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by **CALVIN M. KNOX**

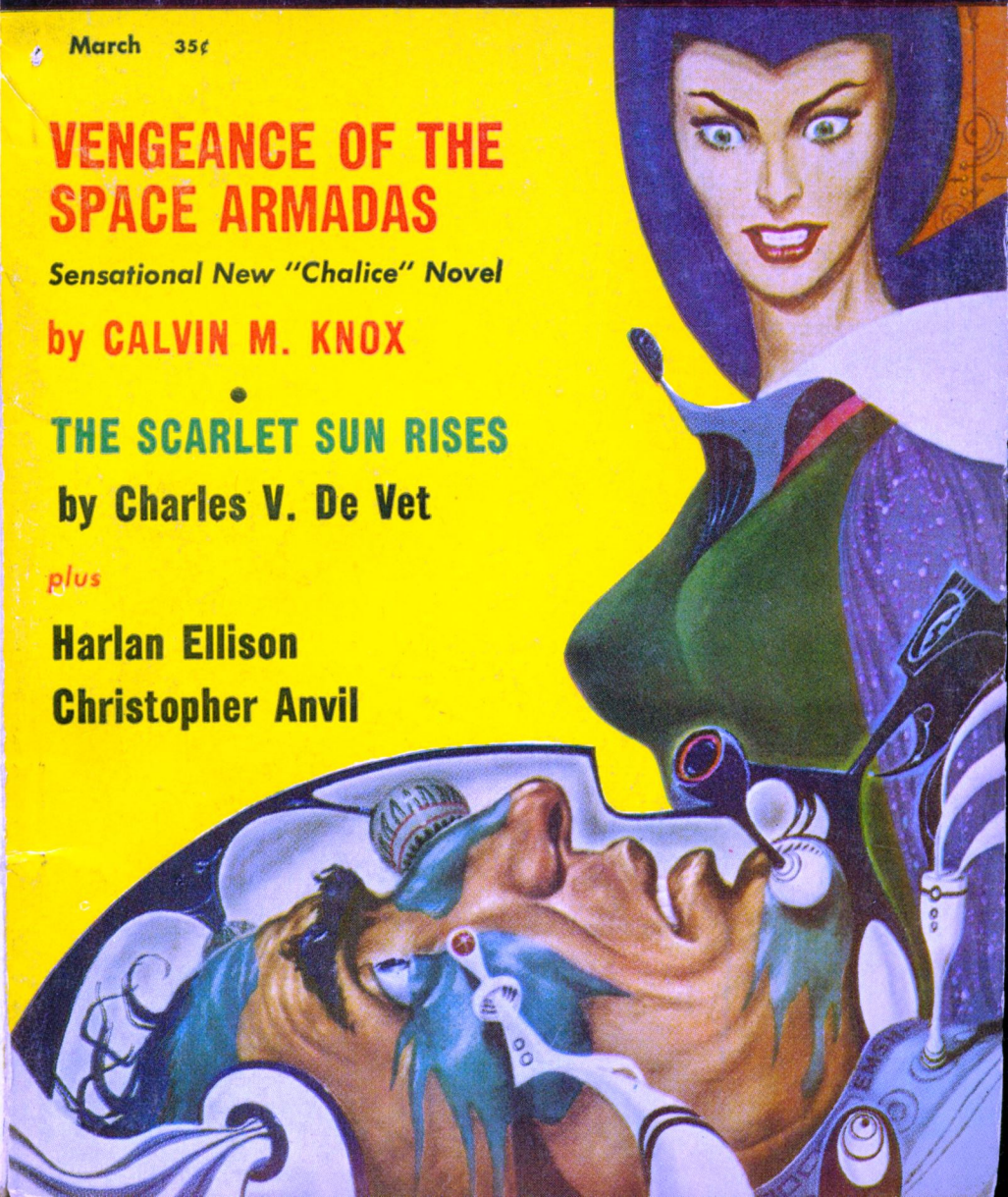
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by **Charles V. De Vet**

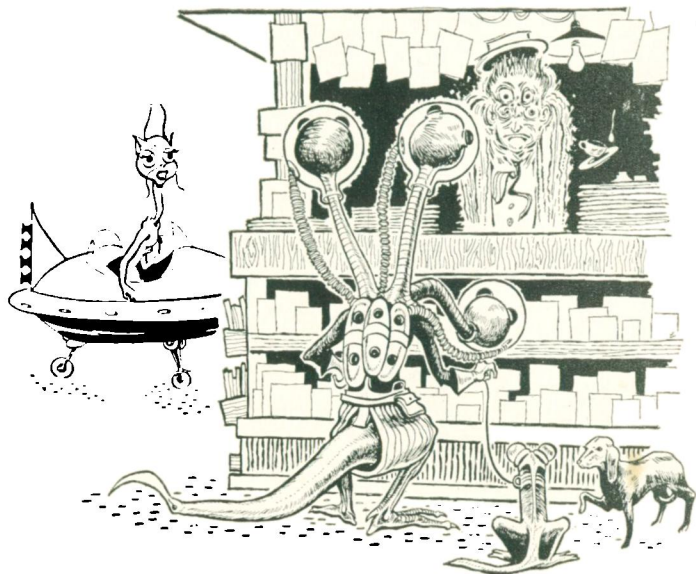
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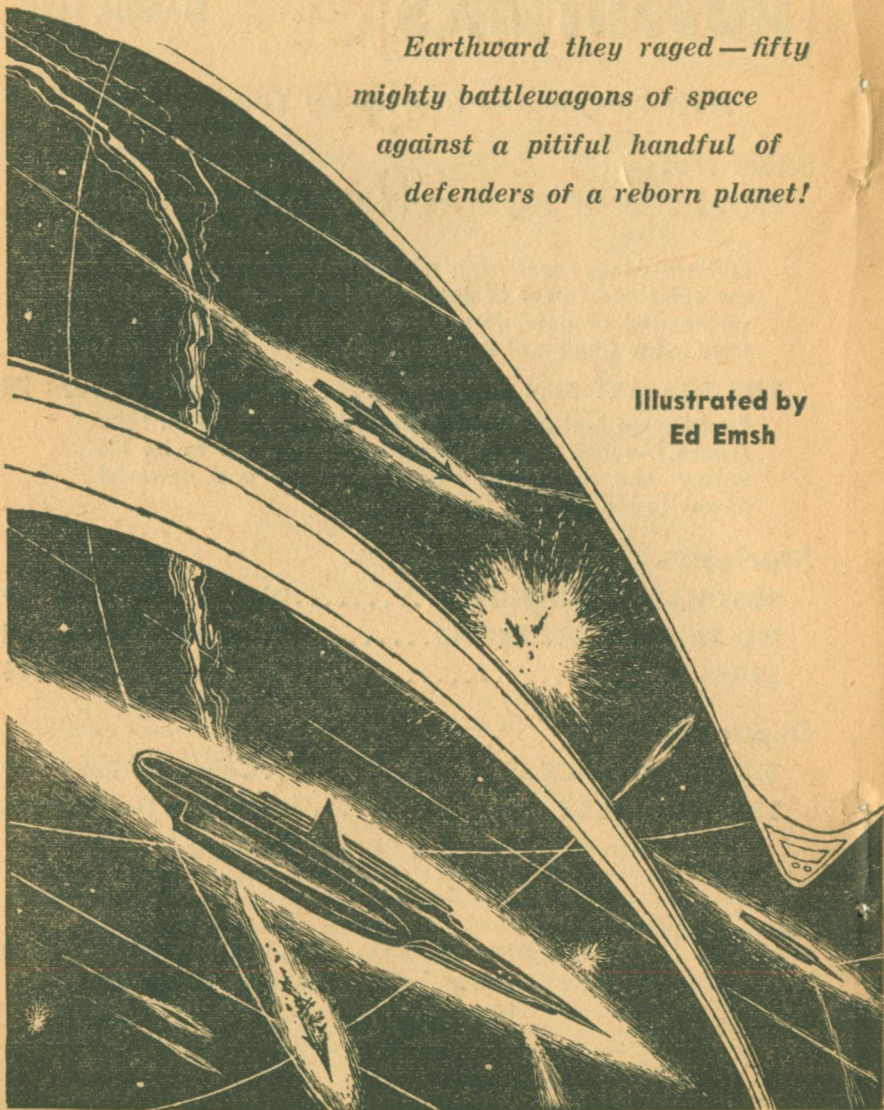
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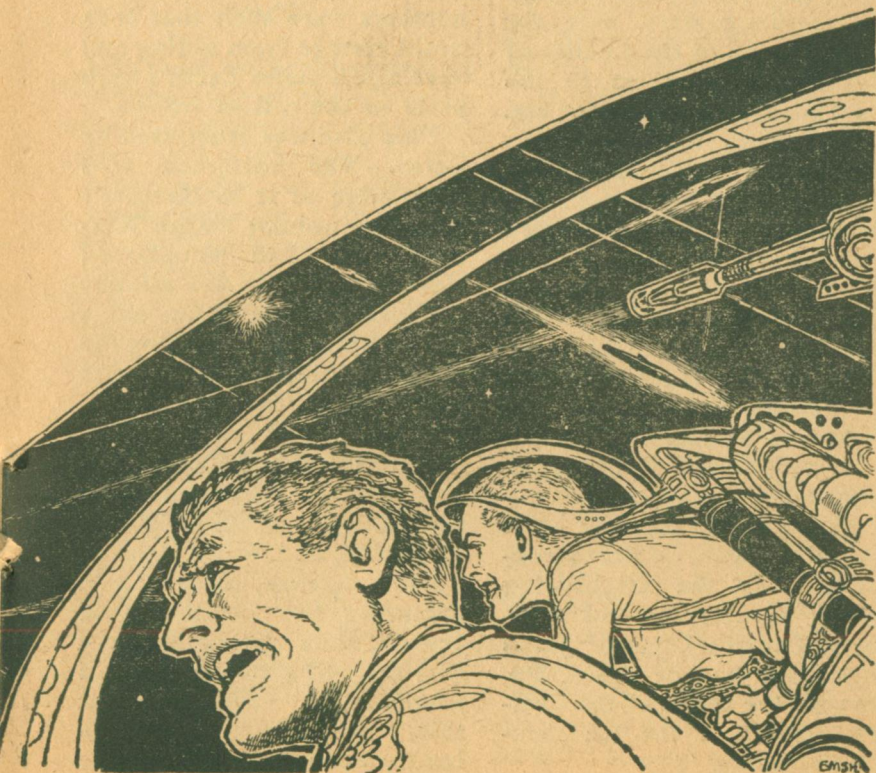
*Earthward they raged — fifty
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against a pitiful handful of
defenders of a reborn planet!*

**Illustrated by
Ed Emsch**



VENGEANCE OF THE SPACE ARMADAS

by CALVIN M. KNOX



Vengeance of the Space Armadas

by Calvin M. Knox

PROLOGUE

AFTER thirty thousand years of darkness, Earth stood once again at the threshold of light. The age-old Terran Empire had shattered, and her children were strewn through the far-flung stars, only the misty legend of the Chalice of Death binding them to the dead glories of the bygone era.

For thirty thousand years the Chalice had held sleepers in suspended animation, ten thousand of Earth's finest men and women, put there to rest until it was time for Terra to regain her place in the galaxy. To forgotten Earth came, finally, Hallam Navarre, a man of Terran descent who had served as adviser to Joroiran VII, Overlord of Jorus, an unimaginably distant stellar system. Navarre, together with Helna Winstin, an Earthwoman born on the neighboring world of Kariad, and half-breed Domrik Carso of Jorus found Earth once again, discovered the secret of the Chalice, and freed the ten thousand sleepers.

Navarre left six thousand of the reborn Earthmen on their own planet and transported the remaining two thousand couples to a planet of Procyon. His plan was to let the years pass and the race of Earthmen increase, until their numbers were such that they could emerge from hiding and once again claim Earth's high place in the roll of worlds.

This plan was frustrated by Carso. The halfbreed sold knowledge of it to Navarre's rival, the outcast Vegan Kausirn, who had supplanted Navarre as Joroiran's adviser on Jorus. Three Joran ships were dispatched to destroy the fledgling settlements on Earth and Procyon lest the Earthmen rise again.

With the aid of Helna Winstin, Navarre obtained three battleships from the Oligocrat of Kariad, and, using them in Earth's defense, succeeded in capturing the Joran trio of vessels, thus giving Earth a tiny navy of six spaceships of dreadnaught category. But this, Navarre knew, would be hardly enough to defend the

small colony against any determined attack by the other star systems.

Two paths lay open. They could wait, and hope that Jorus would make no further threatening attempts against them. Already, the little band on Earth had nearly doubled its numbers through natural increase.

They could wait — or, thought Navarre, they could counterattack.

CHAPTER I

HALLAM NAVARRE stood at the edge of the city—the busy, humming, growing city they called Phoenix. It was hardly a city, yet, by Galactic standards — on Jorus, he thought, ten thousand people hardly rate even the designation of a village. But city it was, and like the phoenix of old it rose from its own ashes.

The city rested between two upswEEPing chains of hills; it lay in a fertile valley that split the heart of the great continent where the Chalice had been. All around him, Navarre saw signs of activity—the rising buildings, the clack of carpenter's tools, the buzz of the paving-machines as they extended the reach of the city's streets yet a few hundred yards farther.

Women big with child; men busy, impatient for the time when Earthmen would cover their own planet again and reach out toward the stars. Six great captured spaceships standing in the sun, nucleus of the Terran navy-to-be. He saw Jorans and blue Kariadi working alongside the Earthmen—the captive crews of the spaceships, men to whom Navarre had given the choice of remaining on Earth as free men and workers or of dying on the spot. There was no time to waste guarding prisoners on the old-young world.

It was slow work, Navarre thought, this rebuilding of a planet. It took time.

And there were many enemies to guard against.

He began to walk through the city, heading for the Administration Building at its center. They greeted him as he passed — *everyone* knew Hallam Navarre, of course. But he felt curiously ill-at-ease in their presence.

They were true Earthmen, sleepers for thirty thousand years, untouched by the three hundred decades that intervened between the time of their sleep and the time of Navarre's birth. They were full of the old glories of Earth, the cities and nations and the billions of people—all

gone, now, all swallowed by the forest.

There were other Earthmen, dwarfish stunted men who had evolved over the years from the genetically deficient people left after the sack of Earth. Of Earth's best, most had died, some had been hidden in the Chalice, the rest had fled to the stars. Those remaining had spawned the little creatures who watched with awe their returned ancestors building their mighty city.

As for Navarre, he recognized his difference. He was the product of an older culture than these sleepers from the crypt, and an alien culture as well. Earth blood was in his veins, but his mind was a mind of Jorus, and he knew he could never truly be part of the race that was springing up anew on Earth and around Procyon.

But that did not mean he would not devote his life to their safety.

He entered his office—bare, hardly furnished—and nudged open the communicator stud. The robot operator asked for his number, and Navarre said, "I want to talk to Mikel Antrok."

A moment later he heard Antrok's deep voice say, "You want me, Hallam?"

"Yes. Would you stop off at my office?"

Antrok arrived ten minutes later. He was a tall, wide-shouldered Terran with unruly blonde hair and warm blue eyes; he had served as leader of the settlement during Navarre's absence on Jorus and Dariak. He entered the office and slouched informally against the door. Navarre noticed that he was covered with mud and sweat.

"Working?"

"Extending the trunk lines on the communicator circuit," Antrok said. "That's how you reached me so fast. I was tapping into the lines when you called. Sweaty work it is, too—but we have to keep pace with the city's expansion. What's on your mind?"

"I'm leaving," Navarre said. "For Jorus and Kariad. And I probably won't be back."

Antrok blinked suddenly and straightened up. "*Leaving*, Hallam? But we're in the midst of everything now—and you've helped us so much. I thought you were staying here for good."

Navarre shook his head. "I can't, Mikel. Earth's not safe yet."

"But we have six ships—" "Suppose Jorus sends sixty?"

"You don't expect a further

attack, do you?" Antrok asked. "I thought you said—"

"Whatever I said at the Council meetings," Navarre broke in, "was strictly for the sake of encouragement. Look here, Mikel: it's seven months since we captured those three Joran ships. That's enough time for Jorus to start wondering what happened out here. Kariad may wonder what ever became of their phony Admiral Finst and *his* three ships."

"But we're building more ships, Hallam—"

"It takes two years to build a starship, and you know it. We have four in progress. That's still not enough. If Kausirn succeeds in working up enough imperial wrath against us, we'll have the whole Joran fleet down on our necks. So I'm going back to Jorus. Maybe I can handle the situation at close range."

"We'll miss you here," Antrok said.

"Thanks," Navarre said, shrugging. "But you know it's not true. You can manage without me. You *have* to manage without me. The day Earth finds that one particular man is indispensable to its existence is the day you all might as well crawl back into the Chalice and go back to sleep."

Antrok nodded. "When are you leaving?"

"Tonight. I waited this long only because I wanted to get things shaped up."

"You won't even stay for the election, then?"

"There's no need of that. You'll win. And I've prepared a memorandum of suggestions for you to consider after you officially take over again."

Antrok looked doubtful. "Of course I expect to win the election, Hallam. But I was counting on you to be here, to—"

"Well, I won't be. I'll be more important elsewhere. But you know my general plans. As soon as the settlement reaches twelve thousand, detach two thousand and start building the second city—as far from this one as possible. That's the important thing right now—spreading out over Earth. Keep the starship factory intact, of course—and have the new city set to work building ships as soon as it's practical. You know the rest. Constant expansion, strengthening of government, close contact with the outfit on Procyon." He grinned. "You can get along without me, Mikel. And if I'm lucky, I'll be back."

