SCIENCE STORIES

APRIL 1954
35¢

The SECRET of PIERRE COTREAU

by Frank Patton

Stories by:

FRANK M. ROBINSON—ROGER DEE—ROBERT COURTNEY—JAMES CAUSEY

The People Who Write SCIENCE STORIES

VIRGIL FINLAY

I SOLD my first illustration in 1935 to the late Farnsworth Wright, at the time Kuttner, C. L. Moore and Robert Bloch were finding their stride and C. A. Smith, R. E. Howard, H. P. Lovecraft and H. S. Whitehead were sturdy veterans. Wright's *Weird Tales* was a fine springboard; A Merritt saw my drawings there and in 1937 asked me to come to New York and join his staff as feature fiction illustrator for *The American Weekly*. I stayed there for three years, during which time I began drawing for many of the fantasy and science-fiction magazines. I did my first drawings for RAP then, and through the years have continued to work for him. In 1940 I became a free-lance and, with time out for World War II, I'm still doing fantasy and science-fiction illustrations.

In 1943 I was inducted into the Army, and returned to New York in 1946 as a sergeant and veteran of the Okinawa campaign. One of the drawings that I completed on Okinawa was hung in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in December of 1952 as part of the American Drawings, Water Colors and Art Prints exhibition. My paintings and drawings have also been hung in the Rochester Memorial Art Gallery and the Art Center of that city; my reconstruction of an ancient Indian temple is in the

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SCIENCE STORIES

Issue No. 4

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Science Stories is published bi-monthly by Palmer Publications, Inc., 1144 Ashland Avenue, Evanston, Illinois. Entered as second-class matter at the Post Office at Evanston, Illinois. Additional entry at Chicago, Illinois. Printed in U.S.A. by the W. F. Hall Printing Company of Chicago, Illinois. Additional entry applied for at Amherst, Wisconsin. No responsibility is undertaken for unsolicited manuscripts, photographs or artwork. Return envelope and sufficient return postage is required. Advertising rates at request. Subscriptions: 12 issues, $3.00; 24 issues, $6.00.

Editorial

THE year 1953 was supposed to be the year of doom. All the prophecies said that year would bring us everything from complete annihilation to going flat broke. Even the Lord's Kingdom was supposed to come to Earth. And during prior years, prophets gained great attention (and not a few dollars) foretelling everything gloomy they could think of. They quoted from the Great Pyramid, Mother Shipton, and Nostradamus.

And do you know what happened?

NOTHING.

Well, almost nothing. At least, by comparison with the horrors that were to come, it was nothing.

Even your editor went into the forecasting game. His MAN FROM TOMORROW created a lot of discussion among his readers. And quite proudly he can point to a lot of his predictions which came true. His predictions were better than those of Nostradamus, for instance. They were better than Mother Shipton. They were only a trifle less short of lousy than the rest! But *some* did come true. The ones you'd least expect.

Well, the prophets have switched to 1966 now. So we want to make a prediction about it. The same thing will happen in 1966 as happened in 1953. NOTHING. That is, nothing in comparison with the horrors that are being predicted.

You might think we are scoffing at predictions, but you are far wrong. In a subtle way, all the predictions were right. The prophets were right, but they were too VIVID. They let their desire for excitement lead them astray. They had LEGITIMATE hunches and feelings and premonitions. But that's the way with predictions. We *know* something is going to happen, but we can't tell *specifically* what it will be, until it happens, then we say: "That's *just* what I expected to happen!" We yell out: "I *knew* it!" if we didn't happen to have said it beforehand, and if we said something, and it didn't exactly fit, we said: "I had the background right, but not the *details*." Or "I was off on the *timing*."

But a man named Rhine has proved we *can* foretell the future. He says we can even *influence* it. He proves it with dice.

Your editor wants to say the same thing, but say it more emphatically. We CAN predict TOMORROW.

What really DID happen in 1953? Well, basically, lacking the

actual detailed events, everything the prophets foretold. But it's all in the background, in our own minds. And there is a good chance that 1966 will bring the actuality. Because we are in a mood today to bring it to pass. And what we *think*, we ARE!

Let's explain that: First, our civilization (what a misunderstood word!) is a product of our minds. It is what we *think* it to be. It was created by our thoughts. And today we are faced with a situation which has built up in our minds to a great FEAR. It is an axiom that what we fear, will eventually track us down and HAPPEN to us. Maybe you won't believe that, but just watch it happen. We have feared from the beginning there will be no peace. We have created, in our minds, a condition of war which we have called a "cold" war. Our own fearful minds have created it, and maintain it. And if we go on thinking of how it will eventually become a "hot" war, it will! THAT is why the prophets foretell a war. The mental atmosphere is about them, pressing in on their consciousness, cloaking them in a black pall which they can actually feel. The predictions they make are an expression of that oppressive feeling they have.

Today we live in a civilization which has been created by Man's thoughts. And Man's thoughts, more today than ever, are directed by a few well-publicized persons' thinking — and we mean, without any "pointing with pride," the science fiction magazines and writers. The printed word today is an accent on mechanical gadgets, principally for the purpose of making war. And today we have, as a result, a mistaken interpretation of the word "civilization." To us, civilization has become a collection of gadgets! We point to our washing machines (when we wish to defend our civilization) and say: "Isn't that wonderful!" And we sneer and tack an opprobrium on anyone who points to the tanks and planes and bombs (when they wish to decry our civilization). We call them variously: cowards, unpatriotic, obstructionists, fanatics, crackpots and vegetarians.

But the fact of the matter is the basic fault with our civilization is that we THINK it consists of gadgets. It DOES, and that is the trouble. We have failed to build anything else into it! We have a mad collection of washing machines, airplanes, automobiles, cyclotrons, atom bombs, jet motors, television, radio, freezers, mechanical toys and chemical fertilizers. We call it "civilization."

The dictionary says to civilize is "to bring out of a savage state, to enlighten, to refine."

Today we are the world's *worst* savages! We are almost completely unenlightened—we live in a mad, total darkness of culture! We are the exact opposite of refined—we are crude, raw, dirty, mean, foul-

(Continued on page 70)

THEY found Matty late that living period, a scant half hour before the Director died. They had searched the regions of weightlessness and inspected the empty holds on the twenty-fifth level before they finally found him in one of the abandoned gun blisters that projected out beyond the hull.

They should have looked there first. Of all the holds and compartments in the *Astra,* Matty liked the plastic blisters the best. The guns had long since gone to Metals Reduction so the blisters were empty and he could lie alone in the darkness and make noises

THE OCEANS ARE WIDE

By

Frank M. Robinson

I.

When we talk of voyages and the planting of colonies, Junius, what interests me is not the ones that fail, for after all the oceans are wide and the Fates can frown upon you with a thousand faces. But, ah, the ones that succeed—what manner of men must lead them!

Dialogues of Lykos

with the stringed sound box that Nurse Margaret had given him.

He floated slowly through the blister, strumming the sound box in the darkness and drifting among the millions of stars that flared and burned seemingly mere inches away from him, just beyond the plastic. He liked to sneak up to the blisters and play the sound box; in the darkened, star-lit hemispheres there were none of the other children of Executives around to tease him.

He bumped into the other side of the blister, twisted so the universe whirled about him in a giddy circle, then pushed off with frail legs and drifted slowly back. Halfway across, the blister suddenly exploded with blinding light and the plastic faded to an opaque gray.

"What the blazes are you doing up here, Kendrick? Your father's dying!"

A softer voice. "Don't be harsh with him, Seth! He's frail and . . ."

"Well?"

The question was harsh and threatening. One of the Executives of the *Astra*, his uncle Seth, a Manager in Air Control, was framed in the open air-lock between blister and hull. He was a thin-lipped, hawk-nosed man with a cruel streak that showed

in the set of his lips and the coldness of his eyes. With him was Matty's nurse, a fat, fluttery looking woman.

"Come here, Kendrick," his uncle repeated, a little softer but with the threat of punishment running just beneath the surface.

Matty spread-eagled himself against the plastic, frightened and trembling, unable to move. The sound box floated a few feet away.

"He's a coward!" a shrill voice suddenly interrupted. "A coward!" The leering face of Matty's cousin, Jeremiah Paulson, peered around his uncle's legs. Matty felt his fear almost vanish in the face of hatred for his cousin—a cousin who was bigger and stronger and far more favored among his relatives.

"I know," Seth sneered, the words cutting like a lash. "An effeminate one at that." He launched himself into the blister, the purple loin cloth of Management flapping about his spare frame. He braked just before he reached the plastic, then clutched Matty's arm in a bone-wrenching grip.

"I said your father was dying, boy. You, of all people, should be there. Or have you forgotten that you're of Kendrick blood?"

"I didn't know he was dying," Matty mumbled tearfully. "Nobody told me!"

His nurse, looking heavy and awkward in her flowing robes, floated up and grasped the sound box. "We kept it from him. He's so young and . . ."

"You're the one we have to thank for what he is!" Seth snarled. He glared at her contemptuously. "You didn't do him any favor by shielding him from death. Now, maybe it will come all too soon for him—and perhaps for you, as well."

Jeremiah, half hidden behind the lock, made a face. Matty started to tremble uncontrollably and his uncle pushed him harshly towards the lock.

"It will be worth your life if you start crying, Kendrick. When you go below, remember only one thing: you're the Director's son. And if you don't act like it, nothing in the *Astra* or Outside will be able to help you!"

The small infirmary was crowded with Executives and their children, clustered about the cushioned dais on which the Director lay. They had been talking in low whispers. When Matty and his uncle came in, the conversations died and the Executives reluctantly made a narrow opening for them.

Matty stayed close to Seth, feeling the hostility of the crowd, and followed him silently up to the dais. The man who lay on the cushions was yellowed and shrunken, a thin froth on his lips and his weak chest pumping slowly in and out and sounding like

a leak in an air tube. Matty felt no emotion for the man who lay there; his father was a stranger to him. The first he had known his father was dying was when Seth had told him in the gun blister. And all the way down from the upper levels he had thought about it and wondered what it was like to die . . .

The yellowed lids suddenly flickered open and a gasp, half of awe and half of consternation, swept the compartment. The sunken eyes fixed on Matty and a withered hand pointed feebly at him.

"The Directorship goes to a weakling," his father whispered bitterly. "You're your mother's son—too good, too weak." He paused and his breath rattled in his throat. "You won't last long, Matty . . ." The hand relaxed, the eyes closed, and the thin chest went back to pumping the last few gasps of life.

Matty flushed with shame at his father's words and he knelt woodenly in front of the dais. He could feel the impatience in the crowd and guessed correctly that if he hadn't been there, somebody would have strangled the dying man to save the waiting.

He looked at those in the compartment from under lowered lids. There was an aunt, Reba Saylor of Hydroponics, a thin, hungry-looking woman dressed in the flowing woman's smock that hid the sharp angles of her body but couldn't hide the sharpness in her face. She was staring at him with a peculiar look. And there was Junius Shroeder, a Department Head in Engineers, A fat, guileless man with a thoughtful expression. Between them stood Jeremiah, his cousin and their favorite. He was heavier, thicker in the shoulders, and far more self-assured. Matty hated him and knew that Jeremiah returned it. And Jeremiah, being bigger and stronger, did more about it.

And there were others in the room. Alvah Hendron of Security—a plump, haughty man. And there was Nahum Kessler, Asaph Whitney, and all the Kendricks. All of them wore looks that were almost evenly split between hatred and pity.

There was a sudden moan and convulsive sudder from the body that lay on the cushions and then it was still, the chest no longer heaving. A Priest came forward from the rear of the compartment and started chanting in Latin. When he was through, other attendants cloaked the body with a sheet and carried it quickly away.

"The Director is dead," Reba Saylor said in a flat voice. She bowed mockingly to Matty. "Hail the Director-to-be!"

The others grudgingly bowed low and then Reba pointed a gaunt arm at Seth. "The boy, Seth! Remember?"

Seth took Matty by the shoulder. "Come with me, Kendrick. We have to discuss something private here." Matty felt puzzled by the change in tone of his uncle's voice but willingly followed him into a small anteroom filled with medical equipment. "You'll wait here, boy, until we call for you."

Matty roamed idly about the compartment, inspecting the neat, glassed-in racks of gleaming surgical tools that walled the room and reading the labels on the vials of medicine in the closed cabinets. The minutes lengthened and Seth did not return. Matty tried the hatch to the infirmary. It was tightly secured, as was the one that led to the passageway. He began to feel the first prickle of fear.

What did they have to discuss in the infirmary that was so important he could not remain to listen, although his cousin Jere Paulson could? Unless it was that they were discussing him?

He pressed his ear to the infirmary hatch. He could make out the sounds of argument and over all, Reba's strident voice.

"Do you want a ten year old milk-sop as Director? If we're going to prevent it, then we'll have to do something about it now!"

There was a silken voice that he couldn't place.

"If the brat should die or come to grief in other ways, then a new Director would have to be selected from among our number, wouldn't he?"

Seth's voice.

"You're a pack of fools! Do you think nobody would guess?"

For a moment Matty thought his uncle was trying to shield him. The next sentence quickly dashed his hopes.

"We'll have to think of something more subtle than that."

Reba's demanding voice suddenly cut in.

"How many, besides those of us in this compartment, know the boy on sight?"

There was a low murmur, then Nahum's husky tones.

"With the exception of his nurse, possibly no one. What's your plan?"

Shrewdly.

"If the nurse were removed, then there would be no one who knew the boy. And it doesn't have to be Mathew Kendrick who is presented to the colonists as the Director's son!"

Matty could feel fear clutch at his heart and the sound of its pounding filled his ears. That was why his cousin Jeremiah had stayed behind; to take his place after he had been—murdered.

"What about the Predict?"

The voices from the infirmary were suddenly silent.

"The Predict doesn't interfere with the internal affairs of the ship. And who's seen him in the last generation?"

The mumble of conversation started up again.

"What do we do with Ken-

drick?"

Reba was indifferent.

"Poison or strangling. It doesn't matter which."

Seth's smooth voice.

"Who's going to strangle the boy, Reba? You?"

Reba laughed.

"Squeamish, aren't you, Seth? But it shouldn't be difficult and there's no reason to procrastinate. Get the boy!"

Matty crouched by the hatch, half paralyzed with fear. There was no place to hide, no one who could help him. And he could hear footsteps approaching the hatch from the other side.

He glanced frantically about the compartment, then ran over to one of the cabinets that lined the bulkheads and tore down a heavy surgery mallet. Back to the hatch, where he quickly smashed the glass eye that opened it when the locks were removed. He had a few minutes now; even with the locks off, the hatch was jammed shut.

The hatch that opened out into the passageway took longer. He placed his palms against it and tried to push it back without success. There were no projections to get a grip on and even if there had been, he was too small and too weak to work it. There were angry noises inside the infirmary now—it wouldn't be more than a few moments more before the Executives thought of entry from the passageway.

He tried the hatch again, then seized a heavy bone chisel, shoved it in the small crack between bulkhead and hatch and leaned his weight against it. The locks suddenly snapped and he was racing down the corridor.

There were no sounds of pursuit. He breathed a little easier, rounded a corner, and was suddenly snatched up by a thick, heavy arm that drew him quickly into a small compartment. He shivered and closed his eyes, waiting for the fingers to fasten tightly around his throat.

"Matty, look it me."

His nurse was standing there, holding a small bundle of freshly washed waist cloths and his sound box. Her face was tense and troubled.

"There is no one who will turn a hand to help you, Matty. They are all against you. And you cannot hide from them forever."

He suddenly burst into tears, partly from relief that it was Nurse Margaret who had snatched him from the corridor and partly from the realization that he had only postponed the inevitable.

The nurse wiped his face and lifted his chin. "You are neither a coward nor a weakling, Matty. But be thankful they misjudged you on that score." Her manner became brisk. "And it isn't hopeless. You'll have to take refuge with the Predict, that's all."

He shivered again. The Pre-

dict, the stranger who lived up in the forward part of the *Astra*. The immortal man whom nobody had seen—the stories went—for the last twenty-five years. And there were some who said that he didn't exist at all, that he was only a legend.

"Would he give me refuge, Margaret?"

She quickly masked the doubt in her eyes. "Of course he would, Matty."

"He doesn't know me," Matty went on. "He doesn't know what happened." He was dangerously close to crying again.

"The Predict knows all about you," Margaret said with firm conviction. "The Predict knows everything!"

Matty didn't argue but accepted it as true because she said so. "How will I go there? My uncle and the others will kill me on sight!"

"They won't recognize you, child." She stripped off his cloth of purple and knotted one of common white about his waist. Then she took a kit from under her voluminous robes and quickly changed his blonde hair to black and subtly broadened the shape of his naturally narrow face. Last, she moulded loose coils of soft, flesh-colored plastic to his chest and arms, adding pounds in appearance to his slight build.

When she was finished, she opened the hatch and peered cautiously out. There was no one in sight. She turned back to the boy.

"Good-bye, Matty."

He wanted to cry and bury his face in her skirts but he knew the last time he would ever do that had passed a few moments before. He pressed his fingers lightly to her lips, then took the bundle of clothes and his sound box and started down the passageway.

The passageway fed into another which led down to the huge central cavern that ran the full length of the *Astra*. He stepped on the slow moving Walk and hunkered down on its soft surface. It took him through the Shops area where red-faced workmen labored at forges and lathes to turn out parts for machines that had broken down and to manufacture the farming tools that had recently been decreed necessary. The commercial district was next with the stores fronting right on the Walk and the phosphorescent adsigns staring down from every bulkhead. Then the commercial district gave way to the Engineering compartments, expansive living quarters where there were only two families to a cabin.

He stopped for lunch at one of the Walkway Restaurants in the huge Hydroponics section. The menu was standard—Yeasty-meat and tomatoes, with flavored water as a beverage. A bronzed worker in the green colored waistcloth of Hydroponics watched

him curiously.

"It's too bad you're not skinnier, half-grown."

Matty managed to control his face so no flicker of fear showed. "Why?"

"There's a big reward in Cash offered for a half-grown your age. Security just passed the description over the speakers a little while ago. Supposed to be an illegitimate."

Matty caught his breath. The *Astra* had been designed to support a static number of colonists. Birth slips were handed out to couples when somebody died or reached the official euthanasia age of sixty. But the discovery of an illegitimate meant that some family wouldn't get a birth slip—if the person were allowed to live. So conviction as an unaccepted illegitimate automatically meant the public strangler

"I have parents," Matty said, desperately trying to hide the tremble in his voice. He held up the ident chain that Margaret had slipped around his neck. "See?"

"Sure—but you don't have to act so scared about it."

The eyes that had been only curious before were suspicious now. Matty hurried with his meal, then slid off the stool and took the Walk again.

The hydroponics tubs stretched through compartment after compartment and by the time he had ridden through the last of them, he felt tired and a little sweaty from the ultraviolet lamps set high in the overhead. He worried that his sweating might have loosened the plastic moulded to him.

Several times he passed Executives on the return Walk who had been present when his father died. None of them recognized him though some glanced sharply at the sound box. He thought for a moment of discarding it, then decided against it. Outside of his nurse, it had been the only friend he had ever had; he was willing to take some risk for it.

Toward the forward part of the *Astra,* the number of people on the Walk decreased sharply and then the Walk itself ended. Matty felt nervous. This part of the ship was almost deserted except for the wandering Security patrols. If anybody should stop him, he knew he'd have a difficult time explaining why he was there.

The compartments and passageways had disappeared entirely now and he was in a world of catwalks suspended over the Engineering chasms that fell off hundreds of feet below. He crept along one of the walks, then suddenly stopped and hid behind a large metal warning plate. Up ahead, patrolling the catwalk that bridged the chasms to the Predict's compartment, were two of the younger members of Management.

Reba and the others had guessed where he would go, Mat-

ty thought sickly. His journey and disguise had been in vain; they had sent representatives there ahead of him. His courage started to ebb and then he recalled Reba's threatening face and strong, powerful hands. He felt along the oil-slicked catwalk, then ran his hands over the warning plate. A bolt was loose in it, a bolt he could easily turn with his fingers. He worked it loose, then threw it in the chasm below.

The noise of the falling bolt drew the two men over to the rail.

"You hear something?"

"Sure — same thing you did. Somebody's down there."

The chasm was poorly lit and the shadows were deceptive.

"I thought I saw something move—next level down!"

"Well, let's go! You know the Cash they're offering!"

They climbed down a metal ladder to the next lower level and Matty dashed silently across the catwalk. A moment later he was standing outside the section of the *Astra* that was carefully sealed off from the colonist's quarters. The single hatch bore the brass nameplate: *"Joseph Smith, Predict."*

Matty hesitated, his heart thumping painfully in his chest. It might not open. Despite what Margaret had said, there was a chance that he wouldn't be granted refuge. Then he took his courage in his hands and quickly covered the cell with his palm. The hatch slid back and he suddenly felt dizzy with relief.

He was safe.

II.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life;
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
for ever.

The 23rd Psalm. Revised Standard Version

THERE was nobody beyond the hatch. Matty started to enter, then hesitated when his feet touched something warm and soft instead of the usual cold hardness of metal. He went on in. The Predict, he soon realized, didn't live as did others on board the *Astra*. All the decks were covered with this soft, warm material and instead of a single cabin, he had several of them—all to

himself.

Matty glanced through the living compartments, then stepped inside one that he took to be an office. It was luxury beyond anything he had ever dreamed of. The soft material covered the deck from bulkhead to bulkhead and the desk and chairs were of practically legendary *wood*. A calendar hung on one of the bulkheads and he stared at it for a moment. The curling cardboard was five hundred years out of date.

In the bulkhead just behind the desk there was a large, square porthole and . . . He gasped. The porthole was *open* and he was looking down a wide street, flanked with what he knew were houses and trees and green lawns. Bright blue sky and an occasional wisp of cloud peeped through the gaps in the trees. There were two strips of white cloth hanging in front of the porthole and these moved slowly in a warm wind that rustled the leaves and brushed across the grass. A few people walked slowly down the street; some of them looked up and waved politely at the port. Matty stared, fascinated. It took him a minute to notice that it was the same people who kept walking down the street and the identical few who each time waved to him.

The port suddenly faded to blankness.

"That's a moving solidograph, Matty," a voice behind him said. "It was taken back on Earth."

Matty whirled. They man who stood behind him was tall, as tall as Seth, dressed in the type of rough, brown garment called a *suit* that Matty had seen pictured in history books. He was, perhaps, thirty. His face was smooth and unwrinkled with high cheekbones and thin, colorless lips. Black hair was combed neatly back and shone with an oily luster. He was smiling—smiling with everything but his cold gray eyes. To Matty, the eyes looked impossibly old.

"I've been expecting you, Matty. Sit down." He had been smoking a pipe—something prohibited to everybody on board the *Astra*, even the Management—and gestured with the stem towards a chair.

Matty sat down—gingerly—on the very edge.

"Earth is our birth planet," the tall man continued. "The planet we left five hundred years ago." He passed a hand over a row of lights on the desk and a large plastic cube on a stand in the corner glowed and darkened and finally showed a small, green planet, obscured with trailing layers of cloud, against a starry background.

Matty finally found his voice. "I've heard songs about Earth," he said timidly.

"Do you know why we left it?"

The boy slowly shook his head, almost hypnotized by his surroundings and the quiet man behind the desk.

"We couldn't stay, Matty—our race was dying. We had fought wars and poisoned the atmosphere; those of us who were chosen had to leave."

The picture in the cube changed to the velvet blackness of space, with a handful of small, red streaks showing among the stars. Of all the streaks, only one still glowed with a pulsing, red light; the others looked dead and dull.

"Fourteen ships left Earth," the tall man mused. "The *Astra* is the only one left. The *Star-Rover, Man's Hope,* the *Aldebaran*—all gone now. Tube trouble or pile blow-ups or else hulled by meteors. Any number of reasons." His voice lowered and Matty caught a tinge of sadness to it. "Kenworthy, Tucker, Reynolds —they're all gone, too."

He was silent for a moment, staring at the cube, then looked up at Matty. "Out of four billion human beings five centuries ago, there's only the few thousand of us on board who remain. And all our lives depend on the man at the top—the Director. He has to be a strong man, Matty."

"That's why they wanted to kill me, isn't it?" Matty asked. "I wouldn't have made a strong Director. And Jere Paulson would."

The Predict shook his head. "You're wrong. You see, power is a funny thing. Those who have it usually want more of it. Seth and Reba and the others for example. They wanted to kill you and make Jeremiah the Director-to-be, not because he would be a strong man but because he would be a weak one. He would owe his Directorship to those who had helped him get it, and a man who owes his position to others is both a weak man and a fool. That's why the Directorship was designed to be hereditary; so that the person who held it would owe nothing to his friends but hold it solely by virtue of his birth."

He noticed Matty's sound box, seemingly for the first time, and suddenly changed the subject. "Do you play music?"

"A—little."

Joseph Smith relaxed in his chair.

"Play me something."

Matty strummed the wires of the sound box in an embarrassed fashion. Finally he decided on a tune and commenced singing in a soft, boyish voice.

"Among the years of night black sky
That fills the Universe,
Among the miles of velvet dusk
That hopes and ships traverse,
There spins a world forever lost,
The world that saw Man's birth,
A world no man shall see again—
The small green globe of Earth."

The music died and Matty's voice drifted off to silence. The Predict applauded admiringly, bringing a faint flush of pleasure to the boy's cheeks.

"That was very nice playing,

Matty. A little unusual—we had a different tonal system back on Earth; one where the interval was longer."

"I made this one up," Matty said shyly.

"Do you know anything else? Something not so sad?"

Matty nodded and let his fingers dance across the wires.

"Listen to the throbbing of the Ship!
Harken to the meaning of the Trip!
Drink in all the wonders of the Stars,
Listen to the legends of Old Mars,
Dream of Earth and sky we called our Home,
But learn to live in worlds of steel and chrome!"

Joseph Smith leaned back in his chair and looked at the boy for a long moment, actually seeing him for the first time. He was a slightly built lad—the size of his wrist and ankles had given away the plastic at first glance—with a thin face graced with a strong chin and Roman nose. His eye brows were blonde, almost white, his hair—under the black dye—probably only slightly darker. It was a face that would not find it easy to be deceitful or cruel. It was more the face of an honest poet than a politician.

"Wouldn't you like to be a minstrel, Matty—a singer of songs and poems? They're quite important in our world, you know. They'll be even more important when we land. And you can do a lot of things for people. You can make them happy or you can make them cry, if you wish."

Matty considered it for a moment, then thought of what his father had said just before he died, the Executives who had tried to kill him, and Jeremiah Paulson leering at him in contempt and derision.

"I want to be Director," he said steadily.

The Predict frowned. "Are you sure you've thought it over? Remember that everything you do will have to be done with an eye to the good of the ship. And you'll have problems. We'll be landing in less than twenty years. You'll have the problems of colonization to deal with. And you'll find out that the privileges and honors of being a Director are pretty hollow; the worries and troubles are almost infinitely great."

"I wouldn't change my mind," Matty said firmly. "Ever."

Joseph Smith looked at him thoughtfully. "You might make a good one at that, Matty. You're quick-witted—you survived long enough to make it up here, which is proof enough of that. You'll owe your position to no-one and you're young enough to be taught." He paused. "I've been around a long time, over five hundred years. I know people rather well. I advise them and make predictions as to the results of their actions. I'll advise you—and ev-

erything I'll tell you will be true but you may have to take it on faith to begin with. Think you could?"

Matty nodded. The thoughtful look on Joseph Smith's face faded and it chilled into an expression that looked like it had been cast in steel.

"To begin with, there are a few things you must learn. The first is that the ship and the colonists on it have one purpose and one purpose only. We are to colonize a planet and establish a civilization there. Everything we do must be directed towards that one end. Do you understand that?"

The intensity in his voice made Matty nervous. "Yes sir, I understand."

The Predict's voice softened slightly and he reached for his pipe. "Even though you're missing, as long as your body isn't found as proof of death, the Directorship will be held open to your eighteenth birthday. But in the meantime we can't allow the *Astra* to go without an Acting Director. I'll have to appoint one now." He leaned back in his chair and puffed contentedly. "Any suggestions?"

Matty understood that the selection of an Acting Director would be limited to the Executives. But there were none that he could think of who hadn't been in on the attempts to kill him, none whom he felt he could trust.

"You don't limit your decisions to those you personally like," the Predict said slowly, guessing his thoughts. "If you want to be a good Director, Matty, you appoint people solely on the basis of ability and loyalty to you. Now who do you think who would be a capable man for Acting Director, everything else aside?"

Matty found it difficult to say but at last he forced the name out. "Seth," he said reluctantly. "The Manager of Air Control."

"A very good choice. One that I had thought of myself."

"But he wouldn't be loyal," Matty objected strenuously. He had sudden visions of Seth in a position of importance, a position where Seth might yet succeed in killing him.

The Predict looked amused.

"For one thing, he won't even know who you are. So until you're eighteen, his loyalty actually doesn't matter. But there is another consideration. The next few years will be very difficult ones for a Director. We have to set up organization lines for when we land. Once landed, the living situation will be entirely different than it is now. There will be no more jobs for Air Control, obviously, and the importance of Engineers and the sanitary corps will decrease sharply. We have to prepare people for that now, or else we would have an impossible task when we land.

"There will, of course, be resentment at the changes." He smiled slightly. "The resentment

will be directed towards Seth, as Acting Director, not against you. Once you assume office, if you want to you could send Seth to the public strangler and there wouldn't be a single dissenting voice. And that's a point you must never forget, Matty. If there are unpleasant duties to perform, never do them yourself. Assign them to subordinates—preferably those who are already disliked."

He rifled through some cards on his desk.

"We'll have a doctor up here to alter your eye-prints and features in a moment. For the next few years you'll have to keep out of the way of Management. Once they locate you, your life will be worth nothing." He found the card he wanted and jerked it out of the box.

"You'll be registered as an acceptable illegitimate." They were the ones who were spared because of exceptional traits and abilities. "You'll live with the Reynolds family—Hydroponics. They're a good family, they can give you a lot."

He paused and picked up Matty's sound box and ran a thumb harshly across the wires. "As a Director-to-be, Matty, you can do nothing that appears frivolous or effeminate. You have to appear, let us say, as a man among men."

He held up the sound box.

"A sound box is fine for a minstrel. It is fine for a talented young man who is known for his prowess in other fields. But what do people think of *you* playing the sound box, Matty?"

Matty licked dry lips. He knew what was coming.

"They think it's kind of . . . kind of childish."

"Then it has to go, doesn't it?"

Matty nodded miserably and the Predict brought the sound box sharply against the side of the desk. The wires twanged and the plastic box itself shattered into a thousand pieces.

III.

"And youth is cruel, and has no remorse
and smiles at situations which it cannot see."
Portrait of a Lady, T. S. Eliot

IT was a warm, Spring day. The woods were alive with the rustle of trees and the quiet noises of small living things. A caterpillar inched slowly down the tree behind which Mathew Reynolds was hiding while high up in the branches a small, red squirrel scampered eagerly about the business of collecting nuts and scraps of bark.

