'll tear the whole building apart," he said flatly. "That means Blackett was wrong."

"You bet he was," I said. "He didn't know any more about it than I did."

Carol was looking up at one of the shoots. "But Bill, you said they'd melted it all down."

"They did, angel. So it got back into circulation, touching off all the other metal it came into contact with. Lubitsch's statue is right here, in this building, in a dozen other buildings just going up, in ships and planes and washing machines, in a million new automobiles. Even if it's only one screw or ball-bearing, that'll be enough to trigger the rest off."

"They'll stop it," Carol said.

"They might," I admitted. "But it'll probably get back again somehow. A few pieces always will." I put my arm round her. "Did you say it was all over? Carol, it's only just beginning."

—J. G. Ballard

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AFTER EDDIE

Stories about barber's shops have been a fascinating theme ever since the Demon Barber of Fleet Street was immortalised many years ago—and where better to pick up the news and gossip of this modern technological world than in just such an establishment only a few hundred yards from the original demon's setting?

By **JOHN KIPPAX**

There were three low steps leading down into the barber's saloon. Henry Soames stood at the top with the doorknob still in his hand, and stared. The barber was sweeping up from the last customer, it seemed, and Henry watched the broom control the lumps of purple hair with the gold glints, saw them swept into a dustpan.

He realised that he was feeling a little upset : he had got as far as the final short list for the job as number three on the research team of World Laboratories, but he would almost have been glad of an excuse to turn tail. In the laboratory he was a lion, but among men he was a lamb, and with women he was a mouse. Janet was very good for him. He knew that she had been right in saying that he should have had a haircut two or three days before the interview so that it didn't look as though he had just had it cut. Then his mind had got into a flap about the interview, then there was another flap when Janet became

very affectionate—it might have been the spring weather, or something—and the result was that he had forgotten all about the haircut. And even Janet did not notice until they were actually on the station and she was kissing him goodbye.

“Henry, dear!” She had been shocked. “Your *hair*! You look wild as a Zulu!”

Zulus came into her conversation quite naturally: things were wild as a Zulu or coarse as a Zulu . . .

“—But you’ll be in plenty of time when you get into London, dear, so you must look for a good quality place and have it done as soon as you arrive.”

And Henry had answered yes, Janet dear, and had kissed her. He had listened to her warnings that they knew all his paper qualifications and it was Soames the man they wanted to see this afternoon: personality was what counted, so he must put his best foot forward and let charm be the watchword. She had not been too convincing about that: Henry was possibly weakest of all in the charm department. But he had replied dutifully, and they had parted.

The train waited for some deep reason for fifteen minutes before going right into Waterloo: then he had left his briefcase in the carriage and had to go back and make enquiries, and by the time he was on his way by tube, he remembered again about the haircut. He had got out at Chancery Lane, fingering the back of his neck and telling himself that it was now or never, and that it had better be now.

And immediately every hairdresser in the neighbourhood disguised his shop as anything from Gamages to a newsstand, so long as Henry Soames should be baulked of the haircut, the bolster to his personal front, that he needed so much. Henry had chased on past the Insurance building, down one or two side streets, and had emerged again with a wild look in his eye near the tube station. It was ridiculous: his interview was in three-quarters of an hour, and there must, there positively *must* be a barber’s somewhere.

Then he had dived down Leather Lane, had gone a hundred yards and had then taken another turning. He had never been here before: then he had felt his heart leap within him as he saw a striped pole . . .

It was an old barbershop: the letters, cracked, white enamel, on the glass panel read NEYTO. Greek? Cypriot? Even African? *Ting* went the bell, and then he found himself looking

down into the saloon. So ordinary, with three chairs, three mirrors, and the *ordinary* paraphernalia of hair driers and lotions and advertisements. The barber, a short round man with black hair and tufty eyebrows was sweeping up . . . that hair. Or had Henry been deceived? Was there still that same glint about it? Very peculiar: still . . .

"Good afternoon, sir."

Henry started.

"Lovely weather, sir." The barber had a comforting sort of voice, normal, fruity, rather cockney, with overtones of football and racing and beer. A voice that suited the face, perfectly.

"Ready for you now, sir?" He flourished a sheet. Henry eyed the rubbish box.

"Thank you." He sat down: the barber sheeted him, noticed the glance.

"You just come after Eddie, guv'nor," he said. He examined Henry's head, peered over the top at the reflection in the mirror.

"A straightforward one. After Eddie, that's nice."

Henry was thinking of course, these fluorescent lights are sometimes deceptive, but apparently Eddie was somebody a little strange: but one did not like to be too inquisitive. He opened his mouth to ask a question, but found himself fore-stalled.

"Now, sir, you'd like me to take a little off all the way round, to leave it looking neat but uncut looking, eh?"

Henry's heart warmed to the man: that was what Janet had said and he was glad that he had found someone a bit above the short-back-and-sides brigade.

"That's it. I must look my best."

"Not a girl?" said the barber. It was more of a statement than a question.

"Oh, no." Henry glanced at his watch. "Interview for a job." It was comforting to have someone to talk to; to take away the butterflies that were beginning to circulate in his stomach. The barber pursed his lips and looked knowing.

"Ah," he said. "Scientific job, eh?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

Neyto, (if that was his name), shrugged and managed a little wink at the same time.

"Guessed sir: you looked scientific. There's a sort of an air of knowledge about you."

Henry was flattered.

"Thank you."

"In my job you get to be a good guesser, with all the different customers you have. You can soon learn to sort 'em out."

"Like Eddie?" suggested Henry warily. But the barber did not seem to take the bait.

"H'm. Ah. Yes, you could say so. Yerss, we need all the scientific gents we can get these days, don't we? You've only got to read the papers. Life blood of the country you are, sir. Important."

"I suppose that's true," said Henry. "Not," he added, "that you can believe all you read in the papers."

It was as though the man had been given a cue. Snip went the scissors, snip hypnotically snip, metallic and regular and soothing, as the barber talked.

"Ah, you're right there. It's the things what *don't* get into the papers what would make the best reading. Now I've got a brother who's on a newspaper, and what he tells me, cor! The *things* they get to know, what the bosses won't allow 'em to print. Makes your hair curl: do me out of a job. Take this geofiz whatsit year. Throwing up satellites and things. What's the good of it? All bunk and eyewash, if you ask me, hey?"

"Hey?" murmured Henry. "Why eyewash, hey?" It was catching.

The barber lowered his lips until he was speaking in a hoarse whisper at a distance of about three inches from Henry's ear.

"Because they already got 'em up: they've had satellites up there for four years now."

"H'm? Who have?"

The barber was practically inside Henry's eardrum.

"'Oo do you *think*?"

"Oh." Henry looked grave: he pursed his lips. "Ah. I see. You might have guessed it, mightn't you?"

"Yerss. Stands to reason—they're as good scientists as we are, ain't they? But they won't say anything."

Henry decided that the man should be humoured. He agreed.

"Naturally, they will say nothing."

"If we was in their place and they was in ours and they found out that we'd got 'em up first they wouldn't let on to their people that we was up there watching 'em, would they?"

Snip, snip, snip.

"Stands to reason," said Henry, as though quoting from the book of the prophet Neyto.

"I mean, cause a ruddy panic, wouldn't it? Questions in the 'ouse, evacuation of London, the lot. Couldn't have that lark, could we? Think what it 'ud do to trade for a start. Be the finish it would. And then where would we be? I can tell *you*, sir," he said, "because I can see that you're a man with understanding; got responsibilities, you have. So have I, in a manner of speaking. You take it from me," he waved his scissors at the ceiling, "they're up there now."

Henry asked, "Who is this brother of yours? On what paper does he work?"

The barber's face seemed to fill with caution.

"Ah, now, sir, we got to respect each other, haven't we? I mean, with a really confidential source like that I've got to be careful, haven't I?"

Henry agreed maybe so.

"Can't go talking like this to all my customers, but I knew you'd be all right: see what I mean?"

Rather untruthfully, Henry said that he did see.

"What firm's your job with, sir?"

"With World Laboratories, I hope."

"Ah—boardroom in Chancery Lane?"

"Yes—how did you know?"

"Remember seeing a brass plate there once. Do all sorts of things, eh? Thermonuclear stuff too?"

"That's right. You're a bit of a scientist yourself it seems."

"Oh no, sir. Just words I got out of the paper. I suppose they're right? You never know—some of the things you read in the paper."

"You should know," said Henry guardedly.

"Well, take this atom bomb business, sir. They don't tell us the half of it, do they? I mean, look at that new bomb they got now. Man in here was telling me about it. They got one now that after it's gone off, it starts to heat up the soil so that the top begins to burn right off the ground. Now, if they made that public, there wouldn't half be an outcry, eh? But they say nothing. They just keep it, in case. We got it, and *they* got it, and each pretends they ain't."

Henry began to feel a little worried. He seemed to have been in the chair a long time, and there was such a matter of fact air about everything the barber said. His watch told him that he had thirty-five minutes left. He relaxed again.

"I don't think that that could be right. After all in my own line—"

"Gas discharge stuff, sir?"

"Yes, as I said. What I know from our work in deuterium, which takes us up to several billion degrees, seems to show that there is no possibility of such an effect on earth in any foreseeable bomb. Extensive calculation—"

Henry, once started, was not easily stopped. After all, if the barber thought him so gullible, Henry would retaliate and blind him with science. Above the burring of the clippers, the barber seemed to be listening intently.

"—If," said Henry, "we were able to find a method of heating the plasma with practically no thermal loss, we could get intense thermonuclear processes with a comparatively low power energy source. But the problem of excluding heat losses is so great that—"

It was quite a speech. Neyto heard him out, and then, with his task nearly completed he said, "Thank you, guv'nor. That was very clear. You tell me your yarns and I'll tell you mine."

Henry, not quite able to assess this remark, stood and allowed himself to be brushed down. A twinkle in the barber's eye seemed to say 'we understand each other now?'

"That's just as I like it," said Henry. He paid and tipped.

"Thank you, guv'nor : hope you get the post."

"Yes." Henry moved to the door. "Then perhaps you'll tell me more—and about Eddie too?"

"Eddie? Oh, I don't think you'd believe me if I told you about Eddie, would you? And I'd have to be sure of you first. Remember what I told you about the satellites."

"I will."

Henry got the job. He felt that he had been lucky, in that they had asked him such a lot about his work on thermonuclear reactions in gas discharges, and he remembered that he had gone over some of these things with the barber. How very fortunate that had been—almost like a rehearsal. The labs of which he was in charge were at Wimbledon, but he felt it worthwhile after a fortnight to make the journey to Chancery Lane tube, and then to go up to Neyto's. As he opened the door with the chipped and faded letters on it and looked down into the saloon, the barber was there sweeping up from the last customer. It was like coming home.

"You got the job then, gov'nor?"

"How did you know?"

Neyto indicated the chair, and Henry sat.

"Easy. You looked like it. Feel happy?"

"Yes I do. Business good?"

"Slowish, you might say. How's the work going?"

"I'm not really settled yet you know, but it's going to be just what I want."

"Getting things hot enough? Millions of atmospheres, — $T = 10^5$ degrees, eh?"

He really *has* been doing some reading up, thought Henry.

"Yes," he said to the barber. "That's one of the troubles. But how did you manage to—"

"Oh, I'm just a bit scientific minded, you know. Takes your mind off—things, eh?"

Snip, snip, hypnotic snip. Henry felt calm and relaxed. It was good to be alive, to have the job safely, to be engaged to Janet . . .

"Know what they say *they've* got now, sir?"

Henry knitted his brows: suddenly, he felt less happy.

"Well?"

The barber put his lips close to Henry's ear.

"A temperature weapon, sir!"

"Heat?"

"No, cold. See, they got this thing and with it they can reduce a country's temperature, give it out of season weather, muck up its crops—"

"A White August, in fact?"

"That's right."

"I thought," said Henry, "that someone had written a book about that."

"Oh, no." The barber seemed surprised: "I shouldn't think so. I mean, it's a dead secret, nearly. But I tell you, it's right enough."

"Don't you think," asked Henry carefully, "that you ought to warn the government?"

The barber pinched his mouth and twitched his eyebrows, as though in his opinion governments were things that scientifically intimate gentlemen didn't discuss. He veered off on a new tack.

He asked, "How about electrons and ions in thermal equilibrium?"

That sounded better. *Snip, snip, snip.*

“ Ah, you mean the equation $T = \frac{1^2}{4Nk}$? ”

“ Yes, gov'nor. ‘ k ’ being a constant.”

“ The Boltzmann constant.”

“ That’s right.”

“ Well,” said Henry contentedly, “ when we look into the conditions necessary for thermal equilibrium—”

It was a pleasant haircut.

For some reason, he had never wanted to tell Janet, or anyone else, about his barber. He was a treasure, this Neyto, and Henry felt that less sensitive types—like any of Janet’s five brothers, might not appreciate the man. But one day, quite absentmindedly, he did tell her, and the name stuck in her mind. She mentioned it to her eldest brother George. One day, soon after Henry’s fourth haircut—lots of scares, science, but no purple hair on the floor—George rang him up.

“ Henry, what’s the name of your barber ? ”

Henry felt cautious : assuredly, Neyto’s tall stories would not go down with George, and Henry was a man very sensitive to ridicule. Why, that one about the secret agents packing the Queen Mary with camouflaged dynamite—

“ Why, George ? ”

“ Janet said that it was a bloke down Leather Lane way, Neyto or something. Well, I’ve been the length of Leather Lane twice, and tried a few turnings, and I don’t see it.”

There was a slightly hectoring tone about George’s voice to which Henry objected.

“ Now, why not try somewhere nearer your office ? There are plenty of good barbers in the city. You know that.”

“ Yes, but it seems so funny—”

“ Excuse me,” said Henry untruthfully. “ Call here on another line. I must hang up.”

He was going for his fifth haircut : absurd, that George couldn’t find it. Here it was, just as it had always been. One of these days he would ask Neyto where he got that name. *Ting* went the bell as he pushed open the door, and there was the barber sweeping up after the last customer : the hair was purple, and there were gold glints in it.

"Ha," said Henry, "so I'm just after Eddie again. How did you arrange this?"

"Not arranged really, gov'nor : it just happened he was up here. He has to have a cut, same as everyone else." He sheeted Henry.

"All right then," said Henry, "but tell me about him."

Snip began the scissors : *snip, snip, snip.*

"But you don't believe me, gov'nor, and it's not fair. Especially when you think of how I believe you, when you tell me things. I mean, here am I with all the secrets about what *they're* up to, and you think I'm pulling your leg. You ought to think about some of the things I've told you. They're full of tricks, you know : look at this disease lark."

"What disease lark?"

Neyto lowered his head and whispered.

"Why, this selective virus they've developed to attack plants. It will kill off all the grass crops in other countries—grass itself, corn, oats, barley—starve 'em out : devilish, eh?"

Henry gave a great snort.

"Now look here ! That has been done—*positively* it has been done in a book ! Pure imagination ! There's not the slightest possibility of it happening, any more than there was of the temperature weapon, the satellite weapon, or the Queen Mary bomb !"

Neyto smiled sadly.

"See ? There's no point in my telling you. And after the way I listened to you, and you such a good customer. Just the sort of gent I'm after. If I told the rest, it would be no good : fall on deaf ears, as they say."

Despite himself, Henry asked, "What *else* do you know then?"

Pause, as Neyto looked at the reflection in the mirror.

"Suppose I was to tell you gov'nor, that the aliens had landed?"

By way of the mirror, Henry gazed at him with tight lips.

"This is confidential, mind. They decided that they wanted samples of the best brains experienced in all the most advanced forms of technology, to build into one great controlling brain to rule the planet. And so they have a detector system which indicates that the sort of specimen they want is approaching, and when they've made sure that it's okay, they finally get 'em in a trap which is designed, so they think, for their needs. For a woman it might be a beauty parlour, for a man a little club,

or even a barber's shop : it's really the same trap, but to the human it appears to be whatever he thinks it is."

"Hum. A barber shop trap : like this one eh ?"

"M'm. And you would be the sort they'd collect, you know."

"All right, you've had your little joke : now tell me, what's your name ?" He jerked his head at the letters on the panel.

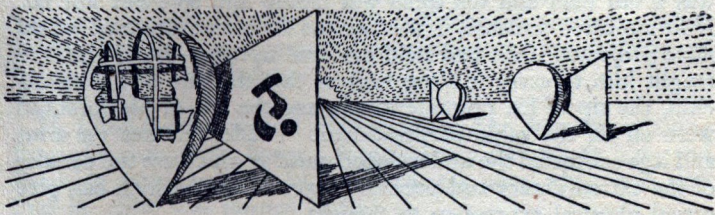
The barber took a hairdrier in his hand.

