SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURES

DECEMBER 1953 35c

THE SYNDIC BY C.M. KORNBLUTH : MOB RULE IN USA

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SCIENCE FICTION
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CONTENTS • DECEMBER 1953 • VOL. 2, NO. 1

SERIAL

THE SYNDIC, *by C. M. Kornbluth* (First of Two Parts) 6

NOVELETTE

TRYST, *by Mike Lewis* 96

SHORT STORIES

CONSIGNMENT, *by Allan E. Nourse* 61
THE SPY, *by Stephen Arr.* 72
THE HANGING STRANGER, *by Philip K. Dick* 122
DOUBLE TAKE, *by Ken Winney* 137
GROUND, *by Hal Clement* 142

A NEW FEATURE

FANMAG 88

DEPARTMENTS

EDITORIAL 4
THE DISSECTING TABLE 117
THE CHART ROOM 157

COVER BY SCHOMBURG • ILLUSTRATIONS BY DREANY • MENDENHAL • SMITH • SUSSMAN

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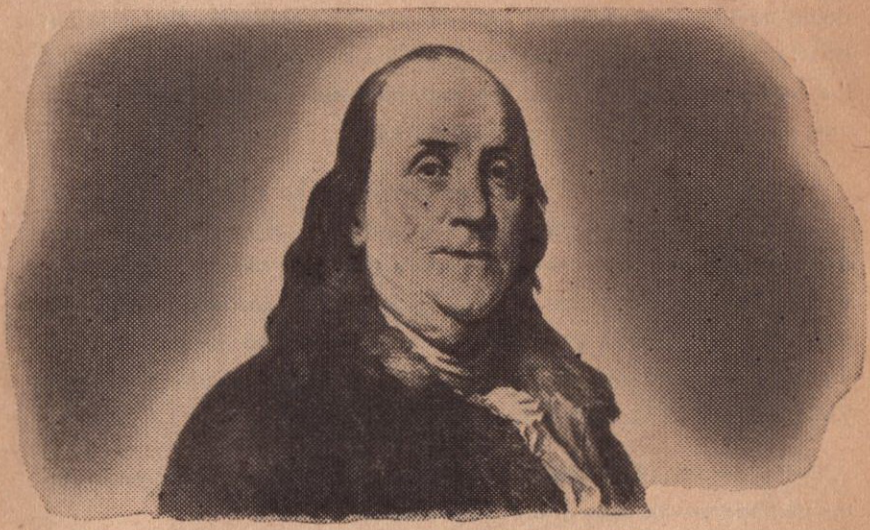
WHAT SECRET POWER DID THIS MAN POSSESS?



BENJAMIN FRANKLIN (A Rosicrucian)

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AN EDITORIAL ON

SCOLEX

The simplest vaudeville act of all time consisted of one man. One man doing nothing—no dogs, no girls, no props or costumes. This man just stood on the stage and answered questions, any and every question that the audience hurled at him. The act was most successful because the man always answered the questions correctly.

He had memorized all the reference works he could lay his hands on, and had read the Encyclopedia Britannica from cover to cover two and one-half times. He had the faculty of being able to recover any of this information at an instant's notice. After correctly setting the population of Nagoya at 1,030,635 he could turn to the gentleman in the third row and describe the horrible details of the death of John Colet, founder of St. Pauls School, on Sept. 16, 1519.

In the evenings he liked to relax with a cold bottle of beer and read the dictionary—his idea of escape literature!

Unfortunately we all can not have this type of eidetic memory. But even if we cannot memorize all of the world's facts, we can read the dictionary for pleasure. This handy little reference book is a uranium mine of information, both useful and useless.

Vaudeville, for instance, the ghost image of a million TV sets. A single word formed from the French phrase *chanson du Vau de Vire,* or song of the Valley of Vire. Very interesting, but hard to drop into a casual conversation.

An example of a more useful word is *scolex.* I ran across this the other day while checking to see how many p's go into *sapphire.* Being

a back-to-fronter I hit the s's first and was stopped dead by *sconce*. I knew of only one definition for it, yet the dictionary gives it four separate listings and meanings. (Including the head or skull!)

Rising out of *sconce* I hit *scolex* and an entirely new train of thought. A scolex is a rough little beast, being the head or working part of a tapeworm. Now a true fan may object to having science-fiction compared to a tapeworm, but the comparison is an apt one.

The scolex develops singly in the larval stage, just a hook, a head and big ideas. The first science-fiction magazines developed that way. The slow growth, taking years, but the hook of these new ideas was capturing new readers all the time.

When scolex reaches a large enough stage it gives growth to a chain of segments. This happened in science fiction with the boom in books, TV shows and movies. These are very showy mediums and their sound and fury tends to override the basic fact that they are just *so many yards of tapeworm*. Their stories are adaptations of magazine stories or, at the very best, written by authors who received their training in the magazines.

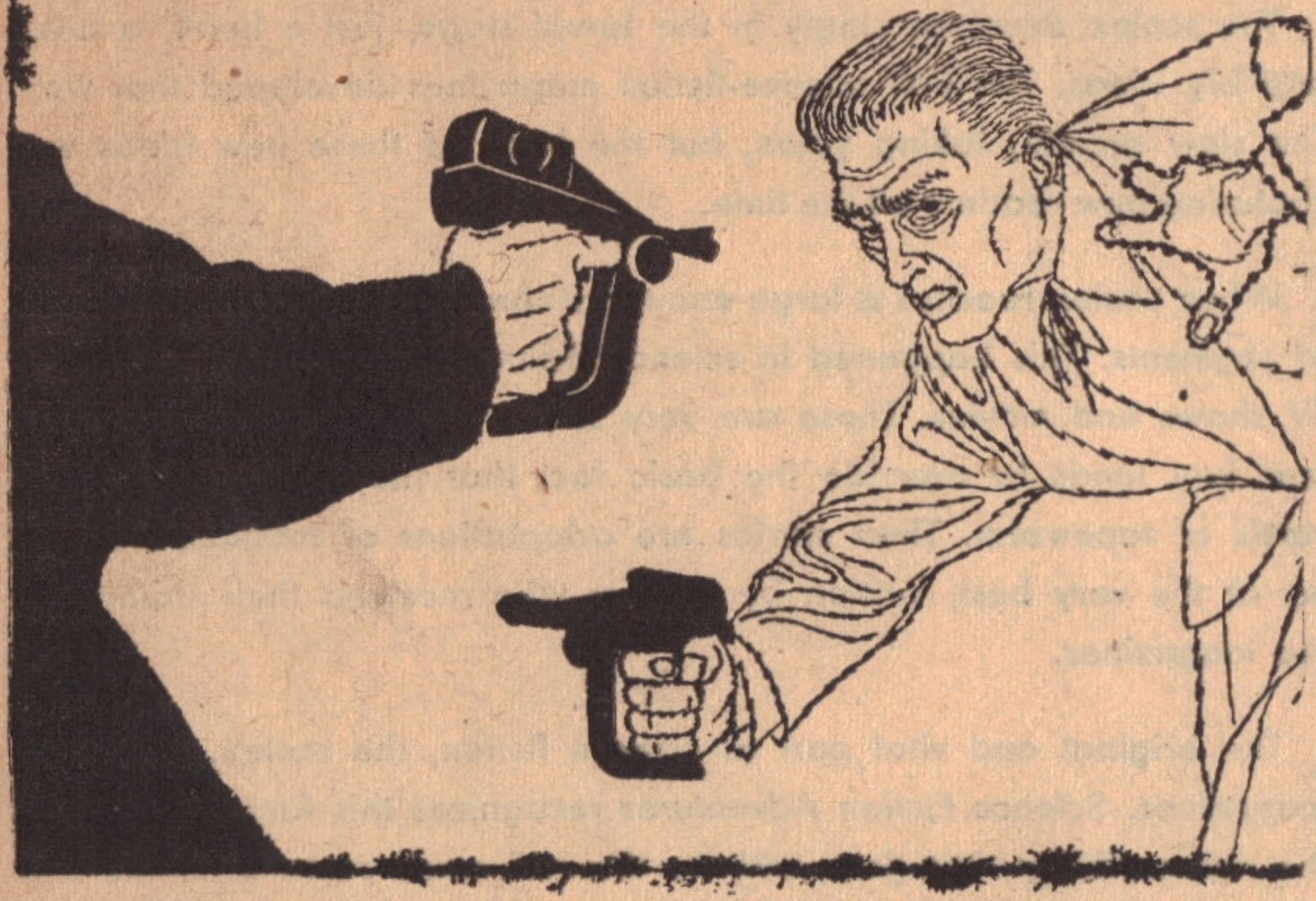
The original and vital part of science fiction, the scolex, is still the magazines. *Science Fiction Adventures* recognizes this fact and accepts the responsibility that goes with it. We will continue to print the best stories by the best authors—both oldtimers and newcomers. We recognize the importance of change in science-fiction, *SFA* will always print the new and interesting—there are no taboos here. SFA will also print the novel twists on old themes. Atom spies are getting to be old hat, yet THE SPY by Stephen Arr is as fine a story as you could want to read.

It may start a few old Latin scholars spinning like rotissomats in their graves but there have been *worse* mottos than "Ad Astra Per Scolex."

HARRY HARRISON

ILLUSTRATED BY SUSSMAN

the SYNDIC



BY C. M. KORNBLUTH

There have been a thousand tales of future Utopias and possible civilizations. They have been ruled by benevolent dictatorships and pure democracies, every form of government from extreme right to absolute left. Unique among these is the easy-going semi-anarchistic society ruled by THE SYNDIC.

"It was not until February 14th that the Government declared a state of unlimited emergency. The precipitating incident was the aerial bombardment and destruction of B Company, 27th Armored Regiment, on Fort George Hill in New York City. Local Syndic leaders had occupied and fortified George Washington High School, with the enthusiastic cooperation of students, faculty and neighborhood. Chief among them was Thomas 'Numbers' Cleveland, displaying the same coolness and organizational genius which had brought him to pre-eminence in the metropolitan policy-wheel organization by his thirty-fifth year.

"At 5:15 A.M. the first battalion of the 27th Armored took up positions in the area as follows: A Company at 190th Street and St. Nicholas Avenue, with the mission of preventing reinforcement of the school from the I.R.T. subway station there; Companies B, C, and D hill down from the school on the slope of Fort George Hill poised for an attack. At 5:25 the sixteen Patton tanks of B Company revved up and moved on the school, C and D Companies remaining in reserve. The plan was for the tanks of B Company to surround the school on three sides—the fourth is a precipice—and open fire if a telephone parley with Cleveland did not result in an unconditional surrender. There was no surrender and the tanks attacked.

"Cleveland's observation post was in the tower room of the school. Seeing the radio mast of the lead tank top the rise of the hill, he snapped out a telephone order to contact pilots waiting for the word at a Syndic field floating outside the seven mile limit. The pilots, trained to split-second precision in their years of public service, were airborn by 5:26, but this time their cargo was not liquor, cigarettes or luggage. In three minutes, they were whipping rocket bombs into the tanks of Company B; Cleveland's runners charged the company command post; the trial by fire had begun.

"Before it ended North America was to see deeds as gallant and strategy as inspired as any in the history of war: Cleveland's historic announcement—'It's a great day for the race!'—his death at the head of his runners in a charge on the Fort Totten garrison, the firm hand of Amadeo Falcaro taking up the scattered reins of leadership, parley, peace, betrayal and execution of hostages, the Treaty of Las Vegas and a united Mob-Syndic front against Govern-

ment, O'Toole's betrayal of the Continental Press wire room and the bloody battle to recapture that crucial nerve center, the decisive march on Baltimore. . . ."

B. Arrowsmith Hynde,
The Syndic—a Short History.

"No accurate history of the future has ever been written—a fact which I think disposes of history's claim to rank as a science. Astronomers quail at the three-body problem and throw up their hands in surrender before the four-body problem. Any given moment in history is a problem of at least two billion bodies. Attempts at orderly abstraction of manipulable symbols from the realities of history seem to me doomed from the start. I can juggle mean rainfalls, car-loading curves, birth-rates and patent applications, but I cannot for the life of me fit the recurring facial carbuncles of Karl Marx into my manipulations—not even, though we know, well after the fact, that agonizing staphylococcus aureus infections behind that famous beard helped shape twentieth-century totalitarianism. In pathology alone the list could be prolonged indefinitely: Julius Caesar's epilepsy, Napoleon's gastritis, Wilson's paralysis, Grant's alcoholism, Wilhelm II's withered arm, Catherine's nymphomania, George III's paresis, Edison's deafness, Euler's blindness, Burke's stammer, and so on. Is there anybody silly enough to maintain that the world today would be what it is if Marx, Caesar, Napoleon, Wilson, Grant, Wilhelm, Catherine, George, Edison, Euler and Burke—to take only these eleven—were anything but what they were? Yet that is the assumption behind theories of history which exclude the carbuncles of Marx from their referents—that is to say, every theory of history with which I am familiar.

"Am I then, saying that history, past and future, is unknowable; that we must blunder ahead in the dark without planning because no plan can possibly be accurate in prediction and useful in application? I am not. I am expressing my distaste for holders of extreme positions, for possessors of eternal truths, for keepers of the flame. Keepers of the flame have no trouble with the questions of ends and means which plague the rest of us. They are quite certain that their ends are good and that therefore choice of means is a trivial matter. The rest of us, far from certain that we have a general solution of the two-billion body problem that is

history, are much more likely to ponder on our means. . . ."

F. W. Taylor,
Organization, Symbolism and Morale

I

Charles Orsino was learning the business from the ground up—even though "up" would never be very high. He had in his veins only a drop or two of Falcaro blood: enough so that room had to be made for him; not enough for it to be a great dearth of room. Counting heavily on the good will of F. W. Taylor, who had taken a fancy to him when he lost his parents in the Brookhaven Reactor explosion of '83, he might rise to a rather responsible position in Alky, Horsewire, Callgirl, recruitment and Retirement or whatever line he showed an aptitude for. But at 22 one spring day, he was merely serving a tour of duty as bagman attached to the 101st New York Police Precinct. A junior member of the Syndic customarily handled that job; you couldn't trust the cops not to squeeze their customers and pocket the difference.

He walked absently through the not-unpleasant routine of the shakedown. His mind was on his early-morning practice session of polo, in which he had almost disgraced himself.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Orsino; a pleasure to see you again. Would you like a cold glass of beer while I get the loot?"

"No, but thanks very much, Mr. Lefko—I'm in training, you know. Wish I could take you up on it. Seven phones, isn't it, at ten dollars a phone?"

"That's right, Mr. Orsino, and I'll be with you as soon as I lay off the seventh at Hialeah; all the ladies went for a plater named Hearthmouse because they thought the name was cute and left me with a dutch book. I won't be a minute."

Lefko scuttled to a phone and dickered with another bookie somewhere while Charles absently studied the crowd of chattering, laughing horseplayers. ("Mister Orsino, did you come out to make a monkey of yourself and waste my time? Confound it, sir, you have just fifty round to a chukker and you must make them count!" He grinned unhappily. Old Gilby, the pro, could be abrasive when a bonehead play disfigured the game he loved. Charles had been sure Benny Grashkin's jeep would conk out in a minute—it had been sputtering badly enough—and that he would have had a dirt-cheap scoring shot while Benny changed mounts. But Gil-

by blew the whistle and wasn't interested in your fine-spun logic. "Confound it, sir, when will you young rufflers learn that you must crawl before you walk? Now let me see a team rush for the goal—and I mean *team*, Mr. Orsino!")

"*Here* we are, Mr. Orsino, and just in time. There goes the seventh."

Charles shook hands and left amid screams of "Hearthmouse! Hearthmouse!" from the lady bettors watching the screen.

High up in the Syndic Building, F. W. Taylor—Uncle Frank to Charles—was giving a terrific tongue-lashing to a big, stooped old man. Thornberry, president of the Chase National Bank, had pulled a butch and F. W. Taylor was blazing mad about it.

He snarled: "One more like this, Thornberry, and you are out on your padded can. When a respectable member of the Syndic chooses to come to you for a line of credit, you will in the future give it without any tomfool quibbling about security. You bankers seem to think this is the middle ages and that your bits of paper still have their old black magic.

"Disabuse yourself of the notion. Nobody except you believes in it. The Inexorable Laws of Economics are as dead as Dagon and Ishtar, and for the same reason. No more worshippers. You bankers can't shove anybody around any more. You're just a convenience, like the nonplaying banker in a card game.

"What's real now is the Syndic. What's real about the Syndic is its own morale and the public's faith in it. Is that *clear?*"

Thornberry brokenly mumbled something about supply and demand.

Taylor sneered. "Supply and demand. Urim and Thummim. Show me a supply, Thornberry, show me a—oh, hell. I haven't time to waste re-educating you. Remember what I told you and don't argue. Unlimited credit to Syndic members. If they overdo it, *we'll* rectify the situation. Now, get out." And Thornberry did, with senile tears in his eyes.

At Mother Maginnis' Ould Sod Pub, Mother Maginnis pulled a long face when Charles Orsino came in. "It's always a pleasure to see you, Mr. Orsino, but I'm afraid this week it'll be no pleasure for you to see me."

She was always roundabout. "Why, what do you mean, Mrs. M.? I'm always happy to say hello to a customer."

"It's the business, Mr. Orsino. It's the business. You'll pardon me if I say that I can't see how to spare twenty-five dollars from the till, not if my life

depended on it. I can go to fifteen, but so help me—"

Charles looked grave—graver than he felt. It happened every day. "You realize, Mrs. Maginnis, that you're letting the Syndic down. What would the people in Syndic Territory do for protection if everybody took your attitude?"

She looked sly. "I was thinking, Mr. Orsino, that a young man like you must have a way with the girls—" By a mighty unsubtle maneuver, Mrs. Maginnis' daughter emerged from the back room at that point and began demurely mopping the bar. "And," she continued, "sure, any young lady would consider it an honor to spend the evening with a young gentleman from the Syndic—"

"Perhaps," Charles said, rapidly thinking it over. He would infinitely rather spend the evening with a girl than at a Shakespeare revival as he had planned, but there were drawbacks. In the first place, it would be bribery. In the second place, he might fall for the girl and wake up with Mrs. Maginnis for his mother-in-law—a fate too nauseating to contemplate for more than a moment. In the third place, he had already bought the tickets for himself and bodyguard.

"About the shakedown," he said decisively. "Call it fifteen this week. If you're still doing badly next week, I'll have to ask for a look at your books—to see whether a regular reduction is in order."

She got the hint, and colored. Putting down fifteen dollars, she said: "Sure, that won't be necessary. I'm expecting business to take a turn for the better. It's sure to pick up."

"Good, then." To show there were no hard feelings, he stayed for a moment to ask: "How are your husbands?"

"So-so. Alfie's on the road this week and Dinnie's got the rheumatism again but he can tend bar late, when it's slow."

"Tell him to drop around to the Medical Center and mention my name, Mrs. Maginnis. Maybe they can do something for him."

She glowed with thanks and he left.

It was pleasant to be able to do things for nice people; it was pleasant to stroll along the sunny street acknowledging tipped hats and friendly words. (That team rush for the goal had been a sorry mess, but not his fault—quite. Vladek had loosed a premature burst from his fifty caliber at the ball, and sent it hurling off to the right; they had braked and backed with much grinding of gears to form

V again behind it, when Gilby blew the whistle again.)

A nervous youngster in the National Press Service New York drop was facing his first crisis on the job. Trouble lights had flashed simultaneously on the Kansas City-New York, Hialeah-New York and Boston-New York trunks. He stood, paralyzed.

His supervisor took it in in a flash and banged open the circuit to Service. To the genial face that appeared on the screen, he snapped: "Trace Hialeah, Boston and Kansas City—in that order, Micky."

Micky said: "Okay, pal," and vanished.

The supervisor turned to the youngster. "Didn't know what to do?" he asked genially. "Don't let it worry you. Next time you'll know. You noticed the order of priority?"

"Yes," the boy gulped.

"It wasn't an accident that I gave it to him that way. First, Hialeah because it was the most important. We get the bulk of our revenue from serving the horse rooms—in fact, I understand we started as a horse wire exclusively. Naturally the horse-room customers pay for it in the long run, but they pay without pain. Nobody's forcing them to improve the breed, right?

"Second, Boston-New York trunk. That's common-carrier while the Fair Grounds isn't running up there. We don't make any profit on common carrier service, the rates are too low, but we owe it to the public that supports us.

"Third, Kansas City-New York. That's common carrier too, but with one terminal in Mob Territory. No reason why we should knock ourselves out for Regan and his boys, but after the other two are traced and closed, we'll get around to them. Think you got it straight now?"

"Yes," the youngster said.

"Good. Just take it easy."

The supervisor moved away to do a job of billing that didn't need immediate doing; he wanted to avoid the very appearance of nagging the boy. He wondered too, if he'd really put it over, and decided he hadn't. Who could, after all. It took years on the wires to get the feel. Slowly your motivation changed. You started by wanting to make a place for yourself and earn some dough. After years you realized, not with a blinding flash, but gradually, that you were working for quite another reason. Nice gang here that treats you right. Don't let the Syndic down. The customers pay for their fun and by God, you

see that they get it or bust a gut trying.

On his way to the 101st Precinct station house, the ears of Charles Orsino burned as he thought of the withering lecture that had followed the blast on Gilby's whistle. "*Mister* Orsino, is it or is it not your responsibility as team captain to demand that a dangerous ball be taken out of play? And did or did not that last burst from Mister Vladek beat the ball out of round, thus giving rise to a distinct possibility of dangerous ricochets?" The old man was right of course, but it had been a pocked and battered practice ball to start with; in practice sessions, you couldn't afford to be fussy—not with regulation 18 inch armor steel balls selling for thirty dollars each at the pro shop.

He walked between the two green lamps of the precinct station and dumped his bag on the sergeant's desk. Immediately the sergeant started a tale of woe: "Mr. Orsino, I don't like to bother you with the men's personal troubles, but I wonder if you could come through with a hundred dollar present for a very deserving young fellow here. It's Patrolman Gibney, seven years in the old 101st and not a black mark against him. One citation for shooting it out with a burglar and another for nabbing a past-post crook at Lefko's horse room. Gibney's been married for five years and has two of the cutest kids you ever saw, and you know that takes money. Now he wants to get married again, he's crazy in love with the girl and his first wife don't mind, she says she can use a helping hand around the house, and he wants to do it right with a big wedding.

"If he can do it on a hundred, he's welcome to it," Charles said, grinning. "Give him my best wishes." He divided the pile of bills into two orderly stacks, transferred a hundred dollars to one and pocketed the other.

He dropped it off at the Syndic Building, had an uninteresting dinner in one of its cafeterias and went to his furnished room downtown. He read a chapter in F. W. Taylor's—Uncle Frank's—latest book, *Organization, Symbolism and Morale*, couldn't understand a word he read, bathed and got out his evening clothes.

A thin and attractive girl entered a preposterously-furnished room in the Syndic Building, arguing bitterly with a white-bearded, hawk-nosed old man.

"My dear ancestor," she began, with exaggerated patience.

"God-damn it, Lee, don't call me an ancestor! Makes me feel as if I was dead already."

"You might as well be for all the sense you're talking."

"All right, Lee." He looked wounded and brave.

"Oh, I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, Edward—" She studied his face with suddenly-narrowed eyes and her tone changed. "Listen, you old devil, you're not fooling me for a minute. I couldn't hurt your feelings with the blunt edge of an axe. You're not talking me into anything. It'd just be sending somebody to his death. Besides, they were both accidents." She turned and began to fiddle with a semi-circular screen whose focus was a large and complicated chair. Three synchronized projectors bore on the screen.

The old man said very softly: "And what if they weren't? Tom McGurn and Bob were good men. None better. If the damn Government's knocking us off one by one, something ought to be done. And you seem to be the only person in a position to do it."

"Start a war," she said bitterly. "Sweep them from the seas. Wasn't Dick Reiner chanting that when I was in diapers?"

"Yes," the old man brooded. "And he's still chanting it now that you're in—whatever young ladies wear nowadays. Promise me something, Lee. If there's another try, will you help us out?"

"I am so sure there won't be," she said, "that I'll promise, And God help you, Edward, if you try to fake one. I've told you before and I tell you now that it's almost certain death."

Charles Orsino studied himself in a three-way mirror.

The evening suit was new; he wished the gunbelt was. The holster rode awkwardly on his hip; he hadn't got a new outfit since his eighteenth birthday and his chest had filled out to the last hole of the cross-strap's buckle since then. Well, it would have to wait; the evening would cost him enough as it was. Five bodyguards! He winced at the thought. But you had to be seen at these things and you had to do it right or it didn't count.

He fell into a brief reverie of meeting a beautiful, beautiful girl at the theater, a girl who would think he was interesting and handsome and a wonderful polo player, a girl who would happily turn out to be in the direct Falcaro line with all sorts of powerful relations to speak up for him. . . .

Someone said on his room annunciator: "The limousine is

here, Mr. Orsino. I'm Halloran, your chief bodyguard."

"Very well, Halloran," he said casually, just as he'd practiced it in the bathroom that morning and rode down.

The limousine was a beauty and the guards were faultlessly turned out. One was democratic with one's chief guard and a little less so with the others. As Halloran drove, Charles chatted with him about the play, which was Julius Caesar in modern dress. Holloran said he'd heard it was very good.

Their arrival in the lobby of the Costello created no sensation. Five bodyguards wasn't a lot of bodyguards, even though there seemed to be no other Syndic people there. So much for the beautiful Falcaro girl. Charles chatted with a television director he knew slightly. The director explained to him that the theater was sick, very sick, that Harry Tremaine,—he played Brutus—made a magnificent stage picture but couldn't read lines.

By then Halloran was whispering in his ear that it was time to take their seats. Halloran was sweating like a pig and Charles didn't get around to asking him why. Charles took an aisle seat, Halloran was across the aisle and the others sat to his side, front and rear.

The curtain rose on "New York—A Street."

The first scene, a timekiller designed to let fidgeters subside and coughers finish their coughing, was a 3-D projection of Times Square, with a stylized suggestion of a public relations consultant's office "down in one" on the apron.

When Caesar entered Orsino started, and there was a gratified murmur around the auditorium. He was made up as French Letour, one of the Mobsters from the old days—technically a hero, but one who had sailed mighty close to the wind. This promised to be interesting.

"Peace, ho! Caesar speaks."

And so to the apron where the soothsayer—public relations consultant—delivered the warning contemptuously ignored by Letour-Caesar, and the spotlight shifted to Cassius and Brutus for their long, foreboding dialogue. Brutus' back was to the audience when it started; he gradually turned—

"What means this shouting? I do fear the people will choose Caesar for their king!"

And you saw that Brutus was Falcaro—old Amadeo Falcaro himself, with the beard and hawk nose and eyebrows.

Well, let's see now. It must be some kind of tortured analogy with the Treaty of Las

Vegas when Letour made a strong bid to unite Mob and Syndic and Falcaro had fought against anything but a short-term, strictly military alliance. Charles felt kind of sore about Falcaro not getting the title role, but he had to admit that Tremaine played Falcaro as the gusty magnifico he had been. When Caesar re-entered, the contrast became clear; Caesar-Letour was a fidgety, fear-ridden man. The rest of the conspirators brought on through Act One turned out to be good fellows all, fresh and hearty; Charles guessed everything was all right and he wished he could grab a nap. But Cassius was saying:

"Him and his worth and our great need of him—"

All very loyal, Charles thought, smothering a yawn. A life for the Syndic and all that, but a high-brow version. Polite and dignified, like a pavanne at Roseland. Sometimes—after, say, a near miss on the polo field—he would wonder how polite and dignified the great old days actually had been. Amadeo Falcaro's Third Year Purge must have been an affair of blood and guts. Two thousand shot in three days, the history books said, adding hastily that the purged were unreconstructed, unreconstructable thugs whose usefulness was past, who couldn't realize that the job ahead was construction and organization.

And Halloran was touching Charles on the shoulder. "Intermission in a second, sir."

They marched up the aisle as the curtain fell to applause and the rest of the audience began to rise. Then the impossible happened.

Halloran had gone first; Charles was behind him, with the four other guards hemming him in. As Halloran reached the door to the lobby at the top of the aisle, he turned to face Charles and performed an inexplicable pantomime. It was quite one second before Charles realized that Halloran was tugging at his gun, stuck in the holster.

The guard to the left of Charles softly said: "Jesus!" and threw himself at Halloran as the chief guard's gun came loose. There was a .45 caliber roar, muffled. There was another that crashed, unmuffled, a yard from Charles' right ear. The two figures at the head of the aisle collapsed limply and the audience began to shriek. Somebody with a very loud voice roared: "Keep calm! It's all part of the play! Don't get panicky! It's part of the play!"

The man who was roaring moved up to the aisle door, fell

silent, saw and smelled the blood and fainted.

A woman began to pound the guard on Charles' right with her fists, yelling: "What did you do to my husband? You shot my husband!" She meant the man who had fainted; Charles peeled her off the bodyguard.

Somehow they got into the lobby, followed by most of the audience. The three bodyguards held them at bay. Charles found he was deaf in his right ear and supposed it was temporary. Least of his worries. Halloran had taken a shot at him. The guard named Weltfisch had intercepted it. The guard named Donnel had shot Halloran down.

He said to Donnel: "You know Halloran long?"

Donnel, not taking his eyes from the crowd, said: "Couple of years, sir. He was just a guy in the bodyguard pool."

"Get me out of here," Orsino said. "To the Syndic Building."

In the big black car, he could almost forget the horror; he could hope that time would erase it completely. It wasn't like polo. That shot had been *aimed.*

The limousine purred to a halt before the titanic bulk of the Syndic Building, was checked and rolled on into the Unrestricted Entrance. An elevator silently lifted the car and passengers past floors devoted to Alcohol Clerical, Alcohol Research, and Testing, Transport, Collections Audit and Control, Cleaning and Dying, Female Recruitment and Retirement, up, up, up, past sections and subsections Charles had never entered, Syndic member though he was, to an automatic stop at a floor whose indicator said:

enforcement and public relations

It was only 9:45 P.M.; F. W. Taylor would be in and working. Charles said: "Wait here, boys," and muttered the code phrase to the door. It sprang open.

F. W. Taylor was dictating, machine-gun fashion, to a mike. He looked dog-tired. His face turned up with a frown as Charles entered and then the frown became a beam of pleasure.

"Charles, my boy! Sit down!" He snapped off the machine.

"Uncle—" Charles began.

"It was so kind of you to drop in. I thought you'd be at the theater."

"I was, Uncle, but—"

"I'm working on a revision for the next edition of *Organization, Symbolism and Morale.* You'd never guess who inspired it."

"I'm sure I wouldn't, Uncle. Uncle—"

"Old Thornberry, President of the Chase National. He had the infernal gall to refuse a line of

credit to young McGurn. *Bankers!* You won't believe it, but people used to *beg* them to take over their property, tie up their incomes, virtually enslave them. People *demanded* it. The same way they demanded inexpensive liquor, tobacco and consumer goods, clean women and a chance to win a fortune and our ancestors obliged them. Our ancestors were sneered at in their day, you know. They were called criminals when they distributed goods and services at a price people could afford to pay."

"Uncle!"

"Hush, boy, I know what you're going to say. You can't fool the people forever! When they'd had enough hounding and restriction, they rose in their might.

"The people demanded freedom of choice, Falcaro and the rest rose to lead them in the Syndic and the Mob and they drove the Government into the sea."

"Uncle Frank—"

"From which it still occasionally ventures to annoy our coastal cities," F. W. Taylor commented. He warmed to his subject. "You should have seen the old boy blubber. The last of the old-time bankers, and they deserved everything they got. They brought it on themselves. They had what they called laissez-faire, and it worked for awhile until they got to tinkering with it. They demanded things called protective tariffs, tax remissions, subsidies—regulation, regulation, regulation, always of the other fellow. But there were enough bankers on all sides for everybody to be somebody else's other fellow. Coercion snowballed and the Government lost public acceptance. They had a thing called the public debt which I can't begin to explain to you except to say that it was something written on paper and that it raised the cost of everything tremendously. Well, believe me or not, they *didn't* just throw away the piece of paper or scratch out the writing on it. They let it ride until ordinary people couldn't afford the pleasant things in life."

"Uncle—"

A cautious periscope broke the choppy water off Sea Island, Georgia. At the other end of the periscope were Captain Van Dellen of the North American Navy, lean as a hound, and fat little Commander Grinnel.

"You might take her in a little closer, Van," said Grinnel mildly.

"The exercise won't do you any lasting damage," Van Dellen said. Grinnel was very, very, near to a couple of admirals and normally Van Dellen gave him

the kid-glove treatment in spite of ranking him. But this was *his* ship and no cloak and dagger artist from an O.N.I. desk was telling him how to con it.

Grinnel smiled genially at the little joke. "I could call it a disguise," he said patting his paunch, "but you know me too well."

"You'll have no trouble with a sea like this," Van Dellen said, strictly business. He tried to think of some appropriate phrase to recognize the danger Grinnel was plunging into with no resources except quick wits, a trick ring and a pair of guns. But all that bubbled up to the top of his head was; thank God I'm getting rid of this bastardly little Sociocrat. He'll kill me some day if he gets a clean shot and the chance of detection is zero. Thank God I'm a Constitutionist. We don't go in for things like that—or do we? Nobody ever tells me anything. A hack of a pigboat driver. And this little bastard's going to be an admiral some day. But that boy of mine'll be an admiral. He's brainy, like his mother."

Grinnel smiled and said: "Well, this would be it, wouldn't it?"

"Eh?" Van Dellen asked. "Oh. I see what you mean. Chuck!" he called a sailor. "Break out the Commander's capsules. Pass the word to stand by for ejection."

The Commander was fitted, puffing, into the capsule. He growled at the storekeeper: "You sure this was just unsealed? It feels sticky already."

A brash jayee said: "I saw it unsealed myself three minutes ago, Commander. It'll get stickier if we spend any more time talking. You have"—he glanced at his chronometer—"seventeen minutes now. Let me snap you in."

The Commander huddled down after a searching glance at the jayee's face which photographed it forever in his memory. The top snapped down. Some day—some happy day—that squirt would very much regret telling him off. He gave an okay sign to Van Dellen who waved back meagerly and managed a smile. Three crewmen fitted the capsule into its lock.

Foomf!

It was through the hatch and bobbing on the surface. Its color matched the water's automatically. Grinnel waggled the lever that aimed it inshore and began to turn the propellor crank. He turned fast; the capsule—rudders, crank, flywheel, shaft and all—would dissolve in approximately fifteen minutes. It was his job to be ashore when that happened.

And ashore he'd be practically

a free agent with the loosest sort of roving commission, until January 15th. Then his orders became most specific.

III

Charles Orsino squirmed in the chair. "Uncle—" he pleaded.

"Yes," F. W. Taylor chuckled, "Old Amadeo and his colleagues were called criminals. They were called bootleggers when they got liquor to people without worrying about the public debt or excise taxes. They were called smugglers when they sold cheap butter in the south and cheap margerine in the north. They were called counterfeiters when they sold cheap cigarettes and transportation tickets. They were called highjackers when they wrested goods from the normal inflation-ridden chain of middlemen and delivered them at a reasonable price to the consumers.

"They were criminals. Bankers were pillars of society.

