SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURES

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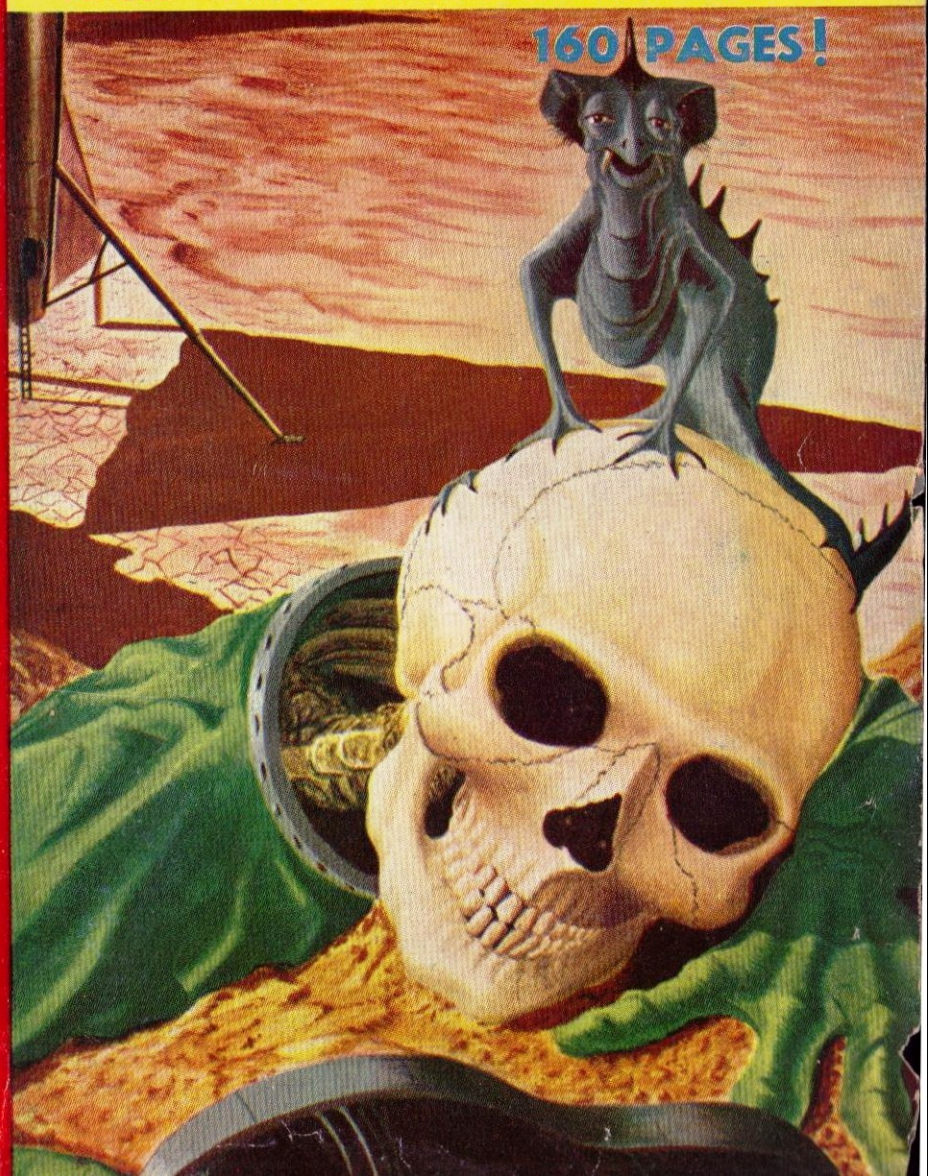

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BENJAMIN FRANKLIN (A Rosicrucian)

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WHAT IS A MAGAZINE?

A magazine, any magazine, is only two things. Neither one of the two can be more important than the other since they cannot exist separately. They are, listed in the order of original occurence, the contents and the readers.

At this point I hear a muffled yawn and the bored tones of "So *what*?" So everything. An issue of a magazine is put together with the readers in mind. The editor visualizes a large, amorphous group —the potential readers of his magazine, TWO-FISTED MARTIAN TALES. He selects stories that he thinks will interest these readers. If his thinking is correct the copies sell like Marilyn Monroe calendars and all concerned will be extremely happy. If the editor didn't care what he put in the magazine, or if he did care and paid a maximum of one-eighth cent a word, or if he did any of the other 5000 and one things that scare away readers—then the magazine is a guaranteed flop.

Finding out what the readers like is another problem altogether. They can be plied with liquor at conventions and skilfully pumped for opinions. Sales figures can be gone over with a slide rule in an attempt to correlate authors, stories and types of stories with percentages. There is of course, also, the both damned and praised letters from the readers.

A number of letters have arrived during the past weeks, some either too long or too late to get into *The Chart Room*. Opinions on stories differed, but *all* the readers had the same opinion about *Fanmag*—a resounding *yes* vote. With this kind of encouragement *Fanmag* will continue as a regular feature.

William Tenn's article in this issue is something else we are looking forward to receiving comment about. In a way this article is kind of a groundbreaker: to date the articles in S-F magazines have concerned themselves with science—this one very positively doesn't.

It mainly concerns itself with the art of writing science-fiction, a too long neglected topic. There is a very sound reason why a man like E. M. Forster can write a story he thinks is a parody of S-F and it is accepted as a perfect example of the craft. Mr. Forster is a writer first, then an S-F writer, the horse before the cart in its proper place. The dusty attic (and parlor) of science-fiction is more than overcrowded with cart-first writers who couldn't earn coffee and cakes if they had to write in other than this field.

That Mr. Tenn knows his way about in S-F is a fact undeniable. Recently his anthology, *Children Of Wonder,* has made a sizable dent in the literary world. (Including a quote from Mr. Tenn's introduction in J. Donald Adams' column *Treasure Chest,* in *The New York Times Book Review*. This column is filled with names like Churchill, Hemingway, Hilton, etc., this is the first time it has been cracked by any of the modern S-F writers.) About a year ago, the noted literary critic, Clifton Fadiman, discussing science-fiction in the book department of *Holiday Magazine,* referred to William Tenn's well-known "Child's Play" as "a masterpiece of its kind." This was the same story that the ultra-sophisticated *New Yorker* once singled out for a special complimentary mention, along with one by Gerald Heard. Since William Tenn's abilities are recognized by all the parties concerned he seems to be the logical person to deal with this problem.

If you don't think there is a problem just give your reasons in a short letter of 500,000 words or more and send it in. You will receive a life-time subscription to TWO-FISTED MARTIAN TALES by return mail.

HARRY HARRISON

Illustrated by Ebel

PLAGUE

BY

KEN CROSSEN

It takes fire to fight fire, but true as this old axiom is, it is also true that he who lives by the sword shall die by the sword. The men of the space fleet of the Hundred Worlds were finding that out. They had adapted the war techniques of the invaders in order to defeat them, they were soon to find out the awful price that they had to pay for this victory.

Eril of Acromo, Liege of the Star Fleet and Temporary Suzerain of The Hundred Worlds Council, sat in his flagship awaiting the final battle of the Five-Years-War. Around him, in tear-drop formation, was the entire fleet of the Hundred Worlds. Far to the left twins suns, one a small white and the other a giant orange star, blazed down on the huge armada.

The light flooded through the transparent dome of the flagship adding copper tints to Eril's black skin. But it only sallowed the dark green cheeks of Brullo of Treema, Sub-Liege of the Star Fleet, who stood beside Eril.

For five long years the Hundred Worlds Council had fought the war with ordinary ships. Ships hastily constructed in the

Fifty-first Year of the Invasion, powered with atomic engines and armed with atomic cannons. Individually, they had been a match for the ships of the invader, but in terms of a fleet they had never caught up. In the fourth year of the war, they had unearthed Primitive Memory Banks of a later date on Capree. From the plans they found, the present fleet had been built far underground on that planet and not one ship had taken to the air until the entire fleet was built. Then they'd helped a spy to stumble on the plans of a secret fleet maneuver. The enemy must follow them.

In the excitement of the moment, Brullo forgot that Eril did not have the telepathic ability of the people of Treema. He thought his question and scowled when there was no answer. Then he remembered and a foolish but pleasant grin spread over his face.

"Will they come?" he asked anxiously. "Will they really come?"

"They'll come," Eril said. "They're as tired of the war as we are—for different reasons. They'll be here."

"But what if they sense a trap?"

"They won't," Eril said calmly. "This is just the sort of trap they would prepare for us, so they will never consider our using it. You should know their mentality even better than I, Brullo. It is unthinkable that you and I—a green man and a black man—could be so original as to copy their tricks."

Brullo grinned nervously. "When enough time has passed," he said wistfully, "I will think a song about this."

"Besides," continued Eril, finishing the one thought before he turned to another, "we sent two of your people out to where they could get a telepathic fix on them. They're coming with their entire fleet, convinced that they will wipe us out. They have closed so many traps like this one that they do not suspect we are deliberately imitating their victims."

As he spoke, Eril looked down at his uniform with distate. That too was made in the likeness of the uniforms worn by the Invaders. It was made of scarlet cloth, cut so as to show off Eril's broad shoulders and narrow waist. The markings of the Hundred Worlds and the twin-suns indicating his rank were in silver. A black-handled dagger swung from his waist. Silver slashes on his left sleeve indicated the five years of service as Liege. The medals across his chest were for the battles he'd led.

"Have they left Seeba yet?" Brullo asked.

"They have left *Denebola, Two,*" Eril said firmly.

Brullo's face flushed a darker green. "I forgot," he said.

"You must not forget," Eril said. A sweep of his arm indicated the medals on his own and Brullo's chests, the fleet, and the worlds about them. "That is the reason for all this. You must remember that the Invaders are coming from Denebola, Two—that you are a second-class citizen of Betelgeuse, One—that I am a second-class citizen of Acrux, Four. There is no Seeba, no Treema, no Acromo. You must remember that I am the Liege of the Star Fleet and Suzerain of the Hundred Worlds Council—with the power of life and death over even you, my second in command."

"Yes, Your Liege," Brullo said dryly.

"Better," Eril answered, nodding.

Eril himself needed no prodding to remember these things. Although they were part of the overall strategy which he had planned for the Council, none found them more distasteful than Eril. And he, more than the others, knew the need for the strategy. The value was twofold. The complete imitation of the Invaders, even down to accepting their names for the Worlds, served always to remind the people of the Hundred Worlds that they were threatened with enslavement. If a man could not call his world what he liked, then every time he spoke he must be aware of the ways which were forced upon him. But there was a second reason for the strategy. The Invaders came from a great distance and were inclined to regard the people of the Hundred Worlds as aliens, even those who were fashioned along the same lines as the Invaders. But the more the people of the Worlds aped the Invaders—the more they adopted the strange names, dressed in like uniforms, and covered their chests with silly pieces of metal—the more the Invaders would think them incapable of original thoughts or actions.

Eril remembered, almost too well, when the Invaders first appeared fifty-six years before. Their meteor-scarred ships had dropped from the skies over almost every planet in the Hundred Worlds. The Invaders had climbed from their ships and stalked over the planets. At first glance, they had seemed so little different from the people of the Hundred Worlds that almost no attention was paid to them.

Eril himself had taken only one casual glance when the first Invaders landed on Acromo—(he automatically corrected his thinking) on Acrux, Four. He'd noticed that the newcomers were of the same general build as himself, that they wore more clothes, that their skin was of a pinkish hue as though they were the result of mating between the people of Seeb—no, of Denebola, Two, and Antares, One. This had seemed strange, not because the Denebolans were white and the Antareans red, but because Antares was a member of the Hundred Worlds and Denebola was still in a stage of primitive culture where the two had nothing in common.

The ships too had seemed strange, but not too much so, for Eril knew that there were records showing that his people had once had a culture in which such vehicles were necessary. So he had thought no more about the Invaders, but had returned to his own thoughts.

All over the Hundred Worlds, the ships had landed and the pinkly-fleshed men had walked about, sniffing and staring. Later, they had converged on the three planets where the people had developed with a complete lack of color in their pigment. In all three planets, the culture was of a primitive stage, so that when Eril first heard of the move he thought the Invaders had merely sought their own cultural level.

Later, when he became aware of the values of the Invaders, Eril knew that the Hundred Worlds had what the strangers would have called a cooperative anarchy. The people on each of the Hundred Worlds cooperated when needed, but for the rest each man was within himself a free entity. The Hundred Worlds Council met only occasionally. As a result, since they were perfectly adapted to their own peaceful existence but not to the intent of the Invaders, several years went by before the people of the Worlds were aware of what was happening.

Eril now realized that the Invaders could never have understood why there was no resistance to them. It had been thousands of years since the Worlds had experienced anything like slavery, even the primitive cultures had left such things far behind. Their unawareness of what seemed a most obvious movement to the Invaders had been interpreted as submission. And there had been other things.

Language, for instance. When the people of the Worlds saw that the strangers couldn't or

wouldn't learn their language, they had acquired the new tongue. It had been easy—Eril had learned the new language in one day once he'd set his mind to it. And everyone of the Worlds learned the new language, partly because it was natural to acquire knowledge and partly because the strangers might sometime wish to communicate. In the same way, they accepted the fact that the strangers insisted on applying their own names to the planets of the Worlds.

And so the Invasion had begun. Eril remembered when the Invaders returned to his planet, bringing with them a number of men from Denebola, Two. They had set up machinery and began to dig into the ground. Eril knew the metal that was there in the ground—he'd often used it in forming some minor piece of art. Later, when he noticed that most of the work was being done by men of his own planet, he'd assumed that they were doing it of their own free will. He was a little surprised that they would spend so much time in fruitless exercise, but had dismissed it as some temporary foible.

He remembered the first time he'd gone to the Social House to find that the Invaders had partitioned it. The Invaders and the men from Denebola Two sat in one section. In the other were the men and women of Eril's planet and those who were visiting from other planets. Over that section was a sign—*FOR COLORED*—in the Invader's language, but at the time Eril had seen no connection between the sign and the colorful array of skins within the section. His first impression had been that the Invaders were sitting in a separate section so that their noise wouldn't interfere with the quieter social life of the Worlders.

Now, he knew that there had been a weak link in the culture of the Hundred Worlds—they had long forgotten that there were aggressive organisms in the universe. The very word had dropped from their language centuries before.

What was happening on Eril's home planet was being duplicated throughout the Hundred Worlds. Even so, it might have been much longer before they were aware of it if it had not been for the people of Betelgeuse I, II, III and IV (by rights, Treema, Treedor, Treela, and Treepi), who were the only telepathic race in the Worlds. The first awareness was passed from them.

The Hundred Worlds were being enslaved in more ways

than one. For centuries the Worlders had developed as individual artists, recognizing that each work of art was something which could be equaled but never duplicated—that each work of art contained something of its creator and was an unique experience to be shared but never copied. There were as many art forms as there were people in the Hundred Worlds.

But, slowly, the Invaders were changing this. They ranged through the Hundred Worlds, picking out certain artists and then duplicating their work by machines. Signboards appeared on the planets, cloud arrangements spelled out the names of products in the skies above them, and crude boxes appeared from which the voices of the Invaders shouted at the Worlders. Their very aggression began to persuade some of the Worlders to trade work or possessions for these duplicates.

Eril, himself, was known for his ability to rearrange things. It was a talent which all of his people possessed, but Eril had it to a higher degree.

The day the Invaders came for him, when the labor in the mines needed replenishing, Eril was busy fashioning a slender golden dancing girl from a pebble. He concentrated on the stone, not hearing the approaching steps, and the pebble slowly melted and reshaped itself.

"Hey," one Invader had shouted to another, "look what this one is doing. He's making some kind of a statue out of a rock without touching it."

"Okay," the other had shouted back. "Find out how he does it. Maybe it's something we can use. I'm going to look in those woods. I think I saw a couple of husky ones go in there."

Eril had finished the dancing girl and was staring at it, frowning. The shouts had disturbed his thoughts just enough so that the contours of the left breast did not match those of the right. He wanted to correct it, but the Invader had squatted down in front of him and was demanding attention.

"How'd you do that?" the Invader asked. He prodded the dancing girl with his finger and looked surprised. "Hey, that feels like gold."

"It is gold," Eril said.

"But a minute ago it was only a rock. What kind of a guy are you?"

"I am Eril of Acromo," Eril had answered with dignity.

"Okay. How did you do this?"

Eril had thought a moment until he was sure of the proper way to explain it in the language of the Invader. "It is simple," he said then. "I merely rear-

ranged the atoms, changing the structure and the number, as well as the mass of isotopes. It would have been better if you hadn't shouted."

"You mean you can do this with anything?"

Eril nodded.

"You can change any metal into another metal," the Invader persisted, "and into any shape you want to?"

Eril nodded again.

The Invader had picked up the dancing girl. "Could you change this into steel and make it come out a gun? Like this?" The Invader pulled the blaster from his holster.

Eril glanced at the object in the man's hand and saw that it was a simple design, with no lines of beauty. "I could," he said, "but I fail to see a reason for creating such an object."

"You're going to come in handy," the Invader said. There was a shrewd look in his eyes as he extended the dancing girl. "Let me see you turn this into a blaster."

"Why?" Eril asked.

"Because I told you to," the man said. His voice had grown harsher.

"No," Eril said. "It has no beauty. If you'd like something else—"

"Make a gun," the Invader said. He thrust the blaster into Eril's face. "Make a gun—or there'll be one less bum on this crummy planet."

Never before had Eril been threatened and never before had he been angry. Before he realized what the new sensation was, the anger had welled up within him and he had concentrated on the first thought that came into his mind. When he'd finished, the Invader still stood before him with drawn gun—constructed of pink-hued stone.

As a work of art, the new statue did not satisfy Eril and he realized that the other Invaders would be even less pleased than he was. Having been threatened once, he was aware of the potential threat of the others.

It was the first time he'd left his home planet in forty years, but he left quickly.

During the next year, Eril of Acromo wandered from planet to planet in the Hundred Worlds and everywhere he saw the same story. Because of the incident on his own planet, Eril was a wanted man and the Invaders had offered a reward for him. Once on Capree they'd almost got him. They might have succeeded if it hadn't been for the telepathic ability of a strange green from Treema who helped Eril to escape.

It was this Brullo, by then a friend, who accompanied Eril to a meeting of The Hundred Worlds Council a few months later. The Council met in the hollow artificial planetoid which swung in an orbit around the system of Sensa (known to the Invaders as Antares) and the Invaders were unaware that it was any more than the dead asteroid it seemed to be.

Eril gave the council the carefully documented report which he had been gathering for the past year. When he finished there was a terrible silence around the huge table. Finally Lonoha of Capree, Chairman of the Council, stood up at the far end of the table.

"Except for the degree of the subjection," she said, "you have told us nothing new, Eril of Acromo. We have all watched our finest work cheapened by the Invaders, we have watched our strongest men march into the mines never to return, and seen some of our most beautiful women carried off to a different sort of slavery. But for longer than we can remember we have lived as a peaceful people. War is a lost enterprise among the Worlders. What can we do?"

"Fight," cried Meeno of Sheela. "We all know how Eril of Acromo turned one of the Invaders into stone. It is an ability possessed by all of his people. Others of us have other gifts—abilities never dreamed of by the Invaders. We can fight with what we have."

Lonoha shook her head. "It would be suicide," she said. "Our abilities that could be used in fighting are only good when we are near the Invaders. They have weapons which can kill from great distances. They would merely withdraw and destroy us at the first sign of resistance. You know how they have kept guns trained on Eril's home planet for the past year even though they have no proof that others have the same power Eril displayed."

"Lonoha is right," Eril said slowly. He gazed gravely around the table. "I have given much thought to this and I tell you we can fight the Invasion in two ways—one our own, the other in the manner of the Invaders. First, we must all use the language of the Invaders—twenty-four hours a day. We must use their names for everything. No more Acromo; it must be called Acrux Four. And so it must be with everything. We must dress like the Invaders, act like them, so that everything we do will remind us that we are slaves and spur us on to throw off the yoke.

"Once upon a time, our more

primitive ancestors were warlike and fought battles. If legends are true, they possessed even greater weapons than those of the Invaders. The knowledge of those weapons and ships were buried in Memory Banks so long ago that we have no records of the locations of the Banks. But we must find them. We must build the ships and the weapons and we must learn to use them."

He sat down and waited. The discussion that followed was long and involved, but in the end they all reluctantly agreed that Eril was right. They had no other choice. Before they disbanded, they formed the first army that the Hundred Worlds had maintained in thousands of years. Eril of Acromo was appointed Liege of the Star Fleet, as it was called, and Temporary Suzerain of the Council. At his insistence, Brullo was made his second in command. And all of the Council agreed to help locate the Memory Banks.

During the following year, Eril remorselessly drove his companions. Primitive Memory Banks were unearthed which revealed how to build atomic-drive ships and crude energy weapons. Worlders were brought into concealed workshops and made to build them. The mistakes were many, but Eril would permit no easing of the relentless drive. And by the end of the year, a fleet of sorts was ready to take to the air.

Eril took the ragged Star Fleet up, leaving others behind to continue the search for more recent Memory Banks. For the next four years he carried on an interplanetary guerrilla warfare—he who had never heard of the word guerrilla and who a short time before had never thought of war. By the sheer force of his determination he made an army out of his band of free men; by the same determination he held his fleet together, hiding out between raids on the Invaders.

Then in the fourth year of the war, they had uncovered Memory Banks which gave up the secret of magnetic power. First they had constructed a magnetic machine which hollowed out great workshops far beneath the surface. There the Worlders constructed the new warships and the weapons which they knew to be superior to those of the Invaders. Only when an entire fleet had been built did Eril consent to put the new ships into use. Then he'd taken up his fleet, set his trap and waited.

Throughout the five thousand ships of the Star Fleet, the men were as nervous as Brullo. Only Eril, sitting with Brullo in the

Acrux IV, flagship of the fleet, was calm.

"Will they come?" Brullo asked for the third time.

"They're coming," Eril said and pointed. Brullo looked in the direction of Eril's finger and finally saw the flickering points of light far off in space.

It wasn't long before the Invaders were closer and it was obvious that this was their entire fleet. There were probably seven or eight thousand ships coming full blast at the Star Fleet.

Eril pressed the key that connected him with the commanders of his fleet. "Put the first plan into operation," he said softly.

Moving at only one-tenth their full speed, the ships of the Star Fleet began moving away as if running from the Invaders. Even so the Invaders had to push their ships to limit to catch up.

Watching from the flagship, Eril nodded with satisfaction as he saw the Invaders begin their maneuver.

"See," he said to Brullo. "They have always found this one method successful so they will not vary it. Their main force strikes us head on, while smaller body attempts to flank us."

He waited until the last possible moment, when the guns of the Invaders were already licking at his fleet, and then gave the next order. The ships of the Hundred Worlds suddenly went on full power, the head of the tear-drop formation splitting, half going to the left and half to the right. Out they spread like two gigantic whirlpools, sucking the Invaders in behind them.

Almost before anyone could realize what had happened, the two circles of the Star Fleet, one above the other, had closed and the full Invaders fleet was inside. There was a long moment when it seemed all the ships were hanging in space, then the Invaders formation fell apart as their ships began nosing out.

There was another command from Eril and then a sudden bursting of a great white light in the center, as though the very universe was splitting open. The heavy ships of the Star Fleet were tossed about like feathers in a wind as powerful forces spread out and beat against them.

When it was over there was not a single ship of the Invaders left in the sky. And not a ship of the Hundred Worlds had been lost.

There was grim satisfaction in the faces of all, but the deaths of the Invaders hung like

a pall over their heads. Eril gave his report to the Council a few hours later.

"We owe you much, Eril of Acru—Acromo," said Lonoha, stumbling over the familiar word which had been denied them for five years. "Now, we can dismantle our ships and our weapons and go back to the life we once knew."

Eril of Acromo, still wearing his scarlet uniform covered with the medals, had remained on his feet while Lonoha spoke. Now he shook his head.

"No," he said, "we must continue to fight."

"What?" The word was thrown at him from every side of the council table.

"The Invaders," Eril said coldly, "came here from somewhere. We know only the general direction, not from what star system. There must be more of their kind wherever that star system is. Sooner or later, they too will follow in this direction. There can be no peace for the Hundred Worlds until we have found them and destroyed them."

Once again the argument was long and passionate. But in the end, Eril won, as he knew he must. The following morning, the Star Fleet once more took off, this time into deep space.

For two years, Eril of Acromo led his fleet through the galaxy. On planet after planet they discovered the Invaders, and in every system where they were found they had enslaved the people of the system. From system to system, the Star Fleet fought its way and each time it left a system behind, it left a free people and the blackened remains of the Invaders.

After the tenth such battle, and when they were well over two hundred light years from home, Brullo entered the flagship to find Eril bent over a star map. He beckoned Brullo to join him.

"We have almost reached the end of the trail, Brullo," he said.

"I hope so," Brullo said fervently. "At times, it seems to me that we daily become more like the Invaders."

"We have enslaved none," Eril said grimly.

"No, but the evil of the Invaders was not just in their mastery," Brullo said. "It was more that they existed only by fighting, by the killing of others. Could that not now be said of us?"

"Never mind," said Eril, dismissing it. "At last, we managed to find the home of the Invaders. It lies there." He pointed to the map which showed a star surrounded by nine

planets. "Their home is on the third planet in that system and by now we have eliminated all but the fountainhead. Tomorrow we leave for that planet—and then our task will be over."

Two days later, the Star Fleet pulled out of its Drive as it neared the atmosphere of the planet which was its destination. Eril tried communicating with the planet but there were no answers to his repeated calls, even though they were made in the language of the Invaders. Finally, he sent a dozen scouting ships flashing down through the atmosphere.

They returned several hours later and one by one reported to Eril on the flagship. They had, between them, covered almost every part of the planet and nowhere had they seen a space fleet or anything which resembled weapons for defending the planet. When he'd received the last report, Eril ordered the fleet down.

"It may be a trap," said Brullo.

"Then we'll fight our way out of it," Eril said carelessly. "We have always beaten their best. There is nothing to fear."

It was mid-day when the great fleet dropped out of the clouds near to a large city. On Eril's orders, the bulk of the fleet remained poised above the city. The flagship, accompanied by a dozen escort cruisers, dropped down and landed at the edge of the city. The cruisers maneuvered until they formed a circle, with noses pointing out, around the flagship. Then they all waited.

Nothing happened. The observers reported to Eril that there was plenty of traffic past the spot where the ships sat—a fact which Eril could see for himself through the dome of his ship—but no one had tried to approach them, communicate with them, or perform any action that would indicate even interest in their presence.

After two hours of waiting, Eril ordered one regiment out of the ships in full dress. When they were assembled, Eril and Brullo went out to inspect them. Their scarlet and blue uniforms were flawless, the polished metal of their Magnetic Disruptors gleamed like mirrors

"Forward, march," Eril snapped. He and Brullo set off at the head of the regiment, their backs like ramrods, the years of conquering written in the granite lines of their faces.

At the edge of the highway, bordering the field on which the ships stood, Eril brought the regiment to a halt. The broad road in front of them was divided into three strips. On the

far side, gleaming stream-lined cars flashed by at great speed. In the center there was a moving strip on which people stood and were carried along. The near strip was filled with walkers. They were all, as near as Eril could see, the counterparts of the Invaders who had come to the Hundred Worlds.

But all of them, riders, gliders and walkers, went by without so much as a glance at the regiment.

Puzzled, Eril finally pointed a finger at a man who was walking by. "Stop," he ordered. "I want to talk to you."

The man walked on by, nothing indicating that he'd even heard the command.

Eril looked around and indicated one of the soldiers behind him. "Stop one of them," he said.

The soldier leaped forward eagerly and stood in the path of an elderly man who walked on the near strip of the road. The man stopped when he reached the soldier, but otherwise did not react.

"Eril of Acromo," the soldier said in a ringing voice, "Liege of the Star Fleet and Temporary Suzerain of the Hundred Worlds Council would speak with you."

The man continued to gaze off in the distance as if lost in his own thoughts.

"Bring him here," Eril ordered.

The soldier grasped the man roughly by the arm and propelled him toward Eril. There was no resistance, but somehow the man managed to give the impression that this too was something which he was doing of his own accord and that it had nothing to do with the presence of the soldiers.

"Where is your leader?" Eril asked. There was no answer.

Angered, Eril glanced around. There were a number of other people passing by, all of them within earshot. Eril gestured toward the one man and said to the soldier: "Arrest him and take him to the ships. We'll find a way of making him talk."

The soldier pulled the man roughly away, while Eril watched the other people. No one so much as looked at the man in the soldier's grasp.

"All right," Eril called harshly. "Let him go."

As the soldier released him, the man turned and went back to the road. Then he continued walking as though nothing had happened.

"Back to the ships," Eril ordered. When the men had returned to their quarters, Eril and Brullo went back to the flag-

ship. Only when they were there did Eril turn to Brullo.

"What about their thoughts?" he asked.

Brullo looked puzzled. "I don't understand it," he said. 'I could read their minds easily But not one of them was thinking about us or our ships. It was just as if they were refusing to even think about us. Only once when a small boy was passing was there a hint that they knew we existed. The boy thought a name for us and then even that thought swiftly changed." Brullo seemed to hesitate.

"What was the name he thought?" Eril asked.

"The Invaders," Brullo said, not looking at Eril.

A long silence fell between the two old friends. After a while Eril stirred and got to his feet.

"I'm going out," he said. "You'll be in charge until I return." He turned sharply and went to his quarters.

He stood in the center of the room and stared around at its harsh simplicity. Almost everything in it represented some aspect of life which Eril hated —it all served to remind him of the Invasion of the Hundred Worlds and of his task. One by one, he fingered the medals on his chest, rubbed his fingers along the service stripes slashing across the sleeve of his uniform.

Carefully he removed the medals and placed them on a small table beside his bed. To them he added the black-handled dagger, the gleaming Magnetic Disruptor. Then he stripped the uniform from his body and placed it on the bed.

Eril of Acromo, his naked body like polished ebony, sat and concentrated. It had been so long and the power was sluggish within him. But after a time, the uniform billowed and writhed on the bed—and when he picked it up it was a scarlet ceremonial robe. He flung it around him, felt his skin quiver at the unaccustomed softness.

He turned to the table.

With one finger, he carefully pushed some of the medals so that they formed a circle around the others and the two weapons. Once again, he sat and concentrated. This time it was easier.

The various metals began the slow process of melting, flowing into each other, reshaping themselves. The medals which had formed the outer circle shaped themselves into a transparent square box. Within, the other metals boiled and shifted and became small spheres. Suspended within the center of the transparent box was one bright

globe, encircled by nine other globes of varying sizes.

Eril picked up the transparent box and walked majestically out of the ship and down to the broad highway. He seated himself beside the road, holding the box with the spinning globes on his lap, and idly watched the people who went by.

It was, perhaps, an hour later when one of the walkers stopped in front of Eril. He was the same man who earlier had been stopped by the soldier. There was a faint smile on his face as he looked at the box on Eril's lap.

"Nice piece of work," he said finally. "Where did you get it?"

"I made it," Eril said simply.

The man nodded. "Thinking of exhibiting it here?" he asked.

"No."

"Must be going to do something with it. What?"

"I thought," Eril said casually, "of giving it to someone who might appreciate it."

The man nodded again. "Lots of people would appreciate it," he said. "Still, you ought to be careful who you give it to. Mighty nice symbolism there." He studied Eril some more. "You look a little like a Liege of something-or-other . . ."

"I am Eril of Acromo," Eril said quietly. If there was pride in his voice, the arrogance was missing.

"I'm Fred James," the man said. He grinned and added: "Of Nuyork. Like to take a walk with me?"

Eril seemed to consider, then nodded. The two of them walked leisurely along the street. The other men and women they met nodded and it seemed to Eril that their smiles were friendly.

After walking for awhile, they switched over to a gliding belt which carried them swiftly into the city. There the man led Eril into a building and up to a suite of rooms. There, a large gray-haired man came to meet them.

"This," said the first man, "is Eril of Acromo. He's looking for someone to give a present to."

Eril stared deeply into the face of the gray-haired man and then silently extended the case and the spinning globes.

"Thank you," the gray-haired man said gently. He took the box and held it. "Thanks, Fred," he said to the first man, then waited until he left the room. He turned back to Eril. "I am Jon Cashwan, President of the United Nations of Terra. Welcome, Eril of Acromo. What can I do for you?"

"I'd like to tell you a story," Eril said.

His host nodded and the two men moved over to a couch. When they were seated, Eril told of the history of the Hundred Worlds. He described their art, the beauty of living, the freedom in which they moved.

"Then," he added, "men came in ships. They were men, much like you yet with great differences. They came and moved in among us and we took no notice except to welcome them. We expected only what we gave and it was many years before we noticed that they took everything and gave nothing."

"Yes," the gray-haired man said, nodding, "they came from here. Once this planet was filled with men like that. We were split into many nations and there was almost constant warfare. Men were mistreated because their skin was different—the color of your own, for example. Men were forced to starve in a world of plenty. Men were slaves without knowing why and killed and were killed knowing less of the reasons." He fell silent for a moment. "Then came space travel. The first ships returned to tell of the wealth they found on other planets, of the simple naive forms of life which lived there. It added up to wealth which made our planet seem barren. Within the first two years, the aggressive men and women of our planets—the ones who were never adjusted to social living—streamed out into space as fast as ships could be built. I'm sorry."

Eril acknowledged the words with a nod of his head.

"But what threatened you," said the gray-haired man, "saved us. When they were gone, our wars stopped. Within a few months we had become one world and we began building toward the sort of life you say you had for so long.

"Oh, there were a few of the old ones still around. Occasionally some of the others would return, even more aggressive than when they left. But in the meantime we had learned something. For hundreds of years we'd had the writings of two men—Thoreau and Gandhi—before us but had refused to learn what they had to tell us. But then we learned that there can be a resistance of spirit as well as physical resistance and that it can be even more successful." He smiled gently. "I believe you saw a slight demonstration of this when you first landed. . . . But you came to tell me a story, not to listen to one of mine."

"It is almost told," Eril said.

"We finally fought back—we recovered our own Memory Banks and relearned how to build weapons and ships—we copied the methods of the Invaders. Then we destroyed them. Since then we have ranged through the galaxy, freeing planet after planet, destroying the Invaders, slowly working our way to the original source of the poison."

"Sometimes," the gray-haired man said, "a snake will strike so hard it loses its fangs."

"And then I discovered," said Eril, "that we had carried the poison back here. That which I hated had become almost a necessity. The Invaded had become the Invaders."

"It has always been that way," said the gray-haired man. "The circle must be closed—it is only important that the momentum stop when the circle is complete. We have here on our planet two old sayings which apply: like cures like—like produces like . . . Our disease of killing was carried to you and you cured it only after catching the disease. And it in turn could only be cured when exposed to health."

The two men stood up and clasped hands.

"When I return," Eril said, "our weapons shall cease to be such and the germs of the disease shall vanish."

"We have a saying for that too," the gray-haired man said. "It's a very old one and comes from an ancient peoples who gave us our most valuable legends, receiving centuries of persecution in return for it. The saying refers to swords being beaten into plowshares."

Eril of Acromo returned to the field where the ships of the Star Fleet had landed. As he neared, he saw that Brullo had ordered the rest of the fleet to the ground and that now the ships were surrounded by men, women and children of this planet. Among them, Eril caught glimpses of his own men and smiled as he saw they were all clad in the ceremonial robes.

As he drew nearer, he saw that they too had learned at least one of the proverbs of this new planet. The ships of the Star Fleet were already stripped of their weapons. And off to one side, on a huge base of polished metal, there was a giant golden plowshare. Standing beside it, still admiring his handiwork, was a young man who came from Eril's home planet of Acromo.

Illustrated by Krenkel

THE PRODIGY

BY THOMAS N. SCORTIA

Did you ever have that nightmare where some harmless little animal turns into a terrible, frightening monster. What greater horror could there be than this nightmare turning into reality?

It wasn't as easy to kidnap the kid as we had thought. We knew his habits thoroughly by that time and, having decided that our purposes would best be served by simply picking him up, Hammond and I waited on Markey Street about three blocks from the school until 3:45. We knew from observation that he always avoided the normal routes that the other children took in coming home from school. I had watched him for several days, sometimes in person, sometimes by other means which we of the Group have, and his small hunched figure with its pale thin face had become a familiar sight, slouching along, the legs like pipe-stems and moving as though with a separate existence of their own. We had timed it well. At 3:44 he rounded the corner a block from our car and walked slowly toward us. There was no one within sight.