"That ? Oh, we took the illusion as it came : genuine barber's name, but a few letters knocked off." The hairdrier thing suddenly said *pouf* to Henry : he slumped forward, and Neyto pressed a lever. Henry's limp form shot through a gaping trapdoor down into a weird looking basement laboratory where a tall white coated figure, whose hair was purple with gold glints in it, was waiting to receive the latest specimen.

"SweENEY TOdd," said the barber : "Traditional, so we understand." He swept the black wig off his head, displaying his own glinting purple mop, and communicated with the one down below.

"There's another, Eddie : I want to rest awhile. Press the light shield button for outside, will you ?"

—John Kippax



GALACTIC

July 1st this year inaugurates the beginning of the International Geophysical Year—1500 years ago the great Roman Empire was breaking up. Let us extrapolate 1500 years into the future and take a guess at the circumstances surrounding the possible Empire of the stars.

YEAR

By **E. R. JAMES**

On a summer's day in the year 3438 A.D. a man called Lambert left his self imposed task, as was his habit each evening, and went to the door of his house.

There he paused a moment, preparing to face the curious eyes of what might so easily turn into a hostile society outside. He was a tall man and his torso was plump and soft but not fat. If he appeared unusual, it was because his broad forehead would have projected if he had held his head upright—but habit had taught him to carry it flung back so that the line of his strong chin, the tip of his prominent nose and the top of his forehead were all on the same perpendicular. Padded clothes on arms and legs concealed the undeveloped muscles which are the penalty of the extraordinary and peculiar power of mind which can give actual physical expression to thought.

He was, in fact, one of twenty known mutants, all born during the year 3405 A.D. but each on different planets throughout the then Galactic Empire of mankind. Produced by a cosmic force which reached a peak owing to the clashing of cycles in certain areas, they were men and yet not men, both weaker and yet stronger than the homo sapiens whom they were destined to serve more and more as time went on.

Lambert had been born on Pollux IV, but had fled from that planet at the time of the anti-telekin hysteria when one of their number on a planet of Arcturus was actually burnt at the stake after a witch-hunt on that particularly mechanised world. He had gone, with his wife, inwards towards Earth, the cradle of mankind, looking for the understanding which he hoped to find within a greater background of history.

Another telekin called Wendell from Capella III reached Earth first and, although remaining there, got word to Lambert, waiting on Procyon IV, that Earth's arteries had hardened and left her bigotted and too busy with the administration of Empire to be sympathetic.

It was the same everywhere, for various reasons, and so the mutants remained scattered—lost against the variety of backgrounds with which they tried, for the sake of peace, to merge.

Thus, for nearly eight years, Lambert had lived as one of the standoffish, intellectual class which supplied capital and sometimes momentum and ideas, usually without moving far from the fertile land around Procity, the capital of the planet on which fate and chance had stranded him . . .

He lifted his actually useless arm and set his feeble fingers around the knob, but turned it with kinetic energy from his mind. There was the appearance of normality to be kept up, and he opened the door, from long practice at such things, and *walked* with his useless legs going one before the other as his mental force held him off the ground and moved him forward at the same time as it moved them.

Other small mansions, all around in this sprawled suburbia, were at a respectful distance and air traffic was all at the regulation height, but he was accustomed to maintaining the pretence of being like his neighbours . . .

He lifted the bones of an arm to wave at Ann, his wife, running from the rear of the house. Running was difficult to him, and laughing at himself, he let her reach his usual chair and sink into it. She was normal human—

His eyes, ears, skin and his *sixth sense* of any kinetic action momentarily all blanked out, leaving him dazed, blinded and shaken—and rising uncontrollably from the ground at a very slow rate.

He had never been so close to an explosion before. As his eyes accustomed themselves to the whitish light of Procyon, he stared dully at the remains of what had been his loving and beloved Ann. She had been blown to pieces.

He sensed movement quite close. He remembered feeling it near the house while working and thinking that Ann had been outside—but she must, in fact, have been still within the house perhaps napping upstairs as was not unusual in the mid-day heat.

Now she was dead—dead because she had sprung a booby trap—it could be nothing else—meant for him, because he always came out in the evening to sit in that chair for the world to see . . .

Grief, utter and helpless to alter events, overwhelmed him. Through the nightmare of that came the sensations—outside ordinary human experience—of nearby purposeful movements.

Fury boiled up through grief. The fingers of his mind seized hold of the creeping assassin, hoisted the man out of a shrubbery into mid-air, six feet up—and almost smashed him down head-foremost. But long conditioning against the violent use of his power took control. The killer, landing on his feet, would be shaken and frightened but unlikely to be much harmed.

All pretence abandoned, Lambert lifted himself back towards the house. He could feel other men closing in through the slight movements of grass and leaves. He might fight against them all—even having some advantage against those coming down from the traffic levels in a 'copter—but there were two reasons, more important than any concept of revenge, why he dared not risk being beaten.

He flew through an open, upper window, flung its concealed armoured shutters into place and barred them without looking back. His enemies were coming cautiously against him, confident that they would not be disturbed, determined of movement, but wary against his unseen strength as they closed in.

They did not expect him to appeal to the law for support ; although they would surely have cut his telephone and radio communication. They thought of him, he guessed, as a sort of rat in a trap, cut off from his own kind, and with no thought

but of his own survival. They could not suspect how wrong they were . . .

He picked up the communicator box from his desk, held it before his face, pouring his mental force into it. Its little column of fluorescent green liquid climbed as he focussed across the light years of space to Earth.

“Wendell!” he said. “Wendell, answer me!”

“Yes, Lambert?” The voice, coming instantaneously across space in defiance of the old Einsteinian laws of space and time, answered his desperation.

He closed his eyes, forcing himself to be calm. “Wendell, Ann has been murdered, killed by a trap set for me. I have to run with the baby, to save it. Even if I live, our work together is ended since I will be a refugee . . . No matter how you feel about Skotte, he is the only one of the *others* who has the mental and moral strength to help make the Galactical Year a reality. You must compromise with his intention to condition homo sap into liking us . . . or Stevens will have died in vain!”

Wendell did not reply. And Lambert, pressed for time, remembered that Stevens had only been lynched because he had preferred to pass on the secret of the communicator box they were now using, rather than submit to being brainwashed. Even if Skotte wished to use that secret for dubious ends, there was now no alternative to co-operating with him.

“Wendell, you must agree!”

“But Lambert, have you thought? Who else but Skotte could have discovered where you are? Who else could have tried to kill you? You are the one big stumbling block to his own plan.”

“You think . . .” Lambert hesitated only a moment. “But it doesn’t matter even if he has tried to have me killed. You must work with him to further our plans of service—and for the sake of my little son.”

“Lambert,” said Wendell’s voice, “I admire you. Humanity will one day realise your sacrifice—”

“I have no sacrifice to make, now,” said Lambert. “Ann is dead. I am only looking after my own son and trying to help my own kind. Now listen. The plan ought to mature in the year 3457 as we intended. In that year I want you to broadcast an appeal for Lann . . .”

Lann was nineteen years old when the supply trader came down out of the sky, with the news. As he crouched, hidden in

the lean-to against the side of the dry-walled, primitive house of Wharton, his foster father, he could hear the sounds of the trader talking and drinking, and feel the excited movements of the homesteader.

He could tell that something unusual was about to happen, and he was more than a little frightened when Wharton came staggering into the lean-to, fat, dirty and unshaven as usual, to fall on his knees and dig with a rusty hand trowel in the dust of the dirt floor.

Wharton, having unearthed his cache of cash, slipped it into the front of his baggy shirt and straightened. "Lann," he said. "Lann, where the hell are you?"

"Up here," said Lann from his perch between ceiling and wall.

Wharton's slitted eyes peered up into the gloomy roof, somehow fearfully, yet with the arrogance of the uncouth towards those merely mentally strong. "Come down, you skinny monster, and act like a man."

Lann pushed out his feeble arms and legs like an unfolding spider and floated down hesitantly, to take the seat on the edge of a farm multi-tool which Wharton indicated.

Wharton eyed him, still somehow fearfully, but with something like fatherliness. "Well kid, this is where and when we part . . . I promised . . . your father that I'd tell you what he said when the Galactical Year was announced . . ."

Lann stared at him, round-eyed below his projecting forehead, and said nothing.

Wharton grimaced. "Hell fire! Haven't you ever wondered how you got here?"

"Yes. Often," said Lann.

The old man sucked at a decaying tooth. "Have you indeed? Bet you never guessed right. It started years back. My wife heard a noise outside and sent me out to look. And there was your father, apparently dying—though we couldn't tell what he was dying of—right on our doorstep. How he had come across the desert, carrying you in his arms, without even getting dusty, was something that never occurred to us to ask about until after I'd buried him. We didn't understand what you both were until you started to move things without touching them with your hands. But my wife was all for keeping you in spite of what you were, because we'd never had kids of our own and she'd got to love you, you see.

"Later you got to be useful around the place. The work you've done for me since she died has paid me back. I don't hold what you are against you—but I can't risk taking you with me now. I'm going back with the trader to end my days in a town amongst real human folk. It wasn't part of my bargain with your father that I should take you with me. All he wanted of me was to bring you up here in the desert so's nobody would see you. And then, when the Galactical Year was announced, I was to point out the direction of the nearest village and leave you to make your own way there. Can you do that?"

Lann nodded wordlessly, disturbed at the idea of leaving the security of the little oasis but more disturbed at the positive idea of entering a village full of non-mutants.

Wharton swallowed. "Good luck, kid," he said gruffly and patted Lann's arm with a big, dirty, hairy hand. "Two hundred miles west, there's mountains. Your father seemed to think you'd be able to locate the village there in a bit of a valley. Think you can?"

Again Lann nodded. It was all he could do to restrain himself from rushing into the old man's arms. But he wasn't wanted . . .

The movements of the trader's aircraft faded into distance, and, in the gathering dusk over the desert, there were only the tiny spasmodic movements of the tiny things which somehow existed amongst the wretched native vegetation.

Lann floated above them, sorry that he was having to leave this world he knew, but there was in his character the same feeling of duty which had activated his father before him, and he presently turned westwards, slowly gathering momentum with the difficulty of traction against a ground that he could not walk upon as did ordinary humans like Wharton and the Trader.

Dawn came over the mountains with himself still on his way. His heart was pounding with the strain of supplying his brain with life-giving blood, and his pockets were already emptied of the small stock of food which he had judged himself able to carry, but he knew that he would at least complete his journey.

He knew also that he must accept civilisation as he found it—and he was already feeling—somehow *hearing* and yet not hearing a curious sibilant undertone of words, over and over repeated "Listen with your soul and not with your ears. Always listen to the telekins. Love these supermen for they wish only to serve your sort of human." Its hypnotic repetition lulled him

somewhat, even though he could by no means understand how or why it should be there in his mind rather than his ears.

He passed into the mountains, low against the ground, guided by a sensation of movements ahead . . . purposeful movements, as Wharton used to make while working at the Homestead, and therefore human movements, but multiplied a hundred times.

Because of them, and *in spite of them*, he forced himself to walk up the last few yards of the weed-grown rutted track in the bottom of the narrow pass leading up from the vast desert.

And then he halted. Before him stretched a valley so green beneath the white sun, and so full of waving movements of crops and the slowness of domesticated animals lazy with the heat, that he almost forgot himself.

He did in fact levitate the merest fraction of an inch as he turned, guided by the activity of the village—so that his feet did not scuff up the dust.

A heavily built man, brawny and sunburnt in faded denims and brown shirt, had stopped half way between him and the village to stare.

Lann returned the stare with the grimness of those determined to keep up a front, and began to place one thin leg before the other and so on in as realistic a demonstration of walking as he was able.

They exchanged greetings. The farmer's stolid face pulled into a puzzled frown as he looked back up the track down which Lann had come from the pass. He took the straw from his mouth and said: "You—" Then his mouth fell open and he just gaped.

Lann *walked* on. A plump mongrel came sniffing out of the village to meet him. Its hackles suddenly rose and its teeth showed as it caught his unfamiliar scent, or perhaps sensed his strange strength with its own canine sixth sense. He reached out with his mind and tapped it on the nose. It yelped and, tail between legs, went scuttling off.

The sun drawing moist heat off running and still irrigation water, the foliage movements caused by the warm breeze, the lazy motions of the animals, the human activity in the village were all living sensations within his being as he entered the cobbled main street. There were quite thirty houses, mostly made of smooth board although some of the newer-seeming appeared to use rough hewn stone as foundation, all clustered together so that they seemed in total to have their back against the crag which shut off the desert.

People, many children amongst them, were gathering around him. People with strong limbs and foreheads that did not jut out—

One man was speaking to him, holding out his hand. "Welcome Telekin. What can we do for you?"

The air of friendliness almost overwhelmed Lann, it was so unexpected. He allowed the speaker to seize his limp hand—*felt* the man's involuntary shudder at its boney limpness, and stiffened it with the sinews of mind so that all seemed normal. "I'm hungry," he said. "If I could have some food—"

They were so extraordinarily anxious to listen to him and to help him in any way they could. He yearned to stay with them, but he had a curious feeling that his destiny was nothing like theirs. Somehow it was as though they did what they could for him because they must—not because they really felt sympathetic to him.

They said they were sorry when he announced his intention of going on. Their words and even the regretful expressions on their honest faces seemed to show that they had hoped he was to stay with them because of the Galactical Year; but he could *feel* the relaxation of their nerves and muscles and knew that, deep within each of them, they were glad to be rid of his demanding presence.

Open mouthed and wide-eyed, their faces dotted the village square as he rose over their heads. At first he was sad and lonely as the cool air over the mountains chilled him but, as he followed the directions he had been given, the comparative ease of progress brought a thrill. Following the lessening heights of the mountain chain towards the nearest town to the North, he could fasten on to a peak ahead and draw himself towards it, thus leaping from one to another.

He sensed Hardstreet before his eyes could see it. The monstrous kinetic energy of harnessed atoms frightened him. As he drew nearer, he felt the awesome precision of tremendous machines tearing at rock below the town and grinding and roaring over it in the surface factories. And he could feel, too, the almost machine-like actions of sombre men, and even of the women in the grey stone houses that stood in severe lines and squares around the factories rising over the desolate skyline.

This was nothing like he had hoped to find. It was symbolic, he feared, of the climb of civilisation—not that he expressed such a concept in terms like that, for he had scarcely heard of

any science beyond the mechanics of a Thirty-fifth Century pastoral, isolated existence.

The sibilant, half-heard undertone that he had felt as he had approached the village again came to meet him, and, even while hating it, he guessed that it at least assured his arrival of a lip-service welcome.

But the machines ! He felt dwarfed, puny, so close to such tremendous expenditure of kinetic force. Even the movements of men tending the machines so confidently made him feel depressed.

Hunger drove him down, however, because although his physical body was feeble in muscles the sinews of his powerful brain required a continuous flow of rich blood.

He paused only long enough on the outskirts of the grim place to be given food and to learn that big freighter aircraft plied continuously towards the spaceport at Procity the capital of the planet.

His mind fastened on to one of these and it towed him all through the coming night. With the dawn, he felt a change in the world below although he did not know that he was passing over the very area of scattered houses there his mother had been killed.

Again he seemed to have leaped forward in time. Procity, the capital of mostly arid Procyon IV, might not be the acme of present day civilisation, but it was far ahead of Hardstreet.

Here men had peace and dignity again. No longer forced by economic forces to serve mighty machines, humanity here was served by a complex multitude of smaller machines designed and equipped with servo-mechanisms to set men and women free.

Encouraged by this and by the sibilant whispers that he had by now guessed were not audible to ordinary humans, he sank gratefully towards the teeming heart of what he felt would be sanctuary.

Coming down between far-spaced, gracious buildings amongst the trees and shrubs and flowers possible in this fertile region near the only sea on the planet, a shout told his ears that he had been seen. He felt the tension grow as all movements stopped immediately below. He felt the great mass of small *movements* going on unchecked all around this frozen centre—further off even than his *sense* could touch, like a mighty cacophony of sound to man used to living in silence like that of cloisters.

Exhausted by the mental effort of the past thirty hours, and driven by his aching hunger, he nevertheless hung in midair, swamped by it all . . . until, knowing he must go down, he at length did so determinedly.

People swarmed around him, some supporting his weight, all trying to aid him, pushing in, bearing on his mind with their total potential so that his weariness grew, and awareness receded as fatigue came in muffling waves . . .

A ceiling of restful blue . . . Cushioned comfort below him and a light, silky covering over him . . . A luxurious room beyond his wildest imaginings . . .

He moved in the bed. The faintest of clicks sounded in his ear and he felt the energy of an impulse that moved with the speed of light. Somewhere outside the room, amidst a calm complex of movements, a new movement of a human answered its summons. Relays clicked in the door of the room and a girl in a graceful, spotless uniform came in and smiled.