Matty pressed himself into the shadows and took only shallow breaths, doing his best to become a part of the landscape. His eyes were riveted on the small valley

that spread out just beyond the trees. There were clumps of weeds and small hillocks throughout the valley and it was these that he watched in particular. There was life there; life which in a minute would show itself.

He could feel the sweat gather on his shoulders and underneath his arms but he didn't move. If he did, he knew he would lose the game and it would probably go to Sylvanus by default. His eyes moved slightly in his head and he caught a glimpse of his foster-brother out of the corner of them. Sylvanus was hiding in another section of the L shaped forest, in the leg that stretched away to his left. Silly was as quiet and unmoving as he himself was, Matty thought, but it would take more than a forest to hide his flame-red hair.

His eyes swiveled back to the valley. There had been a slight movement there. He silently fitted an arrow to his bow and drew back on the thin length of synthetic gut. There was another whisper of motion and he let the shaft fly. Two other arrows thudded into the far clump of weeds and a small, gray shape leaped high in the air, a trickle of red showing where a feathered shaft had buried itself near the hind-quarters.

Matty dashed out of the woods. "It's mine, I saw it hit!"

Sylvanus, thin and gawky-awkward, joined him. He was unhappy. "It has to be yours, Matt—mine didn't even come close."

Matty picked up the small animal and started to tug on the arrow.

"It isn't yours at all," a small, cool voice said. "It's mine."

Matty turned in indignation, ready to reply with hot words of possession, then stopped short. She was no older than his own fifteen years, thin with just the faint swellings of maturity to come. But the features of her face were finely chiseled and there was something about her that made him suddenly aware of his own sixty-four muscular kilos and taller than average height. He inflated his chest slightly without even knowing that he was doing it.

"I watch my arrows carefully," he said, with just a trace of haughtiness. "I don't claim animals that I'm not certain I've hit."

"I never miss," she said, equally as proud. "I never have before and I haven't now."

That such a small girl should have such a large conceit was just too much. Matty disdainfully held out the animal. "So I'm wrong," he said, making his voice as condescending as possible. "Here, take it."

"You don't need to be nice to me," she said, reddening. "I hit it and I can prove it!" She turned towards the forest behind them. "Huntsman!"

The sun faded to just an average fluorescent glow, the breeze died down, the small living things

in the woods suddenly became silent, and the electronic caterpillar and squirrel stopped in midmovement. Further off, the backdrops of the end of the valley and the depths of the forest faded and were replaced by the squarish outlines of a large hold.

An old man in the red waistcloth of a huntsman stepped out of the control booth and hobbled over. "What's the matter?"

The girl handed him the mechanical rabbit with the punctured dye-sac. "Who killed it, Peter?"

The huntsman laughed, a high-pitched old man's cackle. "Can't rightly say anybody killed it since it was never alive. But just a minute and I'll tell you who hit it." He twisted the arrow expertly, pulled it out, and read the number on the metal tip. "Number three. Lemme see, can't remember . . ." He took some custody tags out of a pocket pouch. "That must be yours, Karen—see the writing . . ."

She turned to Matty triumphantly. "You see! It was mine after all!"

He flushed and stared at the ground, digging his toes in the artificial turf. "I must have been off. Anybody coulda hit it . . ."

Her hand touched his and he looked up at her. She was smiling. "I was just lucky this time—I'm really not that good."

After she had gone, the old huntsman puttered about the compartment, hiding another mechanical rabbit behind one of the hillocks and resetting the solidograph projectors for the benefit of the next class. Matty and Sylvanus started for the hatch.

"All three of you did right well," the huntsman called after them. "You'll make good colonists, mark my words!"

Matty didn't even hear him.

He toyed with his food that night, not feeling especially hungry.

"That's good protein, Matty," Alice Reynolds said, frowning. "If you don't eat it tonight, you won't be able to make it up tomorrow you know."

"I'm not hungry," Matty mumbled.

His foster-mother looked over at her husband. "What ails the boy, Jeff?"

Jefferey Reynolds, a big, bluff man increasingly worried by the fear that they wouldn't make planet landing before his sixtieth—and legally last—birthday, looked up from his wax-slate newspaper, annoyed. "How the blazes should I know?" Why women could be so worried over trifles when there were far more important things to worry about was something he could never understand.

"He's in love," Sylvanus said callously.

Matty glared at him. His parents looked interested. "What's her name?"

"None of anybody's business!"

Matty said, angered.

Sylvanus maliciously furnished the information. "Karen West."

"I never heard of her," Alice Reynolds mused, slightly disappointed. She had had fond hopes of her two boys marrying into Management, though Matty being an illegitimate—even an accepted one—made that almost impossible.

Matty felt a trust betrayed. "You better watch out, Silly, or you'll end up even uglier than you already are!"

His foster-parents gave each other a raised eyebrow look and dropped the subject.

Matty went to bed early that night period—night and day, of course, had no meaning on the *Astra* except in a psychological sense—curling up on his flat pad of sponge rubber in a corner of the small compartment and falling asleep almost instantly.

"Matt!"

He jerked awake. Sylvanus was bending over him in the darkness, motioning to the passageway. Matty glanced around. The Reynolds were snoring quietly behind their curtained off section of the compartment. He followed Sylvanus out to the corridor. The attendant from the local gymnasium—a small, gnarled man with a face that had always been too professionally poker-faced for Matty's taste—was waiting for them.

Low, confiding voice: "There's a tournament of *slit* up at no-weight, Matt. Good players from all over the ship."

Sylvanus dug him in the ribs, eagerly. "We could go and watch if nothing else, Matt."

He hesitated. He had never played opposite strangers from other parts of the ship and he had no idea if methods of play differed from his own region.

"You're favored from this section, Matt," the attendant urged. "Hydroponics has a thousand Cash bet on you."

The Cash wasn't an unusually large sum—Hydro had undoubtedly hedged their bets—but the local bet swelled his pride and he felt that he would be doing his section a disservice if he didn't play.

He ducked back into the compartment and came out with the green cloth of Hydroponics tied around his waist. "Let's go."

Sylvanus slapped him on the back and the attendant grinned. "I've got five of my own bet on you, Matt. Good-luck!"

Matty and Sylvanus drifted through the upper levels along with the other figures floating in the shadowy gloom. On the twenty-fifth, a gang of toughs quickly searched them down — a ridiculously short task—and asked for the password. Matty gave it, realizing the precautions were necessary since *slit* games were banned by Security and there was always the danger of official spies.

They finally came out in a large, brilliantly lit hold aft of the gun blisters and towards the tube sec-

tion of the *Astra*. Both sides of the long hold were crowded with spectators while the stretch in the middle was left open for the contestants.

Sylvanus looked around uneasily. "There's a lot of people here, Matt. Too many. This looks like a sponsored event."

"What do you mean?"

"Somebody's been advertising it. There's a lot of people here who never came to *slit* games before."

Matty shrugged it off and they drifted towards one end of the compartment where the contestants were waiting for their match to come up. He paid for a handle from the Keeper—a young Shops man with a withered arm—and inspected it carefully. It was short, made out of plastic, in one end of which was inserted a piece of razor blade half a centimeter long.

He stripped off his waist cloth and Sylvanus started rubbing him down with the thick, antiseptic grease.

"The players look pretty good, Matt."

He grunted and turned his attention to the present battle. The two contestants were about his own age and evenly matched as to skill. Each bore two long, red gashes on their bodies that dripped red, the drops slowly floating to the deck. He felt mildly interested. The match was close, one more slash would determine the winner.

The contestants backed up to the opposite bulkheads, then lunged and floated swiftly towards each other. They met in the middle, grappled briefly for a moment, their hands slipping on the grease that covered their bodies, then their initial momentum tore them apart. There was a sigh of disappointment from the closely packed spectators. No score. They crouched at the opposing bulkheads again, faces shining with grease and sweat, and dove towards each other once more. They met in the middle with a quick, convulsive movement and when they separated one of them bore the bloody slash across chest and arm that marked him as the loser.

There was a *"Hah!"* of appreciation from the crowd.

Both winner and loser were immediately swabbed with collodion and quick-heal ointments by infirmary assistants who hired out for a moderate fee to the *slit* players. Then the lights dimmed while enterprising hucksters with hand-projectors flashed colorful adsigns on the overhead. The crowd laughed and gossiped good-naturedly while waiting for the next match, exchanging the small, aluminum Cash disks to settle their debts.

". . . that short one, the one from Shops, ten Cash he gets in three straight . . ."

". . . and I'm fifty seven now and you know as well as I we won't make planet-landing before I'm sixty . . ."

". . . got to leave you know there's none this far up and even if there was it wouldn't do any good . . ."

". . . that half-grown there, Reba, the one who came in wearing the Hydroponic green . . ."

". . . if Security ever raids this hold they'll get some mighty big fish believe . . ."

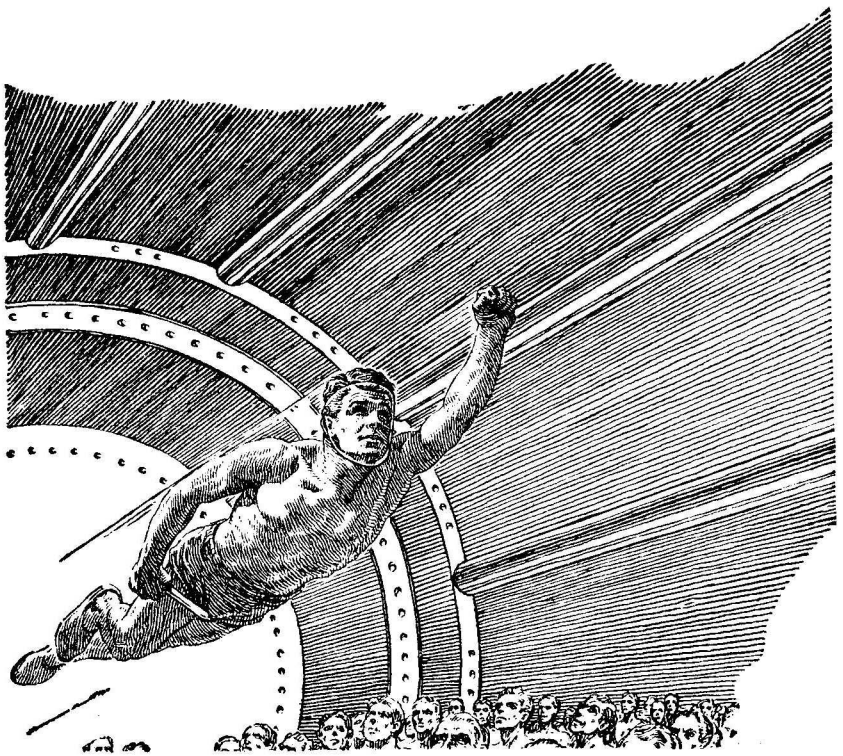
". . . don't think so, he's too heavy for Kendrick, but Jere knows what to do . . ."

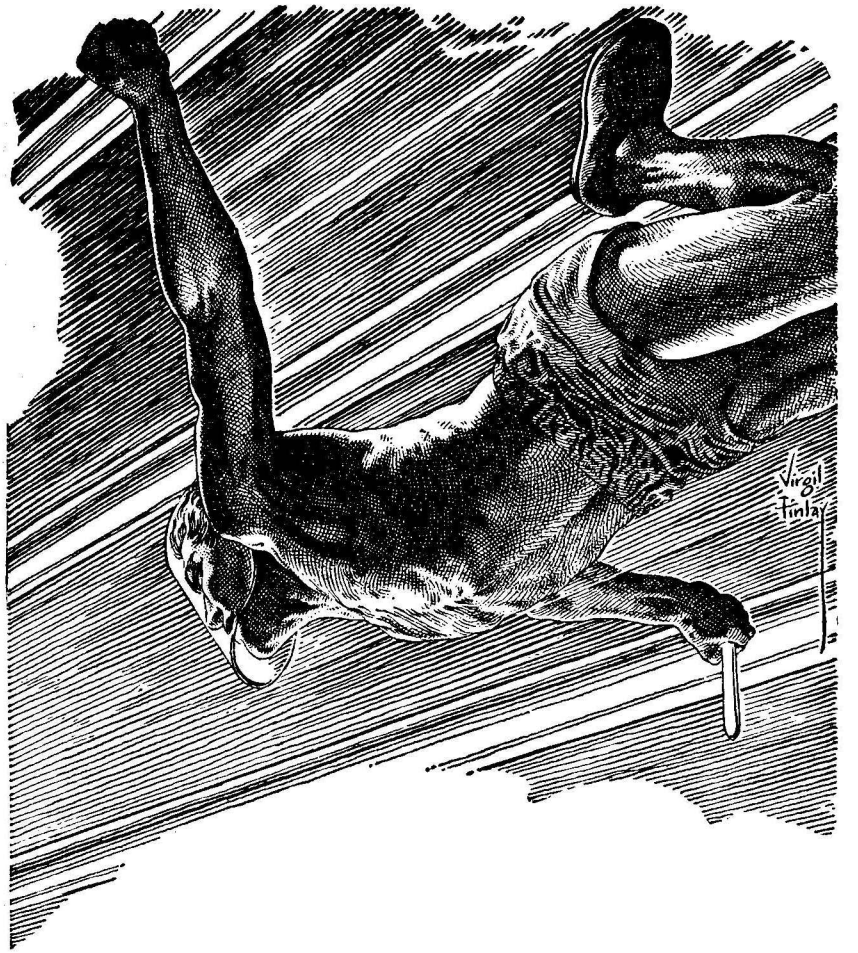
". . . wonder if they know what fools they really are but when I was their age . . ."

Matty was perspiring when it came his turn. There was little ventilation and the sweating of the crowd and participants had fouled the air. He got the nod from the games master and buckled on the plastic shields that protected his loins and face.

Sylvanus squeezed his arm. "Good luck, Matt."

His first opponent was a swarthy youngster from Engineers; a husky half-grown well knotted with muscles and marked with *slit*





scars that stamped him as a veteran of the game. Matty clutched his knife in one hand, gathered his legs under him, and pushed off on signal. They met in the middle, Matty twisted and whirled in the bright light, then felt the sharp sting of the razor and drifted away with a streak of red on his thigh.

"Hah!"

The next time his opponent clumsily left an opening and Matty inflicted a slashing wound of his own. Then it was even up and Matty surprisingly won the match

with a light arm wound.

The games wore on, the losers retired to the spectator side, and the odds juggled back and forth as the compartment filled with the clink of passing coin. Much to Matty's surprise, he went as far as the finals and ended up matched against a husky youth wearing a tight black mask. Masks were not unusual—*slit* games were prohibited by Security and some contestants from well known families didn't want to be recognized—but there was something about the youth that struck Matty as being familiar.

"He's dangerous," Sylvanus warned. "I've seen him play before — but you can take him, Matt!" Matty looked at him affectionately. Sylvanus, thin and somewhat undersized, had a bad case of hero-worship—or maybe it was just that he saw himself in there during the bouts.

The signal was given and the bout was on. Matty lunged out into the light, grappled briefly, and then hesitated with shock as his opponent said distinctly in a voice he would have known anywhere: *"Coward!"* The hesitation cost him the point and he drifted away with a thin slash on his wrist.

"Hah!"

He wheeled at the bulkhead and came in again, trembling with a sudden weakness that he was ashamed of. He knew his opponent was Jeremiah and it was hard to shake off the feeling of inferiority that he had carried with him for so long. He lost the second point as well. The spectators from Hydroponics set up a low wail.

"Hah! Matty! Matty!"

Jeremiah left himself open and Matty took the next point, fighting in determined silence. On the following lunge, Jeremiah slipped and that point went to Matty, too. The match was even up. On his third try, Matty caught a glimpse of a familiar face in the crowd and once again almost lost the match. Reba Saylor, her bony figure cloaked in a disguise of common white! There was a howl from the crowd and his mind slipped back to the fight. He grabbed for Jeremiah, missed, and then the compartment was plunged into darkness.

"Scatter! Security! Security!"

The darkened compartment was suddenly jammed with scurrying figures. Somebody grabbed Matty's wrist and Sylvanus' voice yelled *"This way!"* in his ear. They squeezed through the after hatch and then Matty was diving down the long passageways, silently dodging Security's light beams. Then he felt the short hairs rise on the back of his neck. It wasn't Security who was after him. The lights were sticking with him too long, they were too persistent. Usually, Security's only aim was to break up the game, not to capture and hold for trial all those who had attended.

He banked at the next bulkhead, gathered his legs under him, and dove down a vertical through-shaft, starting the long fall towards the center of the ship. He caught at the hand-holds of a ledge a dozen decks down and swung himself onto another level, quietly avoiding making noise. Nobody was following him.

It was then that he became aware Sylvanus wasn't with him. The idea that something must have happened to Silly didn't occur to him; he concluded that Sylvanus had taken another through shaft and had probably beat him to the home compartment. He started walking down the passageway.

The red light was winking on the speak-box just above his sponge rubber pallet. Matty noticed with a slight stirring of fear that Sylvanus wasn't back yet, then turned the box on low so it wouldn't waken the Reynolds.

The speaker rasped with the voice of the Predict. *"Come into the office, Matty. I want to talk to you."*

He hesitated, then let his face slip into a defiant expression and took the Walk down to the Predict's compartment.

The Predict stood behind the desk, dressed in his odd lounging robe and what he called pajamas, tapping the tobacco in his pipe. Matty expected a minor dressing-down, then praise for his prowess in the *slit* games, as was customary for other contestants to receive when their parents apprehended them.

Joseph Smith's face was grim and distant. He looked at Matty with disgust, then reached behind the desk and threw him a rag. "Wipe the grease off." He followed it up with a small plastic bottle of alcohol. "That's the last time you'll be wearing grease for a *slit* game so do a good job." Matty rubbed in the alcohol with a growing feeling of anxiety; he winced when it burned in his cuts.

"How old are *slit* players?" the Predict suddenly asked.

"My own age," Matty mumbled, not caring to meet the tall man's cold eyes.

"Do you know why they're your own age and no older?"

"No sir."

"Because only the very young and very foolish play *slit*. It draws spectators because it's a good betting game, and people have always liked to gamble. And it amuses people to watch others slice themselves to ribbons. But perhaps you're too young to know the difference between entertainment and amusement."

Matty flushed. The biting sarcasm was worse than any punishment that could have been levied.

Joseph Smith fell silent for a moment, watching Matty work with the rag and the alcohol. Some of the cuts had started to bleed again but beyond a slight wince,

the boy gave no sign that he felt them.

"I've tried to stamp the game out, Matty. Regardless of the actions of the infirmary assistants, it's still a dangerous pastime." He paused. "I don't suppose I'll ever succeed. Children" — Matty reddened at the word—"your age have always done foolish and dangerous things for as long as I can remember. But it isn't going to help when you become Director and the younger colonists recall you as a famous *slit* player."

He abruptly changed the subject.

"How are your studies coming?"

"Not very good," Matty answered sullenly.

Joseph Smith's voice grew harder. "I know. You're poor in math, you're poor in science, you're poor in danger drills. You're good in sports, you're good in hunting. Maybe it's my fault because I've emphasized the physical too much —but you had such a long way to go to catch up."

Matty stared at the deck and said nothing.

"Perhaps you think that all that's necessary to be Director is to know how to play *slit* and glove-ball?"

"No sir, I don't think that."

"Then starting the next living period you're going to devote more of your time to books. And you'll do your best to become familiar with the administration of the *Astra;* you'll attend Judgings, you'll find out how Security works."

"I'll do anything you say, sir," Matty said, chastened.

Some of the hardness went out of the Predict's voice. "Did you recognize anybody at the *slit* game?"

"Reba Saylor," Matty said with a sudden rush of memory.

"Reba wasn't the only one," Joseph Smith said quietly. "There was Junius Shroeder and Nahum Kessler and quite a number of others. Do you know why they were there?" He didn't wait for an answer. "Watch this." He toyed with a plastic and bone handle such as Matty had used in the *slit* game. Suddenly the half centimeter of razor imbedded in the end sprouted to a full twelve of shining steel. "Jeremiah Paulson could have killed you at any time —probably *would* have killed you —if Security hadn't broken the game up. And it was sheer luck that you managed to get away afterwards."

Matty blanched.

"Your friends in Management haven't given up," the Predict continued in a deadly serious tone of voice. "With you out of the way it would be a simple matter for your cousin Jeremiah to be elected to the Directorship when your eighteenth birthday comes up. And if you were more observant than you are, you would know it wouldn't be an unpopular choice. Jeremiah has many friends,

among the colonists as well as the Executives."

Matty digested it for a moment. It was true. He had been busy—playing. And Jeremiah had been busy acquiring a reputation. He had sponsored games, he had put in time entertaining the pile workers who were down with radiation sickness in the infirmaries, he had been a heavy favorite in the more legitimate games.

Then, suddenly, the full meaning of events broke on him.

"Then I'm through," he said dully. "They know who I am."

"No—they don't. They're suspicious but they're not positive. And I've arranged for a decoy. A young illegitimate your age that Security turned in the other period. When we're done he'll look like Mathew Kendrick would have looked at fifteen. And then we'll stake him out for the wolves." Matty shivered. The Predict said it, knowing he was condemning the youth to death, with all the casualness of a man ordering breakfast at a Walkway Restaurant.

"I'm not worth bothering about," Matty said, feeling sorry for himself.

"I bother with you for a very simple reason," the Predict said bluntly. "Because I can trust you. Because you'll do what I say." He paused. "You might be interested to know that the *slit* game was all arranged beforehand. The attendant from the locker room was the steerer. The youngster from Engineers and your other opponents were paid to lose so you would eventually be matched against Jeremiah. And Jeremiah—who is still your superior in strength and agility—would have slit your throat for the third point and escaped with the others in the confusion."

Matty felt both furious and curiously hollow, all at the same time. He clenched his fists and tried to blink back the sudden tears in his eyes.

Joseph Smith looked at him with an expression of pity.

"This isn't a game we're playing. This is for keeps. If you lose, it won't be my neck that will be stretched, it'll be yours. And your worst enemy will be your own conceit. It's nice to excel in things but to be conceited is bad, for conceit can blind a man and make him do foolish and dangerous things."

Matty was only half listening. He wanted desperately to leave the cabin, to hide his tears of rage and shame.

"One more thing," the Predict continued, almost as an afterthought. You pay for every stupid thing you do. If not directly, then through somebody else. In this case, your foster-brother Sylvanus. He didn't get away. Security found his body up in no-weight a few minutes ago."

IV.

The hungry judges soon the sentence sign,
And wretches hang that jurymen may dine.
The Rape of the Lock, Alexander Pope

THE Judging compartment was slowly filling up with spectators. Matty found himself a seat and waited for the proceedings to begin.

A few minutes after he was seated, there was a commotion down the row and a thin red-faced worker wearing the gaudy red-and-yellow waist cloth of Shops worked his way up and sat next to him. The man glanced curiously around, then thrust a plastic sack under Matty's nose.

"Wanna sandwich? Better than the stuff the hawkers sell; wife made them up special."

Matty hesitated, then shook his head. "No thanks." He paused. "You watch these things very often on your lunch period?"

The man nodded between mouthfuls of bread and yeasty-meat. "Sure, all the time. Lots of us do. It's a lotta fun." He looked at Matty curiously. "This the first time you ever been to a Judging?"

Matty said yes and the man from Shops leaned closer, anxious to be helpful and explain the operations of the court to a novice. "Not much to it, actually. The Accusing Attorney comes in and states the case, then the witnesses. Then the Defense Attorney comes in and states his side, then his witnesses. The panel"—he pointed to ten colonists laughing and joking at the front of the compartment—"sets the punishment. Had the same panel for the last week now—most popular panel they ever had. Death sentence every time."

"Who presides over the court?" Matty asked curiously.

His companion found another sandwich and let the greasy crust fall to the deck. "An Executive. Junius Shroeder this time. Good man, never overruled a panel yet."

The compartment was filled now, the trial was ready to begin. Shroeder, white-haired and grossly fat, waddled in and took his place behind the Judging bench.

"There's three things you can get death for," the man from Shops whispered to Matty. "Thefts, murders, and Negligence of Duty. That's the worst of the lot and that's what we got now." He nudged Matty in the ribs. "You can always tell by the size of the crowds."

There was a "*Shhh!*" from behind them and the worker shut up, edging forward in his chair so he would be sure not to miss anything.

Matty listened intently. The case was simple. A middle-aged woman assigned to Diet had been negligent and unsanitary in her

duties at a Walkway restaurant with the result that thirteen workers from Shops had become seriously ill. During the length of time elapsed between their sickness and the start of the Judging, all thirteen had recovered. They filed to the witness stand one by one and described with flying gestures and much emotion the pain they had experienced and the ensuing sickness.

Their stories drew much sympathetic response from the packed compartment but Matty withheld judgment. None of the witnesses had struck him as being of good character and he waited impatiently for the defendant to take the chair. When she did, Matty felt his heart suddenly sink. The woman on the stand, slightly older than when she had given him his sound box and waist cloths and sent him to see the Predict five years before, was his old nurse, Margaret.

"She's guilty!" the Shops man said in a low voice. "You can see it in her face from here!"

"Shhh!"

Matty watched the remainder of the trial sick at heart. The Judging went as the Shops man had unintentionally predicted right at the very beginning. The thirteen workers refused to change their testimony and most produced medical certificates to verify that they had — as testified — suffered food poisoning. The efforts of the Defense to introduce proof that they had actually been working on the days they claimed they were sick, was openly sneered at by Junius Shroeder. He likewise refused to admit—and instructed the panel to ignore—evidence that there was a legitimate doubt as to the validity of the medical records introduced.

Matty's head was aching. It would do no good for him to challenge the court; he had no authority and it was far too late to get the Predict to intercede in her behalf, even if he would. There was nothing he could do but sit there and watch.

There was a short intermission, during which hawkers roamed the aisles selling sandwiches and colored drinks. A few minutes later, the panel rendered the expected verdict of guilty.

The Shops man, along with most of the others in the compartment, jumped on the chair to watch. "Can't miss this . . ."

Matty shuddered and averted his face while the public strangler did his duty. When it was over, the audience filed out, joking and finishing off the last of their lunch.

Matty's friend enthusiastically started comparing the trial and its results with the others he had seen, then caught the look on Matty's face. He looked contemptuous. "Maybe a half-grown like you shouldn't come to these, especially if you got a weak gut."

"That's right," Matty said bitterly. "It made me sick."

He drifted around the ship the remainder of that living period, desultorily going through an emergency hulling drill, then finally went to the Predict's compartment. He told the tall man all about it, including how he had felt and what he had wanted to do about it.

"Do you believe the witnesses?"

"They were lying. Anybody could have seen that."

"You've got opinions on it, Matty. Let's hear them."

"She helped me a long time ago," Matty said slowly. "I think that was part of it. And I think that by killing her they were trying to get to me."

"The noose is drawing tighter," Joseph Smith agreed. "They're reasonably sure that you're alive, even if they don't know who you are. They're trying to isolate you. One, you'll be harder to identify when you try to claim the Directorship. And two, you'll be easier to handle if and when you do become Director."

"And there's nothing we can do about it, is there?"

"They're too smart, Matty. They're experts at covering their tracks. Even when you become Director, you're going to have a difficult time pinning anything on them."

Matty idly ran his knuckles across the backs of the books in the wall cabinet. "It didn't mean anything to the people who were watching," he said in a dull voice. "It was just more entertainment. Something to do during their lunch period, something to watch between sandwiches."

"If you're going to be Director," Joseph Smith said curtly, "you've got to get used to things like that."

"I don't think I ever will," Matty said stubbornly.

"Then maybe you better start trying."

For the first time it occured to Matty that the Predict didn't feel concerned, that he didn't care, that the murders of Sylvanus and Margaret had been insignificant incidents in the ephemeral life of the colonists. The man had no feelings, no emotion. Maybe five hundred years had made him contemptuous of life, had filled his veins with ice.

He gave the Predict a long, cold look and felt a sudden hatred towards the man to whom Death meant so little.

"All right. I'll try."

When he was sixteen, Matty became an apprentice. Though almost every duty on board the *Astra* was a father-son arrangement, there were always youths whose family jobs had been eliminated who were apprenticed out to other sections on their sixteenth birthday. As an accepted illegitimate, Matty went along.

The fat, stocky, assignment man read off the list and as each name was called out, foremen from the section broke away from the

group at the far end of the compartment and came forward to get their men.

"Avery, Hydroponics. Banks, Engineers. Dowd, Medical . . ." The line dwindled. "Reynolds."

Matty stepped forward.

"Shops."

One of the foremen came over to Matty. He held out his hand in the familiar greeting gesture.

"Name's Olson — guess I'm your boss now."

Matty took the hand and gave it a single, solemn shake. The man was big and solid looking, with thick wrists and a bull neck and a blunt, honest-looking face.

"Isn't much to tell you, Reynolds. We got a good group and everybody gets along. We'll expect an honest period's work out of you." He said it as if he expected an argument.

"I expect to work," Matty said simply.

Olson's big, homely face split into a smile. "Then you and me will get along just fine."

Matty followed the big man back to his department in Shops.

"Meet Matt Reynolds, gang!" Matty went down the line. Askelund, the old man with stooped shoulders who ran a lathe, Martin, Wagner—too many to remember. And finally the man with whom he'd work.

"This is Dion West, Matt. You'll work with him at the start."

Matty froze. Dion West was young, his age, with a familiar looking face. A wide, not too handsome face, with an almost abnormal expanse of forehead and ice-blue eyes set on either side of a thin, narrow nose. A sour-looking face, an unfriendly face, but one that he had seen before. Then Matty saw the withered arm and into his mind flashed the picture of the young Shops man who had issued the razor-handles at the *slit* game the year before. After Olson had left, Matty said quietly: "You were at the *slit* game when Security raided it, weren't you?"

Dion West's pale face was a perfect blank.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Reynolds."

Matty gave him a searching look, wondering why he should deny it, then shrugged his shoulders. "Have it your way, West."

That living period he was promptly indoctrinated into the back-breaking labor of foundry work and the forging and machining of metal parts. In the weeks that followed he came to like the feel of sweat rolling down his back and the pleasure of creation as tools and parts took shape under his hands.

He got along with everybody but Dion West. And Dion West was liked by no one. He was a cold, quiet youth whose crippled arm had turned him into a social misfit. It was almost two years before Matty discovered the human being that lay beneath the silent

exterior.

He was coming home from a *slit* game—as a spectator—and was riding the Walk through the darkened Shops area. He was almost through it and could make out the dark greenness of Hydroponics far ahead when a sudden small noise made him turn and glance back. There was a brief burst of light from one of the machine shops and then darkness again.

Matty felt for the long knife hidden in the folds of his waist cloth, then crept silently back. He quietly tried the locks of the hatch, then suddenly threw it open. West had his back toward the hatch, bent over a work bench. He twisted around awkwardly as the hatch banged open.

"You're working late, aren't you, West?"

"It's not your business, is it?"

"There's laws against it."

"There's laws against everything, Reynolds."

Matty felt irritated, then let curiosity get the better of him.

"What were you doing?"

West shrugged. "You wouldn't be interested."

"Try me."

The cripple stared at him for a minute, then stepped aside. "Take a look if you want."