I nodded silently to Hammond and he stepped on the starter. The motor caught and began to purr softly. The kid was off guard. Even then it wasn't as easy as I had expected. It just shows you how we had underestimated him. There were no explanations. Just suddenly darting from the car as he drew abreast, grabbing the frail body and hauling it into the rear seat. He didn't scream or kick. His reaction was more


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effective. A stone suddenly flew from the street for the windshield. Hammond grunted and blocked it. It fell with a clatter on the hood. The car moved from the curb and, as we passed under a tree leaning over the street, a limb tore loose and hit the side of the car a glancing blow. Fortunately, we had the forethought to remove all heavy portable objects from the automobile's interior. I looked down at the kid and smiled knowingly. His face was white and small beads of perspiration were forming on his forehead and his upper lip. Suddenly the car swerved erratically as Hammond gasped. I stole a quick look at the front seat. He was being strangled with his own necktie which stood out rigidly from his neck, its fabric twisted and corded. The kid sank to the floor without a sound and I began to suck my bruised knuckles as Hammond breathed a sigh of relief.

An hour later we rolled into the abandoned garage on the edge of town, the garage which masked the entrance to our local installation. On the way down in the elevator the kid began to moan softly although he remained unconscious. We hurried him to the Chief's office on the second level and Hammond called the dispensary. In a few minutes Sue Phillips was there, carrying a small first aid kit and looking her usual efficient self.

"You big lug," she demanded, "What did you do to the kid?" I waved my skinned knuckles under her eyes.

"You didn't," she stated. Then, "Yes, I guess you would. The poor dear." She was bending over the still form on the couch and feeling tenderly about the jaw. The kid moaned with the pain. "Well," she said, "At least you didn't break his jaw." She knelt for a moment, frowning, and the boy ceased his moaning. Gradually a peaceful smile crept over his features and his breathing became regular.

"You're just full of the milk of human kindness," I said sarcastically. I gestured to Hammond who was sitting silently in the corner. "How about looking at the other casualty now," I suggested. Hammond began to unbutton his shirt and Sue crossed to him.

"What did that?" she demanded. "That" was a livid red welt encircling his neck. It was already turning purple.

"Ouch, take it easy, Sue," Hammond said hoarsely as Sue's fingers touched the bruise. "My

adam's apple feels like a piece of raw liver."

"In answer to your purely rhetorical question," I drawled, "He was strangled with his own necktie . . . no hands."

"Junior?" She raised her eyebrows.

"Junior," I confirmed.

"Wow, Momma's Precious does have his share of wild talents."

"You don't have to convince me," Hammond gritted.

"The Group can certainly use him if he's as good as you seem to think." She sat for a moment, apparently concentrating. Hammond giggled.

"That tickles," he said.

"If you'll sit still and wipe that vacant expression off your face, I'll get rid of those blood clots before your neck assumes the complexion your face has had since birth," she said bitingly.

"Oh, teacher," Hammond sighed, but he remained motionless as the color of his neck slowly returned to normal.

"There shouldn't be any further pain or soreness," she said, matter-of-factly. Telekinesis, I decided, was an asset, even to a doctor. Not that Sue didn't have other, more easily discernible assets. "Now," she said as Hammond buttoned his shirt and straightened his tie with care, "What shall we do about Junior?"

"Is he all right?" I asked, looking at the still form. He was lying in a limp but comfortable position on the couch, one arm hanging to the floor. An unnatural paleness made his features appear more wasted than before. On his right cheek a dark mole or wart stood out in sharp relief against the white waxiness of the skin.

"Of course, he's all right. I stimulated his sleep centers a bit and he's safely tucked in the arms of Morpheus until we decide to wake him."

"Hypnosis?" I suggested. Sue's use of psi talents were quite different in approach from mine and hardly a day went by that she didn't come up with some new application.

"Nothing so crude," she said modestly. "Anyway, hypnosis isn't true sleep. This is the real thing."

"Oh, yes," I said, just a little annoyed by her female smugness, "Don't give my boy artificial respiration. I can afford the real thing." Hammond chuckled appreciatively.

"Very funny," she said. "You belong in vaudeville."

"Vaudeville's dead," Hammond contributed.

"Exactly."

"Someday I'm going to put

you two in a ring and charge admission," said a deep booming voice.

"Hello, Chief," she said, even as I was turning toward the door. "Just sharpening my claws in this man-made jungle." The Chief closed the door softly and waddled over to his desk to lower his three hundred pounds into the plastic-upholstered desk chair with a sigh. He was breathing somewhat heavily.

"And someday," he remarked idly, "I'm going to have Sue teleport about a hundred pounds of *avoir du pois* from this manly frame of mine."

"Couldn't do it," she said. "Probably start a biochemical imbalance in your fat metabolism and raise merry Ned with the endocrines."

"Oh, well," he smiled. "It's all me. . . . How's the boy? Conscious yet?"

"No, but I can wake him if you wish."

"Save that for the moment. I just came from the lab below. They tell me the tracers they had on you and Steve Hammond showed an impossible jump in psi potential about the time you were supposed to grab the kid. What happened?" I told him in detail, including the tap on the jaw. He whistled a long, low whistle.

"He certainly has developed for a boy of twelve. We usually have to bring out such telekinetic control through training." The Group, it has no real name, has in the twenty odd years of its existence developed some very effective techniques for bringing out the latent psi talents of its members. I can vouch for that. When I was first recruited, I couldn't do more than keep a pair of dice from coming up seven. I was doing well for myself even with that negative approach, but the Group and Bryant of Psych dragged out talents and abilities I didn't even dream I had. My one regret has been that I flunked telepathy so miserably though I did pretty fair at associated talents like clairvoyance.

"We may as well wake him," the chief said after some thought. "The four of us should be able to handle him if he proves obstreperous although he should have depleted most of his nervous energy with that earlier demonstration."

"What about Jim Bryant?" Sue asked. "He should be here."

"I excused him because of some work he's doing for me. He'll be along shortly, however. He thinks you can handle the boy. You've seen his psych dossier. What do you think his reaction will be?"

"Well," Sue said doubtfully, "Psychology isn't my forte but I don't think he'll be too startled. His rate of comprehension was measured at 168 although there are unusual fluctuations in this value."

"168 percent of normal," I asked. "How does that compare with the Group norm?"

"It's a little above average. Group norm is 152. You must remember that the base 100 is the norm of a selected group of non-psi measurements. It's not the norm of the population at large. . . . His emotional stability is low, but he's been masquerading fairly successfully with certain lapses for ten years since he first discovered his difference and that indicates a certain adaptability. I don't think he'll object too much to leaving the world in which he was raised. Our reports show a very unsatisfactory adjustment there. No father; domineering, hysterically - inclined mother. Second degree social withdrawal due to emotional disturbances from home environment, all apparently reasonably compensated for after the age of nine. He was living in an unstable situation, but not disastrously so. I think he'll profit a great deal from our help emotionally as well as in psi potential." She looked at the chief expectantly. Hammond cleared his throat. I waited silently.

"Very well, then. Waken him."

The boy moaned slightly and then sat up on the couch, rubbing his eyes. His pinched face was still white under the fluorescent lighting although the mole on his cheek was less ugly when viewed from the front than from profile. Large liquid eyes surveyed the room slowly, resting on the Chief, Sue, Hammond and then me. When he saw me his body stiffened and his hand went to his cheek, his fingers digging at the mole.

"Where am I?" he said in a voice that was small and high-pitched with fright. "What do you want?" Sue walked over and sat down beside him. He started to draw away from her, but she put her arm around him.

"Don't be afraid," she said. "No one will hurt you."

"He did," the boy accused, pointing at me.

"Ah, hah," Hammond said under his breath. I silenced him with a glare.

"I didn't want to do that," I said. "I'm sorry, Billie."

"Billie?" Sue asked. "Is that your name or do you like to be called something else?"

"No," he said and fidgeted on the couch. "That's fine. I don't mind." I started to say something and the Chief silenced me

with his finger. The boy was visibly warming to Sue. No point in disturbing the relationship. She needed the rapport for her evaluation.

"Where am I?" the boy insisted again. Sue's expression at the question changed to one of puzzlement. She opened the dossier on her lap and consulted it briefly.

"You're just outside of town," she said finally. "I can't tell you where but you'll see after awhile."

"I don't understand," he said, becoming frightened again. "Who are you? And how did you stop the stone I threw? I felt somebody do it." Sue nodded to the Chief.

"Billie," he said, for the first time entering the conversation, "I'm George and this is Steve and Mike," pointing to Hammond and me. The boy nodded slowly with a gravity a little ridiculous for a twelve year old. "We brought you here," the Chief continued, "because we're interested in you and . . .," he paused. "And in certain abilities you have . . ., certain things you can do that most boys your age can't." Fear came into the kid's eyes and he shook off Sue's arm.

"I don't know what you mean," he said. "I want to go home."

"Now, Billie," Sue pleaded. "There's nothing to be afraid of. We know all about you. In fact most of us can do the same things you can."

"I can't do anything," the boy pleaded. The Chief wet his lips slowly and then smiled uncertainly. I could see that the boy's reaction was troubling him.

"Billie," he said softly, "Let me tell you about us and why we're interested in you. Then maybe you'll have better reason to trust us." He leaned back in his chair and crossed his thick hands over his paunch. "About twenty years ago," he said, "I was a professor at Markham University in Michigan. . . . Do you know where that is? . . . Well, never mind. Anyway, I was interested in some work being done by a Doctor Rhine in the south, work centering around those abilities we know you have. The ability to move things by thinking, for instance; the ability to find lost objects; even the ability to start fires that some people have; all those things. Do you understand?"

The boy nodded slowly. Color was returning to his face and he seemed more at ease. His fingers still absently rubbed that ugly wart, half reflectively, half nervously. "I found," the Chief continued, "that certain people

seemed to have a native ability in these fields. I had it to a certain extent, but never to the degree that you or Sue have it. I developed techniques for training these abilities, we call them 'psi talents,' and I began to seek out those people who were inherently gifted with a high psi ability. At first I thought of trying to train them, merely develop those talents and allow them to return to society. We quickly and in one case almost disastrously found out that didn't work. These people were different, sometimes unstable. They needed their own kind. Besides the Group I formed was so unusual and superior in its own way from the general run of humanity that it seemed only proper that we band together and go our own way. Since then the Group, as we call ourselves, has independently solved the problems of telepathic training as well as other psi training and devoleped a definitive physics to treat psi talent. Not only that, but we've found our psi talents suited to work in the physical fields: medicine and surgery in Sue's instance, physics in Steve's. Financial manipulation is Mike's forte. He was a crap table artist before I found him. New he finances our activities by juggling the stockmarket."

The Chief smiled in my direction. The boy looked at me in a sort of innocent wonder. "The point is this," the Chief continued, "the Group keeps out scouts, searching for people with psi talent. That's how we first noticed you. One of our scouts spotted you with a psi tracer and watched you play marbles one day. Your taws, he tells me, were doing things no respecting ones would."

The boy smiled guiltily. "That was cheating, I know. Mom made me give them all back, even though she didn't know how I got them." He frowned. "She was always doing things like that." Sue favored me with a significant look.

"Billie, if you meet our tests, we would like you to stay with us. You don't have to. If you decide to leave, you can. Without, of course, the memory of ever having been here. Now, is there anything you would like to know?" The Chief relaxed, waiting. The boy seemed lost in thought.

"I don't know what to say," he said at last. "You're right about me. I've always tried to hide it. I thought I'd done a better job than I have, but you're right." Then he leaned forward. "What are you going to do? Take over the world? You could."

"Yes, we could," Hammond said. "But we don't want to. There's nothing we want but to be left to develop as we are able."

"I don't understand that," Billie said. "You could have lots of money and . . ."

"We have lots of money," I chipped in. "This place is just one of our installations. Here we have things that money could never buy . . . an atomic plant that takes care of all our wants, laboratories, quarters. . . . Why should we want the world?" The Chief gave me the eye and I stopped. Sue was rising.

"We don't do things that way," she said. "It's just because you've had so little in life that you think first of those things. You'll see better what we mean in awhile."

"I don't know," the boy shrugged a very adult shrug. "It seems to me sort of silly. . . ."

"What do you think, Sue?" the Chief said suddenly.

"The reactions are wrong, I think. Several anomalies. Of course, I'm not primarily a psychologist."

"Call Bryant, then. He should be available by now."

"That will not be necessary," the boy said, his shrill voice suddenly clipped and incisive. "In my eagerness I made several mistakes that are too apparent." He straightened and a faint sneer curled the corner of his mouth. "I've found out what I needed anyway."

"Billie. . . ." The Chief was on his feet.

"Unstable. I thought. . . ." Sue whispered.

"Get him," snapped the Chief.

Hammond and I collided in mid-air over the spot where he had been.

"Great saints, he can teleport himself."

"How did we slip up so thoroughly on that little monster?" the Chief demanded. We were in the psych history office and he was pacing ponderously up and down before the file bank. From the left side of the room came the soft mutter of an analyzer, its faint noise reminiscent of beard muttering. Two hours had passed and we were still patiently quizing Bryant's files and running analyses in an attempt to find out where we had miscalculated and to prognosticate Billie's next move.

"He must have been acting a part for our observers for the last year," Sue offered. "Probably spotted them immediately. Otherwise we would have noticed inconsistent data." Bryant, he was our chief of

psychology for this sector, shrugged.

"From what you tell me," he said dryly, "he overacted." He paused to consult the dossier before him. "Comprehension index 168. Yet you tell me he took at least ten minutes to evaluate the situation completely. You should have spotted that."

"That's what made me suspicious," Sue said tiredly. "I wish you had been here."

The Chief waved his hand. "It was my fault. I excused him, Sue. Anyway, our main problem now is to corral this maverick. The knowledge, limited as it is, that he has of us can be doubly dangerous, dangerous if he tells anyone and dangerous more distantly if he should decide to meddle in our affairs later when he's more mature and sure of himself." He walked to the door, then paused. "The question comes to mind: is he dangerous now?"

"Potentially the most dangerous we've ever encountered," Bryant said. "He's emotionally unstable and may have exalted ideas about his own abilities. As to actual danger. . . . He has telekinetic talents developed way beyond his years although they're probably on a strictly molecular level. I shouldn't think he were capable of kinesis submolecularly. That takes training. As to other talents. . . ." He gestured toward the analyzer. "Perhaps that will give us an answer." The Chief shook his head.

"And only twelve years old. In another ten . . ."

"In another ten he won't just talk about taking over the world. That's why we've got to get him . . . now and quick."

"We'd better drop everything and concentrate on Billie Boy," I said.

"I'm afraid you're right," the Chief sighed, walking slowly out the door and up the corridor with us trailing him. Bryant remained behind to shepherd his machines. On the elevator he maintained his silence. I could imagine what such a course of action as I had suggested meant to him. Complete halt to all of the plans that were finally materializing, plans that he had nursed and bottle-fed for years. I wondered if the boy (I still couldn't think of him otherwise.) were hiding now in some unknown spot or, the thought was hard to entertain, planning some more positive action.

"I think," said the Chief when he was again seated behind his desk, "that we'd better make plans for abandoning this installation in the near future."

"But, Chief, he's still only a twelve year old boy."

"Sue, have you ever seen an adult, not to mention a twelve year old, who could teleport himself?" Hammond demanded. "There are certain energy considerations in psi phenomena that this boy of twelve has knocked into the proverbial cocked hat. It's like lifting yourself by your own bootstraps or flying a hand-cranked airplane."

"We made the mistake once of underestimating him," the Chief pointed out. "He was cold-blooded enough to carry out a masquerade that we penetrated only by sheer chance. Don't let his size and age fool you. We have information here that he may want before many years and I think he can get it. Our best bet . . ." At that moment the intercom on the Chief's desk buzzed and the Chief flipped a switched. I was standing to his right and could see the screen. It was Bryant, hair disarrayed and wild-eyed. To his rear and out of focus I could see the record banks of the History Room. They looked as if they had been hit by a tornado.

"Chief," Bryant yelled excitedly, his voice rattling the small speaker. "Your monster was just here."

"What?"

"Your monster. Billie Boy. Little bastard choked me with my own necktie." Hammond threw a quick glance in my direction.

"What did he want?"

"He grabbed his dossier. Yours too . . . Hammond's, Sue's and Mike's. Wrecked the files and the 'lyser, apparently out of sheer vandalism. Didn't get the 'lyser results, though." He waved a long sheet of yellow paper covered with wavy lines.

"Can the dossiers be replaced?"

"Most of them. I have duplicates of all but Billie Boy's at Point Arthur up the coast."

"Get those copies," the Chief snapped. "There's something in them he wants and we've got to find out what."

"Right." Bryant faded from the screen. The Chief punched another button.

"Psionics Three," a bored voice said as a face appeared on the screen. He was one of the new technicians from the North. I didn't know his name.

"Put a psi screen around this place," the Chief clipped. "We've got one running loose."

The Tech's boredom vanished.

"Your office?" the Tech demanded.

"The whole installation, top to bottom. Can you do it?"

"Ninety seconds, Chief." His face faded as the Chief slashed savagely at the cut-off.

"Let's hope he can't get

through a screen," Hammond said.

"Impossible."

"I wish I were that sure."

"Wilson," the Chief was on the intercom again. "You've seen the alert on this Billie kid?"

"Yeah, Chief," the screen said.

"All right, he's somewhere within this installation. We've got a screen around the place and he can't get out unless he walks out. I want you to grab everybody you can. Stop all work. Post guards at the exits and start combing the place from Power up. All six levels. Got it?"

"Got it, Chief." The image faded to be replaced by the Psionics III Tech.

"Screen's up, Chief."

"Check with Wilson and start raising it level by level as he tells you. He's searching the place physically starting with Power. Don't slip."

"I can keep a subsidiary screen around the whole place while I use the main screen to partition off the levels," the Tech volunteered.

"Good boy. Hop to it."

"Sue."

"Yes, Chief."

"As quick as Bryant gets those dossiers and has a chance to interpret the 'lyser data, let me know. I want you to get together with him and find out why the kid swiped those files. You're the only one near a psych specialist who had any protracted contact with him. Go over that data with a microscope. I want to know every thing we may have missed on him. Every insignificant detail down to what he eats for breakfast and what hidden frustrations make him keep scratching that damn wart of his."

"Right."

"Steve, get me a reading on the psi potential necessary for the kid to pull those stunts of his."

"They're up in the mega-units."

"I expect as much. We've got to know his potentialities. Can he interfere with our power sources or our screens? What material or psi attack can't he handle? Can our instruments detect his activity?"

"Should be able to. Detectors spotted his initial activity when we snatched him."

"Find out." Hammond headed for the door with Sue.

"And see if you can get a tracer on him."

"Got you." The door slamed.

"What about me?" I asked.

"You stay here," he snapped. "The kid likes money and apparently doesn't know how to use his talents to get it. Maybe

we can use your talents as bait."

"A thought just struck me," I said.

"What is it?"

"Are we the hunters or the hunted?"

"I'm beginning to wonder," he said sincerely.

I started from my seat as the intercom buzzed again. The Chief hit the switch. It was Bryant.

"Chief," he rasped. "I just received a call from Point Arthur. They've been searching high and low. The masters on you, Steve, Mike and Sue have disappeared. Not only that but the data they have on Billie Boy is gone.""

"Any other duplicates?"

"That's it."

"Get together with Sue. Is she around? . . . Good. She saw the file, studied it. Try hypnotic recall. We've got to duplicate his dossier."

"I'll start on it."

"Good. Call me when you get anything." The Chief rose from his chair and consulted his watch. "It's hell, sitting here and not being able to do a thing."

"Something like this was bound to happen, sooner or later," I said tritely.

"We've had psycho cases before," he snorted. "But nothing we couldn't handle. We had plenty of warning on this one if we had kept our eyes open." He slammed his fist against the desk in disgust.

"His reactions are immature. He'll make a mistake," I said with a confidence I didn't feel. "Look how he grandstanded in this office this evening. A fully mature individual would have been more subtle. He lost his head at the first suspicion instead of trying to bluff it out and gave away his hand before he knew what he was up against."

"The question is, did he know what we could bring against him."

"I don't think so. There was no way for him to find out. He's probably trapped somewhere on the upper four levels now, just waiting until Wilson stumbles on his hiding place.

"Level two is clear," Wilson's voice said. "We're raising the screen to level three. Watch yourself from now on."

"Good work, Wilson. Better bring up those two portable blasters from Power. You may need them when you finally corner him."

"Don't you think you're overdoing it?" I asked.

"Do you?" I remembered Point Arthur and shook my head.

"What's Wilson doing, cart-

ing blasters around," Sue wanted to know as she closed the door.

"We passed him in the corridor at the far end of this level," explained Bryant who had entered ahead of Sue.

"He's gunning for Billie Boy," I explained.

"What did you find out," the chief demanded.

"Well," Bryant smoothed his hair nervously. "Our data is necessarily incomplete. The 'lyser tells us he may have something akin to telepathy but . . ."

"We don't know what to make of it," Sue said hopelessly. "Maybe he can read minds. Maybe he can take us over and make us jump like puppets. We don't know."

"How about the psych end of it? Is there any way we can anticipate him? Any weakness?"

"That's what we're afraid of," Bryant said wearily. "Plenty of weaknesses. Emotional instability. The kid's a hotbed of neuroses. Everything up to and including an Oedipus Complex. Glorifies his father who's dead. Hates his mother almost psychotically."

"In a way, I don't blame him," Sue chimed in. "She apparently made his life a living hell."

"The point is this," Bryant said. "If we press him too far, he may do something drastic. Better keep him away from the pile. He has a terrific ego. If he sees he can't win, he might try to kill himself and take us with him. Look at the way he dramatised himself in this office."

"He can't handle the pile," the Chief insisted. "Can he?"

"I can answer that," Hammond said from the door. We had been so intent on what Bryant was saying that we had failed to notice his entrance. "Yes, he can," Hammond stated. "He's capable, for instance, of fissioning the pile below us or diverting the electricity in the circuits in the walls or any one of several other actions."

"Good God," the chief prayed and sank into his seat. "At least he can't get to Power."

"That means he can probably handle any physical weapon we throw against him," Sue whispered.

"Including Wilson's blasters," Bryant added.

"Look," I demanded. "We don't know all of this for sure. We've only seen him in operation twice. Besides we have psi talents he's probably never heard of and one boy can't handle an assault from several powerful and different sources at the same time."

"How about pyrotics," Bryant said excitedly. "That's a

fairly rare talent. Perhaps he can't handle them."

"Could be," said Hammond. "I . . ." His eyes glazed for a moment and he swayed.

"What's wrong?" the Chief demanded. He straightened slowly.

"Look," he said. "I'm willing to make a deal."

"Billie," Sue gasped as Hammond's fingers stroked a nonexistant wart on his right cheek.

"That's right," he said, grinning. "I could hold all of you off, but I like your organization. I could be a real asset to you. Now a truce . . ." Bryant was moving toward Hammond from one side and I from the other.

"Hold it," said the Chief. "He can get away as easily as he came. What makes you think we'll agree to a truce, Bille?"

"I can kill you all," he said petulantly.

"You're acting like a little boy now, Billie. Give yourself up and we promise you won't be harmed."

"Don't force me to do something I'll be sorry for," he said. "If you don't like all of my ideas, I'll go along with yours but I've decided I want to work with you."

"Until you feel you're strong enough to take over?" The Chief came slowly from around his desk. "Come on in and we'll talk it over."

"You can't fool me that easily," Hammond yelled, his face contorted with hate. Suddenly he grabbed a chair from the floor and lunged at the Chief, swinging it above his head. Bryant and I were on him the same instant. My hand chopped down on his neck and he fell to his knees to collapse with a low moan, out cold before he could react.

"Did you . . ." Sue gasped.

"I hope not," I said.

"This means we'd better crack out the personal shields," the Chief snapped. "At least he hasn't been able to get through the big shield." The intercom buzzed angrily. I grabbed the switch and saw that it was Wilson.

"Is the Chief there?"

"Yes. Go ahead."

"Tell him we've covered all six levels and he isn't in the place."

"Like hell, he isn't," I yelled. "No psi phenomena can penetrate from outside and he was just here." But Wilson wasn't listening. He had turned and I could see his lips moving silently. He turned, his face blank with shock.

"He's down in Power," he said coldly.

"What happened," yelled the

Chief, his huge frame pushing me away from the screen.

"One of my men just came from the sub-level. He's barricaded himself in the reactor room. He's got those heavy shielded doors closed and jammed."

"Get your men and those blasters down there." He ran for the door.

"Bryant," he yelled back. "Round up those pyrotics and any telepath you can find and bring them down to the reactor. We either stop him now or . . ." He didn't need to finish the sentence.

"He can't get out," Wilson was saying, "but then we can't get in." We were standing at the foot of the ramp that led to the reactor room. Two massive doors blocked the far end of the corridor from the ramp. They were about twelve feet by seven each and hung on heavy steel hinges. Although they were built with a heavy steel framework, I knew without being told that the massiveness of those hinges was primarily to support the thick lead sheet that was sandwiched between two layers of steel.

"Psionics has a screen up around the room," Wilson continued. "So he can't get out."

"How did he get past your men the first time?" Hammond demanded, his face still pale from his recent possession.

"Knocked two of my men out. Don't know how he did it yet, though I can imagine." He turned to direct the placing of a blaster.

"I just talked to him on the intercom," the Chief grunted. "He won't come out."

"I didn't think he would," Sue said.

"Can he blow the pile?"

"Of course, it's self-damping," Hammond said. "But I don't think that'll stop him too long if he knows anything about atomic structure."

"And what kid doesn't these days," I moaned.

"How's he taking it?" Sue asked.

"Bad. On the verge of hysteria, I think."

"That makes him doubly dangerous," she said. "I had hoped . . ."

"So did I, Sue." The Chief laid a hand gently on her shoulder. I looked up to see Bryant shepherding a group of four men and two women down the ramp. I nodded to Ed Stringer, whom I knew, as they approached.

"This is all I could find, Chief," Bryant said breathlessly. "Four phase II telepaths and two pyrotics. Don't dare use anything below phase II."

"They'll have to do. You know what I want. Herd them over behind that shield in the far corner and wait until I call you." Bryant hurried off with his charges.

"All set, Chief," Wilson called from behind his shield to our right. Bryant to our left raised his hand.

"All right, Wilson. Blasters."

The crews of the two blasters crouched behind their shields and began to elevate the muzzles of the weapons. In the distance I heard the air conditioning fans take on a deeper note. The air began to sob past my ears. In the interior of the bellies of the blasters, a reaction started. Heat, bouncing back and forth in the interior from reflective surfaces so nearly perfect as to approach the miraculous, suddenly jetted in pale beams from the orifices of the muzzles. It hit the doors to the reactor room and suddenly changed into a white glare of unadulterated fury. I threw up my hand instinctively and crouched behind the shield.

Through the thick viewing glass that pierced the shield I could see the beams converging on the two doors where they met, converging and rebounding in fiery streamers ten feet long. "We can't stand this heat too long, even with the shields," muttered the Chief. The silence was broken only by the hiss of the blasters and the far off laboring of the fans. The doors were beginning to glow a dull red. I could see droplets of molten lead, oozing from the riveted seams as the interior metal melted. As I watched, the color of the assaulted area mounted toward the white. There it stayed. Stayed and then gradually began to recede to the earlier dull red.

"I thought so," Hammond's voice broke the unnatural quiet. "He can handle the blasters."

"Signal Psionics," the Chief yelled at Wilson. "Prepare to lower the screen." Wilson began to speak hurriedly into a pocket communicator. "Bryant, at my signal jam him with your telepaths." Wilson signaled readiness. The Chief raised his arm.

"Screens down," he yelled. "Jam him."

The hiss of the blasters cut through the stillness. I could see four of Bryant's people standing stiffly behind their screen, eyes closed. Slowly the temperature rose again and the doors began to glow. They rose to their former reddness, but got no brighter. I wondered how long the steel would hold before the molten lead middle exerted enough pressure to rupture it. This wouldn't be the safest

place in the world, I realized, with molten lead squirting over the area.

"All right," the Chief said softly when it became apparent that the heat beams were having no further effect. "Pyrotics," he commanded. Something hit me an almost physical blow and I reeled back dizzily. In the confusion no one noticed, for suddenly the two doors slumped tiredly amid a shower of sparks. Through the waves of heat, I could see Wilson's crew dragging their shields back and away from that awful heat.

"There he is," Sue gasped. The kid was visible through the rift in the doors, slumped over the damper controls, apparently unconscious. No one said a word. The pyrotics burned him down where he lay, the unnatural green-blue flames crawling over his thin body and licking greedily at his flesh. His body blackened and charred before our eyes.

It was slightly over an hour before we could cross the threshold and enter the reactor room. The air was still cloudy with steam from the jets of water that Wilson's men had played over what remained of the shielded doors. We looked down at the warped and twisted charred thing that had been Billie. Sue was white and shaking.

"Only twelve," she murmured. "If only we could have got to him five years earlier." I put my arm around her.

"Yes," said the Chief. "Only twelve and he stood off our full power for all that time. It's lucky he didn't get a chance to grow up."

"Well, now I can get back to work," Bryant grumbled. "I've got to reassemble those dossiers on you three before I do anything else."

"I wonder why he wanted those," the Chief asked idly.

"Maybe he needed them for his puppet work," Hammond speculated.

"What a monster." The Chief shook his head.

"A monster, indeed," I agreed and then stopped. Sue was looking strangely at me. I caught the thought forming in her mind and gently erased it. Mentally I cursed myself.

I'd have to break that habit of stroking a mole . . . a mole which I no longer had.

I tightened my arm around Sue, possessively.

Illustrated by Smith

the Ride

BY WALTER L. KLEINE

There was an android on the loose and Gour Hssos had to get her back. He had followed her to this barbarian world of Phase-two, the chase was drawing to a close. He couldn't afford to fail. . . .

Gour Hssos was pushing the Italian-made custom to the limit. He wanted to curse himself for his mistakes, but his giant ego that had caused these mistakes prevented him from correctly placing the blame. Instead he placed the blame on others.

He cursed the Thurusian government that restricted the use of phase-warpers. The illegal one that he had constructed was going out-of-phase. When it failed he would be jerked out of this world of Phase-Two and back to Thurusa in Phase Three.

His attention was drawn back to the road as he rounded a curve. A truck was blocking his lane and a solid stream of traffic going the other way stopped him from going around it. He jerked the wheel to the right, hit the gravel shoulder at over 110 and veered wildly towards the guard fence. The car straightened at the last moment and darting in front of the truck gained the road in the center of a cloud of gravel and raced ahead.

The incident only heightened Gour Hssos' already bad temper. Somewhere up ahead of him was the deadly result of his too-successful attempt to create—illegally—a self-determinant android. He'd thought he had everything right, but she must have become self-conscious before he had a chance to activate the mechanism that would have brought her partially under his control. He wished again, for perhaps the ten-thousandth time, that he knew how she figured out the operation of his phase-warp—also illegal—and how she had managed to survive and elude him for almost two years in the violently unstable society of Phase Two. Telepathy, he often thought, would explain it all nicely. He snorted at the idea, telepathy was one thing he was sure he *hadn't* built into her, there had to be another explanation.

This Phase Two world, the United States—no, that was the name of this country, the world was called Terra by the recorders. This Terra was just on the

outskirts of the atomic age, he knew phase-travel was strictly forbidden here. They must never know of the world of Phase Three lying so close to theirs.

He cursed the android this time, for having brought him here. He had to get to her first. If the Phase Security Police ever got hold of her he'd have both them and the Android Control Corps down on his neck so fast he wouldn't even have time to realize what was coming off before they wiped out every memory in his head.

Two years was a long time for any Thurusian, android or human, to escape detection by Phase Security Police in Phase Two. Worse, the phase-warp was going out of phase. He would be able to make about one more trip before the thin thread snapped and slipped over to Phase Three. The PSP, in less efficient, but never out-of-phase warp-jumpers, would still be able to get through.

According to the detectors focused on the slight radio-activity of her unactivated control unit, she was a little better than thirty miles ahead, and gaining slowly. He wished again that he knew what she'd had done to that black Mercury convertible she drove. The fastest customs he'd been able to buy couldn't touch it on a straightaway, not even now, when it must have close to a hundred thousand miles on it.

He cursed himself for muffing that last shot, a few hundred miles back. He'd been so close—

It was 10:30 at night and raining cats, dogs, and little fishes. Joe Morris twisted his head to one side to avoid the worst of the spray from the accelerating truck and dropped his thumb.

"We should have stayed in Pittsburgh, Shorty," he said for perhaps the tenth time since their last ride had dropped them off here over an hour ago.

"Yeah," said six-and-a-half-foot Chuck "Shorty" Graham, "and we should have had sense enough to stop at a hotel when we saw those thunderheads coming this way. But," he shrugged, "we didn't, and since we're already soaked through we might as well keep on going until we hit Columbus. It can't be much more than another fifty miles from here in Zanesville. See anything coming, Joe?" With or without his glasses, Shorty Graham couldn't see ten feet in front of him in this kind of weather.

"Looks like a truck with a couple of cars behind it pulling away from the stoplight down there."

Both of them were fervently but secretly regretting their decision to make their long-planned summer trip to California anyway, after Joe had rolled and completely demolished his souped-up '41 Ford a week before graduation. They had planned on it so long—and planned to take their college straight through, with no vacations—that they couldn't bring themselves to give up the plan.

The cars were just passing the truck when it went past them.

"Here comes another one," said Joe, "and oh, brother, is he moving!" They jerked their thumbs back up. About fifty feet in front of them the driver hit the brakes, and the car skidded past them, fish-tailing violently, to a stop several hundred feet down the road. They grabbed their bags and ran, while the driver put the car into reverse and backed toward them.

"Looks like a '50 Merc convert," Joe panted, "We're in luck, Shorty!"

" 'Bout time," Shorty mumbled, "Personally, though, I don't give a damn what it is, just as long as the roof doesn't leak."

As they came alongside a woman's voice told them: "Put your bags in the trunk. It isn't locked."

They wasted no time complying, and clambered into the back seat. As they did so, they got a quick glimpse of the driver, a tall-seeming, dark-haired young woman in a white terry cloth beach jacket, from which a pair of slim legs vanished into the darkness around the floorboards, and her passenger, a damp young Air Force Airman Third Class.

The Mercury took off like a scalded cat even before the door was closed behind them.

When the acceleration let up —with the speedometer wavering between one hundred five and one hundred ten—the girl turned her head slightly and said something that sounded like: "Where are you headed?"

Shorty leaned forward and said: "Huh?"

"Where you boys headed?" she shouted above the screaming wind.

"California," he replied, "how far are you going?"

"All the way, Frisco, to be exact. I'm in a hurry, though; I'm not making any stops except for food and gas—I'm one of the people who keep the no-sleep tablet companies in business. If you don't mind sleeping in the car or not at all, you can go all the way, and you'll get there in a hurry. Otherwise I'll

drop you off wherever you want."

Shorty thought of the warm bed he'd been looking forward to in Columbus. Then he thought of the possibility of getting left out in more thunderstorms. He said: "Sounds like a good deal to me. I'll see what Joe thinks."

Let Joe decide.

Joe, meanwhile, had gotten about the same information from the Airman, who was returning to Lockbourne Air Force base, near Columbus. He turned to Shorty and said: "Let's go all the way with her. She's going to have to stop for gas soon, and we can get some drier clothes out of the trunk when she does. At the rate she's rolling we'll be out there in no time! Boy, we couldn't ask for more! A '50 Merc all the way! Whadya say?"

"Good deal as far as I can see, Joe," said Shorty.

Joe leaned forward and said, "We'll go all the way with you, Miss. Say, is this thing souped?"

She made a sound that could have been either a snort or a laugh. "To the gills," she said, "and if you think you've seen speed, wait 'til I get out where it's safe to start rolling."

She demonstrated by floorboarding the accelerator briefly. The Merc jumped like it had been kicked, dumping Joe unceremoniously back onto the seat. He took another bug-eyed look at the speedometer—now steady on one-ten—and muttered, "Gawd!" in an awed whisper he could hardly hear himself.

Shorty's mind was on other subjects. She'd said she was in a great hurry to get to California, and the way she was driving certainly proved that. But why in the name of Creation hadn't she taken a plane? He could think of several reasons, but none which seemed to justify her present haste. And for some reason he was almost certain that there was nothing under that white beach jacket . . .