“I hope you're better, telekin?”

“Yes . . .” He stared at her.

She nodded. “Good. You'll be hungry?”

“Yes!”

She turned to the blank wall and waved her hand. A panel slid aside and Lann felt energy surge into mechanisms coming into view. She made adjustments and he sensed impulses shooting down into the building below, and then a mixture of items coming up in response. Warmed air rose as radiations made a pattern of varying strengths. The items came together in a methodical way. A flap opened and he saw as well as felt a tray of food and drink coming into the girl's waiting hands.

She carried this to him and must have actuated some mechanism that he failed to detect, because the bed moved under him, sitting him up while the bedclothes went down to his waist and a bed table swung around in front of him.

She said: “If there's anything else you want, just call.” And then he was staring at the graceful sway of her back as she went out.

He ate, and when he pushed the table away, it folded into the wall out of sight behind him. He stretched out in the flattening bed, and suddenly frowned.

Until that moment he had not realised that he was like a man drifting on a current, being carried towards some metaphorical

whirlpool of which he had no knowledge. What was the Galactical Year, and what was the part his father had expected him to play in it?

Presently the girl came back to ask him if he felt strong enough to get up, because he had been sent for by his own kind. A wheeled, many-attachented robovalet helped him to dress in new clothes of a luxury and fit such as he had never before seen. At a lift just outside the room, the girl suddenly seized his hand and kissed it, leaving him embarrassed as well as shocked.

On the roof two men helped him into a waiting helicar and he sat, with one of them at his side, and one at the simple controls, marvelling at this V.I.P. treatment.

The kinetic forces within the small but luxurious little aircraft only gradually came through to him. Unlike the packaged power plant of the farm tools he had used on the homestead and the centralised but directly connected power of the industrial town he had seemed, the helicar took power from an unseen radiation that only now did he notice in the air.

His interest captured, he suddenly realised an odd thing about the two men accompanying him. They had some kind of tiny mechanical apparatus concealed within their ears. That they should both have deaf aids—what else could they have?—seemed an extraordinary coincidence.

And, as he thought of the auditory sense, he again became aware of the ever-present sibilance which seemed present in all populated areas. Such deaf aids might perhaps be adjusted to eliminate its hypnotic effect.

Startled, he had smashed the little mechanisms almost without thought. The two men put their hands to their heads, then looked at each other, eyes widening. They turned to him, faces grim with purpose.

One reached out thick-fingered hands on brawny, hairy arms. Lann knocked them aside and hit the man's head with all the kinetic force of his mind, snapping it around grotesquely.

The other man was dragging out a weapon of some sort. Lann wrenched it away, lifted it and pointed it at its owner. "Put me down out of this thing," he said.

But the man's blank eyes baffled him. A deaf man would not hear. Lann hesitated. He had heard of writing . . . but no one had ever taught him. He had never heard of the possibility of telepathy, but wished he had some faculty like that—which was beyond his power to invoke.

And every second was carrying him swiftly wherever these two men wanted to take him— That they meant him no good was obvious enough.

He had never been in a flying machine before. But now his mind reached out and examined the method of its operation feeling along the tensions of its controls and airscrews and adjusting them experimentally and cautiously until the aircar was descending towards a park-like square similar to that in which he had first come down.

He could feel the tension building up in the muscles of the man facing him. Suddenly the fellow lurched forward—

Without thought, Lann felt the gun kick against the grip of his mind. He must have explored its working parts without conscious intention—for it was different from the chemical cartridged weapon Wharton had had on the homestead.

The shot man—an inch wide hole in his face—fell towards Lann, and Lann fended him off, and the spurt of blood too, in horror.

With a jarring crash the aircar landed. Lann glimpsed people closing in from all sides. Terror held him in his seat. What could he say to these people to explain away the fact that he had killed two of their number?

The door of the aircar was dragged open, the bodies pulled out and a dozen voices were asking him if he was hurt.

For a few moments he could only gape. Then, as two men in blue uniform pushed through the gathering crowd and added the same inquiry to those of the others, he came to himself and explained as best he could.

To his astonishment they seemed to believe him without question. He was helped—unnecessarily—out of the aircar, and taken into a beautiful house where he had difficulty in making its owner believe that he was neither hungry nor thirsty.

A cheer rang through the streets as a big, blue aircar carried him up in the direction he ought to have been taken by the smaller one. A uniformed man and another in civilian clothes, both obviously of great importance, had come in this and kept on apologising to him, over and over again as though repetition alone would convince him. Twelve heavily armed other men in uniform sat all around him, watching the skies and ground with the utmost vigilance.

It seemed quite unbelievable. He, an unknown, illiterate farm boy was being treated as though he were a god, incapable of doing wrong . . .

The aircar dived smoothly towards a white building which rose magnificently and shining out of the heart of the city. He was escorted to its door and met there by men in white uniforms who treated him as though they were his high priests. He felt that with the slightest encouragement they would have fallen on their knees and actually worshipped him.

As he entered a large hall in the heart of the building, these too halted, as though it were holy ground, and he went on alone, more mystified than ever.

At first the hall seemed empty of life. On one side there was a group of chairs arranged around a table that was much too high for them, being quite six feet off the ground. On the other side were several beds covered with fine cloths and spotless linen and there were other tables, too, set with gleaming cutlery and the thinnest and finest of china and glass ready for meals to be served it seemed.

But the thing that principally caught his attention was a column of fluorescent green liquid in the centre of the place. About a foot in diameter within a glass tube which stretched up into the ceiling, it was about the height of a man, but rose and fell an inch or two as though to some rhythm of its own. He felt that he knew the rhythm but several moments passed before he connected it with the sibilant whisperings . . . "listen with your soul and not with your ears. Always listen to the telekins. Love these supermen for they only wish to serve your sort of human."

This then was the source of that strange soundless, hypnotic suggestion which had given him—and would give *any* telekin the right to do anything, literally anything . . .

While he still stared at the pulsing column, its glow brightened and it grew rapidly taller. At about double its previous height it steadied again, still pulsing as before. And, abruptly, the outlines of everything around him became less sharp. Other outlines seemed superimposed upon them, as though he were looking at two photographs which had been taken on one negative.

Curiosity made his mind adapt itself so that he saw only the new outlines.

Amongst these were the shapes of some inanimate things, but he was only vaguely aware of those, his attention being taken by seemingly insubstantial shapes of seventeen men and women. Their foreheads all projected as did his own, and they floated several feet off the floor, their limbs thin and uselessly hanging as did his own.

As he looked from one to the other, around the circle of faces, he realised they were regarding him with as much interest as he was showing them.

Then the glowing green column caught his eye again and he saw that it, alone of all other things visible to him, still seemed to have a firm, solid substance. Before he could look away, he noticed that its rhythm had changed. A voice was speaking to him through the sibilance of the pervading whispering and sometimes clashing with it—as when two programmes are being received together over a radio set—although this voice was different because it was being caught wholly by his ears and not as in the case of the sibilance somehow in his mind.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “I didn’t hear that.”

“I was only saying—” One of the suspended, insubstantial telekins spread his hands and smiled with tired, understanding eyes out of an ageing face. “—that you must not be frightened at what you see.”

“Oh, I’m not,” said Lann. Fear had not occurred to him ; he had been to interested for that.

The members of the circle looked at each other, then back at him. The spokesman nodded encouragement, leaned forward with obvious excitement. “What is your name ?”

“I am Lann—”

“Lann !” The exclamation burst from several lips.

But the first speaker continued as though he had expected what he heard. “I’m glad . . . I knew your father. He must have succeeded in hiding you in some very remote place there on Procyon. We’d feared that you and he had both been killed. Can you tell us what happened all those years ago ?”

“Well,” said Lann. “I only know what my foster father told me.” He told them the few details that Wharton had given him.

The speaker nodded slowly. “His brain was hurt in a way not possible to ordinary humans. Many bullets must have been fired at him and although he was able to shield his body—and yours—from physical harm the impacts would have reacted terribly against the special nerves, destroying many of them . . . I’m sorry . . .” He sighed. “However, my name is Wendell. I was a friend of your father’s, and I hope you’ll believe me when I say I want to be your friend too. I want you to trust me.”

“Oh, I do,” said Lann at once. He had no option.

Wendell smiled. "Good. Now, this year of 3457—one thousand five hundred years after the first real geophysical year on Earth—has been chosen as Galactical Year. During this year, scientists throughout the Galaxy are co-operating in an endeavour to discover new facts about how stars are made—and in particular the chain of events which lead to the production of planets which resemble Earth to a sufficient degree for them to be colonised by mankind—God knows they are few enough and widely scattered. Do you understand what I am saying?"

"A little," said Lann. "My foster father started his career as a spaceman and talked to me about the riches awaiting a man who found an Earth-type world."

"Good," said Wendell. "Well, as Telekins, our part in this concerns the possibility of creating new Earth-type planets out of pockets of interstellar gas." He paused. "Can you understand that?"

"I think so."

"We feel sure," continued Wendell, "that the formation of suns and their subsequent ageing proceeds according to fixed rules. We are not Gods to make something out of nothing, but if we could contract a pocket of interstellar gas within itself the rules that govern stars would do the rest for us. Now . . . hitherto, the laws of space and time and the shortness of human life when compared with the cosmic scale have made such an experiment absolutely fantastic. But we have found out that our special brains can have their kinetic force focussed so to speak—and also amplified to a tremendous extent by the green liquid which has enabled us to be speaking to you across rather more than fifty light years at this very moment.

"By its aid we are, in fact, defying the old laws of Space and Time. Already our experiments seem to show that we can alter those laws enough to make new suns—or rather to use laws which already exist to get around the old limitations of having to take things as we find them. But—enough of explanation—Listen carefully. We are going to leave you now. I want you to wait for a quarter of an hour while we make the final preparations here. Then—and only then—reach out and touch the green column with your mind. Experiment with it. It is exactly similar to one we are using here and you can do yourself no harm if you are cautious. When you are sure you can use it, come here. One of us will be waiting to explain what we want you to do. Do you understand?"

"Yes," nodded Lann.

The superimposed images faded and he found himself alone. In his excitement he had so far lost control of himself to have risen quite a foot into the air. Fearing that someone would come in and surprise him thus, he dropped swiftly to the normal human erect position on his feet.

Time passed slowly and his excitement rose together with impatience, but at length he felt he was free to touch the strange green column.

With the first contact he thought himself chilled—then he realised that the feeling of *cold* being comparable to *heat*, he was actually experiencing the latter. A vast and unimaginable power seemed to be enlarging the kinetic forces already generated by his brain. He felt he might do *anything*. He wanted, most of all, to join his own kind wherever they were. And his yearning, together with his amplified ability drew him out of the hall on Procyon as though he had leapt instantaneously into the air, a full mile up.

The sudden thinness of the atmosphere caught at his lungs then eased as he used his heightened powers to solidify and protect his flesh—as instinctively as when he had shot the gunman in the aircar earlier in the day.

Again he wanted to move. The city below him had shrunk to a pattern in which individual houses were difficult to see and the arid face of Procyon tinged the expanded horizon with grey. It was gone. Stars shone around him, hard and bright, unwinking in the vastness of the Galaxy. *Terror* almost overwhelmed him but he fought it back. He could have moved in any direction—could have exploded stars themselves with the growing force within his mind. But there were sixteen separate directions which seemed to beckon to him, and of these one in particular.

He leaped again. The stars did not move ; instead it was as though he passed instantaneously from one viewpoint to another.

And amidst the pattern of lights a gigantic ball of metal, floating free of any Sun and only faintly illuminated by the starshine, stood at his side. He knew at once that this was his destination. He leapt closer so that it was a vast, faintly curving wall which blotted out half the Galaxy. Then, sensing the *cold* or *heat* of the fluorescent green column which had beckoned across the unimaginable billions of miles of nothingness, he leapt again.

The column, a duplicate of that on Procyon, stood at his side. He looked around and vaguely recognised the scene which had been superimposed over the hall he had just quit. But it was empty now of its former occupants.

One man *stood* on long, well muscled legs, and looked at him with speculating eyes from below a broad white forehead that did *not* project.

“Welcome, Lann,” said the man in a rich, sonorous voice. “My name is Carlin. Yes, I am ordinary Homo Sapiens. You are not to meet others of your kind until after this great experiment has taken place.” He lifted his hand and a score of uniformed men doubled out of the shadows of the rim of the hall and turned their backs inwards, while they held their weapons ready for use and looked around with tense vigilance. “One attempt,” he said, “has been made on your life. We do not mean to let a second attempt be more successful.”

“But what,” said Lann, “am I supposed to do?”

“I am to tell you,” said Carlin. “But first of all, let me introduce myself. I am the Emperor, ruler of the Galactic Empire which man has spread across the habitable planets of the system of stars within our reach . . . Yet, like yourselves, having special powers, I am both master and servant. I serve by ruling. My very life is not my own. I am responsible for what happens to the meanest of my subjects. And this Telekin project is very much to my liking. The human race is again reaching the limits of its living space. Although there are uncountable planets around the stars, only very few are capable of supporting mankind—and of those few only fifty-one have been found in a thousand years which can be termed Earth-type . . . We need many more if mankind is not to begin to fight over living space.”

He continued to eye Lann with his curious speculation—not worshippingly as had other homo sapiens except for the deaf men, but with a great suppressed excitement which in spite of his obviously habitual self-control he had great difficulty in containing.

“But in spite of all this,” he said breathlessly, “I want to assure you how valuable you are to us. *Every other mutant with kinetic powers except your father has been sterile—incapable of continuing your race.* You alone carry live genes which can bring a third generation of telekins into the Galaxy . . .

"However," he continued, "that is an aside. What is going to happen is that three separate parties of telekins are going to three separate dust clouds within the Galaxy. Each will have a separate task. One will concentrate on producing planets around a manufactured G type sun by means of an engineered near collision. That will be done under the direction of Skotte, the chief amongst your sort. The second party under your friend Wendell will try to produce the planets at the same time as the Earth type sun is itself made. He thinks that is the most likely of the various theories of the origin of Earth.

"And the third party will nominally be under control of myself—but in actual fact I will be only present as a neutral observer. You will have the power of five others of your kind to help you. You will be testing the validity of both these theories in an area which my scientists have chosen and which is not known to the others taking active part in this great experiment."

"What? Do the others really think that I can do that?"

"They do. Your father's powers were greater than those of the others of his generation. He might have been your leader in Skotte's place, if he had not been assassinated. And now—to work. The preparations are all made. All the apparatus is assembled. We can begin as soon as you are ready. Since time and space can be defied, we should be back here before this day is over." Emperor Carlin inclined his head. "I and the body-guard which I have provided for you depend upon you to transport us to the distant area where you will work." He stood waiting, a serene, proud figure, quietly resplendent in spite of being dressed in clothes of ordinary, if impeccable cloth and cut.

Lann's head swam. To think that forty-eight hours before he had been grubbing in the poor soil of a remote homestead—as an unknown—as little better than a slave! Whereas now the Emperor of a Galaxy awaited his pleasure, and he was being given a place of honour in command of several of his own kind, who were all more experienced by far than he!

He looked at the fluorescent green column—and was too frightened—too terrified at the responsibility suddenly and unexpectedly thrust upon him to reach out and touch it. His mind seemed to retreat within itself, and he goggled stupidly.

As in some nightmare, he seemed to have lost the power to move. Dimly aware of something happening, he strove to break his paralysis—

There seemed to be some shape high above him near the top of the glass pillar. Something struck him, pushing him so that he floated away and up. Flame stabbed and sparks flew from the place where he had stood and things went screaming up—bullets ricochetting.

He came back to himself with a jolt as guns roared deafeningly all around and the thing in the roof came hurtling down to thud horribly to the floor before he could stop it right beside him.

Acrid smells of chemical and electrical discharges stung his nostrils. Carlin was stepping back from him. He had been pushed by the Emperor himself. Imperial hands had been used to save his life. "I—" he began.

But Carlin interrupted urgently. "Hurry, Before your enemies can send fresh assassins."

"Yes." Lann reached out and contacted the reassuring burning of the green column. Strength roared through his mind and, without thought or effort, he blanketed Emperor and guards with protective force and lifted them and himself outwards through the barriers of ordinary space and time in a mighty, blind leap.

In the darkness outside the metal world, the last vestiges of fear left him. Hidden in this timeless state between the stars, he was safe from ordinary humans. Confidence blazed through him.

He felt the calling of green columns scattered throughout space. But now there was a new call—as of several massed columns, and towards this he went as time and space continued to yield to the swollen power of his mind.

He stood in another hall and, as he let go his mental hold of the column now far distant behind him, he saw that six columns stood glowing but unanimated all around him. The guards and Carlin were blinking and swaying like men who have awoken on their feet—time and space were constants for them . . .