"And if you're not lucky?"

Navarre's expression dark-

ened. "Then you'll know about it, Mikel—when the galactic fleet gets here to blast the settlement to atoms."

HE LEFT that night, in the small Joran ship that had originally carried him across space on the quest for the Chalice, more than two years before. Just before leaving he sent a subradio message to Helna, at the court of Marhaill, Oligocrat of Kariad, to warn her that he was on his way back.

Even by hyperdrive, the trip took days, so great was the gulf separating Earth and its island universe from the star-cluster containing the Joran and Kariadi solar systems. Navarre had plenty of time to think.

He thought back over the years to his childhood on Jorus, living in the shadow of the Palace. His father had been adviser to the previous Overlord, Joroiran VI, his mother a lady of the court. The plague brought by a traveling Meznian had carried off the old Overlord and Navarre's father in the same week; and suddenly a new Overlord, weak and fumbling, had come to the throne—a man more interested in dicing with his many-fingered crony,

Kausirn, an itinerant Vegan who held great influence over the young prince, than in ruling a solar system.

Navarre had held the threads of Joroiran's empire together for six years, but the Vegan's influence had grown greater and greater in that time, and at length Kausirn had prevailed upon the Overlord to send Navarre out into space, in quest of the then-considered-mythical Chalice.

So I found the Chalice, Navarre thought.

And the dead legend of Earth sprang into life. But now Kausirn knew that Earth was groping toward its second strength, and the Vegan undoubtedly would be taking steps to crush the upstart settlement quickly, before it became dangerous. On his last visit to Jorus Navarre had discovered that the Overlord had been reduced to a pawn of Kausirn, a prisoner in his own palace.

But there was still a chance. The neighboring system of Kariad—Jorus' ancient enemy, in more recent years a rather distant ally. The female Earthman Helna Winstin still held influence over Marhaill, Kariad's ruler.

Perhaps, thought Navarre, the two worlds could be played off against one another,

with Earth benefiting.

I've played men against each other, he thought. Why not worlds?

Just a simple matter of logistics. Give me the right fulcrum and I'll move the universe.

But Kausirn blocked the path.

The Vegan must die, Navarre realized, before I return to Earth.

HE REACHED Kariad finally, after an overlong journey during which too many plans had spun in his brain, too many strands of conspiracy had been woven. One man bottled up in a tiny warpship thinks too much; Navarre was stale and weary of plotting by the time the mass indicator told him that his destination was in range.

Kariad, the single planet of a double sun.

He dropped down toward the Kariadi system, rapidly setting up the coordinates on the autopilot as the warpship lurched back into normal space; the journey would be completed on ion-drive.

Navarre fed in the coordinates for a landing at the main spaceport; he knew the detector-net was too accurate for a craft such as his, and he

could never hope to slip down to the planet's surface unnoticed.

But he expected no trouble. It was seven months since he had last been in this galaxy, and he had let his hair grow; instead of the shaven scalp of the traditional Earthman, he now presented wavy dark-brown hair. The search for Hallam Navarre had probably died down, anyway; they might still seek him on Jorus, but he doubted if Kausirn's influence extended as far as Kariad.

He brought the ship down lightly on the broad concrete landing-apron of the spaceport and radioed Main Control for his clearance. It came promptly enough. He left the ship and joined the long line passing through the customs building.

He handed over his passport—a fraudulent one that he had had drawn up for him on Earth before leaving. It said he was Nollivar Strumo, a manufacturer of interplanetary vessels, who was vacationing on Kariad.

The customs official was a weary-looking little Kariadi whose dark blue skin was streaked with sweat; he had been passing people perfunctorily, without bothering to ask more than the routine few

questions. Waiting, Navarre had scanned the line—plenty of Kariadi, of course, and also the usual scattering of alien beings.

But no Jorans. *Why?* he wondered.

The customs man took his passport, scanned it boredly, and asked the standard question: "Name and planet of origin?"

"Nolliwar Strumo," Navarre said. He started to add, *Of Jorus*, but the words died as he saw the expression on the official's face. The man had come suddenly awake.

"Is this a joke?" the official asked hoarsely.

"Of course not. Nolliwar Strumo of Jorus. My papers are in order, aren't they?"

What's happened while I was away? Navarre wondered. *What have I done wrong?*

"In order?" the man repeated. He chuckled harshly and gestured to several nearby spaceport guards. Navarre tensed himself for a break-away, but realized he'd never make it. "Your papers in order? Well, not exactly. You just brought a ship down on Kariad and thought you could march into the planet with a passport like this?"

"I've been traveling a while," Navarre said. "Have the laws been changed? Is a

visa required now?"

"Visa! Friend, this passport's dated five weeks ago. I don't know where you got it or who you are, but the passport's obviously fake and so are you." The little man glared triumphantly at Navarre. "You may or may not be aware of it, but Kariad and Jorus severed diplomatic relations six months ago. We'll probably be at war with them within a month. This is a hell of a time to take your vacation on Kariad, Mr. Nolliwar Strumo of Jorus—or whoever you are!"

He signalled to the guards. "Take him away and shut him up until Security can investigate his background. I wonder if he thought I was a fool? Next, please!"

CHAPTER II

NAVARRÉ was growing accustomed to spending his time in prisons. He had passed an hour in a Kariadi jail once before, when he had come here with Carso on the first leg of his search for the Chalice. And he had tasted the stale air of Joran prisons more recently, when Kausirn had had him imprisoned.

Now he sat in a windowless box of a room far below the surface of the spaceport,

breathing shallowly to keep the foul taste of the exhausted air from reaching the depths of his lungs, where it would linger for hours. He wondered what had gone wrong.

A state of war imminent between Jorus and Kariad, after hundreds of years of peace. And he had picked just this time to masquerade as a Joran citizen! Why, it would have been safer to try to bluff his way through under his own identity, he realized. Or perhaps even to assume his false Kariadi guise and become, once again, Melwod Finst, Admiral of the Navy of Kariad.

He heard footsteps. The interrogators coming, at last.

The positronic relays of the cell-door lock whirred momentarily; the door swung back into its niche, and Navarre blinked at the sudden stream of light that came bursting in. When he could see again, he found himself confronted by the stout, stubby bore of a Kariadi blaster.

There were two interrogators, a large fat one and a small wizened one. They always worked in teams of opposites; it was part of the vast body of technique accumulated for the purpose of keeping the prisoner off balance.

"Come with us," said the

small one with the blaster, and gestured.

Navarre pushed himself up off the cot and followed. He knew resistance was out of the question now.

They led him up a long dreary cell-block, through a double door, and into a glass-doored room somewhat larger than his cell, brightly lit, with radiant luminescent panels casting a soft, pleasant glow over everything.

Pointing to a large chair in the center of the room, the small one said, "Sit there."

Navarre sat. The interrogators took seats against the walls, on opposite sides of him. He glanced from one to the other. They were dark blue in color, but otherwise they had little in common. The small man was dried and wrinkled like a prune; glittering fast-moving eyes glinted at him out of a mousy face. As for the other, he must have weighed nearly four hundred pounds; he slumped relievedly in his chair, a mountain of blue flesh, and dabbed futilely at the rivulets of sweat that came dribbling down from his forehead and bushy eyebrows and lost themselves in the wilderness of his many successive chins.

"Very well," the fat one said, in a patient, friendly

voice. "You say you are Nollivar Strumo of Jorus. Your passport says so also. Who are you?"

"Nollivar Strumo, of Jorus," Navarre said.

"Highly doubtful," the heavy man remarked. "I must remind you that it's within our authority to make use of any form of interrogation we may require, in order to obtain information from you. We are nearly in a time of war. You claim to be a representative of a planet with whom we are not currently in diplomatic relations." He smiled coldly. "Now, this may or may not be true. But if you persist in claiming to be from Jorus, we'll have to treat you as if such is the case, until we find out otherwise."

While he had spoken, the character of the luminescent panels had been changing steadily. The pastel greens and oranges had faded, and were gradually replaced by harsher tones, more somber blues and violets. It was part of the psychological approach, Navarre knew; the room color would get less friendly as the interview went on.

The small man said, in a dry rasping voice, "Your passport is obviously a forgery. We have laboratory confirmation on that. Who are you?"

"Nollivar Strumo, of Jorus." Navarre was determined to be stubborn as long as possible.

The fat man scowled mildly. "You have the virtue of consistency, at least. Tell us this: if you're from Jorus, as you insist, why are you here on Kariad? And why did you take no precautions to conceal your point of origin when you must have been aware that traffic between Jorus and Kariad is currently prohibited. What's your game?"

"I sell spaceships," Navarre said blandly.

"Another lie. No Nollivar Strumo is listed in the most recent munitions directory published on Jorus."

Navarre smiled. "You've been very clever, both of you. And busy."

"Thank you. The identity of Nollivar Strumo is obviously false. Will you tell us who you are?"

"No."

"Very well, then. Place your hands on the armrests of your chair, please," the fat man ordered.

"If I don't?"

"We'll place them there for you. If you want to keep all your fingers, you will do it yourself."

He shrugged and grasped the armrests. The fat man jab-

bed a button on a remote-control panel in his hands, and immediately metal clamps sprang out of Navarre's chair and pinioned him firmly.

The fat man touched another knob; a shudder of pain rippled through Navarre's body, making him wince.

"Your pain threshold is abnormally high," the fat one said. "81.3. No other Joran we've tested has run higher than 66. Would you say he was a Joran, Ruiil?"

The small Kariadi shook his head. "Highly doubtful."

"You've had a sample, Nollivar Strumo. That was just a test. The chair is capable of producing pain more than eighteen degrees above even your threshold—and I can guarantee you won't enjoy it." He touched his hands lovingly to the control panel. "You understand the consequences. Tell us your name, stranger."

A bolt of pain shot up his leg; it felt as if his calf-muscle had been ripped from his living leg. He waited till some of the pain had receded, and forced a smile.

"I — am not Nollivar Strumo," he said. "The passport is forged."

"Ah! A fact at last! But who are you, then?"

Another lancing burst of pain—this time, as if fleshy

fingers had grasped the chambers of his heart and squeezed, gently enough, but numbingly. Navarre felt torrents of sweat come dribbling down his face.

"Who I am is not for your ears," he said.

"Eh? And for whose, then?"

"Marhaill's. And the Overlord will roast both of you when he learns what you've done."

"We simply do a job," remarked the smaller man. "If you have business with Marhaill, you should have spoken up about it earlier."

"My business is secret. But I'd be of no use to him dead or mad from torture, which is why I'm letting you know this now."

The interrogators glanced at each other uncertainly. Navarre held his breath, waiting, trying to blot out the lingering after-effects of the pain. Interrogators were probably accustomed to this sort of wild bluffing, he thought.

"You are not from Jorus?"

"I'm an Earthman," Navarre said. "With my hair worn long." Cautiously he said, "Is Helna Winstin still adviser to Marhaill?"

"She is."

Navarre nodded. He had got into trouble once by making assumptions about the status

quo; now he had to check every point.

"Tell Helna Winstin that a long-haired Earthman is in the interrogation chambers, and would speak to her on urgent business. Then see if she allows your quiz-game to continue any further."

The executioners looked doubtful. "If we waste her time, stranger—"

"If you fail to call her, and somehow I survive your gentle handling," Navarre promised, "I'll see to it that your fat is stripped away layer by layer, blubbery one, and that your tiny companion is smothered in it!"

There was a moment's pause. Finally the small man, the one named Ruiil, stood up and said, "No harm checking. I'll call upstairs. Okay?"

"Okay."

Ruiil disappeared. He returned five minutes later, looking pale and shaken.

"Well? What's the word?"

"We're to free him," he said. "There's been some sort of mistake. The Earthman wants to see him in her chambers immediately."

WITH CONSUMMATE punctiliousness the two interrogators helped him out of the chair—he was a little wobbly

of footing on the left leg, which had borne the force of the chair's neural bolt—and paused a moment as he straightened up. They led him back down the corridor, into a large and well-furnished room complete with a lavish bar. *The interrogators live well down here*, Navarre thought, as they drew a pale amber drink for him.

He gulped it and said, "Your hospitality is overwhelming. I'm impressed."

"Please don't hold this against us," the fat man said. The resonance was gone from his voice now; he was whining. "We do our jobs. You must admit we had cause to interrogate you—and you said nothing! If you had only spoken up earlier—!"

"I'll spare you," Navarre said magnanimously. "Take me to Earthman Winstin, now."

They escorted him to a glide-channel furnished in clinging soft brown damask and shot upward with him toward the surface. A dull blue landcar waited there, and the fat interrogator scribbled an order on a stylopad and handed it to the waiting driver.

"Take him to the palace. The Earthman wants to see him quickly."

Navarre glanced back once

and saw the anxious faces of the interrogators staring at him; then he turned his head, and promptly forgot them. The day was warm, and both suns were in the sky, the red and the yellow.

Fifteen minutes later he was at the Oligocrat's palace, and five minutes after that he was being shown through a widening sphincter into the private chambers of Helna Winstin, Earthman to the Court of Oligocrat Marhaill.

She was waiting for him, a slim, wiry figure in glittering platinum-cloth and red tights, looking graceful and delicate and as resilient as neofoam webwork. Her scalp was bare, in Earthman fashion.

"I was worried about you," she said.

"I had some troubles on landing. How was I supposed to know there was friction between Jorus and Kariad? I posed as a Joran—and naturally the customs men collared me."

"I sent you a message," she said. "As soon as I received yours. But there are lags in subspace communication; you must have left too soon. Still, no damage has been done—you've arrived."

No damage, thought Navarre—except for one throbbing leg and an uneasy ache

about the chest. He dropped down wearily on a richly upholstered divan and felt the faint touch of the soothing massage-cells going to work on his fatigued thighs and back.

"How is it on Earth?" she asked.

"Everything is fine." Briefly, he described the status of the settlement as of the time he had left. She nodded approvingly when he was finished.

"It sounds fine. Antrok will win the election?"

"He's a logical choice. The boy's a natural leader. But what's this brewing between Jorus and Kariad?"

She smiled secretively. "You may remember that Admiral Melwod Finst left Kariad seven months ago on maneuvers, with three first-line ships at his command."

"And a Joran fleet of the same size departed about that time for points unknown, under the command of Admiral Hannimon Drulk."

"Exactly. Now, it became necessary for me to account for the whereabouts of Admiral Finst and his fleet. I could hardly say that Admiral Finst was in reality an Earthman named Navarre, whose appointment to the Kariadi Admiralty I had obtained by

bamboozling my good Oligocrat Marhaill. So I took the alternate path of action and caused the manufacture of a dispatch from Admiral Finst saying he had been set upon in deep space by three unidentifiable starships, and was in the midst of a fierce battle."

Grinning, Navarre said, "I begin to see."

"Likewise," she went on, "I filtered into the hands of my tame Joran spy a report that Admiral Drulk's fleet had been destroyed in action somewhere in deep space. Then it was a simple matter to let Jorus accidentally find out about the similar fate that befell Admiral Finst."

"And so both Marhaill and Joroiran concluded that there was a pitched battle between fleets of Kariad and Jorus in some distant sector of space," Navarre said. "Which led each of them to suspect that the other had some designs on him. And which kept both of them from guessing that their ships were perfectly safe, and were now serving as the main line of defense for Earth!"

He leaned forward, suddenly serious. "So Jorus and Kariad are at the edge of war over six ships that they think were destroyed. Do you think that's a wise move?"

Helna said, "Of course. If I

can foment friction between the two systems, it'll keep their minds off Earth. Marhaill's a weak man; he'll listen to me. And he fears Jorus more than he does Earth. I had to drive a wedge between him and Kausirn, and I did."

"Kausirn's in charge, then?"

"Evidently. Joroiran is hardly seen in public any more. He's still alive, but completely in the Vegan's power. Marhaill's aware of this."

Navarre clenched his fists; he still had a mild liking for Joroiran, spineless incompetent of a ruler that he was. And he disliked the Vegan intensely.

"Why did you come back?" Helna asked.

"I was afraid Kausirn might be stirring things up to send a fleet to Earth. Six ships couldn't hold off the full force of the Joran navy any better than six sheep could. But if Jorus and Kariad are going to go to war with each other—"

Helna shook her head quickly; an expression of doubt appeared on her face. "Don't be too confident of that."

"What do you mean?"

"The public attitude is an unhealthy one. But I think Kausirn suspects that he's being hoaxed. He's been negotiating with Marhaill for top-level talks, face to face."

"And you couldn't head such talks off?" Navarre asked.

"I don't know. I've warned Marhaill against an assassination plot, but he doesn't listen. It's inevitable that Kausirn and he will get together and compare notes. And then—"

"And then what?"

"And then Jorus and Kariad will undoubtedly sign a treaty of mutual harmony," Helna said. "And send a combined fleet out to squash Earth."

CHAPTER III

TWO WEEKS LATER, Navarre left Kariad at night, in a small ship bearing the arms of the Oligocrat Marhaill. His pilot was a member of Marhaill's Secret Service, hand-picked by Helna herself. No one was on hand to see him off; no one checked to see his passport, no one asked where he was going.