There was nothing on the bench but a thin wire, held in the opposing jaws of a strength-test machine. A rather simple arrangement, too simple. Then Matty looked at the kilo-pull registered on the machine. It was at its maximum, an impossible pull for the wire to have withstood.

"Where did you get this?"

"I made it—a special alloy." There was a note of pride in West's voice.

Matty was suddenly intensely interested. "You do know a lot about science, don't you? You've done a lot of inventing, haven't you?"

West flushed. "A little. I guess I've got a knack for it."

"I'd like to see more of it," Matty said sincerely.

West hesitated, half refusing to believe that somebody was honestly interested in his work.

"I've got more—at home."

Matty followed him out of the Shops area to the residential compartments. West had somehow managed to bribe the housing authority to let him have a compartment all to himself; a compartment that, Matty discovered later, he shared with his sister.

Working models of inventions almost filled one end of the compartment. There were two that interested Matty the most. One was a heat-gun, looking more like a flash-light, that quickly turned a circle of the compartment bulkhead a cherry red when Matty pointed the gun and pressed the button. It was effective, but the workmanship was crude and it looked like it had been laid aside with little attempt to improve on

it.

The other invention looked like an old-fashioned cross-bow that Matty had seen pictures of. It was ingeniously machined out of West's alloy with springs and wires of the same material that could be tightened to an impossible degree of tension. Unlike the heat-gun, it showed that an immense amount of time and work had been spent on it.

"It can hurtle a metal shaft clean through the bulkhead of this compartment," West said quietly.

"I don't understand," Matty said, puzzled. "Why all the time spent on something so primitive and practically none on the heat-gun?"

Dion West shook his head. "We won't be able to support the technology we have on board once we land, Reynolds. We'll be an expanding society, for one thing, and we probably couldn't find the necessary raw materials for another. And within a few generations the knowledge of how to make a complicated heat-gun would probably be lost. But it'll be hard to forget something simple, like a cross-bow."

Matty thought about it and silently agreed. It was for the same reason that so many of their techniques in working metal and machining in the Shops were primitive. What they did and what they worked with was purposely kept on a primitive level. Once they landed and the long slide towards barbarism started, perhaps they wouldn't slide so far . . .

"I wish I had your ability in science, Dion," Matty said enviously.

West relaxed on the sponge rubber mat in the corner. "I'm not actually interested in science," he said calmly. "I play around with it for lack of anything else to do—and because I'm good at it. But it isn't what I actually want."

Matty looked at him curiously. "Just what is it you want?"

West's face glistened in the soft light from the overhead glow lamp. "I want what everybody else has, Reynolds. I'd like to play games, I'd like to be a good *slit* player, I'd like to be admired, I'd like to be accepted by people, I'd like to know that girls want to sleep with me." The sweat was dripping off his forehead, his face was tense. "I'd like to be so big, so powerful, that people would forget that I'm a damned cripple!"

Matty felt embarrassed.

"You'll never get what you want be feeling sorry for yourself," a voice said.

Matty whirled, his hand flashing towards his long knife.

"It's only my sister, Reynolds," West said dryly.

Karen West, Matty thought, his mind racing. He should have known. She walked in with a sound box under her arm and Matty reflected that any resem-

blance between her and the thin, rather plain looking girl of a few years before was purely accidental. She had filled out, the finely chiseled, somewhat jutting cheekbones had receded so her face was simpler in line and more pensive, and the stringy black hair had thickened and waved until it fell in loose rolls over her shoulders.

She stared at Matty in frank curiosity, then smiled. "I remember you. You're the boy who never claims animals that he's not certain he's hit."

"He's our guest," Dion West explained curtly. "Prepare something to eat."

She looked at Matty and gave the faintest shrug to her shoulders, then moved over to the electric plate and began preparations for a late evening meal. Matty watched her in silence, fascinated by the grace of her movements. When the meal was over, she moved to the far corner of the compartment and softly ran her fingers across the sound box. The wires whispered and a moment later her clear voice was singing the familiar sad song of the *Astra's* voyage through space.

When she had finished, Matty applauded warmly. Her eyes sparkled their thanks and she handed the sound box to him. "You play, don't you?"

He fondled the instrument reluctantly. "How could you tell?"

"I could tell by the look in your eyes when I was playing," she said softly.

Dion West snorted. Matty ignored him and let his fingers stray across the wire strands. Then he suddenly gave the instrument back to her. "Sound boxes are for minstrels and women," he said sharply. "I have no use for them."

He started for the hatch, then suddenly look back at Dion West. He was still reclining on the mat, expressionless eyes looking out of an almost inhumanly intelligent face.

"You gave Jeremiah Paulson the trick razor handle, didn't you?"

The ice-blue eyes didn't even blink. "Yes."

"Why?"

The stooped shoulders shrugged casually. "They never told me what it was for. And they offered Cash for it—a lot of Cash."

"Would you testify to that at a Judging?"

Thin lips curled sarcastically. "You don't honestly think I would live long enough to testify, do you, Reynolds?"

V.

I certainly think it is better to be impetuous than cautious, for fortune is a woman and it is necessary . . . to conquer her by force.
The Prince, Niccolo Machiavelli

THE stars never changed, Matty thought. They blazed and burned beyond the plastic just as harshly as they had eight years before; small pin points of blinding light that to the average eye never moved, never varied. He floated quietly in the darkness, then gradually became aware that he was not alone. There was another shadow inside the blister, obscuring the stars a few yards away.

"The observatory is further aft," Matty said. "It's better for star-gazing than the gun-blisters."

Joseph Smith's voice was easy and quiet in the dark. "I like to watch the stars from here. I have more of a detached viewpoint." He paused. "That small yellow one out there—that's where we're going. We'll be there in a few years."

Matty only half listened, then his mind raced back to the words. Only a few years.

"How many know this besides you?"

"A few. The Planning Board, for one."

The Planning Board. Reba Saylor and Asaph Whitney and Junius Shroeder. And that was all. He filed the information for future reference and turned his attention back to the stars.

"How many planets does it have?"

"An even dozen. Spectroscopic evidence indicates that three will be habitable—if we're lucky."

If we're lucky, Matty thought. But only part of it was luck. When they landed, the rest would lie with the Director.

"You'll be Director in a few hours," the Predict mused. "Management is holding a meeting to nominate Jeremiah for it—in expectation of your failure to show up to claim it."

"I know."

"You know what to do?"

Matty hesitated. "I think so."

The Predict's voice turned business-like. "Have you made any plans for your own protection, Matty? Once you're out in the open, it'll be open season on assassination."

"I'm not worried."

"I'm sorry you feel that way. I was hoping that you would have made plans to protect yourself."

"I can always have bodyguards."

Joseph Smith laughed curtly. "They're just more people whose loyalty you'll have to worry about. The only way you'll save yourself is to get at the root of the trouble."

"How?"

Hesitation. "I could tell you but I'd rather you thought of it yourself."

They floated in silence for a moment, watching the motionless stars outside. "There's a Dion West on board," Matty said suddenly. "He's a scientific—genius."

"I know. I have his record."

"He's also a misfit. A social outcast. Somebody ought to help him."

"You?"

"Maybe."

Joseph Smith sighed. "Your intentions are good—but don't do it."

"Why not?"

"Because he's more valuable to the ship the way he is. You see, if you relieve West of his social frustrations, you also relieve the compulsion that makes him try to excel in things scientific. That isn't always the case, of course, but in this instance you'd gain—if you succeeded—one normal, happy individual. And lose a most talented scientist of the type that we desperately need right now."

"Doesn't West, as an individual, mean anything?"

"The individual never means anything."

Matty digested that in silence.

"How well do you like Karen West?"

Matty stiffened. "That's my personal life."

"As the Director-to-be, you have no personal life."

Reluctantly. "I like her very much."

"I wouldn't advise marrying her."

"That's my business."

"No—it isn't. Marriage is nothing to be entered into lightly. In your case, doubly so. Marriage is too valuable, politically. If you marry now you throw away what could be of great advantage to you in the future."

Matty realized with sudden insight that he hated the Predict. He hated the remorseless logic, the constant denial of self for ship.

"When I'm Director, I'll do as I damn well please."

Coldly. "No, you won't. You're my creation, Matty, just as surely as if I were a sculptor and had carved you out of marble. You owe me your life, you'll owe me your Directorship. You'll do exactly as I say and nothing else. I made you and if necessary, I wouldn't hesitate to break you."

It wasn't primarily a threat; it was a cold recital of fact.

"You're saving me for something. What?"

And then, for the first time, he heard uncertainty.

"I'm not sure."

Matty watched the proceedings over a view screen in the Shops compartment. The screen showed the huge banquet hall crowded with the purple waist-cloths and smocks of Management; Managers and Department Heads and Foremen eating and drinking and waiting for Jeremiah Paulson to be proclaimed Director so they could all pledge faith and fealty to him.

It was pretty much as Matty expected. A pageant that began with solidographs of the death of the old Director and comments about his only son who had disappeared the same period as the death of his father. There was even—as Matty knew there would be—a solidograph of himself at the age of ten. A blond, rather thin, wide-eyed youngster with a sound box

tucked under his arm.

The announcer's voice was unctuous. ". . . *all bereaved with the disappearance of young Mathew Kendrick at the age of ten. It is thought that the boy was murdered by persons still unknown or was the victim of amnesia, though to this period it has been hoped among official circles that he would turn up . . .*"

There was a stir in the crowd in Shops as people edged closer to get a better view of the youngster on the screen.

In the slight stir nobody saw Matty slip away. They had done it perfectly, he thought. Just enough hypocrisy with which to hang themselves . . .

He found an empty washroom near the banquet compartment and quickly slipped out of his waist cloth of Shops red and yellow and tied one of purple loosely about his waist. To dye his hair back to its original yellow took but a moment. His eye-prints had already been altered back by the Predict's doctor and enforced diet had thinned him down to what an eighteen year old Mathew Kendrick could be expected to look like. He surveyed himself in the three-D reflecting mirror and was satisfied with the results. He looked the part, now he had only to act it.

He eased himself into the rear of the banquet compartment and waited. Reba and Junius shared the head table with Jeremiah and his sister. Matty watched them closely. Reba, thin faced and shrewd-eyed, almost glowing with the knowledge that eight years of plotting were about to pay off. Junius, fat and wattle-faced, almost dozing under the steady barrage of speeches and comments. Julia Paulson, a little too fleshy, a little uncomfortable, shy and somewhat frightened. There had been, Matty reflected honestly, nothing but good to be said about Jeremiah's younger sister. A shy, retiring personality, quiet and unassuming—and dull.

His attention switched to his cousin. Jeremiah, handsome, athletic, professionally friendly—with just a trace of weakness showing in a somewhat too-small chin and watery brown eyes. Not too intelligent—probably because with Reba around, he didn't need to be.

Jeremiah was, Matty decided coldly and without prejudice to himself, not fit to be Director.

The speeches wore on and then the climactic moment came. Reba got to her feet and motioned for absolute silence. This was the dramatic moment, the moment that had colonists all over the *Astra* holding their breath while they drank in the pageantry.

"To all the *Astra*—I give you your new Director, Jeremiah Paulson!"

Between the end of any dramatic statement and the thunder of applause that follows, there is the briefest, tiniest moment of abso-

lute silence. Matty took advantage of it, using a low pitched voice but one with enough volume to fill the entire compartment.

"Since when can you give away a hereditary Directorship, Reba, when the inheritor is still alive?"

Reba didn't hear and the thunder of applause started at the far ends of the compartment. But those around Matty stared at him and suddenly grew silent. The silence slowly spread throughout the compartment and the applause slackened. Matty could sense the colonists in the corridors outside and throughout the *Astra* frown and look questioningly at each other. It was what he wanted, what he needed—an audience of colonists that would be watching every move that was made.

Reba seemed puzzled by the deepening, embarrassing silence, then her sharp eyes picked out Matty solemnly approaching down one of the aisles. Her face mirrored a moment of shocked surprise, then her agile mind quickly sized up the situation.

"Security—seize that imposter!"

The Security men stationed around the bulkheads hesitated. The man was a dead ringer for what Kendrick would look like at this age and what was far more important, he *acted* like he was Kendrick. And if they laid hands on him . . .

Matty walked up the stairs to the platform and casually took the cushioned chair that Jeremiah had been about to sit in, as part of the pageantry. Jeremiah reddened, Reba grew pale.

"Nobody would be fool enough to act as an imposter," Matty said evenly. "Everybody knows it would mean the public strangler."

Reba's eyes were narrow slits. "Why should we believe you?"

"My eye-prints match, so do the skeletal x-rays."

"They can be forged."

Matty helped himself to a small bunch of grapes from the banquet table and leaned back in the chair.

"Memories can't, Reba—do you want to try me?"

The question hung there. Matty pushed his luck and stared at her critically. "You were younger the last time I saw you, Reba. Somewhat prettier and a good deal more respectful. I remember at the time you said 'Hail the Director-to-be!' Or have you forgotten?"

"If you really are Kendrick," Reba asked in a silken voice, "what happened to you, why did you disappear?"

It was one of the questions that Matty hoped she would ask. He turned slightly so he was facing the view-screen operator; his words, he knew, would reach the entire ship.

"I wanted to get to know the colonists," he said slowly and distinctly. "I wanted to live among them because I knew, when I became Director, that I would be their Director as well as Director

of the Executives. I've lived with the Reynolds family in Hydroponics"—he had a sudden vision of Alice Reynolds' awestruck face—"and I've worked with the men in Shops. I *know* them—far better than I would have if I had been raised in the Management."

It was a propaganda statement—he knew it and knew that Reba was aware of it, but that would in no way diminish its effectiveness.

Reba was almost strangling on her suddenly fading hopes, realizing her error in allowing the statement to be broadcast. She recovered her poise and gave an abrupt signal to the view-screen operator to cut the broadcast. The cut-broadcast could be laid to "technical difficulties" later on.

When she was certain she was off the screens, she gave an imperceptible nod to Jeremiah. Two Executives jerked Matty suddenly to his feet while Jeremiah hastily pulled his arms behind him and tied them with a napkin. Matty offered no resistance.

"Security!"

The men who lined the bulkheads were up on the stage now, their initial hesitation forgotten.

"How old are you, Reba?"

It was a loud question so all those in the compartment could hear. Fear suddenly showed on Reba's face. Out of the corner of his eye Matty could see the view screen operator, sensing what was coming, silently flick the machine back on.

"Why don't you tell them, Reba?"

There were cries from the audience now, purple-clothed old men and women were staring at Reba in sudden suspicion.

"You carry your age well," Matty continued. "But the records show that you're sixty-one!"

There was pandemonium in the audience now. Old men and women who had drawn close to their sixtieth birthday and automatic euthanasia were screaming curses and fighting with the Security guards, furiously trying to reach the platform and the woman who had defied the age edicts.

"It's a lie!" Reba screamed.

Matty smiled. She was right. It was an outright lie. But it was a lie that would be easily believed and almost impossible to deny, particularly now.

"It doesn't matter," Matty said loudly and distinctly. "I think it's time to tell them now."

The uproar below him suddenly quieted. There were cries of *"Tell what?"* Somebody slashed the cloth that bound his arms and Matty raised them overhead in a sign of triumph.

"The Planning Board hasn't seen fit to tell you," he said, "but we make planet-fall in two years!"

A dead silence. The minds of the younger Executives were filled with nothing but thoughts of the adventure to come. But older people counted on their fingers and

then groaned inwardly. Two years more would cheat them of ten or twenty. They would be sixty before they landed, but once landed there would be no need to limit the population . . .

"I think," Matty continued quietly, "that there is no further reason to keep the euthanasia laws. We will need every colonist we can muster, and we will have desperate need for those among us who are older and more experienced . . ."

The older Executives suddenly shouted and cried with laughter, the older colonists rioted in the corridors.

It gradually quieted down. Matty looked around, then found the one face he wanted to see.

"I have still to be confirmed as your Director," he said slowly.

A man stood up in the crowd and Matty knew that he had won.

"As Acting Director," Seth said loudly, "I acknowledge you as the Director of the *Astra!*"

There was nothing hypocritical about it, Matty thought. Of all the words he had ever heard spoken, these were by far the most sincere. And they stemmed from the one fact that he had been sure of when he had slipped into the banquet compartment an hour before.

Seth was fifty-nine years old.

VI.

The actions of a successful ruler are of three types, Junius. There are the things he can *do, which are few. There are the things he* cannot *do, which are many. And then there are the things he* must *do, and they are legion.*

Dialogues of Lykos

THERE was one prime characteristic of being Director, Matty discovered. And that was the fact that he was busy. There were appointments to be made, official functions to attend, and most important of all—there was the re-education program that the colonists were currently going through preparatory to planet landing. There were regular classes to be scheduled and the showing of solidograph films . . .

His second in command, a young Executive named Uriah, brought him the list of solidographs to be shown. Matty ran his eye down the sheet, then picked out three for the first program. *Farming in Solids, Hunting and Fishing,* and *First Aid.*

Uriah frowned. "Why the last?"

"Because they'll need to know it," Matty said bluntly. "On board the *Astra,* wherever you are, you're only a short distance from an aid station. Once landed, a colonist may be miles away from professional help." He scooted the list back across the desk. "Anything

else?"

Uriah bit his lip. "I probably shouldn't say this . . ."

"If you shouldn't, then don't. If you should, then it must be important and I ought to know it. What is it?"

"There's been some talk . . ." Uriah started, having difficulty finding the words.

"About what?"

Hastily. "Nothing more than rumors. That your health isn't too good and it might be better if the Directorship were in other hands."

Matty started to laugh, and then abruptly fell silent. He was in excellent health but how many people actually saw him each day and could verify it? A few Executives and that was all. And he could almost guess the lines the rumors would take. Frail to begin with as a child, and now the strain and overwork of Director . . .

"Whose hands?"

Uriah looked uncomfortable.

"Jeremiah Paulson's."

"Thanks for telling me. On your way out, tell Alvah Hendron to come in." He stopped the young Executive at the hatch. "One thing more, Uriah. Don't hesitate to tell me things of that nature that you think are important. Don't forget that if I go down, you'll be right there with me. You've been far too closely associated with me to escape."

Uriah paled, nodded, and disappeared.

It was an hour before Alvah Hendron came in. Matty let him stand for a few minutes while he studied him. Hendron was in his forties, well fed, just a trifle plump, and with a somewhat superior air about him. Finally, Matty told him the essence of what he had just heard, neglecting to mention the name of his informant.

Hendron laughed. "Nothing to it, nothing at all. If there was anything to back it up, Security would have discovered it."

Matty wasn't quite so sure.

"You have any suggestions on how to quiet the rumors?"

Hendron looked nettled. "Certainly. What about an inspection tour of the ship? You're due to make one in the near future anyway; a lot of colonists could see you and make up their own minds."

"What time do you recommend?"

"The next living period would be as good as any."

Matty mentally rearranged his schedule and agreed.

The small compartments back near the after tubes were dark and practically deserted.

"This is a long way back, Hendron."

Hendron smiled, somewhat uneasily. "Nobody's been back here for a long time; that's why I thought it would be a good place to begin."

There was a turn in the passageway and Matty stopped short.

A small group of Executives blocked the corridor a few short yards ahead. Reba Saylor, hawk-faced and imperious as always, Junius Shroeder, looking fat and somewhat unhappy, and, as usual, among a backdrop of more minor figures, Jeremiah Paulson, fierce and determined looking — the handsome figurehead of the revolutionary movement.

Reba bowed slightly. "Hail the new Director!"

Matty grasped the situation in an instant. Alvah Hendron, naturally, had been in on it. And he, fool that he was, had fallen for it. And he had gone off with Hendron alone, disregarding the Predict's warning of some time ago that once he became Director, it would be open season on assassinations. Once the colonists became used to his Directorship, it would be increasingly difficult to remove him. But now, while his administration and its policies were still in a state of flux . . .

He started to back down the passageway . . .

Jeremiah rasped: "I wouldn't Kendrick."

One of the young Executives made a movement and Matty found himself staring at something he had seen once before; a glistening cross-bow machined from shiny metal. Dion West's invention had been stolen from him or, more likely, West himself had sold it. He was unstable, neurotic, frustrated—it had probably taken very little to buy his brains and soul.

"What do you want?"

"My Directorship," Jeremiah said slowly. "The one I was raised for."

"You should have done better for foster-parents than Reba and Junius. Anybody else would have told you it is hereditary."

"You deserted it!"

Matty grinned. "I had to. It was getting to be unhealthy." He paused. "What do you intend to do?"

Reba smiled. "Surely you can guess, Kendrick. And remember that we're the only witnesses."

Matty kept looking at his cousin. "You know the penalties for murder, Jeremiah. It's not too late to change your mind. You're well-liked, you're a valuable man, we'll need you when we land. And once landed, there will be important positions open."

He threw out the bait and waited for Jeremiah to take it. The handsome, rugged face with the weak chin wavered a moment.

"He doesn't mean it!" Reba snarled. "He's trying to fool you!"

It was no use, Matty thought quickly. Reba's will was Jeremiah's backbone. He suddenly whirled, pinioned Hendron's arms behind him, and thrust the man in front as a shield. Then he backed down the corridor, still keeping his unwilling victim in front of him.

Reba gave a signal and the

young Executive with the crossbow pulled back on the wire gut.

Hendron squirmed. *"Don't . . ."*

"You've been a fool, Alvah," Reba said quietly.

There was the musical *twang* of the wire and Hendron quietly sagged in Matty's arms, a bloody froth at his chest. Matty dropped the body and leaped around the corner. There was a *whirr* behind him and a metal shaft buried itself in the opposing bulkhead.

He dove for a through shaft, then violently twisted to one side at a sudden breath of air that marked the near-miss of a metal arrow. There was no escape down below so he would have to go *up.* He wadded up his purple waist cloth and threw it into the shaft; in the dark shaft it would be difficult to tell the difference between it and a person. An arrow sped up the shaft, tearing through the loose cloth, then the cloth was below the next level and the missiles were aimed downward.

Matty leaped diagonally across the open shaft, upwards, towards the next level. His sweaty hands touched the grips, held, and then he was pulling himself up. Over the edge—and a thin metal shaft sheared through the fleshy part of his thigh.

He winced with pain and the sudden gout of blood, then hobbled swiftly down the level, doing his best to favor the one leg. He could hear pursuit on the level below; it wouldn't be a moment before they searched the next level up.

The passageway narrowed and then came to a dead end except for a small hatch that gave access to the tubes—a hatch that now would open on the cold and vacuum of space. There was an air vent a few feet overhead. The screen that covered it was not bolted in place but pushed upward in a frame. He leaped for it and pushed upward with the palms of his hands. It buckled and moved an inch. He pushed it a few more inches. On the third leap he managed to hang on with one hand in the opening and work on the screen with the other.

Far down the corridor there was the muffled sound of bare feet slapping on metal. He worked frantically at the screen. He got it all the way up, worked his legs in the opening, then hung for a brief instant on the black inside of the chute. The screen slid down on the outside and banged on his knuckles. He hung there and tried to feel for a ledge or deck beneath him. There was nothing but empty space. Then a sudden cry from the passageway made him jerk his fingers loose.

It was like falling in a through shaft, only a through shaft that was pitch black and thick with dust. There were no hand holds along the sides and no way to brake himself on the smooth, metal surface. It would end at the center of the *Astra,* he thought.

Straight down, with the knife edges of fan blades or a thick mesh screen at the bottom.

There was a sudden pressure of metal against his left side and he knew with a sudden hope that the air vent was curving out towards another outlet. He spread his legs and arms and tried to grip the sides of the shaft. Then his sweating, bloody body hit a vent screen, tore it from its frame, and he was catapulted into a Shops storeroom.

He lay there for a moment, feeling sick and dizzy, the warm blood from his torn thigh muscles trickling down his leg. He'd have to get to an aid station, he thought thickly.

And then he'd have to do something about Reba.

Seth showed his age, even more than he had at the Management banquet. The man was still spare, still tall, but shrunken and a little waxy. His hair was white and the thin, aquiline nose seemed thinner and more prominent than ever. The life in Seth's spare frame, Matty thought, had receded like a tide, leaving two small pools behind in the man's sharp eyes.

"With Alvah Hendron's murder, it becomes necessary to appoint a new Security head. You're it, Seth."

His uncle looked at him shrewdly. "Why choose me? How can you be so sure that I'll remain loyal?"

"I haven't the faintest doubt as to your loyalty," Matty said calmly. "Now, or at any time in the future. You see, your life rests quite securely in the palm of my hand. Ever since the Reorganization you're hardly what I would call the most popular man on board. I'm quite sure that there are several hundred colonists who would volunteer for the duties of public strangler—as long as you stood accused. And any panel would only be too happy to condemn you. You follow me?"

Seth managed the slight bow of acknowledgement without his eyes betraying any feelings whatsoever.

"I have something in mind," Matty continued, "that I want acted on right away."

Seth kept his mask of impassivity. "Yes?"

"I don't think it's any secret," Matty said slowly, "that some of the Executives on board would be happier if I were eliminated from the scheme of things. They've had their chance and failed. Now I think it's my turn. I want Security to find evidence—evidence that I can use at a Judging."

"You can testify yourself — that's all that's necessary."

Matty shook his head. "I don't want to seem like a dictator. I want evidence in writing, something you can point to as exhibits A and B."

Seth digested this in silence,

then: "Who did you have in mind?"

Matty handed him a list. "You know the names. Reba Saylor, Junius Shroeder, Nahum Kessler, Jeremiah Paulson . . . they're all down there."

Seth fingered the list hesitantly, then looked at Matty somewhat critically. "I don't like to give advice but these people are hardly stupid enough to leave evidence behind." His tone of voice belied his words and indicated that he wasn't at all adverse to giving advice, particularly to his nephew.

Matty leaned back in his chair and casually studied his uncle. Like so many old men, Seth was unwilling to admit that time had passed, that the ten year old milk-sop he had once planned to kill so long ago was neither ten years old nor a milk-sop now.

"I didn't ask for your advice, Seth."

"Jeremiah is too popular among the colonists; it will make you enemies."

"I'm not concerned."

Hesitation, then growing stubbornness. "Evidence will be hard to find."

Matty laughed.

"Finding evidence is your problem, Seth. I don't care whether it actually exists or whether you have to buy it, whether you find it or whether you plant it. Such minor difficulties shouldn't bother a man with your background and abilities. Just so long as the evidence you present holds up at a Judging, that's all that matters."

Seth bowed much lower this time and when he straightened up his face looked even older than when he had come in.

"You've changed, Kendrick."

"If I have," Matty said slowly, "it's because I had to."

After Seth had left, Matty took a crumpled piece of paper from his desk and spread it out and reread the note he had received at the start of that living period.

To Mathew Kendrick:

Niccolo Machiavelli once said that a man who wished to make a profession of goodness in everything would come to grief among so many who were not good. That it was necessary for a prince who wished to maintain himself to learn how not to be good, and to use this knowledge when necessary. It's necessary. There is no doubt in my mind if you do not eliminate Reba, she will eliminate you.

Joseph Smith

The Judgings were a popular success. Seth had done a good job. He had planted evidence, he had bought witnesses, he had done a thorough job of packing the panel with colonists who had been hurt by the defendants in the past. Crowds of colonists came to watch, bringing their lunches and dragging their children. It was covered on the ship's view screens and regular reports of the proceedings

were posted on all bulletin boards.

Matty attended one of the Judgings, sitting far back in the compartment. It sickened him. The seemingly endless parade of bought and paid for witnesses, the trumped up stories of perjury, the avid lust of the audience waiting for the penalty they knew would be extracted . . .

And the defendants themselves. Reba Saylor, an old and cringing woman, afraid of the Panel, afraid of the court, afraid for her life. Junius Shroeder, fat and trembling, sweating in the docks . . .

One by one they went to the public strangler, with the exception of Jeremiah. Jeremiah was too popular, too handsome, to be killed. He was acquited and Matty reflected that it would have been better to pardon him and to have made an attempt to win him over. As it was, he would always be a focal point of opposition.

And then it was Dion West's turn. He calmly told the panel his own part in the actual plot. Yes, he had sold cross-bows to an agent of Reba Saylor's. Didn't he know that weapons were prohibited on board? Yes, he had known it. Then why had he done it? For so many of the aluminum money disks.

And for the self importance it would bring him, Matty thought grimly. For the knowledge that he had at least tried to revolt against a society that had refused to accept him.

The panel suspended judgment for one period and in the interim, Matty received a visitor in the Director's quarters, the spacious compartment with the view screens of the stars set in the bulkheads.

She seemed frail and thin, paler than he could remember, and the cheek bones in her face jutted out as they had when she had been a child. But her face was still the face he dreamed about.

"I came to see about Dion."

"It's out of my hands."

"You're the Director. You can do anything you want."

That's what he had told the Predict once, he thought. When he became Director he would do as he damned well pleased.

"Don't you think it would be rather foolish if I did, Karen? He's amoral, he's not a stable personality. His mind is for sale to the highest bidder. Admitted he's a genius but I'm not so sure we can afford his type of genius."

"I would make him promise. I would watch him."

Faintly amused. "For the rest of his life?"

She stood up and walked over to the view screen, staring out at the blazing stars.

"I've always wondered what people would be like if they had power. All the power they wanted —the power of life and death. Now I know. And I wish I didn't."

He spun her around so she was facing him.

"Do you think I like being Director?"

"Don't you?"

"No—I don't. I'm free game for anybody on board — like your brother—who doesn't happen to like the color of my waist cloth. I have all of the worries and none of the benefits of life. I can't do what I want—I never have—because I have to do what I think is best for the ship. Like power? I only wish that somebody else had it, that somebody else had to do the job!"

His fingers dug into her arms for a moment more, then he let her go and turned away.

She touched him on the shoulder for a moment, the soft coolness of her hands making his flesh ache.

"I'm sorry." She started for the hatch.

"I can give him a Director's pardon," Matty said suddenly. "He didn't know what he was doing."

She turned. "You don't need to. And I couldn't—guarantee him."

"That's all right. We need him and a pardon will make the Director look magnanimous." He smiled crookedly. "And it's for the good of the ship."

VII.

Not what we would, but what we must.
The Country Life, Richard Henry Stoddard

MATTY lay on his foam rubber mat, still half asleep. Something was wrong, something . . . He snapped wide awake. The clangor of the emergency alarm filled the compartment. A drill, he thought—but there were no drills scheduled. He counted the peals of the bell, then raced through the adjoining compartment and up the ladder to the huge control cabin. Hulled, the *Astra* had been hulled!

Sleepy-eyed technicians were already manning their posts, barking out orders to the repair parties in different sections of the ship. Matty took his place at the central control board and quickly plugged in the circuits that connected him with the different nerve centers of the vessel. The light from Engineers was flashing impatiently, and he flicked the switch sharply up.

"Meteor hulling on the twenty-fifth level. Level evacuated, hatches automatically secured in hold fourteen. Air pressure zero. Spare plates being brought up from the central storeroom."

"Serious?"

The voice at the other end was noncommital. *"Can't tell extent of physical damage. There's been rumors that a slit game was going on in the hold. Don't know how many were there."*

Somebody in the compartment said: "My God, my son might have been there!"