Beside each of five of the columns stood a telekin. Three men and two women, all a generation older than he and all looking at him with varying mixtures of curiosity and resentment.

Unease began to melt the heat of his confidence as he looked around their unfriendly faces. Compared to these people he was a child in experience as well as in years . . .

"You've got to help me," he muttered, then said more loudly, "I've everything to learn. I don't know why I've been put in charge of experts such as you."

A woman smiled. "A wise boy to think like that."

"But he is Lambert's son," said a man with a lined, haggard face that seemed to reflect grim memories stored behind it. "Remember that Lambert did not want Skotte to use the columns for our protection."

"Please," Lann interrupted further discussion. "I know nothing at all about the things you take for granted. Won't you teach me about the past?"

For a long moment they all looked at him. Perhaps his very real anxiety to learn and to make friends got through to them, for first one and then another began to speak, telling of their experiences.

Life had not been easy for any of them until the columns had been installed on all inhabited planets and small relays built into every city, village and town. Some had been hunted and often barely escaped with their lives. Even later when their fortune had been assured, they had found themselves often envying ordinary humans. They were too obviously different ever to be treated as equals. They could never have children of their own. And yet they were basically subject to all the needs, desires, hopes and fears of the vast multitude from which they had sprung. One woman had adopted a family but, sickening of unending and blind obedience and love had turned what ought to have been a basic human unit into a Galaxy wide system of orphanages. Another man had, for a time, deserted his fellow telekins and studied and practiced medicine. He had been an outstanding doctor but one more doctor seemed not to matter much on a cosmic scale. When the Galactical Year had become a possibility through the untiring efforts of Wendell, he had been glad to abandon his own small career to be absorbed into the great enterprise.

Lann listened to it all, turning from ageing face to ageing face, marvelling at the emptiness that comes with the end of human striving, and astonished more than once when the faces flashed anger or bitterness at each other. To these people petty things were as important—if not more important than the greatest urges ever to seize hold of man. Their slightest wish would be immediately gratified—except amongst themselves.

They told him how they had evolved rules for themselves. One of their number had later been discovered breaking those self-made standards by betraying the trust of ordinary humans for his own vain glory—and he had been executed . . .

Suddenly, as though the tension had been broken by all this talk, they were coming towards him, smiling and laughing and asking him about himself, how he had been brought up, what had happened to his father, and what other things did he wish to know.

But at length one by one they fell silent, and quite abruptly Carlin said: "There is work to be done."

Quietly and seriously then, they explained the experiment to Lann and then took their places, nodding encouragement to him.

He took hold of the remaining pillar and, as its green liquid rose at his first touch, he felt the power of their amplified minds adding to his own.

And he leapt out of the great ship which held the columns, looked back at it once, and then leaped again as vast power came out of it in rising waves.

God-like, and yet human because he was bound by laws not of his making, he saw the Galaxy stretching out in a breathtaking, flattened disc, here and there darkened by patches of dust, one of these patches seeming to be at his very side.

He reached into this and stirred it to action with his mind. He swirled it around and compressed it at the same time. It glowed hotter and hotter as he willed it into the shape of a star. He drained off its heat into space, almost bursting with impatience as he found that it would respond to his intentions only at a rate that seemed to have definite stages of its own. As the centre closed in, vortices of turbulence were left behind, spinning around independently of the forming sun and cooling at the super-normal rate of that sun as they coalesced . . . and yet again seeming to be only partially under his control because they too had to conform to laws which even his might could not change.

He brought the new sun to a stage in its life comparable to that of Sol—and he found that the nine vortices had turned of their own accord into nine planets . . .

He paused, gathering his strength. He had none to waste in moving in to examine his work at closer quarters.

He leaped again, so that the new sun was a mere speck of light lost in the multitude of older stars.

Taking hold of a small, dark star, he moved it from its age-old course setting it hurtling towards a dimming G type star with no attendant family of planets. As it neared this second star, both began to glow with renewed life as gravitic forces struggled between them. But he had planned that they should not meet

The smaller star swept close to its undisturbed brother. Fire zig-zagged between them. The smaller star disintegrated in a violent explosion. Some parts of it hurtled on with increased force, some shot off away at varying angles, and some hurtled with growing mass as velocity mounted until they were lost in the inferno of the star which had been approached and which was now in seeming chaos.

Lann held his mental grip on events, increasing their pace, but again unable to influence the sequence in which they took place, being able only to watch in wonder as the star settled down. When its glare had died sufficiently, he again saw whirling planets taking form and slowing. Six planets and three bands of debris, like asteroids, spaced as before as they settled into equilibrium. He continued to watch, feeling his power begin to wane at last, until the rejuvenated star had cooled to the temperature of Sol, and then, thankfully, he leaped back, content to sink to the floor in great weariness under the influence of the ship's centrifugal spin while the others clustered around, calling him star-maker, in a wild exhibition of excitement.

Twelve hours later, after a long sleep and a restoring meal, he was back in the hall within the metal world. Not all the telekins had returned. Some were examining the newly created systems. But those who were there were "standing" around him with their useless feet a comfortable few inches off the surface below them.

Carlin and all other evidence of homo sapiens had gone ; this was telekin business pure and simple.

Lann looked around the faces that were not familiar to him. For all he had seen when he had been faced with their half-presences on Procyon had been little more than impressions. Wendell he recognised easily, of course. His father's old friend had led one of the other parties which had concentrated only on creation by the turbulence method.

The other party had been under the control of Skotte. Skotte was dark. Deep set eyes seemed to smoulder in secret beneath heavy eyebrows under Skotte's forehead. He stood apart from the others, and they seemed to Lann's imagination, to be watching him warily.

Everyone was waiting. Other telekins began to appear coming across space from the areas of the great experiments.

Presently Wendell looked around, his lips moving as he counted those present. "Well," he said, "fifteen of us are here—and Lann. Is that sufficient for the council ?"

A chorus of ayes answered him, Skotte alone seeming to be unaffected by the excitement, and he nodded. "So it is done," Wendell said. "Our part in the Galactical Year is over. We have proved our value in the scheme of things. I would like to thank our newest fellow for the way in which he fell in with our plan. He did not have to help us—although I rather took it for granted that he would. His life has twice been threatened, but he chose to do his part in spite of that. We could tell him only a little because we needed his mind fresh and unaffected by preconceptions—so that he would not be prejudiced—so that his own desires would not be likely to affect the act of creation. Because of him we have proved that both myself and Skotte are right in the choice of our theories of creation—and we have also proved we are both wrong in that we believed there could only be one way in which planetary systems are formed . . .

"Ladies and gentlemen, fellow telekins, I give you Lann!"

"Lann!" The hall rang with the shout.

Lann glanced sideways at Skotte.

Skotte was rising slowly into the air, his dark visage twisted with the fury of the mind behind it. "Lann!" shouted Skotte in derision. "You fools! You praise a mere, untried stripling! A child compared with any one of us! Don't you see that he will come to rule us all—even myself—I, who have saved you from continual persecution—don't you see the menace of him?" His voice rose to a shriek. "While we grow old—are growing old even now—he will come into the prime of his life and have what we cannot—children! He will live on in them while we must die! I curse him. So should you. Kill him now, I say—"

Lann felt himself seized bodily and flung and thrust faster and faster towards the nearest wall. For a desperate instant he could do nothing. Then he was fighting back to slow himself. He felt a greater force coming against him and saw the column of green climbing within the pillar. And he reached out and fought for the possession of that amplifying liquid.

Kinetic force against kinetic force battled unseen, and he felt the greater experience of the older man was conquering. Everything seemed to be standing still. Time and space had ceased to exist in a normal way for him and his assailant.

And then, desperately, he turned the power of his mind against the column itself and it burst, glass shattering but being confined as he closed his own unaided power around it.

He sank towards the floor, waiting for the renewed attack of mind against mind. But there was nothing. Nothing . . .

Glass and liquids clattered and splashed upon the floor and behind the area of debris a twisted, limp shape thudded down after it to lie grotesque, a bloated doll with stick-legs and stick-arms at wrong angles.

"Skotte is dead," said Wendell's voice.

Lann drew in a long deep breath. Physical reaction to the brief but violent mental battle left him shuddering and cold. Mental forces closed in around him, supporting him, comfortingly

"It had to be one of us who was trying to kill you," said Wendell. "Skotte deserved to die. He knew that what he said about your taking over was the inescapable truth as long as you lived. It was fortunate that your father hid you so well."

Lann stared at Wendell's sober, ageing face. "But I'm so much younger than all of you . . ." he protested.

Wendell nodded. "Yes, it will be hard for you. But it is your destiny. Even this metal world in which we stand at this very moment is named after you. This is the world of Lann—'L' for Lambert and 'A' for Ann."

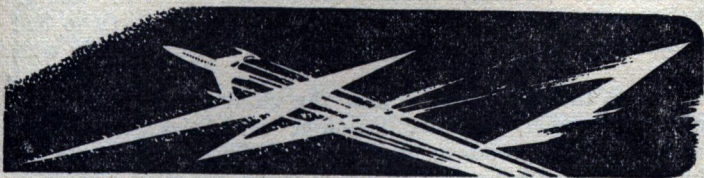
"But I'm so inexperienced . . ."

Wendell looked at him very thoughtfully and slowly turned and pointed.

The two other telekins had appeared in the hall and were standing apart from their comrades. Behind them stood a small group of men and women who stared about them in wonder, and these people were ordinary homo sapiens and dressed in outlandish clothes of material such as Lann had never seen.

"The worlds *we* made," said Wendell, "were not so Earth-like—they had evolved complete with populations."

—E. R. James



LET'S BE FRANK

The chances are that you are a Frank—in which case the publication here of your innermost secret will be annoying but not cause you any untoward distress. After all, it is now too late for the non-Franks to do anything about it. But the next time you use the expression "Let's be frank" its meaning will be a lot clearer. Indeed, let us all be frank!

By **BRIAN W. ALDISS**

Four years after pretty little Anne Boleyn was executed in the Tower of London, a child was born into the Gladwebb family—an unusual child.

That morning, four people stood waiting in the draughty ante-chamber to milady's bedroom, where the confinement was taking place—her mother, an aunt, a sister-in-law and a page. The husband, young Sir Frank Gladwebb, was not present; he was out hunting. At length the midwife bustled out to the four in the ante-chamber and announced that the Almighty (who had recently become a Protestant) had seen fit to bless milady with a son.

"Why, then, do we not hear the child crying, woman?" milady's mother, Cynthia Chinfont St. Giles, demanded, striding into the room to her daughter. There the reason for the child's silence became obvious: it was asleep.

It remained in the 'sleep' for nineteen years.

Young Sir Frank was not a patient man ; he suffered, in an ambitious age, from ambition, and anything which stood between him and his advancement got short shrift. Returning from the hunt to find his first-born comatose, he was not pleased. The situation, however, was remedied by the birth of a second son in the next year, and of three more children in the four years thereafter. All of these offspring were excessively normal, the boy taking Holy Orders and becoming eventually the Abbot of St. Duckwirt, where simony supplemented an already generous income.

The sleeping child grew as it slept. It stirred in its sleep, sometimes it yawned, it accepted the bottle. Sir Frank kept it in an obscure room in the manor, appointing an old harridan called Nan to attend it. In moments of rage, or when he was in his cups, Sir Frank would swear to run a sword through the child ; yet the words were idle, as those about him soon perceived. There was a strange bond between Sir Frank and the sleeping child. Though he visited it rarely, he never forgot it.

On the child's third birthday, he went up to see it. It lay in the centre of a four-poster, its face calm. With an impulse of tenderness, Sir Frank picked it up, cradling it, limp and helpless, in his arms.

"It's a lovely lad, sire," Nan commented. And at that moment the sleeping child opened its eyes and appeared to focus them on its father. With a cry, Sir Frank staggered back dizzily, overwhelmed by an indescribable sensation. He sprawled on the bed, holding the child tightly to keep it from harm. When the giddy feeling had gone, he looked and found the child's eyes shut again, and so they remained for a long while.

The Tudor springs and winters passed, the sleeping child experiencing none of them. He grew to be a handsome young boy, and a manservant was engaged for him ; still his eyes never opened, except on the rare occasions when his father—now engrossed in the affairs of court—came to see him. Because of the weakness which took him at these times, Sir Frank saw to it that they were few.

Good King Harry died, the succession passed to women and weaklings, Sir Frank came under the patronage of Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex. And in the year of the coronation of Elizabeth, the sleeping child awoke.

Sir Frank, now a prosperous forty-one, had gone in to see his first-born for the first time in thirty months. On the four-poster

lay a handsome, pale youth of nineteen, his straggling growth of beard the very shade of his father's more luxuriant crop. The manservant was out of the room.

Strangely perturbed, as if something inexpressible lay just below the surface of his thoughts, Sir Frank went over to the bed and rested his hands on the boy's shoulders. He seemed to stand on the brink of a precipice.

"Frank," he whispered—for the sleeping child had been given his own name—"Frank, why don't you wake up?"

In answer to the words, the youth's eyes opened. The usual wash of dizziness came and went like a flash; Sir Frank found himself looking up into his own eyes.

He found more than that.

He found he was a youth of nineteen whose soul had been submerged until now. He found he could sit up, stretch, run a hand marvelling through his hair and exclaim, "By our Lady!" He found he could get up, look long at the green world beyond his window and finally turn back to stare at himself.

And all the while 'himself' had watched the performance with his own eyes. Shaking, father and son sat down together on the bed.

"What sorcery is this?" Sir Frank muttered.

But it was no sorcery, or not in the sense Sir Frank meant. He had merely acquired an additional body for his ego. It was not that he could be in either as he pleased; he was in both at the same time. When the son came finally to consciousness, it was to his father's consciousness.

Warily, experimenting that day and the next few days—when the whole household rejoiced at this awakening of the first-born—Sir Frank found that his new body could do all he could do: could ride, could fence, could make love to a kitchen wench: could indeed do these things better than the old body, which was beginning, just a little, to become less pliant under approaching middle age. His experience, his knowledge, all were resources equally at the command of either body. He was, in fact, two people.

A later generation could have explained the miracle to Sir Frank—though explaining in terms he would not have understood. Though he knew well enough the theory of family traits and likenesses, it would have been impossible then to make him comprehend the intricacy of a chromosome, which carries inside it—not merely the stereotypes of parental hair or temperament—but the secret knowledge of how to breathe, how to work the

muscles to move the bones, how to grow, how to remember, how to commence the processes of thought . . . all the infinite number of secret 'how to's' that have to be passed on for life to stay above jelly level.

A freak chromosome in Sir Frank ensured he passed on, together with these usual secrets, the secret of his individual consciousness.

It was extraordinary to be in two places at once, doing two different things—extraordinary, but not confusing. He merely had two bodies which were as integrated as his two hands had been.

Frank II had a wonderful time ; youth and experience, foresight and a fresh complexion, were united as never before. The combination was irresistible. The Virgin Queen, then in her late twenties, summoned him before her and sighed deeply. Then, catching Essex's eye, she put him out of reach of temptation by sending him off to serve the ambassador at the court of her brother-in-law, Philip.

Frank II liked Spain. Philip's capital was gayer, warmer and more sanitary than London. It was intoxicating to enjoy the best of both courts. It proved also extremely remunerative : the shared consciousness of Frank I and II was by far the quickest communicational link between the two rival countries, and as such was worth money. Not that Frank revealed his secret to a soul, but he let it be known he had a fleet of capable spies who moved without risk of detection between England and Spain. Burly Lord Burleigh beamed upon him. So did the Duke of Medina Sidonia.

So fascinating was it being two people at once, that Frank I was slow to take any systematic survey of other lurking advantages. An unfortunate tumble from a horse, however, gave him leisure for meditation. Even then, he might have missed the vital point, were it not for something that happened in Madrid.

Frank III was born.

Frank II had passed on the renegade chromosomes via a little Spanish courtesan. The child was called Sancha. There was no coma about him ! As if to defy the extreme secrecy under which the birth took place, he wailed lustily from the start. And he had the shared consciousness of his father and grandfather.

It was an odd feeling indeed, opening this new annexe to life and experiencing the world through all the child's weakness

and helplessness. There were many frustrations for Frank I, but compensations too—not the least being to be closetted so intimately with the babe's delightful mother.

This birth made Frank realise one striking, blinding fact : as long as the chromosome reproduced itself in sufficient dominance, he was immortal ! To him, in an unscientific age, the problem did not present itself quite like that ; but he realised that here was a trait to be kept in the family.