His flight clearance papers bore the code inscription XX-1413, signed by Marhaill, countersigned by Helna. That was enough to get him past any bureaucrat on Kariad; the translation of the double-X was, *Special Secret Ambassador for the Oligocrat, unlimited authority*.

Navarre chuckled every time he had occasion to glance

at his image in the ship's mirror, during the brief journey between the worlds. He could hardly recognize himself, after the job Helna had done.

His youthful crop of brown hair had been shaven once again; to his bald scalp had been affixed a wig of bright glossy black Kariadi-type hair, thick-stranded and oily. His normally high cheekbones had been lowered by an overlay of molding plastic; his eyebrows had been thickened, his lips built up into fleshiness, his ears drawn back and up by a simple bit of surgery.

He weighed twenty pounds more than usual. His skin-color was bright blue.

He was Loggon Domell, Ambassador from the Court of the Oligocrat Marhaill to the Court of Joroiran VII, and only a skilled morphologist could have detected the fact that behind the outer layer that was Loggon Domell was one Hallam Navarre, Earthman.

This was the second time he had masqueraded as a Kariadi—but Helna and her technicians had done an infinitely more painstaking job than he had, when he had passed himself off as Melwod Finst earlier. Finst had looked simply like Navarre with his skin dyed blue and his scalp wig-

ged; Domell was an entirely different person.

It had all been remarkably simple. Helna had persuaded Marhaill that it would be well to send an ambassador to Jorus to discuss the galactic situation with Joroiran and with Kausirn; Marhaill, busy with his *drak*-hunting and his mistresses, had agreed and asked Helna to suggest a man capable of handling the job.

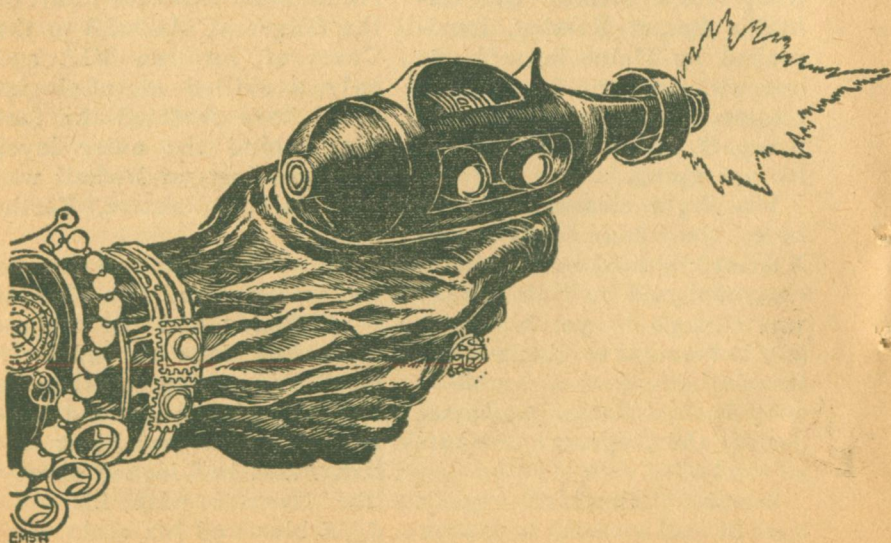
"I have just the man," she had said. "One Loggon Domell, of this city. A wise and prudent man who will serve Your Majesty well."

Marhaill nodded in agreement. "You always serve me

well, Helna. Send him to Jorus!"

THE LITTLE SHIP landed at midday at the Jorus City airport. By prior arrangement, a government car was there to meet "Loggon Domell" at the edge of the landing apron. A high-ranking Joran named Dilbar Loodig had been chosen as the official greeter.

Navarre knew this Loodig: a hanger-on at court, a man with a high hereditary title and little else to commend him. Loodig's boast was that he knew everyone at court by the slope of their shoulders





and the angle at which they held their necks; Navarre wondered whether Loodig's ability would stand him in good stead now. It would cost him his life if he were to recognize Navarre.

But Loodig gave no outward sign of recognition, and he was not clever enough to have masked his true feelings had he detected Navarre behind the personal of "Domell." Navarre presented his papers to the courtier; Loodig riffled through them, smiled ingratiatingly, and said, "Welcome to Jorus. Is this your first visit to our world?"

"Hardly," Navarre replied. "In the old days before the present difficulties I spent many happy vacations here. I once had a summer cottage in the highlands of Velsk, overlooking the river." The microscopic distorter in his throat did things to the sound of his voice, making it lighter in texture, supplying a deep gravelly rasp as well. He spoke in Joran, but with a slight lilting inflection and a shift of the vowel values.

"Indeed?" Loodig said, as they entered the car. "The highland country is some of our most beautiful. You must have enjoyed your stay there."

"I did," Navarre said gravely, and repressed a snigger.

The car threaded its way rapidly through the city to the Palace. He noticed an escort evidently following; they were taking good care of the alleged Kariadi ambassador, it seemed.

At the Palace, Navarre was ushered speedily through the outer rooms.

"Will I be able to see the Overlord shortly?" he asked.

"I've notified him you're here," Loodig said. "The Overlord is—not a well man, these days. He may not be able to see you immediately."

"Oh. How sad!"

"He's been in poor health for quite some time now," said the courtier. "We're extremely worried about him."

I'll bet, Navarre thought. If something should happen to Joroiran, Kausirn would make himself regent for the heir apparent. The boy is only eight.

Loodig excused himself, disappeared for a moment, and returned shortly after. "The Overlord will see you, I'm happy to report. Please come this way."

Loodig led him down the winding passages toward the smaller throneroom Joroiran used for private audiences. It was not nearly as magnificent as the main throneroom, of course, but it did serve to awe visitors. Periscopic viewers

allowed Security men to observe the course of the Overlord's audiences and protect him from harm.

They reached the door. Loodig knelt, making ceremonial gestures, while Navarre remained erect as befitted his post of ambassador.

"His Excellency, Loggon Domell, Ambassador Plenipotentiary from Kariad," Loodig announced.

"Let him enter," Joroiran responded, in a pale, almost timid voice.

THE OVERLORD was showing the effects of his virtual captivity. A small, ineffectual man to begin with, he had hardly bothered to take the usual steps to cover his deficiencies; instead of the magnificent framework-robe that provided him with his regal public stature, he wore only an embroidered cloth robe that added little to his appearance. He had looked poorly the last time Navarre had seen him, nearly a year before; now, if anything, he looked worse.

Navarre made the ambassadorial bow, unfolded the charter of credentials Marhaill had given him, and offered them to Joroiran. The Overlord scanned them briefly and put them aside. Navarre heard

the door slide gently closed behind him, leaving him alone with Joroiran.

There was no indication that the Overlord recognized him; instead, he fixed his gentle, washed-out eyes on a point somewhere above Navarre's left shoulder and said, "It pleases me that I can speak with someone from Kariad. This present friction has distressed me long."

"No more so than it has troubled the sleep of Marhaill," Navarre said. "It seems that groundless friction has sprung up between our worlds. I hope my visit will help in restoring harmony."

Joroiran smiled feebly. "Yes. Indeed." He seemed to be at a loss for his next words. Finally he burst out, "My adviser—Kausirn—he should be here, now. We really should wait for him. He's made a much closer study of the situation than I have."

It was pathetic, Navarre thought. Kausirn had so puppetized the Overlord that Joroiran was totally incapable of conducting business of the realm without him. But it was just as well; Navarre knew it was necessary to have Kausirn on hand when he made his play.

"The Lord Adviser is a man I've heard much about," Na-

varre remarked. "He seems to be a gifted administrator. He must take much of the burden of government from Your Majesty's weary shoulders."

Joroiran seemed to flinch at the telling thrust. He nodded tiredly. "Yes, he is a great help to me. A ruler has so much to think about—and Kausirn is indispensable to me."

"I've often heard Lord Marhaill say the same about his adviser—an Earthman. He finds her an absolute necessity in operating the government."

"I had an Earthman adviser once," Joroiran said distantly. "I thought he was loyal and trustworthy, but he betrayed me. I sent him on a mission . . . but he failed me. His name was Navarre."

"I often dealt with him when he served Your Majesty," Navarre said. "He seemed to me utterly loyal to Jorus. It surprises me to learn of this."

"It came as a blow to me, too. But luckily I had one such as Kausirn to take his place, when he left me. Ah—he comes now!"

The door opened. The Vegan Kausirn entered, smiling coldly. The Vegan was an angular, ascetic-looking person with the deathly pallor of his race lending contrast to the richness of his robes. In-

deed, he was more finely dressed than Joroiran himself; he bore himself upright, confidently, as if he and not the other sat on the throne.

"Your pardon, Majesty. I was unavoidably detained." He turned to Navarre and said, "You are Marhaill's ambassador? I give you welcome. I am Kausirn, Adviser to the Overlord."

"Greetings, Kausirn."

The Vegan's twenty fingers curled and uncurled tensely; his eyes seemed to bore through the layers of plastic that masked Navarre, to expose the Earthman who skulked beneath.

"Let us go to the Council-room," Kausirn suggested. "There we three may talk."

IT TOOK THEM perhaps ten minutes of uneasy verbal fencing in the small, well-lit room before they actually came to grips with the subject at hand. First they had to exchange pleasantries in true diplomatic fashion, approach the topic circuitously, lead up to it in a gradual manner. Navarre let the Vegan control the flow of discussion; he had learned never to underestimate Kausirn, and he feared he might give himself away if he ventured to steer the dis-

cussion in some direction that might be characteristic of Hallam Navarre.

He toyed with the drink-flask at his right, parried Kausirn skillfully, replied with grace to the inane questions of Joroiran. Neither of them seemed to suspect his true identity.

At length the Vegan leaned forward, spreading his ten-fingered hands wide on the burnished cupralloy meeting-table. With the tiny flicker of his eyelids that told Navarre he was choosing his words with particular care, Kausirn said, "Of course, the chief item of curiosity is the encounter that presumably took place between three Joran ships and three of Kariad, eight months ago. Until this matter is resolved, I hardly see how we can discuss any reaffirmation of ties between Kariad and Jorus."

"Of course," added Joroiran.

Navarre frowned thoughtfully. "You imply, then, that your three ships and ships of Kariad fought a battle?"

Kausirn quickly shook his head. "I draw no such implications! But there are persistent rumors."

"May I ask just where the three Joran ships were at the time of their alleged destruction?"

The Vegan nibbled a lip. "This infringes on highly secret information, Ambassador Domell."

Navarre rose swiftly from his seat and said, "In that case, Adviser Kausirn, I fear we haven't much else to talk about. If on this essential matter secrecy is to be maintained between our worlds, I hardly see how we can agree on any other major topics of current dispute. Of course—"

Smoothly Kausirn said, "Again you seem to have drawn an unwarranted implication, Ambassador. True, these matters are highly secret—but did I say I would withhold knowledge of them from you? On the contrary: I summoned an ambassador from Kariad for the very purpose of revealing them."

He's falling into the trap, Navarre thought joyfully. He took his seat once again and glanced expectantly at the Vegan.

Kausirn said, "To begin with: there was a traitorous Earthman in this court once, a man called Hallam Navarre. This Navarre has been absent from this court for several years. He's a dangerous man, milord, and a clever one. He has rediscovered Earth!"

Navarre's eyes widened in mock astonishment. "No!"

"Unfortunately, yes. He has found Earth and established a belligerent settlement there. His intention is to conquer the galaxy—beginning with Jorus and Kariad!"

"And why, then, were we not informed of this?"

"Patience, good sir. When we of Jorus learned of this, we immediately dispatched a punitive mission to Earth—three ships, under the command of our Admiral Drulk. A preventive measure, you might say. We intended to wipe out the Terran settlement before they could make their attack on our systems."

"A wise move."

"But," said Kausirn, "our ships vanished. So far as we know they reached the region of Earth, but that's the last we know of them."

"No dispatches whatsoever from them?"

"None."

"Strange," Navarre mused.

"Now," Kausirn went on, "We learn that the Grand Fleet of Kariad suffered an oddly similar loss—three ships vanished without trace while on maneuvers."

"And how was this learned?" Navarre asked, a trifle coldly.

Kausirn shrugged apologetically. "Let us cast diplomacy aside, shall we? I'll tell you

quite frankly: our spy network brought us the fact."

"I appreciate frankness," Navarre said.

"Very well, then. Jorus sends three ships out to destroy Earth; the same month, Kariad sends three ships out on maneuvers to points unknown. By some coincidence none of these ships is ever heard from again. The natural conclusion is that there was a battle between them, and all six ships were destroyed. Now, milord: Jorus has no hostile intent against Kariad. Our fleet was on its way to Earth when the incident occurred. I can only conclude that for reasons beyond us, Kariad has committed an unprovoked act of war against Jorus."

"Your logic is impeccable," Navarre said, looking at Joroiran, who had been following the interchange like a spectator at a kinetics match. "But faulty, nonetheless. Why should Kariad attack Jorus?"

"Exactly the question that troubles us," Kausirn said. "The rumor is rife that such an attack was made on our ships by Kariad. To be frank, again: our spy network can find no motive for the attack. We have no reason to suspect Kariad." Kausirn took a deep breath. "Let me present my

real conclusion, now. The Joran ships were not destroyed by your fleet. Instead, *both* fleets were destroyed by Earth! The Earthmen have concealed strengths; we sent a ridiculously small contingent and it met destruction. Perhaps your fleet on maneuvers blundered into Terran territory accidentally and was destroyed as well."

Navarre said nothing, but listened with deep interest.

Kausirn continued, "I prefer this theory to the other, less tenable one of unprovoked assault on our fleet by yours. Therefore: I propose that we end quickly the animosity developing between our worlds—an animosity engendered by baseless rumor—and join instead in an alliance against Earth, which obviously is stronger than we suspected."

Navarre smiled blandly. "It is an interesting suggestion."

"You agree, then?"

"I believe not."

"What?"

"Such an alliance," Navarre said, "would involve our denying that our fleet attacked yours. This we are not in a position to do."

Kausirn looked genuinely startled. "You *admit* the attack, then? It was Kariad and not Earth who destroyed our ships?"

Smiling, Navarre said, "Now you draw the unwarranted implications. We neither affirm nor deny that our fleet and yours had an armed conflict provoked by us."

"Your silence on the subject amounts to an admission of guilt," Kausirn said stonily.

"This does not concern me. I act under instructions from Oligocrat Marhaill. I am not empowered to enter into any sort of alliance with Jorus." For the second time, he rose from the table. "We seem to have reached an impasse. You boast of your spy system, Adviser Kausirn; let it discover our motives, if it can. I feel that I would not accomplish anything further by remaining on Jorus. Will you see that I am conveyed to the spaceport?"

Kausirn was glaring at him in glassy-eyed bewilderment. It was the first time Navarre had ever seen the Vegan truly off balance. And small wonder, he thought: he had hardly expected the Kariadi ambassador to reject the chance of an alliance in favor of what amounted to a declaration of war by implication.

"We offer you alliance against Earth," Kausirn said. "Earth, which may be the deadliest enemy your planet or mine may ever have. And

you refuse? You prefer to let the cloud of war hover over Jorus and Kariad?"

Navarre shrugged. "We have no choice. Good day, Your Majesty. Adviser Kausirn, will you arrange transportation for me?"

With sudden shock he realized that he had spoken the last words in his natural voice, not the false one of Loggon Domell. The throat-distorter had failed!

He froze for an instant, seeing the surprise on Kausirn's face give way to abrupt recognition. "That voice," the Vegan said. "I know that voice. You're Navarre!"

He fumbled at his belt for a weapon—but by that time, the Earthman had dashed through the opening doors of the Councilroom and was racing down the long corridor that led to an exit from the Palace.

CHAPTER IV

IT HAD ALMOST worked, he thought bleakly, as he sped down the corridor. If only the distorter hadn't conked out, he could have passed himself off as the Kariadi ambassador and prevented any alliance from forming between Jorus and Kariad by the puzzlingly noncommittal character of his responses. Well, he thought,

it had been a good idea, anyway.

The splat of an energy-gun brought down mortar over his head. He heard Kausirn's angry voice shouting, "Catch that man! He's a spy! A traitor!"

He whirled round a corner and came face-to-face with a surprised Daborian guard. The huge being took a moment to consider the phenomenon before him, and that moment was too long. Navarre jabbed a fist into his stomach, kicked him as he fell, and kept running. The skirt of his ambassadorial garb was hindering him, but he made a good pace anyway. And he knew his way around the Palace.

He crossed the narrow passageway that led to the kitchen quarters, spiralled down a helical staircase, jumped across a low railing, and found himself outside the Palace. Behind him came the sound of confused yelling; there would be a fine manhunt under way any minute.

The car was waiting, though. He forced himself to a calm pace and walked to it. "Back to the spaceport," he ordered. Turbos thrummed and the car glided rapidly into the streets.

The trip to the spaceport seemed to take forever; Na-

varre fretted impatiently as they passed through crowded streets in the center of Jorus City, finally emerging on the highway that led to the port. Once at the spaceport he thanked the driver, got out, flashed his credentials, and made his way to the waiting Kariadi spaceship.

For the first time since his flight began, he paused for breath. He was safe, now. Kausirn would never dare to fire publicly on a vessel bearing the royal arms of Kariad.

IN SPACE, he called Helna via subradio and signalled to her to scramble. After a moment the beeping sound-pattern told him the scrambler was on.

"Well?" she asked. "How'd it go?"