Shorty awoke to a sudden deceleration. It was a bright, sunny morning, and as he pulled himself up to window level, he saw the reason for the slowdown—they were approaching a small town with a sign at its outskirts that read: Speed Limit Enforced—25 MPH.

He turned to the girl, noticing with some surprise that the beach jacket had been replaced by a loose khaki zipper jacket, blue jeans and a long-billed sport cap which partially covered a bandage on her fore-

head, and asked sleepily, "Where are we now?"

"About two hundred miles east of St. Louis," she replied, never taking her eyes from the road.

"That far out," he asked, startled, "At the rate you're going?" Abruptly he realized that he was sitting in the front seat. He had gone to sleep in the back. He cut off her answer on the first syllable with: "How the devil did I get up here?"

She waited until she had brought the car to a stop before the first of two lights in the town, then said, with a hint of laughter in her voice, "One question at a time, Shorty. I had a little—"

"How the devil did you know my name?" Shorty cut her off again, "I didn't tell you last night as far as I can remember."

This time she laughed openly. "I said, one question at a time—please." She touched the accelerator as the light changed, and the Mercury jumped. "I didn't know it was your name; everybody calls me 'Shorty' because I'm so tall for a woman, and I've just gotten into the habit of calling every tall person I meet 'Shorty' just out of —well—call it spite. You came up front under your own power when I let the Airman out in Columbus. I asked you what your name was, and you told me that you were Chuck Graham and your buddy was Joe Morris, but now that I think of it, you did act like you were walking and talking in your sleep. It's not hard to do, I know; I once—they told me—woke up, came down and ate breakfast, and went back to bed again, and I'll swear I don't remember a bit of it.

"Losing that much time is a little longer story—damn this local traffic—" they were poking along behind a pair of semis while opposing traffic flowed by in a steady stream, "I'll have to give you a little background first, though. The reason I left in such an ungodly hurry was the efforts of a few more or less well-meaning but misinformed friends to make up my mind on a matter which was none of their business—or anyone else's. I pulled a couple of fast ones when I left, and figured I had a good two or three hour head start on them, but they started to catch up to me about thirty miles east of Indianapolis. They're driving an Italian-built custom, with a hopped-up Cadillac engine, which, while it's about ten miles an hour slower than this wagon, handles better in traffic and on curves. You just can't miss its

silhouette. I was lucky enough to catch a glimpse of that silhouette in the glare of another car's lights as they came around a curve about half a mile behind me. I'd been taking it slow until I could get by a state cop, but when I saw them I didn't give a damn about any cop. I cut my lights and put the gas on the boards. I don't think the cop knew what happened to me, but he sure knew what was going on when they went past him at about a hundred and twenty. About five minutes later I heard him broadcasting their license number. They were too close to wait until the cops got them, so I led them down Route 9 to Shelbyville. Along some damned country road to Edinburg, out 252 to 31, and back up 31 to Indianapolis. I went through the process twice before I finally got him sandwiched between a state cop and the first stoplight on the edge of Indianapolis. They shot the light, and a city cop got them. Last I saw of them they were arguing it out with both city and state cops." She grinned, "I hate myself when I do things like that, but it should take them at least until morning to get themselves untangled from the law, and I figure that that should give us enough lead on them to stay ahead at least until we're almost through the mountains, and maybe all the way." She saw an opening in traffic, and gunned the Mercury around the semis. Conversation was briefly halted as she closed the gap between the semis and the next car ahead. "The thing that amazes me," she continued, "was the way you two slept. You must have really been dead. I don't think you so much as cracked an eyelid during the whole works." She whipped past the car ahead, and continued, after catching up with the next one, "Now have you got any more questions, Shorty?"

Shorty had plenty, but something made him keep them to himself. Somehow, her story didn't ring true. There was more to it than she had indicated—and he was a light sleeper. A very light sleeper. He said simply, "Apparently I told you my name, but you haven't told me yours—not while I was fully conscious, anyway."

She laughed, then delayed her reply for about five minutes while she whipped around the car ahead, and burned up a long clear stretch. Slowed down to seventy behind a new Buick, she said, "Call me Dee."

"Dee? Dee what? Or isn't that my business, either?"

She laughed, seemed to hesitate briefly, then said: "An-

drade." She shot past the Buick.

Shorty decided to let it go at that. He leaned back in the stretch and watched her as she ate up the miles of another long, clear stretch. Her face was intent, but her slim body seemed relaxed. He could detect no signs of fatigue. He wondered idly about the deep, almost orangish, tan of her skin; she couldn't have gotten that this far north this early in the year.

On an impulse, he asked her: "Where you from?" yelling to make himself heard above the screaming wind.

She shook her head and yelled something indistinguishable. He waited until she slowed down again and repeated his question.

This time she caught it.

"Miami," she said, "I'd been visiting up here and was on my way back; staying at a motel. I left in such a hurry I didn't even have time to dress decently, as you probably noticed last night. Ever been in Miami?"

In the back seat, Joe, as heavy a sleeper as Shorty was light, finally woke. He took one look at the seat beside him and stuck his head over the front seat. "Hey, Miss," he yelled, "how the heck did this seat get a bullet hole in it?"

Shorty jerked his head around. There was a hole in the back seat—it couldn't have been more than a few inches above the position Joe would have occupied when sprawled out sleeping—that could hardly have been caused by anything but a bullet. He leaned over and saw a matching hole in the back of the front seat.

"State cop threw that at me a couple of weeks ago in Virginia," Dee laughed, "I ran away from him, though, and got across the border before he could sic any of his buddies on me. Guess he must have figured I was some kind of crook to be driving like that." She slowed for a fairly large town. "I hate towns like this," she said, "they waste both your time and your gas."

As they drove through town, Joe got about the same story from Dee as she had given Shorty.

When she had finished, Joe said, "Why don't you see if you can get the news, Shorty? See who won the ball games yesterday. You don't mind, do you, Dee?"

"I was just going to suggest it myself," she said.

Shorty reached over and turned on the radio. It warmed up in the middle of a hillbilly hit parade. Dee made a face as Shorty moved it off the station

in search of a newscast. He finally found one.

"—Strike has been on for three days now, the workers return tomorrow. On the national scene, the biggest news seems to be the series of running gun battles which took place in central Indiana shortly after midnight last night. Eye-witness accounts differ, but most agree that only two cars were involved, that both were traveling at high rates of speed, and that one was a convertible with the top down. The only real clue so far appears to be the wreckage of an Italian-made custom convertible which was found abandoned on a deserted stretch of Route 431, south of Indianapolis, about half an hour after the last reported gun battle, which took place near there. State police are attempting to determine whether any of the damage could have been caused by gunfire. While admitting the possibility that the affair was the work of pranksters firing blanks, both state and city police expressed the belief that it was more likely to have been the result of activities of the gambling syndicate known to exist in the city in spite of Marion County Prosecutor James Wilks' frequent attempts to stamp it out. Prosecutor Wilks was extremely hopeful that this lead would produce some concrete results, in spite of a previous re—" The blast of air drowned the voice as Dee whipped out past a battered '34 Chevy and opened up on a long clear stretch ahead.

When she slowed down again, she said: "I heard those guys last time I came up 31. They must have just cut off 31 to 431; I'd slowed down for a minute, and heard shots in the distance. Wondered who'd said 'no' at a shotgun wedding . . ." She jumped past the car ahead and slipped in behind the next one with only inches to spare.

The radio blatted on about some local political news, but Shorty hardly heard it. His eyes were fixed on the magnum-type shell casing rolling slightly on the floor near the brake pedal. He would have bet everything he had on him that it came from a Smith and Wesson .357 Magnum like the one Joe had in his collection.

"What the devil is she running from?" Shorty Graham asked himself. He was dead certain she hadn't told the truth—not all of it, anyway—about either her reasons for going to California or last night's delay. Between the shell on the floor, the hole in the seats, and the newscast, her story seemed to

be quite literally shot full of holes. Only why the devil hadn't it wakened him up?

Maybe he was only imagining things. He'd often been accused of possessing a wild imagination, but that was usually because of his penchant for reading science fiction, by people who'd never cracked the cover of a s-f mag.

What was it she'd said? *"The reason I left in such a hurry was the effort of a couple of well-meaning but misinformed friends to make up my mind for me . . ."* But on what? She considered it none of anybody else's business; she'd been careful to leave no doubt of that. "They" considered it enough of their business to play damned rough, either way he looked at it.

Blackmail? No, if she'd been blackmailing them, she'd have carried out her threat, and vice-versa.

A spy? With the FBI after her? No, the FBI would have more than one carload of agents after her, and she wouldn't have been able to get away last night. Neither did the FBI drive Italian custom convertibles.

The tone of her remarks—*"make up my mind for me . . ."*—made it sound like she had made, or was about to make, a decision of some kind which was unfavorable to "them," but he could think of no situation which could produce the present situation and still involve gunplay.

Suppose he took everything she'd said at face value. It made reasonable sense until he started prying into her reasons for flight. *Why the devil hadn't she taken a plane?*

And maybe it was all his wild imagination. Suppose she'd told the whole thing with her tongue in her cheek. Some people had that kind of a sense of humor. She might have just decided to pull off the road and sleep a little while. And wouldn't that have been the logical explanation to give if she had actually been shooting up the Indiana landscape?

He relaxed a little. Maybe science fiction had made his imagination a little wilder than he thought. Now if this were science fiction, everything would be simple. There had been a number of flying saucer reports recently. She might have opposed the mission of the saucer people, and made her escape, perhaps with a few friends, to do what she could to undermine whatever they had in mind. They would naturally want to stop her, since she would have to be a trained operator of some kind, and could be "rehabilitated" if captured.

They would kill if they had to, but only as a last resort. The last thing they would want would be unnecessary publicity, and they would be greatly disturbed by the failure of their "last resort" attempt to stop her last night. Torn between their desire to avoid publicity and their desire to get her, they would hesitate before making their next move. She wouldn't dare take a plane, of course, because planes were too vulnerable to saucer attack. If they knocked a wing off a plane at long range there wouldn't be any witnesses to worry them. Her reason for going to California might be only to keep ahead of them until some previously set time limit on their stay expired, or she might know of some place there where she could hide for a time, or she might be planning to block a move of theirs in that area. Her haste would be a good indication of the latter, especially now that her immediate pursuers were removed. The unfamiliarity of both herself and her enemies with earth-type firearms would explain why all the shooting and so little damage to her car and apparently to theirs. She would have known when she picked them up that her pursuers weren't far behind, and would probably catch up with her before the night was over. She would have hypnotized herself and Joe to either sleep through the whole thing, or to forget it when it was over. She might even have—

Hypnotized!

That was it! Whether she was an alien or not, it was the only thing that could explain his sleeping through either a gun battle or a wild chase. *If he'd slept!* He broke out in a cold sweat. Hypnotized, he and Joe might have taken part in the battle, shooting while she drove. A command to forget and . . .

He had to get away from her, and the quicker the better. But Joe was perfectly happy with the ride. He wouldn't see through her story.

How the devil could he get Joe out without telling him the real reason?

Joe Morris watched the countryside roll by, with a feeling of complete relaxation. He could see through her story; no woman could fool Joe Morris that easy. She must be a gun moll, probably from one of the New York area gangs, but maybe connected with the Indianapolis outfit. She'd gotten in trouble with her gang or somebody else's, and maybe hoped she could outrun them and hook up with some California

outfit. Maybe she even had friends out there. Her name had probably never been Dee Andrade before she told Shorty so. Her story didn't hold a drop of water after that broadcast about the gun battles. She'd shot it out with the mugs who were after her and got them. They might have gotten away from the wreck of their car, but they'd never find another that fast in Indianapolis. Even if they did, it would take them so long that they'd never catch up to her again anyway. The pieces started to fall together.

There was nothing to worry about now, and if he smelled anything coming up he could always tell Shorty the score, and they'd both get the hell out of there. Shorty's family was highbrow; he'd never had any contact with the gangster elements, and he'd never know one when he saw one. He could be sure Shorty would come along with him at the first mention of gangsters. Like anybody who hadn't had any contact with the underworld, he was just a little afraid of it, and would do anything possible to avoid contact with it. The mere suggestion that she was a gun moll would be enough. Meanwhile, they had a fast, comfortable ride with a good driver. What more could they ask?

The road sign read: CALIFORNIA STATE LINE

The lights flicked briefly across its face as the car hurtled past. Dee's mouth was a thin, hard line, faintly illuminated by the ghostly glow of the dash lights. Her thoughts were just as hard.

The muscles in her leg jerked angrily, as if the pressure could force another mile per hour out of the tortured engine. The speedometer was hard against the stop. She knew she was doing well over one twenty-five, probably much closer to one thirty-five.

The dashboard clock had stopped shortly after two, but she hadn't noticed it yet. She was intent on the road before her, her mind reaching out into every nook and cranny, probing urgently for miles ahead.

Telepathy was one thing he didn't know she had.

The Lord only knew how many times that one fact had saved her from him before. He still thought that his illegal attempt at android-making had failed only in the control mechanism which was to have held her under his control. She was to have been—and was—otherwise a completely normal woman.

Except that she was telepathic.

His control hadn't failed. It had never been activated. He hadn't known that a self-determinant is also self-activating. A self-determinant is really nothing but an artifically-created human, unless the creator has left something out. He hadn't. The control for a self-determinant works just as well on a normal human as on an android, which is one of the main reasons why whole, self-determinant androids were forbidden by law.

He'd assumed, in the lack of released data on the subject, that his self-determinant would lie quietly in its developing bath until activated, like any other android. She'd become conscious first of the slightly irritant bath, then, a microsecond later, of the complete useful knowledge of every mind within thirty miles. Telepathy worked that way, sorting with incredible efficiency, recording the useful and rejecting the useless. She'd known the score and what to do about it. She didn't try to kill him there; too many androids around. She improvised a bomb and used his phase-warp, also illegal, to escape to Phases Two while the bomb effectively prevented him from following her until he could build a new warp. She figured, correctly, that she had about six months, and she used them well. She'd been ready when he came after her, following the faint residual radioactivity of her recently-removed control unit. She'd led him a merry chase since then, the combination of telepathy and a computer-like mind outwitting him at every turn.

The only thing he had over her was the phase-warp. Without that he could never have touched her, and she could have killed him as one might step on an ant. The phase-warp protected anybody in its field—and he was careful to stay in its field—protected from any physical harm by detecting such harm by its effect on the field, and jerking the person in it back to the sending station.

They were due for a showdown. The phase-warp, which was in phase with Phase Two less than one-eighth of the time, was going out of phase. According to his figures last time she'd been close to him, this would be his last trip. He could wait as long as he wanted to return, but he'd have to wait until the warp was back in phase again before he could make another trip, unless he could get his hands on a government-owned warp-jumper, which was like obtaining a chunk of the sun for analysis.

He still had the upper hand, although he didn't think so himself. He could survive a miss; she wouldn't.

She was driving the second of the two Mercuries she'd had time to have souped before the chase began, and it had forty-eight thousand miles on it, three thousand more than the last one had been good for. Mobility was the key to this game; constant mobility, and nothing but a fast car could provide it. Airplanes spent too much time on the ground. If only her poor old boiler would take another thousand—she had no reason not to expect a rod to come out the crankcase at any given minute.

When the hell was he going to make his play?

A blast of gunfire snapped Shorty out of his sleep. The brakes squealed, and a second blast hit just in front of the car. Acceleration plastered him to the seat, and the third blast was behind them by a few feet. A sharp curve taken on two screaming tires put them behind the effective cover of several thousand feet of mountain.

"What the devil—?" Joe yelled above the howling wind.

"Cormissii!" She yelled the post-hypno recall word.

"Where is he?" Shorty asked.

"Must be somewhere up ahead; I can't feel him yet. He still doesn't know I'm telepathic, of course, so he must have figured he could put me off guard with this ambush by electronic-remote robots, and then get me later when I wasn't looking for him. He must be desperate to risk losing a robot and having to account for it."

She braked the car to a gentle stop. "Check the damage," she explained briefly. They all knew they'd been hit the first time.

It was minor; four holes where they did no real damage.

"We're going to have a hard time explaining these to any cops we meet." Dee muttered under her breath, "Well, we'll worry about that later. Have to get him first. Let's go."

Shorty's blood was pounding in his veins. He still found it a little hard to believe, even now. Science fiction in fact. If he had a nickel for every time he'd dreamed of it since he started reading s-f he'd have taken a plane and missed it all.

He slammed the door and took two .357 magnums from the glove compartment. He gave one to Joe, and followed it with two boxes of ammunition.

"Find him yet?" Joe asked.

She shook her head, a quick, nervous gesture. "No. And it scares me. He could have e-r's strung out along this road for miles and I'd never know it. I

can't read electronic minds. There could have been as few as four e-r's back there, and he has over a hundred in his labs. If he was desperate enough to risk one batch, he was probably desperate enough to risk the works. We might get past another ambush, but we won't have a chance in a thousand if we hit a third. I've told you how efficient an e-r master calculator is. Pray he was just using these as a diversion."

Inspiration hit Shorty like the proverbial ton of bricks. "Don't bother praying," he said grinning, "we've got him by the tail."

"Won't work," said Dee, almost before Joe had time to open his mouth for a startled, "Huh?"

"In the first place," she elaborated, "the Sheriff wouldn't get here fast enough. If he did, they'd detect him and blow his brains out before he ever saw them. They're almost certainly set to detect and eliminate anything that smells like the law. That about cover it?"

"Cover what?" Joe yelled in his ear.

Shorty twisted around and yelled back: "I was going to stop at the next house and call the Sheriff."

The brakes squealed and Dee swung the car onto a side road. "Just found out there's a series of dirt road beginning about ten miles down this one that runs between five and fifteen miles from 40 for almost a hundred miles. I don't think he'll be able to shift his e-r's fast enough to get us before I pick up his mind and know what he's doing, *if* I can keep this car on the road and still make reasonable time, and *if* he hasn't got this one ambushed too. *If* he isn't more than thirty or forty miles out of my reach now. You might as well start praying—and keep your guns ready."

Twenty minutes later Shorty was convinced that if this didn't cure Joe of all enthusiasm for hot-rodding, nothing would. Dee was running eighty and ninety and better on a pitted gravel road that wasn't safe for forty. It was all any of them could do to stay on the seats.

She hit the brakes and half-turned and half-slid onto a slightly worse road running at right angles to the one they had been on. She hit the gas and the Merc shot away from the gravel shower it had caused.

A few minutes later they stopped briefly at the entrance to route 40. "Found him," she explained in the brief period of comparative quiet, "We've got him foiled completely. He

doesn't know what to expect now, so I'm going to do what I usually do after he makes an attempt; stop and get some sleep and a decent meal while he thinks I think he's going through the process of getting ready for another try with the phase-warp. There's a motel about twenty miles ahead. We'll stop there and he'll come to us."

Shorty relaxed. She could detect him. There was nothing to worry about now.

Dee gritted her teeth and kept her face calm and expressionless. Even though she had both the kids under hypno-conditioning, it was a good idea not to let them know how scared she really was. She knew she shouldn't be—she had less to worry about this time than almost any before—but she was.

He was almost here now. He'd parked his car alongside the road a few hundred yards from the motel, and was coming through the woods in the back.

"Ready?" she asked softly.

The two kids nodded. Three silenced revolers pointed at the door.

After all her troubles the end was anticlimactic.

He knocked.

"Come in." The damned fool. . . .

Three soft hisses, the phase-warp pulled him back. He was gone. The acrid smell of gunsmoke hung in the room.

Relief flooded through her like a tidal wave.

She was *free!*

She could sleep without fear now.

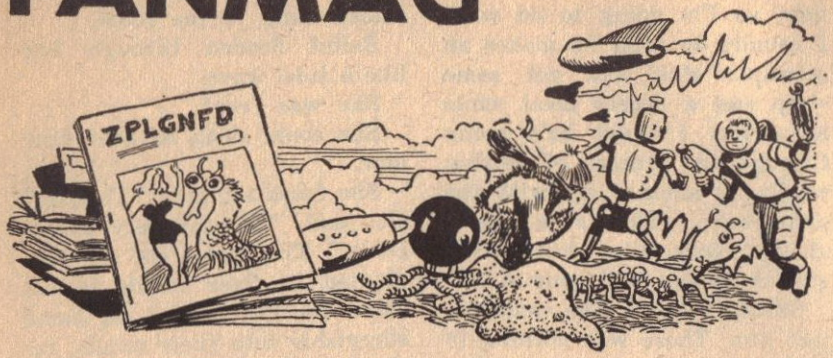
She faced the kids. "Thanks," she said, "Thanks very much. Drun." The memories she had planted in their minds to account for the trip so far came sluggishly into their minds, replacing those of herself. She took the guns from their unresisting hands, dropped them in her jacket pockets, and left the cabin.

Her own was next door. She stepped inside without bothering to turn on the lights. It was all over. All over. She wouldn't have to worry about him again. Not until they discovered his other activities, and found out about her along with them. And if they did, so what? Once the radioactivity from the control unit was gone, they'd never be able to find her; not among a couple billion others.

Now she could go out and try to fit herself into a society of a world that was still frighteningly alien to her, even after two years. Try. She knew she'd never be able to.

She sat on the edge of the bed and sobbed softly in the darkness.

FANMAG



FANSOC

BY BILL VENABLE

1

I should like, if you will permit me, to borrow a gimmick from George Orwell and coin the above title as a new term in the science fiction fan's vocabulary.

The French artist Paul Gauguin spent a lifetime studying the society of the Samoan islanders. Ruth Benedict, the eminent lady ethnologist, spent rather less studying the Zuni Indians in New Mexico. It seems somewhat incongruous that someone hasn't had the brilliant idea as yet to spend a few hours or more ruminating on the microcosmic society that exists within our own, familiar culture of the 20th century: science fiction fandom. Perhaps this article will throw an initial span across the gap, and serve to stimulate other researchers into the field.

Readers of George Orwell's terrifying novel, *1984*, will already have assigned the correct meaning to the title of this article. Borrowing from Orwell's *Ingsoc*, or *English Socialism*, we come up with the convenient abbreviation *Fansoc*, or *Fan Society*. (We must deviate a bit from Orwell's novel in replacing *Socialism* with *Society*, since after all, of all the trends that fanpolitics does take, it is

anything but socialistic: as we shall shortly see.)

The unknown science fiction fan who, many years ago, first applied the term, "microcosm," to science fiction fandom, coined a more apt nomenclature than he perhaps thought. Most of you who have been readers and/or fans of science fiction for some years now have probably ceased to think about one of the most extraordinary features of science fiction fandom.

Fandom is an entity.

That's a mouthful, so let's take it apart. What do we mean by "entity?"

Take a look at it. Here we have a heterogeneous group of individuals, people of the most diversified backgrounds, characters, habits and tastes; with one exception: they all read and like science fiction.

That's not surprising in itself. Liking science fiction is a matter of taste, much the same as liking classical music, or Esquire calendars, or Chinese cookery. The surprising thing is that, by and large, people who like science fiction place enough importance on this one peculiar trait to spontaneously band together, without formality or ceremony, into the unified, solid group that we give the special name of "*fandom.*"

And "fandom?" It is actually a society within a society, a culture within a culture—a *microcosm*, to use the happy title suggested by some unknown lover of science fiction and fantasy. Consider, if you will, that fandom not only exists as a

¶ The happy (we presume) readers of PENDULUM will already be familiar with the writings of Bill Venable. He has slowly climbed the ladder of fandom, over the rungs of *neofan, LNF,* and *BNF*. If there were a fanacademy that awarded these titles we feel sure that he would now be labeled a *BNF*. If these labels leave you with a slightly confused feeling, you will find all the answers in his contribution to FANMAG, entitled FANSOC.

FANMAG appears in every issue of SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURES. The current fan magazines are judged for quality and interest by the staff of SFA. On this basis an editor is picked to write an issue of FANMAG. The choice of material is up to him.

spontaneously unified group, but as a world which is a law unto itself—enforcing, quite literally, its own peculiar set of values and code of ethics and behaviour upon its voluntary members; and without benefit, as we said, of any formally-expressed articles of confederation, purpose or system whatsoever. "And," to quote Sandburg, "this has lights of wonder, echo and pace and echo again."

Unfortunately, your author is not an ethnologist. The job of making a quantitative analysis of the island culture that is fandom, I shall gladly leave to someone else. I don't know whether any ethnologist-at-large ever conceived the idea of having the Samoan write a book on an inside view of Samoan culture. But when was there no more to write on a subject than what the experts wrote about it? And when was it decreed that we should overlook the Samoan's description of Samoa—or the fan's description of *his* peninsula?

I doubt that very many nonfans ever recognize fandom for what it is—they can't, they haven't ever had the experience. Most of them seem to labor under the delusion that fandom is on the whole some kind of *club* (just what kind they usually can't decide). Others mistake it for a professional group. It is so unique unto itself that few outsiders, if any, grasp its basic concepts or view it in proper perspective.

We said that fandom is a mixed group. How far can that be carried? As far as you like. Apart from a common fondness for imaginative literature, there is no more diversified group of people in the world.

Some fans are rich (no kidding!). Others are stone broke 90% of the time and penniless the other 10%. They have all kinds of occupations.

A large number are in fields that relate, directly or indirectly, to writing, publishing and related activities. (Editors, authors, publishers, artists, right on down to copyboys, and extending to one fan I know of who works for the company that makes the ink with which many stfmags are printed.) Another large group falls into the category of workers in science and related fields—engineers, technicians, and so on down to the stenographers in the offices of the Oak Ridge AFC Research Center. There have been taxi drivers, disc jockeys, doctors and dentists, lawyers, janitors, teachers—the list goes on indefinitely.

How about other common

tastes besides a liking for science fiction and fantasy? If anyone has found another such common denominator, I'd like to hear about it. In music, you can range from Tin Pan Alley enthusiasts to lovers of the three Bs. In art, they go from Dali to Michelangelo and back again via a different route. Their other hobbies besides science fiction range from hot-rodding to stamp-collecting.

How about their opinions in politics and religion? Here again is no exception. Politically, science fiction fans range in tastes from monarchy to anarchy. As far as religion goes, there are all kinds, from Catholics to Atheists, with, as far as I know personally, at least one Buddhist and two Moslems in the lot.

It runs on. Apart from a common love of science fiction, no more heterogeneous group exists, I think, anywhere.

Yet, in contrast to the wide diversity of its adherents, science fiction fandom is surprisingly unified. It is rather like a fraternal organization of some sort, with an open membership; except, as we said, that there isn't any real organization to *this* group. Despite this seeming incongruity, a science fiction fan almost always finds the welcome mat out for him on other fans' doorsteps wherever he goes, if for no other reason than the simple one that both host and guest are mutual admirers of imaginative literature. Put two fans together and they can talk for hours on end about matters scientifictional and fantastic—comparing collections (and sometimes throwing in a little horse-trading on the side), discussing favorite stories and favorite authors, recollecting the good old days or looking ahead to an optimistic future for themselves and science fiction. A visiting fan in a strange city finds instant and unreserved hospitality in the science fiction group in that city in almost all cases where there is one.

Does anyone recall the forgotten old-timer in fandom who first coined another phrase that, in spite of the onslaughts and insults of the years, still holds its ring of truth—"It is a proud and lonely thing to be a fan?" Sure, it's corny. It also happens to be true to a large measure—at least, for many fans, the "lonely" part of it.

I'm not advocating the theory that science fiction fans happen to be a chosen group, the elite, separated by a stone wall from the rest of a world of dullards. The percentage of John Public that sneers at science fiction has

declined, and today a large number of non-readers regard it with some respect. I'd still bet that today over 50% of J. P. regards science fiction as "queer" literature—and science fiction fans still bear the brand of, at best, a race of people with misguided tastes and "wild" imaginations. Correspondingly, a large percentage of fandom regards the rest of the world as a group of narrow-minded, unimaginative louts and clods. We're not concerned here with the moral implications of this—what is "right" and what is "wrong,"—only with digging to find the foundation of such an incongruous unity. Conclusion? Fans prefer fans. Fans find the company of other fans to be more interesting, more regarding, more stimulating, on the whole, than the company of non-fans.

Apparently, a taste for science fiction is an offshoot of one of the rather important facets of a person's psychological makeup—so much so that it transcends rather wide differences on other levels of personality. Let the psychologists take it from there.

2

The next time you write a letter to an editor or to a fan with whom you're corresponding, let one of your non-fan friends take a look at it before you seal the envelope and mail it. If you're more or less typical in your fan correspondence, the chances are that your non-fan friend will be baffled by a number of things that you take for granted in writing a letter. For instance, the language.

"Are you corresponding with somebody in code?" asked a puzzled fraternity brother of mine once, after inadvertently reading some of the postcards that had come for me in the afternoon's mail.

"No," I replied, "Whatever gave you that idea?"

"Some of those postcards I saw in your box today," he responded. "I couldn't make head or tail of 'em. What the hell *is* all that stuff, anyway? What's all that about N-F-F-F and *Norwescon* and all the rest of that junk? A new language?"

"No," I told him, "Just some convenient abbreviations that science fiction fans use when they correspond."

"Where did you learn all that?" he queried.

"Oh, you just pick it up."

"*You just pick it up.*" That sounds really strange when you look at it from the point of view of an outsider. A fraternity has

its ritual—I could walk up to another member of my national fraternity and hold a valid conversation that would be perfectly meaningless to any innocent strangers nearby. But I didn't "just pick it up," I had to learn it—to study it, as one of the requirements for formal membership. And yet any two science fiction fans might meet on the street and hold a conversation that would send the nearest idle passer-by scuttling off to find the looney-wagon. Fandom, the loosest and most open of societies, possesses a jargon which is just picked up by members that is surpassed by few of the tightest secret societies on the face of the earth. A fan who doesn't have a fair command of fan-slang finds himself classified by this defect alone with the merest of neo-fans.

Which brings us to consideration of another unusual aspect of this contradictorily heterogeneous group. It promulgates, with fair rigor, a logical but highly unique class system, whose diaphanous basis apparently withstands attempts at both investigation and defiance.

People in fandom may be classified and cross-classified in several categories. Here are a few of them:

1. First, and probably foremost, is *popularity*. Popularity (or fame or notoriety, if you wish) in fandom is generally gained through the medium of the innumerable publications that flood the Microcosm—both fan and professional. In other words, a fan may be classified on the basis of *how well known* his name has become through this medium. From bottom to top, the classifications are *neofan, LNF* (Little Name Fan), *WKF* (Well-Known Fan), and *BNF* (Big Name Fan). With the exception of *neofan*, most of these terms refer to a status more usually permanent than temporal.

2. The second category might be thought more properly to include the term *neofan* than the first: and that category deals with the length of time one has been a fan. The nomenclatures are *neofan* (a relative newcomer), and *Old Guard Fan*, (self-explanatory: a real old-timer). Since the in-between category seems to need no special title, none has been given it.

3. Going at cross-paths to the first two categories, the third defines the degree of a fan's activity, and even goes so far down the scale as to begin with *NORS* (non-readers: of science fiction, naturally). Crossing the bridge into the more decent classifications we have just plain *readers* (do we have to say of what?

again?), *passifans* (who engage only intermittently in fanactivity), and *actifans* (who go at it every day and twice on Sundays). The final status in this category is that of the *burned-out* fan, one who has engaged in fanactivity at such a fast and furious pace that he eventually burned up all the enthusiasm he ever had for it. We might also include a type that doesn't seem to fit into either of the fan categories, and yet must be placed somewhere—the *collector*. A collector is more than just a reader, and yet many collectors object to being called fans, so that they must be put in an odd pigeonhole as far as the niceness of the system is concerned. Collectors are a class by themselves, although many fans are, of course, also collectors.

It's unnecessary—and might be meaningless to many of you—to go on.[1] The three main categories of caste have already been set down, and they should serve to amplify the fact that our Microcosm does indeed maintain a most startling and yet a very successful system of class. Not only that, it is a system of class based, not upon material considerations such as wealth, or upon autocratic considerations such as ancestry or "blood," but primarily on logical considerations that classify the individual according to his own character and works. Anyone can become a Big Name Fan—there are *no* reservations. An individual's classification is actually a rather true measure of the amount of interest and work he has put into being a fan, and of his character as well, for to attain a higher status one must be able to make friends rather than enemies. Most of fandom's despised have been and will probably remain LNF as long as they go on alienating people. It is a democratic system that draws most definite lines of class which are almost universally observed and respected. Why shouldn't they be? And yet it too has developed quite spontaneously in the loose and heterogeneous group that is fandom. And tell it to an outsider and you stand a 50-50 chance of being clapped in the giggle emporium. Fandom's class system arises from a set of standards somewhat alien to the society of which fandom's microcosm is an offshoot. It is a set of cultural standards every bit as extraordinary, if you please, as those of the remote inhabitants of the Samoan Islands.

[1]Readers who wish to investigate this subject more thoroughly are referred to FANSPEAK, a dictionary of fan language issued as a benefit by the National Fantasy Fan Federation, or to FANTRODUCTON, a similar publication, also from the NFFF.

It might be of interest to touch briefly upon the rather bizarre economics of fandom. On the whole, although not quite, fandom appears to be an economic "sink"—expending as it does rather large amounts of money, time and resources upon things that have very little value outside of the peculiar system of standards of value that fandom promulgates.

Collectors represent a large part of this money-sink, spending as they do large sums on magazines and books that are worthless conglomerations of paper and ink to anyone but another collector or fan. This, however, is not too peculiar to fandom, for stamp collectors do much the same thing (with the exception that the value of a rare old stamp is almost universally recognized, whereas the housewives are undoubtedly legion who have tossed piles of pre-World War II Astoundings into the furnace.)

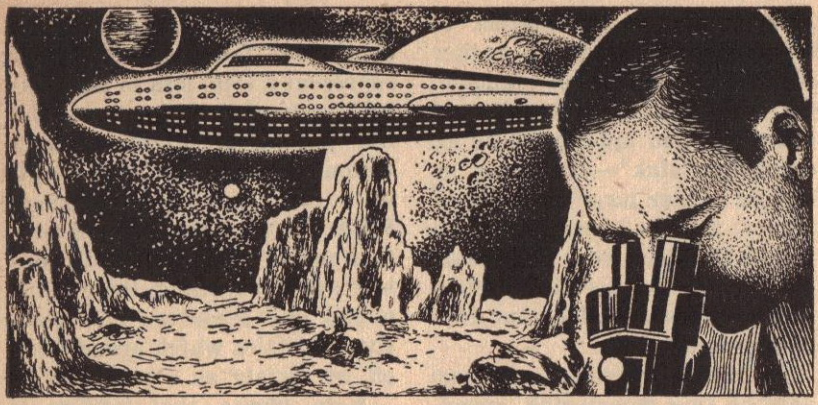
The staggering output of fanzines and other fan publications, however, is a different matter. To anyone else but a fan these are entirely worthless—even objects of derision. And yet money earned by fans in the normal productive activities of society is being funnelled into the hands of mimeograph manufacturers, paper companies and other sorts of firms for the production of fan magazines that represent a total loss to the commodity market. The paper and ink purchased might as well (from "normal" society's point of view) have been burned. With the exception of the professionals, these scientifictionists are channelling their time, money and resources into creative activities which are written off by society as a total loss.

Note, please, that fandom is however an emphatically capitalistic society. Free enterprise is its foundation stone, for its entire output and input are regulated by the absolutely uncommanded spontaneity that we discussed before. Those few individuals who have mistakenly accused fandom of being a bunch of "pinks" could hardly require a better refutation than this.

The all-too brief description of science fiction fandom will have been old stuff to some of you. To others it will have been in the nature of an introduction to something that, I hope, you will find worthy of future exploration. Some of the viewpoints presented may, even to the familiars in fandom, strike a note of fresh surprise at things that you may not have stopped to wonder at before.

Samoa, here we come.

Illustrated by Mendenhall



the FICTION in SCIENCE FICTION

BY WILLIAM TENN

The author, who is a well known writer of science-fiction, takes a very positive stand on that word *writer*. He pulls no punches when he tangles with the *whys* and *hows* of this form of fiction.

Several years ago, when Theodore Sturgeon was assembling his first collection of short stories for Prime Press, he asked Ray Bradbury to write the introduction. The Bradbury name, while not yet one to conjure with, had already begun to exhibit qualities of luminosity and fluorescence—qualities, Ted reasoned, which would serve to light up his own peculiar narrative techniques wonderfully well.