"Yet these bankers who dominated society, who were considered the voice of eternal truth when they spoke, who thought it was insanity to challenge their beliefs, started somewhere and perhaps they were the best thing for their day and age that could be worked out. . . ."

Father Ambrosius gnawed at a bit of salt herring, wiped his hands, dug through the litter in his chest and found a goose quill and a page of parchment. He scrubbed vigorously with a vinegar-soaked sponge, at the writing on the parchment and was pleased to see that it came off nicely, leaving him a clean surface to scribble his sermon notes on. He cut the quill and slit it while waiting for the parchment to dry, wondering idly what he had erased. (It happened to be the last surviving copy of Tacitus' *Annals*, VII.i-v.)

To work then. The sermon was to be preached on Sexagesima Sunday, a prelude to the solemn season of Lent. Father Ambrosius' mind wandered in search of a text. Lent . . . salt herring . . . penitence . . . the capital sins . . . avarice . . . usury . . . delinquent pew rent . . . fatheaded young Sir Baldwin in his tumbledown castle on the hill . . . salt herring now and *per saeculae saeculorum* unless Sir Baldwin paid up his delinquent pew rent.

At the moment, Sir Baldwin came swaggering into the cell. Father Ambrosius rose courteously and said, with some insincerity: "*Pax vobiscum.*"

"Eh?" asked Sir Baldwin, his silly blue eyes popping as he

looked over his shoulder. "Oh, you meant me, padre. It don't do a bit of good to chatter at me in Latin, you know. The king's Norman is what I speak. I mean to say, if it's good enough for his majesty Richard, it's good enough for me, what? Now, what can I do for you, padre?"

Father Ambrosius reminded him faintly: "You came to see me, Sir Baldwin."

"Eh? Oh. So I did. I was huntin' stag, padre, and I lost him after chasin' the whole morning, and what I want to know is, who's the right saint chap to ask for help in a pickle like that? I mean to say, I wanted to show the chaps some good sport and we started this beast and he got clean away. Don't misunderstand me, padre, they were good chaps and they didn't rot me about it, but that kind of talk gets about and doesn't do one a bit of good, what? So you tell me like a good fellow who's the right saint chap to put the matter in the best light for me?"

Father Ambrosius repressed an urge to grind his teeth, took thought and said: "St. Hubert, I believe, is interested in the stag hunt."

"Right-oh, padre! St. Hubert it is. Hubert, Hubert. I shan't forget it because I've a cousin named Hubert. Haven't seen him for years, poor old chap. He had the fistula—lived on slops and couldn't sit his horse for a day's huntin'. Poor old chap. Well, I'm off—no, there's another thing I wanted. Suppose this Sunday you preach a howlin' strong sermon against usury, what? That chap in the village, the goldsmith fellow, has the infernal gall to tell me I've got to give him Fallowfield! Forty acres, and he has the infernal gall to tell me they aren't mine any more. Be a good chap, padre, and sort of glare at him from the pulpit a few times to show him who you mean, what?

"Usury *is* a sin," Father Ambrosius said cautiously, "but how does Fallowfield enter into it?"

Sir Baldwin twiddled the drooping ends of his limp, blond mustache with a trace of embarrassment. "Fact is, I told the chap when I borrowed the twenty marks that Fallowfield would stand as security. I ask you, padre, is it my fault that my tenants are a pack of lazy, thieving Saxon swine and I couldn't raise the money?"

The parish priest bristled unnoticeably. He was pure Saxon himself. "I shall do what I can," he said. "And Sir Baldwin, before you go—"

The young man stopped in the doorway and turned.

"Before you go, may I ask

when we'll see your pew rent, to say nothing of the tithe?"

Sir Baldwin dismissed it with an airish wave of the hand. "I thought I just told you, padre. I haven't a farthing to my name and here's this chap in the village telling me to clear out of Fallowfield that I got from my father and his father before him. So how the devil—excuse me—can I pay rent and tithes and Peters pence and all the other things you priest chap expect from a man, what?" He held up his gauntleted hand as Father Ambrosius started to speak. "No, padre, not another word about it. I know you'd love to tell me I won't go to heaven if I act this way. I don't doubt you're learned and all that, but I can still tell you a thing or two, what? The fact is, I *will* go to Heaven. You see, padre, God's a gentleman and he wouldn't bar another gentleman over a trifle of money trouble that could happen to any gentleman, now would he?"

The fatuous beam was more than Father Ambrosius could bear; his eyes fell.

"Rightoh," Sir Baldwin chirped. "And that saint chap's name was St. Hubert. I didn't forget, see? Not quite the fool some people think I am." And he was gone, whistling a recheat.

Father Ambrosius sat down again and glared at the parchment. Preach a sermon on usury for that popinjay. Well, usury *was* a sin. Christians were supposed to lend to one another in need and not count the cost or the days. But who had ever heard of Sir Baldwin ever lending anything? Of course, he was lord of the manor and protected you against invasion, but there didn't seem to be any invasions anymore. . . .

Wearily, the parish priest dipped his pen and scratched on the parchment: RON. XIII ii, viii, XV i. "Whosoever resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God . . . owe no man any thing . . . we that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak. . . ." A triple-plated text, which, reinforced by a brow of thunder from the pulpit should make the village goldsmith think twice before pressing his demand on Sir Baldwin. Usury *was* a sin.

There was a different knock on the door frame.

The goldsmith, a leather-aproned fellow named John, stood there twisting his cap in his big, burn scarred hands.

"Yes, my son? Come in." But he scowled at the fellow involuntarily. He should know better than to succumb to the capital sin of avarice. "Well, what is it?"

"Father," the fellow said, "I've come to give you this." He passed a soft leather purse to the priest. It clinked.

Father Ambrosius emptied it on his desk and stirred the broad silver coins wonderingly with his finger. Five marks and eleven silver pennies. No more salt herring until Lent! Silver forwarded to his bishop in an amount that would do credit to the parish! A gilding job for the image of the Blessed Virgin! Perhaps glass panes in one or two of the church windows!

And then he stiffened and swept the money back into the purse. "You got this by sin," he said flatly. "The sin of avarice worked in your heart and you practiced the sin of usury on your fellow Christians. Don't give this money to the Church; give it back to your victims."

"Father," the fellow said, nearly blubbering, "excuse me but you don't understand! They come to me and come to me. They say it's all right with them, that they're hiring the money the way you'd hire a horse. Doesn't that make sense? Do you think I *wanted* to become a moneylender? No! I was an honest goldsmith and an honest goldsmith can't help himself. All the money in the village drifts somehow into his hands. One leaves a mark with you for safekeeping and pays you a penny the year to guard it. Another brings you silver coins to make into a basin, and you get to keep whatever coins are left over. And then others come to you and say 'Let me have soandso's mark to use for a year and then I'll pay it back and with it another mark'. Father, they beg me! They say they'll be ruined if I don't lend to them, their old parents will die if they can't fee the leech, or their dead will roast forever unless they can pay for masses and what's a man to *do?*"

"Sin no more," the priest answered simply. It was no problem.

The fellow was getting angry. "Very well for you to sit there and say so, father. But what do you think paid for the masses you said for the repose of Goodie Howat's soul? And how did Tom the Thatcher buy his wagon so he could sell his beer in Glastonbury at a better price? And how did Farmer Major hire the men from Wealing to get in his hay before the great storm could ruin it? And a hundred things more. I tell you, this parish would be a worse place without John Goldsmith and he doesn't propose to be pointed at any longer as a black sinner! I didn't want to fall into usury but I did, and *when* I did, I

found out that those who hoist their noses highest at the moneylender when they pass him in the road are the same ones who beg the hardest when they come to his shop for a loan!"

The priest was stunned by the outburst. John seemed honest, the facts were the facts—can good come out of evil? And there were stories that His Holiness the Pope himself had certain dealings with the Longobards—benchers, or bankers or whatever they called themselves. . . .

"I must think on this, my son," he said. "Perhaps I was over hasty. Perhaps in the days of St. Paul usury was another thing entirely. Perhaps what you practice is not *really* usury but merely something that resembles it. You may leave this silver with me."

When John left, Father Ambrosius squeezed his eyes tight shut and pressed the knuckles of both hands to his forehead. Things *did* change. Under the dispensation of the Old Testament, men had more wives than one. That was sinful now, but surely Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were in heaven? Paul wrote his epistles to little islands of Christians surrounded by seas of pagans. Surely in those days it was necessary for Christians to be bound closely together against the common enemy, whereas in these modern times, the ties could be safely relaxed a trifle? How could sinning have paid for the repose of Goodie Howat's soul, got a better price for brewer Thatcher's ale and saved the village hay crop? The Devil was tricky, but not *that* tricky, surely. A few more such tricks and the parish would resemble the paradise terrestrial!

Father Ambrosius dashed from his study to the altar of the little stone church and began furiously to turn the pages of the huge metal-bound lectern Bible.

"For the love of money is the root of all evil—"

It burst on Father Ambrosius with a great light that the words of Paul were in reference not to *John Goldsmith's* love of money but to *Sir Baldwin's* love of money.

He dashed back to his study and his pen began to squeak over the parchment, obliterating the last dim trace of Tacitus' *Annals,* VIIi i.v. The sermon would be a scorcher, all right, but it wouldn't scorch John Goldsmith. It would scorch Sir Baldwin for ruthlessly and against the laws of God and man refusing to turn Fallowfield over to the moneylender. There would be growls of approval in the church that Sunday, and many black looks directed against Sir

Baldwin for his attempt to bilk the parish's friend and benefactor, the moneylender.

"And that," F. W. Taylor concluded, chuckling, "is how power passes from one pair of hands to another, and how public acceptance of the change follows on its heels. A strange thing—people always think that each exchange of power is the last that will ever take place."

He seemed to be finished.

"Uncle," Orsino said, "somebody tried to kill me."

Taylor stared at him for a long minute, speechless. "What happened?" he finally asked.

"I went formal to the theater, with five bodyguards. The chief guard, name of Halloran, took a shot at me. One of my boys got in the way. He was killed."

Taylor's fingers began to play a tattoo on his annunciator board. Faces leaped into existence on its various screens as he fired orders. "Charles Orsino's chief bodyguard for tonight—Halloran. Trace him. The works. He tried to kill Orsino."

He clicked off the board switches and turned grimly to Orsino. "Now you," he said. "What have *you* been up to?"

"Just doing my job, uncle," Orsino said uneasily.

"Still bagman at the 101st?"

"Yes."

"Fooling with any women?"

"Nothing special, uncle. Nothing intense."

"Disciplined or downgraded anybody lately?"

"Certainly not. The precinct runs like a watch. I'll match their morale against any outfit east of the Mississippi. Why are you taking this so heavy?"

"Because you're the third. The other two—your cousin Thomas McGurn and your uncle Robert Orsino—didn't have guards to get in the way. One other question."

"Yes, uncle."

"My boy, *why* didn't you tell me about this when you first came in?"

IV

A family council was called the next day. Orsino, very much a junior, had never been admitted to one before. He knew why the exception was being made, and didn't like the reason.

Edward Falcaro wagged his formidable white beard at the thirty-odd Syndic chiefs around the table and growled: "I think we'll dispense with reviewing production and so on. I want to talk about this damn gunplay. Dick, bring us up to date."

He lit a vile cigar and leaned back.

Richard W. Reiner rose.

"Thomas McGurn," he said, "killed April 15th by a burst of eight machine gun bullets in his private dining room at the Astor. Elsie Warshofsky, his waitress, must be considered the principal suspect, but—"

Edward Falcaro snapped: "Suspect, hell! She killed him, didn't she?"

"*I was about to say*, but the evidence so far is merely comulative. Mrs. Warshofsky jumped—fell—or was pushed—from the dining room window. The machine gun was found beside the window.

"There are no known witnesses. Mrs. Warshofsky's history presents no unusual features. An acquaintance submitted a statement—based, she frankly admitted, on nothing definite—that Mrs. Warshofsky sometimes talked in a way that led her to wonder if she might not be a member of the secret terrorist organization known as the D.A.R. In this connection, it should be noted that Mrs. Warshofsky's maiden name was Adams.

"Robert Orsino, killed April 21st by a thermite bomb concealed in his pillow and fuzed with a pressure-sensitive switch. His valet, Edward Blythe, disappeared from view. He was picked up April 23rd by a posse on the beach of Montauk Point, but died before he could be questioned. Examination of his stomach contents showed a lethal quantity of sodium fluoride. It is presumed that the poison was self-administered."

"Presumed!" the old man snorted, and puffed out a lethal quantity of cigar smoke.

"Blythe's history," Reiner went on blandly, "presents no unusual features. It should be noted that a commerce-raider of the so-called United States Government Navy was reported off Montauk Point during the night of April 23rd-24th by local residents.

"Charles Orsino, attacked April 30th by his bodyguard James Halloran in the lobby of the Costello Memorial Theater. Halloran fired one shot which killed another bodyguard and was then himself killed. Halloran's history presents no unusual features except that he had a considerable interest in—uh—history. He collected and presumably read obsolete books dealing with pre-Syndic Pre-Mob America. Investigators found by his bedside the first volume of a work published in 1942 called *The Growth of The American Republic* by Morison and Commager. It was opened to Chapter Ten, The War of Independence!"

Reiner took his seat.

F. W. Taylor said dryly: "Dick, did you forget to mention that Warshofsky, Blythe and Halloran are known officers of the U. S. Navy?"

Reiner said: "You are being facetious. Are you implying that I have omitted pertinent facts?"

"I'm implying that you artistically stacked the deck. With a rumor, a dubious commerce-raider report and a note on a man's hobby, you want us to sweep the bastards from the sea, don't you—just the way you always have?"

"I am not ashamed of my expressed attitude on the question of the so-called United States Government and will defend it at any proper time and place."

"Shut the hell up, you two," Edward Falcaro growled. "I'm trying to think." He thought for perhaps half a minute and then looked up, baffled. "Has anybody got any ideas?"

Charles Orsino cleared his throat, amazed at his own temerity. The old man's eyebrows shot up, but he grudgingly said: "I guess you can say something, since they thought you were important enough to shoot."

Orsino said: "Maybe it's some outfit over in Europe or Asia?"

Edward Falcaro asked: "Anybody know anything about Europe or Asia? Jimmy, you flew over once, didn't you? To see about Anatolian poppies when the Mob had trouble with Mex labor?"

Jimmy Falcaro said creakily: "Yeah. It was a waste of time. They have these little dirt farmers scratching out just enough food for the family and maybe raising a quarter-acre of poppy. That's *all* there is from the China Sea to the Mediterranean. In England—Frank, you tell 'em. You explained it to me once."

Taylor rose. "The forest's come back to England. When finance there lost its morale and couldn't hack its way out of the paradoxes that was the end. When that happens you've got to have a large, virile criminal class ready to take over and do the work of distribution and production. Maybe some of you know how the English were. The poor beggars had civilized all the illegality out of the stock. They couldn't do anything that wasn't respectable. From sketchy reports, I gather that England is now forest and a few hundred starving people. One fellow says the men still wear derbies and stagger to their offices in the city.

"France is peasants, drunk three-quarters of the time.

"Russia is peasants, drunk *all* the time.

"Germany—well, there the criminal class was *too* big and *too* virile. The place is a cemetery."

He shrugged: "Say it, somebody. The Mob's gunning for us."

Reiner jumped to his feet. "I will *never* support such a hypothesis!" he shrilled. "It is *mischievous* to imply that a century of peace has been ended, that our three-thousand-mile border with our friend to the West—"

Taylor intoned satirically: "*Un*-blemished, my friends, by a *single* for-ti-fi-*ca*-tion—"

Edward Falcaro yelled: "Stop your damn foolishness, Frank Taylor! This is no laughing matter."

Taylor snapped: "Have you been in Mob Territory lately?"

"I have," the old man said. He scowled.

"How'd you like it?"

Edward Falcaro shrugged irritably. "They have their ways, we have ours. The Regan line is running thin, but we're not going to forget that Jimmy Regan stood shoulder to shoulder with Amadeo Falcaro in the old days. There's such a thing as loyalty."

F. W. Taylor said: "There's such a thing as blindness."

He had gone too far. Edward Falcaro rose from his chair and leaned forward, bracing himself on the table. He said flatly: "This is a statement, gentlemen. I won't pretend I'm happy about the way things are in Mob Territory. I won't pretend I think old man Regan is a balanced, dependable person. I won't pretend I think the Mob clients are enjoying anywhere near the service that Syndic clients enjoy. I'm perfectly aware that on our visits of state to Mob Territory we see pretty much what our hosts want us to see. But I cannot believe that any group which is rooted on the principles of freedom and service can have gone very wrong.

"Maybe I'm mistaken, gentlemen. But I cannot believe that a descendant of Jimmy Regan would order a descendant of Amadeo Falcaro murdered. We will consider every other possibility first. Frank, is that clear?"

"Yes," Taylor said.

"All right," Edward Falcaro grunted. "Now let's go about this thing systematically. Dick, you go right down the line with the charge that the Government's responsible for these atrocities. I hate to think that myself. If they are, we're going to have to spend a lot of time and trouble hunting them down and doing something about it. As long as they stick to a little commerce-raiding and a few coastal attacks, I can't say I'm really unhappy about them.

They don't do much harm, and they keep us on our toes and—maybe this one is most important—they keep our client's memories of the bad old days that we delivered them from alive. That's a great deal to surrender for the doubtful pleasures of a long, expensive campaign. If assassination's in the picture I suppose we'll have to knock them off—but we've got to be *sure*."

"May I speak?" Reiner asked icily.

The old man nodded and re-lit his cigar.

"I have been called—behind my back, naturally—a fanatic," Reiner said. He pointedly did not look anywhere near F. W. Taylor as he spoke the word. "Perhaps this is correct and perhaps fanaticism is what's needed at a time like this. Let me point out what the so-called Government stands for: brutal 'taxation,' extirpation of gambling, denial of life's simple pleasures to the poor and severe limitation of them to all but the wealthy, sexual prudery viciously enforced by penal laws of appalling barbarity, endless regulation and coercion governing every waking minute of the day. That was its record during the days of its power and that would be its record if it returned to power. I fail to see how this menace to our liberty can be condoned by certain marginal benefits which are claimed to accrue from its continued existence." He faltered for a moment as his face twisted with an unpleasant memory. In a lower, unhappier voice, he went on: "I—I was alarmed the other day by something I overheard. Two small children were laying bets at the Kiddy Counter of the horse room I frequent, and I stopped on my way to the hundred-dollar window for a moment to hear their childish prattle. They were doping the forms for the sixth at Hialeah, I believe, when one of them digressed to say: 'My Mommy doesn't play the horses. She thinks all the horse rooms should be closed.'

"It wrung my heart, gentlemen, to hear that. I wanted to take that little boy aside and tell him: 'Son, your Mommy doesn't have to play the horses. Nobody has to play the horses unless he wants to. But as long as one single person wants to lay a bet on a horse and another person is willing to take it, nobody has the right to say the horse rooms should be closed.' Naturally I did not take the little boy aside and tell him that. It would have been an impractical approach to the problem. The *practical* approach is the one I have always advocated and still

do. Strike at the heart of the infection! Destroy the remnants of Government and cauterize the wound so that it will never reinfect again. Nor is my language too strong. When I realize that the mind of an innocent child has been corrupted so that he will prattle that the liberties of his brothers must be infringed on, that their harmless pleasures must be curtailed, my blood runs cold and I call it what it is: *treason.*"

Orsino had listened raptly to the words and joined in a burst of spontaneous applause that swept around the table. He had never had a brush with Government himself and he hardly believed in the existence of the shadowy, terrorist D.A.R., but Reiner had made it sound so near and menacing!

But Uncle Frank was on his feet. "We seem to have strayed from the point," he said dryly. "For anybody who needs his memory refreshed, I'll state that the point is two assassinations and one near miss. I fail to see the connection, if any with Dick Reiner's paranoid delusions of persecution. I especially fail to see the relevance of the word 'treason.' Treason to what—us? The Syndic is not a government. It must not become enmeshed in the symbols and folklore of a government or it will be first chained and then strangled by them. The Syndic is an organization of high morale and easy-going, hedonistic personality. The fact that it succeeded the Government occurred because the Government had become an organization of low morale and inflexible, puritanic, sado- masochistic personality. I have no illusions about the Syndic lasting forever, and I hope nobody else here has. Naturally I want it to last our lifetime, my children's lifetime, and as long after that as I can visualize my descendants, but don't think I have any burning affection for my unborn great-great grandchildren. Now, if there is anybody here who doesn't want it to last that long, I suggest to him that the quickest way to demoralize the Syndic is to adopt Dick Reiner's proposal of a holy war for a starter. From there we can proceed to an internal heresy hunt, a census, excise taxes, income taxes and wars of aggression. Now, what about getting back to the assassinations?"

Orsino shook his head, thoroughly confused by now. But the confusion vanished as a girl entered the room, whispered something in the ear of Edward Falcaro and sat down calmly by his side. He wasn't the only one who noticed her. Most of the faces there registered surprise and

some indignation. The Syndic had a very strong tradition of masculinity.

Edward Falcaro ignored the surprise and indignation. He said placidly: "That was very interesting, Frank, what I understood of it. But it's always interesting when I go ahead and do something because it's the smart thing to do, and then listen to you explain my reasons—including fifty or sixty that I'm more than positive never crossed by mind."

There was a laugh around the table that Charles Orsino thought was unfair. He knew, Edward Falcaro knew, and everybody knew that Taylor credited Falcaro with sound intuitive judgment rather than analytic power. He supposed the old man—intuitively—had decided a laugh was needed to clear the air of the quarrel and irrelevance.

Falcaro went on: "The way things stand now, gentlemen, we don't know very much, do we?" He bit a fresh cigar and lighted it meditatively. From a cloud of rank smoke he said: "So the thing to do is find out more, isn't it?" In spite of the beard and the cigar, there was something of a sly, teasing child about him. "So what do you say to slipping one of our own people into the Government to find out whether they're dealing in assassination or not?"

Charles Orsino alone was naive enough to speak; the rest knew that the old man had something up his sleeve. Charles said: "You can't do it, sir! They have lie-detectors and drugs and all sorts of things—" His voice died down miserably under Falcaro's too-benign smile and the looks of irritation verging on disgust from the rest. The enigmatic girl scowled. *Goddam them all!* Charles thought, sinking into his chair and wishing he could sink into the earth.

"The young man," Falcaro said blandly, "speaks the truth—no less true for being somewhat familiar to us all. But what if we have a way to get around the drugs and lie-detectors, gentlemen? Which of you bold fellows would march into the jaws of death by joining the Government, spying on them and trying to report back?"

Charles stood up, prudence and timidity washed away by a burning need to make up for his embarrassment with a grandstand play. "I'll go, sir," he said very calmly. *And if I get killed that'll show 'em; then they'll be sorry.*

"Good boy," Edward Falcaro said briskly, with a well-that's that air. "The young lady here will take care of you."

Charles steadily walked down the long room to the head of the table, thinking that he must be cutting a rather fine figure. Uncle Frank ruined his exit by catching his sleeve and halting him as he passed his seat. "Good luck, Charles," Uncle Frank whispered. "And for Heaven's sake, keep a better guard up. Can't you see the old devil planned it this way from the beginning?"

"Good-bye, Uncle Frank," Charles said, suddenly feeling quite sick as he walked on. The young lady rose and opened the door for him. She was graceful as a cat, and a conviction overcame Charles Orsino that he was the canary.

V

Max Wyman shoved his way through such a roar of voices and such a crush of bodies as he had never known before. Scratch Sheet Square was bright as day —brighter. Atomic lamps, mounted on hundred-story buildings hosed and squirted the happy mob with blue-white glare. The Scratch Sheet's moving sign was saying in fiery letters seventy-five feet tall: *"11:58 PM EST . . . December 31st . . . Cops say two million jam NYC streets to greet New Year . . . 11:59 PM EST . . . December 31st . . . Falcaro jokes on TV 'Never thought we'd make it' . . . 12:00 midnight January 1st . . . Happy New Year . . ."*

The roar of voices had become insane. Max Wyman held his head, hating it, hating them all, trying to shut them out. Half a dozen young men against whom he was jammed were tearing the clothes off a girl. They were laughing and she was too, making only a pretense of defending herself. It was one of New York's mild winter nights. Wyman looked at the white skin not knowing that his eyes gloated. He yelled curses at her, and the young men. But nobody heard his whiskey-hoarsened young voice.

Somebody thrust a bottle at him and made mouths, trying to yell: "Happy New Year!" He grabbed feverishly at the bottle and held it to his mouth, letting the liquor gurgle once, twice, three times. Then the bottle was snatched away, not by the man who had passed it to him. A hilarious fat woman plastered herself against Wyman and kissed him clingingly on the mouth, to his horror and disgust. She was torn away from him by a laughing, white-haired man and turned willingly to kissing him instead.

Two strapping girls jockeyed Wyman between them and be-

gan to tear *his* clothes off, laughing at their switcheroo on the year's big gag. He clawed out at them hysterically and they stopped, the laughter dying on their lips as they saw his look of terrified rage. A sudden current in the crowd parted Wyman from them; another bottle bobbed on the sea of humanity. He clutched at it and this time did not drink. He stuffed it hurriedly under the waistband of his shorts and kept a hand on it as the eddy of humanity bore him on to the fringes of the roaring mob.

"Syndic leaders hail New Year . . . Taylor praises Century of Freedom . . . 12:05 AM EST January 1st . . ."

Wyman was mashed up against a girl who first smiled at his young face invitingly . . . and then looked again. "Get away from me!" she shrieked, pounding on his chest with her small fists. You could hear individual voices now, but the crowd was still dense. She kept screaming at him and hitting him until suddenly Scratch Sheet Square Upramp loomed and the crowd fizzed onto it like uncorked champagne, Wyman and the screaming girl carried along the moving plates underfoot. The crowd boiled onto the northbound strip, relieving the crush; the girl vanished, whimpering, into the mob.

Wyman, rubbing his ear mechanically, shuffled with downcast eyes to the Eastbound ramp and collapsed onto a bench gliding by at five miles per hour. He looked stupidly at the ten-mile and fifteen-mile strips, but did not dare step onto them. He had been drinking steadily for a month. He would fall and the bottle would break.

He lurched off the five-mile strip at Riverside Downramp. Nobody got off with him. Riverside was a tangle of freightways over, under and on the surface. He worked there.

Wyman picked his way past throbbing conveyors roofed against pilferage, under gurgling fuel and water and waste pipes, around vast metal warehouses and storage tanks. It was not dark or idle in Riverside. Twenty-four hours was little enough time to bring Manhattan its daily needs and carry off its daily waste and manufactures. Under daylight atomics the transport engineers in their glass perches read the dials and turned the switches. Breakdown crews scurried out from emergency stations as bells clanged to replace a sagging plate, remag a failing ehrenhafter, unplug a jam of nylon bales at a too-sharp corner.

He found Breakdown Station 26, hitched his jacket over the

bottle and swayed in, drunk enough to think he could pretend he was sober. "Hi," he said hoarsely to the shift foreman. "Got jammed up in the celebration."

"We heard it clear over here," the foreman said, looking at him closely. "Are you all right, Max?"

The question enraged him. "'Smatter?" he yelled. "Had a couple, sure. Think 'm drunk? Tha' wha' ya think?"

"Gee," the foreman said wearily. "Look, Max, I can't send you out tonight. You might get killed. I'm trying to be reasonable and I wish you'd do as much for me. What's biting you, boy? Nobody has anything against a few drinks and a few laughs. I went on a bender last month myself. But you get so Goddammed *mean* I can't stand you and neither can anybody else."

Wyman spewed obscenity at him and tried to swing on him. He was surprised and filled with self-pity when somebody caught his arm and somebody else caught his other arm. It was Dooley and Weintraub, his shiftmates, looking unhappy and concerned.

"Lousy rats!" Wyman choked out. "Leas' a man's buddies c'd do is back'm up . . ." He began to cry, hating them, and then fell asleep on his feet. Dooley and Weintraub eased him down onto the floor.

The foreman mopped his head and appealed to Dooley: "He always like this?" He had been transferred to Station 26 only two weeks before.

Dooley shrugged. "You might say so. He showed up about three months ago. Said he used to be a breakdown man in Buffalo, on the yards. He knew the work all right. But I never saw such a mean kid. Never a good word for anybody. Never any fun. Booze, booze, booze. This time he really let go."

Weintraub said unexpectedly: "I think he's what they used to call an alcoholic."

"What the hell's that?" the foreman demanded.

"I read about it. It's something they used to have before the Syndic. I read about it. Things were a lot different then. People picking on you all the time, everybody mad all the time. The girls were scared to give it away and the boys were scared to take it—but they did anyway and it was kind of like fighting with yourself *inside* yourself. The fighting wore some people out so much they just couldn't take it any more. Instead of going on benders for a change of pace like sensible people, they boozed *all* the time—and they had a fight inside themselves

about *that* so they boozed harder." He looked defensive at their skeptical faces. "I *read* it, he insisted.

"Well," the foreman said inconclusively, "I heard things used to be pretty bad. Did these alcoholers get over it?"

"I don't know," Weintraub admitted. "I didn't read that far."

"Hm. I think I'd better can him." The foreman was studying their faces covertly, hoping to read a reaction. He did. Both the men looked relieved. "Yeh. I think I'd better can him. He can go to the Syndic for relief if he has to. He doesn't do us much good here. Put some soup on and get it down him when he wakes up." The foreman, an average kindly man, hoped the soup would help.

But at about three-thirty, after two trouble calls in succession, they noticed that Wyman had left leaving no word.

The fat little man struggled out of the New Year's eve throng; he had been caught by accident. Commander Grinnel did not go in for celebrations. When he realized that January fifteenth was now fifteen days away, he doubted that he would ever celebrate again. It was a two-man job he had to do on the fifteenth, and so far he had not found the other man.

He rode the slidewalk to Columbus Square. He had been supplied with a minimum list of contacts. One had moved, and in the crazily undisciplined Syndic Territory it was impossible to trace anybody. Another had died —of too much morphine. Another had beaten her husband almost to death with a chair leg and was in custody awaiting trial. The Commander wondered briefly and querulously: why do we always have such unstable people here? Or does that louse Emory deliberately saddle me with them when I'm on a mission? Wouldn't put it past him.

The final contact on the list was a woman. She'd be worthless for the business of January fifteenth; that called for some physical strength, some technical knowledge, and a residual usefulness to the Government. Professor Speiser had done some good work here on industrial sabotage, but taken away from the scene of possible operations, she'd just be a millstone. He had his record to think of.

Sabotage—

If a giggling threesome hadn't been looking his way from a bench across the slidewalk, he would have ground his teeth. In recent weeks, he had done what he estimated as an easy three million dollars worth of damage to Mob Territory industry. And

the stupid fools hadn't *noticed* it! Repair crews had rebuilt the fallen walls, mechanics had tut-tutted over the wrecked engines and replaced them, troubleshooters had troubleshot the scores of severed communications lines and fuel mains.

He had hung around.

"Sam, you see this? Melted through, like with a little thermite bomb. How in the hell did a thing like that happen?"

"I don't know. I wasn't here. Let's get it fixed kid."

"Okay . . . you think we ought to report this to somebody?"

"If you want to. I'll mention it to Larry. But I don't see what he can do about it. Must've been some kids. You gotta put it down as fair wear and tear. But boys will be boys."

Remembering, he did grind his teeth. But they were at Columbus Square.

Professor Speizer lived in one of the old plastic brick faculty houses. Her horsy face, under a curling net, looked out of the annunciator plate. "Yes? What is it?"

"Professor Speiser, I believe you know my daughter, Miss *Freeman*. She asked me to look you up while I was in New York. Have I come much too late?"

"Oh, dear. Why, no. I suppose not. Come in, Mr.—Mr. Freeman."

In her parlor, she faced him apprehensively. When she spoke she rolled out her sentences like the lecturer she was. "Mr. Freeman—as I suppose you'd prefer me to call you—you asked a moment ago whether you'd come too late. I realize that the question was window-dressing, but my answer is quite serious. You have come too late. I have decided to dissociate myself from—let us say, from your daughter, Miss Freeman."

The Commander asked only: "Is that irrevocable?"

"Quite. It wouldn't be fair of me to ask you to leave without an explanation. I am perfectly willing to give one. I realize now that my friendship with Miss Freeman and the work I did for her stemmed from, let us say a certain vacancy in my life."

He looked at a picture on her desk of a bald, pleasant-faced fellow with a pipe.

She followed his eyes and said with a sort of shy pride: "That is Dr. Mordecai, of the University's Faculty of Dentistry. Like myself, a long-time celibate. We plan to marry."

The Commander said: "Do you feel that Dr. Mordecai might like to meet my daughter?"

"No. I do not. We expect to

have very little time for outside activities, between our professional careers and our personal lives. Please don't misunderstand, Mr. Freeman. I am still your daughter's friend. I always shall be. But somehow I no longer find in myself an urgency to express the friendship. It seems like a beautiful dream—and a quite futile one. I have come to realize that one can live a full life without Miss Freeman. Now, it's getting quite late—"

He smiled ruefully and rose. "May I wish you every happiness, Professor Speiser?" he said, extending his hand.

She beamed with relief. "I was so afraid you'd—"

Her face went limp and she stood swaying drunkenly as the needle in the ring popped her skin.

The Commander, his face as dead as hers, disconnected his hand and sheathed the needle carefully again. He drew one of his guns, shot her through the heart and walked out of the apartment.

Old fool! She should have known better.

Max Wyman stumbled through the tangle of Riveredge, his head a pot of molten lead and his legs twitching under him as he fled from his shame.

Dimly, as if with new eyes, he saw that he was not alone. Riveredge was technically uninhabited. Then what voices called guardedly to him from the shadows: "Buddy—buddy—wait up a minute, buddy—did you score? Did you score?"

He lurched on and the voices became bolder. The snaking conveyors and ramps sliced out sectors of space. Storage tanks merged with inflow mains to form sheltered spots where they met. No spot was without its whining, appealing voice. He stood at last, quivering, leaning against a gigantic I-beam that supported a heavy-casting freightway. A scrap sheet of corrugated iron rested against the bay of the I-beam, and the sheet quivered and fell outward. An old man's voice said: "You're beat, son. Come on in."

He staggered a step forward and collapsed on a pallet of rags as somebody carefully leaned the sheet back into place again.

VI

Max Wyman woke raving with the chuck horrors. There was somebody there to hand him candy bars, sweet lemonade, lump sugar. There was somebody to shove him easily back into the pallet of rags when he tried to stumble forth in a hunt for booze. On the second day he

realized that it was an old man whose face looked gray and paralyzed. His name was T. G. Pendelton, he said.

After a week, he let Max Wyman take little walks about their part of Riverside—but not by night. "We've got some savage people here," he said. "They'd murder you for a pint. The women are worse. If one calls to you, don't go. You'll wind up dumped through a manhole into the Hudson. Poor folk."

"You're *sorry* for them?" Wyman asked, startled. It was a new idea to him. Since Buffalo, he had never been sorry for anybody. Something awful had happened there, some terrible betrayal . . . he passed his bony hand across his forehead. He didn't want to think about it.