"Fine—right up till the end. Then the distorter went dead and Kausirn recognized me by my voice."

"Oh!"

"I was on my way out by then," Navarre said. "He woke up too late. I'm in space and not being pursued. He can't very well attack me now."

"But the mission's a failure, then?"

"I'm not so sure of that," Navarre said. "I had him fooled into thinking Kariad *had* actually destroyed those ships,

and not Earth. Now, of course, he knows it was all a hoax. There'll probably be an alliance between Jorus and Kariad after all, once Kausirn contacts Marhaill and tells him who he really sent."

"Will he do that?"

"I don't doubt it. Kausirn's deathly afraid of Earth. He doesn't want to tackle the job of destroying the settlement himself; he wants to rope Kariad in just in case Earth turns out to be too much for Jorus' fleet alone. So naturally he'll do his best to avoid a war with Kariad. He'll get in touch with Marhaill. You'd better not be on Kariad when that happens."

There was silence for a moment. Then Helna said, "You're right. It's going to be hard to explain to Marhaill just how I happened to send a disguised Earthman as his special ambassador to Jorus. We'd better go to Earth."

"Not me, Helna. You."

"And where will you go?"

"I've got a new idea," Navarre said. "One that can make use of the fact that Jorus and Kariad are going to ally. Tell me; can you think of a *third* world that's likely to be scared by such an alliance?"

"Morank, of course!" she exclaimed.

"Right. So I go to Morank

and offer them some advance information on the coming alliance. If I handle it right, this time, Morank ought to fall in line. Meantime you go to Earth and explain things to Antrok. I'll keep you posted on what happens to me."

"Good luck," she said simply.

He forced an uneasy laugh. "It'll take more than luck. We're sitting ducks if Kausirn ever launches the Grand Fleet against our six ships."

Navarre broke the contact and turned away from the myriad dials and controls of the subradio set; behind him was a mirror, and he stared at his false Kariadi face.

That would have to be fixed. From now on, he would sail under his own colors; there was nothing to be gained by further masquerade.

He moved down the companionway to the washroom of the little ship, nudged the control pod that widened the sphincter, and stepped in, sealing the room behind him. A bottle of hexathyl was in the drug cabinet; he broke the seal, poured a handful of the cool green liquid over his face and shoulders, and stepped under the radiating field of the Vibron.

He felt the plastic layers covering his face sag; with a

quick twisting gesture he ripped them away, and his own features, strangely pale, appeared. He had grown accustomed to the face of Loggon Domell; seeing Hallam Navarre burst forth suddenly was startling.

A second treatment with the dissolving fluid and the Kariadi wig came off—painfully, for his own hair had grown somewhat underneath it. He stripped and rubbed hexathyl over his body, seeing the blue stain loosen and come away under the molecular flow of the Vibron. Within minutes, all that remained of Loggon Domell, Kariadi Ambassador, was a messy heap of blue-stained plastic lying on the washroom floor.

Navarre cleaned himself, depilated his scalp, and dressed again. He grinned at himself in the mirror, and, scooping up the lumps of plastic, dumped them in the disposal unit. *So much for Ambassador Domell*, he thought. He drew the blaster at his hip, squinted into the charge-chamber for an instant to assure himself the weapon was functional. The tiny yellow pilot-light within was glowing steadily. He reholstered the weapon and left the washroom, feeling clean and refreshed now that he wore his own identity again.

THE PILOT was lounging in his cabin; the ship was on hyperdrive, now, and no human hand could serve any purpose in guiding it. The silent ultronic generators would bring the ship unerringly through the nothingness of hyperspace; the pilot's job was strictly that of emergency standby, once the ship had entered warp.

Navarre returned to his own cabin, switched off the visual projector on his communicator, and buzzed the pilot. There was a pause; then the screen lit, and Navarre saw the man, dressed in off-duty fatigues, trying to conceal a look of sour impatience.

"Yes, Ambassador?"

"Pilot, are you busy just now? I'd like you to come to my cabin for a moment if you're not."

The pilot's square-cut blue face showed a trace of annoyance, but he said evenly, "Of course, Ambassador. I'll be right there. Is anything wrong?"

"Not exactly," Navarre said.

A moment later the annunciator-light atop his door flashed briefly. Navarre depressed the door-control and the door pivoted inward and away. The pilot stood there, in the corridor just outside.

"You called me, Ambassa-

dor? I—*who are you?*"

Navarre's hand tightened on the butt of his blaster. "Hal-lam Navarre is my name."

"You're—you're an Earth-man," the pilot said, backing away. "What happened to the Ambassador? How did you get aboard the ship? What are you going to do?"

"Much too many questions for one man to answer," Navarre returned lightly. "The Ambassador, I regret to inform you, is dead. And I fear I'll need the use of your ship."

The Kariadi was wobbly-legged with fear. He half-fell into Navarre's cabin, but Navarre, suspecting a trick, moved forward swiftly, caught the man by the throat, and propped him up against the left-hand bulkhead.

"What are you going to do to me?"

"Put you to sleep and drop you overboard in the escape capsule," Navarre told him. "And then I'll pursue a journey of my own."

He drew a dark violet ampoule of perredrin from his jacket pocket and flicked the safety off the spraypoint with his thumb. Quickly he touched the tip of the ampoule to the man's arm and squeezed; the subsonic spray forced ten cubic centimeters of narcotic liquid into the pilot's blood-

stream instantly. He turned gray-faced and crumpled forward within three heartbeats; Navarre caught him and slung him over one shoulder. The pilot's mouth hung slackly open, and his chest rose and fell in a steady, slow rhythm, one breath-intake every fifteen seconds.

The escape capsule—there were two of them aboard the ship—was situated aft, just above the drive compartment, in a womblike alcove of its own. It was a miniature spaceship, eleven feet long, equipped with its own precision-made drive unit. Navarre stuffed the slumbering Kariadi in head-first, making sure he was caught securely in the foam webwork that guarded against landing shock, and peered at the navigating dial.

For the convenience of laymen who might need to use the escape capsules in a hurry and had no notion of how to astrogate, the engineers of Kariadi had developed a shortcut; a number of possible orbits were pre-plotted, and the computer was equipped to select the most effective one and fit it to whatever destination the escaping passenger chose.

Navarre tapped out *Kariadi* on the dial, and the computer

unit signaled acknowledgment and began clicking out the instructions for the drive. Navarre stepped back, slammed shut the automatically-locking hood of the capsule, and yanked down on the release-lever.

The capsule quivered momentarily in its moorings; then the ship's cybernetic governor responded to the impulse and cut off the magnetic field that held the capsule in place. Slowly, it glided down the passageway toward the outer skin of the ship. Photonic relays opened an airlock for it as it approached; Navarre watched the capsule with its sleeping voyager vanish through the airlock and out of the ship, bound on an orbit of its own.

Some days later, the pilot would be awakened by a gentle bump and would discover he had made a perfect landing somewhere on Kariadi.

Navarre turned away and headed forward to the ship's control center. Altering the ship's course was not so simple as merely punching out a destination on an escape capsule's computer.

He dropped into what had been the pilot's chair, and, lifting stylus and slide-rule, began determining the quickest orbit to the planet of Morank.

MORANK was the fourth world of a red supergiant sun eight light-years from Kariad, ten light-years from Jorus. Morank itself was a large, well-populated world, a busy commercial center, and, in the old days of the Starkings' League, Morank had fought a bitter three-cornered struggle with Jorus and Kariad for trade rights in their cluster.

That had been more than five hundred years before. The Starkings' League had endured ten thousand years, but it was dying, and its component worlds were thrusting up their own claims for independence. Morank, Jorus, Kariad—the three most powerful worlds of their cluster, the richest, the best-situated—they were foremost in the revolt against the powerless Starkings.

Still nominally federated into the League, the three worlds jockeyed for position like racing animals readying for a break from the post. After two hundred years, the break finally came—when Joroiran I and his Earthman cohort Voight Navarre rebelled from the dying League and declared the independence of the Jorus system. Morank had come right after, and then Kariad.

Three hundred years—but

for the last hundred of them, an uneasy friendship had existed among the three planets, each watching the other two warily, none making any overt move toward extending its powers.

Navarre smiled. An alliance between Jorus and Kariad was sure to open some eyes on Morank.

His little ship blinked back into space within landing distance of the planet. In the sky the vast bulk of Morank's feeble red sun Draximoor spread like an untidy octopus, tendrils of flame extending in all directions. Navarre fed the landing coordinates into the computer. The ship plunged planetward.

This is Earth's last chance, he thought. If Morank allows itself to be pushed in the right direction, we may yet survive. If not, there'll be no withstanding the combined fleets.

A landing-field loomed below. His radio sputtered and came to life; a voice spoke, in the crisp syllables of the local lingua spacia.

"This is Central Traffic Control speaking from the city of Ogyglan. If you intend to make a landing on Morank territory, please respond."

Navarre flashed the answering signal. A moment later there came the okay, and with

it was relayed a set of field coordinates, supplementing those he had already computed. He punched them into his tape and sat back, awaiting the landing.

CHAPTER V

THE GRAND SPACEPORT at Ogyglan was a dazzling sight: to offset the dimness of the vast pale red sun, batteries of photoflood illuminoscreens were ranked along the area-way that led from the spaceport buildings to the landing field itself. To Navarre, it seemed as if the entire planet glowed, but it was a muted radiance that brightened without interfering with vision.

Three burly chisel-faced Morankimar waited for him as he clambered down the catwalk of his spaceship and strode across the field. The Morankimar were humanoid aliens, cut to the general biological pattern of the humanoid but approximating it not quite so closely as did the Jorans and the Kariadi; they were heavy-set creatures nearly as broad as they were wide, with dishlike oval eyes set lemurlike in independent orbital sockets, rotating with utter disregard for each other. Their skins were coarse-grained and pebbly, a dark muddy

yellow in color and unpleasant of texture. Fleshy protuberances dangled beard-fashion from their extremely sharp chins. They were sturdy, durable, long-lived creatures, quick-witted and strong.

As Navarre approached them, he observed much anguished rotating of eyes. Finally the foremost of the aliens, a bleak-visaged oldster whose skin had faded to chartreuse, rumbled in *lingua spacia*, "Your ship bears royal arms of Kariad. Are you perhaps the Oligocrat's Earthman?"

"Hardly," Navarre replied, in Joran. He understood the Morankimar tongue, but it was a jawbreaking agglutinating language for which he had little fondness; only a life-long speaker of it could hope to handle its irregularities. "I'm Hallam Navarre, formerly Earthman to the Court of Overlord Joroiran of Jorus. I've come to Morank bearing an important message for the Polisarch."

"A message from Joroiran?" asked the alien, in a thickly-accented version of Joran.

"No," said Navarre. "A message *about* Joroiran. And about Oligocrat Marhaill. And I think the Polisarch would be interested in what I have to say."



THEY DROVE at a steady clip through the enormous metropolis of Ogyglan toward the local residence of the Polisarch. Ogyglan was an attractive city, Navarre discovered; its buildings had been planned with care, with superbly-engineered symmetry, and their color-spectrum had obviously been selected thoughtfully. The buildings were deep blue edged with light orange, scarlet tinged with gentle purple, ochre-stained green, delicate browns, striking off-blacks. The architecture tended toward the floating skylon school; the buildings were airy and graceful, linked by a skyborne network of spidery flexibridges. But not even the gaiety of the Morankimar city helped to lift the uneasy tension that gripped him. At this moment Earth seemed terribly vulnerable—and perhaps even now Kausirn and Marhaill were concluding a joint agreement to destroy the infant settlement.

At length they came to a building that seemed to have no foundation; it drifted ten feet above the ground, terminating in a smooth glassy undersurface, mirror-bright, jet-black. The building itself was a square untapering tower, a

solid block of masonry.

"This is the residence of the Polisarch," he was told.

Navarre looked upward at the shining rectangle that hovered before him. Sleek, handsome, its sides icy blue and gleaming, it was a handsome sight.

"What holds it up?"

"A hundred million cubic feet of graviton repulsors. The Polisarch must never touch Morankimar soil—nor may his residence."

Navarre nodded. It was a fact he had forgotten.

A drawbridge descended from the lip of the building and they rose, the bridge rising behind them and tucking itself invisibly into place. Navarre found himself in a wide cream-colored marble anteroom. The floor was a solid slab of milky obsidian.

Two Morankimar clad in violet robes appeared from a concealed alcove and requested Navarre's blaster. He handed it over, and also, upon request, the slim curved blade beneath his vest. The Palace guards evidently had monitored him by fluoroscreen.

Finally he was ushered into a vestibule that opened on an extensive drape-hung hall. A figure waited at the far end.

"Is that the Polisarch?" he asked his guides.

"His Secretary of State," came the soft reply. "You must discuss your business with him first. If he sees fit, he will admit you to the presence of the Polisarch."

IT TOOK perhaps fifteen minutes of genteel argument before the Secretary of State was willing to agree that Navarre's business was worth putting before the Polisarch. The Secretary was a witty and elegant man, and he found much amusement in the paradox that complicated the problem: it was his task to decide whether a given matter was important enough to merit the Polisarch's attention, and yet he was being told that this particular matter was too important for his own ears! But at length he consented to the interview.

Navarre felt a curious tremor of anticipation as he crossed the threshold of the Grand Throneroom—not only because the fate of Earth hung on his powers of persuasion at this interview, but because the Morankimar Polisarch was one of the legendary figures of the galaxy.

Rel Dominoor was his name, and he had held sway a hundred and eight years, having taken the throne during the

reign of Joroiran IV. During his years on Jorus Navarre had learned to his sorrow the strength of this man; nearly every attempt of his to plant a network of spies on Morank had been frustrated, and in the end he had abandoned hope of monitoring Morankimar activities the way he did those of Kariad and other worlds of the cluster. Dominoor simply was too shrewd.

Navarre bowed deeply at the entrance to the throneroom; a dry deep voice said, "You may rise," and the Earthman rose, looking about for the Polisarch in some surprise. He found him, finally—eight feet above his head, a withered little figure clad in glistening querlon sheaths, sitting crosslegged on nothing in the air. The floor of the throneroom, Navarre realized in astonishment, must be one gigantic graviton-repulsor plate, and the Polisarch's clothes equipped with the necessary resistive coils.

Navarre took three hesitant steps inward and the Polisarch drifted downward until his crossed feet were but three feet off the ground and his eyes level with Navarre's. Rel Dominoor was a commanding sight, even in his extreme old age. His platterlike eyes had nothing fishlike about them;

both were focussed sharply on Navarre. His skin looked paper-thin, paper-dry; tiny beads of spittle flecked his lipless mouth and the fleshy barbels that dangled from his chin. His bare pale feet were limp and tiny; Navarre stared involuntarily at the atrophied members.

"Yes," the Polisarch said as if in answer. "The law compels me to remain aloft. I last walked on solid ground more than a century ago. You're Navarre, Joroiran's man?"

"I was. It's two years since I last served the Overlord."

The Polisarch nodded. "Many years ago I had an Earthman for an adviser—one Mirro Winstin. He served me well. But we grew tired of each other, and he moved on to Kariad. I think his daughter serves Marhaill now."

"She did. She has recently left him."

One of the Polisarch's eyes swiveled disconcertingly upward. "You Earthmen exchange loyalties as you would exchange greetings. I suppose she now serves Joroiran, and you Marhaill? Or have you come to sell your services to me, Navarre? I stand in little need of new advisers now—though I'm always willing to receive information."

The Polisarch's jewel-

studded hand swept idly across his chest, gently touching a control; he began to rise, moving upward some eight feet. Navarre craned his neck, squinted up at the ruler, and said, "I bring you information, but there's a price for it."

Dominoor scowled expressively. "Earthmen haggle well. Let's hear the price, first; the information may come after, if I care to have it."

"Very well. The price is a fleet of Morankimar battleships: twelve of them, fully armed and manned, to be placed entirely under my command with no restrictions whatever as to their use."

Abruptly the Polisarch touched his controls again and dropped rapidly until he was at Navarre's level once again. His expression was grave, almost fierce. "I had heard Earthmen were bold, but boldness carried too far becomes insolence." There was no anger in his voice, merely a sort of didactic peevishness. "You will sell your information for a mere twelve battleships, eh? I could flay you and get it for a less dear outlay."

Navarre met his gaze unflinchingly. "You *could* flay me. But then you'd be faced with solving the problem yourself. I offer a speedy and simply resolution. Your own

spies will tell you what I have to tell you, soon enough—but that will hardly handle the situation adequately.”

Dominoor smiled slowly. “I could like you, Earthman. Twelve battleships, eh? All right. The terms are met. Now tell me what you came here to tell me, and see if you can save your skin from the hand of the flayer.”

“Very well,” Navarre said. “Briefly, it’s this: Jorus and Kariad plan to form an alliance. The balance of power in this cluster will be upset.”

The Polisarch’s pale, almost white skin began to deepen in color, passing through several gradations of chartreuse and becoming finally an angry lemon-color that faded rapidly as the flood-tide of excitement receded. Navarre waited patiently; he saw that his words had made their effect. Victory was almost in his grasp now.

Finally Dominoor said, “Do you have proof?”

“My word as an Earthman is all I can offer.”

“Hmm. Let that pass, then. Tell me: why is this alliance coming about?”

Navarre took a deep breath. It was useless to lie to the old Polisarch; Rel Dominoor was too wise, too keen-witted, to be fooled easily. Choosing his words with care, Navarre said,

“There is a settlement on Earth. Ten thousand Earthmen live there.”