It happened that Frank had married one of his daughters off to an architect called Tanyk. This union produced a baby daughter some two weeks after the secret birth of Frank III (they hardly thought of him as Sancha). Frank I and II arranged that III should come to England and marry Miss Tanyk just as soon as both were old enough ; the vital chromosomes ought to be latent in her and appear in her children.

Relations between England and Spain deteriorating, Frank II came home shortly with the boy Frank III acting as his page. The fruits of several other liaisons had to be left behind with their mothers ; they had no shared consciousness, only ordinary good red English blood.

Frank II had been back in the aptly named Mother Country for only a few months when a lady of his acquaintance presented him with Frank IV. Frank IV was a girl, christened Berenice. The state of coma which had ensnared Frank II for so long did not afflict Berenice, or any other of his descendants.

Another tremendous adjustment in the shared consciousness had to be made. That also had its compensations ; Frank was the first man ever really to appreciate the woman's point of view.

So the eventful years rolled on. Sir Frank's wife died ; the Abbey of St. Duckwirt flourished ; Frank II sailed over to Hispaniola ; the Armada sailed against England and was repulsed. And in the next year, Frank III (Sancha), with his Spanish looks and English money, won the hand of Rosalynd Tanyk, as pre-arranged. When his father returned from the New World (with his English looks and Spanish money), it was in time to see in person his daughter, Berenice, alias Frank IV, also taken in wedlock.

By this year, Frank I was old and grey and retired in the country. While he was experiencing old age in that body, he was experiencing active middle age in his son's and the delights of matrimony in his grandson's and grand-daughter's.

He awaited anxiously the issue of Frank III (Sancha)'s marriage to his cousin Rosalynd. There were offspring enough. One in 1590. Twins in 1591. Three lovely children—but, alas, ordinary mortals, without shared consciousness. Then, while watching an indifferent and bloody play called 'Titus Andronicus,' two years later, Rosalyn came into labour, and was delivered—at a tavern in Cheapside—of Frank V.

In the succeeding years, she delivered Franks VI and VIII. Frank VII sprang from Berenice (Frank IV)'s union. So did Frank IX. The freak chromosome was getting into its stride.

Full of years, Sir Frank's body died. The diptheria which carried him off caused him as much suffering as it would have done an ordinary man ; dying was not eased by his unique gift. He slid out into the long darkness—but his consciousness continued unabated in eight other bodies.

It would be pleasant to follow the history of these Franks (who, of course, really bore different surnames and Christian names) : but space forbids. Suffice it to say that there were vicissitudes—the old queen shut Frank II in the Tower, Frank VI had a dose of the clap, Frank IX ruined himself trying to grow asparagus, then newly discovered from Asia. Despite this, the shared consciousness spread ; the five who shared it in this third generation prospered and produced children with the same ability.

The numbers grew. Twelve in the fourth generation, twenty-two in the fifth, fifty in the sixth, and in the seventh, by the time William and Mary came to the throne, one hundred and twenty-four.

These people, scattered all over the country, a few of them on the continent, were much like normal people. To outsiders, their relationship was not apparent ; they certainly never revealed it ; they never met. They became traders, captains of ships that traded with the Indies, soldiers, parliamentarians, agriculturalists ; some plunged into, some avoided, the constitutional struggles that dogged most of the seventeenth century. But they were all—male or female—Franks. They had the inexpressible benefit of their progenitor's one hundred and seventy odd years experience, and not only of his, but of all the other Franks. It was small wonder that, with few exceptions, whatever they did they prospered.

By the time George III came to the throne and rebellion broke out in the British colonies in America the tenth generation of Franks numbered 2,160.

The ambition of the original Frank had not died ; it had grown subtler. It had become a wish to sample everything. The more bodily habitations there were with which to sample, the more tantalising the idea seemed : for many experiences, belonging only to one brief era, are never repeated, and may be gone before they are perceived and tasted.

Such an era was the Edwardian decade from 1901 to 1911. It suited Frank's Elizabethan spirit, with its bounce and vulgarity and the London streets packed tight with horse vehicles. His manifestations prospered ; by the outbreak of World War I they numbered over three and a half million.

The war, whose effect on the outlook and technology of the whole world was to be incalculable, had a terrific influence on the wide-spread shared consciousness of Frank. Many Franks of the sixteenth generation were killed in the muck of the trenches, he died not once but many times, developing an obsessive dread of war which never left him.

By the time the Americans entered the war, he was turning his many thoughts to politics.

It was not an easy job. Until now, he had concentrated on diversity in occupations, savouring them all. He rode the fiery horses of the Camargue ; he played in the orchestras of La Scala, Milan ; he farmed daffodils in the Scilly Isles ; he built dykes along the Zuyder Zee ; filmed with Rene Clare ; preached in Vienna cathedral ; operated in Bart's ; fished in the bilious Bay of Biscay ; argued with the founder of the Bauhaus. Now he turned the members of his consciousness among the rising generation into official posts, compensating for the sameness and greyness of their jobs with the thought that the change was temporary.

His plans had not gone far enough before the Second World War broke out. His consciousness, spread over eleven million people, suffered from Plymouth and Guernsey to Siam and Hong Kong. It was too much. By the time the war ended, world domination had become his aim.

Frank's chromosome was now breeding as true as ever. Blood group, creed, colour of skin—nothing was proof against it. The numbers with shared consciousness, procreating for all they were worth, trebled every generation.

Seventeenth generation : eleven millions in 1940.

Eighteenth generation : thirty-three millions in 1965.

Nineteenth generation : an hundred million in 1990.

Twentieth generation : three hundred million in 2015.

Frank was well placed to stand as Member of Parliament, for all his alter egos could vote for him. He stood as several members, one of whom eventually became Prime Minister ; but the intricacies of office proved a dismal job. There was, after all, a simpler and far more thorough way of ruling the country : by simple multiplication.

At this task, all the Franks set to with a will.

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, Great Britain consisted only of Franks. Like a great multiplicity of mirrors, they faced each other across counter and club ; young or old, fat or thin, rich or poor, all shared one massive consciousness.

Many modifications in private and public life took place. Privacy ceasing to exist, all new houses were glass-built, curtains abolished, walls pulled down. Police went, the entire legal structure vanished overnight—a man does not litigate against himself. A parody of Parliament remained, to deal with foreign affairs, but party politics, elections, leaders in newspapers (even newspapers themselves) were scrapped.

Most of the arts went. One manifestation of Frank did not care to see another manifestation of Frank performing. TV, publishing, Tin Pan Alley, film studios . . . out like lights.

The surplus Franks, freed from all these dead enterprises and many more, went abroad to beget more Franks.

All these radical changes in the habits of the proverbially conservative British were noticed elsewhere, particularly by the Americans and Canadians. They sent observers over to report on the scene.

Before long, the same radical changes were sweeping Europe. Frank's chromosome conquered everywhere. Peace was guaranteed.

By the end of another century's ruthless intermarriage, Russia and Asia were engulfed as thoroughly as Europe, and by the same loving methods. Billions of people : one consciousness.

And then came Frank's first set-back in all the centuries of his polydextrous existence. He turned his reproductive powers towards the Americas. He was repulsed.

From Argentine to Alaska, and all ports in between, the conqueror chromosome failed to conquer.

The massive, massed intellect set itself to work on the problem, soon arriving at the answer. Another chromosome had got there first. Evidence of the truth of this came when the drastic modi-

fications in domestic and public life which had swept the rest of the world swept the linked continents of North and South America. There was a second shared consciousness.

By various deductions, Frank concluded that the long-dead Frank II's visit to Hispaniola had scattered some of the vital chromosome there. Not properly stable at that time, it had developed its own separate shared consciousness, which had spread through the Americas much as the Frank chromosome spread round the rest of the world.

It was a difficult situation. The Franks and the Hispaniolas shared the globe without speaking to each other. After a decade of debate, the Franks took an obvious way out of the impasse : they built themselves a fleet of space ships and headed into the solar system.

That, ladies, gentlemen and neuters, is a brief account of the extraordinary race which recently landed on our planet, Venus, as they call it. I think we may congratulate ourselves that our method of perpetuating our species is so vastly different from theirs ; nothing else could have saved us from that insidious form of conquest.

—Brian W. Aldiss

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When submitting this story author Tubb suggested that we read it twice before commenting. After the third and fourth reading it begins to take on even deeper aspects of subtlety until you will never be sure just where the beginning and end of the events can be accurately placed. Almost like the "chicken and the egg" theory . . .

AD INFINITUM

By E. C. TUBB

Thomas Garvin placed a sheet of carbon paper between top and bottom copy, rolled the sandwich into the typewriter, adjusted the top margin and scowled at the virgin expanse. His own, personal hell, had begun.

It was always the same. Whenever he tried to begin a story a solid lump of lead took the place of his imagination. It hadn't always been like that. Once, when he'd just started to write, words had flowed easily and his imagination had been an idea-sparkling thing. That had been when he'd written for the fun of it. Now that he had to write in order to eat the old ease had gone. But he had to write. Grimly he flagellated his brains. Reluctantly he began to hit the keys.

Space was a many-eyed monster and the thin hum of the engines was the dirge-song of dying atoms. Captain Frobisher stared at the ranked dials, the winking lights and the glowing tell-tales and fought the fear which mounted within him.

"Captain!" It was Hanson, the young, flushed-faced boy who still had starlight in his eyes and the look of benediction on his face.

"What is it?" Frobisher was curt.

"Object sighted ahead. Mass approximately two thousand tons." His enthusiasm broke through his mask of official correctness. "Is it them, sir?"

"The enemy?" Frobisher shrugged, turning away so that the youngster should not see his face. "You're eager to meet them, aren't you?"

"It's what I'm here for, sir." Hanson spoke with simple dignity.

"I know." The captain sighed. "To engage if possible; to destroy if permissible; to die if inevitable. The creed of the War Academy."

"You laugh, sir?" Quick resentment at an imagined insult. Frobisher quashed it with a look. "I'm sorry, sir. I apologise."

"Return to your post. Sound the alert-alarm." Frobisher turned away, facing the gleaming metal of the forward hull, the three inches of armour plate behind which lay the nothingness of the void. The void—and the enemy!

So far, so good! Gavin leaned back and lit a cigarette. He'd placed the action, set up a situation and introduced his main characters. All very nice and according to the book. The conflict would be between Frobisher and Hanson, the captain bitter, cynical, doubtful of his own motivations; the youngster brash, taking as Gospel the creed of the Academy.

The enemy would provide the main conflict and all the action needed. Alien, of course, repulsive, their ships reaching towards the Galactic Empire, burning, destroying, ravishing the humanoid planets as they probed ever closer to Earth. Plenty of scope there for space battles, blood, sacrifice and heroism. And there could be a heroine, a nurse, maybe, or a fleeing captive of the enemy. Gavin scowled as he thought about it.

The trouble with writing what you liked to read was that you didn't like reading what you had written. Still, it was a living—of sorts. And no one was forcing him to do it. He could always starve.

His fingers hit the keys as if he were attacking his greatest enemy.

Frobisher now, better make him a real character. Give him a glass eye and a prosthetic leg, maybe. He was sick to the stomach of fighting and wanted nothing but peace—but duty,

grim duty, kept him at it. Hanson, he could suffer a little too. Let him be seared by a deflected atom-gun blast, nothing too serious but painful. The girl, as always, had to be out of this world. Desirable, young, pneumatic, skilled, constantly urging and encouraging the others to fight on against hopeless odds, using her femininity as a weapon with which to get her own way. In short, a pain in the neck.

Gavin was busy writing a word picture of just what she looked like when someone knocked on the door.

"Who is it?" He didn't stop writing.

The knock came again, louder than before.

"What the hell!" Gavin jerked to his feet knowing that, now he'd broken out of the groove, he'd have a hell of a time getting back in it again. "What do you want?" He yanked open the door.

And stared at a woman who was, literally, everything he'd ever imagined.

"Nuts!" John Roman ripped the paper from his Underwood stared at it with disgust and then flung it into the waste basket. It joined several, similarly crumpled sheets.

"Trouble, John?" Mary, his wife, a medium sized girl with soft, blonde hair, looked up from her knitting.

"When a writer starts writing stories about writers having trouble writing stories then he's hit the bottom." John lit a cigarette and inhaled with self-disgust. "Man, have I sunk low."

"Tell me about it." Mary set down her knitting and leaned forward. The soft glow from the electric fire shone from her eyes. They were blue eyes and they matched the colour of her dress. It was an expensive dress. She was an expensive woman. John loved expensive things.

"It was just an idea." He rose and sat down on the rug beside her. "You know, one of those gimmick-stories which has been done to death a hundred times already. I thought it might be good for one more trip to the well."

"You could give it a twist." Mary was an intelligent woman. John shrugged.

"How? I've this character, an author who hates to write. Well, he transfers his hatred to his characters, makes them suffer just for the hell of it. While he's at it someone knocks on his door. He opens it and finds a woman standing outside. She is his heroine. Subconsciously he has described

the woman of his dreams, his ideal. So he falls in love with her."

"And then?"

"That's all." John scowled into the fire. The sight of the burning coal irritated him. "So where do we go from there?"

"Well," Mary was thoughtful. "If she is a character in a story then she can only exist as long as he is writing the story. So he finds himself writing on and on and . . ." She noticed his expression. "No?"

"Try again."

"All right. Somehow she has become real to the author so that everything he writes is real to her. So she wants him to help do whatever is happening in the story. End the war or get her her boy friend or make her rich." She smiled. "Better?"

"Better." John frowned around at the apartment. The walls were damp and the paper peeling and the single-bar electric fire did nothing to ease the chill. Even the battered Oliver on the table showed signs of rust. One day, when he managed to get some really decent cheques, he would buy a new machine. An author should, at least, have a decent typewriter.

"It would be a wonderful situation at that," said Mary. She smoothed the shirt she had been sewing, her hands unconsciously touching the cheap cotton fabric of her dress. "It would almost be like having every wish come true. I mean she could say to the author that she wanted new clothes and he'd give her some. It would only be a matter of a few words to him, nothing at all."

"Clothes, must you keep on about clothes?" He was irritated and wished that he could smoke.

"I'm sorry, dear. I didn't mean . . ."

"I know you didn't." He sighed with self-reproach. "It's just that you deserve so much more than I can give you. Your hair, for example," he touched her thick, auburn locks. "Did I ever tell you that I love the colour of your hair?"

"Often."

"If I were an author and you were one of my characters I'd give you everything. I'd write in that you were the best-dressed woman in town, loaded with jewels and with enough money so that you could use it for paper-chases." He sighed and dropped his hand. "Just wishing."

Impulsively she kissed him.

"You know," said Mary later, "I've been thinking about what you said."

"About?"

"About writers and their characters." She hunched up her knees, the woollen dress she was wearing doing nothing to hide the smooth curve of her thighs. "Is it true that most writers don't bother about details?"

"I guess so." John drew thoughtfully at his cigar. "You sketch them in and leave them at it. You don't even describe them in detail, only the main characters."

"Supposing that the characters in a story were real?" Mary poked the fire, sparks flying up the chimney. "Like that woman in the one you started, I mean. They wouldn't know that they were characters at all, would they?"

"No."

"Then if they had a life of their own . . ." She made a vague gesture. "Do you see what I mean?"

"I think so. They would have to live within the framework set up by the story," John shrugged. "That idea isn't new either, darling."

"Maybe not, but it's interesting to think about." She stared into the fire. "Just suppose that there was a couple in that story you started. A married couple, maybe, the parents of Hanson, for example. After all, he did have parents, didn't he?"

"He had to be born," reminded John.

"All right. You hadn't killed them off so they must have still been alive. But you hadn't described them, how they lived or where. So they could have worn any clothing, lived anywhere and be either rich or poor."

"Assuming that they had conscious existence." John smiled and shook his head. "Don't worry that head of yours about it. Carry that argument on far enough and you'll be drawing an analogy between a writer and God."

"And why not?" Mary ruffled his hair. "Isn't that what a writer really is? He creates a world of the imagination, peoples it with characters and sets them in motion. He can make those characters happy or sad. He can make them suffer or let them be without pain. He can cause heart-break, misery or despair. Or he can make everyone get everything they want."

"Not if he wants a story, he can't." John flipped the butt of his cigarette into the fire. "A story must have conflict and you can't get that if everything in the universe is wonderful for everybody."

"You could if you tried."

"Sure, but I wouldn't be able to sell it. Readers want to identify themselves with the characters and they want to enjoy,

vicariously, the pain and suffering of those characters. Give them blood, adventure, suffering and larger-than-life romance and they're happy. No one wants realism. They live it all the time."

"Cynic."

"Realist. I write for a living and I have to write what the editors want. They have to publish what the readers want."

"So you let yourself be dictated to by your characters?"

"Say that again!"

"You've said it yourself. You want to get real men and women into your stories. To do that you've got to copy them from real men and women. In other words your readers. So you have to write what your characters want you to write."