"Would I live here if I weren't?" T. G. asked him. "Sometimes I can help them. There's nobody else to help them. They're old and sick and they don't fit anywhere. That's why they're savage. You're young—the only young man I've ever seen in Riveredge. There's so much outside for the young. But when you get old it sometimes throws you."

"The Goddammed Syndic," Wyman snarled, full of hate.

T. G. shrugged. "Maybe it's too easy for sick old people to get booze. They lose somebody they spent a life with and it throws them. People harden into a pattern. They always had fun, they think they always will. Then half of the pattern's gone and they can't stand it, some of them. You got it early. What was the ringing bell?"

Wyman collapsed into the bay of the I-beam as if he'd been kicked in the stomach. A wave of intolerable memory swept over him. A ringing bell, a wobbling pendulum, a flashing light, the fair face of his betrayer, the hateful one of Hogan, stirred together in a hell brew. "Nothing," he said hoarsely, thinking that he'd give his life for enough booze to black him out. "Nothing."

"You kept talking about it," T. G. said. "Was it real?"

"It couldn't have been," Wyman muttered. "There aren't such things. No. There was her and that Syndic and that louse Hogan. I don't want to talk about it."

"Suit yourself."

He did talk about it later, curiously clouded though it was. The years in Buffalo. The violent love affair with Inge. The catastrophic scene when he found her with Regan, king-pin mobster. The way he felt turned inside-out, the lifetime of faith in the Syndic behind him and the lifetime of a faith in Inge ahead of

him, both wrecked, the booze, the flight from Buffalo to Erie, to Pittsburgh, to Tampa, to New York. And somehow, insistently, the ringing bell, the wobbling pendulum and the flashing light that kept intruding between episodes of reality.

T. G. listened patiently, fed him, hid him when infrequent patrols went by. T. G. never told him his own story, but a bloated woman who lived with a yellow-toothed man in an abandoned storage tank did one day, her voice echoing from the curving, windowless walls of corrugated plastic. She said T. G. had been an alky chemist, reasonably prosperous, reasonably happy, reasonably married. His wife was the faithful kind and he was not. With unbelievable slyness she had dulled the pain for years with booze and he had never suspected. They say she had killed herself after one frightful week-long debauche in Riveredge. T. G. came down to Riveredge for the body and returned after giving it burial and drawing his savings from the bank. He had never left Riveredge since.

"Worsh'p the grun' that man walks on," the bloated woman mumbled. "Nev' gets mad, nev' calls you hard names. Give y'a bottle if y' need it. Talk to y' if y' blue. Worsh'p that man."

Max Wyman walked from the storage tank, sickened. T. G.'s charity covered that creature and him.

It was the day he told T. G.: "I'm getting out of here."

The gray, paralyzed-looking face almost smiled. "See a man first?"

"Friend of yours?"

"Somebody who heard about you. Maybe he can do something for you. He feels the way you do about the Syndic."

Wyman clenched his teeth. The pain still came at the thought. Syndic, Hogan, Inge and betrayal. God, to be able to hit back at them!

The red ride ebbed. Suddenly he stared at T. G. and demanded: "Why? Why should you put me in touch? What is this?"

T. G. shrugged. "I don't worry about the Syndic. I worry about people. I've been worrying about you. You're a little insane, Max, like all of us here."

"God damn you!"

"He has. . . ."

Max Wyman paused a long time and said: "Go on, will you?" He realized that anybody else would have apologized. But he couldn't and he knew that T. G. knew he couldn't.

The old man said: "A little insane. Bottled-up hatred. It's better out of you than in. It's better to sock the man you hate and stand a chance of having

him sock you back than it is just to hate him and let the hate gnaw you like a graveworm."

"What've you got against the Syndic?"

"Nothing, Max. Nothing against it and nothing for it. What I'm for is people. The Syndic is people. You're people. Slug 'em if you want and they'll have a chance to slug you back. Maybe you'll pull down the Syndic like Samson in the temple; more likely it'll crush you. But you'll be *doing* something about it. That's the great thing. That's the thing people have to learn—or they wind up in Riveredge."

"You're crazy."

"I told you I was, or I wouldn't be here."

The man came at sunset. He was short and pudgy, with a halo of wispy hair and the coldest, grimmest eyes that Wyman had ever seen. He shook hands with Wyman, and the young man noted simultaneously a sharp pain in his finger and that the stranger wore an elaborate gold ring. Then the world got hazy and confused. He had a sense that he was being asked questions, that he was answering them, that it went on for hours and hours.

When things quite suddenly came into focus again, the pudgy man was saying: "I can introduce myself now. Commander Grinnel, of the North American Navy. My assignment is recruiting. The preliminary examination has satisfied me that you are no plant and would be a desirable citizen of the N. A. Government. I invite you to join us."

"What would I do?" Wyman asked steadily.

"That depends on your aptitudes. What do you think you would like to do?"

Wyman said: "Kill me some Syndics."

The commander stared at him with those cold eyes. He said at last: "It can probably be arranged. Come with me."

They went by train to Cape Cod. At midnight on January 15th, the commander and Wyman left their hotel room and strolled about the streets. The commander taped small packets to the four legs of the microwave relay tower that connected Cape Cod with the Continental Press common carrier circuits and taped other packets to the police station's motor pool gate.

At 1:00 A.M., the tower exploded and the motor pool gate fused into an impassible puddle of blue-hot molten metal. Simultaneously, fifty men in turtleneck sweaters and caps appear-

ed from nowhere on Center Street. Half of them barricaded the street, firing on citizens and cops who came too close. The others systematically looted every store between the barricade and the beach.

Blinking a flashlight in code, the commander approached the deadline unmolested and was let through with Wyman at his heels. The goods, the raiders, the commander and Wyman were aboard a submarine by 2:35 and under way ten minutes later.

After Commander Grinnel had exchanged congratulations with the sub commander, he presented Wyman.

"A recruit. Normally I wouldn't have bothered, but he had a rather special motivation. He could be very useful."

The sub commander studied Wyman impersonally. "If he's not a plant."

"I've used my ring. If you want to get it over with, we can test him and swear him in now."

They strapped him into a device that recorded pulse, perspiration, respiration, muscle-tension and brainwaves. A sweatered specialist came and mildly asked Wyman matter-of-fact questions about his surroundings while he calibrated the polygraph.

Then came the payoff. Wyman did not fail to note that the sub commander loosened his gun in his holster when the questioning began.

"Name, age and origin?"

"Max Wyman. Twenty-two. Buffalo Syndic Territory."

"Do you like the Syndic?"

"I hate them."

"What are your feelings toward the North American Government?"

"If it's against the Syndic, I'm for it."

"Would you rob for the North American Government?"

"I would."

"Would you kill for it?"

"I would."

"Have you any reservations yet unstated in your answers?"

"No."

It went on for an hour. The questions were re-phrased continuously; after each of Wyman's firm answers, the sweatered technician gave a satisfied little nod. At last it ended and he was unstrapped from the device.

Max was tired.

The sub commander seemed a little awed as he got a small book and read from it: "Do you, Max Wyman, solemnly renounce all allegiances previously held by you and pledge your allegiance to the North American Government?"

"I do," the young man said fiercely.

In a remote corner of his mind, for the first time in months, the bell ceased to ring, the pendulum to beat and the light to flash.

Charles Orsino knew again who he was and what was his mission.

VII

It had begun when the girl led him through the conference room door. Naturally one had misgivings; naturally one didn't speak up. But the vault-like door far downstairs was terrifying when it yawned before you and even more so when it closed behind you.

"What is this place?" he demanded at last. "Who are you?"

She said: "Psychology lab."

It produced on him the same effect that "alchemy section" or "Division of astrology" would have on a well-informed young man in 1950. He repeated flatly: "Psychology lab. If you don't want to tell me, very well. I volunteered without strings." Which should remind her that he was a sort of hero and should be treated with a certain amount of dignity and that she could save her corny jokes.

"I meant it," she said, fiddling busily with the locks of yet another vault-like door. "I'm a psychologist. I'm also by the way, Lee Falcaro—since you asked."

"The old ma—Edward Falcaro's line?" he asked.

"Simon pure. He's my father's brother. Father's down in Miami, handling the tracks and gaming in general."

The second big door opened on a brain-gray room whose air had a curiously dead feel to it. "Sit down," she said, indicating a very unorthodox chair. He did, and found that the chair was the most comfortable piece of furniture he had ever known. Its contact with his body was so complete that it pressed nowhere, it poked nowhere. The girl studied dials in its back nevertheless and muttered something about adjusting it. He protested.

"Nonsense," she said decisively. She sat down herself in an ordinary seat. Charles shifted uneasily in his chair to find that it moved with him. Still no pressure, still no poking.

"You're wondering," she began, "about the word 'psychology'. It has a bad history and people have given it up as a bad job. It's true that there isn't pressure nowadays to study the human mind. People get along. In general what they want they get, without crippling

effort. In your uncle Frank Taylor's language, the Syndic is an appropriately-structured organization of high morale and wide public acceptance. In my language the Syndic is a father-image which does a good job of fathering. In good times, people aren't introspective.

"There is, literally, no reason why my line of the family should have kept up a tradition of experimental psychology. Way, way back, old Amadeo Falcaro often consulted Professor Oscar Sternweiss of the Columbia University psychology faculty—he wasn't as much of a dashing improvisor as the history books make him out to be. Eventually one of his daughters married one of Sternweiss' sons and inherited the Sternweiss notebooks and library and apparatus. It became an irrational custom to keep it alive. When each academic school of psychology managed to prove that every other school of psychology was dead wrong and psychology collapsed as a science, the family tradition was unaffected; it stood outside the wrangling.

"Now, you're wondering what this has to do with trying to slip you into the Government."

"I am," Charles said fervently. If she'd been a doll outside the Syndic, he would minutes ago have protested that all this was foolish and walked out. Since she was not only in the Syndic, but in the Falcaro line, he had no choice except to hear her babble and *then* walk out. It was all rot, psychology. Id, oversoul, mind-vectors, counseling, psychosomatics—rot from sick-minded old men. Everybody knew—

"The Government, we know, uses deinhibiting drugs as a first screening of its recruits. As an infallible second screening, they use a physiological lie-detector based on the fact that telling a lie causes tensions in the liar's body. We shall get around this by slipping you in as a young man who hates the Syndic for some valid reason—"

"Confound it, you were just telling me that they can't be fooled!"

"We won't fool them. You'll *be* a young man who hates the Syndic. We'll tear down your present personality a gray cell at a time. We'll pump you full of Seconal every day for a quarter of a year. . . . "We'll obliterate your personality under a new one. We'll bury Charles Orsino under a mountain of suggestions, compulsions and obsessions shoveled at you sixteen hours a day while you're too groggy to resist. Naturally the supplanting personality will be

neurotic, but that works in with the mission."

He struggled with a metaphysical concept for the first time in his life. "But—but—how will I know I'm *me?*"

"We think we can put a trigger on it. When you take the Government oath of allegiance, you should bounce back."

He did not fail to note a little twin groove between her brows that appeared when she said *think* and *should.* He knew that in a sense he was nearer death now than when Halloran's bullet had been intercepted.

"Are you staying with it?" she asked simply.

Various factors entered into it. *A life for the Syndic,* as in the children's history books. That one didn't loom very large. But multiply it by *it sounds like more fun that hot-rod polo,* and that by *this is going to raise my stock sky-high with the family* and you had something. Somehow, under Lee Falcaro's interested gaze, he neglected to divide it by *if it works.*

"I'm staying with it," he said.

She grinned. "It won't be too hard," she said. "In the old days there would have been voting record, social security, numbers, military service, addresses they could check on—hundreds of things. Now about all we have to fit you with is a name and a subjective life."

It began that spring day and went on into late fall.

The ringing bell.

The flashing light.

The wobbling pendulum.

You are Max Wyman of Buffalo Syndic Territory. You are Max Wyman of Buffalo Syndic Territory. You are Max Wyman of Buffalo Syndic. . . .

Mom fried pork sausages in the morning, you loved the smell of pumpernickel from the bakery in Vesey Street.

Mr. Watsisname the English teacher with the mustache wanted you to go to college—

Nay, ye can not, though ye had
Argus eyes,
In abbeyes they haue so many
suttyll spyes;
For ones in the yere they have
secret vvsytacyons,
And yf ony prynce
reforme. . . .

—but the stockyard job was closer, they needed breakdown men—

You are Max Wyman of Buffalo Syndic Territory. You are—

The ringing bell.

The flashing light.

The wobbling pendulum.

And the pork sausages and the teacher with the mustache and poems you loved and

page, 24, paragraph 3, maximum speed on a live-cattle walk-

way is three miles per hour; older walkways hold this speed with reduction gears coupled to a standard 18-*inch ehrenhafter unit. Standard practice in new construction calls for holding speed by direct drive from a specially-wound ehrenhafter. This places a special obligation in breakdown maintenance men, who must distinguish between the two types, carry two sets of wiring diagrams and a certain number of mutually-uninterchangeable parts, though good design principles hold these to a minimum. The main difference in the winding of a standard* 18-*incher and a lowspeed ehrenhafter rotor—*

Of course things are better now, Max Wyman, you owe a great debt to Jim Hogan, Father of the Buffalo Syndic, who fought for your freedom in the great old days, and to his descendants who are tirelessly working for your freedom and happiness.

And now happiness is a girl named Inge Klohbel now that you're almost a man.

You are Max Wyman of Buffalo Syndic Territory. You are Max Wyman of Buffalo Syndic Territory.

And Inge Klohbel is why you put away the crazy dream of scholarship, for her lips and hair and eyes and legs mean more to you than anything, more than

Later phonologic changes include palatal mutation; i.e., before ht *and* hs *the diphthongs* eo, io, *which resulted from breaking, became* ie (i, y) *as in* cneoht, chieht, *and* seox (x *equalling* hs), siex, six, syx. . . .

the crazy dream of scholarship, what kind of a way is that to repay the Mob and

The ringing bell.

The flashing light.

The wobbling pendulum.

repay the Syndic and young Mike Hogan all over the neighborhood suddenly and Inge says he did stop and say hello but of course he was just being polite.

so you hit the manuals hard and one day you go out on a breakdown call and none of the older men could figure out why the pump was on the blink (a roaring, chewing monster of a pump it was, sitting there like a dead husk and the cattlefeed backed up four miles to a storage tank in the suburbs and the steers in the yards bawling with hunger, and you traced the dead wire, you out with the spot-welder, a zip of blue flame and the pump began to chew again and you got the afternoon off.

And there they were.

Lee Falcaro: (*Bending over the 'muttering, twitching carcass*)

Adrenalin. Brighter picture and louder sound.

Assistant: *(Opening a pinch cock in the tube that enters the arm, increasing video contrast, increasing audio)*: *He's weakening.*

Lee Falcaro: *(In a whisper) I know. I know. But this is IT.*

Assistant: *(Inaudibly) you cold-blooded bitch.*

You are Max Wyman, you are Max Wyman,

and you don't know what to do about the Syndic that betrayed you, about the girl who betrayed you with the living representative of the Syndic, about the dream of scholarship that lies in ruins, the love that lies in ruins after how many promises and vows, the faith of twenty years that lies in ruins after how many declarations.

The ringing bell.

The flashing light.

The wobbling pendulum.

And a double whiskey with a beer chaser.

Lee Falcaro: *The alcohol.*

(It drips from a sterile graduate, trickles through the rubber tubing and into the arm of the mumbling, sweating carcass. The molecules mingle with the molecules of serum: *In seconds they are washed against the cell-walls of the forebrain. The cellwalls, lattices of jelly, crawl and rearrange their structure as the alcohol molecules bumble against them; the lattices of jelly that wall in the cytoplasm and nuclear jelly become thinner than they were. Streams of electrons that had coursed in familiar paths through chains of neurones find easier paths through the poison-thinned cell walls. A "Memory" or an "Idea" or a "Hope" or a "Value" that was a configuration of neurones linked by electron streams vanishes when the electron streams find an easier way to flow a New "Memories," "Ideas," "Hopes" and "Values" that are configurations of neurones linked by electron streams are born.)*

Love and loyalty die, but not as if they had never been. Their ghosts remain, Max Wyman and you are haunted by them. They hound you from Buffalo to Erie, but there is no oblivion deep enough in the Mex joints, or in Tampa tequila or Pittsburgh zubrovka or New York gin.

You tell incurious people who came to the place on the corner for a shot and some talk that you're the best breakdown man that ever came out of Erie; you tell them women are no Goddamn good, you tell them the Syndic—here you get sly and look around with drunken caution, lowering your voice—you tell them the Syndic's no Goddamned good, and you drunkenly

recite poetry until they move away, puzzled and annoyed.

Lee Falcaro: (Passing a weary hand across her forehead) well, he's had it. Disconnect the tubes, give him a 48-hour stretch in bed and then get him on the street pointed towards River-edge.

Assistant: Does the apparatus go into dead storage?

Lee Falcaro: (Grimacing uncontrollably) No. Unfortunately, no.

Assistant: (Inaudibly, as she plucks needle-tipped tubes from the carcass' elbows) who's the next sucker?

VIII

The submarine surfaced at dawn. Orsino had been assigned a bunk and, to his surprise, had fallen asleep almost at once. At eight in the morning, he was shaken awake by one of the men in caps.

"Shift change," the man explained laconically.

Orsino started to say something polite and sleepy. The man grabbed his shoulder and rolled him onto the deck, snarling: "You going to *argue?*"

Orsino's reactions were geared to hot-rod polo—doing the split-second right thing after instinctively evaluating the roll of the ball, the ricochet of bullets, the probable tactics and strategy of the opposing four. They were not geared to a human being who behaved with the blind ferocity of an inanimate object. He just gawked at him from the deck, noting that the man had one hand on a sheath knife.

"All right, buster," the man said contemptuously, apparently deciding that Orsino would stay put. "Just don't mess with the Guard." He rolled into the bunk and gave a good imitation of a man asleep until Orsino worked his way through the crowded compartment and up a ladder to the deck.

There was a heavy, gray overcast. The submarine seemed to be planing the water; salt spray washed the shining deck. A gun crew was forward, drilling with a five-incher. The rasp of a petty-officer singing out the numbers mingled with the hiss and gurgle of the spray. Orsino leaned against the conning tower and tried to comb his thoughts out clean and straight.

It wasn't easy.

He was Charles Orsino, very junior Syndic member, with all memories pertaining thereto.

He was also, more dimly, Max Wyman with *his* memories. Now, able to stand outside of Wyman, he could recall how those memories had been implanted—down to the last stab of the last needle.

He thought some very bitter thoughts about Lee Falcaro—and dropped them, snapping to attention as Commander Grinnel pulled himself through the hatch. "Good morning, sir," he said.

The cold eyes drilled him. "Rest," the commander said. "We don't play it that way on a pigboat. I hear you had some trouble about your bunk."

Orsino shrugged uncomfortably.

"Somebody should have told you," the commander said. "The boat's full of Guardsmen. They have a very high opinion of themselves—which is correct. They carried off the raid in good style. You don't mess with Guards."

"What are they?" Orsino asked.

Grinnel shrugged. "The usual elite," he said. "Loman's gang." He noted Orsino's blank look and smiled coldly. "Loman's President of North America," he said.

"On shore," Orsino hazarded, "we used to hear about somebody named Ben Miller."

"Obsolete information. Miller had the Marines behind him. Loman was Secretary of Defense. He beached the Marines and broke them up into guard detachments. Took away their heavy weapons. Meanwhile, he built up the Guard, very quietly—which, with the Secretary of Information behind him, he could do. About two years ago, he struck. The Marines who didn't join the Guard were massacred. Miller had the sense to kill himself. The Veep and the Secretary of State resigned, but it didn't save their necks. Loman assumed the Presidency automatically, of course, and had them shot. They were corrupt as hell anyway. They were owned body and soul by the southern bloc."

Two seamen appeared with a folding cot, followed by the sub commander. He was red-eyed with lack of sleep. "Set it there," he told them, and sat heavily on the sagging canvas. "Morning, Grinnel," he said with an effort. "Believe I'm getting too old for the pigboats. I want sun and air. Think you can use your influence at court to get me a corvette?" He bared his teeth to show it was a joke.

Grinnel said, with a minimum smile: "If I had any influence, would I catch the cloak-and-dagger crap they sling at me?"

The sub commander rolled back onto the cot and was instantly asleep, a muscle twitching the left side of his face every few seconds.

Grinnel drew Orsino to the lee of the conning tower. "We'll

let him sleep," he said. "Go tell that gun crew Commander Grinnel says they should lay below."

Orsino did. The petty officer said something exasperated about the gunnery training bill and Orsino repeated his piece. They secured the gun and went below.

Grinnel said, with apparent irrelevance: "You're a rare bird, Wyman. You're capable—and you're uncommitted. Let's go below. Stick with me."

He followed the fat little commander into the conning tower. Grinnel told an officer of some sort: "I'll take the con, mister. Wyman here will take the radar watch." He gave Orsino a look that choked off his protests. Presumably, Grinnel knew that he was ignorant of radar.

The officer, looking baffled, said: "Yes, Commander." A seaman pulled his head out of a face-fitting box and told Wyman: "It's all yours, stranger." Wyman cautiously put his face into the box and was confronted by meaningless blobs of green, numerals in the dark, and a couple of arrows to make confusion complete.

He heard Grinnel say to the helmsman: "Get me a mug of joe, sailor. I'll take the wheel."

"I'll pass the word, sir."

"Nuts you'll pass the word, sailor. Go get the coffee—and I want it now and not when some steward's mate decides he's ready to bring it."

"Aye, aye, sir." Orsino heard him clatter down the ladder. Then his arm was gripped and Grinnel's voice muttered in his ear: "When you hear me bitch about the coffee, sing out: 'Aircraft 265, DX 3,000'. Good and loud. No, don't stop looking. Repeat it."

Orsino said, his eyes crossing on double images of the meaningless, luminous blobs: "Aircraft 265, DX 3,000. Good and loud. When you bitch about the coffee."

"Right. Don't forget it."

He heard the feet on the ladder again. "Coffee, sir."

"Thanks, sailor." A long sip and then another. "I always said the pigboats drink the lousiest joe in the Navy."

"Aircraft 265, DX 3,000!" Orsino yelled.

A thunderous alarm began to sound. "Take her down!" yelled Commander Grinnel.

"Take her down, sir!" the helmsman echoed. "But sir, the skipper—"

Orsino remembered him too then, dead asleep in his cot on the deck, the muscle twitching the left side of his face every few seconds.

"God-damn it, those were aircraft! *Take her down!*"

The luminous blobs and numbers and arrows swirled before Orsino's eyes as the trim of the ship changed, hatches clanged to and water thundered into the ballast tanks. He staggered and caught himself as the deck angled sharply underfoot.

He knew what Grinnel had meant by saying he was uncommitted, and he knew now that it was no longer true.

He thought for a moment that he might be sick into the face-fitting box, but it passed.

Minutes later, Grinnel was on the mike, his voice sounding metallically through the ship: "To all hands. To all hands. This is Commander Grinnel. We lost the skipper in that emergency dive—but you and I know that that's the way he would have wanted it. As senior line officer, aboard, I'm assuming command for the rest of the voyage. We will remain submerged until dark. Division officers report to the wardroom. That's all."

He tapped Orsino on the shoulder. "Take off," he said. Orsino realized that the green blobs—clouds, were they?—no longer showed, and recalled that radar didn't work through water.

He wasn't in on the wardroom meeting, and wandered rather forlornly through the ship, incredibly jammed as it was with sleeping men, coffee-drinking men and booty. Half a dozen times he had to turn away close questioning about his radar experience and the appearance of the aircraft on the radar scope. Each time he managed it, with the feeling that one more question would have cooked his goose.

The men weren't sentimental about the skipper they had lost. Mostly they wondered how much of a cut Grinnel would allot them from the booty of Cape Cod.

At last the word passed for "Wyman" to report to the captain's cabin. He did, sweating after a fifteen-minute chat with a radar technician.

Grinnel closed the door of the minute cabin and smirked at him. "You have trouble, Wyman?" he asked.

"Yes."

"You'd have worse trouble if they found out for sure that you don't know radar. I'd be in the clear. I could tell them you claimed to be a qualified radar man. That would make me out to be pretty gullible, but it would make you out to be a murderer. Who's backing you, Wyman? Who told you to get rid of the skipper?"

"Quite right, sir," Orsino said. "You've really got me there."

"Glad you realize it, Wyman. I've got you and I can use you. It was a great bit of luck, the skipper corking off on deck. But I've always had a talent for improvisation. If you're determined to be a leader, Wyman, nothing is more valuable. Do you know, I can relax with you? It's a rare feeling. For once I can be certain that the man I'm talking to isn't one of Loman's stooges, or one of Clinch's N.A.B.I. ferrets or anything else but what he says he is—

"But that's beside the point. I have something else to tell you. There are two sides to working for me, Wyman. One of them's punishment if you get off the track. That's been made clear to you. The other is reward if you stay on. I have plans, Wyman, that are large-scale. They simply eclipse the wildest hopes of Loman, Clinch, Baggot and the rest. And yet, they're not wild. How'd you like to be on the inside when the North American Government returns to the mainland?"

Orsino uttered an authentic gasp and Commander Grinnel looked satisfied.

IX

The submarine docked at an indescribably lovely bay in the south of Ireland. Orsino asked Grinnel whether the Irish didn't object to this, and was met with a blank stare. It developed that the Irish consisted of a few hundred wild men in the woods —maybe a few thousand. The stupid shore-bound personnel couldn't seem to clean them out. Grinnel didn't know anything about them, and he cared less.

Ireland appeared to be the naval base. The government proper was located on Iceland, vernal again after a long, climatic swing. The Canaries and Ascencion were outposts.

Orsino had learned enough on the voyage to recognize the Government for what it was. It had happened before in history; Uncle Frank had pointed it out. Big-time Caribbean piracy had grown from very respectable origins. Gentlemen-skippers had been granted letters of marque and reprisal by warring governments, which made them a sort of contract navy. Periods of peace had found these privateers unwilling to give up their hard earned complicated profession and their investments in it. When they could no longer hoist the flag of England or France or Spain, they simply hoisted the Jolly Roger and went it alone.

Confusing? Hell, yes! The famous Captain Kidd thought he was a gallant privateer and sail-

ed trustingly into New York. Somewhere he had failed to touch third base; they shipped him to London for trial and hanged him as a pirate. The famous Henry Morgan had never been anything but a pirate and a super-pirate; as admiral of a private fleet he executed a brilliant amphibious operation and sacked the city of Panama. He was knighted, made governor of a fair-sized English island in the West Indies and died loved and respected by all.

Charles Orsino found himself a member of a pirate band that called itself the North American Government.

More difficult to learn were the ins and outs of pirate politics, which were hampered with an archaic, structurally-inappropriate nomenclature and body of tradition. Commander Grinnel was a Sociocrat, which meant that he was in the same gang as President Loman. The late sub commander had been a Constitutionist, which meant that he was allied with the currently-out "southern bloc." The southern bloc did not consist of southerners at this stage of the North American Governments history but of a clique that tended to include the engineers and maintenance men of the Government. That had been the reason for the sub commander's erasure. The Constitutionists traditionally commanded pigboats and aircraft while surface vessels and the shore establishments were in the hands of the Sociocrats—the fruit of some long-forgotten compromise.

Commander Grinnel cheerfully explained to Charles that there was a crypto-Sociocrat naval officer primed and waiting to be appointed to the command of the sub. The Constitutionist gang would back him to the hilt and the Sociocrats would growl and finally assent. If, thereafter, the Constitutionists ever counted on the sub in a coup, they would be quickly disillusioned.

There wasn't much voting. Forty years before there had been a bad deadlock following the death by natural causes of President Powell after seventeen years in office. An ad hoc bipartisan conference called a session of the Senate and the Senate elected a new president.

It was little information to be equipped with when you walked out into the brawling streets of New Portsmouth on shore leave.

The town had an improvised look which was strange to Orsino. There was a sanitation reactor every hundred yards or so, but he mistrusted the look of the ground-level mains that

led to it from the houses. There were house flies from which he shied violently. Every other shack on the waterfront was a bar or a notch joint. He sampled the goods at one of the former and was shocked by the quality and price. He rolled out, his ears still ringing from the belt of raw booze, as half a dozen sweatered Guards rolled in, singing some esoteric song about their high morale and even higher venereal rate. A couple of them looked at him appraisingly, as though they wondered what kind of a noise he'd make if they jumped on his stomach real hard, and he hurried away from them.

The other entertainment facilities of the waterfront were flatly ruled out by a quick inspection of the wares. He didn't know what to make of them. Joints back in Syndic Territory if you were a man, made sense. You went to learn the ropes, or because you were afraid of getting mixed up in something intense when you didn't want to, or because you wanted a change, or because you were too busy, lazy or shy to chase skirts on your own. If you were a woman and not too particular, a couple of years in a joint left you with a considerable amount of money and some interesting memories which you were under no obligation to discuss with your husbands or husband.

But the sloppy beasts who called to him from the windows of the joints here on the waterfront, left him puzzled and disgusted. He reflected, strolling up Washington Street with eyes straight ahead, that women must be in short supply if they could make a living—or that the male citizens of the Government had no taste.

A whiff from one of those questionable sewer mains sent him reeling. He ducked into another saloon in self-defense and leaned groggily against the bar. A pretty brunette demanded: "What'll you have?"

"Gin, please." He peeled a ten off the roll Grinnel had given him. When the girl poured his gin he looked at her and found her fair. In all innocence, he asked her a question, as he might have asked a barmaid back home. She could have answered, "Yes," "No," "Maybe," or "What's in it for me?"

Instead she called him a lousy bastard, picked up a beer mug and was about to shatter it on his head when a hand caught her and a voice warned: "Hold it, Mabel! This guy's off my ship.

"He's just out of the States; he doesn't know any better. You know what it's like over there."

Mabel snarled: "You better wise him up, then, friend. He can't go around talking like that to decent women." She slapped down another glass, poured gin and flounced down the bar.

Charles gulped his gin and turned shakily to his deliverer, a little reactor specialist he had seen on the sub once or twice. "Thanks," he said feeling inadequate. "Maybe you better wise me up. All I said was, 'Darling, do you—' "

The reactor man held up his hand. "That's enough," he said. "You don't talk that way over here unless you want your scalp parted."

Charles, buzzing a little with the gin, protested hotly: "But what's the harm? All she had to say was no; I wasn't going to throw her down on the floor!"

It was all very confusing.

A shrug. "I heard about things in the States—Wyman, isn't it? I guess I didn't really believe it. You mean I could go up to any woman and just ask her how's about it?"

"Within, reason, yes."

"And *do* they?"

"Some do, some don't—like here."

"Like hell, like here! Last liberty—" and the reactor man told him a long, confusing story about how he had picked up this pig, how she had dangled it in front of him for one solid week while he managed to spend three hundred and eighty-six dollars on her, and how finally she had bawled that she couldn't, she just hated herself but she couldn't do anything like *that* and bang went the door in his face, leaving him to finish out the evening in a notch joint.

"Good God!" Charles said, appalled. "Was she out of her mind?"

"No," the reactor man said glumly, "but I must have been. I should of got her drunk and raped her the first night."

Charles was fully conscious that values were different here. Choking down something like nausea, he asked carefully: "Is there much rape?"

The little man signalled for another gin and downed it. "I guess so. Once when I was a kid a dame gave me this line about her cousin raped her when she was little so she was frigid. I had more ambition then, so I said: 'Then this won't be anything new to you, baby,' I popped her on the button—"

"I've got to go now," Charles said, walking straight out of the saloon. He was beginning to understand the sloppy beasts in the windows of the notch joint and why men could bring themselves to settle for nothing better. He was also overwhelmed

by a great wave of home sickness.

The ugly pattern was beginning to emerge. Prudery, rape, frigidity, intrigue for power—and assassination? Beyond the one hint, Grinnel had said nothing that affected Syndic Territory.

But nothing would be more logical than for this band of brigands to lust after the riches of the continent.

Back of the waterfront were shipfitting shops and living quarters. Work was being done by a puzzling combination of mechanization and musclepower. In one open shed he saw a lathehand turning a gunbarrel out of a forging; the lathe was driven by one of those standard 18-inch ehrenhaft rotors Max Wyman knew so well. But a vertical drillpress next to it—Orsino blinked. Two men, sweating and panting, were turning a stubborn vertical drum as tall as they were, and a belt drive from the drum whirled the drill bit as it sank into a hunk of bronze. The men were in rags, dirty rags. And it came to Orsino with a stunning shock when he realized what the dull, clanking things were that swung from their wrists. They were chained to the handles of the wheel.

He walked on, almost dazed, comprehending now some cryptic remarks that had been passed aboard the sub.

"No Frog has staying power. Give a Limey his beef once a day and he'll outsweat a Frog."

"Yeah, but you can't whip a Limey. They just go bad when you whip a Limey."

"They just get sullen for awhile. But let me tell you, friend, don't ever whip a Spig. You whip a Spig, he'll wait twenty years if he has to but he'll *get* you, right between the ribs."

"If a Spig wants to be boiled, I should worry."

It had been broken up in laughter.

Boiled! Could such things be?

Sixteen ragged, filth-crusted sub-humans were creeping down the road, each straining at a rope. An inch at a time, they were dragging a skid loaded with one huge turbine gear whose tiny herringbone teeth caught the afternoon sun.

The Government had reactors, the Government had vehicles—why this? He slowly realized that the Government's metal and machinery and atomic power went into its warships; that there was none left over for consumers and the uses of peace. The Government had degenerated into a dawn-age monster, specialized all to teeth and claws and muscles to drive them with. The

Government was now, whatever it had been, a graceless, humorless incarnate ferocity. Whatever lightness or joy survived was the meaningless vestigal twitching of an obsolete organ.

Somewhere a child began to bawl and Charles was surprised to feel a profound pity welling up in him. Like a sedentary man who after a workout aches in muscles he never knew he owned, Charles was discovering that he had emotions which had never been poignantly evoked by the bland passage of the hours in Syndic Territory.

Poor little bastard, he thought, growing up in this hellhole. I don't know what having slaves to kick around will do to you, but I don't see how you can grow up a human being. I don't know what fear of love will do to you—make you a cheat? Or a graceful rutting animal with a choice only between graceless rutting violence and a stinking scuffle with a flabby and abstracted stranger in a strange unloved room? We have our guns to play with and they're good toys, but I don't know what kind of monster you'll become when they give you a gun to live with and violence for a god.

Reiner was right, he thought unhappily. *We've got to do something about this mess.*

A man and a woman were struggling in an alley as he passed. Old habit almost made him walk on, but this wasn't the playful business of ripping clothes as practiced during hilarious moments in Mob Territory. It was a grim and silent struggle—

The man wore the sweater of the Guards. Nevertheless, Charles walked into the alley and tore him away from the woman; or rather, he yanked at the man's rock-like arm and the man, in surprise, let go of the woman and spun to face him.

"Beat it," Charles said to the woman, not looking around. He saw from the corner of his eye that she was staying right there.

The man's hand was on his sheath knife. He told Charles: "Get lost. Now. You don't mess with the Guards."

Charles felt his knees quivering, which was good. He knew from many a chukker of polo that it meant that he was strung to the breaking point, ready to explode into action. "Pull that knife," he said, "and the next thing you know you'll be eating it."