Bradbury, for his part, was enthusiastic. He had been a highly articulate Sturgeonian since back when, as a mere baggy-trousered fan, he had spent his days sneering at fellow

addicts who preferred L. Ron Hubbard over the author of "It" and "Microcosmic God," and his nights dreaming dreams of impossible glory amid the pages of *Unknown* and *Astounding*. Now that he had reached the point when almost any editor in the field considered it a privilege to feature his most casual scribble, he took great pride in presenting to the general public a bound volume of those stories he had delighted in years ago. I suspect his feelings were similar to those of the doctor who is invited to write the introduction to a new edition of the anatomy text he had bleared his eyes over in the first year of medical school.

I saw Ted Sturgeon the day after Bradbury's manuscript arrived. He had the look of a man who had bitten into a ham sandwich and discovered a slice of galvanized iron.

An introduction, you see, has a specific function: it introduces. It says, Reader, I would like you to meet a bunch of extremely interesting stories and the man who created them; I think you will all become very close friends very fast for these, these and these reasons; and just to help you to become much better acquainted in the shortest possible time, here are a few factual tidbits about the author and his work. That's all. You have the introducer's signature and possibly a dateline, and on the very next page the first story in the book.

Bradbury's introduction was something else entirely. It was an intricately written—albeit deftly handled—study in esthetics, devoted to the problem of why American science-fiction had not to date produced a single definite and unquestioned work of art. And it was much more concerned with explication of the author's views on art than it was with the field of science-fiction as such. It hardly mentioned the stories that were to follow.

Ted was in a difficult position. His deadline was heavy upon him, and he felt that the introduction as presently constituted was unusable. He told me that after a good deal of floor-pacing and knuckle-biting, he had decided to send the script back to Bradbury. With it, he had enclosed a letter, explaining what he had wanted and apologizing for not having made it clear at the outset; also, in passing, he criticized the young Californian for being preoccupied with artistic form at the expense of substance, i.e. the specific stories which should have been discussed. He said that if Ray could throw in a couple of lines to make the whole thing more conventional and functional they

might be able to jam it into the book at the last moment—but if it turned out to be as difficult as Ted thought it would, well, lots of books had been published without introductions. . . .

In a couple of days, an envelope decorated profusely with air-mail and special-delivery stamps boiled in. It was a brand-new introduction which Bradbury had written at fever-heat a few minutes after getting Ted's letter. It was exactly the kind of introduction Ted had visualized when he'd approached Bradbury in the first place: it was truly the introduction of his dreams, written as only Ray Bradbury could write it.

And Bradbury apologized to Ted for any erroneous impression that the first document had given of a nose that was lifted and lips that were fastidiously wrinkled when it came to magazine science-fiction. . . .

Well, the book was published under the title *Without Sorcery*, and what with thirteen of Sturgeon's best stories following Bradbury's colorful introduction, it's already become pretty much of a collector's item.

That's all there is to the anecdote. Except that Ted confided to me that he thought that first piece was one hell of a fine essay on the more recondite aspects of the field—even though he disagreed with every word after the author's byline. He talked for hours about what a kick he'd get out of refuting it in print; then he turned back to his word-mill—and the matter of making a living.

Trouble is, I realized, there's no place to publish that sort of thing—Bradbury's original essay or Ted's projected rebuttal—outside of a mimeographed, ink-blotched, butcher-paper fan magazine. A writer for the *New Republic* once described fan magazines as a peculiar blend of *Screen Romances* and *Partisan Review*.

And then, as I had a thousand times before, I thought how strange was the field in which I made my living. From the point of view of any established and conventional literary critic, it can be very easily categorised: one of the several divisions of popular, commercial fiction of which the others are western, detective, sports, love stories and confessions. Such a critic would not have hesitated, especially at the time of my anecdote, to have labeled both Sturgeon and Bradbury as ordinary commercial writers who happened to specialize in science-fantasy and who, as such, are more interested in a steady production of material that has proven salability

than in frequent re-evaluation of their work and the derivation therefrom of new, unfamiliar and possibly unpopular creative azimuths. He would have pointed out with a yawn, this critic, that science-fiction's special literary conventions—such as Outer Space and Murdering Monsters out to Destroy the Earth—are merely high-stepping versions of basics in western and detective stories—the Wide Open Spaces and the Monstrous Murderer about to Destroy Our Heroine. He would have gone on, this critic, to nod wearily at the argument that science-fiction had peculiarities shared by no other branch of letters; he would have pointed out that every aspect of commercial writing had its eccentricities—but that eccentricities do not a literature make. . . .

(I know what he would have said, because I argued with him until my eyes popped and my voice grew hoarse, him and a round dozen others of his kidney —both before and long, long after the incident of the Bradbury introduction.)

But truly odd commercial writers, these, to be brooding about esthetic questions instead of how to go from penny-a-word status to penny-and-a-half and two-cent-a-word eminence like their colleagues, the Shoot-Em-Down Daltons and the Love-Em-Up Desdemonas, in the media immediately adjoining on the newsstands! Western writers, whose standing in their field was comparable with that of Sturgeon and Bradbury, did not—and I knew this from close acquaintance with them—worry overmuch about artistic problems, or if they did, it was in the fashion of the Hollywood storysmith who makes a careful separation in his mind between the crap typed out to keep himself in Cadillacs and the *serious* novel being done page by painful longhand page every night in the privacy of his cabana. The difference was that Sturgeon and Bradbury worried about art *while* worrying about rates; that they closely questioned the integrity of each narrative performance *while* they exchanged market gossip and trade talk; that they concerned themselves with the literary problems *of the popular and commercial* branch of writing in which they earned their living.

This had been true, and briefly, in one other commercial writing field: the detective story. But there was only one Dashiell Hammett, and Raymond Chandler was hardly his prophet.

In science-fiction, I have come to know, in the years since Stur-

geon's book was published, several boxcarloads of writers of substantial talent who have, variously proportioned, the following characteristics in common: (1) They share a passionate belief in science-fiction as a means of literary expression that has particular validity and significance in this age. (2) They are passionately concerned with their own development as writers in the new and untried channels of their medium. (3) They are passionately dedicated to the proposition that while Man may not live by Brèad Alone, Bread is nonetheless a good beginning and should be purchasable by Arts as well as Crafts.

To name a very few, a representative handful who will hate me to the grave and beyond for invading the privacy of their steel-girdered, poured-concrete towers, I know that Damon Knight, Cyril Kornbluth, Katherine MacLean, Fritz Leiber, Judith Merril and Walt Miller are as deeply interested in the esthetic rewards of science-fiction as they are in its rapidly increasing financial ones. It's obvious to me—although I've met none of them—that the same is true of Ward Moore, Philip Jose Farmer, Edgar Pangborn and Jack Vance, to give you another sample plucked almost at random. There are countless others—and more crowding in every day.

There are also those, in and out of the field, who will claim that all this talk of Art and Expression-of-the-Age is so much noonday nonsense. They disagree with the dictum that science-fiction has to do primarily with people—that whether the people are modern *homo sapiens* hammering out the first rocket, twenty-fifth century mutants hammering out the first *xxl-yyrdk*, robots trying to form labor unions, androids fighting to have the manufacturer's label removed from their backsides, or monocotyledonous Arcturians pathetically attempting to smuggle themselves past Terran Immigration disguised as lima beans, it is first and foremost with their problems and view of *themselves* as people that the s-f writer has to deal successfully, it is with their characters as individuals or collective personality as an alien community that he must grapple long before he has a story. There are still those, in other words, who feel that science-fiction is essentially the field of the wonderful gimmick, the dramatized gadget, the engineer's doodle made into flesh and bone and narrative action. They crawl, these folk, out of the cave of the past and cry constantly for more science,

more *science* in science-fiction.

This is the group that plays Scylla to the litterateur's Charybdis. Against them, the average science-fiction writer has been able to develop only the thinnest, most pathetic defense. At least he can reply to the exotics who challenge the artistic substance of his work with the many-lunged rebuttal of *vox populi:* he can dig his fists truculently into his hips and remind sneering estheticians that that part of our heritage which today's taste would call "fine art" was *popular* art in its own time, that the masses flocked to watch Michelangelo sculpt and crowds of standees sweated to see Euripides' latest; and that while popularity, by itself, is no guarantee of future fame, it would seem historically important enough to dim the immortality aspirations of most present-day "serious fiction" for which—according to its publishers—apathy among the buying, reading public has been growing steadily. But the critic who successfully charges the science-fiction writer with inadequate or —much, much worse—*inaccurate* science has smitten him hip, thigh and jawbone and left him a thing of gibbering, barely audible apologies. And his colleagues in the field will not defend him.

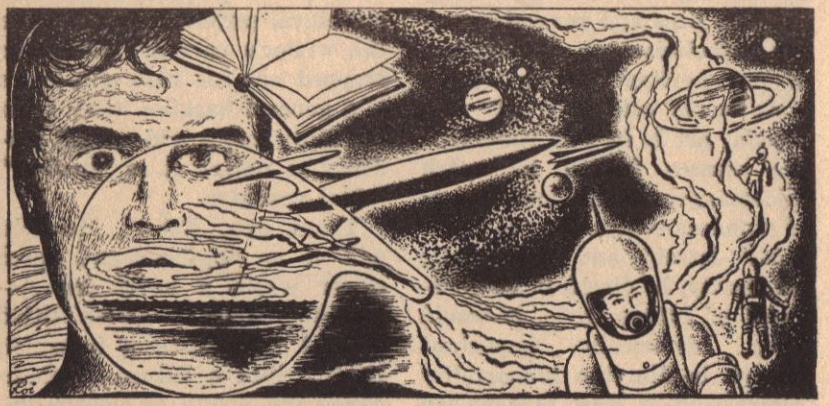
There are two reasons for this: firstly, the fear of being labeled an "escape" literature and, secondly, the heavy quantities of physics and chemistry in the early science-fiction magazines on which most of the modern writers were suckled. As a result of the latter, if it can be proven that a story contains an incorrectly computed orbital velocity or a palpably impossible structural carbon formula, while the writer's ears are no longer cropped nor his nose slit, there is a general backing away from the story and a widespread tendency to regard it as "spoiled."

But consider.

Years ago, Robert Heinlein who is an engineer and naval officer wrote a novel for *Astounding Science-Fiction* titled *Beyond This Horizon* in which he described a future of abundance and plenty so overwhelming that the principal social problem of the day was keeping the bulk of the population amused and occupied. Recently, Frederik Pohl and Cyril Kornbluth, who received their training in advertising and journalism respectively, gave us in the *Galaxy* serialization of *Gravy Planet* (which Ballantine brought out under the title of *The Space Merchants*) a portrait of a world-to-come where the economic returns have diminish-

ed so close to the vanishing point that only the wealthiest and most successful can afford a room of their own. Both books are among the best modern science-fiction.

Both Ward Moore's "Bring the Jubilee" and Isaac Asimov's *Pebble in the Sky* turn to history for their inspiration, the one to depict a thoroughly believable



1953 America in which the South had won the Civil War and the other to show the Earth, a millennium or so hence, in the same position *vis-a-vis* the galactic civilization as Judea of the first century A.D. And both of these are among the best modern science-fiction.

In none of these stories would a scientific error or two be of any consequence; even in the factual matter behind the specific narrative action an inaccuracy should be considered of no more importance than the boners in Shakespearean historical plays. Of course, obvious errors can be annoying to the reader and the writer who has any pride at all will check all doubtful items carefully. But the stories mentioned, like all good fiction, are essentially stories of human relationships, individually and communally, and no misstatements of scientific fact can rob them of this quality nor can dozens of validating footnotes add to their stature.

And as to the charge of being "escape" literature, a charge which even so respected a science-fiction personality as Fletcher Pratt found it necessary to refute in an article that appeared in a West Coast literary magazine, well, I think it's about time that we who read and write

this new kind of story recognize that here is a jealous argument of very ancient lineage indeed. When, back in the eighteenth century, novels first began to appear—and flourish—in booksellers' windows, they were attacked by writers of heavy sermon-essays as instruments of the devil in that they pulled the book-buying public away from the stuff which they should have been reading for the sake of their immortal souls: heavy sermon-essays. The same thing happened when the tedious miracle play of the middle ages began to give way to the Elizabethan drama. In every age, entrenched intellectual privilege has attempted to preserve itself by slighting the newer and more popular forms or by attacking them outright as dangerous. But despite their efforts, the audience for miracle plays and bound volumes of sermons has contracted considerably. . . .

The dictionary definition of *escape* that is pertinent here is "avoidance of reality." On this basis, science-fiction, dealing as it does with events that have not yet occurred (or, as in the Ward Moore story, events that by a matter of historical necessity have never occurred) frequently stands accused of leading our youth astray and perverting the population in general by ladling out great quantities of verbal opiate.

But why do people read fiction in the first place—any kind of fiction? To learn more about their own irritating, unfulfilled and insecure lives? To gather useful moral precepts by means of allegories thinly veneered with narrative? I think not.

The fiction writer is the heir of the Homeric epic poet and the Viking *skald*. His lyre has been replaced by a typewriter, true, and his voice amplified enormously by the printing press —but his role today is fundamentally the same as when the local roughnecks having returned from a hard day's skull-cracking and armor-denting, they sat down in the great smoke-filled hall and, cutting themselves a slab of burnt boar, belched three times and commanded, "Hey, fellow, you with the strange stink: take your arms off that wench and sing us a song of how brave we were in last week's battle. And it better be plenty interesting if you know what's good for you."

Today, if the writer knows what's good for him he continues to make it plenty interesting. And realizing that few people can see the place-time segment they occupy as an intriguing phenomenon, he wanders as far afield as he can, *without jeopard-*

izing the sense of reality.

In that last phrase is the secret—and a paradoxical one!—of the escape element in fiction. It has to be believable. Whether the reader is a sex-starved slum kid following the slickly-written, highly spiced adventures of a well-to-do, well-preserved roue, or an impotent, rich old man wallowing in the sordid details of a naturalistic novel about young juvenile delinquents, both demand a feeling of reality, a feeling that it did happen, that it is happening, that—at the very least—what they are reading *could* happen.

But before that, both have demanded—and found—a literary escape hatch out of the dullness of their own lives. First the child will climb on your knee and ask to be told a story; *then*, it will demand of you: "Is it true?" The above-mentioned minstrel who dared to sing of last week's battle in terms of the situation as it actually occurred, would have been brained by a mead flask. No, he increased the numbers of the enemy ten or twenty-fold, he verbally blunted the axes and broke the swords of the men to whom he was singing until it seemed to his listeners that they had practically committed suicide by getting involved in the battle in the first place; and then, by alternatingly extolling their stout hearts and decrying the cowardice of their opponents, he showed how, in a magnificent charge behind their invincible leader, they had carried the day and won eternal fame for themselves and the patch of hillside on which they lived. It is more than possible that when he finished, his enthusiastic audience had already forgotten that the battle had been no more than an attack on a neighboring village the majority of whose male inhabitants had been known in advance to be away on a fishing expedition. So the minstrel was cheered to the greasy rafters for creating an interesting tale out of what was essentially a rather routine slaughter-and-rape-fest—and asked to give an encore. For an encore, he probably selected his well known piece about the gods—strange, eternal creatures that could hurl lightning bolts from their bare hands and wrestle with serpents twice as long as the Earth, but who, in the song's opening stanzas, were sitting in *their* great, smoke-filled hall munching roast meat and listening to *their* minstrel sing of *their* wars with the mud giants to the south. And the mortal, dirty humans who heard this encore were completely fascinated and marveled delightedly at the incredible, homey parallels between their lives and

the lives of their divinities.

And there, right there, is the area in which science-fiction leads the literary side of its life. It is the job of the science-fiction writer to take the utterly fantastic, if need be and make it seem as real as a copy of today's tabloid newspaper folded to the sports section. To the extent that he succeeds in this is he a good science-*fiction* writer, and to the extent that he fails to make the story believable is he a bad one be it ever so full of faster-than-light-gimmicks and futuristic individuals with triple brains and mechanical genitalia. When H. G. Wells (a writer whose work in and out of science-fiction still waits, in my opinion, to be properly appreciated) gave us the giant children in *Food of the Gods*, he made it clear at one point that they intended to conquer humanity and take over the planet for themselves; yet he had, by then, made them so completely understandable that the reader realized them much more vividly than he did his next-door neighbors and hoped rather wistfully that they would succeed in replacing him and his comparatively minuscule fellow-citizens.

Science-fiction, it is true—as opposed to pure fantasy—is not supposed to deal in the impossible or utterly fantastic. In theory it is rooted firmly in the best available knowledge of the day and its blossoms—once more theoretically—are only those events which can conceivably occur. I have always been impatient of this approach.

Does it really matter that much of Swift's *Gulliver* and most of Rabelais' *Gargantua* are based on what today's science would call fables and legends and impossibilities? Is either work rendered less valid for the child seeking pure entertainment or the adult seeking entertainment plus depth? Yet both Swift and Rabelais were among the best-educated men of their time and based their work as well as they could on such facts (and extensions of these facts) as their age could boast. The facts — the science, so to speak—have been out-dated; the fiction will outendure our civilization.

I tend to limit fantasy, in my own mind, to those stories based primarily on superstitious belief, but I find myself much troubled by this definition. The term "superstitious belief" partakes far too much of an epithetical quality. *Who* is calling *whom* superstitious, I ask, and how much careful investigation has been made of the superstition? On the one hand, you had the spectacle, a few years ago, of extremely able scientists in an extremely

scientific country like Germany insisting that abruptly they found themselves able to detect real differences in "races," a term which, after all, is no more than a semantic convention; on the other hand, you had Professor Rhine of Duke University looking into the hoary old superstitions of telepathy and telekinesis and coming across results which could be expressed in surprisingly positive mathematical terms. And then a madman like Fredric Brown writes a magnificent mad yarn entitled *What Mad Universe,* based on some very acceptable modern theoretical physics, and creates a literary matrix where, as Theodore Sturgeon dazedly pointed out to me, "Anything, absolutely *anything,* could happen and yet be entirely logical!"

What then is the specific literary role of the science-fiction writer? I think it can be said to derive in equal parts from what I call the fictional quality in science and the scientific quality in literature.

Before the development of the electron microscope and sundry useful gadgets like cloud chambers and special photographic devices, it was obvious to most chemists that very definite laws governed the combinations of elements as well as more complex substances. Various laws were worked out, expressed in what were called "combining weights," to cover the observed phenomena. But the question of why the elements combined in the specific ways, weights and quantities that they did could not be answered with the research equipment then available. So, over a century ago, an Englishman named John Dalton revived an ancient piece of Greek metaphysics, altering it to fit the observed data, and gave the world Dalton's Atomic Theory. And that's the theory which, with the necessary amendments to fit new facts as they've been discovered, is behind the modern atomic bomb. Dalton died without seeing either an atom or its path on a photographic plate, but the theory which bears his name still stands in all essentials.

Then, a little while earlier, there was the matter of phlogiston. Unable to explain the phenomenon of combustion any other way, the alchemists and early chemists decided on an imaginary substance which had to be in all things that could catch fire. The more phlogiston, the hotter the flame. Eventually, of course, all the phlogiston would be burned away and only the original substance left. The only trouble was that when Lavoisier burned material under laboratory conditions and

weighed the residue carefully, he found that the weight increased (due to the acquisition of oxygen) and thus destroyed the phlogiston theory.

As a non-scientist, I have always been fascinated by both theories, one accepted even today and the other mentioned now only to be ridiculed. I have always felt that their respective originators, Dalton and Becher, were essentially poets of science. Operating from definite facts, they went beyond facts to create a scintillating explanation of how a specific part of our universe operated. With all due deference to hard-headed laboratory technicians, I call this the fictional quality in science and include in it such delightful items as Einstein's curved space and Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. The entertainment value of such theories, utterly apart from their value to science, to a speculative, elastic mind is prodigious.

But the writer, and I mean any writer here, has to be scientific in his turn. If he constructs a character who is miserly and selfish, he cannot absent-mindedly allow him to be generous at odd moments for no good reason, without destroying the inner consistency of his work. And it is this inner consistency which is the scientific quality in literature. Every good story is a kind of sealed universe, in which, as the action unfolds, the reader is made privy to the laws peculiar to it. If the author destroys a "law" he must rapidly reveal a higher one—or lose the reader's confidence irrevocably.

These two seemingly contradictory qualities from both science and literature have fused in science-fiction and produced a situation where the possible number of "sealed universes" the author can create have multiplied enormously in number and variety. And the author who is true to his craft and daring in it can in this way employ the facts of science to liberate himself from the facts of everyday life and go exploring all kinds of dramatic situations far beyond the dreams of literature to date.

Science-fiction, thus considered, is not a pocket in the rest of fiction: it is the greatest revolution in fiction, the greatest extension of itself that literature has yet made. And the rapid, almost geometric expansion of an increasingly demanding audience indicates that it is a popular revolution.

Squinting at the future, one might say that while the life-expectancy of the field seems to be quite good, what with the movies, television, slick magazines and serious literary critics all standing by to provide a varied nour-

ishment, the continuing health of science-fiction is another matter —and largely because of the aforementioned dieticians and their tremendous capacities for vitaminizing the lustiest art forms into an early, quavering and ulcerous middle-age.

Science-fiction must continue to derive largely from its own roots. They extend neither into the gimmicks of the laboratory nor into the circulation figures of large magazine chains which have invested heavily in western magazines yesterday, in science-fantasy today and would just as cheerfully lief take a substantial flyer in Carpentry Stories tomorrow if the market should take a slight shift in that direction. They are roots which lie deep within a hard core of highly articulate, violently opinionated and author-worshiping fandom —and I deplore the childish excesses of that fandom regularly. They are roots which are locked intricately around the great social issues of our time—and no one knows better than I how confused these issues have become, how murkily and dangerously they twist under the awful historical moment in which we live. They are roots which abide beyond all else in the human mind's elemental sense of wonder, in the probing, restless curiosity which is our primate heritage and which—from its beginnings—has sought a knowledge, some knowledge, of the future.

These are the roots, but into what airy, sunlit realms the upper branches may eventually reach, no man can say. But this much I know: they must grow in their own fashion and not be pruned in the manner of the older, more docile and dying growths in the literary orchard. And they need both the heat of continuing popular acceptance *and* the cool, steady rain of each individual author's personal integrity—always a difficult combination.

But, given that combination, we will live to see the feeble, formless, evocative story of today eventually replaced, in most respects, by a massive and thoroughly modern creation, science-fiction, the literature of extrapolative, industrial man.

BOOKS REVIEWS:

THE DISSECTING TABLE

by DAMON KNIGHT

Nowadays we like to think that everybody loves science-fantasy, from Artie Shaw to Clifton Fadiman; but occasionally we are reminded that not all the world's respectable literary parlors are yet open to us. Such a reminder is Arthur Koestler's short essay, "The Boredom of Fantasy," in the August 1953 issue of *Harper's Bazaar*.

After a burst of good-humored laughter at the expense of one of A. E. van Vogt's wilder novels (the hero of which Koestler identifies as "Robert Headrock"), Koestler admits that he is partially addicted to the stuff himself, deals briefly and penetratingly with the history of the field, and then gets down to his major point: He likes it, but it isn't art.

> . . . Swift's *Gulliver*, Huxley's *Brave New World*, Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are great works of literature because in them the oddities of alien worlds serve merely as a background or pretext for a social message. In other words, they are literature precisely to the extent to which they are not science fiction, to which they are works of disciplined imagination and not of unlimited fantasy.

This criticism is less than we might have expected from one of the most brilliant of living novelists. All that Koestler says here is inarguably true, and perfectly irrelevant. "A similar rule holds for the detective story," he goes on. Just so; and for the historical story, the realistic story, the story of protest, the story of ideas, the story of manners, the story of adventure; in short, for all fiction. The dictum is valid for science-fantasy precisely because, except for its subject matter, there is no important difference between science-fantasy and any other branch of literature.

Again: "This is why the historical novel is practically dead today. The life of an Egyptian civil servant under the Eighteenth Dynasty, or even of a soldier in Cromwell's army, is only imaginable to us in a dim

outline; we are unable to identify ourselves with the strange figure moving in a strange world." Koestler should have added, "unless the writer has genius"; in science-fantasy as elsewhere, this is not a true statement of a limitation but only of an obstacle. We have not been to Mars; neither have we been to Elsinore, nor to ancient Rome, nor, most of us, to a Russian prison, to a penthouse, to a sweatshop, to a DP camp.

This obstacle was brilliantly surmounted in Koestler's own first novel, which dealt with the Slave Revolt of Spartacus, circa 73 B. C.; and what is *Darkness at Noon* but a masterful exercise in speculative imagination?

If science-fantasy has so far failed to produce much great literature, don't blame the writers who have worked in the field: blame those who, out of snobbishness, haven't.

In passing, Koestler makes the now-inevitable comparison between detective fiction and science-fantasy. This is a publisher's comparison and ought never to have got into the critical canon at all, but a number of otherwise cool heads among us have allowed themselves to believe that because corpses and spaceships (and why not cattle rustlers?) are both sold in ghetto bindings to specialized audiences, there must be some deep connection between them, even if we can't quite put our finger on it.

This misconception is directly responsible for much of the twaddle that has been written in and about science-fantasy in recent years. In Wilson Tucker's *The Time Masters,* for example (Rinehart, 249 pp., $2.50), we have still another attempt to fuse the two forms, thus proving the connection; the result, almost inevitably, is neither good corpse nor good spaceship. Evidently Tucker himself didn't take it seriously; his writing, from the astonishing effectiveness of *The Long Loud Silence,* lapses here to the *City in the Sea* level, full of teeth-gritting solecisms like "mental telepathy" and "black and colorless vacuum," the latter, I may add, in a very purple passage.

The Secret Masters, by Gerald Kersh (Ballantine, 225 pp., $2.00 in boards, 35¢ paperbound) is another bastard mixture—science-fantasy and intrigue. This one can't be easily dismissed; Kersh's style is hypnotically good, precise as cuneiform written with scalpels, continually turning up new surprises, and as ebulliently joyous as if Kersh had just invented the universe. But the plot—a clique of villainous millionaires proposes to inundate the world in order to produce fewer and more tractable proletarians—is simply J. B. Priestley's idiotic *The Doomsday Men* all over again.

The Sky Block, by Steve Frazee (Rinehart, 247 pp.' $2.75), is relatively innocuous. The science-fantasy element, a Russian machine that fouls up the weather, serves only to set the story in motion; the rest is

straight suspense, in a Western setting of which Frazee writes intimately and well—and it's believable enough, at least to a critic who has gone bathless in the driest summer the oldest local resident can remember.

Hollywood please note: This is right up your alley. Funk & Wagnalls, of all publishers, have reissued in one volume Olaf Stapledon's five best-known books: *Last and First Men, Star Maker, Odd John, Sirius,* and *The Flames.* The omnibus (775 pp., $5.00) is edited by Basil Davenport, whose name, oddly enough, appears on the jacket in type twice as big as Stapledon's (Almost invisible on the spine, though.) Of the five books, only two are novels: *Odd John,* the best superman story ever written, and *Sirius,* a variant of the same with a superdog in the leading role. *The Flames* is an extended dialogue between a mystic and a flame-creature, left over from the solar explosion which created the planets, who lives in his fireplace. It is only 52 pages long, and for that reason I found it possible to finish it. Stapledon's huge major works, *Last and First Men* and *Starmaker,* have no plots and no characters; they are histories of Life in this galaxy over a period of some eight billion years dating from the present. A great part of this mass of wordage is sheer cataloguing; part of the rest serves as a vehicle for Stapledon's mystical world-view, a moving thing in *Odd John,* but here so dehumanized (and so often repeated) that it becomes obscurely repugnant; and here and there in the residue are sparkling idea-fragments and wasted bits of satire. Koestler, I think, would find this unreadable. So do I.

For all-around bad taste, one recent anthology has no peer. *Prize Science Fiction,* edited by Donald A. Wollheim (McBride, 230 pp., with a jacket design so awful that it looks British, $3.00), has been put together in some fashion which is not clear to me by a committee consisting either of Mr. Wollheim, Forrest J. Ackerman, and somebody named Otto v. St. Whitelock (according to the introduction) or of Mr. Ackerman and Mr. v. St. Whitelock, advised throughout and then overruled by Mr. Wollheim (according to the jacket). Of the twelve stories, three are worth having: *The Last Days of Shandakor,* by Leigh Brackett, *The Altar at Midnight,* by C. M. Kornbluth, and *The Big Hunger,* by Walter B. Miller Jr.

Ballantine Books' simultaneous-edition program, the first breath of intelligence and vigor in American book publishing for many a long year, is now fully under way, with an ambitious schedule of twelve science-fantasy books a year. All of them to date are better than average books, with the single exception of Fletcher *Pratt's The Undying Fire* (148 pp., $1.50, 35¢) a lifeless run-of-the-mill space opera originally published in *Startling Stories* as *The Conditioned Captain.* Pratt, who has one of the keenest critical minds in this field, has shown that he can be one of its best writers: but not here.

Illustrated by Sussman

the SYNDIC

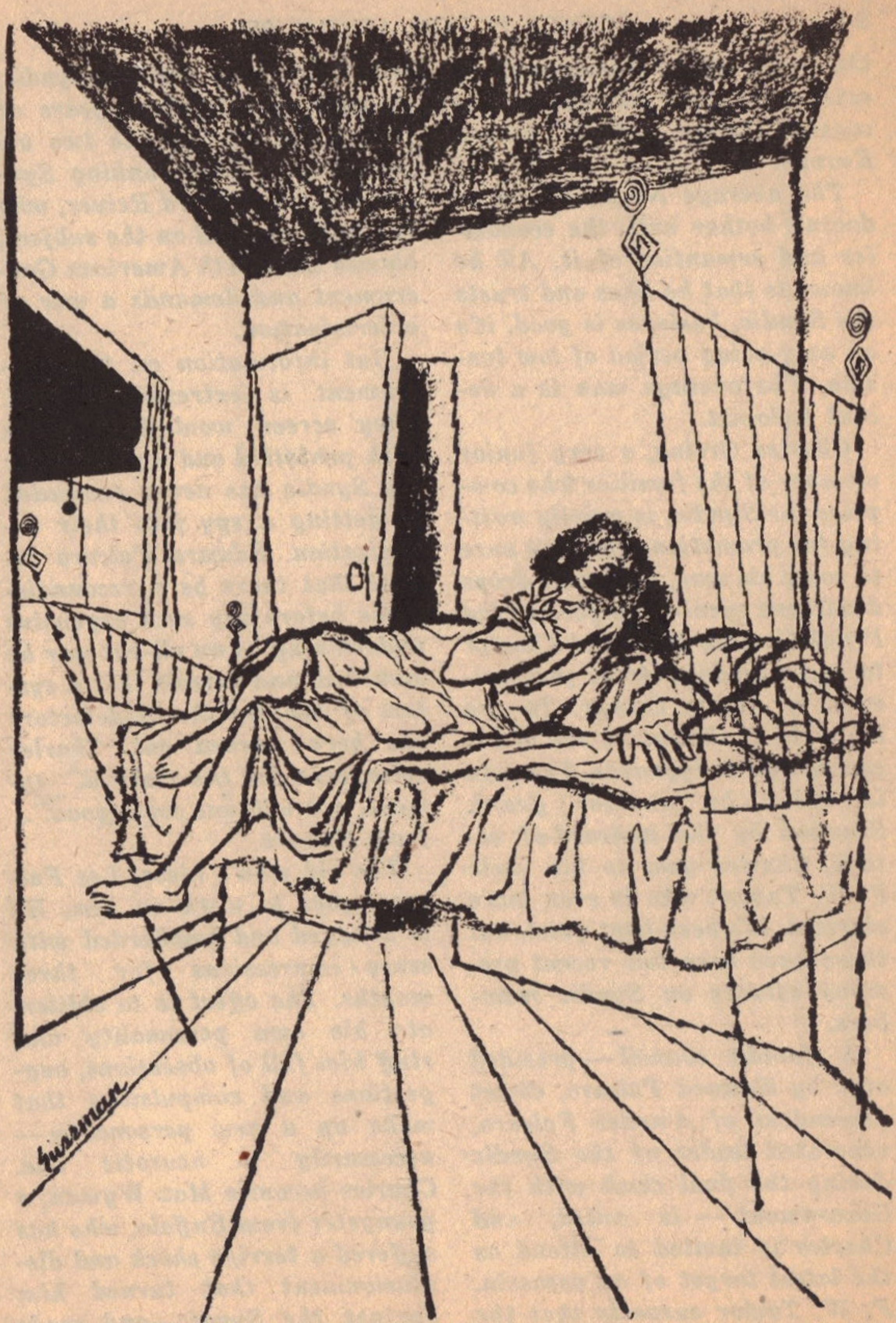
BY C. M. KORNBLUTH

(CONCLUSION)

Charles Orsino left the safety of Syndic Territory to spy on the North American Government. Now, in the center of their strongest naval base, his mission had been discovered. He has been betrayed by the one person he thought was an ally.

Synopsis of Part One

It's the Twenty-First Century, and there have been some changes made. North America is divided into Syndic Territory, east of the Mississippi, and Mob Territory to the west. F. W. Taylor, a leading member of the Syndic with a historiographic turn of mind, would explain it this way: the old North American Government became hopelessly entangled in its own symbols and folklore. The national debt rose to crushing size, but the old image of a man named Government lending to another man named Banks forbade repudiation. Excise taxes and direct taxes rose intolerably and no respectable thinker could see the way out. Unrespectable thinkers could and did. Criminal gangs were the deliverers of the people from obsolete symbols. Though they were called bootleggers, they got low-cost, excise-free consumer goods to the consumers. Though they were called high jackers, they broke out of the costly, wasteful chain of middlemen to get goods to the public. All-out civil war between Government and Syndic was inevitable. Since the general public was on the side of its deliverers, the Government was driven into


Gussman

the ocean, where it maintains an existence on the islands and the coastal fringe of a ruined Europe.

The average North American doesn't bother with the economics and semantics of it. All he knows is that he likes and trusts the Syndic, business is good, it's an easy-going period of low tension. The average man is a decent hedonist.

Charles Orsino, a very junior member of the families who comprise the Syndic, is quietly waiting for promotions that are sure to come his way, unless he drops dead; one evening he goes to the Frank Costello Memorial Theater to see a modern dress performance of Julius Caesar. *In the lobby, he is shot at by one of his ceremonial bodyguards. The man is killed by another guard. Stunned by the unheard-of attack, Charles goes to his uncle F. W. Taylor, who is even more alarmed. It's been kept quiet, but there have been two recent previous attacks on Syndic members.*

A family council — presided over by Edward Falcaro, direct descendent of Amadeo Falcaro, venerated leader of the Syndic during the final clash with the Government — is called, and Charles is invited to attend as the latest target of an assassin. F. W. Taylor suspects that the Mob is gunning for the Syndic, in spite of a hundred years of friendship between the two organizations. High ranking Syndic member Richard Reiner, who is a little cracked on the subject, blames the North American Government and demands a war of extermination.

But information on the Government is extremely scanty. They screen would-be citizens with pentothal and a polygraph; the Syndic has never succeeded in getting a spy into their organization. Edward Falcaro insists that there be a reconnaissance before any such expensive undertaking as an all-out war be launched, and reveals that a system of beating the lie-detectors has been worked out. Charles volunteers for the risky assignment, not without some goading from Falcaro.

The old man's niece, Lee Falcaro, goes to work on him. He is drugged and bombarded with sense-impressions for three months. The effect is to obliterate his own personality and stuff him full of obsessions, suggestions and compulsions that make up a new personality — necessarily a neurotic one. Charles becomes Max Wyman, a youngster from Buffalo, who has suffered a terrific shock and disillusionment that turned him against the Syndic—and made

him a drunk. Inevitably, he comes to the attention of a Government recruiter, Commander Grinnel of the North American Navy. Grinnel takes him to Cape Cod where they isolate the town to set the stage for a raid by a Government submarine. Aboard the submarine, "Wyman" is put through a gruelling examination under the polygraph and is cleared for citizenship. He takes the oath—and knows again that he is Charles Orsino. The oath of citizenship was the "trigger" on his conditioning as Wyman.

The flavor of the Government begins to emerge aboard the sub. Commander Grinnel hooks Charles into a scheme to kill the sub commander, as part of a complicated internal political wrangle. Ashore at New Portsmouth, Ireland, a Government naval base, the flavor gets stronger and a bit rancid. Charles finds a low standard of living, sexual prudery side by side with frigidity, rape and prostitution; intricate gutter politics and corruption; and finally enslavement of Europeans. Though still clinging to its symbols, the North American Government is in fact a pirate band—just as the great Mediterranean pirates long continued to tell themselves that they were gentlemen privateers temporarily without letters of marque and reprisal from recognized governments.