"That's cheating. That isn't what I meant at all and you know it." He grabbed at her and she swayed back, her long, jet-black hair falling over her eyes. They were dark eyes and matched the colour of her dress. It was an expensive dress.

She was an expensive woman.

John made the coffee and served it in fragile cups. Mary sipped hers and held out her hand for a cigarette. John lit two, gave her one, put the other between his lips. On the desk the Olympia gleamed with silent reproach.

"I should be working," he said. "Bills to pay, you know."

"Relax." Her fingers caressed his hair. "Let's talk some more about that story."

"I'm dumping that one."

"Why? It sounds like a possible idea. It just needs a new twist."

"It needs a major operation." He frowned at the smoke coiling from between his fingers. "It's just that you're tickled with the idea of that woman. You like the idea of a character coming alive and getting on hearts-and-flowers terms with her creator."

"I'm thinking of what I'd do in her place," admitted Mary. "First I'd have him dress me with the best. Then I'd want him to arrange things so that I couldn't get hurt. Then I'd want him to arrange a nice boy-friend for me . . . or wouldn't that be wise?"

"He might get jealous and have the enemy boil you slowly in molten lead. Or he could fix it so that your boy friend winds up insane or a helpless cripple or infected with a vile disease." John swelled his chest. "Don't underestimate the power of the author."

"You beast!" She pulled at his ear. "You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

"Like what?"

"Like fixing things just to be contrary."

"It wouldn't be me," he protested. "It would be the author."

"Who would do just as you made him do. It's your story, remember. The author is just another character as far as you are concerned."

"But not as far as the girl is. To her he would be the supreme boss." John chuckled. "Anyway, why should he have all the fun?"

"You're incorrigible." Mary was getting tired of the argument. Her hair had turned back to blonde and her eyes were blue. "You know, John, maybe we shouldn't be talking like this. It gives me the creeps to think of all the characters you've created, all the characters anyone has created, all living their own lives and never knowing what is going to happen next."

"Why?" John was reasonable. "They wouldn't know about it."

"Of course they'd know."

"How?" He smiled and stretched himself. He felt good, the rest had relaxed him. On the table the Remington waited for him to begin work. "Even if the characters do have conscious existence they would never know that they are merely characters. They wouldn't know what is going to happen next any more than you know what is going to happen tomorrow."

"I'm not a character," Mary said sharply. "And you're wrong. What about when you rewrite?"

"Change things after they've been written?" John shrugged. "So what? So I alter the colour of hair, maybe, or their circumstances, but they don't know that. To them everything is as it has always been. Unless I let them know, of course. If I don't they have no way of telling that the way they are isn't the way they've always been."

"That sounds involved." Mary frowned. "As involved as that other thing you said."

"What other thing?"

"The one about the writer writing . . . You know what I mean."

"About a writer writing a story about a writer who is trying to write a story?" John grinned as he rose to his feet. "You can carry that on as far as you like, baby. You can talk about a writer writing a story about a writer writing a story about a

writer . . .” He broke off at her expression. “All right. I’m sorry. Forgive me?”

“Get to work,” she ordered. “And give that poor girl a decent time for a change. Give them all a decent time.”

“Don’t you want me to sell the yarn?”

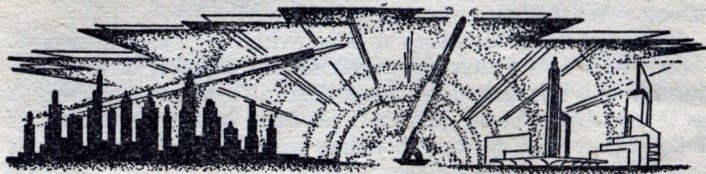
“You can write another.” Her grey eyes were appealing. “Please, darling, be kind.”

“For you, anything.” He chuckled as he sat at the desk and slipped a sheet of carbon paper between top and bottom copy. Skilfully he rolled the sandwich into the Imperial, adjusted the top margin, poised his fingers over the keys.

It was great to be a writer.

It made him feel like a God.

—E. C. Tubb



The power of advertising slogans is growing steadily stronger, hastened by the subtle insinuations of commercial radio and television—soon, as we sleep, goods will be offered by post-hypnotic suggestion ; the sub-conscious will absorb such subtle merchandising without the conscious mind realising the fact. Such power is dangerous . . . but makes delightful satire.

LIVING ? TRY DEATH !

By JUSTIN BLAKE

Even at school, I remember, Digby gave promise of the gift that was first to make, and later to destroy him. The two of us attended a very minor public school—I shall not name it ; one should respect some tendernesses—which preserved rather the forms than the strength of that sort of education. I disliked the ‘ fag ’ system ; Digby found possibilities in it. In the third week of his first term, a notice appeared on the door of his study :

“ ARE YOU FAGGED OUT ?

Then come to DIGBY !

Is your fag-master overworking you ? Would you like more time to yourself ? Then take advantage of the DIGBY COMPREHENSIVE FAG SERVICE. Beds and toast made, shoes cleaned, errands run. Satisfaction guaranteed. Enquire within for FREE price-list and further details of the

DIGBY COMPREHENSIVE FAG SERVICE.”

He began by taking a great deal of money, yet his scheme ended in failure. Its advertisement was excellent, its execution execrable. Digby-cleaned shoes were filthy, Digby-made beds were rumped, Digby-run errands incompetently performed. But the experiment taught him where his real genius lay, and he never again attempted to turn it into any other channel. After an undistinguished school career, he resisted an attempt by his father to send him to Oxford, and joined Fairbrother Simms (Advertising), Ltd., as a trainee-copywriter.

It was at a time when, with the formation of trade associations and what the left-wing press was pleased to call 'cartels,' the advertising agencies no longer concentrated on the vending of branded products, but simply of commodities as such. You will remember those early slogans: "BEER IS BEST," "DRINK MORE MILK," "IF YOU WANT TO GET AHEAD—GET A HAT"; in the simple statement that "MEAT NEEDS MUSTARD," two commodities were advertised at once.

Digby did not institute this trend, then; he was no more than the servant of vast blind economic forces. But as a servant, how deft he was! How swiftly he read the logic of events! The great Food Campaign of 1963 was his entirely. "HUNGRY? TRY FOOD!" cried an enormous poster in Piccadilly; "What's this, mummy?" asked the small boy at the breakfast table, and his mother replied, "It's scrumptious FOOD. Delicious to taste, and nourishing too." And in the London Underground, "For ev'ry meal and ev'ry mood, There is no substitute for FOOD."

The technique was carried over into the strip cartoon. Every weekly illustrated paper in the kingdom carried the first of Digby's FOOD strips. A young diplomat was the hero; foolishly, he had neglected to eat. He became emaciated, irritable, was in danger of being transferred to Tierra del Fuego. His wife encouraged him to consult a doctor ("Doctor, I feel so hungry all the time."). The diagnosis made, the cure was decreed ("And so, every night, a plate of FOOD."), with results miraculous and immediate—"Mannington-Dankworth, you have saved the Entente. Thanks to you, the future of civilised man is once more assured." (*Thinks*) "No—thanks to FOOD!"

The effects of the campaign were widespread. People ate more, and so the Food Association prospered. And the indirect benefits were almost as great. People grew fatter—and the

tailors, cloth-merchants, makers-up and finishers prospered—lazier—and the taxi-drivers and motor-car manufacturers prospered—dyspeptic—and the makers of patent medicines prospered. Digby's salary was increased by three thousand pounds a year (two thousand in expenses), and he was invited to join the board of Fairbrother Simms.

More and more trade associations brought their accounts to Digby, and there followed in quick succession campaigns for Clothes, Education, and Water ("I was heart-broken when I saw John in Denise's arms. So I took Mother's advice and had a BATH. Now we are married, and have three lovely children") The churches and registry offices joined forces to popularize marriage ("IT'S BETTER THAN BURNING."), the lawyers to promote divorce ("MAN CAN PUT YOU ASUNDER."). Within five years, one hundred and twenty advertising agencies in the West End had gone out of business, and Digby was Chairman of Fairbrother Simms, with a safe seat in the House of Commons.

So matters stood when the firm was approached by the Undertakers' Association. It was Digby's last and greatest campaign. For a minute of every day, every television screen in the country bore the slogan, "TIRED OF LIFE ? TRY DEATH," while in the background one heard the murmur of doves, the splash of water, and the sound of a cinema organ, softly playing Delius. "Why wait for your allotted span ?" folks read in the papers, "Die Beautifully—Die NOW !" And in the *Junior News* the kiddies were advised, "MOTHER'S DAY ? GIVE HER A DEATH TOKEN."

Why did Digby succeed ? The country was in a state of unexampled prosperity. Every worker had a car, every home a television aerial, every village a cinema. The gloom had long since been removed from religion, as visiting evangelists toured Britain's musical comedy theatres, their messages relayed even to the tiniest village churches by radio. And if religion had become cheerful, family life had become carefree. Marriage and divorce could be arranged within days; children were delivered under anaesthetic and reared at all-day *creches*, run by social workers in gingham aprons. In every department of daily life, there were devices to promote happiness and dispel boredom, yet Digby's campaign succeeded. When Digby-paid announcers cooed, "Death lasts longer. You sleep sounder," or hectored, "Can you think of one good reason for staying alive ?" the population turned to suicide in droves.

At first the majority of deaths was in the upper-income brackets, because the Undertakers, caught by the law of Supply and Demand, were forced to raise their prices. Then into a temporary lull in the death-rate, Digby flung a follow-up: "*Now within the reach of all—You can DIE NOW, PAY LATER on the new convenient Instalment Plan.*" And the landslide began.

The Government, although alarmed, did not take immediate action. It held the view that businessmen should be free to associate; nothing should be done in restraint of trade. But when the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the C.I.G.S., and fourteen thousand Civil Servants had joined the number of the suicides, something had to be done. It would not have been fair to penalise the Undertakers only; *all* advertising was forbidden by an Order in Council.

Swiftly the hoardings vanished from the roadsides, and areas of country that had not been seen for generations came once more into view. Bereft of advertising revenue and already hit by shortage of staff, the newspapers and periodicals went one by one out of business. Radio and television stations closed down completely. It was a period of great peace and some beauty.

It was also, of course, the end of Digby. Fairbrother Simms went bankrupt, and Digby spent his personal fortune in paying off the Agency's creditors. No legal action was or could be taken against him, but he was advised to apply for the Chiltern Hundreds, and retire from public life. He took the advice literally, and went to live, alone and broken, in a country cottage in Hertfordshire.

And it was to Hertfordshire yesterday that I went to visit him, for he has begun, in the last month or so, to renew his old friendships. How had he taken it, I wondered, as I paid off the taxi and stood hesitant at Digby's gate. Would it be better not to refer to advertising at all? Should I be cheerful or soothing?—jocular?—commiserate? And then, noticing one small sign, I smiled and knew that my meeting would not be difficult after all, that a broken mind soon mends, and that Digby had not changed.

Nailed to the gate was a slate. On it were written in unmistakable capitals the words, "NEW LAID EGGS FOR SALE." Our period of peace and beauty, it seemed, was not likely to be a long one.

—Justin Blake

This month sees the welcome return of author Will Temple who has been too long absent from our pages, mainly due to writing material for other mediums. Nevertheless, the fantasy herewith is neat and forceful with a strong flavour of the Cornish about it—a County where many strange things have happened in the past. And still could.

THE GREEN CAR

By WILLIAM F. TEMPLE

This was one time I really saw an accident happen.

Other times, I'd just miss such things. There's the shriek of locked wheels. I look round and someone's lying in the road. There's a stationary car nearby, slewed half round.

After, I'd tell people : " I saw a nasty accident today . . ." One embroiders to make the story vivid.

But this time I saw it happen. I wish to heaven I never had. Accident ? It was more like plain murder.

The lane through Trescawo was serpentine in the extreme. It looped back on itself as though it were reluctant to reach the village at all, as though it were afraid it would run into something horrible.

The white-faced man in the green car had no such qualms. He came fast and unbelievably silently. Franky Lockett never even saw him. But I did.

I was leaning on my front gate when Franky erupted into his garden. He was eight and lived in the bungalow opposite. He was a sandy-haired kid, snub-nosed, blue-eyed, bright as a button, supercharged with energy. He seldom walked: he galloped.

He saw me and came charging across the lane. "Mr. Murdoch will you let me—"

Without a sound, the green car rushed into Trescawo from the dusk and hit him. He was thrown into the hedge of his front garden. I glimpsed the white, set face of the driver, and then the car was past. Shocked and horrified though I was, I noted the rear number-plate before the gloom swallowed it.

Then: "Franky!" I ran across to him. He was a muddled little bundle at the foot of the hedge, twitching pointlessly. I lifted his head and blood ran from the back of it. His eyes were closed. His mouth hung open, showing the gaps in his milk teeth. Then all at once he gave a great sigh and died in my arms.

Something moved beside me.

Blurrily, I looked up. Franky's father was standing over us, shaking like a man with fever. His hands fluttered uselessly. His eyes were round, staring. He said, thickly: "I was always afraid it would happen. He *will* rush—"

He choked over the broken sentence, knowing the tense was wrong and afraid to face the right one. He dropped on his knees beside us, clutched his son and wept like a woman.

I yielded Franky to him and stood up. I felt numb all over.

Trescawo sprang alive. Doors opened up and down the lane, garden gates banged, people came hurrying. It was a small village. People had lived close together here from infancy. Trescawo was like a single organism, aware immediately when some part of it was hurt.

Crooning wordlessly, they helped bear Franky into his bungalow. Some brave soul went ahead to meet the mother. Somebody ran for Dr. Trevoise.

Still numbed, I reached my own bungalow and raised the local exchange. "Minnie, put me through to the police at Merthavin—hurry, for God's sake."

Minnie was an efficient operator before all else. For the moment, she forgot to be a woman and put me through without question. But doubtless, then, she listened.

Merthavin was a small coast resort five miles along the lane. In all that distance there was no single turning from the lane, and for a three-mile stretch if you turned left you went straight into the sea. Unless it stopped at either of a couple of farm-houses, or unless it turned around and came back, the green car must go by way of Merthavin.

The station sergeant there answered me. I told him what had happened and described the car. "Big, dark green saloon. Maybe twenty years old but runs smoothly. The number is WME 2195. A man driving—seemed to be wearing a bowler hat. White-faced fellow with a thick black moustache."

"We'll stop him, Mr. Murdoch," said the sergeant.

"Then arrest him for murder," I said, bitterly.

I went across to the Lockett's bungalow. Dr. Trevoise was there, but there was nothing he could do, or I could do, or anyone could do.

"Mr. Murdoch, will you let me—" The excited little voice kept calling through my memory. I should never learn what Franky was going to ask of me. When the ache got too bad I went back to my own place, alone, looking for the whisky.

The 'phone rang. It was the police sergeant again.

"He hasn't shown up yet, sir. You say he was travelling fast?"

"Too damn fast," I said, grimly.

"And he's not gone back your way?"

"No—half the village is out waiting for him. They'll lynch him if they catch him—I'll do it myself."

"I understand your feelings, sir. But try to keep him for us if he comes that way. I reckon he must have stopped at one of the farms. Else he should have been here long ago."

"I suppose so."

The sergeant made undecided noises. Then, suddenly: "I'd better stay on watch here. I'll ring George Peters and get him to start from your end and check up at the farms."

"All right, sergeant. If there's anything I can do—"

"Not at the moment, sir. I'll let you know when we locate the man." He hung up.

I poured my whisky, neat, and brooded over it. George Peters was a country police-constable. He lived alone in a cottage a couple of miles north of Trescawo and was the "local" policeman for four villages. He was pure Cornish and from the district and yet, somehow, never seemed of it.

This wasn't just my own impression. I'd lived in Cornwall for only three years and was still the complete "foreigner." But Peters was a "queer 'un" even to those who'd attended the same school.

"Deep," they said. "Knows a lot more than he lets on."

I'd bumped into him a few times but got no further than exchanging formal greetings. Politely, he kept me at arm's length. He didn't want to talk. This piqued me a bit, for he had a scholar's face with quiet eyes and I imagined we might have interests in common. I was an artist but I'd read a few books.

Still, maybe I was wrong about him. People who don't talk much usually don't because they haven't much to talk about.

He drifted from my attention. Franky Lockett came back and the whisky failed to make anything seem better. I was in for a bad night. I was pacing up and down the room, glass in hand, when the door-bell rang.

It was Constable Peters. Gaunt and looking seven feet tall with his helmet on, he regarded me from the step and said in his soft voice with only the echo of a Cornish accent: "Sorry to trouble you, Mr. Murdoch. I had to pass this way, and I'd just like to check the details about the green car."

"Certainly, constable. Come in."