Matty swore quietly over the circuit. "I'll check."

He plugged into Personnel.

"Hulling on the twenty-fifth level. Possibility of *slit* game players and spectators being sealed off. Want a personnel check within an hour."

"Right!"

Uriah, his second in command, was now manning the other half of the board. Matty turned to him. "Take over. I'm going up."

He caught an up through shaft and a moment later clutched the hand rails at the twenty-fifth level and swung out of the shaft. The level was confusion. Rescue workers and technicians fought with the mob of colonists who filled the passageway.

Matty struggled viciously to get through, then collared an almost helpless man in the blue waist cloth of Security.

"Who are these people and why aren't they at their drill posts?"

The man wiped a sweating brow, the drops flying off and floating through the gravity-less level. "They think their kids were up here for the *slit* game; probably couldn't locate them right away and came up."

All the colonists on board the *Astra* would end up jammed in the one small passageway, Matty thought, if something wasn't done.

"Get your reserves!" Matty bawled over the noise in the corridor. "Clear these people out of here and post a cordon at the shaft! All colonists who desert their emergency posts will draw a mandatory death penalty—see that it's publicized!"

It was moments before Security reserves swarmed into the passageway, ousted the distraught colonists, and blocked off the corridor. Down at the other end of the passageway, a group of men were clustered about the hatch. It had already been cut into and a temporary air-lock installed. The Boss in charge was Olson, Matty's old foreman in the Shops.

"How's it look?"

"How the hell do you think?" Olson snarled, then recognized Matty and brought up his arm in sharp salute. "We're doing the best we can, sir. As soon as the lock is in position, we'll send a man in with plates and a welding torch."

"Who's going in?"

"Warren—one of the Engineers. He's handled this in drills."

The men finished welding in the air-lock and a moment later a man in a bulky suit came through the cordon at the end of the passageway. His kit of tools was buckled to his side; the helmet he wore was a space-welding helmet, opaque except for the small colored strip through which he looked.

His voice was muffled. "What's the pressure?"

Olson shook his head. "There ain't none. If your suit gives, that'll be it."

The bulky figure nodded. Matty couldn't see the face but he imagined the lines of strain that were written on it. There hadn't been a hulling since the Trip began and the suits had never been used. They had been frequently tested but there was always the chance that the testers, assuming that since they hadn't been used chances were they never would be, had been careless. And if they had, then Warren would face the chance of a blow-up in the after compartment.

The figure huddled in the airlock and the hatch was slammed shut. There was silence while the air-pressure gage fell to zero, then the lights glimmered in the signal that meant Warren was through the other half of the lock and in the compartment.

The built in radio pick-up and

amplifier on the bulkhead broadcast Warren's comments while he was on the inside.

"Bad. Bigger than I thought—and the plates around it are buckled. Send in the welding outfit and the largest of the plates."

They were fed in through the air lock and then there was silence as Warren went to work. The minutes passed and no word from inside. The men in the repair crew began to look at each other with worried expressions on their faces. If something had happened to Warren . . .

Olson ordered another suit brought up. "If Warren doesn't come out within twenty minutes, I'll go in after him."

The bulkhead amplifier suddenly hummed.

"It's patched—air tight as far as I can make it. I'm inspecting for further leaks." There was a long silence and suddenly the amplifier broke in again. Even with the muffled tones, Matty could sense the horror that lay underneath. *"I'm in hold fourteen. People here—dead—must be close to a hundred. I'll get the names before you open up the hatch. Pretty much of a mess but heat and air would make it worse."* He hesitated a moment and Matty could imagine he was searching the bodies for their ident chains. *"Arnold Sampson, Marcia Dawdet, Caleb Olson . . ."*

The shops foreman suddenly groaned and held his head in his hands. Matty remembered his son — a half-grown a little too smart and a little too wild for his own good. Rumor had it that he had been a champion in the sub-rosa *slit* tournaments held on the upper levels.

The list of dead droned on and a man from Personnel started taking down the names. There was utter silence in the passageway as the repair crew tried to catch the names as they were read. Occasionally one of them would groan.

The voice finally ceased and a glance at the pressure gage told Matty that Warren was coming out. The outer air-lock hatch clanged open and then the figure of Warren was in the passageway and anxious hands were helping him off with his suit. When the helmet was off the repair crew and the cordon of Security broke into cheers.

"Jere! Jere Paulson!"

Jeremiah stood there for a moment, the sweat rolling down his hard-hewn face, then trurned to Matty. "Warren was sick; he couldn't make it up."

There were a hundred other men who could have taken Warren's place, Matty thought. A hundred others who would have volunteered. But Jeremiah had to show up. From honest motives or because it was a ready-made opportunity to be a hero? Matty didn't know and it didn't matter. Jeremiah was beyond all laws, beyond all authority now. He had become

a public hero.

"Congratulations," Matty said dryly.

The moon hung low over the hill and the wind from the west was soft and warm. It was early evening, the stars just beginning to brighten in the sky. Matty was lying on the grass in a low meadow, grass that was sweet and smelled heavy with clover. Behind him the woods stretched away into shadows that were black and almost threatening. The only sound was that of the crickets and the quiet noises of small animals moving about in the brush. And of Karen playing the sound box . . .

She was seated against the tree a few yards away, on the top of a slight rise. Matty could see her outline against the darkening sky, an outline that showed the tilt of her head and the mass of curls at her neck and the thrust of her firm breasts against the stars.

She finished the tune and laid the sound box aside.

"I wish the moon were higher," she said.

Matty felt around in the grass by his side and located the dial. He gave it a twist. The night perceptibly darkened, the stars blazed, and the moon obligingly leaped higher in the night sky.

"How's that?"

"Fine."

They sat in silence for a while, listening to the sounds around them. Finally Karen said: "Do you think the world we land on will be anything like this one?"

"I don't know. It might be." He laughed in the darkness. "I don't think the moon will be quite as obliging—if there is one."

"There might be more than one. There might be two or three—a whole dozen of them. Think how confusing the world would be for lovers then!"

"You mean like saying 'I'll meet you when the moon is full' and they pick different moons?"

"Something like that."

The conversation died. Matty searched in his mind for the means of telling her what he had to, but could find no way of doing it. And—very slowly—the fact that they were alone and would not be disturbed was driving the importance of it from his mind.

"What will be the first things we'll have to do when we land, Matty?"

He stirred. "Set up a stockade of some kind against whatever life there may be on this planet. Start farming immediately. Build shelters against the weather. That sort of thing."

"Can't we live in the ship?"

"We could," he admitted. "But I don't think you'd want to. We've been cooped up, as a race, for too long. It'd be too wonderful to live under the open sky and stars once more. I suppose it would be a lot like this compartment here—but the grass would be real, the ani-

mals wouldn't be robots, and there wouldn't be bulkheads just behind the forest or over the hill."

"I don't know if I'd like it or not," she said slowly. "And I think a lot of people have gotten used to living on board. I think you might find it hard to get them to change."

She was standing against the tree, leaning back against it — a mere shadow in the night.

He walked over to where she stood. He suddenly wanted her in a way that made his very bones ache. He put his hands on her thin waist.

"Why did you ask me to come here, Matty?"

His hands fell away. "Can't you guess?"

"You wanted to tell me something, didn't you? Something unpleasant."

He sat on a boulder on the hill's crest. "All right," he said harshly. "You've got a right to know. I'm in a struggle to hold the Directorship, Karen. I may not succeed."

"Jeremiah?"

He nodded. "Jeremiah. He's well-liked — he's worked hard enough at it. And he's more capable than I thought. And there's still the opinion that Jeremiah was somehow cheated out of the Directorship; that by disappearing when I was young, I automatically relinquished all claim to it." He paused. "And there's some talk of making the Directorship an elected office."

"Would that be bad?"

"Some years from now, after we've landed and settled down, it might not. It would now."

"Why?"

"Because," he said simply, "I know the reason for the ship, the purpose for the Trip. I'll see that it's carried out—I couldn't do anything else. But I'm not at all sure that somebody else would do the same. Reba would have thought only of herself. So would Jeremiah, I'm afraid. He's a brave man, a capable man — but what has that to do with it. I *know* what I will do; I'm not at all sure what he would do."

"The indispensable man, Matty?"

"Maybe."

It was getting colder in the compartment; the small animal noises quieted.

"You've changed," Karen mused. "I remember when I first met you in this compartment. You were a young boy and so different then. I think—at least a part of you—is the same person. But it's in the bottom of a big pit where the bulkheads are duty and purpose and Joseph Smith." She paused. "What did you want to tell me?"

Matty took a breath. "I can't kill Jeremiah, I can't fight him. In a way, I'll have to join him." He felt like he was tearing himself to small shreds. "He has a sister named Julia. I'm going to marry her."

Silence.

"Well, aren't you going to say

something? You've got a right to. Go ahead, say what you're thinking!"

"I can't say anything, Matty. I feel too sorry for you."

Then he was alone on the artificial hill, with only the synthetic moon and stars for company.

VIII.

And here were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree,
And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery
Kubla Khan, E. T. Coleridge

THE green, white flecked globe swung slowly beneath them—a thousand miles below. Matty watched it in the view screen, searching for the speck that was the research rocket. There was a tiny flare of light on the screen and he bent closer to watch it. He couldn't be mistaken—there was a tiny light moving from the globe below to the *Astra* high up in the stratosphere.

A few moments later there was a clang against the metal deck in the vast hold. Matty watched over the view screen in the control cabin. The deck split down the middle and silently folded downward. The small research rocket rose slowly into view balancing delicately on its bottom jets, then the deck folded back into place, the jets splashed red against the metal for an instant, and the rocket was safely housed.

Olson and Murphy, a young and promising colonist Matty had seen fit to elevate to the Management, came directly to the cabin.

"It's perfect!" Olson said, his eyes sparkling with excitement. "If Earth was anything like this, it must have been paradise. Warm—a little over eighty fahrenheit at the landing site—composition of air almost the same as what we've been used to, a little high on the oxygen."

"Let's see the report sheet."

Olson handed it over and Matty scanned it quickly. The biologists had okayed the world—with reservations. "It's about right," he said slowly. "Everything that should be there is." He looked over at Murphy. "Any life?"

The thin, bespectacled Executive, was as enthusiastic as Olson. "All kinds of vegetation. Animal life—the planet is teeming—but no signs of intelligent life that we could see, and we circled the globe an even dozen times. No cities, no villages, no signs of industrial activity."

"That doesn't mean there isn't any," Matty said thoughtfully. "There could be cities beneath the seas for all we know."

He took another look at the re-

port sheet, then turned to his second in command. "What do you think, Uriah?"

Uriah shrugged, trying to mask his eagerness. "There's no sense in waiting; we might as well send down the landing parties now as ever."

Matty punched the button that connected him to Diet. "Send up ten gallons of coffee and sandwiches to Central Control." Then he flipped the switch that put him out over all the *Astra's* speakers. *"All hands—Landing Stations!"*

It was going to be a long grind, he thought. The five thousand colonists would have to be ferried down by the research rocket and the lifeboats, and then the equipment and supplies. The *Astra* itself could never take a planet landing; its own vast bulk would crush it.

They were the last to go down in the lifeboats, leaving only a skeleton crew behind. Matty nervously watched through the plastic port. Far below, he caught glimpses of the rushing planet as the clouds moved slowly across it, hiding it for a moment and then revealing a glimpse of blue and green that might have been sea and land but for which they were still too high up to tell.

The clouds came steadily closer and then they were sinking down through billows of white. The white clouds seemed almost blinding as they drifted past the port. They gave Matty a peculiar feeling—he had been used to the quiet blackness of space, broken only by the blazing stars. The drifting shreds of white cleared away and they were over what seemed to be a rolling, blue sea; from their height the waves looked like small ripples.

The moved over the sea and approached a large land mass in the distance. The land came closer—they were flying over a smooth, broad beach against which the waves of the blue sea washed. They moved inland, settling closer to the land. There was vegetation now—stately forests and green meadows and valleys carpeted with purple flowers.

The lifeboat dipped, dropped closer to the *Astra's* temporary camp, and settled slowly towards the edge of the clearing. The throbbing sounds of the rockets died.

The Trip was over.

The following day, Matty and Olson took the small life-boat for a planetary survey. Uriah was left in charge, along with Murphy, to start the building of a more permanent small village.

The pilot — a young Engineer named Silas Pollard—guided the rocket over a small grove of trees, then steadily gained altitude. Olson sat close to the ports, enthusiastically watching the scenery they passed over.

"We couldn't have picked a better planet, Matt. It's perfect!"

"It looks pretty good," Matty

mused, reserving most of his opinion. "We probably won't be able to appreciate it for a year or so, though. We've got a lot of work to do. We'll have to start farming, locate metals, things like that."

Olson only half heard him. "Sure, it'll be a lot of work. But my God, Matt, what a world!"

It was a paradise, Matty silently agreed. It was far more than they had any right to expect. He moved closer to the port and looked out.

The small valley near which they had originally landed was a fair sample of the entire planet. Lush, almost semi-tropical vegetation that would signify a young planet—but the mountains were dulled and blunted and the valleys were filled which would mean an old one. But that was a problem for the geologists.

They passed over rivers and low mountains and across continents and oceans. They passed through showers but no storms, through gentle drifts of snow in the northern reaches of the land but through no blizzards. Even slight variations in climate would seem drastic to the colonists, used to the static atmosphere control on board the *Astra*, Matty thought, but they had seen nothing to match the solidographs showing the changes of weather back on Earth.

They spent the first night sleeping in the open on the grass in the lee of the lifeboat. The night was warm and mild and the turf was soft and spongy; Matty fell asleep almost at once.

"Matt!"

He jerked awake. Olson was shaking him by the shoulder.

"What's wrong?"

"Listen!"

He strained his ears. There was a small, crunching sound not more than a dozen yards away, to his left.

"It's probably nothing," he whispered uneasily. "Night noises, like the kind they used to have in the Training Room."

"I'll bet it isn't," Olson said slowly. His big face was damp with sweat. "Probably some . . . carnivore."

Pollard was awake now. "Just a minute."

Matty could hear the pilot feeling around in the dark, then there was a brilliant flare of light as the young Engineer found the portable sudden-flash. Their carnivore squatted near a small bush. He was a small, gray animal, not more than two feet high with saucer-like nocturnal eyes that blinked, frightened, in the glare of the light. Little bits of turf and bush shoots hung from a small, bow-like mouth.

Matty laughed. "There's your man-eater, Olson!"

"Well — it coulda been," the foreman mumbled, red-faced.

Matty lay back on the turf. "No," he said sleepily, "it's not that kind of a world. It's a friendly world."

And then, for no reason at all, he wondered if it was too friendly.

They stayed out a week completing a rough survey of the world and getting the feel of the geography, then flew back to the colonist camp. It had moved nearer to the ocean's edge, a collection of nondescript tents and plastic sided housing cubes.

The lifeboat grounded and Matty got out. Uriah wasn't there to meet him. Neither was anybody else. He walked down to the camp and looked around. There were plastic enclosed working rooms set up for Shop machinery—but nobody was running the machines. There was no power, there were no stockades. People were working at small household tasks but there was a certain lassitude in their actions.

A few of the passing colonists nodded respectfully and Matty stopped one of them. "Where's the Executive Uriah?"

The man shrugged. "Don't know, sir. Maybe down at the beach."

He walked down to the strip of white sand and watched the bathers. He located Uriah and his family splashing in the surf and caught the young man's eye. Uriah hastened over.

"There isn't much being done, is there?" Matty commented mildly.

Uriah shrugged. "People have been cooped up a long time, Matt. You can't blame them if they want to relax for a few days."

"There's no farming," Matty said, more concerned. "With an expanding population we can't expect the hydroponics tubs to supply us forever."

Uriah grinned. "That's the beauty of it. We won't have to plant much. It grows wild around here—the trees are loaded, even the grass is edible. We ran tests on some of the wild vegetables in this area and it's just as nourishing as what we grow in Hydroponics, some of it even more so."

Matty relaxed. That had been his biggest worry.

"We should stick to our schedule," he said, only slightly worried. "We'll fall behind."

"We're a little late on it," Uriah admitted. His voice grew more confident. "We'll get back to it in about a week."

But they didn't get back to the schedule that week. Nor that month. In six weeks, the schedule was forgotten.

It was early morning, the sun had just risen and the colonists were still asleep. Matty walked aimlessly down the beach, kicking at small pebbles with his toes. He rounded a small hill of sedge that grew down almost to the water's edge, then stopped.

A man in a brown suit was idly picking flat stones off the sand and skipping them across the low waves.

"Good morning, Matt. Care for

a walk?" Matty nodded and they walked in silence along the beach until they were out of ear-shot of the camp. Joseph Smith asked quietly: "How many men could you count on—I really mean count on if it were a matter of life and death? Men who would follow you into hell itself."

Matty thought for a moment. "Maybe fifty. Why?"

"Because we're not staying here. And those fifty are going to have to help us leave."

Matty stared at him blankly.

"Where are we going to go?"

"Next planet out."

Matty stopped, the incoming tide wetting his feet and ankles. "Why?"

"How long have we been here?"

"Six weeks."

"Any progress being made? Any work being done?"

"It'll change."

Joseph Smith laughed curtly. "Not while we remain here. People do things because they have to, not always because they want to." He paused. "What's the purpose of the Trip?"

"To establish a civilization."

The Predict looked moodily out at the ocean.

"That's right — to establish a civilization. But it isn't going to happen here. Civilizations usually arise in response to a challenge, either from nature or from marauding tribes. And people huddle in towns and villages for mutual protection—that's another incentive for civilization. But here there isn't any threat from nature, or from other forms of life. And people aren't huddling—they're leaving. Do you know how many have slipped away to the brush already?"

Reluctantly. "No."

"Close to three hundred — almost a tenth of the ship. If we stay here, within a generation we'll have degenerated to little scattered groups of savages. Within three we'll have forgotten our science, we'll probably even have forgotten where we came from. And why."

Matty sat down on a clump of sedge.

"You mentioned the next planet out. What do you know about it?"

"It's liveable—but not like this. The average temperature is lower, food is plentiful but we'll have to work for it. And there's intelligent life. A low form but it will probably give us trouble. They won't like it if we drop in." He seemed oddly satisfied at the somewhat foreboding picture he had drawn.

"How do we sell everybody on leaving here?" Matty asked slowly. "They won't want to exchange this for what you've just described. They're not going to pack up and live in hell just because we want them to."

Joseph Smith juggled a few pebbles aimlessly in his hand.

"That's more your trouble than mine. That's why I asked you how

many men you could count on to help. You couldn't convince the colonists to leave voluntarily." He paused. "Maybe you'll have to get them to leave involuntarily."

"Hah! Matty! Matty!"

He lifted a glass and got to his feet. It was dusk but the rigged lights from the lifeboats glittered over hundreds of tables loaded with meat and vegetables and bowls of fermented roots and berries. The colonists sprawled on benches and on the white sand.

"Are you happy?"

The crowd roared back in a half drunken voice. Matty felt cold sober.

"Do you like it here?"

They did. Matty felt sick.

"Then I give you — the new Earth!"

They toasted him and laughed, some started to sing, others danced on the sands. The party was a success, Matty thought. Everybody was there, even most of the stragglers who had built houses in the brush country had come back for it. There was food and drink, most of it native, a lot of it from the raided hydroponic tubs on the *Astra*.

The party roared on and Matty leaned back in his crude chair and waited. There weren't so many celebrating now; quite a few were sprawled silently on the ground, asleep. It wouldn't be too long before the drugged food and drink hit the others.

An hour later there was only silence on the beaches, except for the quiet work of fifty men clearing away the tables and transferring the colonists to the lifeboats. Olson watched the first one take off, then walked back to Matty.

"I don't like this. It'll take us a while to get them all in the *Astra* —think they'll be out that long?"

"They'll be out forty-eight hours," Matty said in a tired voice. "That'll be time enough."

He left on the last boat just as dawn was breaking on the littered beach. Olson and the personnel checker were waiting for him at the *Astra's* air-lock.

The checker touched a hand to his forehead. "We're three short, sir. Raymond Jeffries, Alice Scott, and Herbert Shippen."

Matty rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Jeffries is a good Engineer and Shippen is the best tub man in Hydroponics—but we can't stay and look for them. We can't waste the time." He started for the main control cabin. "Where did you put the colonists?"

"Most of them are in the main solon and the compartments. None of them showed signs of coming out of it."

"Olson?"

"Yes sir."

"What do you think the colonists' reaction will be when they wake up?"

"They aren't going to like it." Grimly. "That's my opinion. Take a detachment of men and

collect all the knives in Diet and anything in Shops that might be used as weapons. Then bring our families in to central control and see that there's food and water enough to last. We'll barricade the hatches from the inside. It'll take us six periods to reach the next planet out. For the last four we're going to be in trouble."

A few minutes later, the families filed in. The last one to enter was Joseph Smith. He didn't look at Matty but sat at one of the ports in the rear of the cabin, an inconspicuous figure in brown.

Matty turned to a white-faced Uriah. "Go ahead and lift."

He walked to the port and looked out. There was the familiar throbbing feel of the rear tubes beginning to fire, then the floating globe below them started to dwindle.

It was a farewell to paradise, Matty thought. A good-bye to Eden.

The mob howled outside the hatch, venting their fury on the inert steel and trying to force their way in. They had tried to storm the pile room and disable the pile machinery until some of the cooler heads reminded the others that then they'd be stranded forever—in space.

It was quiet on the inside. Matty watched the others in the compartment. Nobody had gotten panicky, nobody had had hysterics. And one of the calmest of all was Julia. Julia . . .

He went into a brown study. She was generous, kind-hearted, and she loved him. Whether or not he loved her, he hadn't yet decided. But he no longer saw Karen's face when he looked at her . . .

"They'll get us when we land," Olson said gloomily. "The public strangler or the hangman."

Matty grunted. "You afraid of dying?"

"I'm not afraid of death," Olson said curtly. "Just the method by which it's achieved."

There was silence for the next few hours and Matty morosely watched the planet swim closer in the plate. He had seen the report that the Predict had compiled on it and had a rough picture of what it would be like. It would be livable—there might even be a few times when it would be pleasant. But compared to the world they had just left, it would be living hell.

The hours dragged slowly by but the clamor outside the hatch didn't die. One thousand miles up, the *Astra* went into an orbit.

"What do we do now?" Olson asked sarcastically. "Who's going to volunteer to go out and load them in the lifeboats?"

There was a hesitant silence and then a voice said: "We don't load them in the lifeboats. We're going down in the *Astra*."

Joseph Smith stepped forward, a tall, thin figure in outlandish

clothes, and took the pilot's seat at the control board.

There was dead silence while fear battled superstitious awe in the minds of the others in the compartment. The silence was broken by shouted protests. Olson was livid, his eyes thin slits in his beefy face.

"We'll never make it! The *Astra* was built and assembled in space—it can't take a planet landing! We'd wreck it, we'd never be able to leave!"

"That's right," Joseph Smith said calmly. "We wouldn't be able to leave. Ever."

Olson started for him. "I say we're not going down!"

The Predict turned, something small and blue shining in his fist. "Don't come any nearer, Olson." There was no mistaking the intent in his voice.

Uneasy silence. Anxious eyes looked at the Predict, then turned to Matty.

"Well, Matt," Joseph Smith said softly. "Are we going down?"

Matty looked at him, his eyes dueling with the cold gray eyes of the man who had saved his life at ten and whose word had been law ever since. There was no pity, there was no sympathy in those eyes—there was only the calm determination to do what was necessary. Matty's own eyes fell.

"We're going down," he said huskily.

Olson went white. "We'll never reach the surface alive!"

Matty ignored him and flipped the switch to the ship's speaker. *"All hands man emergency landing stations twelfth level and above! Evacuate all other levels!"*

The clamor in the passageway outside the control cabin suddenly died and a low moan of terror swept the colonists. Then there was only the sound of Uriah calling out orders to the pile crew.

Julia came over and stood close by Matty at one of the ports. The world below started to swell up. They were dropping steadily, the mottled continents and seas rushing rapidly at them. Then thin air of the atmosphere screamed past them and they were at storm level. Shrieking winds tore and buffeted the huge vessel and it pitched sharply, throwing those in the compartment towards the after bulkhead. Matty grabbed Julia with one arm and clung to the port railing with the other.

The whipping rains cleared for a moment and the *Astra* settled towards a wooded ridge. The ship touched the top, smashing the timber growth, grazed the ground and kept right on going. The sides of the ridge exploded outward in a burst of shattered granite and flying dirt. At the same time, the bottom plates of the *Astra* buckled and crumpled in a dozen spots, spewing out stores and equipment and colonists who were unlucky enough to be trapped in the bottom sections.

The crumpling motion stopped.

Matty staggered to the hatch, threw it open, and stumbled down the passageway. He found an open access lock near ground level and dropped the few feet to the ground. The others who had been in the control cabin followed him.

It was cold, the sky dull and clouded. A drizzle of rain coated the ship and ran down the sides to collect in the thick red mud at the base. Further back from the sides of the ship, at the end of the space of smashed timber, was the start of black, unfriendly forest.

Joseph Smith limped over. There were bruises on his face and blood was running down a cheek. The expression on his face was one of accomplishment.

"The colonists will never leave the ship for something like this!" Matty cried above the roar of the wind.

"They already are!"

Matty turned. Flames were spouting from the cracked and broken sides of the *Astra* far down near the tube section. Tiny figures dropped from the ports and hatches or crawled through the torn hull.

"It won't be a total loss," Joseph Smith mused. "We can salvage a lot later on."

Matty didn't reply but stared in horror at the scene. There must have been tens killed in the landing alone. Tens more would perish in the shooting flames.

How much would people take? he thought. And what penalties would they exact from the ones they held responsible?

IX.

A day will come when beings . . . shall stand upon this earth as one stands upon a footstool, and shall laugh and reach out their hands amid the stars.

The Discovery of the Future, H. G. Wells

IT has been thirty days since the vessel Astra *crash-landed on this world. Ninety-eight souls were killed in the landing and one hundred six perished in the flames that consumed the ship shortly afterwards. We have labored hard and long with primitive tools and have erected a stockade and log houses for the survivors. Hunting has proved excellent, though dangerous, and farming appears possible though not as easy as we had hoped. There have been no defections from the group and hard work and danger has only improved the morale of the colonists. There is every prospect for a permanent civilization here, although the world and the small primitive humanoids that inhabit it are hostile.*

As expected, the colonists have rightly held their leadership responsible for the situation they are now in. The larger picture is one that only their historians will appreciate. At present, they consider that we have stolen their paradise and substituted hell . . .

There were footsteps outside. Matty put down his pen and hastily secreted the few scraps of paper in a crack in the rough-hewn floor. The board door suddenly flew open and the small cabin was filled with bearded colonists dressed in stiff and foul smelling skins.

He and the other prisoners were jerked roughly to their feet and hustled outside. It was still cool in the early morning but the sun had split the overhanging clouds and shone fitfully on the cleared assembly area in the center of the stockade. Most of the colonists had gathered there, crowded about a wooden platform on which Jeremiah Paulson and his aides sat.

Matty blinked in the bright sunlight, then stole a glance down the line of other accused. Olson, big and threatening, his alert eyes watching for a break—any break —on the part of the guards. Uriah, white faced but firm in the knees. Murphy, trembling . . . A dozen others.

He was pushed out in front of the platform, his hands trussed behind his back, the thongs cutting deep into his flesh. He stretched and felt the warm sunlight on his back and neck, the neck that would so soon feel the tightening of fingers that he had escaped from fifteen years before . . .

Jeremiah started reading the charge.

"That inasmuch as Mathew Kendrick be accused of illegally and in a premeditated fashion crashing and stranding the starship *Astra* on a cruel and inhospitable world and . . . eh?"

One of his advisors had nudged him in the ribs and Jeremiah bent down to listen. Matty watched in disgust. The advisors who had sprung up to guide Jeremiah had almost uniformly been a shifty and lazy lot. And Jeremiah listened . . .

". . . yes . . . and stand accused of setting the fires after landing . . ."

There was more but Matty wasn't listening. He was thinking of the *Astra*, half buried in the valley a mile away. It was rusting now, birds nesting in the shattered ports. A few more generations and the ship would have crumbled and there would be left only stories and myth . . .

"How do you plead to the charge, Mathew Kendrick?"

The cold voice cut into his reverie and he jerked awake. Jeremiah was going through the Judging process automatically, even though it was a foregone conclusion what the result would be.

"Well?"

It was the moment he had waited for, the moment when his greatest decision would have to be made. He was not afraid of death for himself but it was obvious that it wouldn't stop with him. It would go on. Olson, Uriah, Murphy, Silas Pollard — and their families. The terror would consume them and then strike among the other colonists, searching out those who had helped any of the accused in the past or who had been so lacking in foresight that they had been friends of the accused. It would sow hate and fear and eventually crush the colony, if Jeremiah didn't crush it first through his own stupidity . . .

"I plead innocent," he said slowly. "And so are these others."

There was a burst of angry cries from the crowded colonists. Matty suddenly whirled, facing Joseph Smith, a tall, thin figure in brown standing at the edge of the crowd. The Predict had been convicted with the others as an accomplice, and then immediately absolved by

the court. And Matty had originally refused to testify against him.

"The guilty man is Joseph Smith, your Predict."

There was dead silence and Matty talked on. He could feel the shock in the colonists' faces, sense the contemptuous look on Olson's. His testimony lasted an hour. Some of it was true, some of it was false, and all of it was damning. Towards the end, Matty could feel the mood of the crowd change. Joseph Smith had become the God that had failed, the idol with the feet of clay . . .

And Joseph Smith did not deny it.

Matty unlocked the door and entered. It was dark and foul smelling on the inside and there was the scamper of little things across the floor. He felt for the table, set down the lamp, and lit it. It flickered, then grew to a steady glow that cast a yellow light throughout the room.

The man in the corner was dirty, with matted beard and a brown suit that was rumpled and covered with filth. Matty studied him for a moment. The face was haggard and gaunt but, everything considered, it looked much the same as when he had first seen it. The gray eyes were still alert and unsmiling—and cold.

"How are you?"

"All right." Pause. "I understand that you're Director again."

Matty felt uncomfortable.

"That's right. It wasn't difficult to get it back. The responsibility was . . . too much for Jeremiah."

The Predict nodded. "When's my time up?"

"It isn't. The public strangler has been abolished. In your case, you'll get exile—that was the best I could do. I've had your trunk brought up; you'll leave tomorrow."

Silence. The man in brown picked a small moving thing off his wrist and crushed it between his fingers.

"You hate me a great deal, don't you, Matty?"

Slowly. "I don't think I hate anybody. Let's say I don't understand you, I don't understand the reasons for some of the things you've done." He paused. "The Director is a manufactured personality, isn't he? You pull the environmental strings, so to speak, so the Director ends up as a willing pawn."

"You wanted the Directorship."

"Does a ten year old boy know what he wants? But that isn't answering my question."

The Predict leaned back in the corner, watching Matty curiously. "All right, you're correct. The Director is manufactured—as much as anything can be manufactured."