The man's face went dead calm and he pulled the knife and came in low, very fast. The knife was supposed to catch Charles in the middle. If Charles stepped inside it, the

man would grab him in a bear hug and knife him in the back.

There was only one answer.

He caught the thick wrist from above with his left hand as the knife flashed toward his middle and shoved out. He felt the point catch and slice his cuff. The Guardsman tried a furious and ill-advised kick at his crotch; with his grip on the knife-hand, Charles toppled him into the filthy alley as he stood one-legged and off balance. He fell on his back, floundering, and for a black moment, Charles thought his weight was about to tear the wrist loose from his grip. The moment passed, and Charles put his right foot in the socket of the Guardsman's elbow, reinforced his tiring left hand with his right and leaned, doubling the man's forearm over the fulcrum of his boot. The man roared and dropped the knife. It had taken perhaps five seconds.

Charles said, panting: "I don't want to break your arm or kick your head in or anything like that. I just want you to go away and leave the woman alone." He was conscious of her, vaguely hovering in the background. He thought angrily: *She might at least get his knife.*

The Guardsman said thickly: "You give me the boot and I swear to God I'll find you and cut you to ribbons if it takes me the rest of my life."

Good, Charles thought. *Now he can tell himself he scared me. Good.* He let go of the forearm, straightened and took his foot from the man's elbow, stepping back. The Guardsman got up stiffly, flexing his arm, and stooped to pick up and sheath his knife without taking his eyes off Charles. Then he spat in the dust at Charles' feet. "Yellow crud," he said. "If the goddam crow was worth it, I'd cut your heart out." He walked off down the alley and Charles followed him with his eyes until he turned the corner into the street.

Then he turned, irritated that the woman had not spoken.

She was Lee Falcaro.

"Lee!" he said, thunderstruck. "What are you doing here?" It was the same face, feature for feature, and between her brows appeared the same double groove he had seen before. But she didn't know him.

"You know me?" she asked blankly. "Is that why you pulled that ape off me? I ought to thank you. But I can't place you at all. I don't know many people here. I've been ill, you know."

There was a difference apparent now. The voice was a little querulous. And Charles would have staked his life that never

could Lee Falcaro have said in that slightly smug, slightly proprietary, slightly aren't-I-interesting tone: "I've been ill, you know."

"But what are you *doing* here? Damn it, don't you know me? I'm Charles Orsino!"

He realized then that he had made a horrible mistake.

"Orsino," she said. And then she spat: *"Orsino!* Of the *Syndic!"* There was black hatred in her eyes.

She turned and raced down the alley. He stood there stupidly, for almost a minute, and then ran after her, as far as the alley's mouth. She was gone. You could run almost anywhere in New Portsmouth in almost a minute.

A weedy little seaman wearing crossed quills on his cap was lounging against a building. He snickered at Charles. "Don't chase that one, sailor," he said. "She is the property of O.N.I."

"You know who she is?"

The yeoman happily spilled his inside dope to the fleet gob: "Lee Bennet. Smuggled over here couple months ago by D.A.R. The hottest thing that ever hit Naval Intelligence. Very small potato in the Syndic—knows all the families, who does what, who's a figurehead and who's a worker. Terrific! Inside stuff! Hates the Syndic. A gang of big-timers did her dirt."

"Thanks," Charles said, and wandered off down the street.

It wasn't surprising. He should have *expected* it.

Noblesse oblige.

Pride of the Falcaro line. She wouldn't send anybody into deadly peril unless she were ready to go herself.

Only somehow the trigger that would have snapped neurotic, synthetic Lee Bennet into Lee Falcaro hadn't worked.

He wandered on aimlessly, wondering whether it would be minutes or hours before he'd be picked up and executed as a spy.

(TO BE CONCLUDED)

GOING DOWN . . .

Warning to inhabitants of Massachusetts; get out before it's too late —your state is sinking. A carbon 14 dating on an ancient Indian fish weir shows that it is 4,500 years old. Built at sea level, it is now 20 feet below that point. The rate is accelerating, a dating from 1650 shows it is going down a foot a century.

ILLUSTRATED BY SUSSMAN

CONSIGNMENT

BY ALLAN E. NOURSE

In the jungle the vicious man-killer is king, but what chance would a tiger have in the Times Square traffic.

The three shots ripped through the close night air of the prison, sharply, unbelievably. Three guards crumpled like puppets in the dead silence that followed. The thought flashed through Krenner's mind, incredibly, that possibly no one had heard.

He hurled the rope with all his might up the towering rock wall, waited a long eternity as the slim strong line swished through the darkness, and heard the dull "clank" as the hook took hold at the top. Like a cat he started up, frantically, scrambling, and climbing, the sharp heat of the rope searing his fingers. Suddenly daylight was around him, the bright unearthly glare of arc lights, the siren cutting in with its fierce scream. The shouts of alarm were far below him as he fought up the line, knot after knot, the carefully prepared knots. Twenty seconds to climb, he thought, just twenty seconds—

Rifle shots rang out below, the shells smashing into the concrete around him. Krenner almost turned and snarled at the little circle of men in the glaring light below, but turning meant precious seconds. A dull, painful blow struck his foot, as his hands grasped the jagged glass at the top of the wall.

In a moment of triumph he crouched at the top and laughed at the little men and the blazing guns below; on the other side lay the blackness of the river. He turned and plunged into the blackness, his foot throbbing,

down swiftly until the cool wetness of the river closed about him, soothing his pain, bathing his mind in the terrible beauty of freedom, and what went with freedom. A few dozen powerful strokes would carry him across and down the river, three miles below the prison fortress from which he had broken. Across the hill from that, somewhere, he'd find Sherman and a wide open road to freedom—

Free! Twenty-seven years of walls and work, bitterness and hateful, growing, simmering revenge. Twenty-seven years for a fast-moving world to leave him behind, far behind. He'd have to be careful about that. He wouldn't know about things. Twenty-seven years from his life, to kill his ambition, to take his woman, to disgrace him in the eyes of society. But the candle had burned through. He was free, with time, free, easy, patient time, to find Markson, search him out, kill him at last.

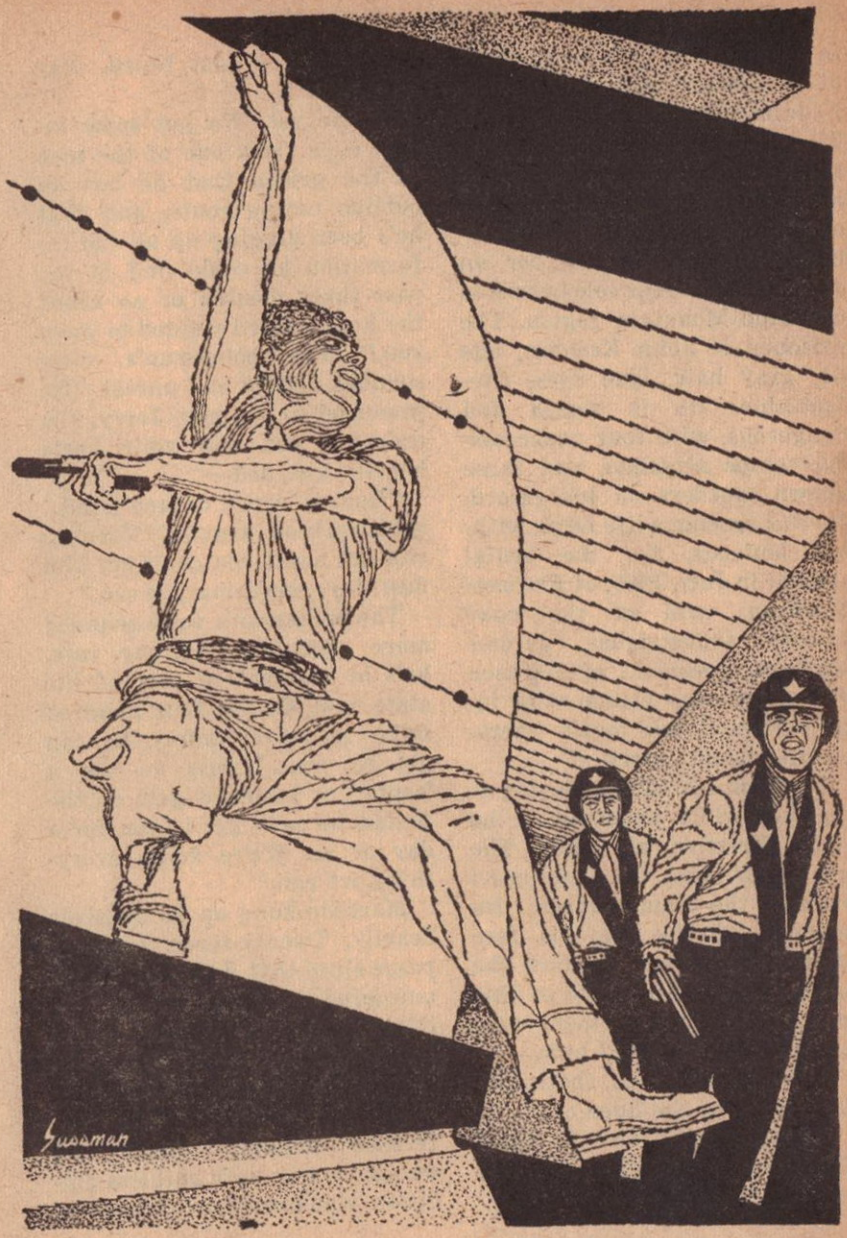
Hours passed it seemed, in the cold, moving water. Krenner struggled to stay alert; loss of control now would be sure death. A few shots had followed him from the wall behind, hopeless shots, hopeless little spears of light cutting across the water, searching for him, a tiny dot in the blackness. Radar could never spot him, for he wore no metal, and the sound of his movements in the water were covered by the sighing wind and the splashing of water against the prison walls.

Finally, after ages of pain and coldness, he dragged himself out onto the muddy shore, close to the calculated spot. He sat on the edge and panted, his foot swollen and throbbing. He wanted to scream in pain, but screams would bring farmers and dogs and questions. That would not do, until he found Sherman, somewhere back in those hills, with a 'copter, and food, and medication, and quiet, peaceful rest.

He tried to struggle to his feet, but the pain was too much now. He half walked, half dragged himself into the woods, and started as best he could the trek across the hills.

Jerome Markson absently snapped on the radiovisor on his desk. Sipping his morning coffee thoughtfully as he leafed through the reports on his desk, he listened with half an ear until the announcer's voice seeped through to his consciousness. He tightened suddenly in his seat, and the coffee cooled before him, forgotten.

"—Eastern Pennsylvania is broadcasting a four-state alarm with special radiovisor pictures


SUSSMAN

in an effort to pick up the trail of a convict who escaped the Federal Prison here last night. The escaped man, who shot and killed two guards making good his escape, dived into the river adjoining the prison, and is believed to have headed for an outside rendezvous somewhere in the Blue Mountain region. The prisoner is John Krenner, age 51, gray hair, blue eyes, five-foot-nine. He is armed and dangerous, with four unsuccessful escape attempts, and three known murders on his record. He was serving a life term, without leniency, for the brutal murder in July, 1967, of Florence Markson, wife of the now-famous industrialist, Jerome Markson, president of Markson Foundries. Any person with information of this man's whereabouts should report—"

Markson stared unbelieving at the face which appeared in the visor. Krenner, all right. The same cold eyes, the same cruel mouth, the same sneer. He snapped off the set, his face white and drawn. To face the bitter, unreasoning hate of this man, his former partner—even a prison couldn't hold him.

A telephone buzzed, shattering the silence of the huge office.

"Hello, Jerry? This is Floyd Gunn in Pittsburgh. Krenner's escaped!"

"I know. I just heard. Any word?"

"None yet. We got some inside dope from one of the men in the prison that he has an outside escape route, and that he's been digging up all the information he could find in the past three months or so about the Roads. But I wanted to warn you." The policeman's voice sounded distant and unreal. "He promised to get you, Jerry. I'm ordering you and your home heavily guarded—"

"Guards won't do any good," said Markson, heavily. "Krenner will get me if you don't get him first. Do everything you can."

The policeman's voice sounded more cheerful. "At any rate, he's in the eastern part of the state now. He has four hundred miles to travel before he can get to you. Unless he has a 'copter, or somehow gets on the Roads, he can't get to you for a day or so. We're doing everything we can."

Markson hung up the receiver heavily. Twenty-seven years of peace since that devil had finally murdered his way out of his life. And now he was back again. A terrible mistake for a partner, a man with no reason, a man who could not understand the difference between right and wrong. A man with ruthless ambition, who turned on his partner

when honesty got in his way, and murdered his partner's wife in rage when his own way of business was blocked. A man so twisted with rage that he threatened on the brink of capital punishment to tear Markson's heart out, yet Markson had saved him from the chair. An appeal, some money, some influence, had snatched him from death's sure grasp, so he could come back to kill again. And a man with such diabolical good fortune that he could now come safely to Markson, and hunt him out, and carry out the fancied revenge that his twisted mind demanded.

Markson took the visiphone in hand again and dialed a number. The face of a young girl appeared. "Hi, dad. Did you see the news report?"

"Yes, I saw it. I want you to round up Jerry and Mike and take the 'copter out to the summer place on Nantucket. Wait for me there. I don't know how soon I can make it, but I don't want you here now. Leave immediately."

The girl knew better than to argue with her father. "Dad, is there any chance—?"

"There's lots of chance. That's why I want you away from here."

He flipped off the connection, and sighed apprehensively. Now to wait. The furnaces had to keep going, the steel had to be turned out, one way or another. He'd have to stay. And hope. Perhaps the police *would* get him—

The elderly lady sat on the edge of the kitchen chair, shivering. "We'll be glad to help you, but you won't hurt us, will you?"

"Shut up," said Krenner. The gray plastic of his pistol gleamed dully in the poor light of the farm kitchen. "Get that foot dressed, with tight pressure and plenty of 'mycin. I don't want it to bleed, and I don't want an infection." The woman hurried her movements, swiftly wrapping the swollen foot.

The man lifted a sizzling frying pan from the range, flipping a hamburger onto a plate. He added potatoes and carrots. "Here's the food," he said sullenly. "And you might put the gun away. We don't have weapons, and we don't have a 'phone."

"You have legs," snapped Krenner. "Now shut up."

The woman finished the dressing. "Try it," she said. The convict stood up by the chair, placing his weight on the foot gingerly. Pain leaped through his leg, but it was a clean pain. He could stand it. He took a small map from his pocket. "Any streams or gorges overland be-

tween here and Garret Valley?"

The farmer shook his head. "No."

"Give me some clothes, then. No, don't leave. The ones you have on."

The farmer slipped out of his clothes silently, and Krenner dropped the prison grays in the corner.

"You'll keep your mouths shut about this," he stated flatly.

"Oh, yes, you can count on us," exclaimed the woman, eyeing the gun fearfully. "We won't tell a soul."

"I'll say you won't," said Krenner, his fingers tightening on the gun. The shots were muted and flat in the stillness of the kitchen.

An hour later Krenner broke through the underbrush, crossed a rutted road, and pushed on over the ridge. His cruel face was dripping with perspiration. "It should be the last ridge," he thought. "I've gone a good three miles—" The morning sun was bright, filtering down through the trees, making beautiful wet patterns on the damp ground. The morning heat was just beginning, but the food and medications had made progress easy. He pulled himself up onto a rock ledge, over to the edge, and felt his heart stop cold as he peered down into the valley below.

A dark blue police 'copter nestled on the valley floor next to the sleek gray one. It must have just arrived, for the dark uniforms of the police were swarming around the gray machine. He saw the pink face and the sporty clothes of the occupant as he came down the ladder, his hands in the air.

Too late! They'd caught Sherman!

He lay back shaking.

Impossible! He *had* to have Sherman. They couldn't possibly have known, unless somehow they had foreseen, or heard—. His mind seethed with helpless rage. Without Sherman he was stuck. No way to reach Markson, no way to settle that score—unless possibly—.

The Roads.

He'd heard about them. Way back in 1967, when he'd gone up, the roads were underway. A whole system of Rolling Roads was proposed then, and the first had already been built, between Pittsburgh and the Lakes. A crude affair, a conveyor belt system, running at a steady seventy-five miles per hour, carrying only ore and freight.

But in the passing years reports had filtered through the prison walls. New men, coming "up for a visit" had brought tales, gross exaggerations, of the Rolling Roads grown huge, a

tremendous system building itself up, crossing hills and valleys in unbroken lines, closed in from weather and hijackers, fast and smooth and endless. Criss-crossing the nation, they had said, in never-slowing belts of passengers and freight livestock. The Great Triangle had been first, from Chicago to St. Louis to Old New York, and back to Chicago. Now every town, every village had its small branch, its entrance to the Rolling Roads, and once a man got on the Roads, they had said, he was safe until he tried to get off.

Clearly the memory of the reports filtered through Krenner's mind. The great Central Roads run from Old New York to Chicago, through New Washington and Pittsburgh—

Markson was in Pittsburgh—

Krenner started down through the underbrush, travelling south by the sun, the urgency of his mission spurring him on against the pain of his foot, the difficulty of the terrain over which he travelled. He was too far north. Somewhere to the south he'd find the Roads. And once on the Roads, he'd find a way to get off—

He stopped at the brink of the hill and gasped in amazement.

They ran across the wide valley like silver ribbons. The late afternoon sunlight reflected gold and pink from the plasti-glass encasement, concealing the rushing line of travel within the covering. Like twin serpents, they lay across the hills, about a mile apart, the Road travelling east, and the Road moving west. They stretched as far as he could see. And he could see the white sign which said, "Merryvale Entrance, Westbound, Three miles."

As he tramped across the field he could hear the hum of the Roads grow loud in his ears. An automatic, machinelike hum, a rhythm of motion. Close to the westbound road he moved back eastward along it, toward the little port which formed the entrance to it. And soon he saw the police 'copter which rested near the entrance, and the uniformed men with their rifles, alert. Three of them.

Krenner fingered his weapon easily. It was almost dark; they would not see him easily. He kept a small hill between himself and the police and moved in within gunshot range. He could see the rocket-like car resting on its single rail, waiting for a passenger to enter, to touch the button which would activate the tiny rocket engines and move it forward, ever and ever more swiftly until it reached the accelleration of the Roads, and slid over, and became a part of the

Road. Moving carefully, he slipped from rock to rock, closer to the car and the men who guarded it.

Suddenly the bay of a hound cut through the gloom. Two small brown dogs with the men, straining at their leashes. He hadn't counted on that. Swiftly he took cover and lined his sights with the blue uniforms. Before they knew even his approximate location he had cut them down, and the dogs also, and raced wildly down the remainder of the hill to the car.

"Fare may be calculated from the accompanying charts, and will be collected when your car has taken its place on the Roads," said a little sign near the cockpit. Krenner studied the dashboard for a moment, then jammed in the button marked "Forward," and settled back. The monorail slid forward without a sound, and plunged into a tunnel in the hill. Out the other side, with ever-increasing accelleration it slid in alongside the gleaming silver ribbon, faster and faster. With growing apprehension Krenner watched the speedometer mount, past two hundred, two hundred and twenty, forty, sixty, eighty—at three hundred miles per hour the accelleration force eased, and the car suddenly swerved to the left, into a dark causeway. And then into the brightly lighted plasti-glass tunnel.

He was on the Roads!

Alongside the outside lane the little car sped, moving on an independent rail, sliding gently past other cars resting on the middle lane. An opening appeared, and Krenner's car slid over another notch, disengaged its rail, and settled to a stop on the central lane of the Road. The speedometer fell to nothing, for the car's motion was no longer independent, but an integral part of the speeding Road itself. Three hundred miles per hour on a constant, nonstop flight across the rolling land.

A loudspeaker suddenly piped up in his car. "Welcome to the Roads," it said. "Your fare collector will be with you in a short while. After he has arrived, feel free to leave your car and be at ease on the Road outside. Eating, resting, and sleeping quarters will be found at regular intervals. You are warned, however, not to cross either the barriers to the outside lanes, nor the barriers to the freight-carrying areas front and rear. Pleasant travelling."

Krenner chuckled grimly, and settled down in his car, his automatic in his hand. His fare collector would get a surprise. Down the Road a short distance he saw the man approaching,

wearing the green uniform of the Roads. And then he stiffened. Three blue uniforms were accompanying him. Opening the car door swiftly, he slipped out onto the soft carpetting of the Road, and raced swiftly away from the approaching men.

They saw him when he started to run. Ahead he could see a crowd of passengers around a dining area. A shout went up as he knocked a woman down in his pell-mell flight, but he was beyond them in an instant. His foot hindered him, and his pursuers were gaining. Suddenly before him he saw a barrier—a four foot metal wall. No carpet beyond it, no furnishings along the sides. A freight area! He hopped over the barrier and plunged into the blackness of the freight tunnel as he heard the shouts of his pursuers. "Stop! Come back! Stop or we'll shoot!"

They didn't shoot. In a moment Krenner came to the first freight carrier, one of the standard metal containers resting on the steel of the Road. He ran past it, and the next. The third and fourth were open cars, stacked high with machinery. He ran on for several moments before he glanced back.

They weren't following him any more. He could see them, far back, where the light began, a whole crowd of people at the barrier he had crossed. But no one followed him. Odd that they should stop. He centered his mind more closely on his surroundings. Freight might conceal him to get him off the Roads where no passenger station would ever let him through. He climbed to the top of a nearby freight container and slipped down in. Chunks of rock were under his feet, and he fell in a heap on the hard bed. What possible kind of freight—? He slipped a lighter from his pocket and snapped it on.

Coal! A normal freight load. He climbed back up and looked along the road. No pursuit. An uneasy chill went through him—this was too easy. To ride a coal car to safety, without a single man pursuing him—to where? He examined the billing on the side of the car, and he forgot his fears in the rush of excitement. The billing read, "Consignment: Coal, twenty tons, Markson Foundries, via Pittsburgh-private cutoff."

His car was carrying him to Markson!

His mind was full of the old, ugly hate, the fearful joy of the impending revenge. Fortune's boy, he thought to himself. Even Sherman could not have done so well, to ride the Rolling Roads, not just to Pittsburgh, not to the mountains, but right to

Markson's backyard! He shivered with anticipation. Pittsburgh was only a few hundred miles away, and at three hundred miles an hour—Krenner clenched his fists in cruel pleasure. He hadn't long to wait.

An hour passed slowly. Krenner's leg was growing stiff after the exertion of running. Still no sign of life. He eased his position, and stiffened when he heard the little relay box above the consignment sheet give a couple of sharp clicks.

Near the end! He hugged himself in excitment. What a neat trick, to ride a consignment of coal to the very yards where Markson would be! The coal yards which he might have owned, the furnaces, the foundry—. There would be men there to receive the car from the line, well he could remember the men, day and night, working and sweating in those yards and mills! There would be men there to brake the car and empty it. He was in old clothes, farm clothes —he would fit in so well; as soon as the car slowed he could jump off, and simply join the other men. Or he could shoot, if he had to. A little agility in getting out of the car, and a little care in inquiring the way to Markson's office—

The car suddenly shifted to the outer lane. Krenner gripped a handle on the inside and held tight. He felt the swerving motion, and suddenly the car moved out of the tunnel into the open night air. He climbed up the side and peered over the edge. There were five cars in the consignment; he was on the last. Travelling almost at Road speed along the auxiliary cutoff. Swiftly they moved along through the night, through the edge of the Pittsburgh steel yards. Outside he fancied he could hear the rattle of machinery in the yards, the shouts of the men at their work. Making steel was a twenty-four hour proposition.

Then they were clear of the first set of yards. The car made another switch, and Krenner's heart beat faster. A white sign along the side said, "Private Property. Keep off. Markson Foundries Line." Soon now they would come to a crunching halt. Men would be there, but his gun was intact. No matter how many men he met, he had to get to Markson.

The car shuddered a little, but the accelleration continued. They were rising high in the air now, above the foundries. He looked down, and could see the mighty furnaces thrusting their slim necks to the sky.

A bolt of fear went through him. How far did the auto-

matic system go? Automatic loading of coal from the fields, automatic switching onto the Rolling Roads. Automatic transfer of cars onto a private line which led the cars to the foundries. Where did the automatic handling stop? Where did the *men* come into it? Twenty-seven-year-old concepts slid through his mind, of how freight was carried, of how machines were tended, of how steel was made. In a world of rapidly, changing technology, twenty-seven years can bring changes, in every walk of life, in every form of production—

Even steel—

A voice from within him screamed, Get off, Krenner, get off! This is a one way road—" He climbed quickly to the top of the car, to find a place to jump, and turned back, suddenly sick with fear.

The car was going too fast.

The first car had moved with its load to a high point on the elevated road. A thundering crash came to Krenner's ears as its bottom opened to dislodge its contents. Without stopping. Without men. Automatically. From below he could hear a rushing, roaring sound, and the air was suddenly warmer than before—

The next car followed the first. And the next. Krenner scrambled to the top of the car in rising horror as the car ahead moved serenely, jerked suddenly, and jolted loose its load with a crash of coal against steel. Twenty tons of coal hurtled down a chute into roaring redness—

Twenty-seven years had changed things. He hadn't heard men, for there were no men. No men to tend the fires. Glowing, white-hot furnaces, Markson's furnaces, which were fed on a regular, unerring, merciless consignment belt, running directly from the Roads. Efficient, economical, completely automatic.

Krenner's car gave a jolt that threw his head against the side and shook him down onto the coal load like a bag of potatoes. He clawed desperately for a grip on the side, clawed and missed. The bottom of the car opened, and the load fell through with a roar, and the roar drowned his feeble scream as Krenner fell with the coal.

The last thing he saw below, rushing up, was the glowing, blistering, white-hot maw of the blast furnace.

ILLUSTRATED BY DREANY

the Spy

BY STEPHEN ARR.

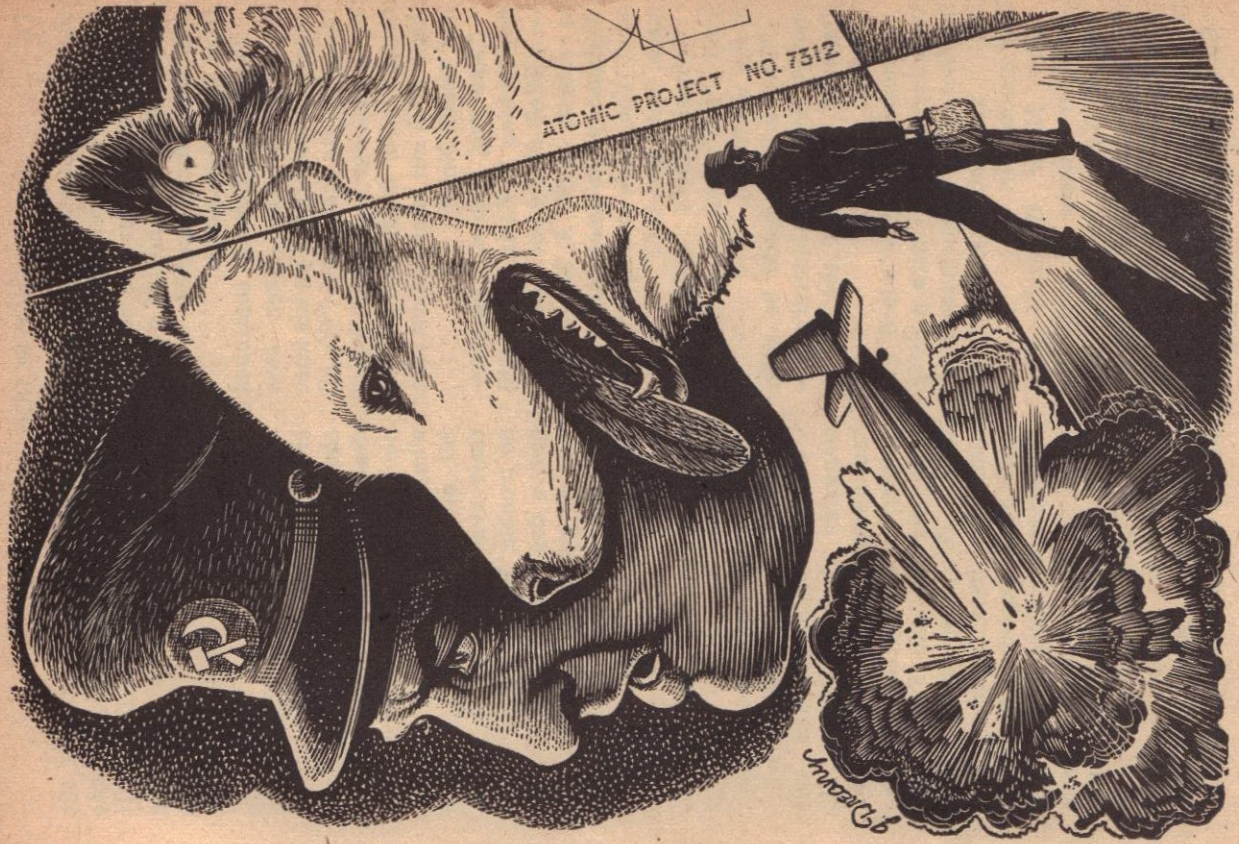
Colonel Zarin was one man against an entire nation—yet he felt secure. He had the unpenetrable disguise, at least it was unpenetrable from the outside....

Three generals sat on the edge of their chairs looking down at Colonel Zarin, tension written clearly in the set of each face. A smell of fear pervaded the room. Colonel Zarin sniffed again and his lips curled in a slight sneer that uncovered the tips of his yellowed fangs. He made a mental note to report that General Andreyev of the Medical Corps and General Popoff of the Air Corps were afraid when he returned from the mission. The third general in the room, Colonel Zarin's superior, the Major General of the Secret Police, also gave off a slightly irritating odor, but it was not of fear. The Colonel tried to place it but could not.

"You understand," General Andreyev, a short, fat, bald man was saying as he clenched and unclenched his sweating hands nervously, "that we have not had sufficient time to experiment satisfactorily. Of course I realize that the need for haste has left us with no alternative. But there is still too much that we do not know. I wish," he added nervously, "that there was more time."

"There is no time," the Major General broke in harshly. "Colonel Zarin is one of our best men, and he has volunteered to risk his life for the movement. That, General Andreyev, is as it should be."

Colonel Zarin nodded his head in agreement. The odor of fear from Andreyev was stronger now, almost distracting. Colonel Zarin wished that he could tell


ATOMIC PROJECT NO. 7512

the Major General about it. It was strange, he reflected, that if it had not been for the surgical skill in the fat hands of a coward the whole project would have been impossible.

The Major General continued speaking to the other two, pounding one big fist on his knee to emphasize each word. "We all know that our sources of information have dried up, yet we must find out more about the new bomb. Now!"

"And you, Colonel," he snapped turning to Zarin, "You will be picked up by me personally at exactly 2:00 A. M. of the Wednesday two weeks after you land. You have memorized the maps, have you not?"

Colonel Zarin nodded his head "yes" and wagged his bushy white tail.

"Two weeks should be safe, should it not General Andreyev?" continued the Major General.

General Andreyev wiped his sweating forehead with a dirty handkerchief. "I guarantee nothing, I guarantee nothing," he said stubbornly.

The Major General's lips curled in a sneer of contempt. "Colonel Zarin, you have two weeks. In those two weeks you must succeed. You will succeed. Is the camera ready?"

Colonel Zarin reached up with his right paw and touched the minute mechanism grafted into the loose fur of his throat. It was well hidden by the long white hairs of his collar. He clicked off a few frames to show that it worked.

"Very good," the Major General seemed pleased. "You should have no trouble. We are dealing with a sentimental people. Remember that no matter what happens. Be cute, be playful, or be sick and hurt. Win their sympathy. You will have no trouble. Who would ever suspect a dog with the brain of a man as our agent? Colonel Zarin," the Major General leaned forward for emphasis. "Even in this country only five men know about this project. And that includes we four. General Popoff will drop you at the proper spot. Gentlemen, you are dismissed."

Colonel Zarin trotted out alongside General Popoff. He had always felt contempt, the contempt of the strong for the weak, for the Air Force General, a thin quiet man whose health had been broken in the crash of an experimental plane. Therefore the Colonel was surprised to find, once they were out in the courtyard with the smell of fear left behind in the room, that he felt some slight satisfaction in running alongside the thin general. He pushed

the feeling out of his mind immediately. What had Andreyev once said, that the body could affect the mind? Nonsense, he, Colonel Zarin had a mind with a will of iron.

However, maybe because of the tension of the morning, he felt a sudden need. Immediately deciding that if he was to act a part for the next two weeks he should start now, the Colonel abruptly left General Popoff's side and made for the telephone pole in the center of the courtyard.

He easily disentangled himself from the special harness, and rapidly dug a hole with his fore-paws in the soft ground, pushed the miniature parachute into it, then hastily covered it with loose earth and rotting leaves. Only then did Colonel Zarin pause to get his bearings. He sniffed the pre-dawn air and caught the scent of rabbit. It roused his interest momentarily, but pushing thoughts of a succulent breakfast aside, he began to slowly trot westwards until he reached the road that he knew would be there. Along the road he ran easily for a mile, until he caught sight of the first barrier. He began to limp towards the gate.

"Whatsamatter, boy. Hurt?" the Pfc on guard spoke to him as he limped up. The soldier reached down and ran his hand along Colonel Zarin's back. The Colonel writhed inwardly at the touch, though it was not really unpleasant, then he moved into his act. Whining a little, he licked the Pfc's hand.

"Say, you're too nice a pup to be wandering about all by yourself without a collar. Let's see that leg, boy." The Pfc put down his rifle. Colonel Zarin noted that breach of discipline with disapproval. Kneeling down beside the dog, the Pfc took his left paw with a gentle hand and examined it carefully. Every time he touched it the Colonel whined and pretended to try to pull it away.

"I dunno," the Pfc said finally, standing up, "I can't see anything, but it sure seems to be hurting you. I'll tell you what, boy. If you stick around till I go off duty I'll see if some of the medics can help you. There might even be a vet on the project for all I know."

Colonel Zarin wagged his tail, licked the Pfc's hand again, then sat down by him patiently to wait.

"That little Spitz is the darnedest dog," the Pfc thought, "Almost acts like he understood me."

The sun was well up when the guard changed. The Pfc picked

the small dog up gently and put him into the back of the jeep, then started off in search of a medic or vet.

As they drove through the project, passing the second and third check-points without difficulty, Colonel Zarin could hardly restrain his jubilation. Though he was not aware of it, his tail was wagging constantly. It had been easier, far easier than he had expected. Oh these stupid, stupid people, he crooned in his mind. The ride even led to an entirely unexpected bit of luck that would save him precious hours of exploration on foot. As they drove past large complicated structures, his trained eyes began to fit them into place. By the time they reached the medical barracks he knew that what he wanted was in the large gray building with the closed steel door.

Colonel Zarin had no intention of letting a veterinarian look at his paw, and as the jeep began to slow down he quietly rocked up on his feet, tensed, and jumped. Hitting the street hard, he rolled over and over, came up on his feet finally, dirty, but only slightly bruised. He darted around a corner, ran up a street and around another corner, continued up a long narrow alleyway. Colonel Zarin did not think that the Pfc had seen him jump, nor did he think that the soldier would send out an alarm for a small white dog, but he was taking no chances.