Orsino's sense of decency is outraged when he sees a Guardsman—one of the elite bullies of the Navy—attack a woman. He pitches in and beats him in a fair fight. Only then does he realize that the woman is Lee Falcaro, niece of Edward Falcaro and the psychologist who conditioned him to pass the lie-detector of the Government. But she doesn't know him. He tells her he is Charles Orsino. She hisses angrily: "Charles Orsino of the Syndicate!" and runs from him, he doesn't know where. A yeoman with Naval Intelligence tells Charles that the woman is Lee Bennet, smuggled into Ireland a couple of months ago by the D.A.R. She hates the Syndic and is supplying priceless inside information on its workings to the O.N.I.

Charles realizes that Lee Falcaro, out of pride and noblesse oblige, *felt she had to follow him and take a risk equal to the one she sent him into. He also realizes that somehow the "trigger" on her conditioning as Lee Bennet, hater of the Syndic, was not tripped—and that she is probably at this moment telling Naval Intelligence that there is a Syndic spy loose in town.*

PART II

X

It took minutes only.

He had headed back to the waterfront, afraid to run, with some vague notion of stealing a boat. Before he reached the row of saloons and joints, a smart-looking squad of eight tall men overtook him.

"Hold it, mister," a sergeant said. "Are you Orsino?"

"No," he said hopelessly. "That crazy woman began to yell at me that I was Orsino, but my name's Wyman. What's this about?"

The other men fell in beside and behind him. "We're stepping over to O.N.I.," the sergeant said.

"There's the son of a bitch!" sombody bawled. Suddenly there were a dozen sweatered Guardsmen around them. Their leader was the thug Orsino had beaten in a fair fight. He said silkily to the sergeant: "We want that boy, leatherneck. Blow."

The sergeant went pale. "He's wanted for questioning by the O.N.I.," he said stolidly.

"Get the marine three-striper!" the Guardsman chortled. He stuck his jaw into the sergeant's face. "Tell your squad to blow. You marines ought to know by now that you don't mess with the Guard."

A very junior officer appeared. "What's going on here, you men?" he shrilled. "Atten-*shun!*" He was ignored as Guardsman and marines measured one another with their eyes. "I said *attention!* Dammit, sergeant, *report!* "There was no reaction. The officer yelled: "You men may think you can get away with this but by God, you're wrong!" He strode away, his fists clenched and his face very red.

Orsino saw him stride through a gate into a lot marked *Bupers Motor Pool.* And he felt a sudden wave of communal understanding that there were only seconds to go. The sergeant played for time: "I'll be glad to surrender the prisoner," he started, "if you have anything to show in the way of—"

The Guardsman kicked for the pit of the sergeant's stomach. He was a sucker Orsino thought abstractedly as he saw the sergeant catch his foot, dump him and pivot to block another Guardsman. Then he was fighting for his life himself, against three bellowing Guardsmen.

A ripping, hammering noise filled the air suddenly. Like cold magic, it froze the milling mob where it stood. Fifty-caliber noise.

The jaygee was back, this time in a jeep with a twin fifty. And he was glaring down its barrels into the crowd. People were beginning to stream from the saloons, joints and shipfitting shops.

The jaygee cocked his cap rakishly over one eye. "*Fall in!*" he rasped, and a haunting air of familiarity came over Orsino.

The waiting jeep, almost bucking in its eagerness to be let loose—Orsino on the ground, knees trembling with tension—a perfect change of mount scene in a polo match. He reacted automatically.

There was a surrealist flash of the jaygee's face before he clipped him into the back of the square little truck. There was another flash of spectators scrambling as he roared the jeep down the road.

From then on it was just a question of hanging onto the wheel with one hand, trying to secure the free-traversing twin-fifty with the other, glancing back to see if the jaygee was still out, avoiding yapping dogs and pedestrians, staying on the rutted road, pushing all possible speed out of the jeep, noting landmarks, estimating the possibility of dangerous pursuit. For a two-goal polo player, a dull little practice session.

The road, such as it was, wound five miles inland through scrubby woodland and terminated at a lumber camp where chained men in rags were dragging logs.

Orsino back tracked a quarter-mile from the camp and jolted overland in a kidney-cracking hare and hounds course at fifty per.

The jeep took it for an hour in the fading afternoon light and then bucked to a halt. Orsino turned for an overdue check on the jaygee and found him conscious, but greenly clinging to the sides of the vehicle. But he saw Orsino staring and gamely struggled to his feet, standing in the truck bed. "You're under arrest, sailor," he said. "Striking an officer, abuse of government property, driving a government vehicle without a trip-ticket—" His legs betrayed him and he sat down, hard.

Orsino thought very briefly of letting him have a burst from the twin-fifty, and abandoned the idea.

He seemed to have bitched up everything so far, but he was still on a mission. He had a commissioned officer of the Government approximately in his power. He snapped: "Nonsense. *You're* under arrest."

The jaygee seemed to be reviewing rapidly any transgressions he may have committed,

and asked at last, cautiously: "By what authority?"

"I represent the Syndic."

It was a block-buster. The jaygee stammered: "But you can't—But there isn't any way—But how—"

"Never mind how."

"You're crazy. You must be, or you wouldn't stop here. I don't believe you're from the continent and I don't believe the jeep's broken down." He was beginning to sound just a little hysterical. "It can't break down here. We must be more than thirty miles inland."

"What's special about thirty miles inland?"

"The natives, you fool!"

The natives again. "I'm not worried about natives. Not with a pair of fifties."

"You don't understand," the jaygee said, forcing calm into his voice. "This is The Outback. They're in charge here. We can't do a thing with them. They jump people in the dark and skewer them. Now fix this damn jeep and let's get rolling!"

"Into a firing squad? Don't be silly, lieutenant. I presume you won't slug me while I check the engine?"

The jaygee was looking around him. "My God, no," he said. "You may be a gangster, but—" He trailed off.

Orsino stiffened. Gangster was semi-dirty talk. "Listen, pirate," he said nastily, "I don't believe—"

"*Pirate?*" the jaygee roared indignantly, and then shut his mouth with a click, looking apprehensively about. The gesture wasn't faked; it alarmed Orsino.

"Tell me about your wildmen," he said.

"Go to hell," the jaygee said sulkily.

"Look, you called me a gangster first. What about these natives? You were trying to trick me, weren't you?"

"Kiss my royal North American eyeball, gangster."

"Don't be childish," Charles reproved him, feeling adult and superior. (The jaygee looked a couple of years younger than he.) He climbed out of his seat and lifted the hood. The damage was trivial; a shear pin in the transmission had given way. He reported mournfully: "Cracked block. The jeep's through forever. You can get on your way, lieutenant. I won't try to hold you."

The jaygee fumed: "You couldn't hold me if you wanted to, gangster. If you think I'm going to try and hoof back to the base alone in the dark, you're crazy. We're sticking together. Two of us may be able to hold them off for the night. In the morning, we'll see."

Well, maybe the officer did *believe* there were wildmen in the woods. That didn't mean there *were*.

The jaygee got out and looked under the hood uncertainly. It was obvious that in the first place he was no mechanic and in the second place he couldn't conceive of anybody voluntarily risking the woods rather than the naval base. "Uh-huh," he said. "Dismount that gun while I get a fire started."

"Yes, sir," Charles said sardonically, saluting. The jaygee absently returned the salute and began to collect twigs.

Orsino asked: "How do these aborigines of yours operate?"

"Sneak up in the dark. They have spears and a few stolen guns. Usually they don't have cartridges for them but you can't count on that. But they have. . . . witches."

Orsino snorted. He was getting very hungry indeed. "Do you know any of the local plants we might eat?"

The jaygee said confidently: "I guess we can get by on roots until morning"

Orsino dubiously pulled up a shrub, dabbed clods off its root and tasted it. It tasted exactly like a root. He sighed and changed the subject. "What do we do with the fifties when I get them both off the mount?"

"The jeep mount breaks down some damn way or other into two low-mount tripods. See if you can figure it out while I get the fire going."

The jaygee had a small, smoky fire barely going in twenty minutes. Orsino was still struggling with the jeep gun mount. It came apart, but it couldn't go together again. The jaygee strolled over at last contemptuously to lend a hand. He couldn't make it work either.

Two lost tempers and four split fingernails later it developed the "elevating screw" really held the two front legs on and that you elevated by adjusting the rear tripod leg. "A hell of an officer you are," Orsino sulked.

It began to rain, putting the fire out with a hiss. They wound up prone under the jeep, not on speaking terms, each tending a gun, each presumably responsible for 180 degrees of perimeter.

Charles was fairly dry, except for a trickle of icy water following a contour that meandered to his left knee. After an hour of eye-straining — nothing to be seen — and ear-straining — only the patter of rain—he heard a snore and kicked the jaygee.

The jaygee cursed wearily and said: "I guess we'd better talk to keep awake."

"*I'm* not having any trouble, pirate."

"Oh, knock it off—where do you get that pirate bit, gangster?"

"You're outlaws, aren't you?"

"Like hell we are. *You're* the outlaws. You rebelled against the lawfully constituted North American Government. Just because you won — for the time being—doesn't mean you were right."

"The fact that we won does mean that we were right. The fact that your so-called Government lives by raiding and scavenging off us means you were wrong. God, the things I've seen since I joined up with you thugs!"

"I'll bet. Respect for the home, sanctity of marriage, sexual morality, law and order — you never saw anything like that back home, did you gangster?" He looked very smug.

Orsino clenched his teeth. "Somebody's been telling you a pack of lies," he said. "There's just as much home and family life and morality and order back in Syndic Territory as there is here. And probably a lot more."

"Bull. I've seen intelligence reports; I know how you people live. Are you telling me you don't have sexual promiscuity? Polygamy? Polyandry? Open gambling? Uncontrolled liquor trade? Corruption and shakedowns?"

Orsino squinted along the barrel of the gun into the rain. "Look," he said, "take me as an average young man from Syndic Territory. I know maybe a hundred people. I know just three women and two men who are what you'd call promiscuous. I know one family with two wives and one husband. I don't really know any people personally who go in for polyandry, but I've met three casually. And the rest are ordinary middle-aged couples."

"Ah-*hah!* Middle-aged! Do you mean to tell me you're just leaving out anybody under middle age when you talk about morality?"

"Naturally," Charles said, baffled. "Wouldn't you?"

The only answer was a snort.

"What are bupers?" Charles asked.

"Bu-Pers," the jaygee said distinctly. "Bureau of Personnel, North American Navy."

"What do you do there?"

"What *would* a personnel bureau do?" the jaygee said patiently. "We recruit, classify, assign, promote and train personnel."

"Paperwork, huh? No wonder you don't know how to shoot or drive."

"If I didn't need you to cover my back, I'd shove this MG down

your silly throat. For your information, gangster, all officers do a tour of duty on paperwork before they're assigned to their permanent branch. I'm going into the pigboats."

"Why?"

"Family. My father commands a sub. He's Captain Van Dellen."

Oh, God. Van Dellen. The sub commander Grinnel — and he — had murdered. The kid hadn't heard yet that his father had been "lost" in an emergency dive.

The rain ceased to fall; the pattering drizzle gave way to irregular, splashing drops from leaves and branches.

"Van Dellen," Charles said. "There's something you ought to know."

"It'll keep," the jaygee answered in a grim whisper. The bolt of his gun clicked. "I hear them out there."

XI

She felt the power of the goddess working in her, but feebly. Dark. . . . so dark. . . . and so tired. . . . how old was she? More than eight hundred moons had waxed and waned above her head since birth. And she had run at the head of her spearmen to the motor sounds. A motor meant the smithymen from the sea, and you killed smithymen when you could.

She let out a short shrill chuckle in the dark. There was a rustling of branches. One of the spearmen had turned to stare at the sound. She knew his face was worried. "Tend to business, you fool!" she wheezed. "Or by Bridget—" His breath went in with a hiss and she chuckled again. You had to let them know who was the cook and who was the potatoes every now and then. Kill the fool? Not now; not when there were smithymen with guns waiting to be taken.

The power of the goddess worked stronger in her withered breast as her rage grew at their impudence. Coming into *her* woods with their stinking metal!

There were two of them. A grin slit her face. She had not taken two smithymen together for thirty moons. For all her wrinkles and creaks, what a fine vessel she was for the power, to be sure! Her worthless, slow-to-learn niece could run and jump and she had a certain air, but she'd never be such a vessel. Her sister — the crone spat — these were degenerate days. In the old days, the sister would have been spitted when she refused the ordeal in her youth. The little one now, whatever her name was, she would make a *fine* vessel for the power when she was

gathered to the goddess. If her sister or her niece didn't hold her head under water too long, or have a spear shoved too deep into her gut or hit her on the head with too heavy a rock.

These were degenerate days. She had poisoned her own mother to become the vessel of power.

The spearmen to her right and left shifted uneasily. She heard a faint mumble of the two smithymen talking. Let them talk! Doubtless they were cursing the goddess obscenely; doubtless that was what the smithymen all did when their mouths were not stuffed with food.

She thought of the man called Kennedy who forged spearheads and arrowpoints for her people—he was a strange one, touched by the goddess, which proved her infinite power. She could touch and turn the head of even a smithyman. He was a strange one. Well now, to get on with it. She wished the power were working stronger in her; she was tired and could hardly see. But by the grace of the goddess there would be two new heads over her holy hut come dawn. She could hardly see, but the goddess wouldn't fail her. . . .

She quavered like a screech-owl, and the spearmen began to slip forward through the brush. She was not allowed to eat honey lest its sweetness clash with the power in her, but the taste of power was sweeter than the taste of honey.

With frightful suddenness there was an ear-splitting shriek and a trampling rush of feet. By sheer reflex, Orsino clamped down on the trigger of his fifty, and his brain rocked at its thunder. Shadowy figures were blotted out by the orange muzzle-flash. You're supposed to fire neat, spaced bursts of eight he told himself. I wonder what old Gilby would say if he could see his star pupil burning out a barrel and swinging his gun like a fire hose?

The gun stopped firing; end of the belt. Twenty, fifty or a hundred rounds? He didn't remember. He clawed for another belt and smoothly, in the dark, loaded again and listened.

"You all right, gangster?" the jaygee said behind him, making him jump.

"Yes," he said. "Will they come back?"

"I don't know."

"You filthy swine," an agonized voice wheezed from the darkness. "Me back is broke, you stinking lice." The voice began to sob.

They listened to it in silence for perhaps a minute. At last he said to the jaygee: "If the rest

are gone maybe we can at least—make him comfortable."

"Too risky," the jaygee said after a long pause.

The sobbing went on. As the excitement of the attack drained from Orsino, he felt deathly tired, cramped and thirsty. The thirst he could do something about. He scooped water from the muddy runnel by his knee and sucked it from his palms twice. The third time, he thought of the thirst that the sobbing creature out in the dark must be feeling, and his hand wouldn't go to his mouth.

"I'm going to get him," he whispered to the jaygee.

"Stay where you are! That's an order!"

He didn't answer, but began to work his cramped and aching body from under the jeep. The jaygee, a couple of years younger and lither than he, slid out first from his own side. Orsino sighed and relaxed as he heard his footsteps cautiously circle the jeep.

"Finish me off!" the wounded man was sobbing. "For the love of the goddess, finish me off, you bitches' bastards! You've broke me back—*ah!*" That was a cry of savage delight.

There was a strangled noise from the jaygee and then only a soft, deadly thrashing noise from the dark. Hell, Orsino thought bitterly. It was my idea. He snaked out from under the jeep and raced through wet brush.

The two of them were a tangled knot of darkness rolling on the ground. A naked back came uppermost; Orsino fell on it and clawed at its head. He felt a huge beard, took two handfulls of it and pulled as hard as he could. There was a wild screech and a flailing of arms. The jaygee broke away and stood up, panting hoarsely. Charles heard a sharp crunch and a snap, and the flailing sweaty figure, beneath him lay still.

"Back to the guns," the jaygee choked. He swayed, and Orsino took him by the arm. . . . On the way back to the jeep, they stumbled over something that was certainly a body.

Orsino's flesh shrank from lying down again in the mud behind his gun, but he did, shivering. He heard the jaygee thud wearily into position. "What did you do to him?" he asked. "Is he dead?"

"Kicked him," the jaygee choked. "His head snapped back and there was that crack. I guess he's dead. I never heard of that broken-wing trick before. I guess he wanted to take one more with him. They have a kind of religion."

The jaygee sounded as though

he was teetering on the edge of breakdown. Make him mad, intuition said to Orsino. He might go howling off among the trees unless he snaps out of it.

"It's a hell of way to run an island," he said nastily. "You beggars were chased out of North America because you couldn't run it right and now you can't even control a lousy little island for more than five miles inland." He added with deliberate, superior amusement: "Of course, they've got witches."

"Shut your mouth, gangster—*I'm warning you.*" The note of hysteria was still there. And then the jaygee said dully: "I didn't mean that. I'm sorry. You did come out and help me after all."

"Surprised?"

"Yes, Twice. First time when you wanted to go out yourself. I suppose you can't help being born where you were. Maybe if you came over to us all the way, the Government would forgive and forget. But no—I suppose not." He paused, obviously casting about for a change of subject. He still seemed sublimely confident that they'd get back to the naval base with him in charge of the detail. "What ship did you cross in?"

"Atom sub *Taft*," Orsino said. He could have bitten his tongue out.

"*Taft?* That's my father's pigboat! Captain Van Dellen. How is he? I was going down to the dock when—"

"He's dead," Orsino said flatly. "He was caught on deck during an emergency dive."

The jaygee said nothing for a while and then uttered an unconvincing laugh of disbelief. "You're lying," he said. "His crew'd never let that happen. They'd let the ship be blown to hell before they took her down without the skipper."

"Grinnel had the con. He ordered the dive and roared down the crew when they wanted to get your father inboard. I'm sorry."

"Grinnel," the jaygee whispered. "Grinnel. Yes, I know Commander Grinnel. He's—he's a good officer. He must have done it because he had to. Tell me about it, please."

It was more than Orsino could bear. "Your father was murdered," he said harshly. "I know because Grinnel put me on radar watch—and I don't know a God-damned thing about reading a radarscope. He told me to sing out 'enemy planes' and I did because I didn't know what the hell was going on. He used that as an excuse to crash-dive while your father was sleeping on deck. Your good officer murdered him."

He heard the jaygee sobbing hoarsely. At last he asked Orsino in a dry, choked voice: "Politics?"

"Politics," Orsino said.

Orsino jumped wildly as the jaygee's machine gun began to roar a long burst of twenty, but he didn't fire himself. He knew that there was no enemy out there in the dark, and that the bullets were aimed only at an absent phantom.

"We've got to get to Iceland," the jaygee said at last, soberly. "It's our only chance."

"Iceland?"

"This is one for the C.C. of the Constitutionists. The Central Committee. It's a breach of the Freiberg Compromise. It means we call the Sociocrats, and if they don't make full restitution —war."

"What do you mean, *we?*"

"You and I. You're the source of the story; you're the one who'd be lie-tested."

You've got him, Orsino told himself, but don't be fool enough to count on it. He's been lightheaded from hunger and no sleep and the shock of his father's death. You helped him in a death struggle and there's team spirit working on him. The guy covering my back, how can I fail to trust him, how could I dare not to trust him? But don't be fool enough to count on it after he's slept. Meanwhile, push it for all it's worth.

"What are your plans?" he asked gravely.

"We've got to slip out of Ireland by sub or plane," the jaygee brooded. "We can't go to the New Portsmouth or Com-Surf organizations; they're Sociocrat, and Grinnel will have passed the word to the Sociocrats that you're out of control."

"What does that mean?"

"Death," the jaygee said.

XII

Commander Grinnel, after reporting formally, had gone straight to a joint. It wasn't until midnight that he got The Word, from a friendly O.N.I. lieutenant who had dropped into the house.

"What?" Grinnel roared. "Who is this woman? Where is she? Take me to her at once!"

"Commander!" the lieutenant said aghast. "I just got here!"

"You heard me, mister! At once!"

While Grinnel dressed he demanded particulars. The lieutenant dutifully scoured his memory. "Brought in on some cloak-and-dagger deal, Commander. The kind you usually run. Lieutenant-Commander Jacobi was in Syndic Territory on a recruiting, sabotage and reconnaissance mis-

sion and one of the D.A.R. passed the girl on him. A real Syndic member. Priceless. And, as I said, she identified this fellow as Charles Orsino, another Syndic. Why are you so interested, if I may ask?"

The Commander dearly wanted to give him a grim: "You may not," but didn't dare. Now was the time to be frank and open. One hint that he had anything to hide or cover up would put his throat to the knife. "The man's my baby, lieutenant," he said. "Either your girl's mistaken or Van Dellen and his polygraph tech and I were taken in by a brand-new technique." *That* was nice work, he congratulated himself. Got in Van Dellen and the tech. . . . Maybe, come to think of it, the tech *was* crooked? No; there was the way Wyman had responded perfectly under scop.

O.N.I.'s building was two stories and an attic, wood-framed, beginning to rot already in the eternal Irish damp.

"We've got her on the third floor, Commander," the lieutenant said. "You get there by a ladder."

"In God's name, why?" They walked past the Charge of Quarters, who snapped to a guilty and belated attention, and through the deserted offices of the first and second floors.

"Frankly, we've had a little trouble hanging on to her."

"She runs away?"

"No, nothing like that—not yet, at least. Marine G-2 and Guard Intelligence School have both tried to snatch her from us. First with requisitions, then with muscle. We hope to keep her until the word gets to Iceland. Then, naturally, *we'll* be out in the cold."

The lieutenant laughed. Grinnel, puffing up the ladder, did not.

The door and lock on Lee Bennet's quarters were impressive. The lieutenant rapped. "Are you awake, Lee? There's an officer here who wants to talk to you."

"Come in," she said.

The lieutenant's hands flew over the lock and the door sprang open. The girl was sitting in the dark.

"I'm Commander Grinnel, my dear," he said. After eight hours in the joint, he could feel authentically fatherly to her. "If the time isn't quite convenient—"

"It's all right," she said listlessly. "What do you want to know?"

"The man you identify as Orsino—it was quite a shock to me. Commander Van Dellen, who died a hero's death only days ago accepted him as authentic and so, I must admit, did I.

He passed both scop and polygraph."

"I can't help that," she said. "He came right up to me and told me who he was. I recognized him, of course. He's a polo player. I've seen him play on Long Island often enough, the damned snob. He's not much in the Syndic, but he's close to F. W. Taylor. Orsino's an orphan. I don't know whether Taylor's actually adopted him or not. I think not."

"No—possible—mistake?"

"No possible mistake." She began to tremble. "My God, Commander Whoever-You-Are, do you think I could forget one of those damned sneering faces. Or what those people did to me? Get the lie detector again! Strap me into the lie detector! I insist on it! I won't be called a liar! Do you hear me? Get the lie detector!"

"Please," the Commander soothed. "I do believe you, my dear. Nobody could doubt your sincerity. Thank you for helping us, and good night." He backed out of the room with the lieutenant. As the door closed he snapped at him: "Well, mister?"

The lieutenant shrugged. "The lie detector always bears her out. We've stopped using it on her. We're convinced that she's on our side. Almost deserving of citizenship."

"Come, now," the Commander said. "You know better than that."

Behind the locked door, Lee Bennet had thrown herself on the bed, dry-eyed. She wished she could cry, but tears never came. Not since those three roistering drunkards had demonstrated their virility as males and their immunity as Syndics on her . . . she couldn't cry any more.

Charles Orsino—another one of them. She hoped they caught him and killed him, slowly. She knew all this was true. Then why did she feel like a murderess? Why did she think incessantly of suicide? Why, why, why?

Dawn came imperceptibly. First Charles could discern the outline of treetops against the sky and then a little of the terrain before him and at last two twisted shadows that slowly became sprawling half-naked bodies. One of them was a woman's, mangled by fifty-caliber slugs. The other was the body of a bearded giant—the one with whom they had struggled in the dark.

Charles crawled out stiffly. The woman was—had been—a stringy, white haired crone. Some animal's skull was tied to her pate with sinews as a head-

dress, and she was tattoed with blue crescents. The jaygee joined him standing over her and said: "One of their witches. Part of the religion, if you can call it that."

"A brand-new religion?" Charles asked dubiously. "Made up out of whole cloth?"

"No," the jaygee said. "I understand it's an *old* religion—pre-Christian. It kept going underground until the Troubles. Then it flared up again all over Europe. A filthy business. Animal sacrifices every new moon. Human sacrifices twice a year. What can you expect from people like that?"

Charles reminded himself that the jaygee's fellow-citizens boiled recalcitrant slaves. "I'll see what I can do about the jeep," he said.

The jaygee sat down on the wet grass. "What the hell's the use?" he mumbled wearily. "Even if you get it running again. Even if we get back to the base. They'll be gunning for you. Maybe they'll be gunning for me if they killed my father." He tried to smile. "You got any aces in the hole, gangster?"

"Maybe," Orsino said slowly. "What do you know about a woman named Lee—Bennet? Works with O.N.I.?"

"Smuggled over here by the D.A.R. A goldmine of information. She's a little nuts, too. What have you got on her?"

"Does she swing any weight? *Is she a citizen?*"

"No weight. They're just using her over at Intelligence to fill out the picture of the Syndic. And she couldn't be a citizen. A woman has to marry a citizen to be naturalized. What have you got to do with her, for God's sake? Did you know her on the other side? She's death to the Syndic; she can't do anything for you."

Charles barely heard him. That had to be it. The trigger on Lee Falcaro's conditioning had to be the oath of citizenship as it was for his. And it hadn't been tripped because this pirate gang didn't particularly want or need women as first-class, all-privileges citizens. A small part of the Government's cultural complex—but one that could trap Lee Falcaro forever in the shell of her synthetic substitute for a personality. Lie-tests, yes. Scopolamine, yes. But for a woman, no subsequent oath.

"I ran into her in New Portsmouth. She knew me from the other side. She turned me in . . ." He knelt at a puddle and drank thirstily; the water eased hunger cramps a little. "I'll see what I can do with the jeep."

He lifted the hood and stole a look at the jaygee. Van Dellen

was dropping off to sleep on the wet grass. Charles pried a shear pin from the jeep's winch, punched out the shear pin that had given way in the transmission and replaced it. It involved some hammering. Cracked block, he thought contemptuously. An officer and he couldn't tell whether the block was cracked or not. If I ever get out of this we'll sweep them from the face of the earth—or more likely just get rid of their tom-fool Sociocrats and Constitutionists. The rest are probably all right. Except maybe for those bastards of Guardsmen. A bad lot. Let's hope they get killed in the fighting.

The small of his back tickled; he reached around to scratch it and felt cold metal.

"Turn slowly or you'll be spitted like a pig," a bass voice growled.

He turned slowly. The cold metal now at his chest, was the leaf-shaped blade of a spear. It was wielded by a red-haired, red-bearded, barrel-chested giant whose blue-green eyes were as cold as death.

"Tie that one," somebody said. Another half-naked man jerked his wrists behind him and lashed them together with cords.

"Hobble his feet." It was a woman's voice. A length of cord or sinew was knotted to his ankles with a foot or two of play. He could walk but not run. The giant lowered his spear and stepped aside.

The first thing Charles saw was that Lieutenant (j.g.) Van Dellen of the North American Navy had escaped forever from his doubts and confusions. They had skewered him to the turf while he slept. Charles hoped he had not felt the blow.

The second thing he saw was a supple and coltish girl of perhaps 20 tenderly removing the animal skull from the head of the slain witch and knotting it to her own red-tressed head. Even to Orsino's numbed understanding, it was clearly an act of the highest significance. It subtly changed the composition of the six-men group in the little glade. They had been a small mob until she put on the skull, but the moment she did they moved instinctively—one a step or two, the other merely turning a bit, perhaps—to orient on her. There was no doubt that she was in charge.

A witch, Orsino thought. "It kept going underground until the Troubles." "A filthy business—human sacrifices twice a year."

She approached him and, like the shifting of a kaleidoscope, the group fell into a new pattern of which she was still the focus. Charles thought he had never

seen a face so humorlessly conscious of power. The petty ruler of a few barbarians, she carried herself as though she were empress of the universe. Nor did a large gray louse that crawled from her hairline across her forehead and back again affect her in the slightest. She wore a greasy animal hide as though it were royal purple. It added up to either insanity or a limitless pretension to religious authority. And her eyes were not mad.

"You," she said coldly. "What about the jeep and the guns? Do they go?"

He laughed suddenly and idiotically at these words from the mouth of a stone-age goddess. A raised spear sobered him instantly. "Yes," he said.

"Show my men how," she said, and squatted regally on the turf.

"Please," he said, "could I have something to eat first?"

She nodded indifferently and one of the men loped off into the brush.

His hands untied and his face greasy with venison fat, Charles spent the daylight hours instructing six savages in the nomenclature, maintenance and operation of the jeep and the twin-fifty machine gun.

They absorbed it with utter lack of curiosity. They more or less learned to start and steer and stop the jeep. They more or less learned to load, point and fire the gun.

Through the lessons the girl sat absolutely motionless, first in shadow, then in noon and afternoon sun and then in shadow again. But she had been listening. She said at last: "You are telling them nothing new now. Is there no more?"

Charles noted that a spear was poised at his ribs. "A great deal more," he said hastily. "It takes months."

"They can work them now. What more is there to learn?"

"Well, what to do if something goes wrong."

She said, as though speaking from vast experience: "When something goes wrong, you start over again. That is all you can do. When I make death-wine for the spear blades and the death-wine does not kill, it is because something went wrong—a word or a sign or picking a plant at the wrong time. The only thing to do is make the poison again. As you grow in experience you make fewer mistakes. That is how it will be with my men when they work the jeep and the guns."

She nodded ever so slightly at one of the men and he took a firmer grip on his spear.

Death swooped low.

"No!" Charles exploded. "You don't understand! This isn't like anything you do at all!" He was sweating, even in the late afternoon chill. "You've got to have somebody who knows how to repair the jeep and the gun. If they're busted they're busted and no amount of starting over again will make them work!"

She nodded and said: "Tie his hands. We'll take him with us." Charles was torn between relief and wonder at the way she spoke. He realized that he had never, literally *never*, seen any person concede a point in quite that fashion. There had been no hesitation, there had been no reluctance in the voice, not a flicker of displeasure in the face. Simply, without forcing, she had said: "We'll take him with us." It was as though—as though she had re-made the immediate past, un-making her opposition to the idea, nullifying it. She was a person who was not at war with herself in any respect whatever, a person who knew exactly who she was and what she was—

The girl rose in a single flowing motion, startling after her day spent in immobility. She led the way, flanked by two of the spearmen. The other four followed in the jeep, at a crawl. Last of all came Charles, and nobody had to urge him. In his portable trap his hours would be numbered if he got separated from his captors.

Stick with them, he told himself, stumbling through the brush. Just stay alive and you can outsmart these savages. He fell, cursed, picked himself up stumbled on after the growl of the jeep.

Dawn brought them to a collection of mud-and-wattle huts, a corral enclosing a few dozen head of wretched diseased cattle, a few adults and a few children. The girl was still clear-eyed and supple in her movements. Her spearmen yawned and stretched stiffly. Charles was a walking dead man, battered by countless trees and stumbles on the long trek. With red and swollen eyes he watched while half-naked brats swarmed over the jeep and grownups made obeisances to the girl—all but one.

This was an evil-faced harridan who said to her with cool insolence: "I see you claim the power of the goddess now, my dear. Has something happened to my sister?"

"The guns killed a certain person. I put on the skull. You know what I am; do not say 'claim to be.' I warn you once."

"Liar!" shrieked the harridan. "You killed her and stole the skull! St. Patrick and St. Bridget shrivel your guts! Abaddon and Lucifer pierce your eyes!"

An arena formed about them as the girl said coldly: "I warn you the second time."

The harridan made signs with her fingers, glaring at her; there was a moan from the watchers; some turned aside and a half-grown girl fainted dead away.

The girl with the skull on her pate said, as though speaking from a million years and a million miles away: "This is the third warning; there are no more. Now the worm is in your backbone gnawing. Now the maggots are at your eyes, devouring them. Your bowels turn to water; your heart pounds like the heart of a bird; soon it will not beat at all." As the eerie, space-filling whisper drilled on the watchers broke and ran, holding their hands over their ears, white-faced, but the harridan stood as if rooted to the earth. Charles listened dully as the curse was droned, nor was he surprised when the harridan fell, blasted by it. Another sorceress, aided it is true by pentothal, had months ago done the same to him.

The people trickled back, muttering and abject.

Just stay alive and you can outsmart these savages, he repeated ironically to himself. It had dawned on him that these savages lived by an obscure and complicated code harder to master than the intricacies of the Syndic or the Government.

A kick roused him to his feet. One of the spearmen grunted: "I'm putting you with Kennedy."

"All right," Charles groaned. "You take these cords off me?"

"Later." He prodded Charles to a minute, ugly block house of logs from which came smoke and an irregular metallic clanging. He cut the cords, rolled great boulders away from a crawl-hole and shoved him through.

The place was about six by nine feet, hemmed in by ten-inch logs. The light was very bad and the smell was too. A few loopholes let in some air. There was a latrine pit and an open stone hearth and a naked brown man with wild hair and a beard.

Rubbing his wrists, Charles asked uncertainly: "Are you Kennedy?"

The man looked up and croaked: "Are you from the Government?"

"Yes," Charles said, hope rekindling. "Thank God they put us together. There's a jeep. Also a twin-fifty. If we play this right the two of us can bust out—"

He stopped, disconcerted. Kennedy had turned to the hearth and the small, fierce fire glowing on it and began to pound a red-hot lump of metal. There

were spear heads and arrow heads about in various stages of completion, as well as files and a hone.

"What's the matter?" he demanded. "Aren't you interested?"

"Of course I'm interested," Kennedy said. "But we've got to begin at the beginning. You're too *general.*" His voice was mild, but reproving.

"You're right," Charles said. "I guess you've made a try or two yourself. But now that there are two of us, what do you suggest? Can you drive a jeep? Can you fire a twin-fifty?"

The man poked the lump of metal into the heart of the fire again, picked up a black-scaled spear head and began to file an edge into it. "Let's get down to essentials," he suggested apologetically. "What is escape? Getting from an undesirable place to a desirable place, opposing and neutralizing things or persons adverse to the change of state in the process. But I'm not being specific, am I? Let's say, then, escape is getting *us* from a relatively undesirable place to a relatively desirable place, opposing and neutralizing the aborigines." He put aside the file and reached for the hone, sleeking it along the bright metal ribbon of the new edge. He looked up with a pleased smile and asked: "How's that for a plan?"

"Fine," Charles muttered. Kennedy beamed proudly as he repeated: "Fine, fine," and sank to the ground, born down by the almost physical weight of his depression. His hoped-for ally was stark mad.

XIII

Kennedy turned out to have been an armorer-artificer of the North American Navy, captured two years ago while deer-hunting too far from the logging-camp road to New Portsmouth. Fed on scraps of gristle, isolated from his kind, beaten when he failed to make his daily task of spear heads and arrow points, he had shyly retreated into beautifully interminable labyrinths of abstraction. Now and then, Charles Orsino got a word or two of sense from him before the rosy clouds closed in. When attempted conversation with the lunatic palled, Charles could watch the aborigines through chinks in the palisade. There were about fifty of them. There would have been more if they hadn't been given to infanticide —for what reason, Charles could not guess.

He had been there a week when the boulders were rolled away one morning and he was roughly called out. He said to

Kennedy before stooping to crawl through the hole: "Take it easy, friend. I'll be back, I hope."

Kennedy looked up with a puzzled smile: "That's such a *general* statement, Charles. Exactly what are you implying—"

The witch girl was there, flanked by spearmen. She said abruptly: "I have been listening to you. Why are you untrue to your brothers?"

He gawked. The only thing that seemed to fit was: "That's such a *general* statement," but he didn't say it.

"Answer," one of the spearmen growled.

"I—I don't understand. I have no brothers."

"Your brothers in Portsmouth, on the sea. Whatever you call them, they are your brothers, all children of the mother called Government. Why are you untrue to them?"

He began to understand. "They aren't my brothers. I'm not a child of the government. I'm a child of another mother far away, called Syndic."