Matty suddenly wondered how much of his life had been left to chance, and how much had been planned by the Predict. Whether, for example, the Executives had been entirely responsible for the

persecution that had driven him to the arms of Joseph Smith . . .

"Why?"

"The Predict is a man apart, Matty. He lives longer than the colonists, his own roots are in a culture that the colonists know nothing about, for the most part haven't even heard of. The Predict acts through the Director." He paused. "You won't understand the allusion, Matty, but the Directors play Trilby to my Svengali. I'm not always successful, of course. Your father was an ignorant stupid man over whom I had little control. You . . . were much better."

"Why is there a Predict in the first place?"

"Predict isn't exactly the right word. Psychologist would be more exact—it's the title I started out with, anyways." Musing. "Five hundred years, twenty generations, is a long time. People forget things. They forget where they're going, they forget why. And they forget the necessity. Somebody had to go along to see that the purpose of the Trip was carried out."

Matty thought about it for a moment.

"It was an insane culture on board ship. I've never realized it until the last thirty days when it's been—different."

"It was a Machiavellian culture on board," Joseph Smith said slowly. "It didn't start out that way, though, it just grew. We didn't organize the ship on military lines; we were afraid of what might happen after a few hundred years had passed. So we ran it like a business, trying to preserve as much of our culture as we could. The Executives of each department made up Management, and at the head of that was the Director. It didn't turn out like we hoped. You take a race that's used to a whole planet to live on and coop them up in a steel cell a few miles long and a thousand yards wide and you might be surprised at the result. The individuals stay sane, but the culture itself goes mad."

"You could have made it different."

The Predict looked up, surprised.

"A democracy?"

"Why not?"

The Predict shook his head. "The *Astra* couldn't have been a democracy under any conditions. Democracies are run by men who agree among themselves as to their course of collective action. The colonists weren't free agents. A civilization that had died a long time ago had already decided what they were going to do. If the *Astra* was a democracy they would have voted to stay behind on the first planet we landed on. And that would have been the end of the Trip and the end of the hopes of . . . the people I knew."

It was cold in the cabin and the man in the corner shivered slight-

ly. He looked tired.

"We were to establish a civilization, Matty, not run loose like a lot of savages and start the long climb from the very bottom. Everything I did was done with that in mind. I've acted under the orders of four billion people who died five centuries ago—and I've been a blackguard, a murderer, and a dictator to carry them out. I've twisted peoples' lives, I've seen them unhappy, I've seen them die, and I haven't given it a second thought. I've played God —or the Devil, if you want to look at it that way. And if I had it to do all over again, I would do it the same way!"

He suddenly twisted and faced the wall, holding his head in his hands. Matty stood there for a moment more, then quietly left.

It was morning of a bright, warm day. The colonists were already up and about the village, drawing water, airing linen, making up hunting parties, and the farm workers were getting ready to go out for the day. All of them were equipped with the cross-bows that Dion West had invented and Matty congratulated himself for the hundredth time on having spared his life the years before.

He stopped at the cabin, knocked, then pushed the door open and walked in.

Joseph Smith — washed and shaved and looking considerably better than he had the night before—was busy, arms deep in the trunk that Matty had had delivered earlier. He was sorting out items and slowly piling them up on the table. Matty looked at them curiously, held several up to the light streaming through the doorway, then paused — puzzled — over a long slender rod of metal.

"That was what you call a raincoat and hip boots you had there, Matty. These are blankets and wool socks and a canvas pack. The rod you have in your hand is what we used to call a fly-rod. Good for fishing." He took some more clothing out of the box and methodically packed it away in the canvas sack. "Fishing should be good here, nobody's ever tried it. I've got a shotgun down there, too. Works on a chemical explosive basis—you wouldn't know the theory."

"You don't need to go too far away," Matty said suddenly. "If you hid out in the woods, Julia and I could bring you food. See that you weren't—lonely."

Joseph Smith laughed — a hollow, bitter laugh. "For five hundred years I've lived with the human race. I know everything there is to know about people, I've enjoyed all the pleasures that can possibly be extracted from their companionship. I've lived with them for five centuries and the only thing that's changed have been the faces. I'm tired of it— Lord, I'm tired of it!"

He rolled up a few more woolen

shirts and stuffed them in the almost full pack.

"Matty, exile isn't a punishment for me—it's something I've looked forward to for a long time."

He tightened the buckles and adjusted the pack to his back. He wore boots and a leather jacket and a red hat; the "shotgun" was tied in with the pack. He took a last look in the bottom of his trunk, then took out a small box.

"Why did you denounce me at the trial, Matty? To save your own life?"

Matty looked him in the eyes. "I've never regarded my own life so highly that I would be willing to sacrifice somebody else's to save it. I had my choice of two alternatives. I think I made the right decision. To a large extent, your purpose had been accomplished. You were expendable."

"Cold, aren't you?"

Matty shrugged. "Maybe."

Joseph Smith nodded slowly. "I meant you to be. Ever since you were ten, I've tried to teach you one thing. The hardest thing there is to do is to make decisions for something as abstract as an ideal and do it on an impersonal basis. Whether those decisions hurt you personally, or those you know, can't enter in. I thought of the same solution as you did—but I couldn't offer myself to the mob, it wouldn't have been convincing. But it had to be done. I would satisfy them, I was an important enough figure. I was hoping you would do what you did, Matt. When you did — I realized you were Predict material."

He gave the box to Matty.

"They need another Predict here more than they need a Director. We're not in the ship any more and we'll have to have a different type of culture. A culture that, perhaps, should be fashioned by a poet and a sound box player. And there has to be somebody around with the long view—somebody to see that the colonists don't forget why they left Earth in the first place, that this time it has to be played differently."

He paused briefly at the door. "Good luck, Matty."

He turned and strode through the clearing and out the open gate of the stockade, disappearing for a moment in the slope of the valley, then coming into view as he climbed the ridges towards the hills beyond. He grew smaller, dwindled, and then was gone.

Nobody would ever see him again, Matty thought. Perhaps someday somebody in the far future would find a pile of bleached bones on some mountain ledge or by some fish stream. And then, nearby, there would be a rotting canvas bag and a rusting shotgun . . .

He turned back to the table and opened the small box. There was a small plastic bottle of clear, colorless liquid and a hypodermic needle whose bluish contents sparkled in the sunlight. The con-

tents of the hypodermic, he realized, was all the difference there was between a Predict and a colonist.

He swabbed his arm with alcohol, then took the needle and slowly pushed the plunger home.

(Concluded from page 5)

mouthed and unprincipled.

What can our civilization bring us in the future? Nothing but MORE gadgets. Until we get so complex our "civilization" collapses of its own weight, or more likely, crushes us under its MASS.

We'd like science fiction writers to begin building some spiritual and moral values into our magazines, and subject the gadgets to them. It's worth trying anyway. The way we're going, we're going smash!

—*Rap*

"Double Shot" Is Earth-side Idiom, Stupid!

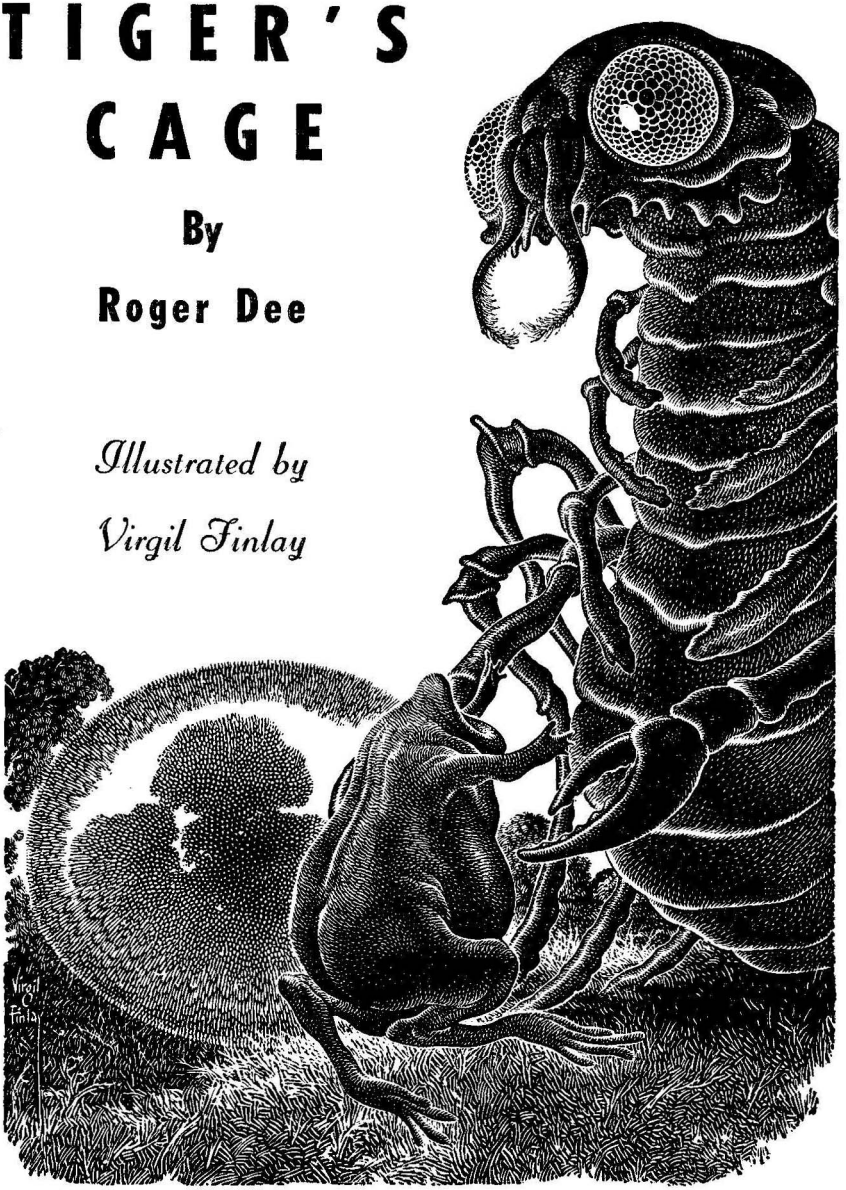
TIGER'S CAGE

By

Roger Dee

Illustrated by

Virgil Finlay



Man is the Ultimate Creation among the intelligent beings that people the Universe. He is supreme in his environment, mastering it with the power of his mighty brain. He has good reason to be proud. Yet, there is the matter of the Tiger . . . relatively speaking.

MACKLIN was near the end of his endurance — and of his sanity—when the emergency party from First Colony arrived. The sound of Captain Neilssen's voice, startlingly loud and imperative over the weather station's communicator after an interminable day and night of static-ridden unintelligibility, sent him weak with relief.

"We're coming down out of the overcast," Neilssen said. "What's wrong there, Macklin? Are you— "

"Details later," Macklin interrupted, driven by fatigue and tension from any pretense at regard for rank. "Did you bring Falkner?"

"I brought him," Neilssen answered. His voice took on an edge of nettled authority. "Though why you should demand a Perceptive out here— "

"You'll know soon enough," Macklin said shortly. "For God's sake get down here, will you? I'm sick for the sight of a human face!"

He left the station at once, cautiously skirting the anomalous gray bulk of the creature that squatted in swollen somnolence near the doorway, and hurried down the grassy slope to the landing ramp overhanging the blue water of the bay. The lighter from First Colony was already well down out of the daylight overcast, wallowing with ducklike clumsiness and glowing with a faint halo of electric charge picked up from the furnace-glare of sunlight above—a functional and unlovely thing against the pastoral simplicity of the Vega IX landscape, but at the moment the most welcome sight of Macklin's life.

The lighter hovered briefly and settled into the landing cradle. Three men got out and came quickly down the ramp: Captain Neilssen, looking like a latter-day Stanley in sun helmet and shorts and belted hand-gun; Falkner, the Perceptive, and Psychomedician Keogh. Sight of Keogh, a fat, sandy little man with pale blue eyes and an air of speculative arrogance, sent Macklin's brows up—and brought them down again in a scowl when he understood the psychomedic's presence.

"Thoughtful of you to bring our ego-shrinker along," he said acidly to Neilssen. "I'll probably need him before this is over. So will the rest of you."

Falkner, slender and dark and smoldering visibly with a sullen, effeminate intensity, anticipated Neilssen's slower retort. "Why should you ask for *me*, Macklin? You know how dreadfully ill flying leaves me!"

"Because there's a job here to suit your talents," Macklin said. "One that I suspect will leave you even sicker."

Neilssen, flushed and angry, stepped between them. "There'll be no bickering," he said sharply. "What's wrong here, Macklin?"

Paradoxically, now that help had come, Macklin felt an odd reluctance to admit that the thing they had anticipated, half in dread and half in eagerness, had come about at last. He found himself staring up at the high pearly overcast of Vegan sky as if he might pierce the intervening light-years of space to the bustling, bursting-at-seams culture that had sent him here. *How will they take it at home,* he wondered, *when they learn that we've no monopoly on intelligence after all?*

Then he shrugged and gave them the news baldly, without any attempt to soften its numbing impact.

"There's an alien in the weather station," he said.

They stared at him incredulously while the import of his words soaked in.

"Alien?" Neilssen said blankly. He pulled himself together with an effort, visibly adjusting to the idea. "You mean we've found a Vegan native at last, after two years of colonization?"

"Not a native," Macklin said. "It came in a ship—if you could call the thing a ship—that's beyond anything we could build within the next thousand years. I'll show you."

The four of them went up the slope toward the hemispherical bulge of the weather station, bunching close together in an instinctive bid for common support. Halfway up the gentle incline Macklin paused, pointing out a distorted globular haziness that hung just above the lush grass to the right of the dome. There was nothing of solidity in its wavering shape; shrubbery beyond it was plainly visible in outline, shimmering and dancing as if seen through a rising curtain of heated air.

"It isn't a material body, for I've tried tossing a stone through it," Macklin said. "The only inference left is that it's some sort of force-field application that operates on a principle entirely new to us."

He paused, waiting for comment that did not come. "There wasn't any sound of propulsion when it came, nor of deceleration when it landed. It just flashed down out of the overcast like a

bolt of lightning and hung where you see it, and the alien stepped out."

They stood quiet for a moment, the light breeze from the bay ruffling their hair and stirring the grass at their feet. Macklin knew precisely the readjustment taking place in each man's mind; he had run the same gamut from bristling incredulity to strained acceptance, and had ended up baffled and thoroughly alarmed.

"It's a member of a highly developed culture, then," Keogh said, belaboring the obvious. His face had lost its ruddiness, and his eyes held more of uneasiness than of their usual clinical curiosity. "A race more intelligent, by your same inference, than we are."

"Intelligence is a relative term," Macklin said. "But you're probably right, though the thing looks more like a toad than like a man. It's telepathic, too—that's why I asked for Falkner. I could feel it fumbling at my mind all night and half the day before it finally fell asleep, trying to communicate with me. I thought I'd go mad before the overcast static finally lifted enough to let me get through to you."

Falkner, his black eyes eternally alert for offense, said sharply: "Is it your idea that I should try to establish rapport with this—*toad?*"

"It's our only means of learning what it wants here," Macklin said. He mopped at sudden perspiration on his forehead and added with some malice, "I don't envy you the job, not with a mind as powerful as that digging at you."

"You endured it for a whole day-night period, though," Keogh pointed out curiously. "Why didn't you put the thing out of the station, or get out yourself?"

"Because I was afraid to tackle it," Macklin said, "and afraid to leave it alone. It might have followed me in the dark."

Neilssen squared his shoulders in conscious resumption of command. "We'll get nowhere by standing here talking. Let's go and see this brute for ourselves."

The alien squatted precisely where Macklin had left it, toadlike, its muscular back legs drawn up to brace its obese gray bulk and its short anterior limbs dangling limply. It had no head, nor any discernible feature beyond a great horizontal slash across its upper chest which might or might not have been a mouth. The aperture hung slackly open, its lower lip ridiculously rubbery and pendulous, to disclose a dry and toothless cavity behind.

"A proper monster," Macklin said, half relishing the open consternation of his companions. "Gentlemen, I give you the Frog."

Keogh drew a ragged breath fighting for professional calm.

"It looks sick," he said. "Was it like this from the first?"

Macklin shook his head. "I

think the midday heat was too much for it. It's been sleeping since noon. Estivating might be a better word — have you noticed that it isn't breathing?"

Neilssen looked at Falkner. "Do you feel anything from it?"

Falkner shut his eyes, concentrating. "I feel a sort of steady mental sussuration, but it doesn't convey anything." He hesitated. "It corresponds to an audible drone or hum, as if the thing were—"

"It's snoring," Macklin interrupted acidly. "I told you it was sleeping, didn't I?"

Falkner flushed furiously.

"You're temporarily unstrung from strain, Macklin," he said. "You're jumpy and sensitive, on edge — suppose you had to bear that maladjustment all your life, and share the brutish mental gruntings of a hundred sex-obsessed colonists into the bargain? Suppose *you* were a Perceptive?"

"With all the instincts of a satyr and none of the equipment?" Macklin jeered. "I'd cut my throat!"

Neilssen moved to intervene and stopped short. "Careful," he said hoarsely. "I think the thing is waking up."

Macklin shot a glance at the station windows and found the glare outside diminishing visibly.

"It's time it woke," he said.

He felt himself tensing against a resumption of the alien's unsettling mental probings, and his own uneasiness engendered a sudden uncharacteristic sympathy for Falkner's congenital edginess.

"I'm sorry, Falkner," he said. "I won't needle you again."

The alien stirred on its powerful hind legs and rose to near man-height. Though it had no eyes to open it was awake; its mind reached out, searching, sifting, weighing.

The Terrans reacted each in characteristic fashion. Macklin moved back warily, bristling like a dog at a wailing in the dark. Neilssen braced himself as against a tangible pressure, fumbling for the hand-gun at his belt. Keogh stood open-mouthed and shivering, his pale eyes popping.

Falkner, more susceptible than the others, took the impact relatively harder. He closed his eyes and began to cry, whimpering like a frightened child.

"What is it, man?" Neilssen demanded. His voice, striving for authority, had a pinched and breathy sound. "You're getting something —is the thing hostile?"

Falkner shook his head without opening his eyes. Tears made tiny glinting arcs across his cheeks.

"No. It's here to warn us against something else, against another alien. Something so awful I can't bear—the image—"

He fainted, falling even in unconsciousness with his Perceptive's pliant, womanish grace.

The three men stared dumbly at each other over Falkner's body. The alien stood motionless;

breathing slowly now it looked more than ever batrachian, its rubbery chest-lip sagging in and out with each dry inhalation.

"We knew when we went out to colonize the stars that we might run into an alien race more intelligent than ourselves," Keogh said. "Why should it seem so dreadful now to know that we've found it—or that it's found us?"

"We've got to determine what sort of threat we're faced with," Neilssen said, ignoring him. He knelt beside Falkner and shook him urgently. "Falkner! Come out of it, man—we need you!"

Falkner groaned and sat up, his eyes flinching away when they found the obese gray figure of the alien.

"Too late," he whispered. "It's on its way."

Macklin moved to help the shivering Perceptive to his feet. "Tell us what's coming, can't you? We've got to alert the others at First Colony."

Falkner shook his head sickly. "There isn't time," he muttered. "It comes so fast! If you could glimpse the thing as I did—"

He pulled himself together with a great effort and shook off Macklin's hands.

"I'm all right now. It was like a plunge into ice-water, too much to bear for the moment. . . . There are two races out here, the Frogs and another much fiercer and more primitive. The Frogs have subjugated the others and keep them under restraint, pretty much as we keep dangerous animals — tigers, for example — in zoos."

Keogh made a protesting sound. "Then why doesn't this one lend us a hand? Is it going to stand by, after taking the trouble to warn us, and see us wiped out?"

Falkner shrugged, his eyes on the alien. "If you were a Terran zoo attendant, would you rush into a tiger's cage to defend a thing like that?"

"You keep referring to *a* tiger," Neilssen said pouncing on the inference. "Does that mean we're threatened by a single predator, rather than by a number?"

Falkner looked surprised. "Yes, though I can't see that it matters. One tiger is as deadly as two, or a dozen."

Keogh voiced the obvious question first. "How long before the thing gets here?"

Falkner turned to the alien, his eyes closed and his narrow effeminate face tight with concentration.

"Our time values differ," he said a moment later. "But it can't be long. As best I can determine, perhaps an hour."

An hour was more than long enough to marshal up such defenses as offered themselves to hand.

The dome, needing no protection against native predators, owned no armament beyond a rack of colored meteorological flares

and a handful of kitchen cutlery. Only Neilssen habitually went armed, and his hand-gun, worn more as a badge of rank than through any real necessity, was of uncertain value against anything physically more formidable than a man.

"We might as well throw stones at it," Macklin summed up their position.

Neilssen's attempt to discover more of their assailant's nature turned out as unfortunately. Falkner, gray from the strain of extended communication with an alien and patently more powerful mind, tried repeatedly for the information without result.

"I can't make out more than a bare suggestion of its shape," he said finally. "Which is terrible enough . . . . There's a sort of masking confusion in the Frog's thinking that blurs its personal conception of the danger, something more like an emotional block than like anything else I can name. I've a feeling that the information is being held back deliberately."

His sketchy impression of the Tiger, when they pressed him, was of a sinuous shining length borne on a flashing myriad of jointed legs, of great compound eyes glowing over what might be either mandibles or chelae. The description was all the more disturbing for its incompleteness.

They waited, drawn and uneasy, while darkness fell slowly outside the dome. With the full coming of night Neilssen tried again to raise the listening post at First Colony, and failed as miserably as before; the static curtain that attended the daytime overcast had lifted to an extent, but its blanketing interference still garbled call and answer hopelessly.

Falkner, slumped with closed eyes in the station's only comfortable chair, voiced the first suspicion of inconsistency.

"I've been wondering how the Tiger will arrive," he said. "But I can't get an answer. I'm beginning to believe that this frog-thing either doesn't know or is determined not to tell us."

Neilssen stood up from the communicator and stared speculatively at the alien. It shifted a little, warily, as if to meet his stare with its own eyeless regard.

"It's holding out on us," Neilssen said. He took the hand-gun from his belt and held it suggestively. "And if you're right about its being able to see into our minds, then it knows what I'm thinking now. Ask it again, Falkner."

"I can't," Falkner said. His voice had a distant sound, as if he had forgotten the others and spoke only to himself. "It's reaching out of the station and away. It's calling out, and up— "

He opened his eyes wide, but their unseeing fixity spoke of vision still turned inward.

"Too late," he said. "The Tiger is here."

It came as Macklin's Frog had come, like a soundless lightning-flash out of the overcast night sky. The shimmering bubble hung just off the ground outside the weather station; there was no movement of mechanism nor opening of ports, but the Tiger flowed out.

It halted at once and reared erect, looming vastly taller than a man, a shatteringly alien centipede-shape with great compound eyes burning luminously in its weaving, carapaced head.

It made no move to attack. It called instead, and the call was ecstasy unbearable.

They rushed headlong out of the station, drawn like iron motes to a magnet, battering frantically at each other to be first. Falkner, knocked down and trampled, his left leg broken and bent unnaturally askew, dragged himself on his belly, his plea rising high and shrill through the moment of bedlam: *"Wait, wait — dear God, don't leave me here!"*

Eyeless and obese as it was, Macklin's alien was faster than any of them. It sprang in great leaps through and over them, bowling men right and left, its rubbery slash of mouth trumpeting joyously.

The Tiger swept it up in jointed chelae like a man catching up a truant puppy. The two of them vanished together into the transparent shimmer of waiting bubble and were gone, like an upward-leaping spark, into the overcast sky.

They splinted Falkner's shattered leg and brought him out of his shock-induced coma, but it was hours before he recovered control enough for questioning. His answers then were disjointed and all but incoherent.

"Macklin's Frog lied to us," he said. "It wasn't one of the rulers —it was one of the others, the subjugated ones. Don't ask me why it lied! Could you tell *me* what wild sort of story a Great Dane might spin to a pack of foreign terriers wandering into its neighborhood? What sort of witless joke it might play them, or why?"

They might have put his mutterings down to delirium, but their own blunter sensibilities still smarted rawly from the memory of that shattering imperative call.

"You felt only the overtones," Falkner said wildly. He cried and fought to stand on his splinted leg, and they were forced finally to strap him to his chair. "I felt it all. I heard what passed between those two. . . . Macklin's alien was pulling our legs, mocking us. There never was a Tiger. There's no danger to us out here —there never will be. We're free to sniff about and set up our little metal kennels and multiply as much as we like."

"I don't follow this symbolic talk of dogs," Keogh said. "What *do* you mean, Falkner?"

Falkner glared at him incredulously.

"You don't see it yet? The frog-thing was *domesticated*—it came here to see Macklin out of simple curiosity, like a pet poodle slipping its leash to swap smells with a street mongrel. It had a wonderful time experimenting with our reactions, but it was more than happy to go home again when its master whistled."

They stared at each other blankly, digesting the inference.

"Pet or no," Macklin said finally, "the Frog was a hell of a lot more intelligent than we are. What does that make us?"

Neilssen fingered his hand-gun nervously.

"It makes us trespassers and potential slaves. If the Tigers—the centipede-things — take it into their heads to domesticate men as well—"

"There's no danger," Falkner said for the second time. He relaxed gradually in his chair, his eyes filming with reaction to shock. "This one wasn't even conscious of your presence here. It sensed me, dimly, because I'm a Perceptive, but it wasn't interested. I felt it dismiss me from mind as I'd dismiss a blindworm twisting under a kicked-over stone."

He began to laugh rackingly, like a drunken man convulsed with the humor of a joke impossible of appreciation by the sober.

"We're safe," he said, "because we're not suited for pets. We're too stupid."

The End

FINLAY *(Concluded from p. 2)*

Museum of the American Indian.

I started as a gallery painter and, although I have little time, I have not given up Art with a capital "A." I've worked in nearly every medium, but still get excited about new techniques. Recently I experimented with my daughter's wax crayons and ink. The technique used in most of my drawings is a combination of pen, brush and knife on scratchboard.

As for vital statistics, I was born in Rochester, New York, on July 23, 1914 — my wife, the former Beverly Stiles, was born exactly one year later, to the day! Our daughter, Lail, was born in 1949. I completed high school in Rochester, and am self taught as an artist. When I can, and depending on the season, I write poetry or garden. My advice to young artists? Develop a constitution (and hide) like an ox—you'll need it!

(Editor's note: Mr. Finlay received the 11th World Science Fiction Convention's award for interior illustrations in September, 1953. Three portfolios of his drawings from Famous Fantastic Mysteries *have been published, and a fourth portfolio (fifteen black and white reproductions selected by Mr. Finlay) can now be obtained for $2.00 from Russell Swanson, 244 S. 44 St., Philadelphia 4, Pa.)*

The experts keep telling us the probable effect of the atom bomb on the human body. There may be a mutation, they say. But what if this mutation is one of the mind, not the body?

Illustrated by Virgil Finlay

FOR a long moment I stood there fighting for breath, and the Prefect of Discipline looked up from his desk and smiled. He was small for a Vorla, eight feet tall, and except for the gills and webbed fingers, looked almost human.

"How old are you, Timmy?"

"Nine, next twelfthmonth." I swallowed. "Genius plus."

"Genius plus," he said, and I couldn't meet his eyes for shame. I stared at the silver whips emblazoned on his blue tunic, at the monitor standing by the great black door.

"All right," I said miserably, "I cheated. All through secondary I cheated. I was almost three before I found out I was—unique."

The monitor's breast diaphragm was vibrating. The iron voice thrummed:

"Cardinal Four.

Talents are gold
Neophytes are told.
A sin to conceal
To the Vorlas reveal."

The Prefect said gently: "Can you—scan me?"

"Oh *no* sir. That would be sacrilege."

"Try."

I moistened my lips. "All I get is a blur. Your neural synapses are too fast. Are you going to—brainburn me?"

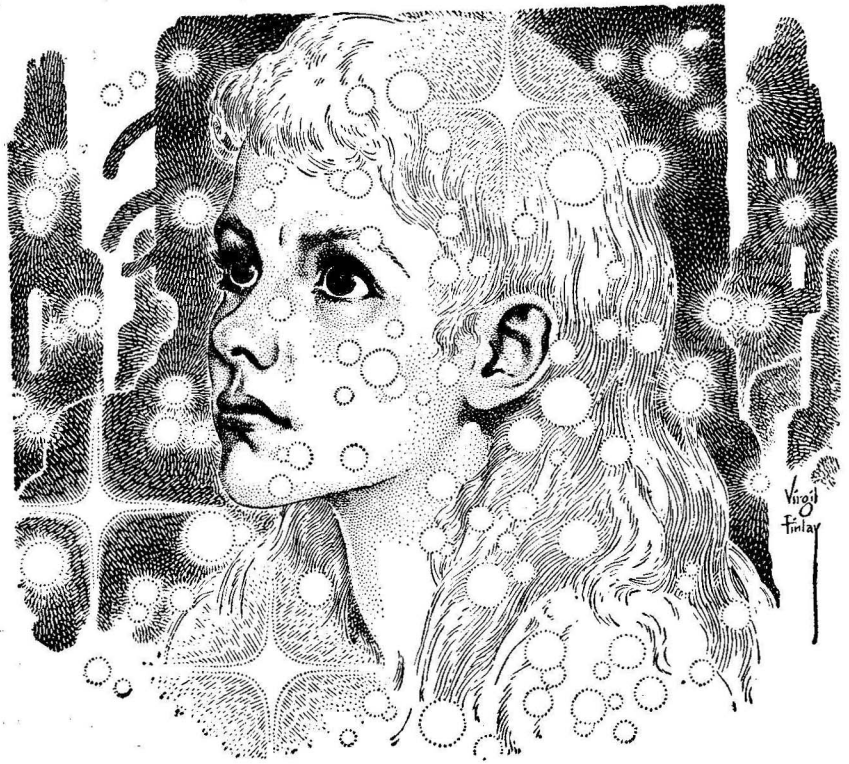
"When was the first time you cheated, Timmy?"

"Well," I said, "It was my third birthday . . ."

The monitors took us into preelemental, the little glass cubicles, and the colored lights flashing to test our reaction times, the oral, which wasn't so bad, then the written exam. I got past the cube roots and the differential equations all right, but when I saw the last page I started to cry. I'd always been bad at nuclear physics, and some of the extrapolations in free energy and quanta wave length were impossible. It wasn't fair!

SCHOOL DAYS

By James Causey



I sniffled, then furtively, hopefully, began touching other minds. The fear, the aching despair in the next cubicle made me sick. The bright happy triumph as somebody else solved a vector—what was this? Here was a mind that was swift and cool, a mind that had already finished in half the allotted time. It was aware of me.

"You're sure dumb, Timmy. Ignore the fourth extrapolation. They'll brainburn you for too much initiative. Write the answers I give you."

I scribbled fast, fast. The monitors were already collecting exams.

Afterwards I looked up and saw her. She was in the cubicle two doors down. Golden hair, wide blue eyes, dimples. *Thanks,* I thought, and her smile was impish. *"I just felt sorry for you. My name's Marsha."*

I remember staring at her, and how the other children cried when the monitors led them away. Tomorrow I'd start secondary.