The Colonel finally ducked into the cover of a doorway to see if there were signs of pursuit. He was panting heavily and his back and left paw were bruised from the jump, but otherwise he was in good condition. Without thinking, he lifted his bruised paw to his lips and licked it. After awhile it felt better.

After about half an hour, the Colonel concluded that no alarm had been given. Keeping in the shade by the side of the street, he trotted in search of the large gray building with the steel door. An occasional soldier or civilian passed on the street, and at first the Colonel crouched, as little a bundle as possible, with his heart in his mouth, but he soon realized that no one was going to pay any attention to a small white dog. After that he made better time.

It was afternoon when he reached the large building. He faded into the shadows by the doorway to rest. As he relaxed, he realized how very hungry and thirsty he was. Drifting through the street came the tantalizing aroma of cooking meat. His ever active nostrils quivered. The smell affected him strongly. Sa-

liva began to run in his mouth, while his thirst became so acute that he opened his mouth and panted, letting his red tongue hang slightly out. For a few moments he lay undecided, and at one point he arose determined to follow the smell back to its source. With an effort the Colonel forced himself to remain where he was. There would be time enough for eating later, after he had put the next stage of his plan into effect. He was working against time, and there was much to be done. He wondered why, with his duty clear before him, he had been so sorely tempted.

From his vantage point by the entrance, the Colonel saw two people approaching the massive steel door. Their credentials were minutely inspected by the guards before the door was opened, even though it appeared that the guards knew them personally. Through the opened door, he could see dimly into the interior for a brief moment. There was, he noted, another check point inside.

Good, he thought, while he would have his troubles getting in, this must be the right place. The Colonel continued to lay patiently in the shadows waiting. Once a field mouse ran by, almost under his nose, and the small white dog came instinctively up on its feet with a low growl. Colonel Zarin stopped surprised and settled down once more to wait. The sun was red and low in the west when men finally started drifting out of the building by twos and threes. Colonel Zarin studied them carefully to pick out a target.

No, not those. Too young, junior engineers. One of that group of three. No, they must be workers from the looks of their hands. Him maybe. No, the guard didn't show him enough deference. That one seems to be important, but let's wait. There, the guard really snapped to that time. That's the one, walking alone, carrying the briefcase. See how the others give him a little room.

The small white dog rose and padded silently after the walking figure of the tall, graying man with the briefcase.

Later that evening, when Professor Ertz left his house for his evening walk, he found a small fluffy white dog crouched shivering by his doorstep. When the dog saw him he whined and still shivering reached up feebly to lick the Professor's hand. Barely hesitating, the Professor picked up the poor animal and carried it inside of the house.

Well fed, warm, more than content with the progress he had made on the first day, Colonel

Zarin curled up on the blanket provided for him in the kitchen by Professor Ertz's plump, motherly wife, and fell into a deep sleep. However, all that night he dreamt that he was chasing a large juicy rabbit whose white cotton tail was always one hop away from his snapping jaws.

The next morning he woke up early, stretched his muscles stiff from the exertion of the day before, and got up. He sniffed around the kitchen. There were many interesting odors. He could tell that there was a piece of uncooked beef on the table, and he considered jumping up to get it. Of course not, what was he thinking. At all costs he must win and keep the affection of the Professor and his wife.

With this thought in mind, he silently explored the house. It was small, compact, neat, and orderly. It had a nice smell. He liked it. There came a stirring from the bedroom, and Colonel Zarin moved confidently in to solidify his position in the household. He searched under the bed and found the slippers of the Professor's wife.

When she rolled sleepily out of bed, Helen Ertz was surprised to see the small white dog that her husband had found the night before sitting by the bedside holding a slipper on an upraised paw. It took a moment for her to grasp the situation, and as she cleared her sleep-filled eyes, the dog moved his paw obviously handing the slipper to her. She took it with a laugh, and slipped it on her foot. Colonel Zarin went under the bed and returned with the other slipper hooked over one paw.

"George," Helen said to her husband as she took the second slipper, "did you see that. He brought me my slippers, and with his paws, not with his mouth."

"Uh," George said, coming out of bed, "he did what?"

Colonel Zarin did not wait to be described. Before the amused eyes of Professor Ertz and his wife he repeated the process with the Professor's shoes.

"Quite a dog," the Professor said approvingly, and he reached down and scratched the Colonel's head. "If no one claims him, let's keep him." The Colonel turned his head up and licked the hand. It came almost automatically now. Funny how it had annoyed him to do it at first.

He followed the Ertz's into breakfast, and further amused them by walking on his hind legs. He was rewarded with scraps of egg and toast, which he truly appreciated. They experimented in giving him simple commands to stand up, lie down,

sit up, and he obeyed them all. By the end of breakfast he had successfully wormed his way completely into the hearts of both the tall thin Professor and his plump wife.

After the Professor finished his breakfast he got up and took his coat out of the closet. Colonel Zarin followed him closely, his tail wagging.

"Come here doggie," Helen Ertz called, "Stay with me. George has to go to work now."

The Colonel ignored her and continued to follow the Professor. His small body was tensed. This was a critical move, and he would have to make it carefully. However, before opening the door the Professor turned and pointed to the kitchen. "Go on back now, go on."

The Colonel whined, wagged his tail harder, and reached up with a moist muzzle to lick the Professor's hand. The Professor caught him by his collar hair. "Helen," he called, "Come here and hold him for a moment, will you, while I leave."

Helen Ertz came out and put an arm around the small white dog. The Colonel struggled violently as the Professor opened the front door, but his strength was no match for that of the woman. As the door closed behind the Professor, in a rage of frustration Colonel Zarin prevented himself with difficulty from turning with a snarl and biting Mrs. Ertz. He must remember not to antagonize them, but he also had to get out to follow the Professor.

Once the door was closed, Helen Ertz released him. "You certainly seem to have taken to George," she said with a smile, then went back to her kitchen.

Colonel Zarin could hear her bustling with the dishes as he ran quickly through the house to see if he could find a way out. He must find a way out, he thought bitterly. What was the use of all he had accomplished if he had to remain a prisoner in the Professor's home. The living room held no hope. The backdoor opening into the pantry was firmly shut, and the slippery knob far beyond the capabilities of his paws.

In the bedroom he found a window open. The sill was a full three feet above the floor, and he could not even guess how deep the drop was on the other side. Well, there was nothing else to do, though the three feet looked tremendous from his angle on the floor. He backed up, took a good run, and jumped. From the moment his feet left the floor he knew he would not make it cleanly. His paws crashed into the sill, while the momentum of the jump carried his body over it,

somersaulting out of control, then he was falling twisting on the other side. After a long drop he hit the earth on his side. For a moment he lay there, the wind knocked out of him, then he rose and shook himself. He was uninjured. He saw that it was a good ten feet from the ground to the level of the window, and that he was lucky that he had landed on the soft earth.

Running swiftly he took off after the Professor and caught up with him several blocks before the building. Professor Ertz told him to go back several times, but the Colonel just wagged his tail, acted playful, and followed along. Finally the Professor shrugged and decided to ignore him.

When they reached the building Colonel Zarin did not try to enter with the Professor. Much to George Ertz's relief he lay down beside the steel door to wait while the Professor's credentials were being checked.

"He followed me here," Professor Ertz said to the sergeant in embarrassment.

"That's all right, sir," the sergeant said with a friendly grin. "You go on in and don't worry. We'll look after him till you come out."

The sergeant came by Colonel Zarin and started to pet him. The Colonel relaxed, the monotonous stroking on his back felt very pleasant. He dozed in the sunlight. Later, around lunchtime, some of the soldiers brought him food from the mess hall, and he did tricks for them. Some ingenious soul even thought of asking how much two and two added up to, and when the dog replied with four short barks his future was made.

"That's the darnedest dog," the sergeant said, and everybody agreed that it was.

"He was no trouble at all," the sergeant said later to Professor Ertz as he was leaving. "Bring him along every day, we enjoyed having him. He's a remarkable dog."

"Yes, he seems to be," the Professor said smiling and petting the Colonel who was wagging his bushy tail furiously.

When they reached the house Helen Ertz was glad to see him also. "Oh, there he is," she said, "I thought we'd lost him. He must have jumped out of the bedroom window to follow you."

After dinner Colonel Zarin relaxed on the kitchen floor by the radiator and reviewed his progress. It had been very, very good. He now was confident that he would have the secret of the bomb before the week was out. Only two of his precious fourteen days were gone. He decided that he could let two more go by

before he made his bid. In the meantime, his condition was not nearly as unpleasant as he had imagined it would be when they had suggested that he "volunteer" to have his brain transplanted into that of the dog. A dog's life, he reflected, at least in this country was not a bad one. No worries, no responsibilities, no purges. He closed his eyes, feeling the comforting presence of Professor Ertz close to him, and slept. Again he dreamed that he was chasing fat round cotton tail rabbits. Once he awoke with a start, and sleepily began to wonder where he, Colonel Zarin, had ever seen a cotton tail. But before he could follow the thought he closed his sleepy eyes again, and this time he dreamed of a cat. A tremendous spitting Tom with unsheathed claws. He barked out loud and woke himself up.

The next day the Professor did not protest when the small white dog insisted on going to work with him. Again the Colonel did not try to follow the Professor through the door, but sat outside with the guard. With the sure hand of a politician, he spent the day making certain that each and every member of the guard detail was his friend by the time he left with the Professor that evening.

On the third day, it was taken for granted that he would leave the house with the Professor. At the building, after fooling with him for a little while the soldiers forgot about him and went on to discuss baseball, the fights, and women. Colonel Zarin sat quietly by the door, memorizing every detail of the entrance.

On the fourth day, five days after he landed, Colonel Zarin made his move. The Professor, trailed by the white dog, arrived at the steel door simultaneously with two other members of the staff. The sergeant checked their credentials and the steel door swung open. A tiny white bundle, crouching close to the floor and well below eye level, the Colonel scooted through the door as it started to shut on the heels of the three men.

"What the heck," the sergeant thought, looking around after the door had closed, "where's the mutt? Must have gone inside with the Professor. Oh, well, he'll be bringing him out in a moment."

The Professor did not bring the white dog out, but the sergeant did not think about it any more. After all, what difference could one white dog make?

Once inside the door, the Colonel slipped under the desk used by the inside guard, and he crouched there unseen until the six feet of the three men dis-

appeared down the hall. The foot of the guard at the desk brushed him once or twice, and the Colonel trembled with excitement, but the guard at the desk did not notice anything.

Finally the Colonel decided that the coast was clear, and he crept from under the desk and darted swiftly down the corridor unseen. Now he was in unknown territory. With his heart pounding and his canine instincts alert, he ran down the full length of the corridor, turned into another corridor, stopped abruptly as he heard the sounds of footsteps coming in his direction, glanced wildly around for shelter, then spying a flight of stairs darted behind them and huddled in the cavity behind the first step. The footsteps came closer and went up the steps above his head.

Colonel Zarin studied his hiding place. It was dark enough there to protect him against a casual glance. He looked at the stairs rising above his head and saw that they did not hold a light socket. Apparently this was just plain waste space, not even used as a broom closet. A good place to hide and to wait. Colonel Zarin curled up as tightly against the step as he could and rested. Many people came and went up and down the stairs above his head, but no one disturbed his hiding place. His stomach told him that many hours had passed long before the great building finally became stilled. Only the occasional footstep of the night guard echoed through the empty halls when he slipped out of his hiding place and began to explore the semi-lit halls of the great building.

Large pieces of machinery whose meanings were obvious to his trained eye filled some rooms, others were offices with charts, papers, graphs. Both were equally important to the Colonel. It was clear that he had been right, this building contained the heart of the construction of the new bomb. What was to be found here would cut years off of the time it would take to duplicate the construction of a similar bomb.

There were several night guards, but Colonel Zarin had no difficulty in evading them. His super-sensitive ears and sense of smell warned him of their presence long before they could see him. After thoroughly investigating the building the Colonel set to work.

First he photographed selected charts, then the pieces of equipment themselves, and finally, jumping up on one desk after another, he read and photographed those papers that he thought would be of use. He worked silently and fast, and

had finished his task long before daybreak. Returning along the corridor by which he had entered, Colonel Zarin crawled back under the guard's desk by the door long before the first of the personnel arrived in the morning.

"Why there you are, you little rascal," the sergeant said when Colonel Zarin slipped out of the steel door sometime later. The sergeant reached down and petted him. The Colonel trembled at his touch, suddenly conscious of the precious role of film under his throat. "Now were you in there all night?" the sergeant asked musing, "or did you get in again this morning and come out again? Or weren't you in there at all? I didn't rightly see where you came from, but it seemed like from inside. The Professor's been lookin' for you, pup." The sergeant ran his fingers over the white dog's head and around his neck. The Colonel felt weak and dizzy from lack of food and sleep, and he wondered if he should run for it or if he was giving way to foolish panic now that he had the films. The sergeant reached down and scratched him under his chin, and his fingernail grated against the lens of the camera. "What's this boy, you got a growth on your throat or something." Holding him loosely with a large hand, the sergeant reached over with his other hand to investigate. The Colonel tensed himself to snap out and try to twist free, when suddenly he found himself released by the sergeant who moved away to examine the credentials of some late comers.

Colonel Zarin trotted casually away. He was still feeling weak and dizzy, but now that the job was done and the steel door left behind he looked forward to a period of rest and relaxation. It would be very pleasant, he thought, to spend a week with the Ertz's just enjoying life without having to make his tired brain drive his unwilling body, to escape from the iron will that had led him to the successful accomplishment of his mission. Reaching the Professor's house, he walked up the path and knocked on the door with his paw.

"Hello," Helen Ertz greeted him, "what happened to you? We thought you'd left us." She reached down and picked him up and carried him into the kitchen where she fed him some kibbled biscuit and soup. Colonel Zarin ate it gratefully. He could hardly remember when he had ever tasted anything so good. After eating he stretched out under the kitchen table and fell into a deep sleep.

He woke up when the Profes-

sor returned, and the Colonel moved to sit by his feet in the living room. He liked the Professor. He liked the house, it smelled nice.

For the next few nights the Colonel dreamed that he was hunting rabbits with Professor Ertz. Each dream was more vivid than the last.

One evening, when he went out with the Professor for his usual walk, he chased a large gray cat. He never did catch the cat, it took refuge in a tree, but he enjoyed the excitement of the chase. After barking and jumping around the base of the tree for awhile he had to run to catch up with the Professor.

Three nights later he saw some papers with symbols and figures on them that the Professor had let slip to the floor in the living room by his chair. As Professor Ertz lay sleeping in the chair, the little white dog studied the papers curiously. From deep within him there came an overpowering impulse, and without quite knowing why he reached up with a paw and touched the tiny switch built into his throat. Methodically he went through the papers sheet by sheet. After he finished, he lay down by Professor Ertz's chair and fell into a deep sleep.

He woke up nervous on the next day, and slowly the idea worked into his consciousness. He had to leave. The idea grew. He had to leave that night. The little white dog was sad, but the idea was stronger than he was.

After the Ertz's had fallen asleep that night, he silently crept into their room and licked the hand of the sleeping Professor for the last time, then he quietly pushed against the unlocked door which was always left a little open so that he could go out at night if he had to, and the Spitz trotted down the deserted street.

The night air felt good. Scents and sounds of small animals stirring came to his senses but did not slow his steady trot. He continued on to the check points, under the barriers, and out into the night.

He went down the road for a mile, then turned eastwards until he reached a moonlit meadow that he knew would be there. He sat in the darkness of the trees and waited and wondered.

He heard the call of an owl and stirred uneasily. For what did he wait? Colonel Zarin had said he should wait. Who was Colonel Zarin? He was Colonel Zarin. No he wasn't Colonel Zarin, he was he. He was the instinct to chase a rabbit. He was hunger for meat and not for bread. He was faithfulness to man, to Professor Ertz. He was

a strong nose and weak eyes, a combination of different senses operating in different ways to bring different messages informing and forming his brain. Different instincts and different glands and different desires altering personality patterns. No, he was not Colonel Zarin, nor was he the small Spits once called "Babush." He was he, waiting in the darkness and not knowing why.

The plane landed smoothly and coasted to a stop close to where he sat. The animal that had been Colonel Zarin rose and trotted towards it, carrying the secret of the bomb in the camera grafted into his neck. A door on the plane swung open and a fat man dropped to the ground.

"Colonel Zarin, thank God," General Andreyev said. He hastily scooped the small dog up and pushed him into the plane then climbed in after him.

"Quick," said the Major General to General Popoff at the controls, "their radar may have picked us up. While this plane is loaded with enough thermite to burn all evidence if anything should happen, it is still of utmost importance that we return with the films."

"You did get the films, did you not, Colonel Zarin?"

The dog smelled the scent of fear from two men in the plane, and the subtler scent of hatred that arose from the third, and he backed away towards the rear of the cabin and growled. The plane started to move with slowly gathering speed across the meadow.

General Andreyev reached for the dog that had been Colonel Zarin. With a quick slash of teeth the dog tore the soft flesh on his fat hand. The General stared at the red on his hand uncomprehending, then turned white. "My God, he has reverted," he said.

"But has he the photographs?" the Major General asked coldly as he drew a long barreled pistol from the holster at his side. The dog smelled the warped hatred in the man and bared his fangs in a snarl.

"No! No! General," Andreyev shouted, and before the Major General could shoot he hurled himself with a surprisingly agile leap on the little white dog. The dog, his bared fangs turned towards the Major General, was unprepared for the attack and he felt himself firmly grasped before he could turn to meet it. The Major General slipped his pistol back into his holster and walked over.

He reached down and grasped the camera grafted on to the dog's throat, then with a powerful wrench of his large hand

tore it loose from the living flesh.

The dog gave a crescendoing scream of pain. Twisting and writhing in agony he tore loose from the grasp of General Andreyev and sprang at the throat of his tormentor. His small hurtling body struck the Major General in the face, knocked him down, then went tumbling over him and into the pilot's compartment trailing a stream of blood from his throat. The pilot glanced up in alarm but the plane was moving along the ground faster now, and approaching the line of trees that marked the end of the meadow.

The Spitz sprang back into the cabin and ripped the Major General's face with his teeth. The Major General had his gun out of his holster and shot at the dog, but he missed his rapidly moving target. The dog, snarling mad with pain and fury slashed at the Major General's face again, and passed back over him into the pilot's compartment. Turning instantly he charged again.

The Major General had pulled himself up on one elbow. His face was streaked with blood, his own mixed with the dog's. He aimed carefully at the bounding dog and fired. The shot burned a red streak along the dog's back, hit the steel armor by the pilot's seat, ricocheted, and General Popoff suddenly slumped forward over his controls.

General Andreyev reached down and tore the snarling Spitz from the Major General's head, kicked open the door of the rapidly moving plane, and threw the bundle of writhing white fur out into the night.

The dog hit the ground hard, rolled over and over, then lay still.

At the end of the meadow a tremendous blast marked the end of the pilotless plane as it plowed into the trees. Roaring white flames of terrible heat consumed every vestige of the fusilage and of the three men in it.

The fire brigade from the project, which arrived soon after the explosion, could do little but stand around and watch the fire. A member of the brigade circling the fire stumbled over the still body of the dog. He felt it and saw that it was still warm, so he carried it over to the first aid section.

"Hey," somebody said, "That's Professor Ertz's pooch."

The medics went to work.

Much later, at the project, the dog opened his eyes and saw Professor Ertz. His body was a mass of pain, he couldn't move his head, there were bandages

around his neck and his left forepaw was in splints, but he still could and did wag his tail.

"If he could only talk," a Major was saying to the Professor. "Strictly in confidence, I would give my right arm to know what plane it was that smashed in that field and what it was doing there. We are checking, but it doesn't seem to be one of ours. But that wandering pup of yours must have been an eyewitness to the whole thing."

"As a matter of fact," the Professor said, "I'd like to know what animal tore his throat and roughed him up that badly?"

"You think that there might be a connection," the Major asked with interest.

"Why of course," the Professor said laughing and stroking the unbandaged portion of the Spitz's head, "It couldn't be that he was out at night chasing a coon and made the mistake of catching up with it. No, sir, I'm sure my little dog here chased the villains away, saved the project, the country, and civilization, only he's too modest to tell us about it.

The dog raised his good paw at that, though he didn't know why, and saluted smartly.

The Professor and the Major looked at each other in momentary astonishment, then burst into roars of laughter. That little dog certainly did the darnedest things.

SCIENCE FICTION BECOMES FACT

The stock science-fictional gimmick, the *spare parts bank*, is coming true at last. At Bethesda Naval Hospital there is a deep freeze filled with odds and ends of bone, blood vessels and skin.

The bone and blood vessel fragments are dead when stored, since the living body only uses them as a structure to grow on. Skin is a different proposition—it must be stored alive. Stored in a nutrient solution, resembling plasma, at 37.4 degrees F; it actually feeds while lying dormant.

Skin sections have been stored for as long as 185 days.

FANMAG

by Bob Silverberg
editor of SPACESHIP

The weird and wonderful world of science-fiction fandom is a development unique in the history of fiction. Science fiction fandom is an outgrowth of that announcement in the December 1926 issue of *Amazing Stories* which proclaimed the institution of a "Discussions" column to begin the following issue and to provide a place where readers of *Amazing* (a lusty ten-month-old infant of a magazine at the time) could "discuss scientifiction and their impression of this new literature." Those readers began to correspond with each other, as well as write to the editor of *Amazing*, Hugo Gernsback, and in this way "fandom" originated.

Science fiction's fans are quick to distinguish between themselves and the hundreds of thousands of science fiction readers. Fandom is an inner-circle sort of movement, its members composed of readers of the many science-fiction magazines. Fandom's numbers have been estimated at any number up to three million, but an accurate count would reveal some thousand active "fans."

The activities of fandom constitute a lively and booming hobby. Fans have their own jargon, developed over more than twenty years: magazines are "mags," bug-eyed monsters are "bems," and so on. Each year, during the Labor Day weekend, a World Science Fiction Convention is held, where fans, writers, readers, bems, and other interested parties congregate for a three-day get-together. This year's convention was held in Philadelphia; the first such affair took place in 1939 in New York, and succeeding ones have been held in Chicago, Denver, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Toronto, Cincinnatti, Portland Oregon, New Orleans, and Chicago for a second time. Those present at each convention choose the site of the next year's event, and this usually provides a lively scene, with fan clubs in many cities jockeying for the right to stage the convention.

Besides the big one, there are

hosts of smaller annual conventions—"cons," in fan parlance. One of the most popular is held each year in mid-May at Indian Lake, Ohio: the Midwestcon. Another takes place annually in November, in Philadelphia. A third is held in late April each year, in New York. There are others, too: recent years have seen minor conventions in Buffalo, San Diego, and several other cities.

The first World Convention, the 1939 "Nycon," was attended by about 200 fans. This number has steadily increased, and the past two years have seen attendances of more than a thousand at the Chicago and Philadelphia conventions.

What goes on at these conventions? In 1952, for example, the Chicago convention was highlighted by a Science Fiction Ballet, "Asteroid," with music and choreography by science fiction fans. Also on the program were scientific and pseudo-scientific discussions, panel debates by fans, writers, and publishers, a science-fiction masquerade that lasted till dawn one evening, and plenty of other things. Besides,

FANMAG is a new department, one that we hope will run for many issues. It is an issue of a fan magazine, a different magazine and a different editor in each issue.

Bob Silverberg, editor of that always interesting fanzine, SPACESHIP, has written FANMAG this month. He has wisely chosen the task of giving an outline of fanzines and fandom in general. Future issues, by different editors, will undoubtedly probe deeper into the strange underworld of fannish life.

The staff of SFA only picks the fan editor to write each issue of FANMAG, they do not tell him what to write about. Fan publications are judged for quality and interest. The editor writes a specified amount of material, (paid for at the regular rate) on the one or more topics that he thinks are best.

A lot of good work appears in the fan magazines and many of the pro writers and editors of today split their first infinitives in the fan mags of the past. FANMAG hopes to print here the work of the science fiction pros of the future.

there were smaller private parties, meetings, and general fannish camaraderie.

Fans are social creatures, as a rule, and few are the major cities which don't have their own science fiction clubs. These groups meet weekly, or monthly, or whenever the urge strikes, and discuss science fiction and related topics. There are numerous science fiction clubs in the country, probably fifty or more. And, besides the local clubs, there are two major national clubs.

The larger of these, The National Fantasy Fan Federation (usually abbreviated as the N3F) is aimed for the "average" fan. Just now, it has some 400 members in America, Canada, Australia, England, and various points west. The N3F attempts to bring fandom closer together; it distributes checklists, pamphlets, and a bi-monthly official organ to all members, and operates a correspondence bureau. Each new member is greeted by a Welcoming Committee of about 25 fans, who try to aid him in adjusting to fandom. Brand-new fans can find companionship and plenty of people with common interests by joining the N3F. Membership cost is $1 a year, payable to the secretary, Janie Lamb, Route 1, Heiskell, Tennessee.

The other national fan organization is considerably different. It's called the Fantasy Amateur Press Association, FAPA for short.

FAPA is a limited circle of amateur science-fiction publishers who distributed their mimeographed (and occasionally hand-printed) magazines in regular quarterly mailings. To join FAPA, you must fulfill certain membership requirements: you must have had material published in two different amateur science-fiction magazines in the twelve months prior to your application, or you must have published your own amateur magazine in that time. Membership is limited to 65, and right now there's a waiting list of about eight. Dues are $1.50 a year, and to maintain membership you must publish at least eight 8½x11 pages per year.

FAPA serves as a means of expression for fans, and as an audience of highly critical readers who will read and comment upon what you write or publish. Four times a year, FAPA members receive a massive bundle containing the quarterly output of their fellow members; the most recent bundle contained a record 479 pages. For further information about this organization of amateur writers and publishers, contact Redd Boggs, 2215

Benjamin Street, NE, Minneapolis 18, Minnesota.

Mention of amateur publishing brings up another facet of fandom: the "fanzines," a contraction of "fan magazines." (Fanzines are also called "fanmags," with the same derivation.) Fanzine publishers are ambitious chaps—their ages run from thirteen to forty—who are willing to come home after school or after work and edit their own mimeographed or hektographed magazines. These usually have limited circulations (few publishers have the time or money to run off more than one or two hundred copies) and sell for ten or fifteen cents per copy. Invariably, the fanzine publisher loses money; in one case, it cost the publisher 35c to produce each copy of a magazine which he sold for 25c!

But fanzine publishers are willing to stand considerable losses for the sake of their hobby. The idea in amateur publishing is not to provide a steady income for the editor. Rather, the fanzines offer vehicles for young writers not quite ready to make the grade, and also constitute a meeting of the minds, as is were, where science fiction fans are able to discuss their favorite literature. And, at the same time, each fan editor has a chance to put himself in the position of a professional editor; he rejects and accepts, edits, plans formats, and does all the other things which he'd probably love to do as a full-time job.

At present there are nearly 100 fanzines being published regularly, and in each issue of *Science Fiction Adventures* this column will review a few of the best and most representative. These magazines usually contain twenty or thirty pages, filled with the work of other fans and occasionally some professional authors who are also interested in fandom. Fanzines contain some fiction, and also articles analyzing and describing science fiction, biographies of fans and authors, checklists of magazines, and all sorts of other things.

One of the most attractive fanzines is *Rhodomagnetic Digest*, which is one of the few titles able to afford a more expensive means of reproduction than mimeographing. *Rhodo*, as it is nicknamed, is a 60-page magazine, lithographed in several colors, featuring the best artwork in fandom and much of the best material found anywhere in the field. The most recent issue on hand includes a short story by Jack Vance, a Gilbert & Sullivan parody by Anthony Boucher, and much other material, plus some artwork which no professional mag-

azine would be ashamed to publish. *Rhodo* is published by an active group of West Coast fans calling themselves the Elves', Gnomes', and Little Men's Science Fiction, Chowder, and Marching Society, and is edited by Don Fabun, 2524 Telegraph Avenue, Berkeley 4, Calif. It sells for 30c per copy, ten for $2.50, and is worth every bit of it.

Not quite so ambitious as *Rhodo*, but still a fine effort, is Harlan Ellison's *Science Fantasy Bulletin*, published bi-monthly and selling for 20c per copy. SFB is a bulky, large-size mimeographed magazine which uses occasional lithographed covers. The last issue features a cover by professional artist Ed Emsh, and was dedicated to *Galaxy Science Fiction*. The issue includes material by *Galaxy's* editor, H. L. Gold, and considerable critical material analyzing *Galaxy* pro and con. Harlan's address is 12701 Shaker Boulevard, Apartment No. 616, Cleveland 20, Ohio.

Harlan Ellison is a typical science-fiction fan. He's a young fellow, eighteen or so; he works during the day, goes to school at night, and somehow finds time to publish a forty-page magazine, write copiously and well for many of his competitors, read the thirty-odd professional science fiction magazines, and eat and sleep. How he does it all is a mystery to his friends, but he's dropped dark hints that it's all done with mirrors.

Another young fan-editor is Joel Nydahl, who publishers *Vega*. Joel is not yet sixteen, but he turns out a popular and mature fanzine, and has also managed to sell a story to one of the professional magazines. *Vega* comes out monthly and contains 25 or 30 well-mimeographed pages, and sells for only 10c a copy, three for 25c, making it one of the least expensive being published. It features columnists and writers who comment on every aspect of science fiction and its fans, in quite capable fashion. Sample copies can be obtained from Joel at 119 S. Front Street, Marquette, Michigan, at 10c each.

But not only youngsters put out fanzines. There's Lee Riddle of 108 Dunham St., Norwich, Connecticut, who publishes *Peon*. Lee, a navy man and father of three future fans, has been publishing his fanzine for six years, something of a record. *Peon* appears four times a year, usually contains about 30 pages, flawlessly mimeographed, and is looked upon as one of the most consistently good fanzines around. It sells for 10c, 12 issues for $1. The issue on hand is

No. 26, and contains a short story, two columns, a review of other fanzines, an article on limited editions of science fiction books, some fan poetry, and other material.

These are just four of the many fanzines; space doesn't allow discussion of all of them at once. But there are many others, and each editor tries his hardest to put out the best of all. Their very names indicate a sort of ingenuity and inspired madness . . . *Tyrann* . . . *Sol* . . . *Quandry* . . . *Slant* . . . *Vanations* . . . *Spaceship* . . . *Oopsla!* . . . *Fiendetta* . . . *Scintilla* . . . *Opus* . . . *Confusion* . . .*Utopian*. . . .

There are also specialized fanzines, such as *Science Fiction Advertiser* (Roy Squires, 1745 Kenneth Road, Glendale, California, 20c per copy) and *Kaymar Trader* (K. Martin Carlson, 1028 Third Ave. South. Moorhead, Minnesota, 10c per copy) which specialize in running advertisements of science fiction books and mags wanted or for sale, or *Fantasy Times* (James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32nd Ave., Flushing 54, N. Y., 10c per copy) and *Science Fiction Newsletter* (Bob Tucker, Box 702, Bloomington, Illinois, 20c per copy) which report all the doings in the world of science fiction and fandom.

Fandom is by no means an American monopoly; on the contrary, it stands out as a remarkable example of international harmony. There are no known fans behind the Iron Curtain, though there are a reported 30 professional s-f mags published in Russia. But there are hundreds of active fans from Australia to Great Britain, from Canada to Israel, in Eire and Ulster, in Wales and Scotland. In fact, Walt Willis, probably the world's best-liked fan, hails from Northern Ireland. Last year a spontaneous movement among fans raised enough money to import the fabulous Willis to attend the Chicago convention; after the Chicago affair, he travelled all over the country, visiting fans from California to Georgia.

There are a dozen fanzines published in Australia, and twice that number in England. Fans from both Australia and England are active contributors to American fanzines, and the policy is reciprocal. Both Australia and England also hold their own annual conventions every spring.

Occasionally fandom produces something more permanent than a fanzine. A group known as the Atlanta S-F Organization is hard at work publishing *The Immortal Storm*, a history of fandom by Sam Moskowitz. This

monumental work covers fannish doings from early Gernsback days on; it runs to more than 150,000 words, and the story, as the title implies, is by no means all told yet. Copies will probably be available by the time this sees print; it is being published by the ASFO Press, c/o Carson F. Jacks, 713 Coventry Road, Decatur, Georgia, at $5. About 200 pages and including numerous photos, this work is a remarkable chronicle of a remarkable movement.

Another fan-published work of similar importance is Don Day's *Index to the Science Fiction Magazines*, published last year by the Perri Press, Box 5007, Portland 13, Oregon at $6.50. This huge book is the result of 20 years' labor by Day; it is a comprehensive index to the first quarter century of magazine science fiction, covering every story, every author (and his pseudonyms), cover artists, etc.

The output of each author during the 25-year period is indexed and cross-indexed; all stories are listed alphabetically; there is a checklist listing each issue of each s-f magazine during the period. The book is a goldmine of information, painstakingly prepared.

Fandom even has its own version of the literary quarterly. It's Sam Sackett's *Fantastic Worlds* (1449 Brockton Avenue, Los Angeles 25, California), a very attractive 32-page lithographed magazine selling for 30c, four issues $1. *Fantastic Worlds* is certainly not a professional magazine ("prozine" in fan terminology), but, since it offers token payments for its material, it is not quite amateur. The issue on hand features a long article by Philip Jose Farmer (who has caused a greater storm of comment in fandom than any other author of recent years) telling the story behind his controversial first story, "The Lovers." Also in this issue are two short stories, an essay by British author William F. Temple, and a bit of reminiscing by old-time favorite Bob Olsen. Editor Sackett's announcement of forthcoming material is a juicy one—coming up is material by Robert Bloch, Wilson Tucker, David Keller, A. Bertram Chandler, and dozens of others, including both prominent fans and prominent pros—and his magazine bears watching by anyone seriously interested in the science-fiction phenomenon.

And anyone seriously interested in that self-same phenomenon would do well to watch this column regularly in *Science Fiction Adventures*. It'll be con-

ducted by a number of different hands, but you can be sure that each editor of *SFA's* FANMAG will do a good job of casting some light on that curious phenomenon, fandom. This first edition of FANMAG has been in the nature of an introduction to fandom; future installments will keep *Science Fiction Adventures'* readers posted on the fans, their fanzines, conventions, and general doings. But you folk reading this needn't be on the outside looking in for very long; fandom is not a closed corporation, and it's always looking for some new blood to expand the ranks.

Subscribe to a few fanzines, write to a few other fans, and before long you've become a fullfledged fan. Anyway, the monkeys looking out through the bars have lots more fun than the people staring in.

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the TRYST

BY MIKE LEWIS

Jose knew he was committing a terrible crime —knew that some day he would have to face a time of justice. But there was no way of escaping the terrible attraction of the dreams.

He crouched in the firelight, listening to the hiss and the drip of the jungle, while he waited for the ship to come in the night. The fog-clouds boiled low over the treetops, low enough for the flickering fire to tint a yellow underbelly upon the floating mist. Soon the fog would settle into the trees, where the jaguar walked, and the python slumbered in the brush—where the man shivered, and hitched himself a little closer to the fire. He knew not by what cunning the ship could find him in the fog, but only that it would surely come, and with it the thing called Mahgríkydrük.

A mocking hoot pierced the jungle — Ooooo-*aha*ha*ha* ha*ha*-ahhhh—a night bird's cry, followed by a host of smaller restless sounds in chirping answer. Then, dripping silence, and the chill wet drift of the fog.