He refused, gently but firmly. He just didn't want to mix. So I told him what I'd told the sergeant. This, clearly, he already knew. He listened impassively, making no notes. Then he asked: "Was it a Morris Sixteen?"

"I wouldn't know. I'm afraid I don't know much about cars."

"I see, sir. Thank you. Good night."

He seemed to reach the front gate with but a couple of strides of his long legs, mounted the bicycle he'd leant against it, and rode off towards Merthavin. The uncertain smear of light cast by his oil lamp weakened with distance and died away altogether.

I duly had my bad night, dozing on and off. Between dozes I thought too much. One of the least worrying questions I kept asking myself was the one Peters had asked me. Was the green car a Morris Sixteen?

And why on earth had Peters asked me that? Did he really "know more than he let on?" If he didn't, the question seemed pointless.

By morning I'd come to hate the wallpaper. I just had to get out in the open. I was cleaning my brushes to escape for a day's painting then the 'phone rang. It was Constable Peters.

"Could you spare the time to come up to my place for a few minutes, Mr. Murdoch?"

I didn't think my heart could sink any lower but it managed it. He'd be wanting my evidence as the sole witness, of course, and I hated the idea of living through the tragedy yet again. I'd been doing it most of the night.

Anyhow, it was his duty to call on me, not the other way round.

I said, rather irritably: "All right . . . Did you trace that driver last night?"

There was a moment of silence. Then Peters said quietly: "He hadn't been to either of the farms. He never reached Merthavin. He never came back to Trescawo."

There was another moment of silence while I absorbed that. "Damn it," I said, "he can't have been snatched up into the sky. Did you find the car abandoned? Or what?"

"That's what I want to talk to you about, Mr. Murdoch."

Obviously he didn't want to say more on the telephone in case Minnie was listening. I was interested now, my irritation gone. "Right, I'll be there in ten minutes."

But I was there in less on my motor-bike. P.-c. Peters was waiting at his cottage door, uniformed but hatless. He showed me into a sizeable room: it took up more than half the cottage. It was very neat but unusual. There were bookshelves all around it, ceiling-high, and they were packed tight with books, folders, filing boxes, and a row of hefty albums.

The floorboards were highly polished. There was a plain oak desk and a couple of wooden office chairs. That was the full inventory.

"My reference library and, you might say, my home," murmured Peters.

He selected one of the large albums and carried it to the desk. "This is what I want you to see, sir. I'd have brought it down to you but it's too bulky to strap on the carrier of my bike."

Our relationship was changing. Peters was becoming quite loquacious and I could find no answer but a grunt. His thin fingers turned the wide pages which were covered with pasted cuttings. He found the one he sought and indicated it. I bent over the desk to look.

It was a two-column story clipped from the local paper, the colour of weak tea. The headlines said : CAR GOES OVER CLIFF and TRAGIC DEATH OF MERTHAVIN MAN. There was a smudgy photograph of a middle-aged man with a heavy black moustache.

"Does he look at all like the driver you saw, sir?"

I looked more closely. The photo disintegrated into a crowd of meaningless black dots.

"Afraid the detail isn't very clear," said Peters, apologetically.

"Even if it were, I still wouldn't be sure," I said. "I had the merest glimpse of the man. But certainly it *could* have been this man. Or his twin brother, for obviously this chap's dead."

"Yes, he's dead—been dead some seventeen years. Albert Wolfe, plumber, of Merthavin. I knew him pretty well. He had no brothers."

"So? Then I wouldn't know him—until three years ago I'd never been anywhere west of Plymouth."

"No, you wouldn't know him, sir. But I'd be glad if you would read the story."

I read it with some effort—the tiny type was eye-straining. It told how Wolfe, driving alone along the coast road between Trescawo and Merthavin in October 1940, swerved to avoid a car coming the other way. His car, a green Morris Sixteen plunged over the 100-foot cliff at that point into the sea.

At the time of going to press his body had not yet been recovered.

"Was it ever?" I asked Peters.

He shook his head. "There's a strong undertow around there. The body must have been washed out to sea. There was a war on at the time, you know, and it was a week before we could get hold of a diver to go down. The car was there, all right, upside down with a door open. No body, though."

"Well, it was a nasty affair but it was a long time ago and I still don't get why you've brought it up here—or me either."

Peters reached down a small ledger. "I'm a hoarder of data," he said. "In this book I've kept a note of the license number of every car or vehicle owned by anyone living within a fifteen miles radius of here during my time in the force. Cross-indexed between numbers and names, you see."

He thumbed open the "W" section and showed me an entry : *Wolfe, Albert Geoffrey. Morris 16 (Green) No. WME2195*

"Th-that's the number of the green car!" I stuttered.

"So you said, sir. And so far as I can ascertain, that number hasn't been re-issued to anyone since Bert Wolfe died."

I stared first at him, then out of the window at the little hedge-enclosed lawn, perhaps to be reassured that the world was still real out there. It was, anyway. I bit my thumbnail and that was real too.

"Are you implying that I saw Wolfe's ghost?"

"I don't know what you saw, Mr. Murdoch. I'm trying to find out."

I took another look at the indistinct photo and paced up and down trying to compare it with the even more indistinct face in my memory. I found myself surveying book titles, at first unconsciously, then consciously. Most of one corner of the room was occupied by works on psychic research and a few odd men out like the books of Charles Fort.

"Ghosts seem to be a particular interest of yours, Peters," I said. "Personally, I don't believe in them. What are you trying to sell me?"

Peter's rather ascetic face showed no reproach. "I'm a hoarder of data," he repeated. "Facts are what interest me, Mr. Murdoch. If you'll examine the rest of the shelves you'll find more encyclopedias, atlases, year-books, and scientific works than anything appertaining to psychic research."

"Nevertheless, you include ghosts among your 'facts'?"

"Apparitions would seem to be a genuine phenomenon according to the annals of the Society of Psychical Research," said Peters, carefully. "Probably they're mostly, if not wholly, subjective, though some might conceivably be explained by past and present time getting temporarily out of phase, as it were, and overlapping. Whether you can call them 'facts' depends on what you mean by a fact. Is imagination itself a fact? Anyhow, what's indisputable fact about ghosts is that people report seeing them."

"As you think I've done?"

"I don't know what to think you saw, sir. Except that it was no subjective phantom. The car was solid enough to kill that poor boy. I'm just surveying the facts. I spend a lot of my life in this room merely comparing facts. It fascinates me. Sometimes the oddest facts fit together, and sometimes the most commonly accepted facts just won't correlate at all. Either way you can't avoid seeing one big fact: this world is a much stranger place than most people think it is."

I looked at him. "If you were an artist, Peters, and saw like an artist, you'd know there was no need to tell me that."

"It's because you're an artist and observant, Mr. Murdoch, that I accept as facts what you say you saw. The bowler hat, for instance."

"What of it?"

"Bert Wolfe always wore a bowler. It wasn't all that common in these parts even back in the 'forties. He was wearing it the day he died."

I frowned. "Look, are you so sure it's a fact he's really dead? I mean, the car was found empty. Supposing he was thrown clear, fell into some crevice, lay there unconscious unseen then later climbed out and wandered away heaven knows where, having lost his memory from concussion?"

Peters shook his head. "Practically impossible. The cliff is sheer at that point and unbroken. I interviewed the other motorist, who saw him go over. The thing happened in broad daylight. He told me he'd never forget the expression on Bert's face behind the windscreen. It was white with the fear of death. And he watched the car fall the whole way, turning half over as it went. Wolfe didn't fall out. Nothing did. The door must have opened when the car hit the sea-bed."

"Still, if he were thrown out even as late as that, he yet might have escaped somehow."

"I don't see how," said Peters. "The motorist never took his eyes off the spot for twenty minutes. He had to sit that long by the roadside, getting his nerve back to drive on—he was an old man. Nothing came up after the bubbles died away."

In the microscopic hall, the telephone rang.

"Excuse me," said Peters. He went. I heard him replying: "Yes, he's here, sarge . . . Yes, I already knew that. I've checked with Mr. Murdoch. He insists he got the number right and I'm sure he did, too . . . Of course I know what I'm saying . . . Yes, I'll come right away. 'Bye."

Peters came back. "That was Horrocks, the police sergeant at Merthavin," he said, unnecessarily. "He's been ringing your place. He found who the license number belonged to and assumed you were mistaken. When I said you weren't, I heard his blood vessels bursting. Now I've got to go and explain myself. Horrocks thinks I'm mad, but then he always did."

"I'll come with you, if you like, though I'm not certain who's side I'm on. But I'll swear in person I got that number right."

Peters smiled—the first time I'd ever seen him smile.

“ I'd be glad if you would, Mr. Murdoch, for on the way there's another fact I should like to bring to your attention.”

I raised my eyebrows, but the only question I asked was : “ Would you care for a lift on my pillion ? It would save you pedalling all that way.”

He accepted, and off we went, down to Trescawo and through it and along the lane the green car had followed yesterday evening. The sea came into view on our left. It was dun-coloured like the dismal clouds that hung over it. Rain looked imminent again and we'd had too much of it lately.

You saw plenty of the sea whether you wanted to or not, for the lane—serpentine as ever—kept wandering dangerously near to the edge of the cliffs. Sometimes there wasn't six feet of grass verge between it and the empty air.

We climbed in low gear towards the worst spot of all, where the cliffs reached their topmost height. The lane went over the brow and you couldn't see if anything was coming the other way. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, on this lonely road, nothing

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was. But I guessed this was the place where the hundredth chance had gone against Albert Wolfe.

I was right. "Stop here, please," said Peters in my ear.

I stopped on the crest and could see the lane running down into Merthavin. I preferred to look at it rather than seawards, for I've always been nervous of heights. Peters wasn't bothered, though. He slid off the pillion and paced to the very brink of the cliff, examining the grassy verge.

"Look at this, Mr. Murdoch."

So I had to. The verge was wet and muddy from the rain. I slid about on it with my heart in my mouth. What Peters pointed out did nothing for my heart, either.

In the sticky soil were the shallow ruts made by a car's wheels. The pattern of the tread was plain. They swerved across the verge the whole way to the brink. Clearly a car had gone over that brink, and probably within the last twenty-four hours—since yesterday's rain.

"I found them by torch-light last night," said Peters, soberly. "When it was apparent the car had disappeared, I had a hunch this was the place where it had left the road. Just where poor Bert Wolfe bought it."

My spine crawled. "And where he bought it again—yesterday?"

Peters shrugged. "Those tracks are another fact—that's all," he said, shortly.

I was scared but morbid interest made me peer over the brink, down at the sea a hundred feet below.

"There's never less than twenty feet of water there," commented Peters.

I drew back. I looked again at the tracks. "The car ran past me weirdly silently," I said. "As silently as a ghost. But if it were immaterial, like a ghost, it couldn't have killed Franky—nor left tracks like that."

"Then obviously it was material," said Peters.

"Transposed from the past to the present by some inexplicable freak of time, d'you think?"

Peters shrugged again. "That's a theory which one fact doesn't fit. Bert Wolfe's car was old when he bought it. He got through a hell of a lot more mileage in it. The engine knocked like fury. You could hear that car coming from a mile off. But yesterday, you say, you didn't hear it coming. Or going. Now, if the car were here materially, then surely its material parts—the cylinders, tappets, and so on—must have caused just as many soundwaves as they always did."

"But just now you said it obviously *was* material!" I cried.

"So I did," said Peters, bestriding the pillion lankily. "We need another theory. To get it we need more facts. Let's go on and see Horrocks. Maybe he'll have some."

But Horrocks had no more facts. However, he accepted ours, though refusing to believe there was anything unnatural about them. He was a solidly built man who assumed the world was equally solidly built. He laughed us to scorn and then assured us that it was no laughing matter.

"Manslaughter has been done," he said, "and I suspect maybe other crimes. Still, it seems the criminal has paid for them with his life."

"What criminal?" frowned Peters.

"The man in the bowler hat who was driving the car, of course," said Horrocks, impatiently. "Mr. Murdoch is quite sure the car number was WME 2195. Right, I'll accept that. There's no such registered number. Therefore, the car had false number-plates."

"But why?" I asked.

Horrocks, still impatient, said: "There can be only one reason, sir—it was a stolen car. Changing the number-plates is a routine dodge."

"It was such an old car, pre-war type, that it could scarcely be worth stealing," I said.

"Perhaps not for its own sake," said Horrocks. "I'd say it was stolen to be used for a job. Pay-roll snatching, perhaps. There was a snatch in Exeter on Friday. Two more in Plymouth—big money every time. The culprit—or one of 'em—was on the run out this way. Obviously, a stranger in the district. He didn't know that tricky coast road very well, if at all, probably missed the turn in the dusk—or skidded on the wet road—and went over the cliff."

He turned to Peters. "Straightforward enough, isn't it, George? No call for spooks."

It was so glib I'd all but accepted it, until Peters said: "That's really *some* coincidence, sarge. I'd hate to have to work out the mathematical chances against two green cars, of the same vintage, driven by a man with a black moustache and wearing a bowler hat, going over the same cliff—and carrying the identical number-plate!"

Horrocks wasn't even shaken. "Coincidence? *Everything's* coincidence. It's merely a coincidence that you're you, Peters,

and not somebody else. The chances are well over two thousand million against it, you know."

Peters sighed. "Sometimes I think you'd be happier if I *were* somebody else, sarge."

Horrocks laughed. "Not at all, George. You're the queerest flatfoot I've ever run across, but I never met a more conscientious one. You do your job. But if you'd only stick to facts and not let your imagination run away with you, I think you'd do it even better."

Peters lifted his eyes to heaven. His lips moved wordlessly. For the first time since Franky's death, I laughed.

Horrocks regarded us with surprise, then said abruptly: "We'll have the truth within a few hours. I've contacted the Aqualung Club and some of their chaps are going down for a look-see any time now."

I'd forgotten about the Aqualung Club, Merthavin's own group of skin-diving enthusiasts.

"Why, of course," I said. "That'll settle who the man was."

"I'm hoping they'll recover his body," said Horrocks. "But it'll be a dicey do with that undertow. Still, they think they can handle it. They're certain to locate the car, anyhow, and perhaps the pay-roll too. Care to come along and see the operations? I've got a launch laid on."

I accepted the invitation. Peters got over his chagrin and came with us, though he remained silent and thoughtful. When we got there, the Club's motor cruiser was already anchored beneath the cliff which stood above it like the wall of a great warehouse.

We tied up alongside the cruiser. We didn't want to risk bobbing against that rock wall, even though the dirty-looking sea was still smooth under the overcast sky. The rain was still holding off.

A couple of Club members were standing on the cruiser's deck making final tests of their equipment. Each had a safety line around his waist to guard against being swept away by the undertow. Three others stood by ready to join the hunt if it became difficult.

The pair slipped on their goggles and dropped over the side. There was a brief flurry of flippered feet, and then the sea was smooth again.

Twenty minutes later they came up empty-handed.

"Pretty murky down there but we've covered the area fairly thoroughly," one of them reported. "Not a sign of the damn car."

Horrocks bit his lip. "But you could have missed it?"

They agreed, and went down again, and presently the others joined them. There were five of them at it, on and off. An hour went by. Then the organiser bobbed up by our launch. He said, rather breathlessly: "Sorry—drawn another blank. Can't even see anything of the car that was supposed to have been down here for years. But probably that's silted over by now. The bottom's very sandy."

Horrocks was disappointed. So was I. Peters remained expressionless.

"All right, old man—thanks for taking the trouble," said Horrocks. "You'd better call your hunting pack off now."

They came up one by one. The last carrying something. He thrust it over the side into our launch. It was corroded, barnacle-encrusted, and enmeshed in seaweed, but was fairly obviously a car's number-plate.

Horrocks and Peters chipped and scraped at it with spanners from the tool-box. Bit by bit, the number became dimly apparent: WME 2195.

"From Bert Wolfe's car," said Peters. "It must have come adrift."

That encouraged the skin-divers to forage about for another half an hour, but without any luck. Then they gave it up. They were unanimous in believing that no car had fallen into the sea in this area lately, else they would certainly have found it.

We returned gloomily to Merthavin. Horrocks got the station car and came part way back with Peters and me. He wanted to see those wheel-marks for himself. He did so. Then he peeped over the cliff. Yes, we'd been searching the right spot: it was directly below.

"It beats me," said Horrocks. He turned his car and went back. I ran Peters up to his cottage. He'd become the reticent type again, and went in muttering something about mulling over the facts again. He obviously didn't want me to mull with him.

I returned home, had some tea, then looked out and found a breeze had sprung up, the heavy clouds were moving off, and the sun was breaking through as it sank towards the sea. It would be a fine evening, after all.