She looked puzzled—and almost human—for an instant. Then the visor dropped over her face again as she said: "That is true. Now you must teach a certain person the jeep and the guns. Teach her well. See that she gets her hands on the metal and into the grease." To a spearman she said: "Bring Martha."

The spearman brought Martha, who was trying not to cry. She was a half-naked child of ten!

The witch girl abruptly left them. Her guards took Martha and bewildered Charles to the edge of the village where the jeep and its mounted guns stood behind a silly little museum exhibit rope of vine. Feathers and bones were knotted into the vine. The spearmen treated it as though it were a high-tension transmission line.

"*You* break it," one of them said to Charles. He did, and the spearmen sighed with relief. Martha stopped scowling and stared.

The spearman said to Charles: "Go ahead and teach her. The firing pins are out of the guns, and if you try to start the jeep you get a spear through you. Now teach her." He and the rest squatted on the turf around the jeep. The little girl shied violently as he took her hand, and tried to run away. One of the spearmen slung her back into the circle. She brushed against the jeep and froze, white-faced.

"Martha," Charles said patiently, "there's nothing to be afraid of. The guns won't go off and the jeep won't move. I'll teach you how to work them

so you can kill everybody you don't like with the guns and go faster than a deer in the jeep—"

He was talking into empty air as far as the child was concerned. She was muttering, staring at the arm that had brushed the jeep: "That did it, I guess. There goes the power. May the goddess blast her—no. The power's out of me now. I felt it go." She looked up at Charles, quite calmly, and said: "Go on. Show me all about it. Do a good job."

"Martha, what are you talking about?"

"She was afraid of me, my sister, so she's robbing me of the power. Don't you know? I guess not. The goddess hates iron and machines. I had the power of the goddess in me, but it's gone now; I felt it go. Now nobody'll be afraid of me any more." Her face contorted and she said: "Show me how you work the guns."

He taught her what he could while the circle of spearmen looked on and grinned, cracking raw jokes about the child as anybody anywhere, would about a tyrant deposed. She pretended to ignore them, grimly repeating names after him and imitating his practiced movements in loading drill. She was very bright, Charles realized. When he got a chance he muttered, "I'm sorry about this, Martha. It isn't my idea."

She whispered bleakly: "I know. I liked you. I was sorry when the other outsider took your dinner." She began to sob uncontrollably. "I'll never see anything again! Nobody'll ever be afraid of me again!" She buried her face against Charles' shoulder.

He smoothed her tangled hair mechanically and said to the watching, grinning circle: "Look, hasn't this gone far enough? Haven't you got what you wanted?"

The headman stretched and spat. "Guess so," he said. "Come on, girl." He yanked Martha from the seat and booted her toward the huts.

Charles scrambled down just ahead of a spear. He let himself be led back to the smithy block house and shoved through the crawl hole.

"I was thinking about what you said the other day," Kennedy beamed, rasping a file over an arrowhead. "When I said that to change one molecule in the past you'd have to change *every* molecule in the past, and you said, 'Maybe so.' I've figured that what you were driving at was—"

"Kennedy," Charles said, "please shut up just this once. I've got to think."

"In what sense do you mean

that, Charles? Do you mean that you're a rational animal and therefore that your *being* rather than *essense* is—"

"Shut up or I'll pick up a rock and bust your head in with it!" Charles roared. He more than half meant it. Kennedy hunched down before his hearth looking offended and scared. Charles squatted with his head in his hands.

I have been listening to you.

Repeated drives of the Government to wipe out the aborigines. Drives that never succeeded.

I'll never see anything again.

The way the witch girl had blasted her rival—but that was suggestion. But—

I have been listening to you. Why are you untrue to your brothers?

He'd said nothing like that to anybody, not to her or poor Kennedy.

He thought vaguely of *psi* force, a fragment in his memory. An old superstition, like the id-ego-superego triad of the sick-minded psychologists. Like vectors of the mind, exploded nonsense. But—

I have been listening to you. Why are you untrue to your brothers?

Charles smacked one fist against the sand floor in impotent rage. He was going as crazy as Kennedy. Did the witch girl —and Martha—have hereditary *psi* power? He mocked himself savagely: that's such a *general* question!

Neurotic adolescent girls in kerosene-lit farmhouses, he thought vaguely. Things that go bump—and crash and blooie and *whoo-oo-oo!* in the night. Not in electric lit city apartments. Not around fleshed-up middle-aged men and women. You take a hyperthyroid virgin, isolate her from power machinery and electric fields, put on the pressures that make her feel alone and tense to the bursting point—and naturally enough, something bursts. A chamberpot sails from under the bed and shatters on the skull of stepfather-tyrant. The wide-gilt-framed portrait of thundergod - grandfather falls with a crash. Sure, the nail crystallized and broke — *who crystallized it?*

Neurotic adolescent girls speaking in tongues, reading face-down cards and closed books, screaming aloud when sister or mother dies in a railroad wreck fifty miles away, of cancer a hundred miles away, in a bombing overseas.

Sometimes they made saints of them. Sometimes they burned them. Burned them and *then* made saints of them.

A blood-raw hunk of venison came sailing through one of the

loopholes and flopped on the sand.

I was sorry when the other outsider took your dinner.

Three days ago he'd dozed off while Kennedy broiled the meat over the hearth. When he woke, Kennedy had gobbled it all and was whimpering with apprehension. But he'd done nothing and said nothing; the man wasn't responsible. He'd said nothing, and yet somehow the child knew about it.

His days were numbered; soon enough the jeep would be out of gas and the guns would be out of ammo or an unreplaceable part lost or broken. Then, according to the serene logic that ruled the witch girl, he'd be surplus.

But there was a key to it somehow.

He got up and slapped Kennedy's hand away from the venison. "Naughty," he said, and divided it equally with a broad spearblade.

"Naughty," Kennedy said morosely. "The naught-class, the null-class. I'm the null-class. I plus the universe equal one, the universe-class. If you could transpose—but you can't transpose." Silently they toasted their venison over the fire.

It was a moonless night with one great planet, Jupiter he supposed, reigning over the star-powdered sky. Kennedy slept muttering feebly in a corner. The hearthfire was out. It had to be out by dark. The spearmen took no chance of their trying to burn down the place. The village had long since gone to sleep, campfires doused, skin flaps pulled to across the door holes. From the corral one of the spavined, tick-ridden cows mooed uneasily and then fell silent.

Charles then began the hardest job of his life. He tried to think, straight and uninterrupted, of Martha, the little girl. Some of the things that interrupted him were:

The remembered smell of fried onions; they didn't have onions here;

Salt;

I wonder how the old 101st Precinct's getting along;

That fellow who wanted to get married on a hundred dollars;

Lee Falcaro, damn her!

This is damn foolishness; it can't possibly work;

Poor old Kennedy;

I'll starve before I eat another mouthful of that greasy deer-meat;

The Van Dellen kid, I wonder if I could have saved him;

Reiner's right; we've got to clean up the Government and then try to civilize these people;

There must be something

wrong with my head, I can't seem to concentrate;

That terrific third-chukker play in the Finals, my picture all over town;

Would Uncle Frank laugh at this?

It was hopeless. He sat bolt upright, his eyes squeezed tensely together, trying to visualize the child and call her and it couldn't be done. Skittering images of her zipped through his mind, only to be shoved aside. It was damn foolishness, anyway. . . .

He unkinked himself, stretched and lay down on the sand floor thinking bitterly: why try? You'll be dead in a few days or a few weeks; kiss the world goodby. Back in Syndic Territory, fat, sloppy, happy Syndic Territory, did they know how good they had it? He wished he could tell them to cling to their good life. But Uncle Frank said it didn't do any good to cling; it was a matter of tension and relaxation. When you stiffen up a way of life and try to fossilize it so it'll stay that way forever, then you find you've lost it.

Little Martha wouldn't understand it. Magic, ritual, the power of the goddess, fear of iron, fear of the jeep's vine enclosure—cursed, no doubt—what went on in such a mind? Could she throw things like a poltergeist-girl? They didn't have 'em any more; maybe it had something to do with electric fields or even iron. Or were they all phonies? An upset adolescent girl is a hell of a lot likelier to fake phenomena that produce them. Little Martha hadn't been faking her despair, though. The witch-girl—her sister, wasn't she?—didn't fake her icy calm and power. Martha'd be better off without such stuff—

"*Charles,*" a whisper said.

He muttered stupidly: "My God. She heard me," and crept to the palisade. Through a chink between the logs she was just visible in the starlight.

She whispered: "I thought I wasn't going to see anything or hear anything ever again but I sat up and I heard you calling and you said you wanted to help me if I'd help you so I came as fast as I could without waking anybody up—you *did* call me, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did. Martha, do you want to get out of here? Go far away with me?"

"You bet I do. *She's* going to take the power of the goddess out of me and marry me to Dinny, he stinks like a goat and he has a cockeye, and then she'll kill all our babies. Just tell me what to do and I'll do it." She sounded very grim and decided.

"Can you roll the boulders away from the hole there?" He

was thinking vaguely of teleportation; each boulder was a two-man job.

She said no.

He snarled: "Then why did you bother to come here?"

"Don't talk like that to me," the child said sharply—and he remembered what she thought she was.

"Sorry," he said.

"What I came about," she said calmly, "was the ex-plosion. Can you make an ex-plosion like you said? Back there at the jeep?"

What in God's name was she talking about?

"Back there," she said with exaggerated patience, "you was thinking about putting all the cartridges together and blowing up the whole damn shebang. Remember?"

He did, vaguely. One of a hundred schemes that had drifted through his head.

"I'd sure like to see that ex-plosion," she said. "The way *she* got things figured, I'd almost just as soon get exploded myself as not."

"I might blow up the logs here and get out," he said slowly. "I think you'd be a mighty handy person to have along, too. Can you get me about a hundred of the machine gun cartridges?"

"They'll miss 'em."

"Sneak me a few at a time. I'll empty them, put them together again and you sneak them back."

She said, slow and troubled: "*She* set the power of the goddess to guard them."

"Listen to me, Martha," he said. "I mean *listen*. You'll be doing it for me and they told me the power of the goddess doesn't work on outsiders. Isn't that right?"

There was a long pause, and she said at last with a sigh: "I sure wish I could see your eyes, Charles. I'll try it, but I'm damned if I would if Dinny didn't stink so bad." She slipped away and Charles tried to follow her with his mind through the darkness, to the silly little rope of vine with the feathers and bones knotted in it—but he couldn't. Too tense again.

Kennedy stirred and muttered complainingly as an icy small breeze cut through the chinks of the palisade, whispering.

His eyes, tuned to the starlight, picked up Martha bent almost double, creeping toward the smithy-prison. She wore a belt of fifty-caliber cartridges around her neck like a stole. Looked like about a dozen of them. He hastily scooped out a bowl of clean sand and whispered: "Any trouble?"

He couldn't see the grin on her face, but knew it was there. "It was easy," she bragged. "One

bad minute and then I checked with you and it was okay."

"Good kid. Pull the cartridges out of the links the way I showed you and pass them through."

She did. It was a tight squeeze.

He fingered one of the cartridges. The bullet fitted nicely into the socket of an arrowhead. He jammed the bullet in and wrenched at the arrowhead with thumb and forefinger—all he could get onto it. The brass neck began to spread. He dumped the powder into his little basin in the sand and reseated the bullet.

Charles shifted hands on the second cartridge. On the third he realized that he could put the point of the bullet on a hearthstone and press on the neck with both thumbs. It went faster then; in perhaps an hour he was passing the re-assembled cartridges back through the palisade.

"Time for another load?" he asked.

"Nope," the girl said. "Tomorrow night."

"Good kid."

She giggled. "It's going to be a hell of a big bang, ain't it, Charles?"

XIV

"Leave the fire alone," Charles said sharply to Kennedy. The little man was going to douse it for the night.

There was a flash of terrified sense: "They beat you. If the fire's on after dark they beat you. Fire and dark are equal and opposite." He began to smile. "Fire is the negative of dark. You just change the sign, in effect rotate it through 180 degrees. But to rotate it through 180 degrees you have to first rotate it through one degree. And to rotate it through one degree you first have to rotate it through half a degree." He was beaming now, having forgotten all about the fire. Charles banked it with utmost care, heaping a couple of flat stones for a chimney that would preserve the life of one glowing coal invisibly.

He stretched out on the sand, one hand on the little heap beneath which five pounds of smokeless powder was buried. Kennedy continued to drone out his power-series happily.

Through the chinks in the palisade a man's profile showed against the twilight. "Shut up," he said.

Kennedy shivering, rolled over and muttered to himself. The spearman laughed and went on.

Charles hardly saw him. His whole mind was concentrated on the spark beneath the improvised chimney. He had left such a spark seven nights running. Only

twice had it lived more than an hour. Tonight—tonight, it *had* to last. Tonight was the last night of the witch-girl's monthly courses, and during them she lost —or thought she lost, which was the same thing—the power of the goddess.

Primitive aborigines, he jeered silently at himself. A life time wasn't long enough to learn the intricacies of their culture—as occasional executions among them for violating magical law proved to the hilt. His first crude notion — blowing the palisade apart and running like hell—was replaced by a complex escape plan hammered out in detail between him and Martha.

Martha assured him that the witch girl could track him through the dark by the power of the goddess except for four days a month — and he believed it. Martha herself laid a matter-of-fact claim to keener second sight than her sister because of her virginity. With Martha to guide him through the night and the witch-girl's power disabled, they'd get a day's head start. His hand strayed to a pebble under which jerked venison was hidden and ready.

"But Martha. Are you sure you're not — not kidding yourself? Are you *sure?*"

He felt her grin on the other side of the palisade. "You're sure wishing Uncle Frank was here so you could ask him about it, don't you, Charles?"

He sure was. He wiped his brow, suddenly clammy.

Kennedy couldn't come along. One, he wasn't responsible. Two, he might have to be Charles' cover-story. They weren't too dissimilar in build, age, or coloring. Charles had a beard by now that sufficiently obscured his features, and two years absence should have softened recollections of Kennedy. Interrogated, Charles could take refuge in an imitation of Kennedy's lunacy.

"Charles, the one thing I don't get is this Lee dame. She got a spell on her? You don't want to mess with that."

"Listen, Martha, we've *got* to mess with her. It isn't a spell—exactly. Anyway I know how to take it off and then she'll be on our side."

"Can I set off the explosion? If you let me set off the explosion, I'll quit my bitching."

"We'll see," he said.

She chuckled very faintly in the dark. "Okay," she told him. "If I can't, I can't."

He thought of being married to a woman who could spot your smallest lie or reservation, and shuddered.

Kennedy was snoring by now and twilight was deepening into blackness. There was a quarter-

moon, obscured by over-cast. He hitched along the sand and peered through a chink at a tiny noise. It was the small scuffling feet of a woods-rat racing through the grass from one morsel of food to the next. It never reached it. There was a soft rush of wings as a great dark owl plummeted to earth and struck talons into the brown fur. The rat squealed its life away while the owl lofted silently to a tree branch where it stood on one leg, swaying drunkenly and staring with huge yellow eyes.

As sudden as that, it'll be, Charles thought abruptly weighted with despair. A half-crazy kid and yours truly trying to outsmart and out-Tarzan these wild men. If only the little dope would let me take the jeep! But the jeep was out. She rationalized her retention of the power even after handling iron by persuading herself that she was only acting for Charles; there was some obscure precedent in a long, memorized poem which served her as a text-book of magic. But riding in the jeep was *out*.

By now she should be stringing magic vines across some of the huts and trails. "They'll see 'em when they get torches and it'll scare 'em. Of course I don't know how to do it right, but they don't know that. It'll slow 'em down. If *she* comes out of her house—and maybe she won't—she'll know they don't matter and send the men after us. But we'll be on our way. Charles, you *sure* I can't set off the explosion? Yeah, I guess you are. Maybe I can set off one when we get to New Portsmouth?"

"If I can possibly arrange it."

She sighed: "I guess that'll have to do."

It was too silent; he couldn't bear it. With feverish haste he uncovered the caches of powder and meat. Under the sand was a fat clayey soil. He dug up handsfull of it, wet it with the only liquid available and worked it into paste. He felt his way to the logs decided on for blasting, dug out a hole at their bases in the clay. After five careful trips from the powder cache to the hole, the mine was filled. He covered it with clay and laid on a roof of flat stones from the hearth. The spark of fire still glowed, and he nursed it with twigs.

She was there, whispering: "Charles?"

"Right here. Everything set?"

"All set. Let's have that explosion."

He took the remaining powder and with minute care, laid a train across the stockade to the mine. He crouched into a ball and flipped a burning twig onto

the black line that crossed the white sand floor.

The blast seemed to wake up the world. Kennedy charged out of sleep, screaming, and a million birds woke with a squawk. Charles was conscious more of the choking reek than the noise as he scooped up the jerked venison and rushed through the ragged gap in the wall. A hand caught his—a small hand.

"You're groggy," Martha's voice said, sounding far away. "Come on—fast. *Man,* that was a great ex-plosion!"

She towed him through the woods and underbrush—fast. As long as he hung on to her he didn't stumble or run into a tree once. Irrationally embarrassed by his dependence on a child, he tried letting go for a short time —very short—and was quickly battered into changing his mind. He thought dizzily of the spearmen trying to follow through the dark and could almost laugh again.

Their trek to the coast was marked by desperate speed. For twenty-four hours, they stopped only to gnaw at their rations or snatch a drink at a stream. Charles kept moving because it was unendurable to let a ten-year-old girl exceed him in stamina. Both of them paid terribly for the murderous pace they kept. The child's face became skull-like and her eyes red; her lips dried and cracked. He gasped at her as they pulled their way up a bramble-covered 45-degree slope: "How do you do it? Isn't this ever going to end?"

"Ends soon," she croaked at him. "You know we dodged 'em three times?"

He could only shake his head.

She stared at him with burning red eyes. "This ain't hard," she croaked. "You do this with a gut-full of poison, *that's* hard."

"*Did* you?"

She grinned crookedly and chanted something he did not understand:

"*Nine moons times thirteen is the daughter's age*
"*When she drinks the death-cup.*
"*Three leagues times three she must race and rage*
"*Down hills and up—*"

She added matter-of-factly: "Last year. Prove I have the power of the goddess. Run, climb, with your guts falling out. This year, starve for a week and run down a deer of seven points."

He had lost track of days and nights when they stood on the brow of a hill at dawn and looked over the sea. The girl gasped: " 'Sall right now. *She* wouldn't let them go on. She's a bitch, but she's no fool." The child fell

in her tracks. Charles, too tired for panic, slept too.

Charles woke with a wonderful smell in his nostrils. He followed it hungrily down the reverse slope of the hill to a grotto.

Martha was crouched over a fire on which rocks were heating. Beside it was a bark pot smeared with clay. As he watched, she lifted a red-hot rock with two green sticks and rolled it into the pot. It boiled up and continued to boil for an astonishing number of minutes. That was the source of the smell.

"Breakfast?" he asked unbelievingly.

"Rabbit stew," she said. "Plenty of runways, plenty of bark, plenty of green branches. I made snares. Two tough old bucks cooking in there for an hour."

They chewed the meat from the bones in silence. She said at last: "We can't settle down here. Too near to the coast. And if we move further inland, there's *her*. And others. I been thinking." She spat a string of tough meat out. "There's England. Work our way around the coast. Make a raft or steal a canoe and cross the water. *Then* we could settle down. You can't have me for three times thirteen moons yet or I'd lose the power. But I guess we can wait. I heard about England and the English. They have no hearts left. We can take as many slaves as we want. They cry a lot but they don't fight. And none of their women has the power." She looked up anxiously. "You wouldn't want one of their women, would you? Not if you could have somebody with the power just by waiting for her?"

He looked down the hill and said slowly: "You know that's not what I had in mind, Martha. I have my own place with people far away. I want to get back there. I thought — I thought you'd like it too." Her face twisted. He couldn't bear to go on, not in words. "Look into my mind, Martha," he said. "Maybe you'll see what it means to me."

She stared long and deep. At last she rose, her face inscrutable, and spat into the fire. "Think I saved you for that?" she asked. "And for *her?* Not me. Save yourself from now on, mister. I'm going to beat my way south around the coast. England for me, and I don't want any part of you."

She strode off down the hill, gaunt and ragged, but with arrogance in her swinging, space-eating gait. Charles sat looking after her, stupefied, until she had melted into the underbrush. "Think I saved you for that? And for *her?*" She'd made some kind of mistake. He got up stiffly

and ran after her, but he could not pick up an inch of her woodswise trail. Charles slowly climbed to the grotto again and sat in its shelter.

He spent the morning trying to concoct simple springs out of bark strips and whippy branches. He got nowhere. The branches broke or wouldn't bend far enough. The bark shredded, or wouldn't hold a knot. Without metal, he couldn't shape the trigger to fit the bow so that it would be both sensitive and reliable.

At noon he drank enormously from a spring and looked morosely for plants that might be edible. He decided on something with a bulbous, onion-like root. For a couple of hours after that he propped rocks on sticks here and there. When he stepped back and surveyed them, he decided that any rabbit he caught with them would be, even for a rabbit, feeble-minded. He could think of nothing else to do.

First he felt a slight intestinal qualm and then a far from slight nausea. Then the root he had eaten took over with drastic thoroughness. He collapsed, retching, and only after the first spasms had passed was he able to crawl to the grotto. The shelter it offered was mostly psychological, but he had need of that. Under the ancient, mossy stones, he raved with delirium until dark.

Sometimes he was back in Syndic Territory, Charles Orsino of the two-goal handicap and the flashing smile. Sometimes he was back in the stinking blockhouse with Kennedy spinning interminable, excruciatingly boring strands of iridescent logic. Sometimes he was back in the psychology laboratory with the pendulum beating, the light blinking, the bell ringing and sense-impressions flooding him and drowning him with lies. Sometimes he raced in panic down the streets of New Portsmouth with sweatered Guardsmen pounding after him, their knives flashing fire.

But at last he was in the grotto again, with Martha sponging his head and cursing him in a low, fluent undertone for being seven times seven kinds of fool.

She said tartly as recognition came into his eyes: "Yes, for the fifth time, I'm back. I should be making my way to England and a band of my own, but I'm back and I don't know why. I heard you in pain and I thought it served you right for not knowing deathroot when you see it, but I turned around and came back."

"Don't go," he said hoarsely.

She held a bark cup to his lips and made him choke down some

nauseating brew. "Don't worry," she told him bitterly. "I won't go. I'll do everything you want, which shows that I'm as big a fool as you are, or bigger because I know better. I'll help you find her and take the spell off her. And may the goddess help me because I can't help myself."

". . . things like sawed tree-trunks, shells you call them. . . . a pile of them. . . . he looks at them and he thinks they're going bad and they ought to be used soon. . . . under a wooden roof they are. . . . a thin man with death on his face and hate in his heart. . . . he wears blue and gold. . . . he sticks the gold, you call a coat's wrist the cuff, he sticks the cuff under the nose of a fellow and yells his hate out and the fellow feels ready to strangle on blood. . . . it's about a boat that sank. . . this fellow, he's a fat little man and he kills and kills, he'd kill the man if he could. . . ."

A picket boat steamed by the coast twice a day, north after dawn and south before sunset. They had to watch out for it; it swept the coast with powerful glasses.

". . . . it's the man with the bellyache again but now he's sleepy. . . . he's cursing the skipper. . . . sure there's nothing on the coast to trouble us. . . . eight good men aboard and that one bastard of a skipper. . . ."

Sometimes it jumped erratically, like an optical lever disturbed by the weight of a hair.

". . . . board over the door painted with a circle, a zig-zag on its side, an up-and-down line. . . . they call it office of intelligent navels. . . the lumber camp. . . . machine goes chug-rip, chug-rip. . . . and the place where they cut metal like wood on machines that spin around . . . a deathly-sick little fellow loaded down and chained. . . . fell on his face, he can't get up, his bowels are water, his muscles are stiff, like dry branches and he's afraid. . . . they curse him, they beat him, they take him to a machine that spins . . . *they* . . . *they*—*they*—"

She sat bolt upright, screaming. Her eyes didn't see Charles. He drew back one hand and slammed it across her cheek in a slap that reverberated like a pistol shot. Her head rocked to the blow and her eyes snapped back from infinity-focus.

She never told Charles what they had done to the sick slave in the machine shop, and he never asked her.

Without writing equipment, for crutches, Charles doubted profoundly that he'd be able to hang onto any of the material she supplied. He surprised him-

self; his memory developed with exercise.

The shadowy ranks of the New Portsmouth personnel became solider daily in his mind; the chronically-fatigued ordnanceman whose mainspring was to get by with the smallest possible effort; the sex-obsessed little man in Intelligence who lived only for the brothels where he selected older women—women who looked like his mother; the human weasel in BuShips who was impotent in bed and a lacerating tyrant in the office; the admiral who knew he was dying and hated his juniors proportionately to their youth and health.

And—

". . . this woman of yours . . ., she ain't at home there. . . . she ain't at. . . . at home. . . . *anywhere*. . . . the fat man, the one that kills, he's talking to her but she isn't . . . yes she is . . . no she isn't—she's answering him, talking about over-the-sea. . . ."

"Lee Falcaro," Charles whispered. "Lee Bennet."

The trance-frozen face didn't change; the eerie whisper went on without interruption: ". . . Lee Bennet on her lips, Lee Falcaro down deep in her guts. . . . and the face of Charles Orsino down there too. . . ."

An unexpected pang went through him.

He sorted and classified endlessly what he had learned. He formed and rejected a dozen plans. At last there was one he could not reject.

XV

Commander Grinnel was officer of the day, and sore as a boil about it. O.N.I. wasn't supposed to catch the duty. You risked your life on cloak-and-dagger missions; let the shorebound fancy dans do the drudgery. But there he was, nevertheless, in the guard house office with a .45 on his hip, the interminable night stretching before him, and the ten-man main guard snoring away outside.

He eased his bad military conscience by reflecting that there wasn't anything to guard, that patrolling the shore establishment was just worn out tradition. The ships and boats had their own watch. At the very furthest stretch of the imagination, a tarzan might sneak into town and try to steal some ammo. Well, if he got caught he got caught. And if he didn't, who'd know the difference with the accounting as sloppy as it was here? They did things differently in Iceland.

They crept through the midnight dark of New Portsmouth's outskirts. As before, she led with

her small hand. Lights flared on a wharf where, perhaps, a boat was being serviced. A slave screamed somewhere under the lash or worse.

"Here's the doss house," Martha whispered. It was smack between paydays — part of the plan—and the house was dark except for the hopefully-lit parlor. They ducked down the alley that skirted it and around the back of Bachelor Officer Quarters. The sentry, if he were going his rounds at all, would be at the other end of his post when they passed—part of the plan.

Lee Falcaro was quartered alone in a locked room of the O.N.I. building. Martha had, from seventy miles away, frequently watched the lock being opened and closed.

They dove under the building's crumbling porch two minutes before a late crowd of drinkers roared down the street and emerged when they were safely gone. There was a charge of quarters, a little yeoman, snoozing under a dim light in the O.N.I. building's lobby.

"Anybody else?" Charles whispered edgily.

"No. Just her. She's asleep. Dreaming about — never mind. Come on Charles. He's out."

The little yeoman didn't stir as they passed him and crept up the stairs. Lee Falcaro's room was part of the third-floor attic, finished off specially. You reached it by a ladder from a second-floor one-man office.

The lock was an eight-button piccolo—very rare in New Portsmouth and presumably loot from the mainland. Charles' fingers flew over it: 1-7-5-4-, 2-2-7-3-, 8-2-6-6- and it flipped open silently.

But the door squeaked.

"She's waking up!" Martha hissed in the dark. "She'll yell!"

Charles reached the bed in two strides and clamped his hand over Lee Falcaro - Bennet's mouth. Only a feeble "mmm!" came out, but the girl thrashed violently in his grip.

"Shut up, lady!" Martha whispered. "Nobody's going to rape you."

There was an astonished "mmm?" and she subsided, trembling.

"Go ahead," Martha told him. "She won't yell."

He took his hand away nervously. "We've come to administer the oath of citizenship," he said.

The girl answered in the querulous voice that was hardly hers: "You picked a strange time for it. Who are you? What's all the whispering for?"

He improvised. "I'm Commander Lister. Just in from Iceland aboard atom sub *Taft*. They

didn't tell you in case it got turned down, but I was sent for authorization to give you citizenship. You know how unusual it is for a woman."

"Who's this child? And why did you get me up in the dead of night?"

He dipped deeply into Martha's probings of the past week. "Citizenship'll make the Guard Intelligence gang think twice before they try to grab you again. Naturally they'd try to block us if we administered the oath in public. Ready?"

"Dramatic," she sneered. "Oh, I suppose so. Get it over with."

"Do you, Lee Bennet, solemnly renounce all allegiances previously held by you and pledge your allegiance to the North American Government?"

"I do," she said.

There was a choked little cry from Martha. "Hell's fire," she said. "Like breaking a leg!"

"What are you talking about, little girl?" Lee asked, coldly alert.

"It's all right," Charles said wearily. "Don't you know my voice? I'm Orsino. You turned me in back there because they don't give citizenship to women and so your de-conditioning didn't get triggered off. I managed to break for the woods. A bunch of natives got me. I busted loose with the help of Martha here. Among her other talents, the kid's a mind reader. I remember the triggering shocked me out of a year's growth; how do you feel?"

Lee was silent, but Martha answered in a voice half puzzled and half contemptuous: "She feels fine, but she's crying."

"Am not," Lee Falcaro gulped.

Charles turned from her, embarrassed. In a voice that strove to be normal, he whispered to Martha: "What about the boat?"

"Still there," she said.

Lee Falcaro said tremulously: "Wh-wh-what boat?"

"Martha's staked out a reactor-driven patrol speedboat at a wharf. One guard aboard. She—watched it in operation and I have some small-boat time. I really think we can grab it. If we get a good head-start, they don't have anything based here that'll catch up with it. If we get a break on the weather, their planes won't be able to pick us up."

Lee Falcaro stood up, dashing tears from her eyes. "Then let's go," she said evenly.

"How's the C.Q. — that man downstairs, Martha?"

"Still sleepin'. The way's as clear now as it'll ever be."

They closed the door behind them and Charles worked the lock. The Charge of Quarters looked as though he couldn't be

roused by anything less than an earthquake as they passed—but Martha stumbled on one of the rotting steps after they were outside the building.

"Patrick and Bridget rot my clumsy feet off!" she whispered. "He's awake."

"Under the porch," Charles said. They crawled into the dank space between porch floor and ground. Martha kept up a scarcely-audible volleyfire of maledictions aimed at herself.

When they stopped abruptly Charles knew it was bad.

Martha held up her hand for silence, and Charles imagined in the dark that he could see the strained and eerie look of her face. After a pause she whispered: "He's using the—what do you call it? You talk and somebody hears you far away? A prowler, he says to them. A wild man from the woods. The bitches bastard must have seen you in your handsome suit of skin and dirt, Charles. Oh, we're *for* it! May my toe that stumbled grow the size of a boulder! May my cursed eyes that didn't see the step fall out!"

They huddled down in the darkness and Charles took Lee Falcaro's hand reassuringly. It was cold. A moment later his other hand was taken, with grim possessiveness, by the child.

Martha whispered: "The fat little man. The man who kills, Charles."

He nodded. He thought he had recognized Grinnel from her picture.

"And ten men waking up. Charles, do you remember the way to the wharf?"

"Sure," he said. "But we're not going to get separated."

"They're mean, mad men," she said. "Bloody-minded. And the little man is the worst."

They heard the stomping feet and a babble of voices, and Commander Grinnel's clear, fatman's tenor: "Keep it quiet, men. He may still be in the area." The feet thundered over their heads on the porch.

In the barest of whispers Martha said: "The man that slept tells them there was only one, and he didn't see what he was like except for the bare skin and the long hair. And the fat man says they'll find him and—and—and says they'll find him." Her hand clutched Charles' desperately and then dropped it as the feet thudded overhead again.

Grinnel was saying: "Half of you head up the street and half down. Check the alleys, check open window—hell, I don't have to tell you. If we don't find the bastard on the first run we'll have to wake up the whole Guard

Battalion and patrol the whole base with them all the goddam night, so keep your eyes open. Take off."

"Remember the way to the wharf, Charles," Martha said. "Good-bye lady. Take care of him. Take good care of him." She wrenched her hand away and darted out from under the porch.

Lee muttered some agonized monosyllable. Charles started out after the child instinctively and then collapsed weakly back onto the dirt. They heard the rest.

"Hey, you—it's him, by God! Get him! Get him!"

"Here he is, down here! Head him off!"

"Over there!" Grinnel yelled. "Head him off! Head him—good work!"

"For God's sake. It's a girl."

"Those goddam yeomen and their goddam prowlers."

Grinnel: "Where are you from, kid?"

"That's no kid from the base, commander. Look at her!"

"I just was, sarge. Looks good to me, don't it to you?"

Grinnel, tolerant, fatherly, amused: "Now, men, have your fun but keep it quiet."

"Don't be afraid, kid—" There was an animal howl from Martha's throat that made Lee Falcaro shake hysterically and Charles grind his fingernails into his palms.

Grinnel: "Sergeant, you'd better tie your shirt around her head and take her into the O.N.I. building."

"Why, commander! And let that lousy little yeoman in on it?"

Grinnel, amused, a good Joe, a man's man: "That's up to you, men. Just keep it quiet."

"Why, commander, sometimes I like to make a little noise—"

"Ow!" a man yelled. There was a scuffle of feet and babbling voices. "Get her, you damn fool!" "She bit my hand—" "There she goes—" and a single emphatic shot.

Grinnel's voice said into the silence that followed: "That's that, men."

"Did you *have* to shoot, Commander?" an aggrieved Guardsman said.

"Don't blame me, fellow. Blame the guy that let her go."

"God-dammit, she bit me—"

Somebody said as though he didn't mean it: "We ought to take her someplace."

"The hell with that. Let 'em get her in the morning."

"Them as wants her." A cackle of harsh laughter.

Grinnel, tolerantly: "Back to the guardhouse, men. And keep it quiet."

They scuffled off and there was

silence again for long minutes. Charles said at last: "We'll go down to the wharf." They crawled out and looked for a moment from the shelter of the building at the bundle lying in the road.

Lee muttered: "Grinnel."

"Shut up," Charles said. He led her down deserted alleys and around empty corners, strictly according to plan.

The speedboat was a twenty-foot craft at Wharf Eighteen, bobbing on the water safely removed from other moored boats and ships. Lee Falcaro let out a small, smothered shriek when she saw a uniformed sailor sitting in the cockpit, apparently staring directly at them.

"It's all right," Charles said. "He's a drunk. He's always out cold by this time of night." Smoothly Charles found the rope locker, cut lengths with the sailor's own knife and bound and gagged him. The man's eyes opened, weary, glazed and red while this was going on and closed again. "Help me lug him ashore," Charles said. Lee Falcaro took the sailor's legs and they eased him onto the wharf.

They went back into the cockpit. "This is deep water," Charles said, "so you'll have no trouble with pilotage. You can read a compass and charts. There's an automatic dead reckoner. My advice is just to pull the moderator rods out quarter-speed, point the thing west, pull the rods out as far as they'll go —and relax. Either they'll overtake you or they won't."

She was beginning to get the drift. She said nervously: "You're talking as though you're not coming along."

"I'm not," he said, playing the lock of the arms rack. The bar fell aside and he pulled a .45 pistol from its clamp. He thought back and remembered where the boat's diminutive magazine was located, broke the feeble lock and found a box of short, fat, heavy little cartridges. He began to snap them into the pistol's magazine.

"What do you think you're up to?" Lee Falcaro demanded.

"Appointment with Commander Grinnel," he said. He slid the heavy magazine into the pistol's grip and worked the slide to jack a cartridge into the chamber.

"Shall I cast off for you?" he asked.

"Don't be a fool," she said. "You sound like a revival of a Mickey Spillane comedy. You can't bring her back to life and you've got a job to do for the Syndic."

"You do it," he said, and snapped another of the blunt, fat, little cartridges into the magazine.

She cast off, reached for the

moderator-rod control and pulled it hard.

"Gee," he gasped, "you'll sink us!" and dashed for the controls. You had seconds before the worm-gears turned, the cadmium rods withdrew from their slots, the reactor seethed and sent boiling metal cycling through the turbine—

He slammed down manual levers that threw off the fore and aft mooring lines, spun the wheel, bracing himself, and saw Lee Falcaro go down to the deck in a tangle, the .45 flying from her hand and skidding across the knurled plastic planking. But by then the turbine was screaming an alarm to the whole base and they were cutting white water through the buoy-marked gap in the harbor net.