A small bundle lay beside him on a nest of dry grass and leaves. Once it kicked and quivered slightly, and the man felt its dirty blanket-wrappings with his hand. Gently, he turned its other side toward the fire so that it would not be scorched. It whimpered a little, and fell silent. Mahgríkydrük should be pleased with this one, he thought. Its skin was healthy pink, and the fur of its scalp was yellow as the bright breath of the flame. Where had the old Indian woman stolen it?

"Jose will cure you of your plague of warts, Small One," he whispered to the bundle. "Jose—


hal smith

and the Lord Mahgríkydrük." He smiled with restrained eagerness. "And your Mamá shall pay me with many yams, and Mahgríkydrük shall pay me with a wonderdream—and you, Small One—*you* shall pay Mahgríkydrük—and never miss the price, nor ever know you paid it."

Jose's scrawny wrinkled hands opened their palms to the flame, and he stared between their silhouettes at the licking tongues of brightness, letting his mind grow dull, trying to recapture the substance of a wonderdream. If only his poor worn brain could dream the dreams without help from the thing that lived in the ship. If only he could stop the weekly treks into the jungle, carrying some squealing infant into the night—for a tryst with the power of Mahgri. Jose was tired, and the ache of age was in his bones. But it was necessary to continue, else he would lose the dream. For fourteen rains, he had lived for nothing but this weekly taste of paradise. And now, he could scarcely imagine a life without it.

It was true that he had won respect among his people, as a blessed healer of the young. Cleverly, he had preserved the mystery of his jungle retreats, allowing no one to accompany him when, hearkening to the pleas of a worried mother, he stole alone into the night, carrying the stricken child. He had won respect—and now he could retire in peace and tribal wealth, if only he could command the dream.

The fog was settling now, creeping stealthily through the jungle, writhing away where the smoke rose up from his fire. Again came the nightbird's sarcastic cry, and the distant wail of the jaguar. A scant distance to the north, rolled the deadly silent Mother—Amazon, with serpents coiled in her bosom, with rending jaws awaiting the quiet fawn who suckled there. She tore the flesh of her jungle children with a thousand needle-fangs.

Jose inched back the edge of the blanket to peer at the flame-haired infant. Its chubby jaw moved briefly in a dreamlike nursing movement, but it did not wake. From what world did it come—this pale one? To the east—a week's journey by the river—lay villages to which the pale ones often came. But it was not their world. Their world was a place of magic—far to east perhaps, where the waters were reputed to be even wider than Mother Amazon. Mahgríkydrük had always wanted him to bring one of the pale ones. He was a being of strange, ferocious appetites.

The jungle was suddenly stiller than before. There was only the drip and the hiss as it listened; and Jose listened with it. From high above the curtaining fog came the faintest of hummings, a tight-stretched grass blade whistling in the wind. A high pitched ringing in the ears it was, scarcely discernable at first, then growing in strength—not loud, but stinging the ears with its highness.

The child awoke and began to wail in the night. Jose shivered with the usual fright that possessed him when Mahgri came. He made the magic sign with his right hand, touching first his forehead, then his breast and shoulders, as a black-clad shaman of the pale ones had taught his grandmother to do when evil threatened. It was a cross that sealed in the breath of the soul.

Then it was directly above him, wrapped in mist—the ship. He felt its presence as a faint tingling of his skin, as an aura of heat from its furnaces, as the burning pain in his ears. It hung there motionless for a time, above the trees; and Jose was trembling violently as he peered up at the black blanket—and waited.

The metal tendril came down slowly, inching into view out of the vapor, descending like the slithering head and neck of a silvery python hanging from some invisible limb. At the lower end of the arm-thick tentacle hung the globe, dripping wet, blackly transparent. Out of the heart of the dripping sphere, looked the eye of Mahgri—a ball of green luminescence, shimmering and crawling with phantom lights. In the center of a pale violet iris, an inky pupil sought the figure of the man cringing on the ground by the fire. Lower came the tendril, until it hung a few feet above him in the smoky light. No word passed between them, no thought. For a long time it simply hung and watched him. Then the thought seared into his brain, too loud for comfort:

You have brought me a pale one.

"Y-yes."

From the culture to the north.

"I—I—"

Well done.

"The dream, Lord—"

First give me the child.

Quivering in fright, Jose stooped and lifted the tiny girl from the bundle of blankets. The baby was shrieking in spasms as he held it out toward the compelling eye. Slowly, the wirelike fingers unfolded from the neck of the tendril, just above the globe—triple jointed fingers, spiny as the legs of a giant spider. They wrapped about the

child in careful embrace, pressing slightly into the soft pink flesh. Then the eye winked shut, its light faded. Rapidly, and with a piercing hum from above, the tentacle snaked upward into the invisible ship, bearing its small human cargo. The hum became monotonous boredom.

Jose sat down to wait. Gradually his trembling subsided, leaving a fright-stricken emptiness, full of disjointed thoughts. It was always thus—when Mahgríkydrük came, and pierced his mind with the knife of thought.

If Mahgri wanted the pale ones, with their mighty magic, why had he not gone to them—rather than by stealth to a poor jungle sorcerer who was ignorant of the magic? He thought the question to himself, but like a spear flung unexpectedly out of the darkness came Mahgríkydrük's answer:

They would guess my aims, dull one.

Jose fell into shivering silence. Not so bold as to question Mahgri, he tried to strip his mind of wonderings, but the question came. What *was* the aim of the demon healer from out the sky? Jose felt its evilness, but so was the jungle evil, and the lurking creatures of the night. Life, was it not a constant bickering with evil, a buying of time, an appeasement wherein something was sacrificed to the bloody appetites of the Darkness—in exchange for a little more of life?

A rattle of thought answered him from above, not words, but the faint pulses of a feeling—hunger and amusement blended into one. Then an image swam before his mind, a serpent with its tail in its mouth, a giant boa slowly devouring itself in straining gulps, that brought its circle ever tighter, its body ever fatter—until it became one writhing ball of scaly pain. Its beady eyes sought Jose's. They watched him in a trancelike stare.

Then the whole began to digest itself. He shrieked and clawed at his eyes. The image vanished.

Again the hungry amusement from above.

At last Mahgríkydrük was finished with the child. Slowly the damp metal tendril snaked downward, bearing the small body in its wiry grasp. The golden head lolled back, and the limbs dangled limply, glistening-wet in the firelight. The infant slept the deep slumber of one who had eaten too much coca leaf. It was water-drenched, as if Mahgri had kept it immersed in a tank of liquid. Jose took the child and dried it in the blankets. The warts were gone,

leaving only faint pink scars—and the two other scars that Mahgri always left, no matter what the sickness: a thin bright welt at the base of the skull, and another across the abdomen.

The luminescent eye with its violet iris came piercing alive again, to stare at the wizened little man.

"The dream—plant the dreamseed—" he pleaded, but the eye of Mahgri continued the unwinking gaze without responding.

Then a sudden gale of thought: *My first child is about to mate.*

Jose's glance flickered nervously about the clearing. It was true. Marguerita, the first child he had brought to Mahgri's embrace, was about to be wed. She was now fourteen. The dowry was fixed, and the gifts exchanged. In a few days she would belong to a young man of the village. Jose recalled with consternation that Mahgríkydrük, a dozen rains ago, had promised to return four times every moon —until the first child was of an age to mate. And then—?

I shall not come again. My work is done.

"No! The wonderdreams! I must have—"

The hungry amusement interrupted him. The swarming luminescence of the eye grew brighter. The jet-black pupil expanded and contracted in a slow pulsation. *You shall have them, Trader. You shall have them weekly until you die, until all my daughters are wed and you are dead. Until my Tryst with Man.*

"But the dreamseed—"

I shall plant it now.

The pulsing of the pupil grew wider, blacker, now swelling to a black blot, now contracting to a pinpoint. It detached itself from the eye and became an inky heart, beating with the slow cadence of a death-drum. Jose closed his eyes, but his lids were transparent as the membraneous wing of a plump young bat, and he still saw the swelling and contracting. Soon he saw nothing else.

Pendulumlike, the tentacle began to sway, toward him and away, in slow stately strokes. He slumped into a daze. The steely python paused, swang lower, found his head. The wiry fingers crawled about his temples —exploring, encircling, digging deep—

He awoke in an icy sweat. Mahgríkydrük was gone. The first gray of dawn was in the fog, soaking it in a faint ghostly light. The infant was awake and whimpering hungrily. Jose climbed shakily to his feet, looked wildly about him, then gathered the child in his arms and

fled along the jungle trail toward the village.

"Lord Mahgri has left us! Lord Mahgri has left us! No more can I heal your young ones!"

As the scrawny sorcerer burst clamoring into the village at dawn, dusky faces blinked sleepily from the doorways of the huts, and old Pedro came out to scold. Carmela, the foster mother, waddled quickly after him, bleating plaintively until Jose relinquished the child into her arms.

"The marks of Mahgri are upon her!" she shrilled, seeing the red welts of the scars. "The marks!"

"Hush, Woman," growled Pedro, "let the rest of us return to our huts."

When he reached his own shanty near the center of the village, Jose turned in, and sat grinning to himself upon a mat of straw. Now he was through with the distasteful business, and, if Mahgri's words were really true, he would still have the wonderdreams—that made his life worthwhile. At high noon, Pedro and two elders came to call. Their faces were grave as they sat in a circle on the floor of his hut, but they exchanged pleasantries for a time before coming to business, as was considered proper.

"Is it true, Jose," Pedro murmured at last, "that El Señor Mahgri will no longer appear to assist you in curing our innocents?"

Jose inclined his head in a sadness he did not feel. "It is true. He will not come again until all his adopted children are wed."

A murmur of puzzlement travelled about the circle.

"To heal the next generation, no doubt?" asked Pedro.

"Who knows. El Señor failed to say."

There was no further discussion of the matter. They sat in silence for a time, then arose and filed wordlessly out the door. Jose, smiling to himself, watched them move up the trail and enter the council hut, where they remained a long time. Then —before sundown—Pedro came, and set a sack of yams before Jose's door. He moved away without speaking. Jose the sorcerer had retired.

That night, came the first of the promised dreams—

An orange-colored beach under a slate-gray sky. Low upon the horizon hung the red dwarf sun-star, burning an ugly hole in the dull canopy—while from the zenith, blazed its binary mate, a blue-white sun of dazzling brilliance, so distant as to be a burning gem of light. The slow

roll of the waves complained in a bass rumble, and the clouds of spray fell slowly in the faint gravity. On the beach, walked a proud biped, head held high. The black mane that grew along its spine fluttered in the wind. Its eyes watched the dun-colored water ravenously.

It was feeding time.

Out of the depths came the kydrük, rising majestically to the surface and riding on the waves. Its metallodermic tendril reared itself high over the water, arching like the neck of a swan, its eye seeking the biped. The blue-green lace of its gills spread about it gracefully, like the tail of a peacock. Its plump thinking-organ, lodged deep in the sleek white underbelly, swelled with longing for the pretty biped, and slowly it lifted its tulip-like mouth to the surface, opened it wide as a pink lily-pad atop the absorbing-tube. Its gill-fins stroking the waves, it moved gracefully toward the shore. The biped, stopped, turned slowly to face it, and waited with a faint dreamy smile as their eyes locked in intimate rapport.

It was feeding time. Generously, lovingly, the kydrük opened its mighty intellect to the famished mind of the land-creature, let it see the dark ways of the universe, taught it in a moment the ways of the heavens, and let it feel the longings of desire in the kydrük heart.

The biped sank slowly to its knees in tottering ecstasy. Burning with irresistable hunger, it crawled slowly into the shallow, lacelike waves, mounted to the top of the pink lily pad, and lay moaning softly as the mouth-pad —set with tiny needle-fangs— closed slowly about its body. There was only one word to describe the biped's expression: rapture. The kydrük bore its bundle lovingly to the bottom.

Jose awoke as always in a pink sweat of ecstasy, with the warm taste of flesh in his mouth. But it faded, as it always faded, and with it the memory of the dream. He sat up panting in the darkness, and shaking his head. The incidents escaped him, and after a few moments he could remember nothing. What had happened? He knew he had dreamt, and he still felt the emotion of it—but it was a detached emotion now, linked to nothing. It too soon fled, leaving him empty and shivering. If only he could recall the dream!

Then came the aftermath, and he lay back upon his mat of straw, his spindly old body quivering in a wave of deep depression, guilt, and loathing. The emotion being spent, it was replaced by a deep remorse which seemed to have no cause. He

longed to steal away into the jungle and hide from his fellow man in shame, to bury himself in the mud and die. The face of his elders loomed up to accuse him. But why?—*why?* What had he done in the dream? He rolled on his face, and lay groaning, and pulling the straw up over his head.

The wedding of Marguerita, first child saved by the magic of Mahgri, to Lazaro, eldest son of a respected leader, was a festive occasion, but Jose took no part in it. He was uneasy about the marriage. It marked the end of his practice as sorcerer, but it also seemed to portend the beginning of a dark era. Jose, in his fifty years, had gained much wisdom—the wisdom of the jungle. In dealing with Mahgríkydrük, he knew that he had been dealing with a creature of evil, and in bargaining with Darkness, Man must pay a price. What price had he paid? Mahgri had taken nothing in return for the healing and the blessing of hundreds of stricken infants. Jose was led to the inescapable conclusion that the price was yet to be paid. He could somehow not look his savelings in the face, for fear their dull eyes would begin to accuse him.

Furthermore, because of the bride's father, Jose was not welcome at the wedding feast. Old Francisco—although he paid lip-service to tribal gods and customs of his people—had lived many years in one of the villages to the east, and he had adopted many of the pale one's strange ways. He had erected a small altar in his hut, and sometimes he was heard praying to strange gods that he called Jesu, and Maria, and El Trinidad. He even insisted that Marguerita and Lazaro go in a canoe to a village in the east, and be remarried by a shaman of the pale ones, before an altar of their gods. Francisco disapproved of Jose's sorcery, and would not invite him to the feast.

When the marriage was over, and the couple gone, Jose's spirits arose again. He settled back to enjoy his retirement, occasionally participating in village ceremony, sitting-in upon the council of elders, accompanying the young men on their hunts, and acting as diviner in disputes. The wonderdreams came weekly, followed by the usual remorse which passed before dawn, leaving him hungry for more.

His complete peace of mind was short lived however. Others of Mahgri's children were coming of marriagable age—in his own village, and in neighboring communities which had also

availed themselves of his services. Nearly every week, nuptial drums throbbed in the jungle, reminding him of Mahgrí-kydrük's promise of return, reminding him of the python devouring itself.

Frequently he wondered about the meaning of that brief vision. Could it be that the man who reaped good from evil was really only feeding himself upon his own flesh? Jose shuddered at the thought of what Mahgri's return might bring.

He had always noticed a certain *difference* about the children Mahgri had healed, not pronounced, but certainly observable. They seemed to move more slowly, to play their games with a note of apathy, or detachment. There was a dullness in their faces, and sometimes he came upon one of them sitting alone on the edge of the cliff overlooking the small river which led past the village and into the Amazon. They stared silently out across the water, dreaming. Sometimes a group of them would sit together on the narrow beach at the foot of the cliff, watching the water together, saying nothing to one another, but seeming to share a common thought.

Once he approached a group of them, and asked almost irritably, "Why aren't you working in your father's gardens? What are you doing here, lazy ones?"

Three small faces turned toward him expressionlessly. The thin red welts had long since disappeared, but he knew they were Mahgri's children. They were slow to answer.

"What are you doing loafers?" he demanded.

One of them groped with his mouth, and finally said, "Waiting."

"Waiting for what?" Jose snapped.

They glanced at one another curiously for a moment, and shook their heads. "Who knows?" the speaker murmured.

Jose sent them scurrying back to the village with a switch, but the encounter troubled him.

Marguerita and Lazaro came to the village shortly before the coming of the rainy season. They came bringing many wonderful things from the east—beads, and fine fabrics, and silver earrings, and small statues of strange deities that simpered and wore long robes. The villagers—all save Jose—crowded about to welcome them, to inspect their souveniers, and to peer in awe at the imposing tatoo which Lazaro had acquired — and proudly displayed—upon his red-bronze chest. It was the image of

a big blue heart, wrapped in thorn-vines, crowned by a cup of flame, and pierced by a pointed machete.

On the day following the return of the lovers, a tall bony figure appeared in the doorway of Jose's hut, and stood there blocking the sunlight while he clutched a small wooden cross in one hand—as he always did when passing near the house of the sorcerer. They stared at one another sullenly for a time.

"Francisco!"

The father of the bride remained silent for a time, his jet eyes narrowed, staring into the sorcerer's.

"My daughter is possessed."

It was a cold, toneless voice, but full of suppressed hatred. Jose flinched in his heart, but donned an impassive face.

"Why come to me?"

Again Francisco observed an ominous silence.

"What are the symptoms of her possession?"

"Only two moons have passed since her wedding, and already she grows great with child."

Jose snickered. "Many people would not consider that as a symptom of possession."

Francisco's hand dropped the tiny cross and slid to the hilt of his machete. He advanced a step into the hut.

Jose added hastily, "But perhaps as a bloated condition of the liver."

"The child stirs."

The sorcerer said nothing, but watched the angry quiver of the elder's arm as he gripped the knife.

"She is subject to sleep-walking, and she goes alone to the river in the night."

"But why come to me?"

"She is cursed by the devil you serve."

Again Jose winced. He denied it with an emphatic shaking of his head. "No devil is the Lord Mahgríkydrük."

The arrogant figure of Francisco straightened. He spat contemptuously into the dust of the hut. "You will come remove this curse, or I shall kill you."

"Are not your gods—"

"Do not speak the name of my gods, you shivering excrement!" The blade of the machete slid halfway from its sheath.

Jose cringed away, his face apologetic. "Of course I shall come, Francisco."

The elder let the blade slide back with a quick flick of the wrist. He turned half way. "Be certain you come at once," he snapped, then strode rapidly away in the sunlight.

Breathing relief, Jose wasted no time in making his preparations. Spreading a blanket on the floor, he set out the tiny pots

of paints and filled the black-bottomed mirror-bowl with water. He plaited anklets, armbands, and a headpiece of straw, then painted his face and torso with the designs his father had taught him long ago. He doubted that the magic of his father would prevail against the power of Mahgri, but it might at least protect him from Francisco's surly temper.

In an earthen bowl, he ground brittle-dry coca leaves into a fine powder and poured it into a snake-skin pouch. Having armed himself with rattling bead-sticks and a drum, he trotted through the village toward Francisco's house. A fat and sullen-faced woman met him at the door.

"Have the girl placed on a pallet in the center of the hut," he told her. "All others must leave. I would be alone with her."

The woman hissed at him, but went to do his bidding. Jose recalled irritably that she had been less scornful that night a dozen years ago when a tiny Marguerita was bloated with dysentery and burning with fever, the night he had taken her to Mahgríkydrük and brought her back in a serene sleep.

The preparations were made. The relatives, and the husband, stood in a semicircle a dozen yards from the hut, watching him ominously. A nervous Jose stepped into the doorway and struck a commanding pose. The girl lay at his feet, looking up without interest, gazing at him through listless eyes. Jose began the slow, jerky dance, pacing rhythmically about the pallet and chanting in a thin high voice.

In Amazon's waters
The crocodile lurks.
She is his mother,
And she has made his home.
In Brazil-tree branches,
Spider-monkey climbs.
She is his mother,
And she has made his home.
Crocodile falls from the tree!
Spider-monkey drowns in the river!
They go home to their mother.
They run quickly to the hut of their mother.

Having thus offered a hint to the devil, Jose let out a piercing shriek and leaped high in the air, to come down straddling Marguerita's pallet. He flung handful after handful of coca-dust in her face, until she closed the dull eyes and muttered protestingly. He filled the air with clouds of the dust.

Then she began to sneeze in violent spasms, and Jose bent low over her face, holding a thin peg of polished mahogany and a pair of coca beans. As soon as

she finished a sneeze, he quickly slid the peg between her teeth and pressed the beans into her nostrils.

"Bite the stick," he ordered.

She sneezed again, feebly, but the plugs remained in place.

"Keep them there."

Having seen that the devil was sneezed out of her body, and having insured against its return, Jose began the exorcism of the hut, then chased the spirit out of the village with a bundle of fronds. The villagers paused to watch imassively, but soon returned to their tasks. He came back panting to face the sullen Francisco.

"Are you done, sorcerer?"

"I am done. See that she gets a strong purgative however."

"The devil is gone?"

"It is gone indeed."

Francisco frowned uncertainly and glanced into the doorway of the hut. "But the swelling remains."

Jose grumbled irritably. "I am a sorcerer, not a midwife."

Hot temper flared briefly in the elder's eyes, and faded into sullenness. "We shall see," he grunted.

A week passed, during which Jose saw nothing of the newlyweds, nor of the threatening elder. But a new note of uneasiness came to haunt him, a feeling of quiet desperation that grew stronger as time went by. At first it was only a vague suspicion, a tightening of the nerves when darkness fell, a sudden glancing into empty shadows with frightened eyes. But gradually it became a silent conviction, inescapable. For he knew his state of mind too well —and knew its origin.

The Kydrük was hovering somewhere near.

Perhaps in the jungle, or the river, or passing by night over the village—but wherever it might be, he felt it watching. And its effects were present in his weekly dreams. No longer were the dreams completely pleasant. Sometimes he awoke, not tasting ecstasy, but feeling the gaunt hunger unappeased. And—perhaps because of the Kydrük's nearness—the fantasies were becoming careless about erasing themselves from his mind after the awakening. He remembered vague images, and they terrified him during the day.

The sea was hot under the twin suns, hotter than was pleasant upon the delicate gills. He broke surface beyond the slow breakers and stared ravenously at the orange-colored beach. It was feeding time. But the beach was empty, shimmering with heat waves, devoid of life. They were all dead—he

knew that they were dead, but he came only to look, and to wish.

The cause of death blazed ever brighter in the slate-colored sky. The blue-white star stared a hissing glow of burning death as it grew ever bluer, ever hotter in the heavens. It roasted the earth, and heated the waters of the sea. Gathering greater mass as it swept up great quantities of the thin interstellar dust, its internal pressures were increasing. The weight of the greater mass was causing it to collapse still smaller, to fuse its helium ash into heavier elements, to cram them into an ever tighter core. Soon it would fade into violet, and begin emmitting a blast of X-rays to sear the small planet and boil the oceans. Then it would burst into a nova.

The kydrük understood. His hunger unappeased, he sank again beneath the tepid waters. He must get away. Quickly he must build ships and leave his world—to find another world where bipeds walked the beaches—

Jose remembered some of the dream, and it frightened him, plagued him constantly with vague wonderings, with dismal flashes of insight. He could feel the aura of the kydrük's mind, hanging close about the village. Driven by suspicion, he visited the jungle clearing of the weekly trysts, but instead of growing stronger, the aura weakened, and he knew that its source was closer to the settlement.

The children of Mahgri seemed also to feel it, and their behavior became peculiar. Once each day they visited the neighboring river, pacing restlessly along the narrow beach, and sometimes wading out to stand in shallow water, braving the menace of the crocodile.

Marguerita was still prowling through the village by night, eyes half-open but unseeing. Behind her came Lazaro, lighting her way with a torch, but fearful of waking her lest her soul should depart instead of the devil. Always when she prowled in the night, the other children of Mahgri came awake, and gathered to follow expressionlessly at a distance. The sight set Jose shivering in his hut.

Other villagers were noticing, and wondering. Whisperers congregated in small groups, and stared toward the sorcerer's house, their ugly temper showing plainly in their faces. Jose made himself scarce by day and slept warily by night. But the whisperers made no overt move to harm him. They seemed to feel that the privilege belonged to Francisco or to Lazaro. Strangely however, the menfolk of

Marguerita's family failed to approach him again. Since the day he had performed the ineffective exorcism, no word passed between them. It was rumored that Francisco was doing penance before his gods, out of remorse for his seeking Jose's services. His gods, it seemed, resented any dealings with the darker forces of the jungle. The rumor gave Jose new heart.

But then the news came stealing through the village one late afternoon when the sun slanted down through the limp foliage to make eerie shafts of gold in the dusted air. The news was frightening; Marguerita was in labor. And Francisco refused to admit that she had been with child more than the four months since the marriage. And indeed, other villagers came to his support, for more of Mahgri's children were wed, and awaiting childbirth.

Jose sat gloomily in the shadows of his hut, watching across the clearing toward Francisco's hut where the menfolk sat outside, leaning against the wall. Birth was a business for women.

The shadows grew longer, and twilight came. Other rumors filtered through the village: the child refused to come; Marguerita refused to have it; Marguerita begged to be carried down by the river. And at last, with the coming of inky night; the labor stopped; the child would not come. The menfolk re-entered; the midwives went back to their huts.

But Jose, glum and miserable sorcerer, still sat in the jet-black shadows, watching with doubtful eyes. He was coming to hate Mahgríkydrük, and coming to hate himself for the long years of posing as a healer, and as a dealer with Dark Forces. A dealer? What had he sold? Perhaps he had sold to a snake its tail.

Weary of sitting, but fearful of retiring, he dozed, slumped in the shadows. But a little later, he was awakened by a shout from across the clearing.

"Marguerita! She is gone! She is gone into the jungle. Who will help us search? Help us! Before the jaguar takes her along the way!"

It was Lazaro. There were sounds of stirring in the village. Jose arose quickly and retreated to the rear of his hut, not lighting the oilpot, but crouching low in the darkness with his machete across his knees. In time of excitement, the afflicted family might decide in haste to wreak some vengeance upon him.

He heard searching parties form and go stalking into the jungle. When they were gone,

the hush returned—except for a distant sobbing from the hut across the way. Then, like a sudden spectre, a black shadow appeared to block his entrance-way—a man stood motionless there. Jose came softly to his feet, gripping his machete in nervous hands, knowing the shadow could not see him.

"Francisco," he whispered softly.

The shadow stopped in the doorway, and a hand rattled in a pouch. There were several clinking sounds. Then the shadow went away, trotting quickly across the clearing.

What had he left there in the doorway? Jose shivered. Fearing the magic of strange gods, he would not approach it, but remained huddling against the back wall. Tomorrow he would run away, go to a far village—perhaps to the east.

The searching parties were returning. He heard the mutter of their voices through the thatched wall, and—they had found her! They had found her *alive!* He listened.

There was no child. The child was gone. Vanished. They had found her standing in shallow water at the river, standing and staring at the blackness. And all that she could say was: "He swam away. He left me."

Jose shook his head in bewilderment. Torchlight gathered in the clearing as the searchers returned, and by its glow he saw three small objects in the doorway. He crept toward them for a closer look and the breath caught in his throat with a choking sound.

Three stacks of coins, silver coins, as they used for barter in the east, three equal stacks of—*two, four, six, eight*—ten coins each. *Why?* A hint to leave the village? To take the coins and go? Jose was willing, more than willing. His hand snaked toward them hungrily, and then—a ghost of memory flickered in his mind. The hand stopped. He backed away in horror.

Thirty pieces of silver.

His grandmother, who had taught him the magic of the cross-sign, had taught him of the Betrayer and his price. He backed as far from them as he could and crouched there staring until the torchlight died.

Hours later he drowsed, and dreamed, but somehow the aura of the kydrük had weakened, and the dream was disjointed—brief glimpses of the world of two suns, of ships, of blackness between the stars, of blackness on a hilltop under the stars, where he walked as a man. Hot wind swept across a treeless plain, washed the hilltop, and passed on across a neat black

nest of trees that grew beyond. A faint gleam of firelight flickered there—among the trees. He stopped to wait, and the kydrük waited with him.

Out of the trees came a white shadow, climbing the hill, moving with stately tread. Even in blackness its face was visible, serene, expectant. It was—Francisco? No, more like Lazaro—or old Pepin. No, it was none of them—or rather, it was *all* of them. Its face was the face of Man.

It stopped before him, to accuse him with Its eyes, and he felt the hungry laughter of the kydrük.

"That which thou dost, do quickly," breathed the White Shadow.

When Jose awoke, he was already on his feet, and tottering about the hut. Nearly treading on the coins, he shrieked and flung himself away, falling heavily across the hard floor. Bruised, and sore from sleeping in a slumped heap, he crept whimpering to his mat, and lay watching the coins with frightened eyes as the gray of dawn crept into the clearing.

As morning climbed into its seat, ugly whispers were travelling about the village. Marguerita had given birth to a demon, they said. No baby had been lost in the river, they said, but a thing that floated on the tide, and sank beneath the surface where it watched the shore. The crocodiles, they said, were slithering from their banks to move downstream in a nervous exodus. The reptiles were leaving the smaller river for the Amazon; and from what would a crocodile flee?

Jose knew, and his face became a graven mask, chiseled in black shadows of despair. He had sold his world to demons, given the children of men into the Hands of Evil. And the price lay in the door, blocking the entrance; he would not leave his hut. Memories of forgotten dreams crowded about him, goading him with horror. And when the village whispers said that the children of Mahgri were wandering to the river-front, the sorcerer knew the reason. But he gave no warning to the elders. It was not yet feeding time.

The villagers gave his hut a wide berth. He saw them avert their eyes in passing. Thirst and hunger oppressed him, but no one came, nor would he cross the threshhold where the silver lay.

One thought compelled his mind: there were as many children of Mahgri as there were weeks in the years of his sorcery. And there would be more. He

was certain of it. Soon many kydrük would haunt the river, and the tribes would be their slaves. And then the cities of the east, the lands of the pale ones.

The pale ones? Could their magic overcome the evil of the kydrük? Perhaps, if they learned the truth in time.

Francisco came. He came to stand in the clearing before Jose's hut. He came to hate in silence. They stared at each other across the triple stack of coins upon the threshhold.

"The pale ones," Jose croaked. "You must send a messenger to tell them—to seek their help—"

Francisco seemed not to hear him. Slowly, he turned his back upon the hut and paced away.

Night came, and dreams, but not the wonderdreams, for the tryst had come, and Mahgri's race was planted on the earth—through the ignorance of an old man. He dreamed of the hilltop again, and the White Shadow of Man coming out of the grove to be betrayed, to be led away in servitude. And in the dream, the thirty coins were with him, burning his flesh. He tried in vain to return them to the kydrük, but the creatures laughed. He tried to throw them away, but they clung to his skin —while he unwillingly watched the White Shadow carry a pair of crossed beams upon another hill, in silence. The hammers rang loud in the clear air—

When he awoke, he was sitting erect. His hands were full of hemp, and he was plaiting a rope!

It was morning again, and he stared at the rope in shocked silence. While he slept, he had done it. He stared at the doorway. The magic of Francisco's gods? But he did not drop it. After a troubled quiet, his lean and bony fingers slowly twisted the strands, almost lovingly. He continued plaiting the rope, and his face was strangely relaxed.

But toward the middle of the morning, he shifted restlessly, and looked out through the doorway. The aura—it was slowly growing stronger, calling, luring.

The rope was finished. He knotted its end. He caught up his machete and made a few last preparations about the hut. Then he approached the door, and without hesitation, picked up the thirty silver coins and walked outside.

It was nearly feeding time.

After a short trot through the forest, he came to the cliff overlooking the river. A hundred feet below him, the children of Mahgri were sitting on the narrow strand, assembled in an orderly group of dreamers. All

but one. A slender girl stood ankle deep in water, on the long tongue of a sandbar. Her arms were outstretcehd toward the tide. It was Marguerita, and she was waiting for her "son." Jose knew not what ritual had elected her to be the first, but he knew that the others would wait quietly until it was over, then go back to their homes until the next feeding time.

The kydrük had not yet appeared, but he felt the aura of its approach. He tried to close his mind to it, lest it detect his presence. It was still a young one, and perhaps incautious—while the sorcerer had been dealing with the one called Mahgri for many years, and he was skilled at detecting the thought-glow of the kydrük mind. Not a child of Mahgri by growth from infancy, he felt none of the compelling urge to join the thing.

Jose paused a moment on the cliff-top, looking down at the tide. Then he moved along it until he reached a crag that overhung a deep place, where the constant eddy of a whirlpool had eaten out a basin in the bottom. He drew his machete and crouched there to wait.

The wait was short. Rising majestically above the muddy surface came the tentacle of a small kydrük. It was far out in the center of the river, but a murmur of awe arose from the congregation on the beach. Then a hush fell over them as the eye-stalk drifted slowly toward the shore. The girl waded a step deeper, then stooped a little to lift double handfuls of water which sparkled gemlike in the sun as they fell. Her dress slipped aside and floated northward, leaving her a gold-bronze statue in the noontide glare.

Jose closed his eyes and thought a jumble of nonsensical imagery, lest the kydrük become aware of his presence. When he opened them again, the rapport was established, and there was no further danger. The creature was absorbed with the mind of the victim, and the girl was on her hands and knees in the shallow tide.

Its blue-green gills undulating about it, the kydrük approached the deep-place on its way toward the girl. Jose gripped his machete and tensed his quivering body on the crag. The pink mouth-pad was already opening to the surface.

Now! He shot out and away from the clifftop in a silent plunge. He tried to paw at the air, to correct his plummeting dive for direct impact, holding the machete ahead of him in both hands. But he was old and clumsy, and he was going to miss. Somehow, he managed

to strike the water feet-first in a stinging crash that brought a moment of blackness to his brain. Still he gripped the machete with a tenacity of hatred.

The kydrük moved slowly. By the time Jose fought his way coughing to the surface, its swanlike neck was turning to look at the source of the watery thunder. Its eye gripped him compellingly.

But with the fury of a maddened bull, Jose found the edge of the bar and launched himself toward the thing with a high-pitched shriek. Fresh-snatched from rapport with its victim, the kydrük was dazed.

Jose's machete flailed in a wide arc, crunched through thin metallic exoderm, and bit blue flesh. The top of the eye-stalk sliced clean and skittered off to splash near shore. The small kydrük thrashed in agony. Jose's machete slashed, and slashed again. The mouth-pad wrapped stingingly about his calves, but he cut it free.

At last the thing was still. He dragged it shoreward, past the dazed statue of Marguerita, past the uncomprehending crowd of Mahgri's children. Atop the cliff again, he looked back, and shuddered. *He*, Jose, would-be sorcerer, had made them so, given them into Mahgri's hands that they might become mindless slaves of the demon race. He departed quickly from the cliff, dragging the blue-gilled kydrük.

A party of warriors waited in the clearing of the village, and among them were the elders, wearing the caps of judgment. He knew they were unaware of what had happened by the river, and he also knew that they were waiting for *him*. They spread out casually, drifted into a wide circle about him as he walked into the clearing. The circle tightened. The faces were dark with anger.

A murmur travelled among them as Jose tossed the killed kydrük on the ground. Shoulders hunched, head bobbling slightly, he faced the elders resignedly. Among them stood Francisco, machete drawn and twitching in his hands. He looked down in horror at the thing on the ground, then back to Jose with added hate.

"We must have help," Jose panted. "Help from the pale ones. All the children of Mahgri will bring forth—such things as these."

A surly sound of rage rumbled through the group.

"You must see that the afflicted ones—are tied to stakes in their huts—when their time is come. Else they will go to the river."

The elders were glaring at him fixedly.

"Before you judge me, will you see to these things?"