“I know.”

Navarre smiled. “Morank has its spies too, then.”

“We have sharp ears here,” said the Polisarch. “But continue.”

“These ten thousand of Earth desire nothing but peaceful existence. But Kausirn of Vega, the Overlord Joroiran’s adviser, fears them. He thinks Earth is much stronger than it actually is. He is afraid to send a Joran fleet against Earth unaided. Hence his pact with Marhaill; together Jorus and Kariad will dispatch fleets to crush ten thousand unarmed Earthmen.”

“I see the picture,” Dominoor said. “Mutual deception, leading to an alliance of cowards. Go on.”

“Naturally Earth will be destroyed by the fleet—but the link between Jorus and Kariad will have been forged. This Kausirn is unscrupulous. And Marhaill is a weak man. Before too many months have passed, you’ll see Jorus and Kariad under one rule.”

“This would violate a treaty even older than me,” Dominoor mused. “The three worlds are to remain separate and unallied, perpetually out-

stretched at the vertices of a triangle. This to insure safety in our galaxy. An alliance of this sort would collapse the triangle. It would break the treaty."

"Treaties are scraps of paper, my lord."

"So they are. But important scraps. We would have to go to war to protect our rights. It would be painful for all of us. Our cities might be destroyed." The thick barbels at his chin had twined eerily about each other; Navarre stared, fascinated.

"War between Morank and the allied worlds could be avoided," Navarre said.

"By giving you twelve of our ships?"

"Yes. My plan is this: your ships shall be unmarked, unidentified in every way. No one will know they originate on Morank. I'll undertake to repel the Jorus-Kariad fleet that is converging on Earth, driving them off in such a way that they think Earth is incalculably powerful. With luck, it'll smash the Jorus-Kariad axis. It'll incidentally save Earth. But also Morank will be untouched by war."

The Polisarch was smiling again.

"At worst, it would cost me twelve ships. Such a loss I could bear, if needful. At best,

I avoid a war in this cluster."

"You agree to the terms, then?"

"I think so," the Polisarch said. "Subject to a certain degree of preliminary checking by my informants, of course. I don't hand over twelve ships with quite this much ease, friend Earthman."

"Naturally not."

"And one further point seems to be being overlooked," Dominoor added.

"Which is?"

"That Earth once again exists," said the Polisarch. "You very speedily glossed over that fact."

Navarre felt chilled. Had this all been some callous cat-and-mouse game on the part of the shrewd Morankimar ruler?

"There are but ten thousand on Earth," Navarre said. "They are harmless."

"They are harmless *now*," Dominoor said crisply. "In ten generations, though—? This Kausirn is no fool. He knows the time to strike at Earth is now, before it is too late. Otherwise there will be no stopping them, when they number in the billions again."

Navarre moistened his lips. *How*, he asked himself, *could I have expected Dominoor to fall for such a transparent offer as mine?*

"We offer no threat to the

galaxy's peace, Your Grace," Navarre said hesitantly.

"This is the first lie you've told since entering my chamber. You *do* threaten the galaxy. It's a built-in consequence of allowing Earth to return to power. But," he added mildly, "that will be in ten generations. Perhaps I will be dead by then. We do not live forever, even hovering in air as I do."

Navarre blinked uncertainly. "Does the agreement still stand, then?"

"The agreement stands. The twelve ships are yours. Take them, Navarre—and use them well. Keep Jorus and Kariad apart. Keep war from touching Morank. Save your Earthmen from destruction. And, perhaps, thank an old man who has become a coward."

Navarre flushed. "Your Grace—"

"Don't contradict me. You see me humbled before you, Earthman. I give you the ships; play your little ruse. I want only to die in peace. Let those who follow after worry about checking the rising tide that will pour forth from Earth. I worry only about today; at my age, tomorrow is too distant."

There was nothing Navarre could say. He had achieved his goal; at least, he had not

deceived Dominoor. The old man knew perfectly well what the situation was.

The Polisarch drifted, feather-light, across the room and touched one gnarled finger to a protruding stud. Moments later, the Secretary of State appeared, looking questioningly at Navarre.

"Give this man a suite in the Palace," Dominoor said. "He'll stay here a while. When he's settled down, come back: I have some special instructions for you. You might also summon Admiral Yeeg of the Grand Fleet; he enters into this as well."

The Secretary of State nodded, obviously puzzled.

Navarre dropped to his knees gratefully. "Your Grace, your decision is a noble one, generous and good."

"Another lie, Navarre. I acted out of the most petty self-interest, and you know it. But I appreciate your flattery, none the less; in a century's time, one grows to tolerate courtier's oil." To the Secretary of State the Polisarch said, "Show him to his rooms."

The last thing Navarre heard as he left the Polisarch's chamber was a deep bitter sigh—the sigh of a weary ruler who knew he had sold his galaxy's future to purchase a moment's peace.

THERE WERE fifty ships in the armada: fifty great golden-hulled vessels, sleek and powerful, advancing at a steady pace across the galaxy. The flagship was a mighty gleaming ship that led the pack, a shark among sharks, a giant battleship of the realm of Jorus. The armada radiated confidence. They seemed to be saying, *Here we are, twenty-five ships of Jorus and twenty-five of Kariad, crossing the universe to wipe out once and for all the pestilence of Earthmen.*

Hallam Navarre sat in his own flagship, a vessel that once had borne the name *Pride of Kariad* but now carried no designation whatever. He watched the steady advance of the monstrous alien armada.

Fifty ships, he thought. Against twenty-two.

But we know how many they have. They can't measure our numbers.

He sat poised behind his viewscreens, biding his time, thinking, waiting. They were fifty thousand light-years from Earth, now, and he had no intention of letting Kausirn's fleet come any closer than five thousand. Once even one ship eluded the inner line

of defense and got through to Earth—

Helna appeared and slipped into the seat next to him. She had let her hair grow once again; it was only an inch or two long at its longest, but was a bright auburn in color, giving promise of greater loveliness to come.

She said, "It'll all be decided now, won't it? All the thousand of years of planning, ever since the Chalice was sealed and the sleepers left?"

Navarre nodded tightly. Thousands of years of planning had all devolved down on this one day, on these twenty-two ships, ultimately on the mind of one man. He stared at his unquivering hands. He was calm, now; so much was at stake that his mind failed to encompass it, and apprehension was impossible.

He jacked in the main communication line and studied the deployment of his twenty-two ships.

Four of them remained in close orbit around Earth, in contact with each other, ready to move rapidly when needed. He hoped they would not be needed; they were the last line of defense, the desperation blockaders, and it would be dark indeed if they were called into play.

The smaller colony on Pro-

cyon had two ships guarding it.

Ten more were deployed at the farthest edges of the sphere of conflict, forming a border for the coming battle. That was his second line of defense. And four of these were mere shells, rushed to completion on Earth.

Six ships formed a solid phalanx ten light-years across, turned outward toward the advancing combined armada. Navarre's flagship was among this group. These would make the initial attack.

The twelve ships given him by the Polisarch had been carefully recoated; their hulls no longer glowed in Morankimar colors, but were an anonymous gray. Each of the ships had a complement of Earthmen aboard, aiding the Morankimar captain. The aliens knew only that they were to take orders from the Earthmen; the Polisarch had made that amply clear in his instructions to the Grand Admiral.

It might work, he thought. If not, well, it had been a game try—and perhaps there might be another Chalice on some other world. Earth was not that easily defeated, he told himself.

Time was drawing near. All the efforts, all the countless

schemes, all Navarre's many identities and many journeys, converged into one *now*.

He opened the all-fleet communicator and waited a moment until all twenty-one bulbs at the side of the central monitorboard had lit.

Then, in a quiet voice, he said, "Attention, Unit A—low-intensity defense screens are to be replaced with full screens immediately. Unit B—stand by until called into action as previously instructed. Unit C—remain at your posts in orbit round the planets, and under no circumstances leave formation. Unit D stand by for emergency use.

"The battle is about to begin."

THERE WAS a moment of silence. Quickly Navarre reached up to shut off the all-fleet communicator; what he had to say now, was directed at the armada. He signalled for a wide-beam subspace hookup.

"All right," he muttered. "Now it starts."

He drew the microphone toward him and said, in a ringing voice, "Attention invaders! Attention invaders! This is Hallam Navarre, Admiral of the Grand Fleet of Earth. Come in, invader flagship!"

He repeated the message

three times each in Joran and Kariadi. Then he sat back, staring at the complex network of machinery that was the communicator panel, waiting for some reply.

Less than a thousand light-years separated the two fleets. The time-lag should have been virtually nil. But a minute went by, and another, with no response. Navarre grew cold; were they simply going to ignore him and move right on into their midst?

But after four minutes the speaker crackled into life. "This is Flagship calling Admiral Navarre." The inflection was savagely sardonic. "Come in, Admiral Navarre. What do you want?"

Navarre's heart leaped. He hadn't expected *him* to be commanding the armada in person!

"Kausirn?"

"Indeed. What troubles you, Navarre?"

"You infringe on Terran domains, Kausirn. State the purpose of your invasion."

"I don't think we need to explain to you, Navarre. The Terran Empire passed out of existence thirty thousand years before; you have no claim to a domain as such. And we're here to see that no ghosts walk the starways."

"An invasion fleet?"

"Call it that, if you will."

"Very well," Navarre said sharply. "In that case, I call on you to surrender or be destroyed. The full might of the Grand Fleet of Earth is waiting to hurl you back to your own system."

Kausirn laughed harshly. "The full might! Six stolen ships! Six against fifty! You deceived me once, Ambassador Domell—you won't a second time!"

A moment later a bright energy flare licked out across space toward the Terran flagship. Navarre's screens easily deflected the thrust.

"I warn you, Kausirn. Your fleet is outnumbered six to one. Terra's resources are greater than you could have dreamed. Will you surrender?"

"Ridiculous!" But there seemed to be false bravado in Kausirn's outburst; he sounded uncertain.

"We of Earth hate unnecessary bloodshed," Navarre said. "I call upon the captains of the invading fleet to head their ships back to home. Kausirn is an alien; he hardly cares how many Joran or Kariadi lives he throws away for nothing."

"Don't listen!" came the Vegan's shout over the phones. "He's bluffing! He *has*

to be bluffing!" It sounded a little panicky.

"All right," Navarre said. "Here we come."

HE GAVE the signal, and the battle that had been planned so long swung into existence. The six ships that comprised his fighting wedge moved forward, charging across hyperspace toward the evenly spaced invading fleet.

"You see!" Kausirn shouted triumphantly. "They have but six ships! We can crush them!"

Navarre's ship shook as the first heavy barrage crashed into it; the screens deflected the energy and a bright blue nimbus sprang into being around the ship as the overload was dissipated.

Six ships against fifty—but six rebuilt ships, six ships so laden with defense screens that they were no faster than snails. They moved steadily into the heart of the armada, shaking off the alien barrage and counterattacking with thrusts of their own. They were unstoppable, those six ships—but difficult to maneuver, slow to return fire. In time, the alien fleet could wear down their screens by constant assault, and that would end the battle.

"Six outmoded crawlers," Kausirn exulted. "And you ask us to surrender!"

"The offer still goes," Navarre said, and gave the signal for the second third of the fleet to enter the fray.

They came down from six directions at once, their heavy-cycle guns spouting flame. They converged on the Joran-Kariadi fleet, six light Morankimar vessels equipped for massive offensive thrusts. The invaders were caught unawares; four Joran ships crumbled and died in the first shock of the unexpected attack.

Kausirn was silent. Navarre knew, or hoped he knew, what the Vegan was thinking: *I had expected only six defending ships. If the Earthmen have six more, how many additional ones might they have?*

The radar screen was crisscrossed with light. Navarre's original six ploughed steadily forward, drawing the heaviest fire of the aliens and controlling it easily, while the six new ships plunged and swerved in daring leaps, weaving in and out of the alien lines so fast they could not be counted.

Navarre gave another signal. And suddenly three of his offensive ships leaped from view, blanked out like extinguished candles, and reappear-

ed at the far end of the battlefield. They drove downward from their new angle of attack, while the remaining trio likewise jumped out of warp and back in again. Navarre picked up curses coming from the harassed aliens.

Three more ships had perished. The odds were narrowing — forty-three against eighteen, now. And the aliens were definitely bewildered.

The tactic was unheard-of: it was suicide to leave and re-enter hyperspace in an area barely a thousand light-years on a side. There was the ever-present consideration that one ship might re-materialize in an area already occupied; the detonation would be awesome.

There was always the chance. But Navarre had computed it, and the chance was infinitesimal. Like leaping silver-bellied fish his ships flicked in and out of space-time. The aliens moved in confused circles now.

Flick!

Two astonished Kariadi vessels thundered headlong into each other to avoid a Terran vessel that had appeared less than a light-minute away from them. The proximity strained the framework of hyperspace; they were sucked downward into a wild vortex, out of control.

Flick!

Flick!

Navarre's board showed eleven invader losses already, and not one Terran ship touched. He grinned cheerfully as one of the six original attackers speared through the screens of a harassed Joran destroyer and sent it reeling apart.

"Kausirn? Are you convinced?"

No answer came this time.

Navarre frowned speculatively. So far the battle was going all their way; but eventually the shattered invader lines would re-group, eventually they would realize that only twelve ships opposed them instead of hundreds.

He gave one final signal. Suddenly, four more Terran ships warped into the area.

They were dummies, the half-finished ships built on Earth, and manned by skeleton crews. They carried no arms, only rudimentary defense-screens; Navarre had ordered them held in check for just this moment. And here they were.

At the same time the six warp-jumping ships stabilized themselves. Now sixteen Terran ships menaced the alien fleet at once, and Kausirn had no way of telling how many more lurked in hidden reaches.

The armada milled hesitantly, ships changing course almost at random.

Navarre's ships formed into a tight wheel and spun round the confused aliens. He opened the communicator wide and said, "We have already destroyed thirteen of your number at no cost to ourselves. Will you surrender now, or do we have to pick you all off one by one. Speak up, Kausirn!"

Garbled noise came from the communicator—sure sign that more than one ship's captain was trying to speak. Navarre sensed indecision; he flashed one last-ditch signal along his communication channel, ordering the six defensive ships to leave their bases and join the fray.

He heard Kausirn's cold steely voice saying, "No! He's bluffing us! He *has* to be!"

The six last ships winked into being, spitting death. The subradio phones brought over an agonized scream.

The sky was full of ships, now — twenty-two Terran ships, of which four were mere shells and six more were so weighted with defense-screens that they were virtually useless on offense.

"Kausirn? Do we have to bring out the *real* fleet now?"

No response.

"Kausirn?"

A new voice said, suddenly, "The Vegan is dead. This is Admiral Garsignol of Kariad. By virtue of the authority vested in me by Oligocrat Marhaill, I surrender the eighteen surviving Kariadi ships."

A moment later another voice broke in, speaking in Joran. The nineteen Joran ships were likewise surrendering. Resistance was futile.

IT WAS OVER at last, Navarre thought, as he stared from the window of his office in the city of Phoenix, on Earth, looking outward at the thirty-seven alien vessels the battle had yielded.

Victory was sweet.

Earth now had forty-three ships of first-class tonnage, plus four more half-finished ones, and twelve more belonging to the Polisarch of Morank. The Polisarch would never miss his ships, he thought. And Earth needed them.

Fifty-nine ships. That comprised a major armada in itself; hardly a hundred worlds in the galaxy could muster fleets of such size. And this was only the beginning, he thought.

He would be merciful to

Marhaill and Joroiran; the worlds of Jorus and Kariad were at his pleasure now, virtually shipless as they were. He would grant them their lives—as vassals of Earth. There would be annual tithes, of course.

Naturally, the balance of power in the cluster could not be allowed to remain even—so Morank, too, would need to be brought under Terran sway. But that could wait, Na-

varre thought, at least until the old Polisarch died. He owed him that much.

Three worlds. It was beginning.

Earth herself numbered barely twelve thousand, now. But time would remedy that. The ancient legend had spoken truth: the Chalice held the key to immortal life. Earth, reborn phoenix-like from its own ashes, had once again won its place in the roll of worlds.



ADVENTURES IN THE FUTURE

As we've mentioned before, Robert Silverberg has been unanimously acclaimed one of the very best of the "regular" writers in SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURES. And as everyone knows who has read much of his work, he is at his brilliant best in longer novels. Thus it is doubly good news that the next SFA will contain *Shadow on the Stars*, a brand-new, complete book-length novel (it'll take up almost the entire issue all by itself) by Robert Silverberg.

Shadow on the Stars is a tightly-knit, complexly-plotted story of Earth in the vastly distant future, seen through the eyes of a human with Earthly heritage who has never been there before. He's there to obtain help, because his own world is about to be over-run by the savagely alien Klodni—but Earth has no help to give. There are intrigues and counter-intrigues, wheels within wheels and battles within battles, and it races to a startling climax unlike any you've ever read before.

This giant-size novel (a \$3.00 value if ever there was one) will be in the April SFA, on sale February 6, along with short stories and our regular departments.

Destination Unknown

by CHRISTOPHER ANVIL

*The Kid had one fixed and furious ambition:
to be the man who killed Freeman Zellinger.
And no one on the asteroid could stop him!*

Illustrated by John Schoenherr

JIM CARNEY glanced up from the clacking teleprinter as the door slid back.