I stared across at the Lockett's bungalow. The window with the blind down made my throat feel dry. The funeral was to-

morrow. I was just too close to it all here. I escaped again, riding in the evening sunlight along the lane as it wound out of Trescawo in the opposite direction to Merthavin.

There were no cliffs this way. The lane led gently down to the beach. There was over a mile of level sands here. I parked my bike at the edge of them and began trudging along at the sea's constantly moving rim. There were no living things in sight save seagulls.

The sunset was a splendid show of coloured and gleaming clouds, and the sea made a rippling carpet of its reflection. It took my mind off things, as I'd hoped. I began to wonder what Turner would have made of it.

The glory had died and the sea had claimed the sun when I turned back. The beach looked desolate in the grey light now and the wind had become chill. I tramped back a deal faster than I'd come.

I was almost within arm's reach of my bike when I saw the wheel-tracks grooving the sand not five yards beyond it. They ran from the lane clear across the beach and straight into the sea. My heart missed a beat. I went on a bit shakily to examine them.

The tide was on the ebb, and on the mud-smooth wet sand it left behind it the tracks were clear enough for me to recognize the pattern of the tread.

The tracks weren't there when I'd come—I couldn't have missed seeing them. While I'd been traipsing away from this spot, entranced by the sunset, behind me the green car must have rolled silently into the sea.

Or have emerged from it.

It was impossible to tell which from the tracks.

I looked at the blank sea under the dulling sky. The wavelets advanced, slopped, and retreated, and the wind was beginning a thin, high keening. I shivered, and it wasn't just because of the cold wind.

I stumbled back to my bike, started her up, and began hitting it back along the lane. But I turned off before Trescawo, and headed uphill. I was making for Peters' cottage. I wanted him to see those tracks before the tide turned.

Up the gloomy, deserted lane I tore, rounded a curve, then pulled to one side, braking like mad. For plunging noiselessly down between the hedges towards me was the green car. I had a full head on view of it. But only for a few seconds. It missed me by inches and I felt the wind of its passing.

During those heart-stopping seconds the white face of Albert Wolfe regarded me stonily from behind the windscreen. I was certain it was he—or a zombie using his body. Things had become so nightmarish now that I could almost believe it *was* a zombie.

But I didn't stop to think about it. I wrenched the bike round and rode like fury downhill after the car. I caught it up on the outskirts of Trescawo, but couldn't get past it : the lane was too narrow.

So I began hooting continuously. We shot between the Lockett's bungalow and mine at over fifty, despite the snaking bends. The blare of my horn had preceded us. The villagers were peering from their windows and doorways. But nobody had time to do a thing. We were out into the open country again before they'd reached their garden gates.

And there the green car began to move away from me with contemptuous ease, though I tried hard to hang on to its tail. I must have been doing close on eighty, which was lunacy in that lane and in the gathering dark.

But at least I had my headlamp on. The car showed no lights at all.

Continued on page 120

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A minute or two later we were continuing the fantastic chase along the margin of the sea, and then climbing the rise to the high cliff. I was a hundred yards behind. As we emerged from the dead ground, the pale light of the moon, rising over the inland hills, reached us.

So I saw what happened. The green car reached the crown of the rise, then spun abruptly to the left and went flying out into space. It curved down towards the cliff-shadowed sea. The moonlight couldn't reach there, so I never saw the splash.

I pulled up, sweating, my nerves jumping.

Albert Wolfe had plunged to his death for the third time—at least. And there was no cause at all to assume that he would stay dead.

I switched off my engine and went gingerly to peer into the shadow beneath the cliff. But I could see nothing and there was no sound but the wash of the sea and the shrill note of the wind.

I took it easy on the way back to Trescawo. I had to. My nerves kept twitching like the leg of Galvani's frog. The village was in ferment. Somehow, Peters was already there taking notes. I beckoned him into my bungalow and poured us both stiff whiskies. Then I told him all about it.

"It *was* Wolfe—I saw him distinctly," I repeated. "I noticed other things, too. The front number-plate was missing."

"That's interesting," said Peters. "No one else noticed that. But Claude Farmer and Bill Jones glimpsed the back number-plate. WME 2195, sure enough."

He scratched his chin. "Wolfe's car—minus the number-plate we found today. What are we to make of that?"

"I don't know," I said, pouring another double. "But it was some car. I touched eighty and it was leaving me standing."

"Now, that doesn't sound like Wolfe's car at all," said Peters, thoughtfully. "It was in such bad shape I'm certain it would have seized up at anything over fifty."

"It was Wolfe's car," I said, and gulped a mouthful. "It had masks over the head-lamps—war-time pattern for driving in the blackout. *Circa* 1940. The lamps weren't switched on, though. That zombie could see in the dark."

"There are no facts to support the existence of zombies," said Peters. "I've been mulling over the facts we have, and a few more I've dug up, and I don't believe there's anything supernatural about this whole thing. You say you felt the draught as the car passed you. Right: it's solid. It displaces air. Let's see if it can displace a road barrier."

"That's fine—if you know when and where to plan the barrier."

"I'd say tomorrow at dusk, on the road between here and Merthavin—the best place would be Crowley Farm," said Peters, calmly.

"Good heavens, Peters, just because the car went through here two evenings running at roughly the same time, there's no reason to suppose it'll do so again tomorrow. What d'you imagine it is—a local bus keeping to a time-table?"

Peters remained calm. "When a phenomenon repeats itself, there's always a chance it'll go on doing so. We can but try. Anyhow, we've got more facts for Horrocks. Also, this time, a whole crowd of eye-witnesses. He'll have to do something."

Sergeant Horrocks did plenty. From somewhere or other he rustled up no less than three police patrol cars with two-way radio.

The following evening one of the cars lay concealed behind a hedge in the lane skirting the bare beach where I'd seen the wheel-tracks. Another blocked the turning leading up to Peters' cottage. The third was parked in the gateway to Crowley Farm, a mile out of Trescawo on the Merthavin road, and as well as its constable-driver and his observer, Horrocks, Peters, and I waited with it.

Across the road was drawn the biggest of the farm-carts, still loaded heavily with sacks of potatoes.

It had drizzled all morning, and the funeral had been a damp and depressing affair. During it, I'd found myself becoming angry at I knew not what. Anger at fate generally, I suppose, for killing a child so pointlessly. Somehow it was difficult to get angry with the occupant of the green car. How can one be angry with a man already dead? Or the shade of that man? Or—?

Something that was out of this world, anyway.

Perversely, the sun came out brilliantly after lunch. Now the fine afternoon was passing into another fine evening. In the darkening blue of the sky the pinpoint of Venus was just visible.

We were grouped around the car parked just inside the farm gate, listening to the faint etheric wash of the radio net.

Monotonously at intervals came from the other two waiting cars: "Able—nothing to report. Over." And "Baker—nothing to report. Over."

"Light the lanterns, George," said Horrocks, presently.

Constable Peters lit the four red-glassed hurricane lamps, carried them out into the lane and set them down in pairs on either side of the farm-cart barrier. A policeman was stationed at Merthavin to stop any traffic using the lane from that direction, but there was always a chance some motorist might slip past him. We didn't want any accidents.

Time ticked on. Venus became ever brighter as its setting became darker. The faint points of a handful of stars began to appear.

Every now and then, one or other of us would give way to impatience and peer round the gate and up the lane with the dusk thickening between its bordering hedges.

None of us seemed in the mood for talking.

Then the carrier wave rustled on the car radio and a voice, a little indistinct with excitement, said: "Able—there's a dark object rising from the sea, moving slowly landwards. Over."

We all tensed up.

Horrocks grabbed the microphone. "Dog—okay. Watch it. Over."

Soon: "Able—it's the green car, all right. Coming slowly up the beach. Water streaming down its sides. No lights—but seems to be a man inside, driving. Over."

Horrocks: "Dog—okay. Baker—are you getting this? Over."

"Baker—yes. We're standing by. Over."

In a moment: "Able—it's turning into the lane ahead of us. Heading for Trescawo. We're about to start. Over."

Horrocks snapped back: "Dog—right, off you go. Just follow. Don't try to overtake. Over."

"Able—wilco. Over."

"Baker—standing by. Over."

The tempo was speeding up. I felt Peters grip my wrist. It was too dark to see his expression clearly, but his whole attitude said: "This is it. We'll soon know."

He let go and began to loosen his truncheon. I had no weapon beyond a heavy torch. We hadn't a gun between us. Horrocks had vetoed it. "When we corner him, we'll be nine against one—he'll have no chance," he said.

I reflected, yes, but nine men against one—*what?*

I licked dry lips, and my cursed nerves began jumping again.

The radio crackled, and a voice unsteadied by the bumpy journey reported: "Able—he's approaching Trescawo at speed. Fifty, maybe. We're keeping pace behind. Over."

"Baker—we're ready. Over."

Horrocks answered neither. His bulky figure was motionless as he waited.

"Baker—he tried to turn up here, saw us, swerved back, stayed on the road. We pulled out after him. Passing through Trescawo now. He's piling on speed. Look out there, Dog—he's got no lights and you can't hear his engine. Over."

But now through the fading twilight, from the direction of Trescawo, we could hear the distant engines of the two police cars heading this way—with the silent phantom car fleeing before them.

"Dog—okay. Out." snapped Horrocks. He dropped the microphone and ran out into the lane, waving an electric torch. Peters and I and the observer constable weren't two paces behind him. We formed a human barrier across the narrow lane, in front of the cart, adding our flashing torches to the red warning of the lanterns.

And then it came at us without a sound along the lane, a dark blur on the dim ribbon, travelling at a terrific speed. It could not swerve off the lane. High hedges, as well as deep ditches, on both sides prevented it—that was why this spot had been chosen.

We shouted and waved our torches wildly. The oncoming car seemed only to accelerate.

"Scatter!" yelled Horrocks when it was clear that the green car wasn't going to stop.

We jumped aside, I stumbling into a ditch and dropping my torch.

Crash! The green car smacked straight into the cumbersome cart and overturned it with a great cracking and splintering of wood. Potatoes went rolling all ways. The car, still upright and apparently undamaged, went on trying to climb over the wreck. Its wheels spun rapidly, seeking a purchase.

The white-faced driver remained at the wheel. The buzzing wheels got a grip, and the car, lurching from side to side, began to work its way over the shattered cart.

The two pursuing police cars came, with screeching brakes, to a halt a few yards back. Their crews scrambled out.

I climbed out of the ditch with clumsy haste but Peters was faster. Truncheon in hand, he leaped up on the running-board of the escaping green car.

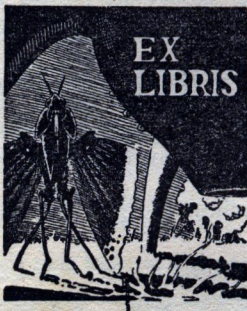
"Stop!" I heard him yell. "Come out of there—whoever you are."

And he yanked open the door of the car.

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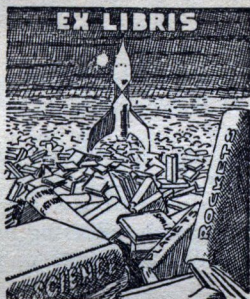
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It was like a flood-gate being opened. A mass of water came pouring out of the car, washing the driver out with it—a legless, struggling, oddly-shaped figure. He—or it—flopped into the ditch where I'd just been. The water gushed briefly over the creature and drained away along the ditch. The being continued to struggle helplessly and in silence down there. It thrashed about like a landed fish.

A strong smell of the sea was filling the air.

Then, horribly, the figure expanded slowly like a toy balloon being blown up. And all the while it moved convulsively. And then there was a sickening sound, and it collapsed in a still, limp heap at the bottom of the ditch. There came a stench which drowned out the sea-smell.

We had to back away from it, and I, for one, was glad to.

The green car had ceased to move, too, and save for the water still trickling from it, all was silent.

The nine of us stood awkwardly in the lane. I don't know how the others felt about it but I had more than a twinge of guilt about the dreadful death of the thing. We hadn't meant to kill it any more than—probably—it had meant to kill little Franky Lockett.

The foul smell dissolved into the evening air. The sea-smell returned faintly—obviously, the water in the car had been seawater. We braced ourselves to go and inspect the thing by torchlight. It was a grisly and bewildering business, and while we were occupied with it the stars were coming out overhead in strength.

What we learnt that night merely confused me more than ever. The creature belonged to no species known to marine biology. It was cold-blooded, dark-skinned, and had gills and a tail. It had two main tentacles which branched into whole deltas of thinner tentacles—as Peters pointed out, much more useful for precision work than man's stubby fingers.

It also had a face. A grotesque, noseless, stalk-eyed face, which it had concealed behind a plastic death-mask of Albert Wolfe. About the upper part of its body was wrapped Wolfe's coat—the genuine article, as we found from the tailor's label.

The incongruous bowler hat, which we found farther along the ditch, was also genuine.

When the Maritime Biological Station at Plymouth dissected the creature, they found it had a brain of a size to command respect.

The green car had its mysteries, too. In the first place, it wasn't Wolfe's old car at all, but a careful replica even to the headlamp masks, although the front number-plate was missing. Yet it was only a replica so far as outward appearance went. There was a front seat, a steering wheel, and a few odd controls. Beyond that, it was little more than a travelling sea-water aquarium, very stoutly built and heavy.

Small wonder we'd not heard its engine : there wasn't one. The theory grew that it picked up and used power radiated from some distant source.

"Beamed in this direction from some point out to sea," Peters guessed. "They are well ahead of us."

"They" were still the staple talking point between Peters and me even a month later. We never tired of discussing "them," usually in Peters' library. If the affair had lost me one friend, it had gained me another.

Peters hunted through the charts and showed me the long, deep crack in the continental shelf which reached almost to the headland from which Wolfe's car had plunged.

"They came up here," he said, tracing it with a forefinger. "First they took Wolfe's body from the car. Some time later they came back for the car itself. They overlooked the front number-plate, which had been torn off—and which remained there until it was found by the Aqualung Club."

Mentally, I pictured "them" dragging the battered green car down towards the dark depths where they dwelt. It was obvious on several counts that they were creatures of the oceanic abyss. Firstly, because they could see in the dark, and ventured on land only when darkness was falling. Secondly, because the fake car had been constructed of tremendously strong material to contain the pressure of the sea-water with which it had been filled.

Peters—the facts at his fingertips, as usual—told me that water *is* compressible, though only by one per cent for every 3000 pounds per square inch of pressure.

It was a pity we'd had no chance to measure the pressure of the water in the car and therefore deduce the depth from which it had come.

Thirdly, of course, was the manner of death of the creature when that balancing pressure had been drastically lowered.

"We have to allow them that it was a bold piece of camouflage and opportunism," I said.

Peters agreed. "If it weren't for that unlucky accident at the outset, the creature might still be carrying out its nocturnal

exploration, venturing ever farther inland. As it was, it had little chance to learn much about the world-above-the-water."

"But they must have known of our existence for hundreds of years—from sunken ships," I commented. "Why start only now to investigate our species?"

"I'm not so sure they didn't start long ago," said Peters. "Think of the missing crew of the *Marie Celeste*." He tapped the spine of one of Charles Fort's books. "And in here you'll find plenty of other reports from last century of whole missing crews, as well as ships themselves mysteriously disappearing in fair weather. What of the two ships and 129 men of the Franklin expedition, which vanished over a hundred years ago, and were never seen again despite prolonged searches? Specimens for *their* research, like as not."

"But why do they have to be furtive about it?" I complained. "They must know we're intelligent and would welcome contact with another intelligent race."

Peters smiled cynically. "You imagine they think us intelligent because we invented magnetic mines and sent them more free specimens of men and ships in 1939 and 1940 than they'd ever had before? It's my guess that's why they came up to investigate things a bit in 1940 and found that car."

I thought about it, then said: "Perhaps you're right. They had reason to be cautious about us. In fact, we really began to invade their territory during World War Two. All those sinking ships, all those submarines and U-boats. And now atomic submarines and underwater H-bombs—"

"And all the Aqualung Clubs of the world," smiled Peters.

I smiled, too, then said: "But it's no joke, really. They've intelligence, resource, boldness, and obviously a technology in some respects more advanced than ours. If it ever came to war—"

"If it ever came to war, I think we'd be far outnumbered," cut in Peters, grimly. "Remember this: there's more than twice as much land beneath the sea as there is above it. And presuming it's as thickly populated . . ." He trailed off speculatively.

Presently, he said, looking out at the tiny lawn: "Two races with a common nursery—the sea. We came out of it. They stayed in. Would a war decide who was the wiser?" His gaze wandered round the room and all its books. "Knowledge is a great thing, but wisdom is a greater," he said. "Let's hope that between us we can muster enough wisdom not to have a war at all."

—William F. Temple

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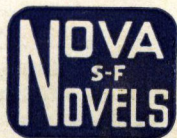
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