"You saw her after that?" the Prefect said.

"All through secondary," I said. "Five years."

"And you cheated regularly."

Faintly: "Yes, sir."

I wouldn't have lasted a month if it hadn't been for Marsha. Cybernetics was my major, hers was nuclear physics. Everytime I'd start floundering in the midst of an exam I'd send a screaming thought out through the corridor to the nuclear wing, and she was always there, soothingly there. *"Trace the circuit so. See, lamebrain?"*

The monitors praised me. Here is a genius plus, they said. Someday he will be a first-class repairman and do honor to the great ones.

The rec periods. The white courtyard, with the other six-year-olds playing in the sunlight, yelling.

"Let's play Vorla and man."

The delighted shrieks.

"Now I'm killing other men. I'm burning forests, poisoning reservoirs, blasting cities. When I get finished I'll kill myself. Because I'm madbad. I'm loaded with sin."

Rolling on the ground. The laughter.

"We're Vorla. Stop fighting. Let us help you. Please."

"No! We do not want your help." They stood in a defiant huddle, shaking their fists.

A chorus. "Please. Let us weed out sin, war, initiative . . ."

Marsha and I almost never played. We stood in the corner of the courtyard, and I thought: "How long have the Vorla been here?"

"A hundred and fifty years. Know something, Timmy?"

"What?"

"I'm going to mate with you when we grow up."

My face burned. "You hush. That's up to the Eugenics Com-

putor."

Her tinkling laughter.

"I guess I'm dumb, Marsha. But I've got a feel for repair circuits, even if I can't pass those exams. Do you think we're really violating the Fourth Cardinal?"

Raw blistering contempt. "You are a fool."

I probed, got nothing, just a dancing mockery in the radiant deeps that were her mind.

"They don't know my IQ is two hundred plus, that we're mutations, Timmy. Yesterday the headmaster called me in to ask about my experiments in hard radiation shielding. Oh, they can scramble our chromosomes, they're smart at breeding slaves for their old machines, but they're basically ignor—"

"Mutations," I said. It was a frightening thought.

Her blue eyes were opaque, frosty. "Try something, Timmy."

"What?"

"See the niche at the end of the courtyard."

I squinted at the white wall. Marsha was smiling a secret. "Think about being there," she said. "Think real hard. *Will* yourself there. What's the matter?"

"My head feels funny."

Abruptly the sky whirled. A flash of blue, a sickening lurch, nausea.

Marsha was no longer beside me.

She stood at the other end of the courtyard. Now she was running towards me, past the other children, her laughter joyous. "Oh, Timmy, on the first try, you did it!"

"Did what?" Mingled with the sickness in my belly was a growing fear.

"Teleport," she said.

"No!"

The shame was a scarlet sunburst inside me. I tried to turn away and Marsha gripped my arm hard. "Instantaneous reaction time," she said fiercely. "And you can scan. You know what this means?"

I knew. The tears came in a scalding flood. It meant another talent concealed from the Vorla, another cardinal sin. Marsha caught my thought and her lip curled. "Stupid," she flashed. "Stupid as they are. What a waste!"

That was blasphemy.

All day long I went around in a sick daze and that night I lay awake, staring at the dark walls of my sleeping cell, remembering my basic catechism on the evil of man. How the Vorla had come to save man, to breed out the brutishness, the wars, the greed. When I finallay fell asleep I dreamt the Prefect of Discipline came majestically forward and fixed us with an accusing eye. And while we pleaded and wept and squealed he took us through that great black door to the radiation chamber.

That week we graduated from secondary first in our class. The headmaster granted me a ten-hour

free period, and Marsha's thought was like flame. *"The ruins, Timmy! It's important!"*

She was insane! I'd wanted to tinker with repair units in the Cybernetics wing, but instead I mumbled, "I got a low mark in catechism the other day, sir. About the basic nature of man. I thought if I could see one of the ruins firsthand it might help my humility potential."

The headmaster blinked. Then his gills quivered pontifically as he beamed. "Excellent."

We had never been outside before. Skipping along the silver roadway, and the sky a rich clear blue, and Marsha's eager excitement, with the golden figure of the monitor walking beside us saying, "Here is the local atomic pile. And there, the city."

The city shimmered in the distance, the white spires and the steel towers, while closer, loomed the dark humming bulk of the power plant. Overhead the Vorla ships twinkled through the sky and the monitor droned: "Everything in harmony. Man working for his redemption and the Vorla guiding him, setting his feet on the right path."

It was good until we came around a bend in the road, and I cried out and covered my eyes.

Those smashed towers of steel and concrete, the raw black magma pits, the scarred earth! The swimming blue haze of radiation. The Geiger in the monitor's chest was clicking. "No closer. This is the danger point. Gaze upon the quintessence of evil. Even after a hundred years the death lingers. This is the symbol of old man. Look and remember."

I hated it. I was looking at Marsha. But her nostrils were quivering and her eyes shone. Abruptly she grabbed a small metal plate from her tunic, held it in front of the monitor's faceplate. There was a *snick* and the monitor was silent.

"What did you do?" I whispered.

"A dampening field," she said happily. "He'll stay this way for three hours and won't remember a thing. Now we can go *into the city.*"

My mouth was dry. "Marsha, you mustn't."

"Here." She handed me a tiny jar. "Rub it on. All over."

"What—"

"To protect us from the radiation, silly. I made it in the lab. For three years I've dreamed of this. I want to *know.*"

Surely this was some awful dream. In a moment I'd wake up sweating, safe in my sleeping cell. But now Marsha was removing her tunic, with swift sure strokes she was dabbing the blue ointment all over her. "Hurry!"

"I—won't do it!"

"We've got Tertiary entrance exams coming up next week," she said grimly. "Do you want me to erect a mind shield? I can."

"Please—"

"Hurry up," she said.

Even now I hate to think about that afternoon. The buckled streets, with that terrible blue haze flickering around us, following Marsha as she ran like a wild thing, crawling through the gutted buildings, the tangles of steel girders, until finally she stopped in front of a ruined brick building. "This is it. Teleport me inside. Hurry."

"I won't! You know what the Code says. We'll burn forever."

She sniffed, and wriggled through a fallen archway.

I stood there for an hour. I was crying.

When Marsha finally came out her face was pale and set. I touched her mind and there was a queer emptiness. "That was the public library," she said.

"We can still repent," I said. "We can throw ourselves on the mercy of the headmaster—"

"I've suspected, ever since I was five," she said. "But I never—" She choked off, her eyes shining wet. Her mind was cold and metallic now, closed to me.

"What did you find?" I breathed.

"The way man was before the Vorla came."

"See? Maybe now you'll repent."

Her laughter was ugly.

I didn't see Marsha for a week after that. I'd wait in the Recreation yard, but she was busy in the nuclear lab and she never came. That third afternoon a funny thing happened. During the catechism class a blazing white light exploded in my brain and I screamed. So did everyone else. Everybody had an awful headache and the monitors dismissed afternoon classes. We found out later it was school-wide, and the Prefect of Psychology investigated; there were semantic reaction tests and questioning, but nothing was found.

Marsha came out into the rec yard next day. Her face was like stone. I asked her something about Tertiary Entrance exams and she thought: "It doesn't matter. Forget it." Then: "So you're curious. Scared, too."

"Tell me, Marsha. Please."

"All right, lamebrain. Take a look."

She opened her mind and I couldn't grasp the concept for a second, it was too horrible.

Then I vomited.

"See? I told you! Crybaby!"

That night I couldn't sleep. I kept after her, begging. She just laughed.

"It's wrong, Marsha, wrong."

"Shut up. Go to sleep."

"You're a regressive!"

"You're a cretin."

"I'll tell the monitors."

"Just try. I'll fry *your* brain."

Next morning the monitor gave me a scourging for inattention during classes. I didn't care. Tertiary exams that afternoon, and it didn't matter. I remember staring at the exam, knowing I could never pass

it, reaching out for Marsha, and her mind cold, disdainful.

"Leave me alone."

"Please. I'll fail!"

"It doesn't *matter*. Increase the frequency here, modulate the band. More power, maximum range."

I fought for rapport, and now I could see with her eyes, and she was in the lab. Her fingers darted here, there, adjusting a platinum dial on an assembly of glass and copper tubing. The assembly glowed with a faint turquoise shimmer and I saw what it was that she meant to do, and I coiled inside her mind, begging. "Stop it!" she lashed. She was hurting me. "You'll spoil everything!"

I reached for her cortex and *twisted*. I was looking into the depths of her mind, seeing what man was before the Vorla came, and it did not matter, what mattered was stopping her. But she was strong, strong.

"What did you do?" asked the Prefect quietly.

I took a slow deep breath, remembering how Marsha had cried inside, how she had fought.

"I made her short-circuit it," I said.

"And so, Timmy, an atomic explosion destroyed an entire wing of the nuclear building. A Vorla died."

I was trembling. "Another thirty seconds, sir, and all the Vorlas would have died."

The Prefect's voice was tired. "Have you anything further to add to the confession?"

I shook my head numbly. That was all. I'd sinned, and now I was going to pay.

Marsha's thought shimmered faintly inside my head, mocking. *"See! See what you get, lame-brain!"*

"I wanted to know."

"Now you know. Come to me, Timmy."

The Prefect stood up slowly and opened the black door. The monitor took me by the arm. "Expiation," the monitor boomed like a benediction. He led me towards the door.

I closed my eyes. I thought hard of Marsha.

The dark lurch, the sick falling. And the room vanished. I was standing on green grass with the sun golden in the blue sky and the ruined city looming a hundred yards away. It no longer looked horrible, just sad. Marsha stood with her hands on her hips.

"Cretin," she said.

"I'm sorry," I said.

She was mad. "First you throw me way out here then start a chain reaction that destroys—"

"I tried to stop you." I felt very tired. "Your center helix was two coils short, it would have brain-burned humans too. You wouldn't listen."

We looked at the ruins.

"We'll need some copper," Marsha said thoughtfully, "and some

platinum. And an atomic battery —I can make one, I guess. There's no radiation on this side," she said. "Come on," she said.

Hand in hand, we entered the city.

Peace on Earth and good will to men. Somehow it seems that no matter how firmly you keep your feet on the ground, peace just isn't possible. But maybe we could do it if we went

ONE THOUSAND MILES UP

By Robert Courtney

Illustrated by Virgil Finlay

"SO you're Wolfe." The General drummed his fingers on the desk top and stared bleakly at the man sitting in front of him. The man was of medium height, chunky, and wearing a pair of dark, horn-rimmed glasses that seemed oddly out of place against the tan of his face.

He doesn't look like the man for the job, the General thought, *but then just what the blazes should the man for the job look like?*

"I'm wondering if you can be trusted," the General said.

Sam Wolfe stirred uneasily in the leather padded chair. He hadn't asked to come to the New Pentagon. He would just as soon have stayed home; in fact, maybe a whole lot sooner. They had said something about a Top Secret mission, and as far as he was concerned Top Secret was just another word for danger. And he had had enough of danger. Burma, Korea, the Berlin war . . . after a while you got tired of the job of volunteer fireman to man the pumps at every hot spot on the globe.

"The CIA checked . . ." he began.

The General waved it aside. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean it that way. It's not that we don't trust you *for* the job, it's just that I wonder if you could be trusted to *do* the job."

"You must have checked my qualifications."

"You speak several different languages—in this case, the ones we're interested in," the General interrupted, "and you're a competent man in physics."

"Something I just managed to sandwich in between recalls," Wolfe said bitterly.

"And outside of that," the General continued, "we haven't the slightest idea as to what the quali-

Virgil
Finlay

fications should be. An uncommon store of personal courage and no nerves, perhaps. And for the job that has to be done I wouldn't trust my own son to have enough guts to pull him through."

"I've done secret work for the government in the past," Wolfe said, and then bit his lip. He didn't want to sound like he was volunteering for anything.

"But nothing quite like this." The General stood up and padded across the thick carpeting to a lighted wall map recessed in the dark walnut paneling of the room.

Wolfe's hands tightened on the arms of the chair. Imbedded in the clear plastic of the map was a three dimensional view of the Earth and just above it a doughnut of metal, far smaller than the moon, poised threateningly over the globe below.

"A thousand miles up floats the balance of power for the entire world," the General said softly. "Its orbit carries it over every important country on the globe. It knows no nationality and respects no Iron Curtain. And it isn't ours."

The space station had been a political football even before it had been launched two years before, Wolfe thought. The problem of who should control it had finally been decided by a UN commission which rendered a Solomon-like decision that had pleased nobody but had been accepted for lack of a better one.

"It was a mistake," the General continued bitterly. "A bigger mistake than the failure to secure a corridor to Berlin or the decision to divvy up Korea on the 38th parallel. They chose a national from England, Italy, Russia, China and America to man that station. You know what that means, Wolfe? A safety margin for the West of one man!"

"How do you mean?"

The General started pacing before the lighted map like an impatient schoolteacher before a blackboard. "The axiom of modern warfare is that whoever controls the space station controls the world. In unfriendly hands that station could launch hydrogen warhead rockets at any American city with no fear of retaliation from us." He paused and looked straight at Wolfe to emphasize his next words. "It isn't pleasant to lie awake at night and think of what might happen if one out of the three men on our side should turn traitor."

The General sat down and pushed a package of cigarettes across the desk top. "You married, Wolfe?"

"No. Widower."

"The CIA told me, of course. No children, either." He stopped talking and the silence settled in the room like dust. Wolfe stared uneasily at the map and wondered exactly what it was that the General was driving at.

"We need that station," the General said quietly. "If we don't get

it, somebody else will. And if somebody else gets it, well, that's all there is, there isn't any more."

Wolfe felt cold. "And that's where I come in."

The General nodded. "You're to be sent to the station as a routine replacement. You'll have instructions to do whatever you think necessary to gain control of that station for ourselves."

A thousand miles up, Wolfe thought, five men held the world in the palms of their hands. Five men knee deep in fear and intrigue, living under strained conditions in a little sphere of metal, each waiting for a chance to slit the other's throat. And they wanted him to get messed up in that.

"Suppose I don't consent to go? You can get somebody else, you don't have to have me."

The General's face didn't change expression. "We don't have time to look for another man and even if we did, I doubt that we could find one. You can't fake a scientific background and a wide knowledge of languages is essential. We either send you up within a week or we lose by default."

Wolfe hunched forward in his chair. "Look, General, I'm tired. I think I've done more than my share in the last ten years. And, frankly, I'm getting too old to be the hero type."

"I never met a hero in my life," the General said in a tired voice. "Only men who did what they had to do under the circumstances in which they found themselves."

"I actually don't have much of a choice, do I?"

"I understand," the General said slowly, "that you were in Nagasaki shortly after they dropped the big one. I've often wondered what Washington or Chicago or New York would look like in a similiar situation."

He had no choice at all, Wolfe thought, and felt the resistance go out of him like the air from a pricked balloon. "What time do I leave?"

"You'll leave Friday noon with the supply rocket. We'll try to fill you in on all the details between now and then."

"You mentioned me as a replacement. When do I have a chance to talk the situation over with the man I relieve?"

The lines in the General's face deepened. "You won't. He arrived on the return rocket this morning. Died before he got here. We think it's heart failure but we don't know for sure."

Wolfe picked up his hat to leave, then paused at the door. "When you find out, General, you'll let me be the first to know, won't you?"

There were three men waiting for him when he stepped out of the air-lock at the space station. They stared at him curiously and Wolfe used the short, awkward silence to size them up and review the few facts that the CIA had compiled on them.

The tall thin man with the wispy blonde hair was Roberts, the Englishman, doctor and biologist of the station. An introverted, brilliant type with a flair for painting and a taste for the bottle. Mikhail Balanski was a Georgian; a short, balding man just verging on fatness but with an air of physical strength about him nonetheless. He had a wife named Greta and two children — further data not available. The last of the three was Li T'Sien, a finely featured Chinese wearing thick, steel-rimmed glasses on a bland, expressionless face. Educated at Stanford but politically anti-western. Parents had been killed in an American air-raid on the coast some years before.

Roberts would be useful, Wolfe thought shrewdly, and with Covici, the Italian. . . . But there were only three men here. Where was the fourth?

Roberts caught his puzzled look and said: "Covici's fixing dinner. He's the chemist here so I suppose he's more qualified for a cook than the rest of us."

"Spaghetti," Balanski said distastefully, in a heavily accented voice. "He is probably fixing spaghetti—he says it is easier to eat. You can wind it around your fork so it does not float off." He managed a gold filled smile. "With Covici as cook, we have a wide selection on the menu. Spaghetti, ravioli, or chicken cacciatore. And you know, sometimes I think I am getting to like them better than borscht!"

Roberts coughed politely and extended his hand. "Perhaps we should introduce ourselves. I'm Peter Roberts and this is Mikhail Balanski, our astronomer, and Li T'Sien, communications."

Wolfe started to shake hands and suddenly found himself floating near the ceiling. There was no gravity here, he remembered wryly. The station was in a state of free fall and any slight movement would send him floating off down the corridor.

Li T'Sien handed up a pair of alnico boots. "You'll have to wear these to get around, Mr. Wolfe."

He put them on and floated down to the floor. "I guess I've got a lot to learn."

"I thought they would put you through a pretty stiff indoctrination before they sent you up," Li T'Sien said suavely.

"They did. I imagine it was about as good as the one you went through."

"I think it's time for dinner," Roberts interrupted quickly, and led the way down the passage.

Wolfe followed the others, thinking grimly that he had to watch himself. He couldn't afford to let himself be needled.

And he couldn't afford for a second to forget any of the details about the station.

"What is it like down below, Wolfe?" Balanski asked, wiping

away traces of spaghetti with his napkin. "You know we have been up here for two years now and we have not even been able to talk to the pilot of the relief rocket. And you have no idea of how lonely it gets."

"I shouldn't think it would be too bad. With radio and television . . ."

Roberts squeezed a drink from a plastic water skin and snorted. "The radio-teletype is used only for coded messages from the various governments. And the television is used only for technical purposes. So you see, we've been looking forward to your arrival here for a number of reasons. You can tell us what it's like back on Earth. Sometimes . . . we forget."

The others were looking at him expectantly but Wolfe hesitated. What could he tell them? How the cold war was going, how the tension was slowly building up day and night, how the race for bigger and better bombs was waxing hot and furious?

"Just what is it you'd like to know?"

"Tell us about New York," Balanski asked innocently. "The crowds of people and your Broadway shows and the shops and everything."

"Well . . . New York is a lot different than Moscow, of course."

"A city is a city," the Russian interrupted. "Who cares about the differences? What I miss is the similarities, the people!" He sighed and lowered his voice. "The people, Wolfe! You have no idea how much you will miss the people!"

"And baseball," Li T'Sien said quietly. "I became quite interested in the sport when I was in the States."

"The Politburo doesn't approve of baseball," Wolfe couldn't help saying.

Li T'Sien's face momentarily slipped into its usual bland expression. "Ah, that is so." Suddenly he laughed. "But the Politburo is down *there* and I am up *here!*"

Roberts leaned back in his chair, lit a cigarette, and watched the smoke follow the eddies caused by the air circulation fans. "I can remember the last free day I had before I came up here. You know how many ways you think of spending it. Maybe having one last party and getting drunk or perhaps seeing all your friends and saying goodbye. I said goodbye to no one. I went for a walk in the country instead.

"I could close my eyes and take that walk all over again, if I wished. The gravel roads and the fields of heather bordering them, and the little thatched roof farm houses further off. And the sky, the *blue* sky . . ." His voice trailed off.

"I think what I remember most about my home land," Balanski said soberly, "is the winter. You have not seen a winter until you have seen a Russian winter where the snow covers everything but

your chimney and the cold soaks into you until your bones feel like the ground frost. Sometimes in my dreams I still see the fields of white and the pines standing on the hills like little green toothpicks." He gestured towards the ports. "I would not trade it for all the blackness of space and all those unwinking dots we call the stars. But maybe in another year, when my time is up, I shall go back to my Russian winter and dream of the nice warm station up here, eh?"

Li T'Sien drifted over the port and stared out at the blackness, broken only by the stars and the ring of lights that outlined the doughnut shaped station. "After you've been here a while, Mr. Wolfe, no matter what country you come from you'll miss the same things. Your friends, your relatives, even your enemies. On Earth a thousand miles *away* is not so far. But a thousand miles *up* is infinity."

Wolfe felt uncomfortable. Down below a billion people looked up into the sky with dread, while up here five men looked down at the Earth only with longing. "I think I ought to see the station. I'll be starting my duties tomorrow so I'd like to poke around tonight."

"That is right," Balanski said, floating to his feet. "We almost forgot. Tonight you are our guest and every guest should have a tour!"

They started down a passageway and a moment later Wolfe found himself at the hub of the station.

"It's one hundred and twenty-five feet from hub to rim," Roberts was saying, "seven hundred and eighty-five feet around. We're one thousand and seventy-five miles up and make a revolution around the Earth every two hours. Use about three pounds of oxygen per day per man, carbon dioxide is automatically removed and the air dehumidified. Electronic cooking . . ."

". . . the only people in the world who eat electronically cooked spaghetti," Balanski cut in.

". . . use solar power with mercury as a heat exchanger."

The station seemed vast, with a power plant, an observatory, a communications room, and even a small greenhouse. Wolfe stopped at one of the laboratories to inspect some of the complex and heavy apparatus.

"We could have a form of gravity by rotating the 'doughnut'," Li T'Sien explained carefully, "but it would make many of our mechanical arrangements, such as you see here, impossible. As you see, with a no-gravity field we need no bracing for heavy apparatus."

"Probably better for us physically, too," Roberts added. "With absolutely no strain on the heart, maybe the years spent up here won't be as much of a debit as we think."

Towards the end of the tour they

made a short stop at a heavily barred and locked lead door. Nobody bothered explaining what it was and Wolfe didn't need any explanation. This was it, this was the reason for the station's existence. The guided missile warheads behind the door had been stocked as the first line of defense in case the saucers should ever prove to be real. But nobody had ever doubted what they would eventually be used for.

Wolfe looked at the others, trying to read their minds. But each face was impassive, masking the thoughts beneath.

"Each of us has a key," Roberts said quietly. "It takes all five to get in."

A half hour later Wolfe had seen all there was to the station and went to his room. Li T'Sien had the one right next to his and the little Chinese was standing at the door, waiting for him.

"So you think you will like it here, Mr. Wolfe?"

"Everybody seems to get along," Wolfe said.

Li T'Sien nodded. "I know. Perhaps at another time, in another place . . . You know, the difficulty in politics is that nations are a great deal like individuals. They trust themselves with power but they're convinced that they can't trust each other." He broke off. "But this is all a polite fencing game. You see, we all know why you're here, Mr. Wolfe."

It was Wolfe's turn to look inscrutable. "You're so sure of that."

Li T'Sien shrugged. "Each of us is here for the same reason you are. Each of us wants the station. And for each of us the reward for gaining it is high while the penalty for losing it will be severe."

He smiled slightly. "It's too bad that one of us will eventually win."

Within a month Wolfe knew his routine by heart. He maintained the power plant and machinery on the station, including the radar stoves and the air plant for Covici, the fuel-food-air man. The rest of the time he spent helping Balanski develop his astronomical plates or prowling the station, planning ways of taking it over. There was always the chance, of course, that Balanski and Li T'Sien would beat him to it. May Day was not too far away and that would be an ideal time for them to try to seize the station.

Alone, Wolfe knew he had no chance at all of succeeding. Roberts would be of some help. But Roberts was unreliable. The man was homesick—they all were—and every few weeks he would disappear into the dispensary and get slightly drunk on diluted medical alcohol. And when he was drunk, he talked. Roberts might come through in a pinch but he wasn't the man to confide in too far ahead of time.

Sooner or later, Wolfe realized, he had to talk to Covici.

He found his chance one day when Covici was puttering around in a corner of the greenhouse.

Wolfe studied the man in silence, watching with interest while the thin Italian sprinkled plant food around the trees of a miniature landscape. Wolfe coughed and Covici looked up, somewhat embarrassed.

"Sometimes we have enough time for hobbies, Sam. Li showed me how to raise these miniatures so I thought I'd try. It—well, it reminds me of home. I'm fixing it so it looks a lot like the country around Naples."

Wolfe tamped his pipe and fished in his pocket for a lighter. "How about Roberts and Balanski? What do they do?"

"I think Roberts paints landscapes. They're English landscapes, of course, and from what I've seen, very good ones. Balanski likes to write poetry—mostly about the Russian winter and the fields of wheat rippling through the Ukraine."

Wolfe bent down to look at the miniature landscape more closely.

"You wouldn't recognize it," Covici said, "but it's an exact replica of a little section just off the road from Amalfi to Sorrento. The rocks and the pines and the little orange trees are all there, you see."

He added a pinch more of food and injected a little water under the soil. "Russia is bigger than my country and yours is richer but I think Italy is the most beautiful. I'm prejudiced, of course."

There was another miniature landscape a few tables away and Wolfe went over to look at it. "That's Li's," Covici said. "It's a section just outside of Tientsin. He's very sentimental about it."

"You'd like to go home, wouldn't you?" Wolfe asked, wishing he had thought of a more subtle way to approach the subject.

"We all would, I suppose. Even with all the tension and worry down below, I would still like to be there."

"There doesn't have to be the tension and the worry that there is in the world today," Wolfe said slowly.

Covici left the small box of plant food floating in the air and came closer to Wolfe. "What do you mean?"

"The station," Wolfe said in a low voice. "It's too much of a temptation for any of us here. Sooner or later one of us will grab it. And I would rather have it be us."

The little Italian didn't look surprised and Wolfe wondered how many times he had thought about it on his own.

"There would be you and I and Roberts, I suppose."

Wolfe nodded. "I have a plan..."

Covici suddenly looked drawn and tired. He held up a hand.

"Don't tell me. I don't think I'd care to know."

"You've sold out," Wolfe said thinly.

"No, I haven't," Covici objected. "Oh, I've had offers. But I didn't take them, just like I'm not taking yours. Whoever owns this station owns the world. That's too much for me to give away, to any country. I know what you will say. You are a democracy and you would not misuse the power. But the others say the same thing and who am I to say that they are not as sincere in their belief as you are?"

He paused for a moment and gently pushed a miniature tree so it leaned at a slightly different angle in his landscape. His face had begun to shine with a slight film of sweat.

"I have to be practical, Wolfe. Suppose I helped you and you lost? I do not care what happens to me but people would assume that my decisions reflected those of my government. My country is a poor one and in many ways a weak one. If you lost and the Russian bear won and they knew my country had tried to help you. . . ."

He straightened up and shrugged "I am neutral. I have to be. I cannot help you."

Wolfe lay on his bunk and stared at the radium dialed watch on the wall. A quarter to three in what passed for morning. It was time to begin.

He stripped off the stay-in sheet and started to dress. The others would be sleeping, except for Roberts who had the duty that night. He'd meet the Englishman in the greenhouse and then the two of them would take the station.

The plan was simplicity itself, Wolfe thought, buckling on his magnetic boots. There was a small reaction pistol just inside the airlock that they sometimes used to propel themselves around the station when they had to make outside repairs. It wasn't much bigger than a twenty-two but it was a pistol nonetheless. They'd get hold of that and then they'd disable the communications room. And finally they'd get the portable welding machine and some locks and go to work on the water-tanks and the refrigerator room. And after that all they had to do was wait.

They probably couldn't force Li and Balanski to give up their keys outright but they could starve them into it. He and Roberts could take turns sleeping and standing guard until the others finally gave up. It was cruel, but not nearly so cruel as the next war might be. And it was still far more humane than turning off the air-circulation fans and letting them smother in their sleep because there was no gravity and thus no convection currents to carry away the carbon dioxide they exhaled.

He stood at the door of his room for a moment, listening for any noises beyond. There was nothing but the slight *whoosh* of the air fans. He took a last nervous hitch at his belt and glided silently down the corridor to the greenhouse.

Roberts was seated behind

some fern-like plants. Wolfe whispered *"Roberts!"* but the man didn't stir. Suddenly Wolfe froze and felt the hair on the back of his neck start to rise. Roberts' head lolled forward and he was making heavy, deep, breathing sounds.

Wolfe drifted over and shook him. The man moved limply and little bubbles frothed off his lips and spun away into space.

Drunk, Wolfe thought despairingly. Dead drunk. Two empty whiskey plastics lay near the ferns, half hiding a sheet of paper beneath his elbow. Wolfe moved them and picked up the paper.

April 30, London, Personal Peter Roberts, Station Able.

Expect arrival relief 15 May. Make plans departure according London letter three five paren six paren paragraph two.

He had probably taken one to celebrate and one for good measure and so on into the night, Wolfe thought grimly. And that did it—at least for tonight. There was nothing to do but go back to bed and hope that Roberts had sense enough to keep quiet in the morning.

He floated down the corridor towards his own room, then braked to a sudden stop. Balanski's door was open. Wolfe glided nearer and looked in. Empty.

He felt sick. It had to be tonight, and it had to be soon. He kicked off down the corridor to the airlock. The pistol was gone. He felt around inside the empty case, then turned to search the rest of the room.

"Perhaps you are looking for this," a voice said.

Wolfe twisted slowly around to face the Russian.

"Do not feel so bad," Balanski shrugged. "One of us had to win. Obviously the situation could not continue forever."

"This will make for quite a celebration down below tomorrow," Wolfe said wryly.

"My reasons for doing this are not political," Balanski said quietly. "No doubt you have often thought of the shambles that New York or Chicago would be after the next war? You will forgive me if I have thought the same about cities in my own country."

"We could compromise," Wolfe suggested.

Balanski shook his head. "The stakes are too high for any of us to trust the other. I would like to but . . ." He pointed down the corridor. "I think we should go to the communications room and wake the others. You first."

Balanski threw open the station loudspeaker when they got there and a moment later the others filed in, Covici still rubbing the sleep from his eyes, Roberts white-faced and sick, and Li T'Sien, obviously not displeased by the turn of events.

"Then the station is ours?" Li asked.

"Not ours," Balanski said. "Mine. Whatever disposition my

government makes is up to them. But right now the prize is far too valuable for there to be more than one winner. Stand with the others."

"How do you expect to get our keys?" Wolfe asked curiously.

"I can deprive you of water or starve you out. You have probably thought of the same thing. I can lock you in when I have to sleep."

"Your comrades in the party will be very proud of you," Wolfe said.

"I am not a member of the party, Wolfe. To be indiscreet I will admit that I don't entirely approve of the party. But I love my country."

"I doubt that you could shoot us all, Balanski, if we should decide to jump you now," Wolfe said casually.

The hand holding the gun trembled slightly and Wolfe realized with a growing sense of pity that the man was in an unfamiliar role, that he was first a scientist and second a plotter, and that in his own eyes his motives in taking over the station were sincere.

Suddenly there was a rattling from the teletype in the corner and for a second Balanski's eyes were off the group. Wolfe dove, there was a gout of flame from the gun, and then he and Balanski were grappling awkwardly, turning a slow cartwheel in the air.

Then Wolfe had the gun and he was motioning Balanski back to the group.