There was a hesitant moment, but enough of the elders nodded to themselves to tell him that they would see it was done. Jose touched his pouch. The silver rattled in the soggy leather. He took it off and dropped it beside the carcass.

"It will buy food—for the messenger—in the villages of the pale ones."

No one spoke. The angry circle closed a little tighter, hands clenching and quivering in hunger for his throat. Jose was past fear.

"May I go to my house for a moment—before you kill me?"

All eyes turned toward Francisco. The elder wrestled with himself a moment, then grunted, "I will accompany you."

Together they walked across the clearing. But Francisco stopped just short of the door —for a yard beyond it hung the noose of handplaited rope, dangling from a rafter-pole, waiting. The top of the door cut off a view of it at the knot, so that it looked like a snake devouring its tail.

Francisco watched for a moment, his eyes thoughtful. Then he left the sorcerer alone and walked back to join the others. He heard the thatched door close softly behind him.

"The trial is over," he announced quietly.

S-F WRITERS TAKE NOTE

A patent has been granted to inventor Joshua E. Shirley for a remote-controlled elevator. It is a simple device that looks like it came right out of a Flash Gordon serial.

A TV pickup, a loudspeaker and a microphone are installed in each elevator car. One operator sits in the control room surrounded by video screens and buttons. He watches the car doors, counts the number of people and requests floors through the speakers.

Since there is never an operator *in* the car, there is always room for one more rider.

A good addition for rush hours would be an automatic recording that droned, "Step to the rear and kindly face the front of the car."

BOOK REVIEWS:

THE DISSECTING TABLE

by DAMON KNIGHT

THE GOLDEN APPLES OF THE SUN, by Ray Bradbury. Doubleday, 250 pp., $3.00 • Since about 1945, almost unnoticed by science-fantasy addicts with their noses to newsprint. Ray Bradbury has been turning away from the science-fantasy idiom to fiction-without-labels, to the mainstream short story. *The Big Black and White Game* was first published eight years ago; so was *Invisible Boy*. These are the oldest stories in the present volume, which contains nine stories originally published between 1951 and 1953, and six more which have never before been published anywhere; so that I think we may take this collection, so different from his previous ones, as an indication of the way Bradbury is going.

Including two titles mentioned above, 11 out of 22 stories are mainstream, either with no science-fantasy element at all, or with such marginal science-fantasy connotations as are often found in mainstream literature.

I think this is all to the good; it is impossible to object when Bradbury sells the Post or Collier's or Esquire a mainstream story; equally impossible to repress a stab of irritation when, because of the happenstance of his early development in our microcosm, he sells them something which he and they mistakenly suppose to be science fiction.—Or, to be equally accurate and more polite, Bradbury is far too good a writer to be circumscribed by a fictional tradition in which he had never been entirely at home.

At any rate, crossing off 11 stories leaves us 11 more to deal with. They break down as follows:

Science fiction

Three, all bad: *The Fog Horn*, of no interest to anyone who has read

Rudyard Kipling's *A Matter of Fact; A Sound of Thunder,* the very oldest deadest of trite time-travel plots; and the title story, *The Golden Apples of the Sun,* which takes place in a Bradbury spaceship and is therefore incredible from eggs to apples.

Watered-down science fiction (a spaceship is just a brass kettle, a Conestoga wagon, a Wilshire bus. . . .)

One story: *The Wilderness* represents one of Bradbury's rare attempts to come to grips with the basic material of science fiction as opposed to its window-dressing; this one is written with the greatest delicacy and sensitivity but is a failure like the rest, simply because Bradbury cannot and will not admit that a spaceship is a spaceship.

Anti-science fiction (the world began going to the dogs circa 1900)

Four stories: *The Pedestrian,* in which a man is arrested for not watching television (invented later than 1900); *The Flying Machine,* in which a 5th century Chinese emperor saves the world from aircraft by destroying its unsung first inventor; *The Murderer,* in which a man smashes a great many noisy gadgets; *Embroidery,* in which three old ladies wait for the Earth to be destroyed by the meddling of nuclear physicists. The second and fourth of these are among the most effective stories in the collection; the other two are not far behind.

Murder

One story: *The Fruit at the Bottom of the Bowl.*

Fantasy

Two, both excellent: *The April Witch,* the wistful story of a girl whose powers make her something more, and something less, than human; *Hail and Farewell,* the curiously haunting tale of an eternal twelve-year-old.

Rightfully, the ten of these stories which are approximately science-fantasy are all that concern this department; if Ray Bradbury's next book of stories, or his next after that, turns out to be entirely mainstream—and places it in the top five on national best-seller lists—I'll have to be pleased in silence. Still, at this moment when the left foot

of Bradbury is still visible in our sky, it ought to be permissible for us to take a valedictory look at all he has done till now, mainstream and fantasy alike, and hazard a guess, or at least a hope, as to where he may be headed.

There is so much to say about Bradbury's meaning that perhaps too little has been said about his technique. He is a superb craftsman, a man who has spent fifteen years laboriously polishing a great gift. "For here was a kind of writing of which there is never much in any one time—a style at once delicate, economical and unobtrusively firm, sharp enough to cut but without rancor, and clear as water or air." That's Stephen Vincent Benet, writing in 1938 about Robert Nathan; the same words, all but the next to last phrase, might have been written with equal justice of Bradbury. His imagery is luminous and penetrating, continually lighting up familiar corners with unexpected words. He never lets an idea go until he has squeezed it dry, and never wastes one. I well remember my own popeyed admiration when I read his story about a woman who gave birth to a small blue pyramid; this is exactly the sort of thing that might occur to any imaginative writer in a manic or drunken moment; but Bradbury wrote it and sold it.

As for the rancor, the underlying motif of much early Bradbury, which Ken Crossen calls hatred and I call a death-wish, the newer stories in this collection show little of it; this might be taken as a sign that Bradbury is mellowing in his thirties, and perhaps he is; I have the feeling that he is rather trying to mellow—deliberately searching for something equally strong, equally individual, less antagonistic toward the universe that buys his stories. I don't think he has yet found it. There's the wry, earthy humor of *En la Noche*, the pure fancy of *The Golden Kite, The Silver Wind;* these are neutral stories, anyone could have written them. There are the moralistic tales; if you find the moral palatable, as I do in *The Big Black and White Game* and *Way Up in the Middle of the Air*, these are sincere and moving; if you don't, as I don't in *Powerhouse* or *The Fire Balloons*, there is a pious flatness about them. Then there is sentiment; and since Bradbury does nothing by halves, it is a sentiment that threatens continually to slop over into sentimentality. At its precarious peak, it is a moving and vital thing; when it slops, it is—no other word will do—sickening.

It has been said of Bradbury that, like H. P. Lovecraft, he was born a century or so too late. I think he would have been a castaway in any age; if he would like to destroy airplanes, television sets, automatic washing machines, it's not because they make loud noises or because they have no faces or even because some of them kill people, but because they are grown-up things; because they symbolize the big, loud, faceless, violent, unromantic world of adults.

Childhood is after all Bradbury's one subject. When he writes of explorers visiting the sun or the Jurassic jungles, they are palpably, sometimes embarrassingly, children playing at spacemen or time-travelers. He writes feelingly and with sharp perception of young women and of old people—because, I think, he finds them childlike. But it is only when the theme becomes explicit that his song sings truest:

> The boys were playing on the green park diamond when he came by. He stood a little while among the oak-tree shadows, watching them hurl the white, snowy baseball into the warm summer air, saw the baseball shadow fly like a dark bird over the grass, saw their hands open in mouths to catch this swift piece of summer that now seemed most especially important to hold onto. . . .

Finally, Bradbury is a man with a strong sense of his own destiny. I think he has always known the scope of his talent, even when it was perceptible to no one else; in the lean years there were a thousand times when he could have made more money by compromising, by writing what editors thought they wanted; he never did. He wrote for odd corners of the pulp market, for *Detective Tales*, for *Dime Mystery*; but the stories he wrote were like no others those magazines had ever printed; they were Bradbury stories; assistant editors sat up straight when they read them, scratched their heads, wrote offusive blurbs, went out and got happily drunk.

Wherever he is going, Bradbury remains Bradbury. I think nothing is less to be hoped for—or less likely—than for him ever to change into anyone else.

STAR SCIENCE FICTION STORIES, edited by Frederik Pohl. Ballantine, 202 pp., $1.50 hardcover, 35¢ paperbound. • I remarked about

Healy's *New Tales of Space and Time* that an anthologist working with a single-shot collection of new stories is unlikely to better a good single issue of a top-flight magazine. That still goes; this is a bright, exceedingly readable collection, however, and its four A's and six B stories make up for five stinkers. The B's are high B's; perhaps I ought to explain that I keep the first category for stories that seem to me either absolutely flawless or so near as makes no difference; a great many good stories go into the second compartment for some small logical lapse or element of triteness. Cyril Kornbluth's *Dominoes* and John Wyndham's *The Chronoclasm,* for example, are beautiful jobs of writing, but their time-paradox plots strike me as stale. William Morrison's *Country Doctor* is a memorable thing, probably the best work this writer has done yet; several unanswered or badly answered questions about the ailing monster kept me from enjoying it fully. H. L. Gold's tongue-in-cheek *The Man With English* contains an essential bit of illogic; Ray Bradbury's *A Scent of Sarsaparilla* and Murray Leinster's *The Journey* are low-key stories, unimprovable but relatively unexciting.

The C's include Clifford D. Simak's plotless and soupily ruriphile *Contraption,* Judith Merril's soap-opera *So Proudly We Hail,* William Tenn's hortatory and humorless *The Deserter,* Isaac Asimov's *"Nobody Here But—"* and Robert Sheckley's *The Last Weapon,* the last pair both too trite, for my taste, to be redeemed by occasional flashes of brilliance.

The A's are wonderful: *Idealist* by Lester del Rey, a world's-end story written with the quiet competence which distinguishes this writer's best work; Fritz Leiber's *The Night He Cried,* an absolutely demolishing satire on a certain "Slickie Millane;" a little gem by Henry Kuttner and C. L. Moore called *A Wild Surmise,* in which two mutually exclusive psychiatrists, one spectacled, one bug-eyed, wrestle for the soul of a gentleman who does not believe in either of them; and Arthur C. Clarke's *The Nine Billion Names of God,* about which I will only say that the ending is predictable, but this fact doesn't matter in the least.

ILLUSTRATED BY SMITH

the hanging stranger

BY PHILIP K. DICK

Ed had always been a practical man, when he saw something was wrong he tried to correct it. Then one day he saw *it* hanging in the town square.

Five o'clock Ed Loyce washed up, tossed on his hat and coat, got his car out and headed across town toward his TV sales store. He was tired. His back and shoulders ached from digging dirt out of the basement and wheeling it into the back yard. But for a forty-year-old man he had done okay. Janet could get a new vase with the money he had saved; and he liked the idea of repairing the foundations himself.

It was getting dark. The setting sun cast long rays over the scurrying commuters, tired and grim-faced, women loaded down with bundles and packages, students swarming home from the university, mixing with clerks and businessmen and drab secretaries. He stopped his Packard for a red light and then started it up again. The store had been open without him; he'd arrive just in time to spell the help for dinner, go over the records of the day, maybe even close a couple of sales himself. He drove slowly past the small square of green in the center of the street, the town park. There were no parking places in front of LOYCE TV SALES AND SERVICE. He cursed under his breath and swung the car in a U-turn. Again he passed the little square of green with its lonely drinking fountain and bench and single lamp post.

From the lamppost something was hanging. A shapeless dark bundle, swinging a little with the wind. Like a dummy of some sort. Loyce rolled down his window and peered out. What the hell was it? A display of some

kind? Sometimes the Chamber of Commerce put up displays in the square.

Again he made a U-turn and brought his car around. He passed the park and concentrated on the dark bundle. It wasn't a dummy. And if it was a display it was a strange kind. The hackles on his neck rose and he swallowed uneasily. Sweat slid out on his face and hands.

It was a body. A human body.

"Look at it!" Loyce snapped. "Come on out here!"

Don Fergusson came slowly out of the store, buttoning his pin-stripe coat with dignity. "This is a big deal, Ed. I can't just leave the guy standing there."

"See it?" Ed pointed into the gathering gloom. The lamppost jutted up against the sky—the post and the bundle swinging from it. "There it is. How the hell long has it been there?" His voice rose excitedly. "What's wrong with everybody? They just walk on past!"

Don Fergusson lit a cigarette slowly. "Take it easy, old man. There must be a good reason, or it wouldn't be there."

"A reason! What kind of a reason?"

Fergusson shrugged. "Like the time the Traffic Safety Council put that wrecked Buick there. Some sort of civic thing. How would I know?"

Jack Potter from the shoe shop joined them. "What's up, boys?"

"There's a body hanging from the lamppost," Loyce said. "I'm going to call the cops."

"They must know about it," Potter said. "Or otherwise it wouldn't be there."

"I got to get back in." Fergusson headed back into the store. "Business before pleasure."

Loyce began to get hysterical. "You see it? You see it hanging there? A man's body! A dead man!"

"Sure, Ed. I saw it this afternoon when I went out for coffee."

"You mean it's been there all afternoon?"

"Sure. What's the matter?" Potter glanced at his watch. "Have to run. See you later, Ed."

Potter hurried off, joining the flow of people moving along the sidewalk. Men and women, passing by the park. A few glanced up curiously at the dark bundle—and then went on. Nobody stopped. Nobody paid any attention.

"I'm going nuts," Loyce whispered. He made his way to the curb and crossed out into traffic, among the cars. Horns honked angrily at him. He

gained the curb and stepped up onto the little square of green.

The man had been middle-aged. His clothing was ripped and torn, a gray suit, splashed and caked with dried mud. A stranger. Loyce had never seen him before. Not a local man. His face was partly turned away, and in the evening wind he spun a little, turning gently, silently. His skin was gouged and cut. Red gashes, deep scratches of congealed blood. A pair of steel-rimmed glasses hung from one ear, dangling foolishly. His eyes bulged. His mouth was open, tongue thick and ugly blue.

"For Heaven's sake," Loyce muttered, sickened. He pushed down his nausea and made his way back to the sidewalk. He was shaking all over, with revulsion—and fear.

Why? Who was the man? Why was he hanging there? What did it mean?

And—why didn't anybody notice?

He bumped into a small man hurrying along the sidewalk. "Watch it!" the man grated. "Oh, it's you, Ed."

Ed nodded dazedly. "Hello, Jenkins."

"What's the matter?" The stationery clerk caught Ed's arm. "You look sick."

"The body. There in the park."

"Sure, Ed." Jenkins led him into the alcove of LOYCE TV SALES AND SERVICE. "Take it easy."

Margaret Henderson from the jewelry store joined them. "Something wrong?"

"Ed's not feeling well."

Loyce yanked himself free. "How can you stand here? Don't you see it? For God's sake—"

"What's he talking about?" Margaret asked nervously.

"The body!" Ed shouted. "The body hanging there!"

More people collected. "Is he sick? It's Ed Loyce. You okay, Ed?"

"The body!" Loyce screamed, struggling to get past them. Hands caught at him. He tore loose. "Let me go! The police! Get the police!"

"Ed—"

"Better get a doctor!"

"He must be sick."

"Or drunk."

Loyce fought his way through the people. He stumbled and half fell. Through a blur he saw rows of faces, curious, concerned, anxious. Men and women halting to see what the disturbance was. He fought past them toward his store. He could see Fergusson inside talking to a man, showing him an Emerson TV set. Pete Foley in the back at the service counter, setting up a new Philco. Loyce shouted

at them frantically. His voice was lost in the roar of traffic and the murmur around him.

"Do something!" he screamed. "Don't stand there! Do something! Something's wrong! Something's happened! Things are going on!"

The crowd melted respectfully for the two heavy-set cops moving efficiently toward Loyce.

"Name?" the cop with the notebook murmured.

"Loyce." He mopped his forehead wearily. "Edward C. Loyce. Listen to me. Back there—"

"Address?" the cop demanded. The police car moved swiftly through traffic, shooting among the cars and buses. Loyce sagged against the seat, exhausted and confused. He took a deep shuddering breath.

"1368 Hurst Road."

"That's here in Pikeville?"

"That's right." Loyce pulled himself up with a violent effort. "Listen to me. Back there. In the square. Hanging from the lamppost—"

"Where were you today?" the cop behind the wheel demanded.

"Where?" Loyce echoed.

"You weren't in your shop, were you?"

"No." He shook his head. "No, I was home. Down in the basement."

"In the *basement?*"

"Digging. A new foundation. Getting out the dirt to pour a cement frame. Why? What has that to do with—"

"Was anybody else down there with you?"

"No. My wife was downtown. My kids were at school." Loyce looked from one heavy-set cop to the other. Hope flicked across his face, wild hope. "You mean because I was down there I missed—the explanation? I didn't get in on it? Like everybody else?"

After a pause the cop with the notebook said: "That's right. You missed the explanation."

"Then it's official? The body—it's *supposed* to be hanging there?"

"It's supposed to be hanging there. For everybody to see."

Ed Loyce grinned weakly. "Good Lord. I guess I sort of went off the deep end. I thought maybe something had happened. You know, something like the Ku Klux Klan. Some kind of violence. Communists or Fascists taking over." He wiped his face with his breast-pocket handkerchief, his hands shaking. "I'm glad to know it's on the level."

"It's on the level." The police car was getting near the Hall of Justice. The sun had set. The streets were gloomy and dark. The lights had not yet come on.

"I feel better," Loyce said. "I

was pretty excited there, for a minute. I guess I got all stirred up. Now that I understand, there's no need to take me in, is there?"

The two cops said nothing.

"I should be back at my store. The boys haven't had dinner. I'm all right, now. No more trouble. Is there any need of—"

"This won't take long," the cop behind the wheel interrupted. "A short process. Only a few minutes."

"I hope it's short," Loyce muttered. The car slowed down for a stoplight. "I guess I sort of disturbed the peace. Funny, getting excited like that and—"

Loyce yanked the door open. He sprawled out into the street and rolled to his feet. Cars were moving all around him, gaining speed as the light changed. Loyce leaped onto the curb and raced among the people, burrowing into the swarming crowds. Behind him he heard sounds, shouts, people running.

They weren't cops. He had realized that right away. He knew every cop in Pikeville. A man couldn't own a store, operate a business in a small town for twenty-five years without getting to know all the cops.

They weren't cops—and there hadn't been any explanation. Potter, Fergusson, Jenkins, none of them knew why it was there. They didn't know—and they didn't care. *That* was the strange part.

Loyce ducked into a hardware store. He raced toward the back, past the startled clerks and customers, into the shipping room and through the back door. He tripped over a garbage can and ran up a flight of concrete steps. He climbed over a fence and jumped down on the other side, gasping and panting.

There was no sound behind him. He had got away.

He was at the entrance of an alley, dark and strewn with boards and ruined boxes and tires. He could see the street at the far end. A street light wavered and came on. Men and women. Stores. Neon signs. Cars.

And to his right—the police station.

He was close, terribly close. Past the loading platform of a grocery store rose the white concrete side of the Hall of Justice. Barred windows. The police antenna. A great concrete wall rising up in the darkness. A bad place for him to be near. He was too close. He had to keep moving, get farther away from them.

Them?

Loyce moved cautiously down the alley. Beyond the police station was the City Hall, the old-fashioned yellow structure of wood and gilded brass and broad

cement steps. He could see the endless rows of offices, dark windows, the cedars and beds of flowers on each side of the entrance.

And—something else.

Above the City Hall was a patch of darkness, a cone of gloom denser than the surrounding night. A prism of black that spread out and was lost into the sky.

He listened. Good God, he could hear something. Something that made him struggle frantically to close his ears, his mind, to shut out the sound. A buzzing. A distant, muted hum like a great swarm of bees.

Loyce gazed up, rigid with horror. The splotch of darkness, hanging over the City Hall. Darkness so thick it seemed almost solid. *In the vortex something moved.* Flickering shapes. Things, descending from the sky, pausing momentarily above the City Hall, fluttering over it in a dense swarm and then dropping silently onto the roof.

Shapes. Fluttering shapes from the sky. From the crack of darkness that hung above him.

He was seeing—them.

For a long time Loyce watched, crouched behind a sagging fence in a pool of scummy water.

They were landing. Coming down in groups, landing on the roof of the City Hall and disappearing inside. They had wings. Like giant insects of some kind. They flew and fluttered and came to rest—and then crawled crab-fashion, sideways, across the roof and into the building.

He was sickened. And fascinated. Cold night wind blew around him and he shuddered. He was tired, dazed with shock. On the front steps of the City Hall were men, standing here and there. Groups of men coming out of the building and halting for a moment before going on.

Were there more of them?

It didn't seem possible. What he saw descending from the black chasm weren't men. They were alien—from some other world, some other dimension. Sliding through this slit, this break in the shell of the universe. Entering through this gap, winged insects from another realm of being.

On the steps of the City Hall a group of men broke up. A few moved toward a waiting car. One of the remaining shapes started to re-enter the City Hall. It changed its mind and turned to follow the others.

Loyce closed his eyes in horror. His senses reeled. He hung on tight, clutching at the sagging fence. The shape, the man-shape, had abruptly fluttered up

and flapped after the others. It flew to the sidewalk and came to rest among them.

Pseudo-men. Imitation men. Insects with ability to disguise themselves as men. Like other insects familiar to Earth. Protective coloration. Mimicry.

Loyce pulled himself away. He got slowly to his feet. It was night. The alley was totally dark. But maybe they could see in the dark. Maybe darkness made no difference to them.

He left the alley cautiously and moved out onto the street. Men and women flowed past, but not so many, now. At the bus-stops stood waiting groups. A huge bus lumbered along the street, its lights flashing in the evening gloom.

Loyce moved forward. He pushed his way among those waiting and when the bus halted he boarded it and took a seat in the rear, by the door. A moment later the bus moved into life and rumbled down the street.

Loyce relaxed a little. He studied the people around him. Dulled, tired faces. People going home from work. Quite ordinary faces. None of them paid any attention to him. All sat quietly, sunk down in their seats, jiggling with the motion of the bus.

The man sitting next to him unfolded a newspaper. He began to read the sports section, his lips moving. An ordinary man. Blue suit. Tie. A businessman, or a salesman. On his way home to his wife and family.

Across the aisle a young woman, perhaps twenty. Dark eyes and hair, a package on her lap. Nylons and heels. Red coat and white angora sweater. Gazing absently ahead of her.

A high school boy in jeans and black jacket.

A great triple-chinned woman with an immense shopping bag loaded with packages and parcels. Her thick face dim with weariness.

Ordinary people. The kind that rode the bus every evening. Going home to their families. To dinner.

Going home—with their minds dead. Controlled, filmed over with the mask of an alien being that had appeared and taken possession of them, their town, their lives. Himself, too. Except that he happened to be deep in his cellar instead of in the store. Somehow, he had been overlooked. They had missed him. Their control wasn't perfect, foolproof.

Maybe there were others.

Hope flickered in Loyce. They weren't omnipotent. They had made a mistake, not got control of him. Their net, their field of control, had passed over him. He had emerged from his cellar as

he had gone down. Apparently their power-zone was limited.

A few seats down the aisle a man was watching him. Loyce broke off his chain of thought. A slender man, with dark hair and a small mustache. Well-dressed, brown suit and shiny shoes. A book beteen his small hands. He was watching Loyce, studying him intently. He turned quickly away.

Loyce tensed. One of *them?* Or—another they had missed?

The man was watching him again. Small dark eyes, alive and clever. Shrewd. A man too shrewd for them—or one of the things itself, an alien insect from beyond.

The bus halted. An elderly man got on slowly and dropped his token into the box. He moved down the aisle and took a seat opposite Loyce.

The elderly man caught the sharp-eyed man's gaze. For a split second something passed between them.

A look rich with meaning.

Loyce got to his feet. The bus was moving. He ran to the door. One step down into the well. He yanked the emergency door release. The rubber door swung open.

"Hey!" the driver shouted, jamming on the brakes. "What the hell—"

Loyce squirmed through. The bus was slowing down. Houses on all sides. A residential district, lawns and tall apartment buildings. Behind him, the bright-eyed man had leaped up. The elderly man was also on his feet. They were coming after him.

Loyce leaped. He hit the pavement with terrific force and rolled against the curb. Pain lapped over him. Pain and a vast tide of blackness. Desperately, he fought it off. He struggled to his knees and then slid down again. The bus had stopped. People were getting off.

Loyce groped around. His fingers closed over something. A rock, lying in the gutter. He crawled to his feet, grunting with pain. A shape loomed before him. A man, the bright-eyed man with the book.

Loyce kicked. The man gasped and fell. Loyce brought the rock down. The man screamed and tried to roll away. "*Stop!* For God's sake listen—"

He struck again. A hideous crunching sound. The man's voice cut off and dissolved in a bubbling wail. Loyce scrambled up and back. The others were there, now. All around him. He ran, awkwardly, down the sidewalk, up a driveway. None of them followed him. They had stopped and were bending over the inert body of the man with

the book, the bright-eyed man who had come after him.

Had he made a mistake?

But it was too late to worry about that. He had to get out—away from them. Out of Pikeville, beyond the crack of darkness, the rent between their world and his.

"Ed!" Janet Loyce backed away nervously. "What is it? What—"

Ed Loyce slammed the door behind him and came into the living room. "Pull down the shades. Quick."

Janet moved toward the window. "But—"

"Do as I say. Who else is here besides you?"

"Nobody. Just the twins. They're upstairs in their room. What's happened? You look so strange. Why are you home?"

Ed locked the front door. He prowled around the house, into the kitchen. From the drawer under the sink he slid out the big butcher knife and ran his finger along it. Sharp. Plenty sharp. He returned to the living room.

"Listen to me," he said. "I don't have much time. They know I escaped and they'll be looking for me."

"Escaped?" Janet's face twisted with bewilderment and fear. "Who?"

"The town has been taken over. They're in control. I've got it pretty well figured out. They started at the top, at the City Hall and police department. What they did with the *real* humans they—"

"What are you talking about?"

"We've been invaded. From some other universe, some other dimension. They're insects. Mimicry. And more. Power to control minds. Your mind."

"My mind?"

"Their entrance is *here*, in Pikeville. They've taken over all of you. The whole town—except me. We're up against an incredibly powerful enemy, but they have their limitations. That's our hope. They're limited! They can make mistakes!"

Janet shook her head. "I don't understand, Ed. You must be insane."

"Insane? No. Just lucky. If I hadn't been down in the basement I'd be like all the rest of you." Loyce peered out the window. "But I can't stand here talking. Get your coat."

"My coat?"

"We're getting out of here. Out of Pikeville. We've got to get help. Fight this thing. They *can* be beaten. They're not infallible. It's going to be close—but we may make it if we hurry. Come on!" He grabbed her arm

roughly. "Get your coat and call the twins. We're all leaving. Don't stop to pack. There's no time for that."

White-faced, his wife moved toward the closet and got down her coat. "Where are we going?"

Ed pulled open the desk drawer and spilled the contents out onto the floor. He grabbed up a road map and spread it open. "They'll have the highway covered, of course. But there's a back road. To Oak Grove. I got onto it once. It's practically abandoned. Maybe they'll forget about it."

"The old Ranch Road? Good Lord—it's completely closed. Nobody's supposed to drive over it."

"I know." Ed thrust the map grimly into his coat. "That's our best chance. Now call down the twins and let's get going. Your car is full of gas, isn't it?"

Janet was dazed.

"The Chevvy? I had it filled up yesterday afternoon." Janet moved toward the stairs. "Ed, I—"

"Call the twins!" Ed unlocked the front door and peered out. Nothing stirred. No sign of life. All right so far.

"Come on downstairs," Janet called in a wavering voice. "We're—going out for awhile."

"Now?" Tommy's voice came.

"Hurry up," Ed barked. "Get down here, both of you."

Tommy appeared at the top of the stairs. "I was doing my home work. We're starting fractions. Miss Parker says if we don't get this done—"

"You can forget about fractions." Ed grabbed his son as he came down the stairs and propelled him toward the door. "Where's Jim?"

"He's coming."

Jim started slowly down the stairs. "What's up, Dad?"

"We're going for a ride."

"A ride? Where?"

Ed turned to Janet. "We'll leave the lights on. And the TV set. Go turn it on." He pushed her toward the set. "So they'll think we're still—"

He heard the buzz. And dropped instantly, the long butcher knife out. Sickened, he saw it coming down the stairs at him, wings a blur of motion as it aimed itself. It still bore a vague resemblance to Jimmy. It was small, a baby one. A brief glimpse—the thing hurtling at him, cold, multi-lensed inhuman eyes. Wings, body still clothed in yellow T-shirt and jeans, the mimic outline still stamped on it. A strange half-turn of its body as it reached him. What was it doing?

A stinger.

Loyce stabbed wildly at it. It

retreated, buzzing frantically. Loyce rolled and crawled toward the door. Tommy and Janet stood still as statues, faces blank. Watching without expression. Loyce stabbed again. This time the knife connected. The thing shrieked and faltered. It bounced against the wall and fluttered down.

Something lapped through his mind. A wall of force, energy, an alien mind probing into him. He was suddenly paralyzed. The mind entered his own, touched against him briefly, shockingly. An utterly alien presence, settling over him—and then it flickered out as the thing collapsed in a broken heap on the rug.

It was dead. He turned it over with his foot. It was an insect, a fly of some kind. Yellow T-shirt, jeans. His son Jimmy... He closed his mind tight. It was too late to think about that. Savagely he scooped up his knife and headed toward the door. Janet and Tommy stood stone-still, neither of them moving.

The car was out. He'd never get through. They'd be waiting for him. It was ten miles on foot. Ten long miles over rough ground, gulleys and open fields and hills of uncut forest. He'd have to go alone.

Loyce opened the door. For a brief second he looked back at his wife and son. Then he slammed the door behind him and raced down the porch steps.

A moment later he was on his way, hurrying swiftly through the darkness toward the edge of town.

The early morning sunlight was blinding. Loyce halted, gasping for breath, swaying back and forth. Sweat ran down in his eyes. His clothing was torn, shredded by the brush and thorns through which he had crawled. Ten miles—on his hands and knees. Crawling, creeping through the night. His shoes were mud-caked. He was scratched and limping, utterly exhausted.

But ahead of him lay Oak Grove.

He took a deep breath and started down the hill. Twice he stumbled and fell, picking himself up and trudging on. His ears rang. Everything receded and wavered. But he was there. He had got out, away from Pikeville.

A farmer in a field gaped at him. From a house a young woman watched in wonder. Loyce reached the road and turned onto it. Ahead of him was a gasoline station and a drive-in. A couple of trucks, some chickens pecking in the dirt, a dog tied with a string.

The white-clad attendant

watched suspiciously as he dragged himself up to the station. "Thank God." He caught hold of the wall. "I didn't think I was going to make it. They followed me most of the way. I could hear them buzzing. Buzzing and flitting around behind me."

"What happened?" the attendant demanded. "You in a wreck? A hold-up?"

Loyce shook his head wearily. "They have the whole town. The City Hall and the police station. They hung a man from the lamppost. That was the first thing I saw. They've got all the roads blocked. I saw them hovering over the cars coming in. About four this morning I got beyond them. I knew it right away. I could feel them leave. And then the sun came up."

The attendant licked his lip nervously. "You're out of your head. I better get a doctor."

"Get me into Oak Grove," Loyce gasped. He sank down on the gravel. "We've got to get started—cleaning them out. Got to get started right away."

They kept a tape recorder going all the time he talked. When he had finished the Commissioner snapped off the recorder and got to his feet. He stood for a moment, deep in thought. Finally he got out his cigarettes and lit up slowly, a frown on his beefy face.

"You don't believe me," Loyce said.

The Commissioner offered him a cigarette. Loyce pushed it impatiently away. "Suit yourself." The Commissioner moved over to the window and stood for a time looking out at the town of Oak Grove. "I believe you," he said abruptly.

Loyce sagged. "Thank God."

"So you got away." The Commissioner shook his head. "You were down in your cellar instead of at work. A freak chance. One in a million."

Loyce sipped some of the black coffee they had brought him. "I have a theory," he murmured.

"What is it?"

"About them. Who they are. They take over one area at a time. Starting at the top—the highest level of authority. Working down from there in a widening circle. When they're firmly in control they go on to the next town. They spread, slowly, very gradually. I think it's been going on for a long time."

"A long time?"

"Thousands of years. I don't think it's new."

"Why do you say that?"

"When I was a kid . . . A picture they showed us in Bible League. A religious picture—an old print. The enemy gods, de-

feated by Jehovah. Moloch, Beelzebub, Moab, Baalin, Ashtaroth—"

"So?"

"They were all represented by figures." Loyce looked up at the Commissioner. "Beelzebub was represented as—a giant fly."

The Commissioner grunted. "An old struggle."

"They've been defeated. The Bible is an account of their defeats. They make gains—but finally they're defeated."

"Why defeated?"

"They can't get everyone. They didn't get me. And they never got the Hebrews. The Hebrews carried the message to the whole world. The realization of the danger. The two men on the bus. I think they understood. Had escaped, like I did." He clenched his fists. "I killed one of them. I made a mistake. I was afraid to take a chance."

The Commissioner nodded. "Yes, they undoubtedly had escaped, as you did. Freak accidents. But the rest of the town was firmly in control." He turned from the window. "Well, Mr. Loyce. You seem to have figured everything out."

"Not everything. The hanging man. The dead man hanging from the lamppost. I don't understand that. *Why?* Why did they deliberately hang him there?"

"That would seem simple." The Commissioner smiled faintly. "*Bait.*"

Loyce stiffened. His heart stopped beating. "Bait? What do you mean?"

"To draw you out. Make you declare yourself. So they'd know who was under control—and who had escaped."

Loyce recoiled with horror. "Then they *expected* failures! They anticipated—" He broke off. "They were ready with a trap."

"And you showed yourself. You reacted. You made yourself known." The Commissioner abruptly moved toward the door. "Come along, Loyce. There's a lot to do. We must get moving. There's no time to waste."

Loyce started slowly to his feet, numbed. "And the man. *Who was the man?* I never saw him before. He wasn't a local man. He was a stranger. All muddy and dirty, his face cut, slashed—"

There was a strange look on the Commissioner's face as he answered. "Maybe," he said softly, "you'll understand that, too. Come along with me, Mr. Loyce." He held the door open, his eyes gleaming. Loyce caught a glimpse of the street in front of the police station. Policemen, a platform of some sort. A telephone pole—and a rope! "Right

this way," the Commissioner said, smiling coldly.

As the sun set, the vice-president of the Oak Grove Merchants' Bank came up out of the vault, threw the heavy time locks, put on his hat and coat, and hurried outside onto the sidewalk. Only a few people were there, hurrying home to dinner.

"Good night," the guard said, locking the door after him.

"Good night," Clarence Mason murmured. He started along the street toward his car. He was tired. He had been working all day down in the vault, examining the lay-out of the safety deposit boxes to see if there was room for another tier. He was glad to be finished.

At the corner he halted. The street lights had not yet come on. The street was dim. Everything was vague. He looked around—and froze.

From the telephone pole in front of the police station, something large and shapeless hung. It moved a little with the wind.

What the hell was it?