The Kid dropped into the room with a faint smile on his face. He reached back with his left hand and slid the door shut behind him.

"Hello, Carney," he said softly.

Carney took a slow even breath, and hunched slightly. The pencil gun slid down into his hand.

The Kid smiled.

"I'd like a little information, Carney."

Carney smiled back coldly. As communications technician

on a Service-M, a tunneled-out asteroid hauled onto the space lanes for a supply depot, Carney could give no information without losing his job.

"Whatever you want," he said evenly, "I don't know it."

"When's Freeman Zellinger coming through?"

"I can't tell you when or if."

The Kid let the smile leave his face.

"When?"

Carney didn't answer. He kept his eyes on the Kid's hands.

The Kid's step was almost pretty as he walked across the room. His right hand drew a

silky white handkerchief from his pocket. His voice was a rising falsetto.

"When - does - Freeman - Zellinger - come - through - Carney?"

Carney squeezed the stud on the pencil gun. A bright thin beam shot out in front of the Kid.

"You must want to fight," said the Kid. He took a step forward.

Carney kept his hand perfectly steady. A little more pressure on the stud and he would make himself a murderer. A little less pressure and the Kid would decide he was scared.

The Kid looked him squarely in the eyes.

"You like Freeman Zellinger?"

"Who doesn't?"

The Kid smiled.

"I like him, too," said the Kid. "I think of all those lists he's got. I'm going to get them, Carney. I'm going to be the guy that killed Freeman Zellinger."

The Kid smiled and stepped back. He walked to the door and slid it open. He looked at Carney.

"Thanks. I didn't know for sure he was coming through. But the way you act, now I know."

The Kid reached up, grip-

ped the hall web, and pulled himself outside. Floating in the hall, he gave Carney a long, considering look. Then he gave a hard yank on the web and was gone.

CARNEY took a deep breath, crossed the room and slid the door shut. He went back to the teleprinter. He sorted messages till Gus Stevens came on shift, half an hour later.

Gus was short and stocky, with a thick mop of graying black hair.

"You look restrained," said Gus.

"The Kid was just in here."

"Oh. What did he do this time?"

"He wanted a little information."

"About what?"

"Look in the local tape file. Passenger list for the *City of Dallas*, refueling here about dinner time."

Gus thumbed through a number of message tapes. His eyes widened suddenly and he whistled.

"Freeman Zellinger!" Gus grinned. "Well. *Well*. Say, which way is the Kid's turret from here?"

Carney frowned, then pointed toward a corner of the room.

Gus raised his fingers to his



lips and tossed a kiss toward the same corner.

"Goodbye, Kid," said Gus cheerfully.

"Goodbye, Zellinger," said Jim.

"Oh, come on. The Zell's a

legend. The Kid will go out of here in deep storage."

"It takes time to get to be a legend," said Jim.

"You mean Zellinger's too old?"

"He was middle-aged when

I was just a little kid.”
“He’s put a lot of punks and bullies under the ground since then.”

“Maybe, but look where he’s going.”

Gus picked up the tape and frowned.

“Terra. So what?”

“He was born on Terra.”

“Oh,” Gus lowered the tape. “You mean he wants to spend his last few years in peace, back on the home planet. But, what’s the difference? Somebody could give him the challenge there as well as anywhere.”

“Oh, no, they couldn’t,” said Jim. “Anyone who tries that on Terra ends up behind three feet of concrete and steel. If Zellinger gets there, he can spend the rest of his life in peace.”

Gus looked at the tape again, and shook his head.

“Well,” he said, “I don’t know. It’s too bad. He’s one of the good ones, too. I mean, he doesn’t throw his weight around. . . . What the hell,” Gus glared. “I still bet on the Zell.”

“Yeah,” said Jim.

“Go on, get out,” said Gus. “If the Kid comes back here, I’ll tell him Zellinger’s coming through next week. Go on. Beat it. It’s my shift. Damn it, anyway.”

JIM WENT to the door, slid it open, reached up and grasped the smooth metal strands of the web. He tugged hard, and he was floating in the null-gravity of the hall. He looked back at Gus. Gus was looking gloomily at the message tape. Jim closed the door, pulled hard on the net, and shot down the hallway. He gave a quick tug to send himself flying down a cross corridor, stopped at a door, opened it, and floated into his room. He set his feet carefully on the floor, switched on the gravity, and shut the door.

There was a faint rustle of cloth behind him.

“Hello, Carney,” said the Kid’s soft voice.

Jim turned and the rippling silky cloth snapped up. His face felt as if a swarm of bees had stung him.

The Kid’s voice was a mincing falsetto. “When’s-Free-man - Zellinger - coming - through-Carney?”

“I don’t know.”

“Come on!”

The cloth snapped up and back. It stung his cheek, his neck, his forehead.

“You want eyes to see with? When’s - Freeman - Zellinger - coming-through-Carney?”

The outlines of the room wavered as if seen under wa-

ter. Carney dove for the Kid and something hit him hard in the face. There was a bright explosion, then blackness.

Carney felt the hard floor under him. A bright beam was hanging in front of his face, going forward and back, forward and back, like the forked tongue flicking out of the mouth of a snake.

"When's - Freeman - Zellin - ger-coming-through-Carney?"

"Come on! You want me to leave you some teeth to eat with? You want some bones left to stand with?"

The beam vanished. He felt himself gripped by the collar. Something smashed across his face.

"When?"

Loose-lipped, Carney spat blood and clinking pieces of tooth. He felt weak and sick. But inside himself he felt a growing hardness.

"Three a.m. tomorrow," he said, his voice shaking with tension, and added silently, *Jupiter time*.

"Three a.m.," said the Kid, musing. "Thank you, Jim boy. You could have saved yourself some trouble." He went out.

Carney pulled himself to his feet and stood still till the room came into focus. He walked on trembling legs to the door and locked it. He went to the bottom drawer of

his desk, pulled it out, and unstrapped a little, old-fashioned .22 revolver. He took out the shorts he used for target practice, and replaced them with explosive gougers. He looked at the gun for a long while, shook his head, and got up. He put the gun in his pocket and went to the infirmary.

The nurse on duty didn't think he should go to dinner. Jim talked to her till at last she understood. When he left, his right arm, face, neck, and part of his chest were bandaged. In his right hand, a single thin strip of gauze across its muzzle, was the gun.

THE KID was already at the table. He picked up three pieces of bread from a platter. The ration was one piece for a person. Carney looked around the room, then sat down. The Kid looked up.

"Is that you, Carney?" said the Kid.

"It's me," said Carney.

The Kid grinned, then suddenly looked serious.

"Say," said the Kid, "I left you some teeth to chew with, didn't I, Carn?"

"A few," said Carney.

The Kid smiled and looked relieved.

"That's good. Just don't get

in my way, and I can be easy to get along with." The Kid looked around the table. "Can't I?" he said.

Most of the men acted as if they hadn't heard. One or two miserably nodded their heads and looked away.

"If you and me come up against each other," said the Kid cheerfully, "*you* give way. That's all there is to it." He stuffed a forkful of food in his mouth.

A lull came over the dining room. Jim Carney looked up. The station chief walked in, smiling, with several men, one a rather slender, well-knit man of slightly above average height. Carney recognized him instantly, though his hair was nearly white instead of the steel gray of his pictures.

The Kid disinterestedly glanced up and down, without stopping the tempo of his eating.

The station chief stopped at the head table, smiled, and said clearly, "Gentlemen—"

Everyone looked up.

"Men," said the station chief, "we have an unusual honor tonight. After tonight, you may say you have shared supper with Freeman Zellinger, who is our guest."

There was a momentary silence. Freeman Zellinger looked faintly surprised, then

smiled pleasantly and started to sit down.

Across the table, the Kid's eyes darted back and forth from Zellinger to Carney.

"Speech!" someone shouted.

Zellinger smiled. In a calm, controlled voice that had a trace of an old man's rumble, he said, "It is a pleasure to dine with you. And it is a great pleasure to be here, so close to home."

There were cheers and clapping. Zellinger smiled and sat down.

The Kid got up. He walked down the aisle between the tables to the table where Freeman Zellinger sat. He took hold of two men sitting across from Zellinger, slewed them around in their chairs, and jerked his thumb over his shoulder. They got up, white-faced, and left. The Kid sat down.

JIM CARNEY was on his feet, walking slowly to the table. He pulled out the chair next to the Kid and sat down, jostling him roughly.

Zellinger's eyes, Jim could see, were a clear, calm gray. Zellinger looked at Jim briefly, and it seemed to Jim that something moved deep in the back of his eyes. Then he looked back at the Kid. He

reached out with a perfectly steady hand and took a long slow sip of water, as if relishing it.

Jim could feel the Kid's tenseness beside him. Suddenly the Kid relaxed and laughed.

Zellinger set the glass down gently and gratefully, as if he had partaken of a precious gift. He picked up his knife and cut a small bite of meat.

The Kid reached across with a table knife and smashed Zellinger's water glass.

Carney looked at Freeman Zellinger and saw him as an old man who had almost made it home.

Zellinger looked up, calmly chewing the little bite of meat. He swallowed, set down his fork and rested his hand on the table edge.

The Kid tossed his knife on the table.

"I challenge you—" he began.

The something that had been in the back of Freeman Zellinger's eyes was big in the front of them. His hand reached out. There was a smooth rippling snap, and the Kid's voice dragged backwards in his throat. The old man's hand rested on the edge of the table.

"Yes?" he inquired gravely.

"You son of a pig!" said the

Kid. "You bastard! I'll kill you for that."

The old man waited.

The Kid's voice cut off abruptly. His hand darted back and out. There was a silky ripple.

Jim Carney clawed at the cloth and jabbed the Kid in the side with the gun.

"Fight me," said Carney, his voice rough.

Zellinger came to his feet.

"Give him the cloth."

The Kid snapped the cloth out of Jim's hand. He jumped up, his breath coming fast and his eyes blazing. His cheek was running blood.

"I'll kill you for that," he said.

The old man waited.

There was a little stir in the back of the room.

The Kid's hand lashed forward. The silk rippled out and snapped—in the empty air. Zellinger had moved at the last moment. He pulled the Kid's extended hand farther forward. The Kid landed with a smash in the broken glass on the tabletop, then struggled awkwardly to his feet.

Zellinger's hand blurred out and back, and the Kid was dragging in air roughly.

The Kid straightened up, blinking.

The old man waited.

The Kid made an abortive

snatch in the direction of his waistband, then froze.

Zellinger smiled faintly and seemed to relax all over.

The Kid made a final small motion.

Zellinger smiled.

The Kid blinked.

"Aren't you going to go for your gun?"

"What's the hurry?" said the old man, smiling.

The Kid looked blank and frozen.

"You're too slow," said Zellinger. "You planned this so badly you had a man with a gun in your side before you even got started. With the skill and brains you've shown tonight, probably two out of five here could finish you. As for the gun, yes, when your hand reaches a certain point, I will have to kill you."

The Kid blinked. His hand edged downward and stopped. It edged a little bit farther. And stopped. A tiny bit farther.

Freeman Zellinger waited.

The Kid stood perfectly still.

Someone cleared his throat in the back of the room.

"I've had enough," the Kid blurted. He turned suddenly. He walked out rapidly with nearly a hundred eyes looking at his back.

"Two out of five," said

someone musingly.

Jim Carney handed Zellinger another glass of water, from an empty place.

"Thank you," said Zellinger. He smiled and sat down, holding the glass.

Jim went back to his table. He felt worn out. He ate a little, then got up and went back to his room. He locked the door, switched off the grav, swam to the bed and snapped the blanket in place.

DURING THE NIGHT he heard people drifting through the hall outside. Bits of conversation came through to him.

"Seen the Kid?"

"Scully seen him in the lounge."

"I'm going to see if I'm one of them two out of five."

"There's a lot of fives on this M. I'm coming with you."

Jim had the nightmare that he'd killed the Kid, and now he had all the lists of the people the Kid had killed, and all the lists the Kid had taken from the people he'd killed, and all the lists they'd taken from the people they'd killed, and now men were stalking Jim to kill *him* and get the lists. Jim walked around a corner and there was Freeman Zellinger, waiting. Jim clutched at his waist. A gun appear-

ed in Zellinger's hand. There was a blast.

The blast went on. Gasping and sobbing for breath, Jim came awake. The morning buzzer was ringing in his ear. He switched it off, unsnapped the blanket and floated up. He pushed gently on the bed, drifted across the room, got his feet under him, and switched on the gravity.

He ate breakfast and went to the communications center. Gus Stevens was leaning over the clacking teleprinter, grinning broadly.

"What are you doing here?" asked Jim.

"Lefty Schultz went Kid-hunting," said Gus. "I took his shift for him. They're searching the ventilation system for the Kid right now, but I guess

I better go stop them."

His grin widened.

"What's the grin for?" demanded Jim.

"Oh," said Gus, "look at this passenger list the *City of Dallas* just sent in."

Jim took the list and glanced at it. He laughed unrestrainedly.

"The Kid's retiring early," said Gus, grinning wider.

The list read:

<i>P. M. Jones</i>	<i>to Mars</i>
<i>Oscar J. Rasch</i>	<i>" Terra</i>
<i>F. R. Zellinger</i>	<i>" Terra</i>
<i>Kid Roe</i>	<i>" Destination</i>
	<i>Unknown</i>

"I hope he's happy there," said Gus. He grinned some more, and blew a kiss at the wall.



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The SCARLET SUN RISES

by CHARLES V. DE VET

*The job involved all kinds of enemies
—including the one inside his own skull!*

Illustrated by Richard Kluga

CHAPTER I



AS USUAL the job was tough. And confidential. Also as usual, Fred Thelen was on his own. If he got into trouble, the EIAC—Earth Interplanetary Adjustment Corps—would claim they'd never heard of him.

The Observer planted on New France had stopped sending in his reports three months earlier, and Thelen had been sent to investigate—and to take over if necessary. He landed at daybreak, and that same afternoon the autho-

rities clamped on an embargo against incoming spaceships.

Thelen had little to go on. He had to operate almost entirely by "feel." The last communications from the Observer had indicated that this colony world hovered on the brink of social upheaval. Discretion and caution had prompted Earth to keep hands off—officially—but Thelen was to do what he could to keep bloodshed at a minimum.

He knew that New France had been colonized, approximately eighteen generations before, by members of the old nobility of France, and that their descendants still ruled the world's one habitable continent. And that was about all he had.

For two days he tried to contact the Observer, or to learn what had happened to him, without success. The mission couldn't be allowed to drag. The time had come to take a necessary risk.

THELEN found an unoccupied table at a sidewalk cafe—a national custom still retained on this world—and lit a cigar as he idly surveyed the promenade of evening strollers. The martini the waiter brought had just the proper touch of vermouth. The eve-

ning promised to be pleasant, perhaps even exciting.

An old man in a shapeless topcoat stopped at his table. "I have not eaten since this morning," he whined. "Could you spare an old soldier a few coins?"

Thelen shoved the change from his drink toward the man. From his brief observation he had concluded that the imminent trouble here stemmed from the harsh inequality between the classes. The ruling nobles kept most of the luxuries and wealth for themselves, allowing the tradesmen and artisans to prosper only modestly. The plebians were poorly clothed, poorly fed—and resentful. Many, like the miserable man before him, were reduced to begging. He had noticed earlier that the black-cloaked gendarmes traveled in parties of four—obviously for their own protection. The people must be in an ugly mood.

"Do you know where I can find a man by the name of Gerald Garlock?" Thelen took his necessary risk.

"Gerald Garlock?" The old man rolled the words around in his mouth like sour wine. He spat on the ground, and drew back his hand as though to throw the money in Thelen's face, thought better of it

and walked away, muttering to himself.

Thelen shrugged and continued to observe the strollers as they passed his table. He avoided the glances of the *poules* with their invitations to easy friendship.

One of them, however, bolder than the others, paused at his side. "Would you care to buy me a drink?" she asked. Her voice was gently modulated. She showed white teeth in a smile of calculated geniality.

She was exceptionally beautiful, Thelen noted, with a body built on heroic proportions, a honeyed-olive complexion, and a cameo-shaped face. Her hair was jet black and her eyes, behind half-closed languid lids, a vivid, candid blue. He wondered briefly how a girl so naturally endowed could have been reduced to earning her living in this manner. She was probably a victim of the environment, he decided. On a world where the classes were so sharply divided, a girl born without the proper background might be forced to sell herself merely to survive.

She wore a pert white hat, and a form-fitting gold dress that left her shoulders bare and covered her full-fleshed body only from low-cut neck-

line to mid-thigh. A gold stocking draped one shapely leg. The other was bare—the mark of her trade.

Thelen rose. "Won't you sit down?" he asked courteously, motioning to the chair opposite with an inclination of his head.

"Thank you." She crossed her legs, gold stocking on top, as she sat. "My name is Jo," she introduced herself.

"Mine is Fred," Thelen answered.

A waiter came to their table, and the *poule* raised her eyebrows inquiringly at Thelen. He nodded. "I'll have a red lady," she told the waiter. "Are you a stranger in town?" she asked Thelen.

"Arrived two days ago," he answered. He was quite content with his companion thus far. She had a pleasant personality—and he was a man to whom a certain amount of feminine companionship was a necessity.

"From the southern provinces?" She was obviously doing her job of being sociable, but she was clever enough to make a good pretense of unassumed interest.

"From Earth," Thelen said on impulse.