"It is still something of a stalemate," Li T'Sien said coldly. "It was true what you said about jumping Mikhail and it also holds true for you. One of us could probably break away and cripple the station so it would fall back to the Earth."

"Maybe that would solve our problem," Balanski said heavily.

Covici shook his head. "No, they would only build another."

Wolfe suddenly became aware that the teletype, clicking all the time, had stopped. "Get the message, Peter." He wasn't interested in a routine message but he had to stall for time. It was only a momentary stalemate. In a minute something would happen and he wasn't at all sure he would come out on top.

The message was short, factual, and not even encoded. When he finished reading it he let his grip relax on the gun until his hands hung limp.

"The gun," Roberts said stupidly.

"It doesn't matter," Wolfe said dully. "No matter who wins, we've lost. None of us are going back. None of us can ever go back."

Covici moistened his lips and stuttered "I . . . I don't understand."

Wolfe crumpled the message in his hands. "We've been up here too long. No gravity. It's easier on your heart, it's easier on your organs. They become used to it.

But it's a one way street. You can't go back because your heart can't take full gravity all of a sudden. The man I relieved died of heart failure before he even got back. They just discovered why."

They looked at him uncomprehendingly. They didn't seem to get it.

"Don't you understand?" Wolfe said harshly. "It's suicide to go back!"

"I'm supposed to be relieved," Roberts said slowly. "But now . . ."

"But now we're stuck here," Wolfe said.

Balanski was mumbling to himself in Russian. Covici drifted over to a port and looked out. He said nothing.

"Oh, we have our memories," Wolfe said dryly. "We can always remember the world like it was."

"Like it was," Balanski said bitterly. "And how long do you think it will stay that way?"

He had been thinking about it ever since he read the message and now was the time to spring it, Wolfe thought. "For as long as we live, if we want it to."

The others stared at him.

"Well, why not?" he asked defensively. "None of us are going back, they can't do anything for or to you now. We're all in the same boat. Whether we like it or not we have to trust each other now."

"There is no need for politics a thousand miles up," Balanski said suddenly. "Maybe we could agree among ourselves that the first country that breaks the peace, whoever it is . . ."

"And of course, if they knew what would happen if they *did*," Li added, "then they never would."

"And perhaps after thirty years of peace," Covici said, "it might become a habit."

"It won't work," Roberts said sourly. "They could starve us out."

Li T'Sien laughed. "Do you think they would dare?"

"Well?" Wolfe asked.

They looked at each other and then Li T'Sien moved to one of the radio transmitters. "We'll have to let them know that it's all over. For good."

Balanski took the pistol that was still hanging in mid-air and walked out to replace it in the airlock holster. Wolfe walked over to one of the ports and looked out at the huge blue sphere of the Earth below.

He would have to burn the message tomorrow, he thought. Especially the part that said since he had been there only a month he stood an excellent chance of making it back to Earth with no ill effects.

You had to begin someplace. And the idea would only work if everybody was convinced that they were all in the same boat, that nobody could return. To send up a relief for him would be to start the vicious circle all over again.

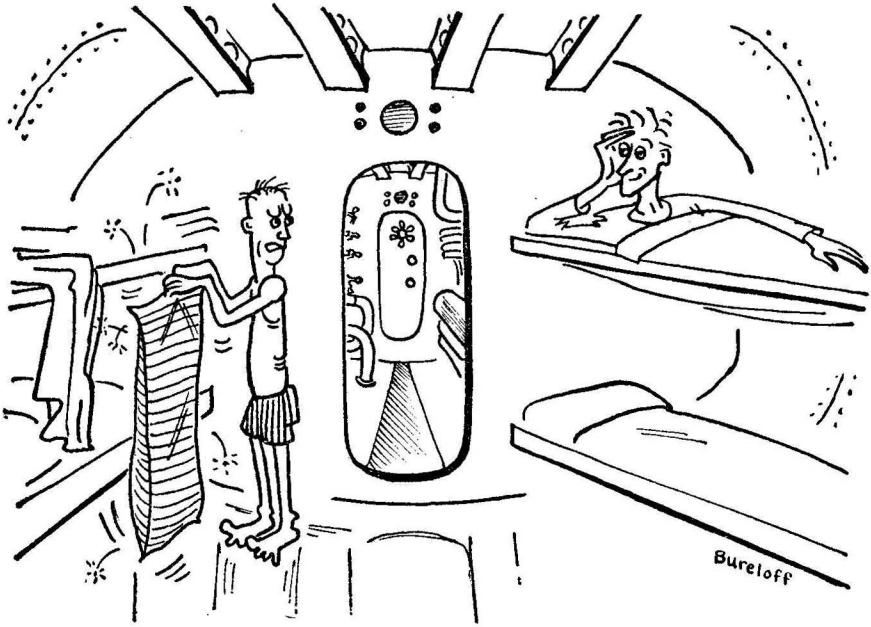
The General probably wouldn't

like it because it wasn't the solution of the problem that he had wanted. Maybe he would think that Wolfe had turned melodramatic and gone hero on him.

But there were no heroes, Wolfe thought.

Only men who did what they had to do.

THE END



"Tiny visitors from outer space" nothing; I still say they're bedbugs.

INFERIORITY

By James Causey

The ego of the hero is perpetuated by the sculptor, who carves his bust with an artist's genius, only to be trod into the dust by the conqueror. Avila also carved a bust, but it enshrined—futility!

Illustrated by Virgil Finlay

WHEN Avila found out what Marl Jedsen was, she did not quite die. She smashed the topaz bust she had carved so lovingly, and spent the long mad days keening over the glistening fragments. In time she helped lethargically with the new village, helped fashion it from the tired limestone of the hills. Not again the white spires carved like foam, the exquisite explosions in stone lace, but squat humble cubes, glowing with color.

The seasons came and went and the silver ships of the Earthmen twinkled overhead like vigilant wasps, yet no Earthman came. Avila even attended the spring festivals now, but it was understood she could not mate again. She had recovered an even greater genius, greater because of the new haunting sorrow that marked her simplest figurines. She could not quite forget that monstrous fungus blooming in the pink Martian sky, or the waste of radioactive obsedian that now marked the village of her birth.

This day it was summer, and the desert was a vast golden mirror under the chill sun and the waters in the canal crawled like warm green oil. Avila worked in her artifact room. She crooned softly as she plied chisel and hammer, an elfin melody that Shar from the old village, had first sung on his silver lute, a song of the lost ages, about ghosts and dreams and waste ruins in the tinkling moonlight. Shar had been the very greatest of them all, she thought.

And a strange sound stilled Avila's song, made her freeze into startled immobility at the heavy booted footsteps. She heard the outer door open, then the door to her artifact room.

Marl stood there.

He had not changed in five years. The hard handsome face, the good breadth of shoulder, the black uniform with the scarlet comet glaring angrily from his chest. Avila drew a long shuddering breath. "Welcome home, beloved."

He stared at her across a gulf in time and the old arrogance in his eyes died quietly at the wonder of her.

"After five years?" he said wryly.

"After a hundred," she said softly. Her turquoise eyes caressed

him. "That comet. So they made you a member of the Imperial Council."

"Director of the Council," Marl said quietly. "You're very beautiful."

Her eyes were shining wet. "Why, Marl, *why?*"

"Orders. Take a Martian to wife. *Absorb their culture.* It was impossible!"

"Eighty-seven of them." Her voice was very soft. "Old Shar, the greatest poet of them all. Young Teena, who could turn limestone into lazuli. My father — he could fashion a singing flame from a lump of clay."

"That was why," said Marl, and his voice was hard. "Some of you were evacuated."

"The stupid ones, the clods."

"We had to know. It's why I came back."

Avila's eyes closed. Faintly: "Then it wasn't for me."

"I'm surprised you lived. We have a bird on earth, the parakeet. When its mate dies . . . but then I didn't die. Did I, Avila?"

"No," she said.

He looked carefully around the artifact room. His keen gaze missed nothing, the carved animals that seemed about to spring, the tormented figurines. "You've done very well in five years," he said, and his words, flat, utterly without inflection, caused twin spots of color to glow in her cheeks.

"Uproot them," Marl mused. "Set them down in the desert, without tools, without food. Let them build. Come back in five years. Perhaps they'll have changed." He looked suddenly tired. "It's a matter of survival. There's a new movement on earth, a soft, silly non-interference policy. It's infecting the Council. It's why I'm here. Today is Inspection Day. Let's take a walk."

She bowed her bright head. They went out into the cold hard sunlight.

Down the red road they went, slowly, past the squat rainbow dwellings, and Avila said, "See? Humility. No spires to soar and mock. Is it what you wished?"

Marl stared at the green crystal patio across the way. A youth dabbed at an easel, carefully studying the prismatic leapings of sunlight in the canal waters.

"Kell, son of Kell," Avila said. "He daubs, fruitlessly. His father was great, the son but an empty echo."

'We'll see," Marl said.

They approached the painting and Kell smiled at them, and bent back to his canvas. Marl caught his breath. From the half-finished canvas, incredible colors roared. The desert was gold, pure gold, the canal had a desolate forlorn look that brought tears.

"What will you call it, Kell?" Avila asked gently.

"Future Tense," Kell said, sighting along his brush.

They walked along. Marl's face was a study in stone. "Where do

you get your raw materials?"

"Mordak built a converter," Avila said. "A clumsy thing, always breaking down. It's not bad for proteins and carbohydrates, but she hasn't yet produced a diamond without a flaw."

They walked to the end of the village where the converter loomed, blackly. Marl eyed the vats of mercury, the strange twisted vanes, the cold white flame spanning the silver electrodes. Mordak looked up from the relay panel and came eagerly forward, holding in her palsied hands a great blue chrysolite. "Flawless, my dear," she quivered. "Seven trials, but it's perfect. Please take it. Use it for the festival mosaic."

"Only," said Avila gravely, "on the condition that you allow me to carve your bust from it."

Mordak thanked her and Marl said, tight-lipped, "Let's see some of the others."

They walked back through the village, Avila carrying the chrysolite very carefully, Marl staring bleakly ahead. That morning he saw Glax the toy-maker make the children scream with delight at his jeweled fire-bursts of bright emerald, crimson and orange stars that tinkled a soft symphony as the colors died. He heard Glax's wife sing a song so poignant that he cried, and he laughed like a child at the joyous notes that followed. He nodded to some of the elders who had played at their wedding feast, and although they knew what he had done, why he was here, there were only friendly smiles.

Finally he said, "I've seen enough, Avila. Let's go back."

In the dimness of Avila's artifact room he held up a pale green vase and trembled at the agonized beauty of it. "You made this?"

"I know," she said, ashamed. "Hideous. Please destroy it, beloved."

The vase shivered into fragments on the marble floor. "That," Marl said brutally, "would make our finest ming look like china." Hot little lights danced in his black eyes. "Yet it's not good enough for you to look at. I'm glad I came," he said.

He strode forward, grasped her savagely by the arms. "A race of artisans," he said. "Poets, artists! And no survival quotient. A race of vegetarians," he said bitterly. "*Why?* No carnivorous animal has ever been discovered on Mars. A perfectly balanced ecology. You had it handed to you on a silver platter. Do you know about man? Claw and fang, up from the slime! And he'll never stop fighting, Avila."

She looked at him numbly. Marl's voice was a dead monotone.

"The first Neanderthal, without steel or flint, shambling. Shambling into a shamed oblivion because he had a neighbor who could paint the walls of his cave. Cro-Magnon. Cro-Magnon had fire, steel, he killed Neanderthal

with an inferiority complex. Man," he said thickly, "came here in good faith. He saw — splendor. He tried to follow your science and he went mad. The mouse in the maze. Our greatest painters looked at your children's poorest canvasses and stopped painting forever. Our poets heard your songs and killed themselves. Well, we've got one thing you never had and never will have," he said. "Because we're men. We've got a bred-in-the-bone survival instinct, we've got a drive that will take us beyond the stars! Nothing — nobody — will quench that drive. Can you understand? This village was an experiment. The experiment failed. The Council doesn't know. They don't know I'm here. But they'll accept my recommendation."

Avila whispered, "We could go away. To another planet."

His eyes were inexorable. "Could you? Really?"

"No," she said dully.

"No," he said. "Rabbits, all of you. You wouldn't spill a drop of blood to save your entire race. That's why we're greater. That's why we'll go on. You believe that, don't you, Avila?"

"Yes," she said.

"Good-bye, Avila," he said.

She raised her face to his, and her mouth quivered in the vestige of a smile. "Before you go— "

"Yes?" His grin was hard, knowing.

"I destroyed that bust of you, five years ago," she said simply. "Could I make another one? To look at while you're away?"

"I won't be gone long," he said, and she knew what he meant.

"Please," she said. "It's a new process. Ten minutes."

He frowned, cupped her chin in one hand, raised her calm face to his. "Martians never lie," he said softly. "You really love me? In spite of— "

"That does not matter," she said, and he knew she spoke the truth. "I want you near me always. I want nothing else."

"What a shame you can't hate," he said. "This pose all right?"

He threw back his head fiercely, man bursting from the slime, man the unconquerable, and Avila said gently, "No, beloved. Look helpless. It will be—better."

"Eh?" Quick suspicion darkened his face and he moved swiftly. But Avila's fingers had flickered over a tiny stud on her workbench and bronze manacles had slid from the wall, and Marl stood transfixed, raging.

"Please," Avila said, throwing a switch, and the hidden electrodes appeared. The blue sparks crackled. "Stand still, beloved." Mercury vapor coiled like a live thing in the crystal vats and Avila's fingers flashed over the row of studs on her workbench and Avila murmured a litany of love as she watched him curse and tear at the bronze clamps.

The blue radiance touched Marl's face, caressed his shoul-

ders, the lightnings laughed and hissed along his legs, turning the pink of his skin into a hard wet onyx. Marl was very still.

At length Avila depressed the switch. He would never leave her now. He stood frozen forever into a splendid straining attitude, and she must put chains on his arms, broken chains to symbolize the futility and the glory.

After all, he was a man.

PROBLEM ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? IN ? GEOMETRY

EDDIE wiggled comfortably in his seat, almost forgetting to chew his gum. Life was full for him. Life was a symphony, an epic, all the grandeur of space, beauty and adventure, terror and pity. Life was the story of Killer Mike.

Killer Mike stepped slowly around the death ray machine, his faithful pistol clenched tightly in his strong right hand. His narrow lips tightened as he sneaked up behind the six guards and bashed them into unconsciousness. Drawing a blowtorch from his kit of burglar tools, he began to dismantle the death ray, unconscious of the eight armed monster at the door. The monster approached.

Eddie leaned forward and his heart beat faster. This was life. Life on the frontier.

Captain Hassen snored gently as he lay on the couch in his office.

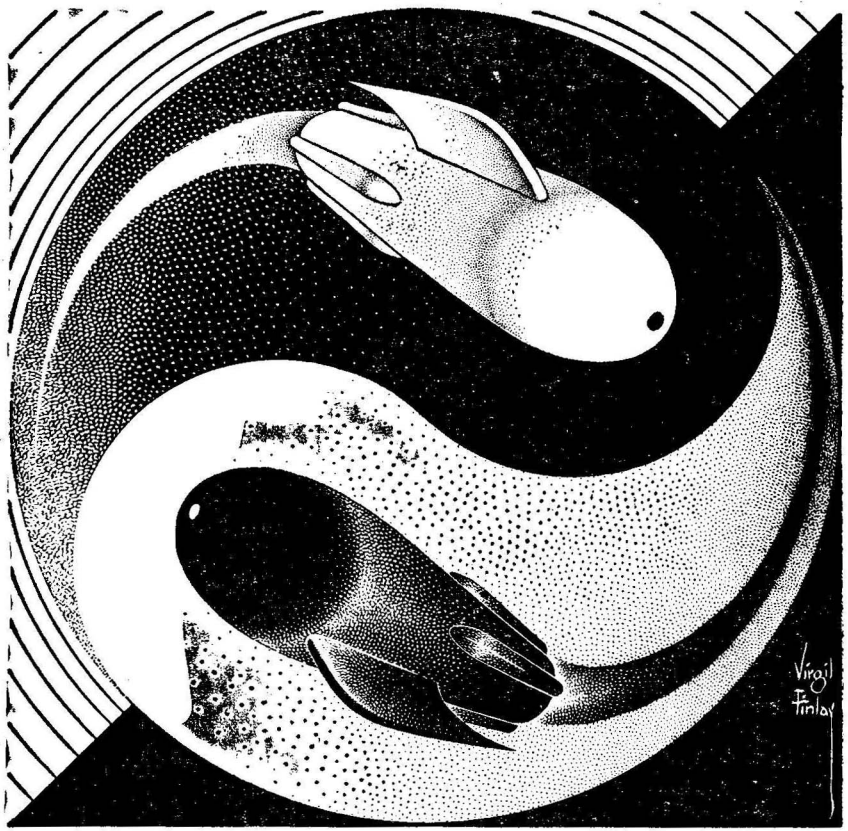
The purser soothed a space-sick passenger in the lounge two decks below.

Ramsay, the chief mate, picked up the bridge telephone and spoke to the navigating compartment. "Ready for overdrive," he said.

"Thirty seconds," said the navigator. The ship's lights dimmed as the warp-generator took power from the line.

Sparks turned on his transmitter and tapped out his departure report.

Killer Mike whirled suddenly, his sensitive ears hearing the mon-



By T. P. CARAVAN

The Chinese have a concept for Infinity which has the same value as a circle—360°. The symbol used to express it is, strangely enough, also the symbol of Life. But who but a child could be so discerning as to see that Life is also a movie film of Killer Mike, Robin Hood of Space, destroying the Monster and saving the earth . . . being projected over and over to be experienced again? The big fallacy in our concept of geometry is that parallel lines go in the same direction. Do they?

ster's slithering approach. They met in a death-grapple.

Eddie moaned with excitement. Life! There was no glory and no shining danger on the Sol-Procyon run. Only the adventures of Killer Mike as he took from the rich and gave to the poor filled Eddie's dull days with the beauty of violence. He ran the reels over and over each trip, but he never grew tired of them.

Captain Hassen turned over comfortably in his sleep.

"No ma'am. Yes ma'am," said the purser. He was paid five hundred a month, and he earned it. "Yes ma'am," he said. "No ma'am."

The chief mate yawned.

The ship went on overdrive.

Putting down his slide rule, the navigator lit a cigarette. The ship's receptors were already feeding information to the comparison unit. The computor clucked happily as it began to file warp data.

Sparks turned off his useless receiver and began to read.

There was a revolving shaft inside the computor, and this shaft began to turn. Wrapped around it was a piece of thin wire. The far end of this wire went to the pin of a demolition grenade. The wire tightened.

Eddie gulped nervously as Killer Mike struggled to reach his knife.

The captain smiled in his sleep, dreaming of the farm he was going to buy somewhere in Minnesota someday.

Sparks turned a page.

The grenade exploded. A piece of the computor slashed through the navigator's throat.

Ringing shrilly, the high clanging of the general alarm filled the ship. Airtight doors slammed shut. Captain Hassen rolled from the couch and rushed toward the bridge.

The navigator died.

Chief Mate Ramsay whirled from the general alarm button as the captain came running in. "Explosion in the nav compartment, sir. The board shows no fire."

"All right," said the captain. They turned toward the door together as Eddie came thundering through it and skidded to a halt beside the manual gyro crank at his emergency station. "What is it, pirates?" he asked.

Sparks sat anxiously in the silent radio room. There was nothing he could do while the ship was on overdrive.

"No ma'am," said the purser. "There's no cause for alarm. Yes ma'am, I'm sure your dog will be all right. No ma'am. Yes ma'am. Everything's under control. Yes ma'am. No ma'am."

"Keep the bridge, Mister Ramsay," the captain said. "You can open the airtight doors. I want to take a look at the nav compartment." He returned almost immediately. "The computor's gone," he said. "Blown up. Navigator's dead. I don't know what we're go-

ing to do." He sat down in the conning chair. "I don't know what we're going to do at all. I think it's sabotage, a grenade perhaps. There's no chance of fixing that computor, Mister Ramsay, and without it we're lost out here on overdrive."

"Take it easy, Skipper," the mate said.

"I'm only a ferryboat captain: New York one day, Procyon Three the next. How the devil am I supposed to navigate through subspace without a computor? It's never been done." He put his head in his hands. "How much fuel have we?"

"About eight hundred megawatt hours, Skipper. We can stay in sub-space for months."

"Months! Sure we can. But what for? We've got to warp back to normal space sometime, and how are we going to know where? We don't have enough power to go back on overdrive once we leave it: suppose we come out between the galaxies? Suppose we come out in the middle of a star? Figure it out for yourself, Mister. We can leave subspace anywhere in the universe, anywhere; and only two hundred and sixty-five planets have been settled. What are the chances of coming within a parsec of one of them? It would take the computor to tell you: I don't know any numbers high enough. I just don't know." He shook his head. "I don't know at all."

"It's a nice problem, Skipper."

"Um," said the captain. He stood up and walked to the annunciator. "Now hear this," he bellowed into it. "Will any crew members or passengers who have training in mathematics please report to the bridge?"

Eddie stood silently at his emergency station. Just stood there: nobody shooting nobody, nobody running around screaming, no pirates trying to capture the ship, nothing. Just a machine blowed up and killed the nav officer. He sighed.

"Might as well do something," the captain said, turning to the chief mate. "We can't just sit around and wait for our fuel to run out. I remember reading that six geniuses, working full time for twenty years without stopping to sleep or eat, could figure out where to take a ship off overdrive. That means a hundred and twenty geniuses could do it in one year, but we've only got six months' rations aboard. Anyhow, we don't have a hundred and twenty geniuses: the computor was supposed to be able to work the problem in a couple of minutes."

Sparks came into the bridge. "What's up?" he asked.

"Do you know math, Sparks?"

"I took enough for a degree in electrical engineering, but I guess I've forgotten most of it." He grinned at them. "Anyhow, I flunked out."

"Tell you in a minute, Sparks," the captain said. "Let's see who

else shows up." He drummed his fingers nervously on the blank surface of a viewscreen. "What are the chances of sending out a distress call?"

The radio officer's grin faded. "An SOS? On overdrive? Can't be done, sir. The sub-space geometry garbles the wave patterns completely, and you have the problem of hitting an antenna in normal space with a wave train in sub-space that seems to be going almost infinitely fast: they just won't resonate to such a short wave length. Then you've got to figure out what direction to beam your signal in, and you've got to figure out what a straight line looks like. I guess the computor can give us the constants for the warp, so we can do that, but then there's the problem of polarization: your vertical and horiz . . ."

"All right, Sparks. I get the idea. No SOS. The computor's been destroyed. That's the problem: without it we can't figure out the sub-space geometry, and without knowing the geometry we can't navigate."

Sparks sat down suddenly. "Oh," he said.

Dopes, Eddie thought, what they worrying about an SOS for? The ship was OK. No meteor holes, no pirates, no fire. There wasn't nothing wrong and already they're yelling for help. Old man Hassen sure was a different kind of skipper from Killer Mike. Old Mike would haul out his proton gun and shoot somebody, boom! A lousy machine blows up a little and kills the navigator, and right away everybody gets so scared they can't stand up. Dopes.

The purser came in. "Sorry I'm late, sir. I had to get rid of about a dozen old ladies who wanted to throw fits."

"Do you know any math, purser?" the captin asked.

"Statistics, sir. It's my hobby. And a little calculus."

"That may be some help. Do you think you could . . ."

"Is this the bridge?"

They turned to the door. The purser groaned. "Yes ma'am," he said. "I'm sorry, but the operating spaces are off limits to passengers during emergencies."

"Oh dear," she said. "I didn't intend to trespass, but that nice man's voice on the loudspeaker said for everyone who had a knowledge of mathematics to come to the bridge, and he said Please, so I thought I'd just come along and tell you whatever it is you wanted to know." She beamed around at them. "My name is Miss Dutton."

"Listen," the captain said. "Do you think you could work out the rate and direction of change of the sub-space coordinates in a four dimensional geometry whose radius of curvature is an unknown variable, given a continuing reading of the apparent gravatic constants met on our track within the sub-space? I mean could you work out a geometry we could navigate by?"

"I'm afraid I don't quite understand," she said.

He shook his head unhappily. "I'm afraid I don't either, but that's our problem."

The purser brought her a chair. "Will you sit down, Miss Dutton? We have to . . . Is that an umbrella?"

"Oh, yes. I never travel without it."

"Uh . . . yes." He cast a despairing glance at the mate.

Ramsay stepped forward. "Are you a mathematician, Miss Dutton? Our computor has been destroyed, and we have to find a way to navigate through sub-space. The books say it can't be done."

She settled herself primly in the chair. "The books are always right, young man. You can count on that. I've been teaching elementary algebra at the Decote School for Backward and Maladjusted Children now for almost forty years, and I've never found the text to be wrong yet."

The captain moaned softly. "You teach algebra to idiots," he said. "And the purser's hobby is calculus."

"Only differential," said the purser. "Mostly I fool around with statistics."

"Not idiots," said Miss Dutton, "morons."

"And you took college math, but you flunked out."

Sparks looked up, blushing. "I didn't really flunk," he said. "I quit to ship out on a freighter. I could of passed if I'd tried."

"Um." The captain turned to the chief mate. "And you and I took our math at the academy twenty or thirty years ago."

"Yeah," said the mate, "and I don't remember mine. And even if I did, and even if I knew all there was to know about math, and even if I had all the books and tables I needed, even then I couldn't figure out a sub-space geometry."

Dopes, thought Eddie: Dopes. He decided to stop listening. He had worries of his own. In his hurry to reach his emergency station on the bridge, he had left his projector running. The film would keep going over and over until he shut it off, round and round, wearing itself out. Could he sue the company? Killer Mike wouldn't even need a minute to figure out what to do, and here they were jabbering away, talk talk talk. That was what made Killer Mike a hero: he never had to think. Dopes. He concentrated on his chewing gum.

"Look, skipper," the purser said, "I'm not sure I know what's going on. I thought the nav officer could fix the computor if it broke down."

The captain looked unhappily around him. "I'd better start from the beginning. The computor isn't simply broken. It's been blown up by a demolition grenade: there's nothing left of it and there's no way to build a new one with just the spare parts. The nav officer's

dead. The explosion killed him."

Miss Dutton waved her umbrella. "Are you telling me, young man, that explosives are allowed to get into the machinery of this ship? I think it's shameful!"

"It isn't customary for us to blow up our own gear, ma'am. Somebody sabotaged the computor. There is still a fairly large group of people on Earth who consider space travel sinful, and occasionally they try to wreck a ship to prove their point." He rubbed his hand through his thin hair. "They seem to have wrecked this one."

"Why doesn't somebody do something? Why don't you find the guilty one and have him punished?"

"He won't be here, ma'am. If you considered space travel a sin you wouldn't be here, would you? Especially if you'd arranged for the ship to disappear?"

"I? I am not a fanatic, young man, and I consider it most ungentlemanly of you to suggest I am."

The captain smiled at her. "Sorry," he said. "I guess I'm under a strain of sorts. What I mean is we don't have to worry about the saboteur: he's back on Earth telling his friends how holy he is. Our problem is to . . . I'll start from the beginning. Let me explain overdrive theory. I'm not a nav specialist, but I know something about it. You can't travel faster than the speed of light: there's no getting around that; and since the stars are light-years and light-centuries away from us we were cut off from them until the overdrive was invented. Instead of travelling through the tremendous distances of interstellar space, we simply warp the space itself and travel through the warp. What the overdrive does — or seems to do—is shrink the whole universe down to a fraction of its real size; real, that is, in the sense that it is measured by the time it takes light to pass through it. As a matter of fact, we could theoretically warp the universe right down to a point, and then we wouldn't have to travel through sub-space at all: we'd be everyplace at once. The trouble is, we'd have no control over where we'd be when we came out of overdrive: we might be anywhere. You see?"

"No," said Miss Dutton. "If every ship that leaves the solar system for another star warps the whole universe, why don't we on Earth see everything warp each time a ship takes off?"

The purser cleared his throat. "You might say that you are warped, too."

"Nonsense," she said. "I'm sure I'd notice."

"Um . . . Yes."

Dopes, thought Eddie. You push a button and you're on overdrive and then you wait a couple of hours and push another button and you're at Procyon. All these people do is think and talk, think

and talk. Too much thinking is bad for the head. It drives you nuts. He waited sullenly for the captain to remember to take the crew off emergency stations.

"Look, Miss Dutton," the captain said. "I'm sure the purser didn't mean to imply you were . . . Let us say that the ship is warped relative to the universe: that's just as valid. It's easier, though, for our purposes, to think of it as if the universe is warped. What we do, then, looking at it from our point of view, is warp the entire continuum down to a size we can travel across at a reasonable speed. The trouble is this: that warped-down space is full of kinks and twists put there by the presence of matter in it. We effectively reduce the size of the universe without reducing the mass of it: consequently, it's a geometrical nightmare. No two parts of it are the same. Do you follow me?" Without pausing, he went ahead. "Now, in order to plot a course through this sub-space, we have to work out its geometry, and that's what the computor's used for. We have a bank of receptors which constantly measure the gravitational forces acting on our hull, and the computor, taking the apparant change in these forces as we move, uses this change to figure out the radius of curvature and all the other qualities of the geometry of our particular warp. From that information we plot our course." He looked around. "The receptors aren't harmed. All we can tell here is how gravitation is affected by the warp. Can anybody figure out a way to do the computor's work ourselves?"

Sparks looked up at him. "Couldn't we just head for the strongest source of gravitation? It ought to be the nearest."

"No good. The inverse square law doesn't apply when your distances are distorted."

"Oh."

"And there isn't any sense to the readings, not till the geometry is worked out."

"Can't we simply turn around and go back to Earth?" asked Miss Dutton.

"No ma'am," the chief mate said. "We wouldn't know when we were back there."

And so Eddie stood angrily at his emergency station for three hours while the captain and the others talked.

". . . but if I took the ship off overdrive," the captain said, "the chances are tremendously in favor of us being between two stars or even two galaxies without enough fuel to reach either of them. It's almost a certainty we'd be outside the settled zone. But what else can I do?"

They looked at one another glumly.

"All right," the captain said. "That's what I'll do." He walked slowly toward the control panel. "It's no chance at all, but we have to take it."

Eddie's patience ran out. "Damn it, skipper," he said. "You going to keep us at emergency stations here forever? I left my projector running."

The Captain, startled, looked across the bridge at him. "I'm sorry, Fowler. I forgot all about you."

Miss Dutton left her chair. "You're young Edward Fowler," she said happily. "You were in my class four years ago. I recognize you."

Eddie squirmed miserably. "Yes'm," he said. "Can I . . . May I go now? I got one end of the reel spliced back to the other end, and it keeps running over and over. I'm afraid it'll wear itself out." He danced slightly in his excitement.

"All right," the captain said. "You can secure from emergency stations."

Eddie rushed out.

"I always like to meet my old students," Miss Dutton said. "What was that about his reel?"

Sparks was glad to take his mind off the ship's troubles. "He has a collection of wild space pictures he looks at," he said. "He's figured out some way to splice the end of the film to the beginning, and he just sits there and lets it repeat over and over."