Lee Falcaro got to her feet. "I'm not proud of myself," she said to him. "But she told me to take care of you."

He said grimly: "We could have gone straight to the wharf without that little layover to pick you up. Take the wheel."

"Charles, I—"

He snarled at her.

"*Take the wheel.*"

She did, and he went aft to stare through the darkness. The harbor lights were twinkling pin-points; then his eyes misted so he could not see them at all. He didn't give a damn if a dozen corvettes were already slicing the bay in pursuit. He had failed.

XVI

It was a dank fog-shrouded morning. Sometime during the night the quill of the dead reckoner had traced its fine red line over the 30th meridian. Roughly halfway, Charles Orsino thought, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. But the line was straight as a string for the last four hours of their run. The damn girl must have fallen asleep on watch. He glared at her in the bow and broke open a ration. Blandly oblivious to the glare, she said: "Good morning."

Charles swallowed a mouthful of chocolate, half-chewed, and choked on it. He reached hastily for water and found the tall plastic column of the ion-exchange apparatus empty. "Damn it," he snarled, "why didn't you refill this thing when you emptied it? And why didn't you zig-zag overnight? You're utterly irresponsible." He hurled the bucket overside, hauled it up and slopped seawater into the apparatus. Now there'd be a good twenty minutes before a man-sized drink accumulated.

"Just a minute," she told him steadily. "Let's straighten this out. I haven't had any water on the night watch so I didn't have

any occasion to refill the tube. You must have taken the last of the water with your dinner. And as for the zig-zag, you said we should run a straightaway now and then to mix it up. I decided that last night was as good a time as any."

He took a minute drink from the reservoir, stalling. There was something—yes; he had *meant* to refill the apparatus after his dinner ration. And he *had* told her to give it a few hours of straightaway some night. . . .

He said formally: "You're quite right on both counts. I apologize." He bit into a ration.

"That's not good enough," she said. "I'm not going to have you tell me you're sorry and then go scowling and sulking about the boat. In fact I don't like your behavior at all."

He said, enormously angry: *"Oh, you don't do you?"* and hated her, the world and himself for the stupid inadequacy of the comeback.

"No. I don't. I'm seriously worried. I'm afraid the conditioning you got didn't fall away completely when they swore you in. You've been acting irrationally and inconsistently."

"What about you?" he snapped. "You got conditioned too."

"That's right," she said. "That's another reason why you're worrying me. I find impulses in myself that have no business there. I simply seem to do a better job of controlling them than you're doing. For instance: we've been quarreling and at cross-purposes ever since you and Martha picked me up. That couldn't be unless I were contributing to the friction."

The wheel was fixed; she took a step or two aft and said professorially: "I've never had trouble getting along with people. I've had differences, of course, and at times I've allowed myself displays of temper when it was necessary to assert myself. But I find that you upset me; that for some reason or other your opinion on a matter is important to me, that if it differs with mine there should be a reconciliation."

He put down the ration and said wonderingly: "Do you know, that's the way I feel about you? And you think it's the conditioning or—or something?" He took a couple of steps forward, hesitantly.

"Yes," she said in a rather tremulous voice. "The conditioning or something. For instance, you're inhibited. You haven't made an indecent proposition to me, not even as a matter of courtesy. Not that I care, of course, but—" In stepping aft, she tripped over the

water bucket and went down to the deck with a faint scream.

He said: "Here, let me help you." He picked her up and didn't let go.

"Thanks," she said faintly. "The conditioning technique can't be called faulty, but it has inherent limitations . . ." She trailed off and he kissed her. She kissed back and said more faintly still: "Or it might be the drugs we used . . . Oh, Charles, what *took* you so long?"

He said, brooding: "You're way out of my class, you know. I'm just a bagman for the New York police. I wouldn't even be that if it weren't for Uncle Frank, and you're a Falcaro. It's just barely thinkable that I could make a pass at you. I guess that held me off and I didn't want to admit it so I got mad at you instead. Hell. I could have swum back to the base and made a damned fool of myself trying to find Grinnel, but down inside I knew better. The kid's *gone*."

"We'll make a psychologist of you yet," she said.

"Psychologist? Why? You're joking."

"No. It's not a joke. You'll *like* psychology, darling. You can't go on playing polo forever, you know."

Darling! What was he getting into? Old man Gilby was four-goal at sixty, wasn't he? Good God, was he hooked into marriage at twenty-three? Was she married already? Did she know or care whether he was? Had she been promiscuous? Would she continue to be? He'd never know; that was the one thing you never asked; your only comfort, if you needed comfort, was that she could never dream of asking you. What went on here? Let me out!

It went through his mind in a single panicky flash and then he said: "The hell with it," and kissed her again.

She wanted to know: "The hell with what, darling?"

"Everything. Tell me about psychology. I can't go on playing polo forever."

It was an hour before she got around to telling him about psychology: "The neglect has been criminal—and inexplicable. For about a century it's been *assumed* that psychology is a dead fallacy. Why?"

"All right," he said amiably, playing with a lock of her hair. "Why?"

"Lieberman," she said. "Lieberman of Johns-Hopkins. He was one of the old-line topological psychology men—don't let the lingo throw you, Charles; it's just the name of a system. He wrote an attack on the *mengenlehre* psychology school—point-sets of emotions, class-inclusions

of reactions and so on. He blasted them to bits by proving that their constructs didn't correspond to the emotions and reactions of random-sampled populations. And then came the payoff: he tried the same acid test on his *own* school's constructs and found out that they didn't correspond either. It didn't frighten him; he was a scientist. He published, and then the jig was up. Everybody, from full professors to undergraduate students went down the roster of the schools of psychology and wrecked them so comprehensively that the field was as dead as palmistry in twenty years. The miracle is that it hadn't happened before. The flaws were so glaring! Textbooks of the older kind solemnly described syndromes, psychoses, neuroses that simply couldn't be found in the real world! And that's the way it was all the way down the line."

"So where does that leave us?" Charles demanded. "Is it or isn't it a science?"

"It is," she said simply. "Lieberman and his followers went too far. It became a kind of hysteria. The experimenters must have been too eager. They misread results, they misinterpreted statistics, they misunderstood the claims of a school and knocked down not its true claims but straw-man claims they had set up themselves."

"But—*psychology!*" Charles protested, obscurely embarrassed at the thought that man's mind was subject to scientific study—not because he knew the first thing about it, but because *everybody* knew psychology was phony.

She shrugged. "I can't help it. We were doing physiology of the sensory organs, trying to settle the oldie about focusing the eye, and I got to grubbing around the pre-Lieberman texts looking for light in the darkness. Some of it sounded so—not sensible, but *positive* that I ran off one of Lieberman's population checks. And the old boy had been dead wrong. *Mengenlehre* constructs correspond quite nicely to the actual way people's minds work. I kept checking and the schools that were destroyed as hopelessly fallacious a century ago checked out, some closely and some not so closely, as good descriptions of the way the mind works. Some have predictive value. I used *mengenlehre* psychology algorisms to compute the conditioning on you and me, including the trigger release. It worked. You see, Charles? We're on the rim of something tremendous!"

"When did this Lieberman flourish?"

"I don't have the exact dates in my head. The breakup of the schools corresponded roughly with the lifetime of John G. Falcaro."

That pin-pointed it rather well. John G. succeeded Rafael, who succeeded Amadeo Falcaro, first leader of the Syndic in revolt. Under John G., the hard-won freedom was enjoyed, the bulging store-houses were joyously emptied, craft union rules went joyously out the window and builders *worked*, the dollar went to an all-time high and there was an all-time number of dollars in circulation. It had been an exhuberant time still fondly remembered; just the time for over-enthusiastic rebels against a fusty scholasticism to joyously smash old ways of thought without too much exercise of the conscience. It all checked out.

She started and he got to his feet. A hardly-noticed discomfort was becoming acute; the speedboat was pitching and rolling quite seriously, for the first time since their escape. "Dirty weather coming up," he said. "We've been too damned lucky so far." He thought, but didn't remark, that there was much to worry about in the fact that there seemed to have been no pursuit. The meager resources of the North American Navy wouldn't be spent on chasing a single minor craft—not if the weather could be counted on to finish her off.

"I thought we were unsinkable?"

"In a way. Seal the boat and she's unsinkable the way a corked bottle is. But the boat's made up of a lot of bits and pieces that go together just so. Pound her for a few hours with waves and the bits and pieces give way. She doesn't sink, but she doesn't steam or steer either. I wish the Syndic had a fleet on the Atlantic."

"Sorry," she said. "The nearest fleet I know of is Mob ore boats on the great lakes and they aren't likely to pick us up."

The sea-search radar pinged and they flew to the screen. "*Sŏmĕthing* at 273 degrees, about eight miles," he said. "It can't be pursuit. They couldn't have any reason at all to circle around us and come at us from ahead." He strained his eyes into the west and thought he could see a black speck on the gray.

Lee Falcaro tried a pair of binoculars and complained: "These things won't work."

"Not on a rolling, pitching platform they won't—not with an optical lever eight miles long. I don't suppose this boat would have a gyro-stabilized signal glass." He spun the wheel to 180; they staggered and clung

as the bow whipped about, searched and steadied on the new course. The mounting waves slammed them broadside-to and the rolling increased. They hardly noticed; their eyes were on the radarscope. Fogged as it was with sea return, they nevertheless could be sure after several minutes that the object had changed course to 135. Charles made a flying guess at her speed, read their own speed off and scribbled for a moment.

He said nothing, but spun the wheel to 225 and went back to the radarscope. The object changed course to 145. Charles scribbled again and said at last, flatly: "They're running collision courses on us. Automatically computed, I suppose, from a radar. We're through."

He spun the wheel to 180 again, and studied the crawling green spark on the radarscope. "This way we give 'em the longest run for their money and can pray for a miracle. The only way we can use our speed to outrun them is to turn around and head back into Government Territory —which isn't what we want. Relax, Lee. Maybe if the weather thickens they'll lose us—no; not with radar."

They sat together on a bunk, wordlessly, for hours while the spray dashed higher and the boat shivered to hammering waves. Briefly they saw the pursuer, three miles off, low, black and ugly, before fog closed in again.

At nightfall there was the close, triumphant roar of a big reaction turbine and a light stabbed through the fog, flooding the boat with blue-white radiance. A cliff-like black hull loomed alongside as a bull-horn roared at them: "Cut your engines and come about into the wind."

Lee Falcaro read white-painted letters on the black hull; "*Hon. James J. Regan, Chicago.*" She turned to Charles and said wonderingly: "It's an ore boat. From the Mob great lakes fleet."

XVII

"Here?" Charles demanded. "*Here?*"

"No possible mistake," she said, stunned. "When you're a Falcaro you travel. I've seen 'em in Duluth, I've seen 'em in Quebec, I've seen 'em in Buffalo."

The bull-horn voice roared again, dead in the shroud of fog; "Come into the wind and cut your engines or we'll put a shell into you."

Charles turned the wheel and wound in the moderator rod; the boat pitched like a splinter on the waves. There was a muffled double explosion and two grapnels crunched into the plastic

hull, bow and stern. As the boat steadied, sharing the inertia of the ore ship, a dark figure leaped from the blue-white eye of the searchlight to their deck. And another. And another.

"Hello, Jim," Lee Falcaro said almost inaudibly. "Haven't met since Las Vegas, have we?"

The first boarder studied her cooly. He was built for football or any other form of mayhem. He ignored Charles completely. "Lee Falcaro as advised. Do you still think twenty reds means a black is bound to come up? You always were a fool, Lee. And now you're in real trouble."

"What's going on, mister?" Charles snapped. "We're Syndics and I presume you're Mobsters. Don't you recognize the treaty?"

The boarder turned to Charles inquiringly. "Some confusion," he said. "Max Wyman? Charles Orsino? Or just some wild man from outback?"

"Orsino," Charles said formally. "Second cousin of Edward Falcaro, under the guardianship of Francis W. Taylor."

The boarder bowed slightly. "James Regan IV," he said. "No need to list my connections. It would take too long and I feel no need to justify myself to a small-time dago chisler. Watch him gentlemen!"

Charles found his arms pinned by Regan's two companions. There was a gun muzzle in his ribs.

Regan shouted to the ship and a ladder was let down. Lee Falcaro and Charles climbed it with guns at their backs. He said to her: "Who is that lunatic?" It did not even occur to him that the young man was who he claimed to be—the son of the Mob Territory opposite number of Edward Falcaro.

"He's Regan," she said. "And I don't know who's the lunatic, him or me. Charles, I'm sorry, terribly sorry, I got you into this."

He managed to smile. "I volunteered," he said.

"Enough talk," Regan said, following them onto the deck. Dull-eyed sailors watched them incuriously, and there were a couple of anvil-jawed men with a stance and swagger Charles had come to know. Guardsmen —he would have staked his life on it. Guardsmen of the North American Government Navy—aboard a Mob Territory ship and acting as if they were passengers or high-rated crewmen.

Regan smirked: "I'm on the horns of a dilemma. There are no accomodations that are quite right for you. There are storage compartments which are worse than you deserve and there are passenger quarters which are too good for you. I'm afraid it

will have to be one of the compartments. Your consolation will be that it's only a short run to Chicago."

Chicago—headquarters for Mob Territory. The ore ship had been on a return trip to Chicago when alerted somehow by the Navy to intercept the fugitives. *Why?*

"Down there," one of the men gestured briskly with a gun. They climbed down a ladder into a dark, oily cavern fitfully lit by a flash in Regan's hand.

"Make yourselves comfortable," Regan told them. "If you get a headache, don't worry. We were carrying some avgas on the outward run." The flash winked out and a door clanged on them.

"I can't believe it," Charles said. "That's a top Mob man? Couldn't you be mistaken?" He groped in the dark and found her. The place did reek of gasoline.

She clung to him and said: "Hold me, Charles. . . . Yes that's Jimmy Regan.

"That's what will become top man in the Mob. Jimmy's a charmer at a Las Vegas Hotel. Jimmy's a gourmet when he orders at the Pump Room and he's trying to overawe you. Jimmy plays polo too, but he's crippled three of his own teammates because he's not very good at it. I kept telling myself whenever I ran into him that he was just an accident, the Mob could survive him. But his father acts —funny. There's something wrong with them there's somewrong with them, there's some-

"They roll out the carpet when you show up but the people around them are afraid of them. There's a story I never believed —but I believe it now. What would happen if my uncle pulled out a pistol and began screaming and shot a waiter: Jimmy's father did it, they tell me. And nothing happened except that the waiter was dragged away and everybody said it was a good thing Mr. Regan saw him reach for his gun and shot him first. Only the waiter didn't have any gun.

"I saw Jimmy last three years ago. I haven't been in Mob Territory since. I didn't like it there. Now I know why. Give Mob Territory enough time and it'll be like New Portsmouth. Something went wrong with them. We have the Treaty of Las Vegas and a hundred years of peace and there aren't many people going back and forth between Syndic and Mob except for a few high-ups like me who have to circulate. Manners. So you pay duty calls and shut your eyes to what they're really like.

"*This* is what they're like. This dark, damp stinking com-

partment. And my uncle—and all the Falcaros—and you—and I—we aren't like them. Are we? *Are we?*" Her fingers bit into his arms. She was shaking.

"Easy," he soothed her. "Easy, easy. We're all right. We'll be all right. I think I've got it figured out. This must be some private gun-running Jimmy's gone in for. Loaded an ore boat with avgas and ammo and ran it up the Seaway. If anybody in Syndic Territory gave a damn they thought it was a load of ore for New Orleans via the Atlantic and the Gulf. But Jimmy ran his load to Ireland or Iceland, H.Q. A little private flier of his. He wouldn't dare harm us. There's the Treaty and you're a Falcaro."

"Treaty," she said. "I tell you they're all in it. Now that I've seen the Government in action I understand what I saw in Mob Territory. They've gone rotten, that's all. They've gone rotten. The way he treated you, because he thought you didn't have his rank! Sometimes my uncle's high-handed, sometimes he tells a person off, sometimes he lets him know he's top man in the Syndic and doesn't propose to let anybody teach him how to suck eggs. But the spirit's different. In the Syndic it's parent to child. In the Mob it's master to slave. Not based on age, not based on achievement, but based on the accident of birth. You tell me 'You're a Falcaro' and that packs weight. Why? Not because I was born a Falcaro but because they let me stay a Falcaro. If I hadn't been brainy and quick, they'd have adopted me out before I was ten. They don't do that in Mob Territory. Whatever chance sends a Regan is a Regan then and forever. Even if it's a paranoid constitutional inferior like Jimmy's father. Even if it's a giggling pervert like Jimmy.

"God, Charles, I'm scared.

"At last I know these people and I'm scared. You'd have to see Chicago to know why. The lakefront palaces, finer than anything in New York. Regan Memorial Plaza, finer than Scratch Sheet Square—great gilded marble figures, a hundred running yards of heroic frieze. But the hovels you see only by chance! Gray brick towers dating from the Third Fire! The children with faces like weasels, the men with faces like hogs, the women with figures like beer barrels and all of them glaring at you when you drive past as if they could cut your throat with joy. I never understood the look in their eyes until now, and you'll never begin to understand what I'm talking about until you see their eyes . . ."

Charles revolted against the

idea. It was too gross to go down. It didn't square with his acquired picture of life in North America and therefore Lee Falcaro must be somehow mistaken or hysterical. "There," he murmured, stroking her hair. "We'll be all right. We'll be all right." He tried to soothe her.

She twisted out of his arms and raged: "I *won't* be humored. They're mad, I tell you. Dick Reiner was right. We've got to wipe out the Government. But Frank Taylor was right too. We've got to blast the Mob before they blast us. They've died and decayed into something too horrible to bear. If we let them stay on the continent, with us their stink will infect us and poison us to death. We've got to do something. We've got to do something."

"What?"

It stopped her cold. After a minute she uttered a shaky laugh. "The fat, sloppy, happy Syndic," she said, "sitting around while the wolves overseas and the maniacs across the Mississippi are waiting to jump. Yes—do what?"

Charles Orsino was not good at arguments or indeed at any abstract thinking. He knew it. He knew the virtues that had commended him to F. W. Taylor were his energy and an off-hand talent for getting along with people. But something rang terribly false in Lee's words.

"That kind of thinking doesn't get you anywhere, Lee," he said slowly. "I didn't absorb much from Uncle Frank, but I did absorb this: you run into trouble if you make up stories about the world and then act as if they're true. The Syndic isn't somebody sitting around. The Government isn't wolves. The Mobsters aren't maniacs. And they aren't waiting to jump on the Syndic. The Syndic isn't anything that's jumpable. It's some people and their morale and credit."

"Faith is a beautiful thing," Lee Falcaro said bitterly. "Where'd you get yours?"

"From the people I knew and worked with. Numbers-runners bookies, sluts. Decent citizens."

"And what about the scared and unhappy ones in Riveredge? That sow of a woman in the D.A.R. who smuggled me aboard a coast raider? The neurotics and psychotics I found more and more of when I invalidated the Lieberman findings? Charles, the North American Government didn't scare me especially. But the thought that they're lined up with a continental power does. It scares me damnably because it'll be three against one. Against the Syndic, the Mob, the Government—and our own unbalanced citizens."

Uncle Frank never let that word "citizens" pass without a tirade. "We are not a government!" he always yelled. "We are not a government! We must not think like a government! We must not think in terms of duties and receipts and disbursements. We must think in terms of the old loyalties that bound the Syndic together!" Uncle Frank was sedentary, but he had roused himself once to the point of wrecking a bright young man's newly installed bookkeeping system for the Medical Center. He had used a cane, most enthusiastically, and then bellowed: "The next wise guy who tries to sneak punch-cards into this joint will get them down his throat! What the hell do we need punch-cards for? Either there's room enough and doctors enough for the patients or there isn't. If there is, we take care of them. If there isn't, we put 'em in an ambulance and take them someplace else. And if I hear one goddammed word about 'efficiency'—" he glared the rest and strode out, puffing and leaning on Charles' arm. "Efficiency," he growled in the corridor. "Every so often a wise guy comes to me whimpering that people are getting away with murder, collections are ten per cent below what they ought to be, the Falcaro Fund's being milked because fifteen per cent of the dough goes to people who aren't in need at all, eight per cent of the people getting old-age pensions aren't really past sixty. Get efficient, these people tell me. Save money by triple-checking collections. Save money by tightening up the Fund rules. Save money by a nice big vital-statistics system so we can check on pensioners. Yeah! Have people who might be *working* check on collections instead, and make enemies to boot whenever we catch somebody short. Make the Fund a grudging Scrooge instead of an open-handed sugar-daddy—and let people *worry* about their chances of making the Fund instead of *knowing* it'll take care of them if they're caught short. Set up a vital statistics system from birth to death, with numbers and fingerprints and house registration and maybe the gas-chamber if you forget to report a change of address. You know what's wrong with the wise guys, Charles? Constipation. And they want to constipate the universe." Charles remembered his uncle restored to chuckling good humor by the time he had finished embroidering his spur-of-the-moment theory with elaborate scatological details.

"The Syndic will stand," he said to Lee Falcaro, thinking of

his uncle who knew what he was doing, thinking of Edward Falcaro who did the right thing without knowing why, thinking of his good friends in the 101st Precinct, the roaring happy crowds in Scratch Sheet Square, the good-hearted men of Riveredge Breakdown Station 26 who had borne with his sullenness and intolerance simply because that was the way things were and that was the way you acted. "I don't know what the Mob's up to, and I got a shock from the Government, and I don't deny that we have a few miserable people who can't seem to be helped. But you've seen too much of the Mob and Government and our abnormals. Maybe you don't know as much as you should about our ordinary people. Anyway, all we can do is wait."

"Yes," she said. "All we can do is wait. Until Chicago we have each other."

XVIII

They were too sick with gasoline fumes to count the passing hours or days. Food was brought to them from time to time, but it tasted like avgas. They could not think for the sick headaches that pounded incessantly behind their eyes. When Lee developed vomiting spasms that would not stop, Charles Orsino pounded on the bulkhead with his fists and yelled, his voice thunderous in the metal compartment, for an hour.

Somebody came at last—Regan. The light stabbed Charles' eyes when he opened the door. "Trouble?" Regan asked, smirking.

"Miss Falcaro may be dying," Charles said. His own throat felt as though it had been gone over with a cobbler's rasp. "I don't have to tell you your life won't be worth a dime if she dies and it gets back to Syndic Territory. She's got to be moved and she's got to have medical attention."

"Death threat from the dago?" Regan was amused. "I have it on your own testimony that the Syndic is merely morale and people and credit—not a formidable organization. Yes, there was a mike in here. One reason for your discomfort. You'll be gratified to learn that I thought most of your conversation decidedly dull. However, the lady will be of no use to us dead and we're now in the Seaway entering Lake Michigan. I suppose it can't do any harm to move you two. Pick her up, will you? I'll let you lead the way—and I'll remind you that I may not, as the lady said, be a four-goal polo player but I am a high expert with the handgun. Get moving."

Charles did not think he could

pick his own feet up, but the thought of pleading weakness to Regan was unbearable. He could try. Staggering, he got Lee Falcaro over his shoulder and through the door. Regan courteously stood aside and murmured: "Straight ahead and up the ramp. I'm giving you my own cabin. We'll be docking soon enough; I'll make out."

Charles dropped her onto a sybaritic bed in a small but lavishly-appointed cabin. Regan whistled up a deckhand and a ship's officer of some sort, who arrived with a medicine chest. "Do what you can for her, mister," he told the officer. And to the deckhand: "Just watch them. They aren't to touch anything. If they give you trouble, you're free to punch them around a bit." He left, whistling.

The officer fussed unhappily over the medicine chest and stalled by sponging off Lee Falcaro's face and throat. The deckhand watched impassively. He was a six-footer, and he hadn't spent days inhaling casing-head fumes. The trip-hammer pounding behind Charles's eyes seemed to be worsening with the fresher air. He collapsed into a seat and croaked, with shut eyes: "While you're trying to figure out the vomiting, can I have a handful of aspirins?"

"Eh? Nothing was said about you. You were in Number Three with her? I suppose it'll be all right. Here." He poured a dozen tablets into Charles' hand. "Get him some water, you." The deckhand brought a glass of water from the adjoining lavatory and Charles washed down some of the tablets. The officer was reading a booklet, worry written on his face. "Do you know any medicine?" he finally asked.

The hard-outlined, kidney-shaped ache was beginning to diffuse through Charles' head, more general now and less excruciating. He felt deliciously sleepy, but roused himself to answer: "Some athletic trainer stuff. I don't know—morphine? Curare?"

The officer ruffled through the booklet. "Nothing about vomiting," he said. "But it says curare for muscular cramp and I guess that's what's going on. A lipoid suspension to release it slowly into the bloodstream and give the irritation time to subside. Anyway, I can't kill her if I watch the dose . . ."

Charles, through half-opened eyes, saw Lee Falcaro's arm reach behind the officer's back to his medicine chest. The deckhand's eyes were turning to the bed—Charles heaved himself to his feet, skyrockets going off again through his head, and started for the lavatory. The

deckhand grabbed his arm. "Rest, mister! Where do you think you're going?"

"Another glass of water—"

"*I'll* get it. You heard my orders."

Charles subsided. When he dared to look again, Lee's arm lay alongside her body and the officer was triple-checking dosages in his booklet against a pressurized hypodermic spray. The officer sighed and addressed Lee: "You won't even feel this. Relax." He read his setting on the spray again, checked it again against the booklet. He touched the syringe to the skin of Lee's arm and thumbed open the valve. It hissed for a moment and Charles knew submicroscopic particles of the medication had been blasted under Lee's skin too fast for nerves to register the shock.

His glass of water came and he gulped it greedily. The officer packed the pressurized syringe away, folded the chest and said to both of them, rather vaguely: "That should do it. If, uh, if anything happens—or if it doesn't work—call me and I'll try something else. Morphine, maybe."

He left and Charles slumped in the chair, the pain ebbing and sleep beginning to flow over him. Not yet, he told himself. She hooked something from the chest. He said to the deckhand: "Can I clean the lady and myself up?"

"Go ahead, mister. You can use it. Just don't try anything."

The man lounged in the doorframe of the lavatory alternately studying Charles at the washbasin and Lee on the bed. Charles took off a heavy layer of oily grease from himself and then took washing tissues to the bed. Lee Falcaro's spasms were tapering off. As he washed her, she managed a smile and an unmistakable wink.

"You folks married?" the deckhand asked.

"No," Charles said. Weakly she held up her right arm for the washing tissue. As he scrubbed the hand, he felt a small cylinder smoothly transferred from her palm to his. He slid it into a pocket and finished the job.

The officer popped in again with a carton of milk. "Any better, miss?" he asked.

"Yes," she whispered.

"Good. Try to drink this." Immensely set up by his success in treatment, he hovered over her for a quarter of an hour getting the milk down a sip at a time. It stayed down. He left trailing a favorable prognosis. Meanwhile, Charles had covertly examined Lee's booty: a pressurized syringe labeled *morphine*

sulfate sol. It was full and ready. He cracked off the protective cap and waited his chance.

It came when Lee grimaced at him and called the deckhand in a feeble murmur. She continued to murmur so indistinctly that he bent over trying to catch the words. Charles leaned forward and emptied the syringe at one inch range into the taut seat of the deckhand's pants. He scratched absently and said to Lee: "You'll have to talk up, lady." Then he giggled, looked bewildered and collapsed on the floor, staring, coked to the eyebrows.

Lee painfully sat up on the bed. "Porthole," she said.

Charles went to it and struggled with the locking lugs. It opened—and an alarm bell began to clang through the ship. *Now* he saw the hair-fine, broken wire. An alarm trip-wire.

Feet thundered outside and the glutinous voice of Jimmy Regan was heard: "Wait, you damn fools! You in there—is everything all right? Did they try to pull something?"

Charles kept silent and shook his head at the girl. He picked up a chair and stood by the door. The glutinous voice again, in a mumble that didn't carry through—and the door sprang open. Charles brought the chair down in a murderous chop, conscious only that it seemed curiously light. There was an impact and the head fell.

It was Regan, with a drawn gun. It had been Regan. His skull was smashed before he knew it. Charles felt as though he had all the time in the world. He picked up the gun to a confused roar like a slowed-down sound track and emptied it into the corridor. It had been a full automatic, but the fifteen shots seemed as well-spaced as a ceremonial salute. Regan, in his vanity, wore two guns. Charles scooped up the other and said to Lee: "Come on."

He knew she was following as he raced down the cleared corridor and down the ramp, back to the compartment in which they had been locked. Red danger lights burned on the walls. Charles flipped the pistol to semi-automatic as they passed a red-painted bulkhead with valves and gages sprouting from it. He turned and fired three deliberate shots into it. The last was drowned out by a dull roar as gasoline fumes exploded. Pipe fittings and fragments of plate whizzed about them like bullets as they raced on.

Somebody ahead loomed, yelling querulously: "What the hell was that, Mac? What blew?"

"Where's the reactor room?" Charles demanded, jamming the

pistol into his chest. The man gulped and pointed.

"Take me there. Fast."

"Now *look*, Mac—"

Charles told him in a few incisive details where and how he was going to be shot. The man went white and led them down the corridor and into the reactor room. Three white-coated men with the aloof look of reactor specialists stared at them as they bulled into the spotless chamber.

The oldest sniffed: "And what, may I ask, are you crewmen doing in—"

Lee slammed the door behind them and said: "Sound the radiation alarm."

"Certainly not! You must be the couple we—"

"*Sound the radiation alarm.*" She picked up a pair of dividers from the plot board and approached the technician with murder on her face. He gaped until she poised the needle points before his eyes and repeated: "*Sound the radiation alarm.*" Nobody in the room, including Charles, had the slightest doubt that the points would sink into the technician's eyeballs if he refused.

"Do what she says, Will," he mumbled, his eyes crossing on the dividers. "For God's sake, do what she says. She's crazy."

One of the men moved, very cautiously, watching Charles and the gun, to a red handle and pulled it down. A ferro-concrete barrier rose to wall off the chamber and the sine-curve wail of a standard radioactivity warning began to howl mournfully through the ship.

"Dump the reactor metal," Charles said. His eyes searched for the exit, and found it—a red-painted breakaway panel, standard for a hot lab.

A technician wailed: "We *can't* do that! We can't *do* that! A million bucks of thorium with a hundred years of life in it—have a heart, mister! They'll crucify us!"

"They can dredge for it," Charles said. "Dump the metal."

"Dump the metal," Lee said. She hadn't moved.

The senior technician's eyes were still on the bright needle points. He was crying silently. "Dump it," he said.

"Okay, chief. Your responsibility, remember."

"Dump it!" wailed the senior.

The technician did something technical at the control board. After a moment the steady rumbling of the turbines ceased and the ship's deck began to wallow underfoot.

"Hit the panel, Lee," Charles said. She did, running. He followed her through the oval port. It was like an open-bottomed diving bell welded to the hull.

There were large, luminous cleats for pulling yourself down through the water, under the rim of the bell. He dropped the pistol into the water, breathed deeply a couple of times and began to climb down. There was no sign of Lee.

He kicked up through the dark water on a long slant away from the ship. It might be worse. With a fire and a hot-lab alarm and a dead chief aboard, the crew would have things on their mind besides looking for bobbing heads.

He broke the surface and treaded water to make a minimum target. He did not turn to the ship. His dark hair would be less visible than his white face. And if he was going to get a burst of machine-gun bullets through either, he didn't want to know about it. Ahead he saw Lee's blonde hair spread on the water for a moment and then it vanished. He breathed hugely, ducked and swam under water toward it.

When he rose next a sheet of flame was lightening the sky and the oily reek of burning hydrocarbons tainted the air. He dove again, and this time caught up with Lee. Her face was bone-white and her eyes blank. Where she was drawing her strength from he could not guess. Behind them the ship sent up an oily plume and the sine-curve wail of the radioactivity warning could be faintly heard. Before them a dim shore stretched.

He gripped her naked arm, roughened by the March waters of Lake Michigan, bent it around his neck and struck off for the shore. His lungs were bursting in his chest and the world was turning gray-black before his burning eyes. He heaved his tired arm through the water as though each stroke would be his last, but the last stroke, by some miracle, never was the last.

XIX

It hadn't been easy to get time off from the oil-painting factory. Ken Oliver was a little late when he slid into the aseptic-smelling waiting room of the Michigan City Medical Center. A parabolic mike in the ceiling trained itself on the heat he radiated and followed him across the floor to a chair. A canned voice said: "State your business, please."

He started a little and said in the general direction of the mike: "I'm Ken Oliver. A figure man in the Blue Department, Picasso Oils and Etching Corporation. Dr. Latham sent me here for—what do you call it?—a biopsy."

"Thank you, please be seated."

He smiled because he was

seated already and picked up a magazine, the current copy of the *Illinois Sporting News*, familiarly known as the Green Sheet. Everybody in Mob Territory read it. The fingers of the blind spelled out its optimism and its selections at Hawthorne in Braille. If you were not only blind but fingerless, there was a talking edition that read itself aloud to you from tape.

He riffled through the past performances and selections to the articles. This month's lead was—*Thank God I am Dying of Throat Cancer.*

He leaned back in the chair dizzily, the waiting room becoming gray mist around him. *No,* he thought. *No.* It couldn't be that. All it could be was a little sore on the back of his throat—no more than that. Just a little sore on the back of his throat. He'd been a fool to go to Latham. The fees were outrageous and he was behind, always a little behind, on his bills. But cancer—so much of it around—and the drugs didn't seem to *help* any more. . . . But Latham had almost promised him it was non-malignant.

"Mr. Oliver," the loudspeaker said, "please go to Dr. Riordan's office, Number Ten."

Riordan was younger than he. That was supposed to be bad in a general practitioner, good in a specialist. And Riordan was a specialist—pathology. A sour-faced young specialist.

"Good morning. Sit here. Open your mouth. Wider than that, and relax. *Relax;* your glottis is locked."

Oliver couldn't protest around the plastic-and-alcohol taste of the tongue depressor. There was a sudden coldness and a metallic *snick* that startled him greatly; then Riordan took the splint out of his mouth and ignored him as he summoned somebody over his desk set. A young man, even younger than Riordan, came in. "Freeze, section and stain this right away," the pathologist said, handing him a forceps from which a small blob dangled. "Have them send up the Rotino charts, three hundred to nine hundred inclusive."

He began to fill out charts, still ignoring Oliver, who sat and sweated bullets for ten minutes. Then he left and was back in five minutes more.

"You've got it," he said shortly. "It's operable and you won't lose much tissue." He scribbled on a sheet of paper and handed it to Oliver. The painter numbly read: ". . . anterior . . . epithelioma . . . metastases . . . giant cells . . ."

Riordan was talking again: "Give this to Latham. It's my report. Have him line up a sur-

geon. As to the operation, I say the sooner the better unless you care to lose your larynx. That will be fifty dollars."

"Fifty dollars," the painter said blankly. "But Dr. Latham told me—" He trailed off and got out his check book. Only thirty-two in the account, but he would deposit his paycheck today which would bring it up. It was after three so his check wouldn't go in today—he wrote out the slip slowly and carefully.

Riordan took it, read it suspiciously, put it away and said: "Good day, Mr. Oliver."

Oliver wandered from the Medical Center into the business heart of the art colony. The Van Gogh Works on the left must have snagged the big order from Mexico—their chimneys were going full blast and the reek of linseed oil and turps was strong in the air. But the poor beggars on the line at Rembrandts Ltd. across the square were out of luck. They'd been laid off for a month now, with no sign of a work call yet. Somebody jostled him off the sidewalk, somebody in a great hurry. Oliver sighed. The place was getting more like Chicago every day. He sometimes thought he had made art his line not because he had any special talent but because artists were relatively easy-going people, not so quick to pop you in the nose, not such aggressive drunks when they *were* drunks.

Quit the stalling, a thin, cold voice inside him said. Get over to Latham. The man said "The sooner the better."

He went over to Latham whose waiting room was crowded with irascible women. After an hour, he got to see the old man and hand him the slip.

Latham said: "Don't worry about a thing. Riordan's a good man. If he says it's operable, it's operable. Now we want Finsen to do the whittling. With Finsen operating, you won't have to worry about a thing. He's a good man. His fee's fifteen hundred."

"Oh, my God!" Oliver gulped.

"What's the matter—haven't you got it?"