Her eyes widened. "You're being a bit indiscreet in telling me that, aren't you?"

"Why?" Thelen evaded.

She hesitated. "Foreigners are not very popular here right now. With either side," she added. When Thelen continued to look askance, she said, "There's going to be trouble, you know."

"I'll have to take my chances on that," Thelen replied.

The girl studied his face, and seemed to see something there that made her interest more genuine. "I'll wager you left Earth because of some kind of trouble," she hazarded.

"You think I'm a criminal?" Thelen asked.

"I think you might be," she answered thoughtfully. "Just by looking at you I can tell that you have a streak in you—a pure wild streak. I don't think you'd take much from anyone. You look as though you'd enjoy trouble and fighting. And I understand Earth is desperately overcrowded. Your kind of man would be bound to get into trouble on a world like that."

Thelen saw, by the softening of the expression about her eyes and the way her mouth became gentle at the lip edges, that she was seeing him in a new light. She was building glamor, and affection, around the picture she had drawn of him. He wondered

without pride, as he often had before, at this thing in him that attracted women. To the best of his observation there was no tangible reason for it. It was just that it was there.

He recognized also that she had quickened his interest as well, as many women had before her. He observed in her now a woman's soft depth, and a woman's fire, and it drew his closer attention.

"You are a very discerning person." He made no effort to correct her false impression. He had to adopt some pose to explain his presence here. This was as good as any.

ABRUPTLY Thelen felt a stirring in his subconscious. His fingers instinctively fondled the spot in his right temple where a small metal plate was buried. He was never able to experience the result of this implanted linkage with the other part of his brain without surprise. Bringing the subconscious up where rapport could be established between it and the conscious brain was a technique newly developed by the medical research branch of the EIAC. He was the first to give it a practical testing.

He had often wished, since the operation, that they had left his mind alone. It had

proven a constant source of difficulty—rather than the implementation of normal faculties it was intended to be. Only in theory had it made him a more efficient operative, though that might be the fault of insufficient experimentation.

He had volunteered for the test, in the line of duty, a month before. The doctors had intended to keep him under observation much longer, but the emergency on New France had come up and he had been the only qualified agent available.

Strangely, Thelen was never able to think of the other part of his brain as anything except a separate entity, occupying his skull side by side with his true self. He had even given it a name: Roscoe.

And Roscoe apparently shared the dissociation. He had a total disregard for the safety and well-being of the body they shared. There was even some indication that he regarded his co-tenant as a rival. It was a possible danger against which Thelen had to maintain a continuous alertness.

Ordinarily Roscoe gave a reasonable degree of cooperation — whenever he wasn't sleeping—and he reacted well to pressure, but he was brash,

unpredictable, entirely without fear, and imbued with a roguish sense of humor.

Roscoe's communication now was urgent, and as usual, impertinent. "Look across the street, you dope," he voiced wordlessly, silently, in Thelen's mind.

Thelen glanced across the paved cobblestones. A dozen men, and a few women and children, had gathered in front of a darkened building there. They muttered low among themselves and cast surly glances in Thelen's direction.

Jo noticed his abstraction and followed his gaze to their observers. "They're looking at us," she said. "And they seem angry. Do you know them?"

In the middle of the group Thelen spotted the man he had given the coins to earlier. "I gave that old man—the one waving his arms—some change a while ago," he said, "and I asked him where I could find a man named Gerald Garlock. The question did seem to anger him."

"That explains it then." The girl rose to her feet. Her face had lost much of its color. "Garlock is a government tax collector. The poor people hate everyone who works for the nobility. They probably

think you are a friend, or a government spy, and they'll make trouble. We'd better leave. Quickly!"

They were too late. Two men had separated themselves from the crowd and were crossing the street.

Within Thelen's brain Roscoe chortled gleefully, "Now you're in for it!"

CHAPTER II

"YOU ARE looking for Gerald Garlock?" one of the men, short and heavy-bodied, but with a thin undernourished face, asked. The other was of medium height, with bad teeth and a broken-visored cap pulled low over his eyes.

Without waiting for an answer the short man smashed his right fist into Thelen's face.

His chair crashed over backward as Thelen sprang to his feet, blood streaming from his nose. An unbidden bellow of happiness rumbled up from his throat. Roscoe was enjoying himself.

Thelen staggered his short assailant with a blow to the midriff, and another to the temple sent the man crashing back against the table behind him. Without conscious attention Thelen noted that the girl had disappeared. There was

no reason why he should have expected her to stay, he reflected.

The second man sprang on Thelen's back and threw both arms around his neck and head. "Grab him, Jack!" he shouted to the man on the ground. "Grab him by the legs!"

Thelen reached behind his head, clutched the coat of the man and threw him over his head. Others of the group reached them then and forced him backwards. He tried to get the tables between him and them, but one of the fallen men grabbed him about the legs and tripped him up.

Thelen fell on his side and much of the wind left his lungs in an anguished grunt. He kicked himself loose from the grip around his legs and pulled himself to his feet. For a time the close press of bodies gave him some protection, and he struck down each face that appeared in front of him. But at last they pulled him to the ground again. And this time he was unable to regain his feet.

A heavy boot crashed against the side of his head. He felt consciousness leaving him. A second boot smashed his lips and drove his front teeth inward. Within his head Roscoe crowed happily.

Thelen was still conscious when he became aware that the blows he heard striking were no longer landing on his numbed body. He looked up through blood-rimmed eyes to see an ox-chested man straddling his battered form and striking to left and right with a heavy cane. He was smiling, and his cuspid teeth—longer than normal—gave him an appearance of vicious savagery. None of Thelen's former assailants fought back.

Soon Thelen was alone with his rescuer, and the girl, Jo, who had re-appeared behind him. The big man laid his cane on the walk and helped Thelen to his feet. "Can you stand?" he asked.

"I think so," Thelen answered, testing his legs with a few hesitant steps. Gingerly he shoved his loosened teeth forward with his tongue. With luck they would grow firm again.

"Let's go, then." The man picked up his cane and locked an arm in Thelen's.

"We can take him to my place," Jo said, going around Thelen and grasping his other arm.

They walked for several blocks. Thelen had difficulty keeping his eyes in focus, and several times he stumbled. Each time the big man at his

side held him firmly erect and said, "Easy does it."

They reached a narrow eating place, squeezed between two larger buildings, and Jo led them inside. "My room is in the rear," she said. The one diner, at a counter in the front, paid no attention to them as they passed through.

In the back room they led Thelen to a wide bed where he stretched out gratefully. His rescuer stood looking down at him for several minutes. Thelen had his first opportunity then to study the man closely. He was powerfully built, with shaggy black hair, and a dark oily complexion. There were down-slanting lines of harshness at the corners of his mouth, and his eyes were a blank green, the eyes of an emotionless cat. There was nothing genteel about his physical make-up. Why had the man helped him, Thelen wondered.

"That face looks pretty bad," the big man cut short Thelen's speculation. "We'll need bandages and salve, Jo. Do you have any?" His voice was as flat and expressionless as his eyes.

"I have bandages, but no salve," Jo answered.

"I'll get some from the lunch room. You clean up those cuts." He turned and

walked unhurriedly out.

The girl went to a wash bowl in the corner of the room and wet face cloth at a hot water faucet. Returning to Thelen she sat on the side of the bed. "Listen carefully," she said as she cleaned the cut places on his face. "We may have only a few minutes to talk before he returns. His name is Armand La Beau. He's the leader of the underworld in the city. I told him you were a criminal who had fled Earth. That you are a killer." She smiled apologetically. "I had to tell him something to get his help. That mob would have finished you."

Thelen tried to return her smile, but pain lanced his mashed lips and he had to hold his face still. "That was quick thinking," he complimented.

Jo raised and lowered her eyebrows noncommittally. "You'll have to keep up the lie," she said. "La Beau's sort of a friend of mine, but he's ruthless. He has need of the kind of man he thinks you are, but he'll kill you without hesitation if he distrusts you. He . . ."

She was interrupted by the return of the big man. He tossed a green tin of ointment to the girl. "Rub it in good," he directed. He turned to address Thelen. "I can't stay any

longer," he said, with what was apparently meant to be a friendly smile. "We'll talk later."

"Thanks for the help," Thelen said.

La Beau grunted and went out.

THELEN slept for what must have been several hours and when he awoke the girl fed him a thick soup. He fell back to sleep again a few minutes later.

The next time he opened his eyes he found that his clothes had been removed while he slept. The room was dark and silent. At first he thought that the girl must have left, but gradually he became aware of a breath of perfume—and of a soft round pressure of warmth against his left side.

For a long minute he lay unmoving, with the sense of her nearness and her womanhood tangling his thoughts and expanding into his blood.

He knew by the stillness with which she lay, and the slight unevenness of her breathing, that she did not sleep. What she was doing, he was certain, was being done because of the gentleness of her nature. There was a compassion and humaneness there that would have done credit to

her more reputable sisters.

Yet Thelen was oddly reluctant to accept what she was offering him. He was afraid that the act itself might make him seem ungrateful. Regretfully he turned on his side, facing away from her.

As he might have expected, Roscoe was wide awake. "Sissy," he sneered.

Deliberately Thelen quickened his mind's activity. For some reason unknown to him Roscoe operated best when Thelen slept, and was inclined to doze when Thelen's thoughts were active. He had debated with himself whether or not this was because both had recourse to the same blood supply: When his conscious mind was most keen, Roscoe's supply was most limited, and vice versa. Whatever the reason, Roscoe's emanations soon faded out.

Once again Thelen became tantalizingly conscious of the warm, yielding, softness against his back, and a deep-seated restlessness took its place within him. The unease grew slowly, until it became a heavy, insistent appetite. He fought against it with less and less success.

He was not helped in his effort of restraint by the knowledge that the girl was probably very much aware of

what was happening, was waiting for his reserve to break, possibly hoping for it. Already she must know how the unequal struggle must end.

Soon the hunger became a need, so urgent that a normal, healthy man could not contain it, and Thelen turned desperately and drew the woman's golden body tight against his own.

THELEN stayed with the girl for three days. The second day two of La Beau's men paid them a visit. They were men of a common breed—hard, rapacious, and thin-lipped. It was obvious they were there to check on Thelen, to find how far he could be trusted. At the end of their visit their satisfaction might not have been complete.

Jo filled Thelen in with much of the background of the city and its social environment as the days passed. He learned that the bulk of the nobility lived on the Island, a narrow nine-mile strip of land in the middle of the broad sluggish river that flowed through the city. They were guarded by well-paid gendarmes, in number actually a small army. All commoners except a few tradesmen were

barred from the Island.

She told him of a religious leader known as the Shepherd, who commanded an almost fanatic following of the bulk of the city people. Lately he had been preaching against the rule of the nobles. Word had spread that they had given the order to the gendarmes to capture him and take him to the city prison, where they would undoubtedly put him to death by torture. But he was carefully guarded.

Thelen was surprised to learn that the hard core of the Shepherd's guardians was La Beau and his henchmen. "Why does La Beau protect him?" he asked. "Surely La Beau is not a religious man."

"La Beau finds ways to make money from anything he does," Jo answered, "and he hates the nobles. But mainly, I think, he wishes to loot the Island of its gold and treasures. If the Shepherd can arouse the commoners enough, they might storm the Island, and carry it. That would lay open the mansions and storehouses of the rich to the looting of the patient La Beau."

"Is the Shepherd aware of La Beau's plans, or is he actually a scoundrel also?"

"No," Jo answered. "I don't believe he knows what La Beau is. I'm certain he regards

him only as a loyal follower. The Shepherd is a brilliant preacher, but a quite simple man otherwise."

Though he was still bandaged and sore the third day, Thelen decided he could spend no more time away from his job. Though she protested, Jo purchased attire of the type worn by the servants of the nobles, as Thelen asked her, and he wore them when he left.

REACHING the Island was not difficult. Thelen rented a boat a short time before dusk and rowed it around to the wooded side. Once there he tied the boat at a small dock and followed a path leading toward the dwellings on the crest of a ridge ahead. Under one arm he carried a basket of groceries.

A barbed wire barricade, with pillboxes set at twenty-foot intervals, blocked his path halfway up the hill. Gun muzzles protruded from apertures in each box.

Swiftly Thelen surveyed the barricade. There was a gate directly ahead, he noted. He walked boldly forward. The gate swung open as he neared it. His disguise had passed admirably. But only, he suspected, because those inside

the guard stations knew they had nothing to fear from a lone man.

Once past the barbed wire, Thelen had little difficulty locating the street number Jo had gotten for him. It was the last known address of the Observer, Gerald Garlock. The house was located in a district less pretentious than other parts of the Island, the section occupied by the guards and retainers who did not live in the mansions of the nobles.

The house was closed and its windows boarded up.

Thelen's first thought was that his trip had been in vain. He would learn nothing here. Yet he hated to return, now that he had come this far. At last he decided to consult with Roscoe.

Roscoe, of course, was sleeping. Thelen tapped gently against the plate in his temple.

"All right. A-l-l right." Roscoe never liked to be wakened. However, he readily took in the situation from what he observed and from Thelen's thoughts. There was a short pause. "I don't see anything you can do except break in," Roscoe declared. "Better go around to the back."

Thelen considered the advice and could think of no reason for not following it. He walked to the end of the block

and down a rear alley. The way here was narrow, semi-dark, and deserted. At the closed house he pried loose a board over the lower part of a ground floor window and crawled in.

He removed a pencil-flash from his pocket and pressed the switch. The room he had entered was empty. He went out into a long hallway and inspected two other rooms, both in the same condition. Further search would be a waste of time.

Thelen debated for a moment his next step. He recalled then the part of his EIAC training that should cover a situation of this kind. If the Observer had been even ordinarily efficient he should have left some lead for Thelen to follow. Probably in the kitchen. It was the large room he had just left, he decided. He returned and knelt beside the door.

Running the tips of his fingers lightly along the bottom edge he felt a series of deep scratches. He concentrated and deciphered the letters the scratches formed. R-T-U-R-S-U-B-D-N-Y P-G-C-U-G-S-U-T-R-A-P-F-I-S-M-O-N-N.

Mentally crossing out the first and every second letter left T-R-U-D-Y G-U-S-T-A-F-S-O-N. Trudy Gustafson.

"A girl!" Roscoe was still awake.

That was all he could learn here. Thelen returned to the room he had first entered and crawled out through the window opening. He straightened, heard Roscoe cry, "Duck!" and sank into a deep pit of darkness.

THELEN's feet were cold. It seemed that they had been near freezing for hours, that he had been standing in icy water up to his ankles, unable to get out. He had the vague sensation of having just wakened from a nightmare.

He heard Roscoe whisper, "Have fun," and fade out. He looked down.

The cold water lapping around his ankles was real enough. Also real was the iron belt around his waist, and the chain leading from it to a cement post sunk in the muddy bank at the edge of the stream. In his hands he held a stout-handled fork, with three bent prongs on its end.

He looked about him. There were concrete abutments on all sides, he saw, and a concrete roof overhead. He was somewhere underground. In the stream, and extending in either direction as far as he could see in the dim light,

other toilers worked in the stream with their bent-fork tools. All were naked to the waist, and chained as he was.

A stench of filth and human refuse hung heavy in the air. After a minute Thelen decided that they were in one of the city's sewers.

A sharp pain lanced across his shoulders. He looked up. A guard was standing on the bank, grinning mirthlessly. "Are you tired, mister?" he asked, with heavy humor. He lashed out with the whip again. "Now get back to work!"

Thelen did not argue. He bent and began loosening the soggy debris about his feet. His hands moved as though well practiced in the work. This was not his first day here. Why did he have no remembrance of the time that must have passed? Roscoe was back of it somehow, but investigation would have to wait until later. He wanted no more of that whip on his back.

Thelen worked through the remainder of the day—or night; there was no way of telling down here. Once he and the others of the unkempt crew were allowed to rest while they ate a brackish stew brought to them from somewhere overhead. And at last the work period was over.

As the prisoners trudged wearily up a slippery iron stairway Thelen unobtrusively tapped the plate in his temple. Roscoe came awake in good spirits. "Yes?" he inquired cheerfully.

"Give!" Thelen commanded. He was in a bad temper. One of the many frustrating aspects of his other brain tenant was the fact that there was no way to punish or get back at him for anything he might do. Thelen even suspected that the situation might be reversed: that in a contest of wills, Roscoe would win every time. There was a sense of deep reserve beneath his surface superficiality.

Roscoe was quite willing to talk. "Vagrants and petty thieves are assigned to the sewer gangs," he said. "You were caught apparently attempting to burglarize. You were sent down here. It's as simple as that."

"Did I have a trial?"

"No trial." Roscoe's irritating sense of humor evidenced itself again. "An obviously lower class specimen like yourself has no rights on this world."

Thelen ignored the baiting. "How long have I been here?"

"I'd say about three weeks."

"Why wasn't I aware of it before now?" Thelen tried

hard to jab Roscoe with the anger he felt.

Roscoe remained unperturbed. "You were stuck here," he said, "so I decided to make the best of it. You know, take over, and have a little fun."

What Thelen had feared, then, was true. Roscoe could assume dominance whenever he wished. It was bleak knowledge, but there was little he could do about it. "I hope you enjoyed yourself," he said with sarcasm.

"I was getting a bit bored," Roscoe acknowledged.