Mason approached it warily. He wanted to get home. He was tired and hungry. He thought of his wife, his kids, a hot meal on the dinner table. But there was something about the dark bundle, something ominous and ugly. The light was bad; he couldn't tell what it was. Yet it drew him on, made him move closer for a better look. The shapeless thing made him uneasy. He was frightened by it. Frightened—and fascinated.

And the strange part was that nobody else seemed to notice it.

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SEA STORIES

In the first issue: MR. MIDSHIPMAN HORNBLOWER by C. S. Forester. Other great sea stories and articles by *Jack London, Fletcher Pratt, M. E. Chaber* and others.

DOUBLE TAKE

BY KEN WINNEY

They were called the *double-takes* and the *horrid-torrids*, the whole country went mad for them. They were more than plain motion pictures—they were a new way of looking at things.

Paul made good in Hollywood, all right, but not the way many people predicted. I wish the bastard *had* turned actor. He could have easily enough. The 1957 trend to picture heroes was back on the pale, frail, mother-me-baby cycle, and Paul Conrad's tall slenderness fit the casting specifications to the droop of a pathetic shoulder.

His deep eyes and pallid brow had every female on the set quivering for one of the rare glimpses of him. Glimpses were rare, because when he came to me out of Cal-Tech as a stereophysicist he buried himself in the camera-sound lab and wouldn't even come out for lunch.

We men were interested in Paul, too. I was technical director at Medoc Studios, and I hired him because he claimed to have a patent on a special lens that solved the only remaining problem we had before launching a colossal new projection technique. The industry needed something to drag itself out of its latest slump. The novelty was worn off the tri-di and stereo projections that hit so hard in 1953, and now television was pulling theater box-office out by its screaming roots again.

Paul was such a shy guy, I thought, that I had to coddle him and make much over him just to be safe. I passed the word on to all the important people on the lot to do likewise. We didn't want this cookie leaving us for *any* reason.

He didn't take to the assortment of glamor girls that I introduced to him, and this worried me. If some other studio got to him with the right babe—well, it was a chance I couldn't take. So I went all out. I persuaded Gloria Breen to befriend Paul. This was a rough decision

for me, because I was crazy about her.

She was a starlet who was graduating fast. She was so beautiful and talented that she didn't have to accept dates from producers to get parts, which is real talent even in Hollywood. In fact so far I was the only guy in the studio she'd even had lunch with, and I figured I was on the way in with her at the time I got this damned fool notion of hanging her on Paul as a company anchor.

I introduced them at the cafeteria, and that was the last time I had her with me. From then on they went out together almost every night. At the spots she would fend off the agents, predatory females and rival casting directors who stared at Paul hungrily from every corner. And Paul would sit there and talk with her.

Talk, talk, talk. That's all they did. Never even held hands. Hopper couldn't make much out of it, but she said whatever was going on it couldn't happen to a couple of nicer people.

Soon everyone wondered why they didn't get married. Oh, everybody was so happy for them, the shy inventor and the ambitious young actress. And I couldn't complain, because Gloria was only doing the job I asked her to.

Then I started getting uneasy about Paul on another score. His invention was the McCoy, and soon I didn't have to go around getting people to be nice to him. Our new secret process was mostly my idea, but it was beginning to appear that it was all Paul's baby. I had planned to make Paul my first assistant when I thought the front office would hold still for it, so it was a little shock when *they* told *me* to promote him. They intimated I was trying to hide his light under a bushel.

Well, we shot that first picture under tight wraps, and by the time the preview was ready, tension was so great around town that nobody lesser than a director, first vice-president or an arrived star could get a ticket to Grauman's for that night.

It was a flesh-potty little picture done on a B budget which we spent mainly on exotic lounging pajamas and interestingly designed chaise lounges. The critics shook their heads on the way in when we handed them spectacles in the foyer. I stood by and listened to their remarks.

"I thought Polaroids went out two years ago."

"This is new? Nuts, I knew Medoc was bluffing!"

"Like I was saying at Rotary this noon, pictures gotta go for-

ward or they go backwards. Medoc's slipping."

But Alf Moccho, president of Medoc, stood at the door and beamed, insisting that each couple get the right glasses. "Pink rims for the little girls, blue for the little boys," he repeated over and over with a smugness that stank of confidence.

We had the ushers double-check as they seated the patrons to be sure the men and women had the right color goggles.

Two hours later I wiped the sweat off my face and watched our distinguished audience do the same. They were bright-eyed and enthusiastic, but none stopped to fill out the audience-reaction cards. A few ducked their heads together to exchange remarks. I managed to catch a few of the whispers.

"Not much plot, but my God, what characterization!"

"Well, that *was* something!"

"Incredible! I had her on my lap!"

"Why, darling, when he leaned over me I thought I'd faint!"

Gloria came out on Paul's arm. I stuck out my hand to him expecting to exchange congratulations. They brushed by me with little nods like I was the doorman. I almost clobbered the sob right there and then. If I had I would have been better off. At least I would have made the morning editions.

As it happened, our little bomb exploded the headlines, all right, but whose picture and whose name got the credit?

A dozen columnists ran interviews under Paul's quotes. They were his usual stuffy, reserved line of guff. So reserved that he forgot to mention me.

Then it came to big stupid me. He wasn't shy at all. I had been trying to build up the most egotistical slob in the colony. And all the time he was slipping the knife to me so gently I never felt it.

His steel got into my guts but good that same day. When I showed up for a scheduled victory conference after lunch he hailed me with a small, generous smile and turned to the gathered officials. "I want you to know, gentlemen, that I am grateful for this appointment, but I accept only on the stipulation that you allow me to keep Jake, here, as my assistant."

That's right. He had my girl. Now he had my job. And he was insisting that I take his old job. I've done a little acting in my time, and I managed to paste a big, wet smile on my face and make like the honor was overwhelming.

It wasn't easy to get to a guy whose success depended upon an

invention. Not only did he have a top salary—my salary—but within six months every studio in town was paying him a licensing fee to use his special lens. It's hard to undermine a man with a million dollars in the bank. I needed a break, and I finally got it.

Paul and Gloria were still inseparable. They were addicts for the "double-takes." They were called this because our new technique consisted of filming our pictures twice: once from the point of view of the heroine, through whose eyes the lady customers enjoyed the picture, and then again through the hero's eyes. The men never saw the hero, just the heroine as he leaned over to kiss her, etc. Likewise, the ladies *lived* the part of the female lead. The two pictures, projected simultaneously, were separated for customers of the proper sex by the pink and blue-rimmed polarized spectacles.

Without the restriction of having to satisfy both sexes with the same point of view, our producers went wild with their scenarios. As Fiddler put it, they leaned over forward on the love scenes. Another critic put it, "Why get married?"

Everybody liked them.

Well, as I said, Paul and Gloria were two of the best customers in town for the "horrid-torrids." So I wasn't too amazed to see them sit down in front of me one night for a repeat showing of "Come With Me." It was dark, and I leaned forward to make sure it was them, but they didn't notice me. I leaned forward just in time to catch them—

—holding hands? Playing footsie or something? Sniffing heroin? No, Hedda. *They were trading spectacles.*

COMING UP . . .

A line-up of great stories including the conclusion of C. M. Kornbluth's THE SYNDIC. As you have probably noticed this is running as a two part serial. There have been a number of letters complaining about extra-long serials; therefore we are putting a maximum of two parts on any story. Let us know how you feel about it.

Kendall Foster Crossen makes his first appearence in SFA with SIMILIA SIMILIBUS CURANTOR. The problem: what does a peaceful culture do when it is contacted by an aggressive, war-like culture? The answer will surprise you.

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ground

BY HAL CLEMENT

They were inside the sun, in a temperature of 900 Kelvin. With the refrigerators out there was only one wild chance to pull through.

The little ship plunged into the star.

If anyone had asked Jack Elder to justify his uneasiness, he could not have obliged. He might even have gone so far as to deny any such feeling; but he would not have been speaking the truth. He had every confidence in the refrigerators of the *Wraith*, untried as they were; he had helped design them; but the phrase, "Inside a star," which he had used so casually in New York a few short weeks ago, now seemed to carry a more tangible—and deadly—implication.

Admittedly, the words had been a half truth, designed to impress an already awe-struck audience; the fringes of VV Cephei's far-flung atmosphere did technically constitute a portion of the giant sun, and he was certainly well within those fringes, but the environment was certainly not the raging hell of an atomic furnace which an unwary listener to his words might have been led to suppose. There was actually solid matter outside the spherical hull of the tiny interstellar traveler.

Elder sneaked a glance at the other men in the small cabin. Dressler, who had collaborated with him in the design of the heat-distributor, was looking at the recording dials pertaining to the device with every appearance of satisfaction. Snell, the astrophysicist, was sitting before the control board of his weird mass spectrograph that was mounted outside the hull, and periodically working knobs and switches that changed plates and altered the sensitivity regions of the device. He had some abstruse

theory of isotope distribution in stellar atmospheres, and had come with the *Wraith* on her own test run solely to get his own data.

Calloway, the pilot, had no regular duties while the ship was in free fall. He was engaged in a pastime which increased Elder's uneasiness almost to the breaking point. Hanging before one of the outside view screens—the *Wraith* had no direct vision ports, as the electronic heat distributor required an unbroken conductor for an outer surface—he was gazing with interest at the fuzzy red area that was the image of VV Cephei's core, some three-quarters of a billion miles distant. Elder gave the screen a single glance, and returned to his own work. The dials before him were in the green without exception, and formed a much more comforting view. If Calloway must look at stars, he thought, why not examine the primary of the VV Cephei system, in the opposite direction? True, the blue star was not much farther away than the core of the red giant, but at least the *Wraith* was comfortably outside it.

There was little speech. The ship was in free fall, in an orbit that would carry it through a "grazing" periastron point, about one hundred million miles inside the arbitrary fringe of the stellar atmosphere. It had a speed far in excess of the star's parabolic velocity at this distance—the orbit was practically a straight line, and they would be within the atmosphere only about three weeks—but it was considered adequate for a first test. The density of the atmosphere at this altitude was known to be neglible, and they expected no serious alteration of their path by friction with the particles of liquid and solid matter, and molecules of gas, which were known to be present.

Snell had assured them of this; there were certainly, he said, no solid or liquid objects to be encountered whose dimensions would much exceed a micron or two, and even those must be appallingly rare to permit such a low general density. Everyone was perfectly at ease, therefore, with the exception of Elder . . .

Until a note like the clanging of an immense gong brought the four men abruptly to an erect attitude, to hang poised for seconds in startled silence as the metallic echoes reverberated through the spherical hull and gradually died away.

"Meteor!" gasped Calloway as he leaped for his controls.

"Nonsense!" snapped the astronomer. "There could be no

possible stable orbit in a resisting medium, even one as tenuous as this. Besides we weren't hit hard—the hull seems to be intact."

"The Earth's atmosphere is a resisting medium, and lots of meteors enter it. This one may have come from outside, and have nearly matched our velocity. I'll admit there is no danger, but what else—" He was interrupted.

"Open your lock! Open your lock!" It was a metallic voice that belonged to none of them, and was felt as much as heard. The pilot recognized its source, turned to his lock switches with an expression of relief. "Someone has tied up to us with a magnetic grapple," he said as he opened the outer door, "he's talking to us with a rescue amplifier that uses our own hull as a diaphragm."

Elder and Dressler uttered wordless cries as the meaning of the pilot's words penetrated, and leaped to their control panels. Their refrigerator used an electronic equivalent of the expanding gas cycle heat absorber that had served in household refrigerators for a good many centuries; and in the present state of development of the device an uninterrupted electronic current had to flow in the outer hull. The news that a magnet of considerable power was attached to the surface they had nursed so carefully did not make the inventors any happier. Dressler, after a glance at his meters, gave an agonized yell.

"What are the fools trying to do to us? The radiator dropped more than ninety per cent in output when they touched. And how did they get here, anyway? Nothing but our gadget could make a ship habitable for any length of time in this environment, and the only one in existence is right here!"

"It was, I will admit, an uncomfortable journey." The new voice caused them all to whirl toward the door of the passage that led to the air lock. The figure standing just inside the control room was obviously human, but that was all that could be said about him with any certainty. He was clad in a heavy space suit; the helmet was sealed, and the faceplate darkened sufficiently to prevent recognition of the occupant. He drifted further into the room as they stared, and half a dozen other men, similarly dressed, followed him. As the last one entered the room, Dressler found his tongue again.

"Are you aware that your grapple is seriously impairing the functioning of our refrigerator?" he spluttered. "We would

appreciate your casting off at once, before our hull temperature reaches an insupportable value. What do you want here, anyway?" Sudden realization hit him. "This test was supposed to be top secret."

"Some secrets are hard to keep," replied the first of the intruders. "It was hearing about the test that brought us here. We are highly interested in your refrigerator. You will oblige me by showing at once all the apparatus connected with it." His tone was a flat command; there was no suggestion of courtesy or of the slightest interest in Dressler's feelings. The inventor raised his eyebrows in astonishment.

"When tests are complete, we plan to return to Earth," he said loftily. "At that time, we will be prepared to listen to offers for the device. Until then, gentlemen, we would prefer to be alone. I will admit that no steps have been taken as yet to secure the necessary patent rights to our machine; I make no further apology for our attitude. I have already pointed out the damage being caused by your grapple, so I am sure you will kindly leave us and break your connection with our hull as soon as possible."

Elder, listening silently, was able to imagine an unpleasant smile on the stranger's face as he answered this speech.

"I am afraid you fail to understand me. I have no business interest in your invention—at least I have no intention of paying you for it. My purpose will perhaps be made clearer when I say that the last berth of my ship was on Sheliak Three." The ugly smile was more implicit than ever in his voice, as he saw by the reactions of the four listeners that his words had carried meaning. The Federation had made no particular secret of the fact that their patrols had, about a year since, discovered a Suzeraintist base of embarrassing strength on the planet mentioned, and that efforts to reduce it had been seriously hampered by the nearness of the great double primary Sheliak—otherwise known as Beta Lyrae. The Suzeraintists, fanatics, who believed only in violence and their socio-political theories, had been a thorn in the government's side for years.

"The discovery of our base, which you seem to recall, has not been fatal; but it is rather embarrassing. We had planned to move to another planetary system, though it would have been difficult to do so without being tracked, until we heard of the work on this new refrigeration

of yours. There are two planets closer to Sheliak than our own, and Three is already uncomfortably close for existing ships. I think you understand?"

He did, to Calloway, at least. The pilot realized instantly that the planned Suzeraintist retreat closer to the twin suns would be purposeless if the Federation also possessed the information regarding the new protective device; and with that fact grasped, the immediate intentions of the present individual could not be in serious doubt. Calloway had the lightning reactions needed by a space pilot, and his mind was working nearly as fast; in consequence, the pirate had hardly ceased to speak before one of his listeners had burst into frenzied action.

Kicking off from the control board behind, Calloway streaked across the room at the leader of the attackers. The latter swung up his armored arms defensively as the heel of the pilot's big hand came fiercely at his face plate; but the blow was a feint. The other hand streaked to the pirate's belt, and came away with the tiny flame tube that the other had been surprised into forgetting for one precious instant. With a maneuver similar to the pivot parry of the swimming life saver, Calloway continued past his antagonist, turning as he did so, and discharged the weapon against his armor at a range of a few inches.

Fortunately for both, the weapon was set to low power. In the instant he was able to hold it on the target, the stream of flame heated the armor sufficiently to bring a howl of agony from its occupant—and the reflected heat blistered badly the hand holding the flame tube. For just that instant he held it; then the pirate's followers were on him, and had wrenched the weapon from his grasp. Calloway continued fighting, falling back on his heavy boots as the only lethal devices left to him. About this time the three scientists recovered their wits sufficiently to move; but two of the armored intruders detached themselves from the melee around the pilot and covered them with flame tubes.

Unarmed and unarmored as he was, it took several minutes to subdue the pilot. For some reasons the pirates made no attempt to burn him, and it was not until one of them resorted to his own tactics and sent a metal-shod foot slamming against his skull that the fight ceased. Calloway relaxed in the grip of two of the pirates, blood streaming from temple and cheek where the metal boot had

struck; and the leader of the attackers hung before him, the pain of his burn reflected in the snarl with which he spoke.

"I was going to give you a clean death before we left, it is necessary that you do not pass on any embarrassing knowledge. Now I'm going to leave you alive—and wreck your drive and communicators. The black body temperature here is nine hundred Kelvin, and your hull is polished so your equilibrium temperature is a good deal higher. You can sit here and watch it climb!" He turned away, cringing a little as his scorched body came in contact with the rough lining of his armor, and beckoned to one of the men in charge of the scientists. "Bring one of those fellows along. We'll collect the refrigerator apparatus. Len, you will get any explanations as we take it out. You," he addressed Elder harshly, "will answer his questions. If we have to ask any of the others, you won't hear his answer whether he does or not. Do you follow me?" Elder indicated his complete understanding, and went along at a gesture from the weapon of his guard. The other Suzeraintists followed, except two who remained with the prisoners in the control room.

Elder's will to resist, if it had ever been strong, was now completely paralyzed. He was not a man of violence or even of action, and would have been the first to admit the fact. He answered the questions of the Suzeraintist technician without hesitation or attempt at deception—it was quickly evident, anyway, that the fellow was probably too good to be easily fooled. He grasped the principles of the refrigerator very quickly, and informed his chief that it would not be necessary to carry away all the apparatus; only certain key parts, which he indicated. The leader was pleased, and the others still more so, since their labor was lightened thereby. Suddenly, however, the technician turned to Elder.

"How about that junk that was mounted just outside the air lock?" he asked. "I didn't look it over closely, but I figured it was part of the equipment. It was insulated from the hull, I noticed."

"That was not our stuff," replied the inventor. "It's Snell's mass spectrograph. The big disc which is probably bothering you is the cathode—it ionizes the particles outside of the hull, and the ring anode around the admission slit drags them in. He has another electric system to control their speed, and—"

"All right; we don't want it, and you can't hurt us with it.

You can't do much with a cathode gun unless your target's grounded." The technician turned back to the job of dismantling one of Elder's pet machines.

By the time the intruders had finished their work, the atmosphere in the *Wraith* was noticeably warmer—not actually hot, but anyone with a fair imagination could picture what was coming. Inventors have good imaginations as a rule, and even astronomers at times.

Elder had been returned to the group of prisoners in the control room while the last of the equipment was piled together in the air lock. Then two of the Suzeraintists began carrying it to their own ship, which none of the prisoners had yet seen, but which was arousing lively curiosity in the minds of two of them; and the leader returned to the control room. He could not have been seriously burned, for his activity had not been very noticeably impaired, but he was evidently suffering considerably; and Calloway more than expected the Suzeraintists had no one on board with enough medical training to treat a second degree burn. The prospect of nursing a collection of blisters across two or three thousand light years of space was probably bothering the fellow fully as much as his present discomfort. Something certainly was making him unhappy.

He entered the room, pushed off from the doorway, and brought himself to a halt against the bulkhead a few feet from the pilot, at whom he gazed for several minutes. At last he spoke.

"I'm a little undecided about you," he said. "I can't quite make up my mind whether to leave you here to die, like I said, or take you along and administer the proper punishment myself. It would be fun to watch. On the other hand, you'd be a lot safer here; and if anything were to happen to the equipment we borrowed between here and Sheliak, the council might not like it. So I think I'll leave you here." He struck out suddenly with his metal-gloved fist, catching Calloway on the side of the head. The wound made by the metal boot started bleeding again, and a number of angry red marks showed the plate-pattern of the space suit glove; but the pilot said nothing. The Suzeraintist commander laughed, and suddenly pushed off toward the door. "Come along, men. They're safe enough, and no one will have to worry about them for long. If all the stuff isn't over in our ship by now, we can give the rest a hand." At the

door he paused, looked back at the still motionless figures of his captives, and waved a hand mockingly. "Good-bye, sirs. I am sorry I could not do your bidding at once; but the magnetic interference of my grapple on your hull shall be removed as soon as Len tells me all our new equipment is stowed—and that nothing has been forgotten." The last phrase was uttered directly at Elder; evidently the pirate had also thought of the possibility of attempted deception or sabotage. With his final words, the fellow disappeared down the corridor to the air lock, and the prisoners felt free once more to move.

Dressler glided at once to the pilot.

"There isn't much first aid equipment on board," he said, "but there must be something. Come along to the cabins and we'll do what we can to that skull of yours." Calloway started to shake his head, and evidently found the motion too painful; he spoke instead.

"Never mind that; if we're to get out of this we can't waste time, and if we don't there's no point in patching me up. Are you sure all that crowd has left?"

"I think so; we can check easily enough. But what can we do? The refrigerator is gone, which means we can live only a dozen hours at the outside unless we can get out of here, and that fellow said he was going to wreck our drivers and communicators."

"Let's find out how much damage he did—*quickly;* we certainly can do nothing after they leave, and it shouldn't take them over half an hour to check and stow their loot." As he spoke, Calloway led the way down the corridor leading to the power room.

The exact amount of damage was not at once evident, for the various parts of the refrigerator had been installed in different places and their removal made things look worse than they really were. A close look, however, showed that the Suzeraintist had kept his word. The coils on each of the four second-order drive converters had been fused by a shot from a flame tube, the insulated case of the medium crystal had been broken open, and the crystal itself not only discharged but shattered to pieces.

The main phoenix converter was intact, and there was power enough available to boil a fair-sized lake out of its bed in a matter of seconds; but there was no way of applying the power to drive or communicate.

"I guess he just wanted to tantalize us," said Elder slowly.

"He only wrecked the stuff we could use; and he must have checked pretty thoroughly. Their technician asked about your mass spectrograph outside the lock, Snell, and did nothing about it when I told them what it was. He said a cathode gun couldn't be used against an ungrounded target, and anyway he must have seen that the leads to your cathode couldn't carry a very dangerous load." Calloway listened with growing eagerness to this tale; when Elder had finished, he spoke up.

"We needn't be limited to those conductors. There are yards of coaxial superconductor for converter repairs, and we could run a line to that cathode in a few minutes. We couldn't insulate it very well, but our suits are synthetic and would protect us from anything running through the hull—it would tend to run on the surface anyway. Let's go!"

The three scientists shook their heads negatively in unison, like three members of a team of singing waiters. Snell took it upon himself to explain matters to the pilot.

"I'm afraid, friend Calloway, it's not lack of power that renders a cathode beam ineffective in our situation. A cathode ray is simply a stream of electrons; impinging on a grounded target they would set up an electric current through it, which could be useful if the target is inhabited by men, whose tolerance to electricity is not exceptionally high. Unfortunately, that electron stream encountering a ship in space simply charges it up until the electrostatic field formed is strong enough to deflect the beam. The stronger the beam, the stronger the field; the weapon provides its own defense."

"But it's something to try; can you think of anything better?" asked the pilot desperately. "Maybe if we send a heavy enough beam across, the current flowing around their hull to equalize its potential would be strong enough to get them. Isn't there a chance?" The heads of Elder and Dressler again oscillated dismally from side to side, and Snell's started to share the motion; but suddenly the astronomer altered the plane of vibration of his skull ninety degrees, and said, "I'll help you if you want to try it. As you say, it's something to do; and also as you say—there might be a chance. Come on; if there is any good to be gotten from this, it will have to be done quickly."

Snell and the pilot made for the spare-part cabinets along the walls of the power room, and began to string the two-inch-

thick strand of Fleming alloy from the leads of the phoenix converter toward the air lock. It would not be necessary to run it through the lock or the hull itself; the mass spectrograph was mounted in a block of insulating synthetic set directly in the hull, and access could be had to the instrument from within the ship. The other two men did nothing; they appeared to have given up all hope, if men can really be said to surrender all traces of that emotion. They were not bereft of reason, however; and Elder moved rapidly enough when Snell addressed him.

"Reg, you might jump up to the control room and tell us how far away that other ship is, and whether he's right in front of the air lock. He should be—he must have tied on there, and I don't suppose he's cast off yet."

Elder went; not only in response to the request, but on his own account. Meaningless as the answer would shortly be, he wondered how the Suzeraintist vessel had protected itself this far inside VV Cephei's atmosphere without the refrigerator they had come to steal. The screens were still working, and he was able to examine the ship closely.

The protection was evident. The ship was a sphere like their own, and only a little larger. One side was brightly polished, silvery metal, and that hemisphere was turned to face the crimson heart of the giant sun; the other was black, to radiate off as much heat as possible. It was a standard system on space craft which were called upon to approach stars at all closely, and its effectiveness did not approach that of the Elder-Dressler device. That ship must be quite uncomfortable by this time; that might have been why the Suzeraintists were wearing space suits. An evacuated hull would have been additional protection —for a time.

Elder remembered the errand on which he had been sent, noted that the other ship was still directly opposite their air lock, about two hundred yards away, and that the line of the magnetic grapple still extended across the intervening space. He returned to the power room with the information, and met Snell and Calloway in the corridor, removing the wall panel that exposed the back of the mass spectrograph. It took them only a few moments to complete this task, and the pilot at once set to work joining the cable to the silver disc that marked the rear of the heavy cathode. This did not take long either, as he had a

molar diffusion welder with a head set for the Fleming alloy.

While this work was going on, Elder was sent back to the control room to keep an eye on the pirate vessel. Dressler was still in the power room; he had been put to work checking the phoenix converter for damage that the first inspection might have failed to disclose.

The entire job took little time; heavy as it would have been on a major planet, the Fleming cable was easy enough to manipulate in free fall, and there certainly was no great complexity to the circuit being set up. Twenty minutes from the time the outer air lock door had closed behind the pirates, everything was ready. By this time even the two inventors had caught the fire of enthusiasm and were watching eagerly for the circuit to be closed—if it could be. It was Calloway who had to restrain the general enthusiasm—probably because he had never considered the attempt anything but a forlorn hope. He warned them of the small chance of success as they all glided from the corridor where the welding had just been finished to the control room, where he at once sought the pilot board from which he could handle all the power developed in the room below. Elder returned to the screen—his watch had been interrupted as he heard them approach—and at once gave an exclamation of alarm.

"They've cast off!" he called. "The grapple is being drawn back, and their air lock is closed." Calloway promptly craned his neck to view the plate for himself, and Snell moved over beside Elder. The astronomer nodded at what he saw.

"The grapple is about half way between the ships now, Calloway," he said quietly. "I'd advise letting go as soon as you can; I doubt if they'll hang around long after the cable is reeled in." Calloway's reply was equally quiet.

"The switch is closed."

Four pairs of ears strained for a nonexistent sound, and four pairs of eyes sought the screen, which still showed the enemy sphere hanging unharmed beside them. Neither eyes nor ears caught any sign of the terrific load that was being slammed into space from the silver disc beside their air lock.

"We're in an atmosphere," said Calloway suddenly. "Wouldn't that ground our charge?"

"You could stuff radio tubes with this atmosphere and find them working nicely," said the astronomer briefly. "The only difference between this atmosphere and empty space is the

factor I used to tell you when we were in it—*Holy Smoke, why didn't I think of that!*"

His companions had no time to ask for an elucidation of this remark. On the heels of the astrophysicist's words, the eyes fixed on the viewplate were abruptly dazzled by a flare of yellow-green light that suddenly erupted in front of the image of the other ship. Calloway, whose eyes were by far the fastest, was sure it had jetted originally from the end of the grapple cable, of which a few yards had been still projecting; but now there was no way to be sure. The flare was not just a spark; it continued, the automatic safety controls on the screen cutting down the brilliancy of the image so that nothing else could be seen. Calloway made a movement to open the switch, and was stopped at once by Snell.

"Leave it on!" exclaimed the astronomer. "Leave it on until we touch! We have no drive, remember!" The pilot obeyed, only half understanding what went on. He let the power run for nearly five minutes, and finally cut it off when Snell signaled him to do so. The plate instantly cleared.

The other sphere was a scant fifty yards away, and visibly drawing closer. An area eight or ten yards across, centered at the spot where the magnetic grapple had been projected, was glowing a fierce white; and a wave of heat from the corridor where the cathode was mounted caused the men to realize that their own hull could be in little better condition. Investigation showed, however, that only the anode of the mass spectrograph had suffered seriously—the insulating block in which the device was mounted had held up very well. Snell's instrument, however, was a hopeless ruin.

There was no sign of activity on the other ship. Calloway and Snell donned space suits and went across, gaining access through the lock on the further side. They found three charred bodies in the air lock toward the *Wraith*, four rigid forms in the control room, and a single living pirate in one of the bunks who was just recovering the use of his limbs after a heavy electric shock. He was quickly disarmed and locked in his cabin; and Calloway immediately attached grapples to the *Wraith* and began accelerating as hard as he dared away from the core of VV Cephei.

Three hours later, when they had attained open space and made a short second-order leap to safety, the others joined them in the Suzeraintist ship. Elder

and Dressler had a question to ask.

"Snell, just what closed that circuit? Cal's idea of knocking them out before the hull loaded up was nonsense from the first; and you said that there was practically no matter outside our hull to conduct electricity. Anyway, gases and dust particles are rotten conductors. You seemed to expect something just before things let go; what was it?" The astronomer smiled.

"I should have thought of it sooner. Of course, a complete circuit was what we needed. That length of cable projecting toward our hull helped a lot—don't jump on me, I know it wasn't enough by itself, but it helped, as I say. The real deciding factor was *that*." He pointed through a port in the control room wall. The others stared, and said nothing. Beyond the transparent window was the dazzling blue-white glare of a sun, a sun near enough to show a perceptible disc. It hung close beside the foggy red bubble that was the red giant they had just left. Snell saw the uncomprehending expressions on the three faces, and smiled again.

"Gentlemen, meet VV Cephei—the *primary* of the system we have just left. It is the one you see from Earth with a telescope. It's fainter and less massive, but far more voluminous, companion occupies a large fraction of the space between, so that one surface is comparatively close to the primary—a primary far brighter than Sol, and a class B sun, which means lots and lots of ultra-violet radiation"—he smiled faintly once more as Elder's whistle of comprehension reached his ears—"which in turn means a heavily ionized layer in the region of the companion's atmosphere nearest the primary. There are other such systems—Epsilon and Zeta Aurigae, to name two. I will admit that the actual ion density is very small, but coupled with the local field intensity caused by the projecting cable it was enough to start things, and the vapor produced when the cable boiled away undoubtedly helped. Is it clear enough?"

"No," said Calloway. "That current was running through both ships. Why didn't it get us? We weren't protected any more than they."

"Not through both ships. Through their ship, and through our Fleming cable, which is a superconductor. Their entire hull had a far higher resistance than our cable, so in their ship the current went through men where it could—the fellow in the bed, luckily for him, was probably touching metal at only one

spot. The others were up and around, and even if they didn't close a circuit with their bodies in the first instant, I am sure none of them would have had self-control enough to stand still when he found himself alive.

"And that, I think, is that. I want to go back to Earth and get a new spectrograph. I'll have to do all my work over again, blast it; I forgot to remove my plates from the machine before we closed the circuit."

THE WRIST-RADIO HAS ARRIVED

It may not be worn on the wrist, but there is a definite resemblance between the Page-ette or Aircall (the name varies in different locations) and that little marvel of the comic strips, Dick Tracy's Two-way Wrist Radio. This gadget would have been considered a weirdy right out of science fiction, a few years back, now it is as commonplace as the two-way car telephone.

Most of the large cities have this service, their ad is usually on the back of the phone book. You pay between $12 and $20 a month and receive a completely self contained, 6-oz. receiver. Anywhere within a 25 mile radius you can press the button and hear a series of three numeral code groups, repeated every minute. If you hear your number, say 321, you phone the service and get the message. This is a real boon to doctors, lawyers and others who must be ready for emergencies at any hour of the day or night.

A *real* two-way pocket radio has been constructed by a government research laboratory. It is a masterpiece of minute construction—printed circuits, acorn tubes and transistors are used in its construction. The entire transmitter-receiver fits into a plastic case the size of a pack of cigarettes! Production has not been started yet, but it was designed for use by law enforcement officers.

THE CHART ROOM

Where Readers Help Us Plot Our Orbits

We were hoping to revive The Chart Room *with this issue, but we ran into one snag. No letters. If you stop to consider that the one essential ingredient a letter column cannot do without is letters, you will understand why this department is so short.*

However we did receive one letter. It is important enough, we think, to print it in its entirety. The Fanvets have done a fine job in sending reading matter to the armed forces, they deserve to be supported. They don't expect any magazines from the completists, but hope to get a good response from other readers.

Now about those letters . . . It has been said that science fiction readers will write letters in their sleep. (We've seen some that looked as if they had been written that way.) If this is true and there are any number of people poised over typewriters—we would like to see some of those letters. We'll print any and all that exceed a basic minimum in literacy and would be of interest to other readers.

And don't forget to rate the stories, this is the best way of making sure that you will see the kind of fiction you like in SFA.

James V. Taurasi
137-03 32nd Avenue
Flushing 54, New York

Dear Harry:

About the Fanvets, here are the details.

Ray Van Houten and I met in La Havre in mid 1945 (we had known each other for years before the war and had worked together on numerous science fiction projects) and found that both of us were not getting any s-f to read. In our part of France or in England where Ray had been for a while, there was NO s-f. We decided then and

there, that after the war was over and we got back home we'd start the Fantasy Veterans Association, with the aim that in case of another war, the organization would see to it that all readers of s-f in the Armed Forces overseas would get reading material.

I came home in 1946, Ray stayed over as a civilian employee of the Army and didn't get home until 1947. In 1948 we officially began the formation of the organization with no real hurry to get it going. By 1950 we had quite a few members and a set of plans if and when a war should start (tho we didn't expect one for years, if not at all). When the Korean war began we put our plans into effect; had a constitution written and accepted and began the publication of a regular organ to be given free to the members and all interested friends and donors.

At the present time we mail out on an average of 400 mags a month (these go to anyone in the Armed Forces overseas whether he's a member or not).

Right now we're very short of current magazines. We have a supply of 200 mags for July (half of the required number) and none on hand for August.

Current s-f, fantasy and weird magazines, books etc. should be mailed to Ray Van Houten, 26 20th Ave., Paterson 3, New Jersey.

All money donations (and we need this too as it costs us approx. $25 a month in stamps to mail the mags out) should be sent to me.

The magazines are actually wrapped and mailed overseas by Bob Adeler, our hard working Special Service Officer.

We can actually use any s-f/fantasy mag, books or comics.

Anything sent in will be deeply appreciated. Any s-f readers who were in the Armed Forces are eligible to sign up and join.

as ever,
JIMMY

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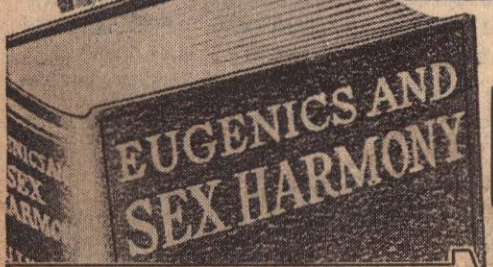

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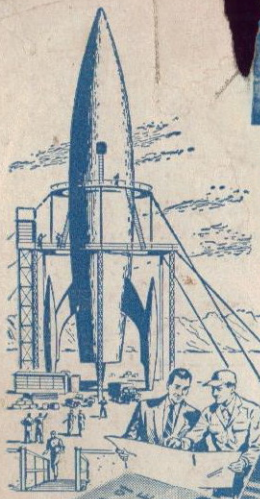

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