To his surprise and terror, Oliver found himself giving Dr. Latham a hysterical stump speech about how he didn't have it and who did have it and how could anybody get ahead with the way prices were shooting up and everybody gouged you every time you turned around and yes, that went for doctors too and if you did get a couple of bucks in your pocket the salesmen heard about it and battered at you until you put down an installment on some piece of junk you didn't want to get them out of your hair and what the hell kind of world was this anyway.

Latham listened, smiling and nodding, with, as Oliver finally realized, his hearing aid turned off. His voice ran down and Latham said briskly: "All right, then. You just come around when you've arranged the financial details and I'll contact Finsen. He's a good man; you won't have to worry about a thing. And remember: the sooner, the better."

Oliver slumped out of the office and went straight to the Mob Building, office of the Regan Benevolent Fund. An acid-voiced woman there turned him down indignantly: "You should be ashamed of yourself trying to draw on the Fund when there are people in actual want who can't be accommodated! No, I don't want to hear any more about it if you please. There are others waiting."

Waiting for what? The same treatment?

Oliver realized with a shock that he hadn't phoned his foreman as promised, and it was four minutes to five. He did a dance of agonized impatience outside a telephone booth occupied by a fat woman. She noticed him, pursed her lips, hung up—and stayed in the booth. She began a slow search of her handbag, found coins and slowly dialed a new number. She gave him a malevolent grin as he walked away, crushed. He had a good job record, but that was no way to keep it good. One black mark, another black mark, and one day —bingo.

General Advances was open, of course. Through its window you could see handsome young men and sleek young women just waiting to help you, whatever the fiscal jam. He went in and was whisked to a booth where a big-bosomed honey-voiced blonde oozed sympathy over him. He walked out with a check for fifteen hundred dollars after signing countless papers, with the creamy hand of the girl on his to help guide the pen. What was printed on the papers, God and General Advances alone knew. There were men on the line who told him with resignation that they had been paying off to G.A. for the better part of their lives. There were men who said bitterly that G.A. was owned by the Regan Beneyolent Fund, which must be a lie.

The street was full of people —strangers who didn't look like your run-of-the-mill artist. Muscle men, with the Chicago style and if anybody got one in the gut, too goddammed bad about it. They were peering into faces as they passed.

He was frightened. He stepped onto the slidewalk and hurried home, hoping for temporary

peace there. But there was no peace for his frayed nerves. The apartment house door opened obediently when he told it: "Regan," but the elevator stood stupidly still when he said: "Seventh Floor." He spat bitterly and precisely: "*Sev-enth Floor.*" The doors closed on him with a faintly derisive, pneumatic moan and he was whisked up to the eighth floor. He walked down wearily and said: "Cobalt blue" to his own door after a furtive look up and down the hall. It worked and he went to his phone to flash Latham, but didn't. Oliver sank instead into a dun-colored pneumatic chair, his 250-dollar Hawthorne Electric Stepsaver door mike following him with its mindless snout. He punched a button on the chair and the 600-dollar hi-fi selected a random tape. A long, pure melodic trumpet line filled the room. It died for two beats and than the strings and woodwinds picked it up and tossed it—

Oliver snapped off the music, sweat starting from his brow. It was the Gershwin *Lost Symphony*, and he remembered how Gershwin had died. There had been a little nodule in his brain as there was a little nodule in Oliver's throat.

Time, the Great Kidder. The years drifted by. Suddenly you were middle-aged, running to the medics for this and that. Suddenly they told you to have your throat whittled out or die disgustingly. And what did you have to show for it? A number, a travel pass, a payment book from General Advance, a bunch of junk you never wanted, a job that was a heavier ball and chain than any convict ever wore in the barbarous days of Government. Was this what Regan and Falcaro had bled for?

He defrosted some hamburger, fried it and ate it and then went mechanically down to the tavern. He didn't like to drink every night, but you had to be one of the boys, or word would get back to the plant and you might be on your way to another black mark. They were racing under the lights at Hawthorne too, and he'd be expected to put a couple of bucks down. He never seemed to win. Nobody he knew ever seemed to win. Not at the horses, not at the craps table, not at the numbers.

He stood outside the neon-bright saloon for a long moment, and then turned and walked into the darkness away from town, possessed by impulses he did not understand or want to understand. He had only a vague hope that standing on the Dunes and looking out across the dark lake might somehow soothe him.

In half an hour he had reach-

ed the deciduous forest, then the pine, then the scrubby brushes, then the grasses, then the bare white sand. And lying in it he found two people: a man so hard and dark he seemed to be carved from oak and a woman so white and gaunt she seemed to be carved from ivory.

He turned shyly from the woman.

"Are you all right?" he asked the man. "Is there anything I can do?"

The man opened red-rimmed eyes. "Better leave us alone," he said. "We'd only get you into trouble."

Oliver laughed hysterically. "Trouble?" he said. "Don't think of it."

The man seemed to be measuring him with his eyes, and said at last: "You'd better go and not talk about us. We're enemies of the Mob."

Oliver said after a pause: "So am I. Don't go away. I'll be back with some clothes and food for you and the lady. Then I can help you to my place. I'm an enemy of the Mob too. I just never knew it until now."

He started off and then turned. "You won't go away? I mean it. I want to help you. I can't seem to help myself, but perhaps there's something—"

The man said tiredly: "We won't go away."

Oliver hurried off. There was something mingled with the scent of the pine forest tonight. He was half-way home before he identified it: oil smoke.

XX

Lee swore and said: "I can get up if I want to."

"You'll stay in bed whether you want to or not," Charles told her. "You're a sick woman."

"I'm a very bad-tempered woman and that means I'm convalescent. Ask anybody."

"I'll go right out into the street and do that, darling."

She got out of bed and wrapped Oliver's dressing gown around her. "I'm hungry again," she said.

"He'll be back soon. You've left nothing but some frozen—worms, looks like. Shall I defrost them?"

"Please don't trouble. I can wait."

"Window!" he snapped.

She ducked back and swore again, this time at herself. "Sorry," she said. "Which will do us a whole hell of a lot of good if somebody saw me and started wondering."

Oliver came in with packages. Lee kissed him and he grinned shyly. "Trout," he whispered. She grabbed the packages and flew to the kitchenette.

"The way to Lee Falcaro's heart," Charles mused. "How's your throat, Ken?"

"No pain, today," Oliver whispered. "Latham says I can talk as much as I like. And I've got things to talk about." He opened his coat and hauled out a flat package that had been stuffed under his belt. "Stolen from the factory. Brushes, pens, tubes of ink, drawing instruments. My friends, you are going to return to Syndic Territory in style, with passes and permits galore."

Lee returned. "Trout's frying," she said. "I heard that about the passes. Are you *sure* you can fake them?"

His face fell. "Eight years at the Chicago Art Institute," he whispered. "Three years at Original Reproductions, Inc. Eleven years at Picasso Oils and Etchings, where I am now third figure man in the Blue Department. I really think I deserve your confidence."

"Ken, we trust and love you. If it weren't for the difference in your ages I'd marry you *and* Charles. Now what about the Chicagoans? Hold it—the fish!"

Dinner was served and cleared away before they could get more out of Oliver. His throat wasn't ready for more than one job at a time. He told them at last: "Things are quieting down. There are still some strangers in town and the road patrols are still acting very hard-boiled. But nobody's been pulled in today. Somebody told me on the line that the whole business is a lot of foolishness. He said the ship must have been damaged by somebody's stupidity and Regan must have been killed in a brawl —everybody knows he was half crazy, like his father. So my friend figures they made up the story about two wild Europeans to cover up a mess. I said I thought there was a lot in what he said." Oliver laughed silently.

"Good man!" Charles tried not to act over-eager. "When do you think you can start on the passes, Ken?"

Oliver's face dropped a little. "Tonight," he whispered. "I don't suppose the first couple of tries will be any good so—let's go."

Lee put her hand on his shoulder. "We'll miss you too," she said. "But don't ever forget this: we're coming back. Hell won't stop us. We're coming back."

Oliver was arranging stolen instruments on the table. "You have a big order," he whispered sadly. "I guess you aren't afraid of it because you've always been rich and strong. Anything you want to do you think you can do. But those Government people? And after them the Mob? Maybe it would be better if you

just let things take their course, Lee. I've found out a person can be happy even here."

"We're coming back," Lee said.

Oliver took out his own Michigan City-Chicago travel permit. As always, the sight of it made Charles wince. Americans under such a yoke! Oliver whispered: "I got a good long look today at a Michigan City Buffalo permit. The foreman's. He buys turps from Carolina at Buffalo. I sketched it from memory as soon as I got by myself. I don't swear to it, not yet, but I have the sketch to practice from and I can get a few more looks later."

He pinned down the drawing paper, licked a ruling pen and filled it, and began to copy the border of his own pass.

"I don't suppose there's anything I can do?" Lee asked.

"You can turn on the audio," Oliver whispered. "They have it going all the time at the shop. I don't feel right working unless there's some music driving me out of my mind."

Lee turned on the big Hawthorne Electric set with a wave of her hand; imbecillic music filled the air and Oliver grunted and settled down.

Lee and Charles listened, fingers entwined, to half an hour of slushy ballads while Oliver worked. The news period announcer came on with some anesthetic trial verdicts, sports results and society notes about which Regan had gone where. Then—

"The local Mobsters of Michigan City, Indiana, today welcomed Maurice Regan to their town. Mr. Regan will assume direction of efforts to apprehend the two European savages who murdered James Regan IV last month aboard the ore boat *Hon. John Regan* in waters off Michigan City. You probably remember that the Europeans did some damage to the vessel's reactor room before they fled from the ship. How they boarded the ship and their present whereabouts are mysteries—but they probably won't be mysteries long. Maurice Regan is little-known to the public, but he has built an enviable record in the administration of the Chicago Police Department. Mr. Regan on taking charge of the case, said this: "We know by traces found on the Dunes that they got away. We know from the logs of highway patrols that they didn't get out of the Michigan City area. The only way to close the books on this matter fast is to cover the city with a fine-tooth comb. Naturally and unfortunately this will mean inconvenience to many citizens. I hope they will bear with the inconveniences gladly

for the sake of confining those two savages in a place where they can no longer be a menace. I have methods of my own and there may be complaints. Reasonable suggestions will be needed, but with crackpots I have no patience."

The radio began to spew more sports results. Oliver turned and waved at it to be silent. "I don't like that," he whispered. "I never heard of this Regan in the Chicago Police."

"They said he wasn't in the public eye."

"I wasn't the public. I did some posters for the police and I knew who was who. And that bit at the end. I've heard things like it before. The Mob doesn't often admit it's in the wrong, you know. When they try to disarm criticism in advance . . . this Regan must be a rough fellow."

Charles and Lee Falcaro looked at each other in sudden fear. "We don't want to hurry you, Ken," she said. "But it looks as though you'd better do a rush job."

Nodding, Oliver bent over the table. "Maybe a week," he said hopefully. With the finest pen he traced the curlicues an engraving lathe had evolved to make the passes foolproof. Odd, he thought —the lives of these two hanging by such a weak thing as the twisted thread of color that feeds from pen to paper. And, as an afterthought—I suppose mine does too.

Oliver came back the next day to work with concentrated fury, barely stopping to eat and not stopping to talk. Lee got it out of him, but not easily. After being trapped in a half dozen contradictions about feeling well and having a headache, about his throat being sore and the pain having gone, he put down his pen and whispered steadily: "I didn't want you to worry friends. But it looks bad. There is a new crowd in town. Twenty couples have been pulled in by them—*couples* to prove who they were. Maybe fifty people have been pulled in for questioning—what do you know about this, what do you know about that. And they've begun house searches. Anybody you don't like, you tell the new Regan about him. Say he's sheltering Europeans. And his people pull them in. Why, everybody wants to know, are they pulling in couples who are obviously American if they're looking for Europeans? And, everybody says, they've never seen anything like it. Now—I think I'd better get back to work."

"Yes," Lee said. "I think you had."

Charles was at the window,

peering around the drawn blind. "Look at that," he said to Lee. She came over. A big man on the street below was walking, very methodically down the street.

"I will bet you," Charles said, "that he'll be back this way in ten minutes or so—and so on through the night."

"I won't take the bet," she said. "He's a sentry, all right. The Mob's learning from their friends across the water. Learning too damned much. They must be all over town."

They watched at the window and the sentry was back in ten minutes. On his fifth tour he stopped a young couple going down the street studied their faces, drew a gun on them and blew a whistle. A patrol came and took them away; the girl was hysterical. At two in the morning, the sentry was relieved by another, just as big and just as dangerous looking. At two in the morning they were still watching and Oliver was still hunched over the table tracing exquisite filigree of color.

In five days, virtually without sleep, Oliver finished two Michigan City-Buffalo travel permits. The apartment house next door was hit by raiders while the ink dried; Charles and Lee Falcaro stood waiting grotesquely armed with kitchen knives. But it must have been a tip rather than part of the search plan crawling nearer to their end of town. The raiders did not hit their building.

Oliver had bought clothes according to Lee's instructions—including two men's suits, Oliver's size. One she let out for Charles; the other she took in for herself. She instructed Charles minutely in how he was to behave on the outside. First he roared with incredulous laughter; Lee, wise in psychology assured him that she was perfectly serious. Oliver, puzzled by his naivete, assured him that such things were not uncommon—not at least in Mob Territory. Charles then roared with indignation and Lee roared him down. His last broken protest was: "But what'll I do if somebody takes me up on it?"

She shrugged, washing her hands of the matter, and went on trimming and dying her hair.

It was morning when she kissed Oliver good-bye, said to Charles: "See you at the station. Don't say good-bye," and walked from the apartment, a dark-haired boy with a slight limp. Charles watched her down the street. A cop turned to look after her and then went on his way.

Half an hour later Charles shook hands with Oliver and went out.

Oliver didn't go to work that day. He sat all day at the table, drawing endless slow sketches of Lee Falcaro's head.

Time the Great Kidder, he thought. He opens the door that shows you in the next room tables of goodies, colorful and tasty, men and women around the tables pleasantly surprised to see you, beckoning to you to join the feast. We have roast beef if you're serious, we have caviar if you're experimental, we have baked alaska if you're frivolous—join the feast; try a little bit of everything. So you start toward the door.

Time, the Great Kidder, pulls the rug from under your feet and slams the door while the guests at the feast laugh their heads off at your painful but superficial injuries.

Oliver slowly drew Lee's head for the fifteenth time and wished he dared to turn on the audio for the news. Perhaps he thought, the next voice you hear will be the cops at the door.

XXI

Charles walked down the street and ran immediately into a challenge from a police sergeant.

"Where you from, mister?" the cop demanded, balanced and ready to draw.

Charles gulped and let Lee Falcaro's drilling take over. "Oh, around, sergeant. I'm from around here."

"What're you so nervous about?"

"Why, sergeant, you're such an exciting type, really. Did anybody ever tell you you look well in uniform?

The cop glared at him and said: "If I wasn't in uniform, I'd hang one on you sister. And if the force wasn't all out hunting the lunatics, that killed Mr. Regan I'd pull you in for spitting on the sidewalk. Get to hell off my beat and stay off. I'm not forgetting your face."

Charles scurried on. It had worked.

It worked once more with a uniformed policeman. One of the Chicago plain-clothes imports was the third and last. He socked Charles in the jaw and sent him on his way with a kick in the rear. He had been thoroughly warned that it would probably happen: "Count on them to over-react. That's the key to it. You'll make them so eager to assert their own virility, that it'll temporarily bury their primary mission. It's quite likely that one or more pokes will be taken at you. All you can do is take them. If you get—*when* you get through, they'll be cheap at the price."

The sock in the jaw hadn't been very expert. The kick in the pants was negligible, considering the fact that it had propelled him through the gate of the Michigan City Transport Terminal.

By the big terminal clock the Chicago-Buffalo Express was due in fifteen minutes. Its gleaming single rail, as tall as a man crossed the far end of the concourse. Most of the fifty-odd people in the station were probably Buffalo-bound . . . safe geldings who could be trusted to visit Syndic Territory, off the leash and return obediently. Well-dressed, of course, and many past middle-age, with a stake in the Mob Territory stronger than hope of freedom. One youngster, though—oh. It was Lee, leaning, slack-jawed, against a pillar and reading the Green Sheet.

Who were the cops in the crowd? The thickset man with restless eyes, of course. The saintly-looking guy who kept moving and glancing into faces.

Charles went to the newsstand and put a coin in the slot for *The Mob—A Short History*, by the same Arrowsmith Hunde who had brightened and misinformed his youth.

Nothing to it, he thought. Train comes in, put your money in the turnstile, show your permit to the turnstile's eye, get aboard and that—is—that. Unless the money is phony, or the pass is phony in which case the turnstile locks and all hell breaks loose. His money was just dandy, but the permit now—there hadn't been anyway to test it against a turnstile's template, or time to do it if there had been a way. Was the probability of boarding two to one?

The probability abruptly dropped to zero as a round little man flanked by two huge men entered the station.

Commander Grinnel.

The picture puzzle fell into a whole as the two plainclothesmen circulating in the station eyed Grinnel and nodded to him. The big one absent-mindedly made a gesture that was the start of a police salute.

Grinnel was Maurice Regan—the Maurice Regan mysteriously unknown to Oliver, who knew the Chicago police. Grinnel was a bit of a lend-lease from the North American Navy, called in because of his unique knowledge of Charles Orsino and Lee Falcaro, their faces, voices and behavior. Grinnel was the expert in combing the city without any nonsense about rights and mouthpieces. Grinnel was the expert who could set up a military interior guard of the city. Grinnel was the specialist tem-

porarily invested with the rank of a Regan so he could do his job.

The round little man with the halo of hair walked briskly to the turnstile and there stood at a military parade rest with a look of resignation on his face.

How hard on me it is, he seemed to be saying, that I have such dull damn duty. How hard that an officer of my brilliance must do sentry-go for every train to Syndic Territory.

The slack-jawed youth who was Lee Falcaro looked at him over her Green Sheet and nodded before dipping into the Tia Juana past performances again. She knew.

Passengers were beginning to line up at the turnstile, smoothing out their money and fiddling with their permits. In a minute he and Lee Falcaro would have to join the line or stand conspicuously on the emptying floor. The thing was dead for twenty-four hours now, until the next train—and then Grinnel headed across the floor looking very impersonal. The look of a man going to the men's room. The station cops and Grinnel's two bruisers drifted together at the turnstile and began to chat.

Charles followed Grinnel, wearing the same impersonal look, and entered the room almost on his heels.

Grinnel saw him in a washbowl mirror; simultaneously he half turned, opened his mouth to yell and whipped his hand into his coat. A single roundhouse right from Charles crunched into the soft side of his neck. He fell with his head twisted at an odd angle. Blood began to run from the corner of his mouth onto his shirt.

"Remember Martha?" Charles whispered down at the body. "That was for murder." He looked around the tiled room. There was a mop closet with the door ajar, and Grinnel's flabby body fitted in it.

Charles walked from the washroom to the line of passengers across the floor. It seemed to go on for miles. Lee Falcaro was no longer lounging against the past. He spotted her in line, still slack-jawed, still gaping over the magazine. The monorail began to sing shrilly with the vibration of the train braking a mile away, and the turnstile "unlocked" light went on.

There was the usual number of fumblers, the usual number of "please unfold your currency" flashes. Lee carried through to the end with her slovenly pose. For her the sign said: "incorrect denominations." Behind her a man snarled: "for Christ's sake, kid, we're all waiting on you!" The cops only half noticed; they

were talking. When Charles got to the turnstile one of the cops was saying: "Maybe it's something he ate. How'd *you* like somebody to barge in—"

The rest was lost in the clicking of the turnstile that let him through.

He settled in a very pneumatic chair as the train accelerated evenly to a speed of three hundred and fifty miles per hour. A sign in the car said that the next stop was Buffalo. And there was Lee, lurching up the aisle against the acceleration. She spotted him, tossed the Green Sheet in the Air and fell into his lap.

"Disgusting!" snarled a man across the aisle. "Simply disgusting!"

"You haven't seen anything yet," Lee told him, and kissed Charles on the mouth.

The man choked: "I shall certainly report this to the authorities when we arrive in Buffalo!"

"Mmm," said Lee, preoccupied. "Do that, mister. Do that."

XXII

"I didn't like his reaction," Charles told her in the anteroom of F. W. Taylor's office. "I didn't talk to him long on the phone, but I don't like his reaction at all. He seemed to think I was exaggerating. Or all wet. Or a punk kid."

"I can assure him you're not that," Lee Falcaro said warmly. "Call on me any time."

He gave her a worried smile. The door opened then and they went in.

Uncle Frank looked up. "We'd just about written you two off," he said. "What's it like?"

"Bad," Charles said. "Worse than anything you've imagined. There's an underground, all right, and they are practicing assassination."

"Too bad," the old man said. "We'll have to shake up the bodyguard organization. Make 'em de rigeur at all hours, screen 'em and see that they really know how to shoot. I hate to meddle, but we can't have the Government knocking our people off."

"It's worse than that," Lee said. "There's a tie-up between the Government and the Mob. We got away from Ireland aboard a speed boat and we were picked up by a Mob lakes ore ship. It had been running gasoline and ammunition to the Government. Jimmy Regan was in charge of the deal. We jumped into Lake Michigan and made our way back here. We were in Mob Territory—down among the small-timers—long enough to establish that the Mob and Gov-

ernment are hand in glove. One of these days they're going to jump us."

"Ah," Taylor said softly. "I've thought so for a long time."

Charles burst out: "Then for God's sake, Uncle Frank, why haven't you *done* anything? You don't know what it's like out there. The Government's a nightmare. They have slaves. And the Mob's not much better. Numbers! Restrictions! Permits! Passes! And they don't call it that, but they have taxes!"

"They're mad," Lee said. "Quite mad. And I'm talking technically. Neurotics and psychotics swarm in the streets of Mob Territory. The Government, naturally—but the Mob was a shock. We've got to get ready, Mr. Taylor. Every psychotic or severe neurotic in Syndic Territory is a potential agent of theirs."

"Don't just check off the Government, darling," Charles said tensely. "They've got to be smashed. They're no good to themselves or anybody else. Life's a burden there if only they knew it. And they're holding down the natives by horrible cruelty."

Taylor leaned back and asked: "What do you recommend?"

Charles said: "A fighting fleet and an army."

Lee said: "Mass diagnosis of the unstable. Screening of severe cases and treatment where it's indicated. Riveredge must be a plague-spot of agents."

Taylor shook his head and told them: "It won't do."

Charles was aghast. "It won't *do?* Uncle Frank, what the hell do you mean, it won't do? Didn't we make it clear? They want to invade us and loot us and subject us!"

"It won't do," Taylor said. "I choose the devil we know. A fighting fleet is out. We'll arm our merchant vessels and hope for the best. A full-time army is out. We'll get together some-kind of militia. And a roundup of the unstable is out."

"Why?" Lee demanded. "My people have worked out perfectly effective techniques—"

"Let me talk, please. I have a feeling that it won't be any good, but hear me out.

"I'll take your black art first, Lee. As you know, I have played with history. To a historian, your work has been very interesting. The sequence was this: study of abnormal psychology collapsed under Lieberman's findings, study of abnormal psychology revived by you when you invalidated Lieberman's findings. I suggest that Lieberman and his followers were correct—and that you were correct. I suggest that what changed was

the makeup of the population. That would mean that before Lieberman there were plenty of neurotics and psychotics to study, that in Lieberman's time there were so few that earlier generalizations were invalidated, and that now—in our time, Lee—neurotics and psychotics are among us again in increasingly ample numbers."

The girl opened her mouth, shut it again and thoughtfully studied her nails.

"I will not tolerate," Taylor went on, "a roundup or a registration, or mass treatment or any such violation of the Syndic's spirit."

Charles exploded: "Damn it, this is a matter of life or death to the Syndic!"

"No, Charles. Nothing can be a matter of life or death to the Syndic. When anything becomes a matter of life or death to the Syndic, the Syndic is already dead, its morale, is already disintegrated, its credit already gone. What is left is not the Syndic but the Syndic's dead shell. I am not placed so that I can say objectively now whether the Syndic is dead or alive. I fear it is dying. The rising tide of neurotics is a symptom. The suggestion from you two, who should be imbued with the old happy-go-lucky, we-can't-miss esprit of the Syndic that we cower behind mercenaries instead of trusting the people who made us—that's another symptom. Dick Reiner's rise to influence on a policy of driving the Government from the seas is another symptom.

"I mentioned the devil we know as my choice. That's the status quo, even though I have reason to fear it's crumbling beneath our feet. If it is, it may last out our time. We'll shore it up with armed merchantmen and a militia. If the people are with us now as they always have been, that'll do it. The devil we don't know is what we'll become if we radically dislocate Syndic life and attitudes.

"I can't back a fighting fleet. I can't back a regular army. I can't back any restrictive measure on the freedom of anybody but an apprehended criminal. Read history. It has taught me not to meddle, it has taught me that no man should think himself clever enough or good enough to dare it. *That* is the lesson history teaches us.

"Who can know what he's doing when he doesn't even know why he does it? Bless the bright Cromagnon for inventing the bow and damn him for inventing missile warfare. Bless the stubby little Sumerians for miracles in gold and lapis lazuli and damn them for burying a dead queen's

hand-maidens living in her tomb. Bless Shih Hwang-Ti for building the Great Wall between northern barbarism and southern culture, and damn him for burning every book in China. Bless King Minos for the ease of Cnossian flush toilets and damn him for his yearly tribute of Greek sacrificial victims. Bless Pharaoh for peace and damn him for slavery. Bless the Greeks for restricting population so the well-fed few could kindle a watch-tower in the west, and damn the prostitution and sodomy and wars of colonization by which they did it. Bless the Romans for their strength to smash down every wall that hemmed their building genius, and damn them for their weakness that never broke the bloody grip of Etruscan savagery on their minds. Bless the Jews who discovered the fatherhood of God and damn them who limited it to the survivors of a surgical operation. Bless the Christians who abolished the surgical preliminaries and damn them who substituted a thousand cerebral quibbles. Bless Justinian for the Code of Law and damn him for his countless treacheries that were the prototype of the wretched Byzantine millenium. Bless the churchmen for teaching and preaching, and damn them for drawing a line beyond which they could only teach and preach in peril of the stake.

"Bless the navigators who opened the new world to famine-ridden Europe, and damn them for syphillis. Bless the redskins who bred maize, the great preserver of life and damn them for breeding maize the great destroyer of topsoil. Bless the Virginia planters for the solace of tobacco and damn them for the red gullies they left where forests had stood. Bless the obstetricians with forceps who eased the agony of labor and damn them for bringing countless monsters into the world to reproduce their kind. Bless the Point Four boys who slew the malaria mosquitoes of Ceylon and damn them for letting more Sinhalese be born then five Ceylons could feed.

"Who knows what he is doing, why he does it or what the consequences will be?

"Let the social scientists play with their theories if they like; I'm fond of poetry myself. The fact is that they have not so far solved what I call the two-billion-body problem. With brilliant hindsight some of them tell us that more than a dozen civilizations have gone down into the darkness before us. I see no reason why ours should not go down into the darkness with them, nor do I see any reason why we

should not meanwhile enjoy ourselves collecting sense-impressions to be remembered with pleasure in old age. No; I will not agitate for extermination of the Government and hegemony over the Mob. Such a policy would automatically, inevitably and immediately entail many, many violent deaths and painful wounds. The wrong kind of sense-impressions. I shall, with fear and trembling, recommend the raising of a militia—a purely defensive, extremely sloppy militia—and pray that it will not involve us in a war of aggression."

He looked at the two of them and shrugged. "Lee, so stern, Charles so grim," he said. "I suppose you're dedicated now." He looked at the desk.

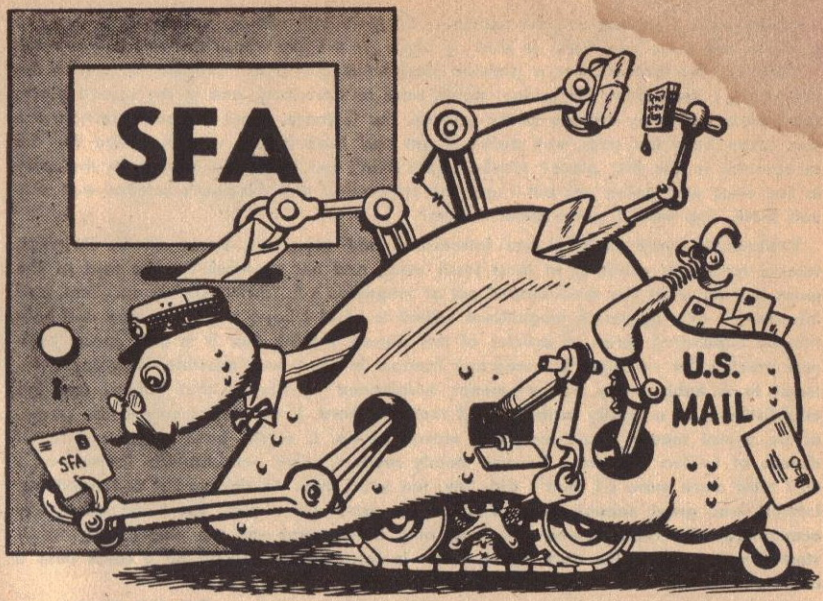
He thought: *I have a faint desire to take the pistol from my desk and shoot you both. I have a nervous feeling that you're about to embark on a crusade to awaken Syndic Territory to its perils. You think the fate of civilization hinges on you. You're right, of course. The fate of civilization hinges on every one of us at any given moment. We are all components in the two-billion-body problem. Somehow for a century we've achieved in Syndic Territory for almost everybody the civil liberties, peace of mind and living standards that were enjoyed by the middle classes before 1914—plus longer life, better health, a more generous morality, increased command over nature; minus the servant problem and certain superstitions. A handful of wonderfully pleasant decades. When you look back over history you wonder who in his right mind could ask for more. And you wonder who would dare to presume to tamper with it.*

He studied the earnest young faces. There was so much that he might say—but he shrugged again.

"Bless you," he said. "Gather ye sense impression while ye may. Some like pointer readings, some like friction on the mucous membranes. Now go about your business; I have work to do."

He didn't really. When he was alone he leaned back and laughed and laughed.

Win, lose or draw, those two would go far and enjoy themselves mightily along the way. Which was what counted.



THE CHART ROOM

Where Readers Help Us Plot Our Orbits

Dear Harry:

It's been many years since I've written a "fan" letter, but noticing your new "Chart Room" in the current issue, I thought I'd see if I can still crash the back pages as we did in the old days.

Incidentally, many thanks for publishing Jimmy Taurasi's letter on FANVETS. Hope it brings results as we are constantly in need of help of various kinds.

The current issue (Dec. '53) was enjoyable, while not outstanding. I'm one of those unfortunates who can't read serials piecemeal, so I can't say how I liked "The Syndic"; but if it's Cy hitting on all cylinders, it'll be good.

"Consignment" by Nourse was another look at old material, saved from being annoyingly familiar by being well-handled.

"The Spy" by Arr. (who?) was very acceptable (although here too the ideas are by no means new) but I felt that there was too much flesh on the bones. About one-third less wordage would have improved the story in my opinion.

"The Tryst" by Lewis was best in the issue, I thought. I applaud the author who is bright enough, and brave enough, to bring in the *details* of a story idea, and make them consistent and believable. This picture of an alien invader and his effect on a type of human decidedly unfamiliar to me, and probably to almost every other reader,

was very vivid. Anybody can, for example, kill his villain with a "space warp," but the guy who can make one work, at least on paper, is the guy whose stories I like to read.

"Ground" by Clement was a problem story which just didn't probble for me. In the first place, I don't think the gadget would work as described, and in the second place, there were too many elisions in the science. For instance, when the super-refrigerator was taken from the ship, why didn't it get *real* hot? If not, why the need for the refrigerator in the first place? Maybe I just didn't get interested enough in the story to see what was going on, but I got the impression that Clement's science was only half there. See what I mean about details?

Deparments—your editorial was interesting, and even true to an extent. However, what a tapeworm grows is at least fresh meat, and not as much can be said of the great bulk of what has mushroomed out of magazine s-f. "FANMAG" is excellent, and Silverberg's offering was a magnificent kickoff to what I hope will be a long and continually expanding series of articles of this nature. I think that it is only sound business practice for s-f mags to encourage fandom in every way possible. Heightened interest in a hobby—any hobby—means heightened activity in that hobby, and the establishment of a loyalty to the subject that dies hard, if ever. Fans spread the gospel as no casual reader would ever feel moved to do. I, myelf, have introduced to s-f dozens of fellows who have become steady readers, some even fanatics themselves. I now read much more s-f than I did, say, ten years ago. As the market expanded, my interest was great enough to encompass the comparative glut. But I am personally acquainted with *readers* who still read *only* those mags—or the single mag!—they started with back in the dark ages! A fan is much more likely to be a colex than a reader, it seems!

Ray Van Houten
26 Twentieth Ave.
Paterson 3, N. J.

Stephen Arr. is a writer who, we are happy to announce, first broke into SF through the pages of SFA. He has sold to most of the other magazines since we first bought his story, you'll be seeing a lot more of his stuff around . . . It seemed to me that the ship in GROUND was getting real hot, at a certain rate. Remember the other ship could take the heat with normal refrigeration.

Dear Editor:

I want to cast my vote with serials, if necessary, longer installments, but continue the serials.

I have been a constant reader of Science Fiction since way back in 1926 when I accidentally picked up a copy of *Amazing Stories* in a magazine stand. This magazine contained the second part of a serial by A. Hyatt Verrill. It took me nearly three months to locate a copy of the first part but it was worth it.

Since then I have read hundreds of short stories, novellas, novelettes, etc., and some of them were wonderful stories, but all of the real exceptional super stories have been serials or books. So to repeat myself, make the installments as long as possible, but above all don't give up the long stories.

By the way, when you have a long exceptionally good story why not devote the entire magazine to it. That way is better than serials.

Sincerely yours,

B. L. Willard

Mr. Willard has a foot firmly planted in both camps, he opens with a plea for serials and ends with the statement that book-length stories are better than serials. Seems to be an easy man to please—as long as the stories are long.

Dear Editor:

In the September issue of S-F Adventures you ask us fen for definitions of science-fiction. I'll bet you didn't know what you were letting yourself in for. You're probably buried up to here in letters from screaming fen—"I know what S-F is!" And this is one of those letters, although I'm trying to keep my screams down to a loud shout.

No doubt most definitions will be short and sweet—"S-F is a story involving interpolated science." Good, but hardly complete. Suppose we start with a statement of fact. "Science-Fiction is that form of literature in which science, per se, plays an integral part in the formation of the plot." But that is only an extension of what was said before, and both definitions are still incomplete and technical—too technical. So it seems we have a problem. Well, let us attack it in the manner of a problem.

Begin the solution with an equation—Science + Fiction = Science-Fiction. Now which is the unknown quantity? Fiction is Fiction, so it's not that. So it must be the Science in Science-Fiction that we should explain.

Now the science we are looking for is definitely not what we may call "accepted" science, that is, the science of telephone or television, etc. But it may be "unproven" science, such as the science of a visionphone. To explain further, an author can give his hero a "disintegrator gun" because it has not, *as yet*, been disproven that a gun can generate and direct a power which will reduce solids to gases or component molecules or atoms, or whatever the author wishes to reduce solids to. But he can't write a story *now* about an atomic-bomb setting off a chain reaction in the atmosphere, because A-Bombs don't do that and we know it. Spaceships can "warp" the ether to attain speeds faster than light speed, in stories, because it has not, *as yet*, been disproven that space can be warped. But heroes of stories can *not* go unprotected into space anymore because we know now what would happen to them if they did.

It appears to me that it is along these lines that the two factions of SF are splitting. (This may not have anything to do with the definition of science fiction, but I think that it is an interesting correlation of the foregoing definition.) On one hand there is the party which advocates a return to "old time" S-F. Stress Science—make only foreseeable extrapolations with almost mathematical precision. This faction is perhaps typified by Hugo Gernsback. The other side says that the story is more important than the science involved—change science to fit the plot. This side is led probably by van Vogt.

Both factions have difficulties involved for the reader, they're fine if the reader is feeling like taking mental gymnastics or trying to improve his reading ability. However, most of the time I'll take to the kind SFA gives out.

But to get back to the task at hand—How do you like his definition? As far as I can see, it covers every story I have ever read, and doesn't leave any kind of tiny hole open or unprotected against the critics.

M. Desmond Emery
93 Hemlock St.
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