"Skipper," the purser said quietly.

"What?"

"I know a way to get us out of this mess."

The captain turned from the control panel. "Let's have it." There was sweat on his forehead, though it was cool in the bridge.

"The receptor unit isn't hurt, is it?"

"No," said the mate. "But what good's . . ."

"We can get a measurement of the sub-space gravitic constants continually, can't we?"

"Yeah. But they don't mean anything until we compare them to normal space constants and feed the difference to the computor."

"Sure. Then there's a unit to do the comparison, isn't there? Is that broken?"

"Of course not. It's built in the console with the receptor." The mate glared at him. "Why don't you admit we're lost? What's the good of . . ."

"Let him talk, Mister Ramsay," the captain said.

"Listen," said the purser. "We have the sub-space constants from the first instant we entered overdrive: we can use the readings for the entrance point in one side of the comparison unit. As soon as we get the same readings coming in the other side, we'll know we're back at the place we started from. Come out of overdrive there, and we'll be back near Earth."

The mate snorted angrily. "So we turn around and go back. How do we turn around in sub-space without knowing the geometry? What does a hundred eighty degrees look like out here?" He turned to the captain. "Skipper,

we're wasting time."

The radio operator began to laugh. "I see it," he said happily. Rushing over to the purser he slapped him on the back.

"Are you sick, young man?" asked Miss Dutton.

"Shut up, everybody," the captain roared. "What's this nonsense all about?"

"Listen, Skipper," the purser said eagerly. "The universe is infinite but bounded, isn't it? Like those reels of Eddie's? There's only a limited amount of film there, but he can keep playing it forever: one end's spliced to the other. OK. We've warped the universe down to size: let's keep right on going on the course we entered sub-space in. Let's go right on spang around the universe."

"It'll work," Sparks shouted. "As soon as the readings from the receptor match the first ones we got, we'll know we're home. We can rig a relay on the comparison unit to throw us out of overdrive right there."

The captain sat down. "Anybody want a drink?" he asked.

"Certainly not!" snapped Miss Dutton, waving her umbrella at them. "I had never expected such depravity on a ship of this company or of any company. Drinking! Drinking on a space ship! It's unheard of!"

And two decks down and three bulkheads over, Eddie breathed a vast sigh of content. *Killer Mike wiped the blood from his knife. The world had been saved again.* Adventure!

"Yes ma'am. No ma'am," said the purser.

The End

FIFTH INDIAN LAKE CONFERENCE

By Don Ford

EVERY year the readers of SCIENCE STORIES (and a few other magazines) hold a Conference at Indian Lake near Bellefontaine, Ohio, and it has grown to be one of the most popular science fiction conferences outside the World Convention.

This year the Conference is to be held on May 22 and 23, at the Hotel Ingalls, Bellefontaine, Ohio. You are cordially invited to attend, and you can make your own reservations directly with the Hotel management by mail.

If you are interested in meeting many popular science fiction authors and editors, seeing the real people behind the magazine you read, and mingling with other readers like yourself, and sharing opinions and experiences, you will like the Indian Lakes Conference. Why not come out and join us in the fun?

The SECRET *of* PIERRE COTREAU

By Frank Patton

She was beautiful, that wife of Pierre Cotreau; incredibly so — and his companion lumberjacks wondered where he had gotten her. Their wonder increased vastly when they learned of her pointed ears! But when ghastly death came to the forest, they wondered no more; for to the superstitious the ears explained—everything!

Illustrated by Virgil Finlay

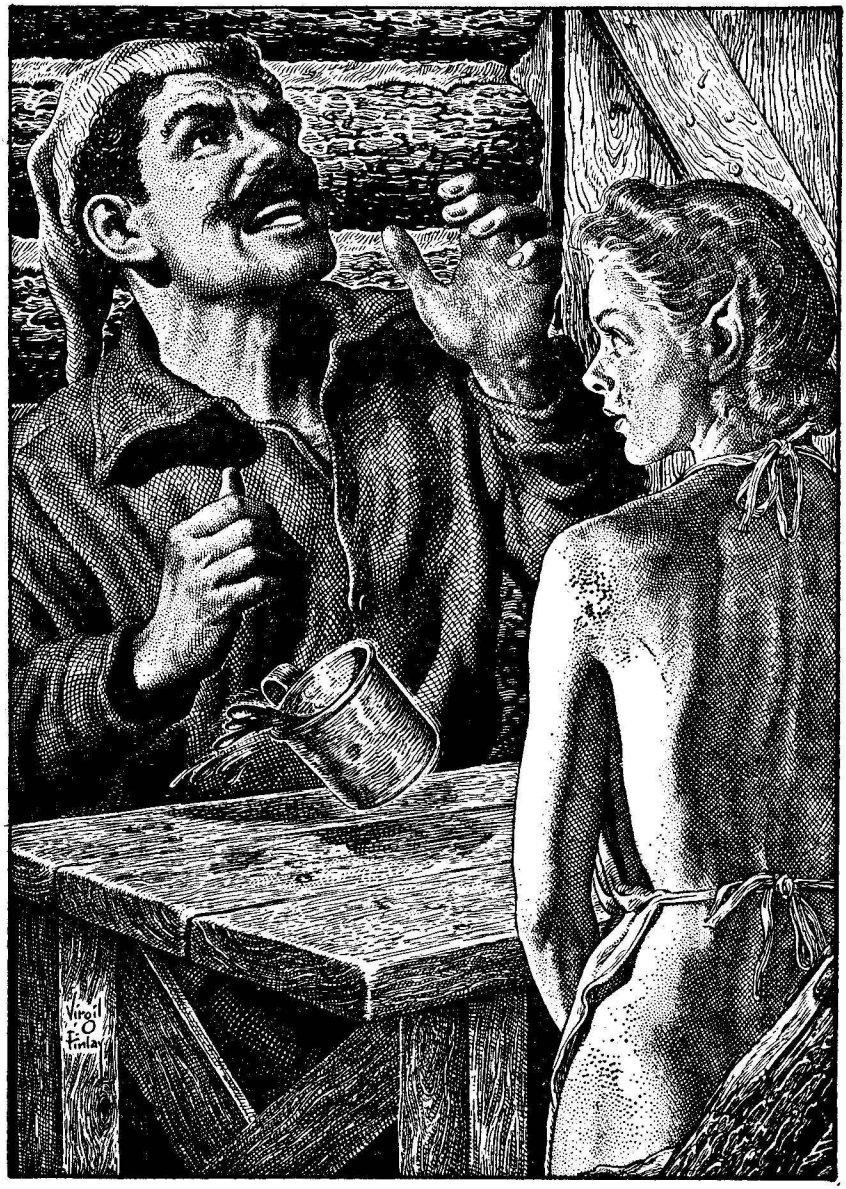
"TIMBER!" The bull voice of Pierre Cotreau bawled through the forest, drowning out even the shot-like sounds of the increasingly staccato cracklings as the great tree began to lean slightly away from the two-man saw. His companion pulled the saw free and began to run with it.

"Run, Danny," shouted Pierre boisterously. "Thees tree, she goin' make beeg noise. She mighty big fella!" He walked almost lazily after Dan Forman, while behind him the great tree leaned more from the perpendicular and suddenly began its groundward passage with a rush.

There was a crash of branches breaking as the big tree plowed down through its smaller brothers, then with a roar the thick trunk smashed into the underbrush. The ground shuddered. There was a tremendous *boom*, and the roar of the tree's falling echoed and re-echoed through the forest. The crash was almost ear-splitting.

Pierre, now standing facing the fallen giant, bore a ludicrous look of amazement on his mustached face. His bushy eyebrows lifted, and for once his little piggish eyes seemed large enough for his coarse face.

"*Sacre bleu!*" he exclaimed in awe, as the echoes died away. "This is beegest noise I ever hear tree make! She is tremendous!"


Virgil
Finlay

Dan Forman came stumbling back through the underbrush. "The tree didn't make all that noise, Pierre."

"*Non?* Then what, my friend?"

"I saw a flash . . ." Dan pointed through the forest. "Over there. A bright blue flash. And then a big orange flare. You were standing too close to the tree to hear that the big noise was from another direction."

"Eh?" said Pierre stupidly. "The lightning?" He looked up through the leafy boughs overhead. "In a clear sky, you hear the lightning?"

"Not lightning. The flash came at the same instant as the sound. And if it had been lightning, it would have come later, at such a distance. The sound came from directly overhead."

"Eh?" Now Pierre peered at Dan owlishly, as if trying to understand. Suddenly he looked triumphant. "So! It is lightning. Or it is not lightning. But just the same the sound comes at the same time. You are a liar!"

"The sound had nothing to do with the flash. The sound came from overhead. Something went over us just as the tree fell, going so fast it created a blast-wave in the atmosphere, just like when a jet plane goes through the sound barrier. Something, maybe a big meteor, went overhead, creating the blast-wave, and then crashed over there on the other side of the valley."

Pierre looked stupidly through the forest in the direction Dan was pointing. "She is wild, over there. Lots of swamp, no trail. Nobody ever find that meteor!"

"I think I can find it," said Dan. "I saw just where the flash was, just beyond the ridge that overlooks the swamp. We ought to take a look, Pierre."

"Ha! She take half the day. We get docked pay."

"The right kind of a meteor might mean a lot of money for us, Pierre. Scientists pay well for big ones."

"Eh?" Pierre's eyes lighted up. "They pay, you say? Then by golly, we go!"

"And if it wasn't a meteor . . ." Dan Forman wrinkled up his brow in thought.

Pierre, about to swing off in the direction Dan had pointed, halted abruptly. "If she is no meteor, why we go? We not get the pay for no meteor."

Dan looked at Pierre. "If it was something else, we might get a lot more than for a meteor."

"What is she, if she is something else?" demanded Pierre.

"Might have been a spaceship, or a flying saucer, or more likely, a secret military craft—in which case there'd be a good reward for finding it."

"By golly!" enthused Pierre. "You tell me so many good reasons why we knock off work and go now, quick! Let us go!" He swung his axe to his shoulder and set off. Dan leaned the saw against

the fallen tree-trunk and set out after him.

THREE hours later, after skirting the edge of the swamp, they passed over the ridge where Dan insisted he had seen the flash. It was Pierre who first spotted the object for which they searched.

"By golly, somebody is cut down couple big trees!"

"Knocked down, you mean!" said Dan excitedly. "Whatever we saw plowed down here and bowled those trees over. We'll find it at the end of that slash."

Pierre led the way down the slope, his thick legs smashing down the underbrush and making a clear trail for Dan following him. Twenty minutes later he came to a halt before a tangle of fallen trees. Through the pile something silvery was gleaming.

"That's no meteor!" exclaimed Dan. "It's either a big plane or . . ."

They beat their way around the tangle and suddenly came upon the gleaming object. It was a long cylindrical hull, shaped much like a Navy blimp. It lay with its nose buried in the soil, but in spite of the destruction it had caused in the forest, it seemed undamaged itself. In its side a port was open.

"She is big tin balloon," announced Pierre. "We get plenty money for her, I bet."

Don Forman was standing with a strange gleam in his eyes. "Plenty money, Pierre, but it isn't a tin balloon. This thing was never made on Earth!"

"Non?"

"No. That thing came from another planet!"

"A spaceship, you mean? Maybe has big frogs in it? They come out and kill people, smash cities . . ." Alarm was beginning to spring up in Pierre's eyes. "The door, she is open!"

"I don't know about frogs and smashing cities," said Dan, "but you're right about the door. Whatever was in there has come out." He glanced around apprehensively.

"Nothing in sight," said Pierre.

Dan Forman stood indecisively a moment, then he shrugged. "Let's take a peek inside."

Pierre hefted his axe nervously. "Okay. You peek, I come after and cut off frog's head when he grab you."

Dan laughed, then stepped up to the open port. He climbed inside and his voice became hollow. "Not much room in here."

"Room enough for both of us?" asked Pierre.

"Yes. Come on in."

"Okay," said Pierre reluctantly. He shoved his axe in ahead of him and climbed after it. Once inside, he picked it up hastily again and stood with it at a menacing ready. It was partially dark inside, but in a moment he could see Dan standing beside a bucket-seat that faced a control board. The entire room was small, and there was nothing but the barest of furnishings in it. It was empty of life.

"Nobody in here now," said Dan. "But whoever was in here was human enough to sit in an ordinary chair."

"Pretty small chair," said Pierre. His courage heightened as he made the observation. "She is little guy."

Abruptly Dan made a decision. "We've got to get out of here, Pierre. We've got to try to find out where the pilot went, and get word out about this thing. Whoever came in this, came alone. But you never can tell. Maybe one of them is more trouble than we'd expect."

"Maybe I can track her," said Pierre. "We look for trail."

"You French are funny," laughed Dan. "To you, everything is a she. Small likelihood of the pilot of this thing being a female."

"Too bad," said Pierre. "The ladies of this planet, she think I am not handsome. They always give me the pass over. Sometimes I think I steal one and hide her in the woods. Maybe lady of another planet not be so foolish." His face darkened and Dan looked at him quizzically. Abruptly he shut his mouth and climbed from the ship.

Outside Pierre looked about carefully. Finally he uttered an exclamation. "She *is* lady!" he announced. "Look at trail."

Dan looked at the track Pierre had found. "Small. But what makes you think it is a woman's track?"

"Easy. Woman, she walk with toes out."

"Hogwash," said Dan. "I walk with my toes out."

Pierre leered at him. "Maybe you are woman? That may be why you cannot pull the saw, with those little city muscles?"

"Why pull the saw with you around?" countered Dan with a grin.

Pierre grinned back. Then he set out through the trees, looking at the ground intently. He hadn't gone a hundred yards before he let out a yell.

"She *is* a woman!"

Dan Forman came on the run, and as he stepped around Pierre's big body, he stopped with a gasp of surprise. There on the ground, lying where she had apparently fallen as she stumbled through the underbrush, was the body of a woman, perhaps four to four and a half feet tall, clad in a tight-fitting suit of what seemed to be yellow plastic, and wearing a metallic-looking belt fastened around her with straps that crossed between her breasts, which were prominent evidence that she was a fully-developed woman and not a girl, as a first glance at her face might suggest.

Pierre knelt beside her and stared down at her as though fascinated.

"She is so pretty!" he breathed. His hands hovered over her as though he wished to touch her, but was afraid to for fear she would vanish.

"Take it easy," said Dan uncomfortably. "She's hurt."

"She is breathing okay," said

Pierre, staring intently. "I think she is only fainting. Maybe I think she is only pretending . . ."

Don Forman took a step forward.

Suddenly the tiny woman's eyes flashed open, and her hand moved swiftly. She snatched at a strange weapon that lay on the ground beside her, where it had obviously fallen from a holster on her belt. With incredible swiftness she leveled it at Dan and pressed the trigger. There was a slight hissing sigh, and an owlish look appeared on Dan's face. Even as he started to topple forward, the girl turned the weapon in Pierre's direction. But big Pierre's fist was already swinging down. With crushing force it caught the girl beside the ear and hurled her back to the ground. She lay there unconscious. Pierre uttered a bull-roar of anger and leaped forward as though to hit her again. But he halted in mid-stride and looked down at her closely.

"This time you not pretend," he said savagely. "I knock you cold, you bet!"

Then he turned to Forman, who lay face down on the turf. With cautious fingers Pierre turned him over on his back. Then an explosive sigh came from the big lumber jack's lips. He got hastily to his feet and looked down at the body.

"By golly, she kill you, Danny!"

There was no doubt about it. In the center of Dan Forman's forehead was a singed hole from which blood was just beginning to ooze—blood and something else that was not blood.

For a long moment Pierre stood, then he turned to the unconscious figure of the girl from the spaceship. He walked back to her, bent down and ripped the metallic belt from her body. He hurled it into the underbrush and followed it with the strange weapon, throwing it savagely.

"You kill no more!" he roared.

Then he stood in indicision. His eyes roved back to the spaceship, visible through the tangle of fallen trees.

"Plenty money," he said.

Once more he turned his gaze upon the unconscious girl. His action in tearing the belt from her had torn her plastic suit, so that one shoulder and a sleeve had been torn completely off. One rounded breast was exposed, and it gleamed whitely in the half-light of the forest.

"By golly!" breathed Pierre.

He bent down, and his fingers reached out hesitatingly. He touched her cheek, pushed aside a strand of copper-colored hair. Then he started and snatched his hand back. He stared down at her ear, exposed by his action.

"Pointed, like the bat!" he exclaimed.

He looked at her face intently. Then his momentary revulsion subsided, and he muttered: "She is so beautiful . . ." Once more his fingers reached out, caressingly...

Abruptly he stood erect, looked back at the fallen spaceship. "Let them keep the money!" he said fiercely. "They never find the tin balloon anyhow. Soon the underbrush will cover her. Later, maybe, I find her again, make the money. She is safe."

"Oui!" he exclaimed, looking down at the unconscious girl. "I take you. It will be better than the money, I bet!"

Stooping down, he lifted the tiny body in his big arms, and without a backward glance, strode off through the forest. Almost at once he halted, turned back. Slinging the girl's body over one shoulder, he picked up his axe in the other, and once more turned toward the ridge over which he and Dan Forman had come an hour earlier. Behind him dusk began to settle over the scene, mantling the spaceship and the dead body lying where it had fallen.

IT was dark when Pierre reached his remote cabin in the forest. For years Pierre had lived here, and his fellow lumberjacks had learned that he disliked vsitors, so now no one ever visited the surly Frenchman. Pierre had built the house himself, of sturdy oak logs, and he had included a third room which he had furnished "for my wife, when she marry me." Once or twice he had been twitted about it, but upon each occasion the jester had received a severe beating. Thus, the subject had been brought up very rarely — except when Pierre was not around. Pierre was particularly unappealing to the opposite sex, and almost instinctively women seemed to shun him, expressing instant dislike. It was the general opinion of the married men among the loggers that Pierre was a little bit twisted regarding women, and none of them would have trusted their women anywhere near his forest home either by day or night.

Upon one occasion, at a dance held in town, Pierre had showed up, but he had sensed the instant rejection by the assembled women and had gotten roaring drunk. The result had been a fracas that was remembered for many a day. Pierre had never gone to another dance.

Now, staring down at the tiny woman from the stars as she lay upon the bed in the room he had built for his "wife when she marry me," Pierre Cotreau's fingers clenched and unclenched, and an unholy look of triumph lit his face.

"I show them!" he whispered. "They will see that Pierre has the most beautiful wife of them all. And she will be nice to me, or I will beat her every day!"

He almost snarled down at the unconscious figure, but then his face drew into softer lines, and he knelt beside the bed and began to strip the rest of the tattered plastic suit from her body. When he had removed it, he looked around for a place to put it, and finally stuffed it in a high cupboard and crammed

a burlap bag in after it to conceal it. Then he returned to the bad.

For a moment he stared down at her, then a great sigh rumbled through his chest. He got up, went outside to the spring and got a pan of water. He sprinkled some in her face, and began rubbing her wrists. After a moment she sighed and stirred. Pierre dropped her hand and stared at her intently. He watched the rise and fall of her breasts with fascination, then lifted his eyes to her face to find that her eyes had opened and she was staring at him uncomprehendingly. This time, as she looked at him, there was no alarm in them, such as had been in her eyes in the forest. Only blankness, and an apparent attempt to remember something. Baffled, she seemed to give it up, but only stared at him. Pierre stared back.

After a moment she sat up, looked down at herself. She gave no sign that she realized she was naked. She merely looked at her own body in the same blank lack of understanding. Her gaze roved about the room, but there was no response, no glimmer of intelligent realization of what she saw.

Pierre scratched his head. "Maybe I hit you too hard," he said. "You look like you are still out cold."

She looked at him blankly, as if trying to rationalize the sudden sound of his coarse voice. She passed a hand bewilderingly over her eyes, shook her head. Then she swung her slim legs over the edge of the bed and sat there a moment. At length she got to her feet. Pierre offered no obstacle to her progress, but he kept a sharp eye on her. She walked over to the cheap woman's dressing table that Pierre had bought to furnish the room, and sat down in the chair before it. Her eyes caught the morror and she started, peered into it with an exclamation. She studied her image in the glass in obvious surprise.

"You not know her?" asked Pierre in astonishment.

She merely glanced at him blankly, then returned to her study of herself in the mirror. Then she smiled. She picked up a comb and began running it idly through her copper hair.

"By golly!" said Pierre. "I think you forget your memory!" A satisfied look spread over his face. "I think that is good! You are Pierre's wife now, and it will be better for you if you never know where you come from. It will keep you from getting foolish ideas."

The girl turned to him and eyed him curiously. Then she said a few syllables in a cool, liquid voice. They made absolutely no sense to Pierre.

"*Non,*" he said. "You will have to speak the English . . . but no! . . . the French will be better. I teach you—we have plenty time. Better you not be able to talk to everybody!"

He rose to his feet, walked over to her. She looked up at him inno-

cently, and he snatched her into his arms. Roughly he kissed her on the lips. Abruptly she squirmed in his grasp, and her fingers reached out to claw his cheek. Indignant anger suffused her face, and she struggled to escape his arms.

Pierre uttered a bull roar and cuffed her savagely with the back of his hand. She rocked back, almost fell to the floor. But Pierre grasped her to him again. Her face was white, now, and she stared at him with a strange expression, almost more of resentment than of fear. Pierre saw it, and he began slapping her face with first one hand then the other until she slumped before him, dazed.

"By golly!" he roared. "You will be good wife, or I will beat you all the time!"

Once more he clutched her now yielding body to him . . .

WITH a concern that would have misled the most suspicious of persons, Pierre joined in the hunt for the missing Dan Forman. Arriving at the camp the next morning, after having securely locked his new "wife" in her bedroom, he had been informed of the fact that Dan Forman had failed to return to camp the previous evening.

The section foreman, assigning the districts for the day, had been the first to note the absence of Dan Forman. "Where's your helper?" he had asked Pierre.

Pierre shrugged innocently. "I leave him at quitting time, like always, to go to my house and my wife. By golly, maybe you give me new helper. That Danny boy, he saw like woman. I never make no money cutting trees with him!"

The section foreman lifted his eyebrows. "Your wi—" he began, then stopped abruptly. "Must have gone to town for a drink and took too many. He'll be back . . . But meanwhile, you'll have to wait until I scare up another man for you. You are too good a sawman to stay idle just because your helper doesn't show up."

An hour later Pierre was in the woods with his new helper, a man he had never seen before.

As evening approached, Pierre had clapped him on the shoulder in bluff good spirits. "I go to my wife now," he had announced. "Be on time in the morning, because tomorrow we cut plenty trees!"

But in the morning Dan Forman had not shown up, and word had come from town that he had not shown up there. A searching party was organized. Willingly Pierre led them to the place where he had been cutting with Dan Forman. There, across the felled tree the saw lay where Dan had left it.

"That is funny," announced Pierre. "Danny would not leave the saw. It would come out of his pay."

The rest of the party had agreed, and at Pierre's suggestion, since he was the best tracker, he led the way on a feigned hunt in the opposite direction from the swamp.

Swiftly Pierre led them away from any possible trail, then led them deeper into uninhabited country. He followed the trail of a bear, and pointed to the tracks. "Maybe he hunt the bear," he said. No one questioned his statement, and, convinced that none of the men with him were trackers of any ability, Pierre marched on confidently, now following a trail absolutely invisible to the others. Night came, and the weary men were glad to return to the camp.

A week later the search was abandoned.

SEVERAL months went by. Winter had closed down on the forest, and the hauling of the logs to the mill had begun. The first of the dances of the winter was about to be held. And as it had finally filtered into the consciousness of the loggers that Pierre actually had a wife back in his forest house, there were more than one who wondered if he would show up at the dance with his new wife.

Several of the loggers had seen her from a distance, but none had dared to go closer to the house. Yet, in spite of the few occasions on which she had been seen, almost a legend was springing up about her.

"I tell you," one logger had insisted to his fellows, "I saw her out in the snow, hanging up Pierre's wash, and she was as naked as the day she was born!"

This statement had been greeted with great disbelief until one day when another logger had gone (on washday) to see for himself, and had been tracked and beaten nearly to death by Pierre. After that, it was accepted as the truth. It was said that Pierre forced her to go without clothes and beat her regularly. And in fact, it was well-known around the village that he never bought any woman's clothing.

Just the day before the dance, however, Pierre did buy woman's clothing.

"But for a child!" swore the keeper of the general store. "I showed him my ladies' dresses, and he said none of them would fit. I had to sell him a dress for a twelve-year-old girl! But I will say, he bought the best dresses in the place."

By the time the hour of the dance came around, the whole village was agog, and every lumberjack in the camp was present. It could also be truthfully stated that not one woman of the community was absent. It was a certainty that when Pierre Cotreau showed off his carefully guarded bride, there would be no lack of an audience.

And Pierre, glorying in the triumph that he felt was at last going to be his, was well aware of the sensation he was causing. And in order that nothing should go wrong, he had impressed upon his tiny wife, who now spoke enough French to understand his simple—and always brutal—demands, that

she was not to speak nor dance with anyone else. There was only one thing Pierre forgot—because it never entered his mind: that when he stepped out onto the dance floor, his wife would not have the slightest idea of what she was expected to do there.

NOBODY was late for the dance—except Pierre. He arrived on foot, his tiny wife walking behind him, an hour late. As he threw open the door of the community hall where the dance was being held, the orchestra (piano accordion and violin) stopped playing. As at a signal, everyone drew to the side, and left the center of the floor clear.

Slowly, triumphantly, Pierre strode into the room, pulling his wife up beside him by one hand, roughly, carelessly. He swung her about to face the audience, and they gasped as they saw her beauty. In a moment they gasped again as they realized she had come to the dance clad only in her party-dress. Whereas Pierre wore his heavy lumber jacket and his fur cap and mittens, his tiny wife wore no outer clothing at all, and looked as warm and comfortable as if she had never left a warm room.

"This is my wife," announced Pierre. "I think she is more beautiful than any of you, no?"

His arrogance was supreme, but his accuracy could not be denied.

"Let the music go on," he waved a big hand. "I have come here, me and my wife, to dance!"

Then, as the music resumed, and the tiny, but unmistakeably womanly woman beside him stood still, unaware of what was going on around her, but regarding it all with a strange, intent gaze, Pierre swept her to him, lumber-jacket and all, and lumbered about the floor with her, dragging her feet until she lifted them free and allowed him to carry her around. But as impossible-to-hide smiles and audible snickers floated around the room, her tiny face grew as red as the copper of her hair.

Suddenly a woman screamed, and the dance stopped. One of the dancers nearest Pierre and his weirdly beautiful bride pointed hysterically at her. "Look at her ears!" she shrieked. "Pointed, like a bat! She's a vampire! No wonder Pierre keeps her hidden . . ." And she fainted in a heap on the floor.

Eyes wide in a sudden terror, the woman from the spaceship tore from Pierre's arms and raced out of the door and into the night. With a roar of rage, Pierre rushed after her, bowling over several men who tried to delay him without seeming to be interfering—for no one interfered with Pierre when he looked as he did now.

Outside Pierre saw that his other-world wife was not fleeing from him, but was racing back in the direction of the only place she could call home. Pierre followed more slowly, but a great rage was

building up in him.

That night he beat her worse than he had ever beaten her before.

IT was not two weeks later that the Forestry Service Aerial Survey plane spotted the space ship. And as luck would have it, Pierre was present when the news broke. As quickly as possible he faded from the scene and returned to his cabin. Once there, he burst in, shouldered past his wife and went directly to the cabinet where he had hidden the remnants of the plastic suit she had worn when he had found her. As her eyes fell upon it, they widened and a startled look of recognition came into them. But she said nothing as Pierre stuffed it into the stove and burned it.

Pierre remained to see that it was fully consumed, then he turned to see her watching him. "Why do you look at me?" he asked roughly.

"Why do you burn my suit?" she asked in return.

Pierre halted. "So you remember now!"

"Yes. Why do you burn the suit?"

He struck her across the face, but she did not flinch. "They have found your spaceship," he said roughly. "But it will do you no good. If you ever leave this cabin, or speak to anyone, I will kill you. Do you understand?"

For an instant she stared at him, then her gaze dropped. "I understand," she said lowly.

"Then make me some hot coffee," he said. "I will go to the spaceship too. Perhaps I can be of help." But in his mind was a picture of a body, now no doubt covered by snow, whatever remained of it. Exactly what he intended to do about it even he could not have said.

Twenty minutes later she placed a cup of steaming coffee before him and then stood on the other side of the table, clad only in the rough apron she had contrived from a few scraps of cloth. She watched him with strange calmness as he lifted the coffee to his lips.

"What is the name of your planet?" he asked, pausing to fix her with his piggish eyes.

"In your language I do not know what you call it, but it is the next planet out from the sun."

"In your spaceship there is much worth?"

"What do you mean by worth?"

"I mean they would pay much money for it?"

"I suppose your scientists would do that."

Pierre frowned. "I have made the very bad mistake. I should have taken the money as I took you. I should have kept you hidden."

"You have made a very bad mistake," she agreed. "Where is the ship?" Her eyes were burning on his now with an intensity that disturbed him.

"I will not tell you!" he roared. But suddenly there was a slight smile on her lips.

"Drink your coffee," she said. "It will get cold."

He glared at her. "You can forget about the ship. They are coming out from the village even now to find it. Then they will take it away, and you will be my wife without a space ship."

"I am happy to be your wife," she said.

He stared at her, then he laughed. "Now you are smart," he said, and with one gulp, he tossed the hot coffee down his throat. Almost as he did so, he stiffened and half rose to his feet. Then, clutching for her with great hands, he began gasping in great wheezing coughs. She eluded him easily, dancing about the room always out of reach. And all the time she gazed at him with eyes that burned. And it seemed to him that they grew larger until they filled the room, then all went black.

THE party from the village reached the scene just in time to see the silvery ship take off from the forest, hurling fallen trees from about it, and raising a great gout of snow out of which it shot, to take a course for the zenith at blinding speed.

They were greatly disappointed.

But they returned to an even greater mystery, for it was only several days later when a venturesome logger went to find Pierre, who had not shown up for work. He found Pierre, white and cold in his house, and no sign of his wife with the pointed ears. An autopsy showed that nothing remained in the veins of Pierre Cotreau but a colorless water substance—not one drop of blood.

And to the superstitious loggers, all mysteries were solved. Pierre's wife had been a vampire, and they were glad she was gone. The space ship was a concern only of the scientists, and it too, was gone. They could see no connection between the two.

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"THE inhabitants of the Third World are not human, but brutes, savage beyond belief," reported one of the most beautiful of the Martians. "I was kept captive and subjected to incredible tortures and indecencies for many months, while I was under the influence of amnesia due to being struck on the head by one of them. I finally regained my memory, learned the location of my ship by mental probing, and escaped. I was forced to utilize a primitive chemical poison, easily obtained by combining several simple substances ordinarily used in making a drink called *coffee*, which I had been forced to prepare by my enslaver. It dissolved nerve and blood cells after causing almost instant strangulation. If we are ever forced to occupy their world, they can easily be eliminated by using this poison in their water supply. Meanwhile I advise that we shun the planet as we would a plague!"

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