By this time they had reached a large barracks-like room on the underground level above the sewers. The iron belts were removed in a small anteroom and the prisoners shoved inside one at a time. Once within the larger room they were allowed the small measure of freedom available there. Most washed their faces and hands, and some their bodies, at a long sheet-metal tank against one wall, then walked about to stretch their tired muscles. Some carried on an apathetic conversation.

After a half-hour, during which Thelen kept to himself and Roscoe refused to answer any questions, a gong sounded. With a rush of sudden energy the men scrambled for positions in a line forming at

the far end of the room. They tussled for places without pride or considerations of dignity, snarling and cursing at competitors for favored positions. The animal in man rose near the surface in a place like this.

A minute later two men in prison garb pushed a cart laden with food through a wide door at the head of the line.

By then Thelen discovered that he was famished. He started toward the line, maintaining an unhurried pace with an effort. He noticed a small man, with the face of an imp, slipping into an opening near the center of the line. The man glanced back, saw that Thelen was looking at him, and shuffled to the rear, grinning apologetically.

For some reason this amused Roscoe. "They jump for you, chum," he said.

Thelen took a place in line behind the imp-faced prisoner. After a minute he became aware that the others had become still, that they were all facing his way—as though expecting something from him.

"Move up to the head of the line," Roscoe prompted.

"What's this all about?" Thelen inquired.

"Move!" Roscoe snarled. "Do you want to ruin every-

thing I've done the past three weeks? You're the bully boy here."

The other prisoners were shifting restlessly. One or two growled irritably. Thelen decided to play along, at least until he found out more about the situation. He walked toward the head of the line. "Why the act?" he pressed Roscoe.

"Feel your left cheek," Roscoe directed.

Thelen raised his hand and touched the cheek. It was bruised and sore. The inside of his mouth was swollen and tender to the tip of his tongue. "You got that from the bearded brute four men back," Roscoe explained contentedly. "He thought he could take over as head boy." He snickered. "Oh, we've had some beautiful fights, especially at the beginning, when you were showing them who was best man. You didn't lose one. I'm proud of this body of ours."

Thelen said nothing. As he ate he glumly considered Roscoe's going it alone. Now that he had demonstrated that he could take control any time he wanted to, what was to prevent him from shoving Thelen out for good? Could the linking operation be undone? Would removing the plate bring his mind back to its

former normalcy — if and when he returned to Earth? He was disturbed even more by the knowledge that Roscoe knew his every thought, even what he was thinking now. There was a good chance that he would object to the reversal, for it would rob him of the ability to dominate as he could now. However, Roscoe gave no indication that Thelen's thoughts had any interest for him.

With an effort Thelen dismissed the subject and turned to concentrating on his more immediate problem. "Do you know how long they intend to hold me here?" he asked Roscoe.

"You were sentenced to two years."

"Two years!" Thelen exclaimed. "Good God!" The prospect was appalling.

"That's mild, compared to the treatment given more serious offenders," Roscoe offered meager solace. "Torture is the common practice on this world. But don't worry. I've taken steps to get us out of here."

"What did you do?"

"I sent out a message with a prisoner that was released today. All we have to do is sit tight for a while."

"You sent a message? To whom?"

"To the girl. Naturally." Roscoe evidenced a bit of impatience.

"The girl?" Thelen was unable to grasp much from Roscoe's cryptic replies.

"Trudy Gustafson. Who else?"

It became a bit clearer. Roscoe was trying to contact the girl whose name the Observer had left behind. "What message did you send her?"

"I wrote that you were a friend of Gerald Garlock, and told her where she could find you. Nothing more. Women like to have their curiosity piqued, you know."

"How do you know the prisoner will deliver the message?" Thelen asked.

"He'd be afraid of ever meeting you again if he didn't."

"Do you think the girl will come?"

"I'll give you odds on it."

CHAPTER III

ROSCOE was wrong. It was a man who paid Thelen's fine and secured his release the next day.

After Thelen had bathed and dressed he went outside and found his benefactor waiting for him: a tall man—perhaps six foot four—with a leathery complexion and a

sprinkling of gray in his neatly combed hair. Twin lines creased his forehead, giving him a look of moody introspection.

He came directly to the point. "You say you're a friend of Gerald Garlock?" His voice was deep, with a slight nasal intonation, and he spoke with an even, flintlike courtesy.

Thelen nodded.

"Tell me about it."

"I'll tell Trudy Gustafson," Thelen stalled.

The man considered the reply for a moment. The twin wrinkles became deeper, as though he grew angry, then he smiled thinly and lifted his shoulders philosophically. "All right," he said. "I'll take you to her now." He had an easy indolent manner that seemed to indicate that he took nothing seriously, that he viewed life only in the role of a casual spectator.

Thelen went with him and was not too surprised when they reached the river bank and the man boarded a small outboard motorboat tied at a pier. They rode to the Island and went through the wire barricade without challenge.

THE TALL WHITE MANSION at which they arrived ten min-

utes later was surrounded by a neat lawn and well-kept shrubbery. Thelen's companion did not enter, but followed a brick-lined walk around the house. "She'll probably be swimming now," he said.

The pool they came to as they turned the last corner of the house was large and ornate. It was painted blue, with blue lounge chairs and umbrellas spaced along its edges. The hot sun overhead reflected back from the water in a bright yellow sheen — and bronzed the nude figure of the girl standing at the far edge!

From where Thelen stood she looked young; probably about eighteen, he guessed. She stood poised to dive, with her bronzed body looking supple and boyish in its wide-armed moment of hesitation.

She pushed herself up and out, seemed to hang motionless for a moment, till her hips arched in a half bow, and she cut the water neatly, only her feet making a slight splash as she submerged.

For half the length of the pool she stayed beneath the water, swimming with her arms tight against her sides, and her clean white legs treading with effortless harmony and coordination. Her hair, cut semi-long, streamed along her shoulders and back,

writhing sinuously, like animated brown seaweed.

When her head broke the surface of the water her hair clung to the sides of her face, framing it in a sharp contrast against her fair skin. She gasped for breath and laughed in Thelen's direction before she dove again, coming up a second time with her hand gripping the edge of the pool. She reached up her free hand in a casual gesture, and Thelen pulled her out.

"Hi," she said, throwing her hair back with a toss of her head. She was obviously an active girl, with a deep reserve of vitality.

"How do you do?" It sounded more formal than Thelen had meant it to be. He found himself just a bit ill-at-ease. They were more sophisticated here than he had expected. The girl, he noted now, was older than she had appeared from across the pool. Her body no longer seemed so boyish; it was slim, but with the full development of a mature woman. Thelen changed his estimate of her age to twenty-five.

The woman stood regarding him coolly as she brushed the moisture from her body with her hands. "You're the man who sent the letter?" she asked.

"That's right," Thelen answered.

She considered his words, as though he might have said something profound. "Who are you?" she asked. She had the sureness and easy informality of manner of one born to the ruling class and a certainty of her fitness to occupy her place.

As she waited for his answer she reached for a pair of tan shorts lying on the back of a chair at her side. She turned her back with what Thelen took to be a gesture of modesty as she pulled them on.

Her hips were wide and firm, Thelen noted, and her back curved powerfully up into the even rise of her shoulders. It was the back of an athlete, but without the athlete's hardness of muscle. Her neck was graceful and tapered, but set solidly in the frame of her shoulders. Hers was a body meant to bear children, and to mother them into healthy adulthood.

She slipped on a short jacket and buttoned it as she turned again to Thelen. Her expectant glance reminded him that in his absorption he had neglected to answer her question. Mentally he shook himself. "Will you tell me first your connection with

Gerald Garlock?" he asked carefully. He had to make certain just what her position was before he decided what he could tell her.

The girl stood thoughtfully for a moment, looking down at her bare feet, and wriggled one toe in quiet abstraction. She looked up again. "I'd have to know what your intentions are," she pointed out to Thelen. "Whether you wish to help Garlock, or harm him." She walked slowly toward Thelen as she talked. "Surely you don't expect me to take you into my confidence without even knowing who you are."

When she reached a point a few inches from Thelen she stopped, and turned her head upward and gazed into his eyes. Her face was so close that her breath was warm against his lips, and he could see his reflection in the pupils of her eyes. He experienced a heady moment of pleasant unease.

Suddenly Thelen's arms were gripped tightly behind him. His surprise was mingled with his dismay as he realized that he had forgotten about the other person with them. Instinctively he struggled to throw the man off. When he failed to free his arms he threw his body forward, at the

same time twisting in a maneuver learned in the EIAC. The man behind him countered his every move. This was no amateur who held him. A moment later Thelen was helpless.

As he stood perspiring gently the girl patted him about the hips and went swiftly over his body. She satisfied herself and stepped back. "He's not armed, Gerald," she said. "You can let him go."

THE PATTERN clicked into place. "You're Garlock," Thelen said, turning to the tall man and flexing his arms as he spoke.

"That's right. And you're from the EIAC. I thought I recognized the maneuver when you tried to free yourself."

"Why didn't you tell me who you were before?"

"I didn't know you. This was the safest way. Incidentally, what's your name?" Apparently Garlock was not a talking man.

"Thelen. Fred. Where does she come in?" He nodded to the girl, who was listening attentively. She had drawn a chair up to where they stood, and as Thelen looked at her she stretched her long cool legs lazily out into the warm



sunlight. She met his eyes squarely and smiled.

"She's all right," Garlock cut into his reflections.

Thelen hesitated. He was not happy about talking with the girl listening, but Garlock should know what he was doing. "Better fill me in with the background," he said.

Garlock shifted his weight ruefully from one leg to the other.

The girl took up the conversation before he could speak. "Gerry doesn't care much for talking," she said. "I'll tell you what you want to know." She took a small ornamental pipe from the table at her side and lit it, drawing the smoke contentedly deep into her lungs.

"First you must know that my sympathy is with the poor people," she said. "When New France was settled the nobles were going to bring back the lost glory of Earth's France. Bring back the elegance of court life, with its courtesy and fine manners, its conventions and formalities. They succeeded magnificently. But with the elegance of the aristocracy came the degradation of the poor, just as it did on Earth. Also as on Earth, when the lot of the commoners became too pain-ridden to bear, the situation became explo-

sive. That's where we are now. The day of reckoning will come soon."

Thelen was mildly amazed to recognize how his conception of her had changed during the past few minutes. Before he had regarded her only as a beautiful woman. Now he was aware that he was dealing with an unusually strong-minded individual. There was no single act that had given him this conviction: just that it was apparent in her calm poise, her voice, and in every small movement. He regarded her with new respect.

He returned his attention to Garlock. "You're taking part in this revolt?" he asked.

Garlock brushed the question aside with an irritable gesture of one hand. "I'm taking no part in any revolt," he said sourly. "I aided Trudy in planning and setting up a shadow cabinet of men with the same ideals as hers, who will act as a provisional government when the nobles fall—as we're certain they must. A democratic form of government will then be established as soon as order is restored and elections can be held."

"What makes you think you'll be able to take over, if and when that happens?" Thelen asked.

"We have an ace in the

hole," the girl said confidently. "The Shepherd."

Thelen waited, but she told him no more. "You will see what I mean when you meet him," she said.

Thelen turned to Garlock. "Why haven't we heard from you lately?"

Garlock raised his hands, palms upward. "I couldn't get anything past the censors," he said briefly.

Trudy went into the house on some routine errand, and Thelen resumed his questioning. "Why are you so certain of the girl?" he asked. "Her turning against her own class is at least a bit unusual, isn't it?"

"You have to know her story," Garlock began what was a long speech for him. "Her father was killed in a duel. He was state regent—the equivalent of our president, but elected by the council of nobles rather than by the people—until he died in a coup of his political enemies. But what started with bitterness in Trudy is now a firm conviction of the need for democratic government."

"How did you get into this?"

"Just by doing my job: trying to keep bloodshed at a minimum. There will be some lives spent—there's no way

out of it. But if you remember your Earth history, France went through bloody chaos, even after the king and the nobles had died. That's the part we might be able to prevent here."

"What I'm trying to find out," Thelen said patiently, "is how you happen to be working with the Gustafson woman. I thought you were a government tax collector."

"I was—my first year here. Tax collecting is not very popular, as you may have heard, and the job was the easiest to get and the simplest way to become established. But tax collectors don't live to enjoy an old age. I observed the political situation, learned of Trudy's dissatisfaction with it, and made it a point to meet her. We talked, and I agreed to move here, ostensibly as her secretary."

They continued their discussion and Thelen learned that Garlock and Trudy—and her group—hoped to achieve their goal through the Shepherd. They already had his sympathy, and they were confident their plan would work.

"The Shepherd can be maneuvered," Garlock explained. "But that is his weakness also. He can be maneuvered by others as well. I particularly have in mind a man by the

name of La Beau, the leader of the underworld in the city. That is one of our big problems, to make certain that we are in the position to do the influencing, rather than La Beau, when the time comes. But another problem, right now, is more crucial.

"Unless you and I can do something to prevent it, Trudy will be dead before the week is out!"

THE LARGE blond man, sitting alone at the table near that potted plant," Garlock spoke in an undertone, as he and Thelen treaded their way carefully through the hotel dining room.

"Those two men sitting at the table next to his are his footmen—guards really," Garlock said as they found places at a vacant table. It was three days since Thelen had left jail and met Garlock and Trudy.

Since that time he had attended two house gatherings with the Marquise de Gustafson—Trudy—and been introduced as a relative from Earth. That had gained him entree to the social life of the city's elite, and he had been accepted without further question. He had noted with amusement Trudy's unique position in her society. Her sympathy

with the commoners was well known, but her blood lines were too noble for her to be treated with any open animosity. Rather, her defection was regarded by most as an amusing idiosyncrasy. A clique of more politically acute nobles, however, headed by a Count Sant Rivier, recognized her very real threat. And they intended to do something about it. Garlock had learned that Sant Rivier intended to have her assassinated.

"The only sure way to save her is for us to get Sant Rivier first," Garlock said.

They had planned as carefully as time would permit. Thelen would have to be the active instrument, they decided. Garlock was known as Trudy's secretary; he was beneath the condescension of a Sant Rivier. Thelen had to be established as one with equal social standing.

Sant Rivier had been at neither of the gatherings Thelen attended; it became necessary to seek him out. The third day Garlock had spotted him entering a restaurant, and had called Thelen.

"You have clearly in mind how it is to be handled?" Garlock asked.

Thelen nodded. He pushed back his chair and made his way toward the men's room.

As he passed Sant Rivier he allowed his hip to brush heavily against the edge of the table. A glass of wine tipped and splashed its contents into Sant Rivier's lap.

Sant Rivier cursed as he rose and hastily wiped the liquid from his trousers, then brought his anger under a close leash. He looked across at Thelen and waited.

Thelen returned the gaze, smiled insolently, and said nothing. From the side of his eye he could see the Count's men standing, shocked and undecided.

"An accident?" Sant Rivier asked softly.

"An accident that Monsieur should be so inconsiderate as to usurp the greater portion of the aisle for his dining space," Thelen replied.

A slow flush stained Sant Rivier's cheeks. "May I ask to whom I am speaking?"

"My name is Frederick Thelen."

"I am asking if you are in a position to give a gentleman satisfaction, or if I must have my lackeys thrash you," Sant Rivier said with a frigid arrogance.

The proprietor of the restaurant bustled up to where they stood. "Gentlemen, gentlemen . . ." he began in an anguished tone of voice. Sant

Rivier silenced him with a frosted glance and returned his attention to Thelen.

"I believe a cousin of the Marquise de Gustafson can give any satisfaction you may deem necessary." Thelen made his tone as disdainful as the other's.

Sant Rivier's only reaction was in his lips, which made a slight change, growing narrower. He removed a card from a vest pocket and handed it to the proprietor. "If you will ask this gentleman to leave his card, the necessary arrangements will be made." He bowed briefly and stalked from the room.

CHAPTER IV

A FRIEND of Trudy's—a Monsieur Baudette—agreed to act as Thelen's second. As always on occasions such as this, the necessity for what must be done saddened Thelen. Men must die, but that they should die for such futile causes always left him with a feeling of frustration. He vented his irritation now on the stiff-backed man who walked at his side—and who considered this all very proper. "We are on a fool's errand," he said.

Monsieur Baudette's neck became as stiff as his back. "I

beg your pardon?" he said.

"On Earth dueling is considered juvenile," Thelen told him.

Baudette was a good man, but a prig and humorless. He might have been giving a lecture as he spoke in his dry voice. "We owe much of the characteristic courtesy of our race to the effects of dueling," he said. "To that source also we owe the origin and heredity succession of valor found to be so fatal by our enemies. We would consider ourselves base if we avenged an affront, or an injury to our honor, with our hands—as I understand you do on Earth." He made no effort to conceal his contempt.

"The belief that a man proves himself brave by demonstrating a higher skill with a sword is absurd," Thelen said. By now they had come to a cleared space beside a clump of trees. Sant Rivier had already arrived, he saw. He had removed his coat and rolled the sleeves of his blouse half to his elbows. He slashed the air with vicious passes of his sword, stepping and sidestepping swiftly.

Thelen's reluctance to do what must be done came back stronger than before. "See if Sant Rivier is willing to forgive the affront to his honor,"

he instructed Baudette.

Baudette's face registered his definite disapproval. "A gentleman does not ask that." He refused to meet Thelen's gaze. "Attempting to maintain honor, while fleeing your responsibilities, is a phantom hope that will keep stalking before you."

"That may be true," Thelen answered wearily. "Nevertheless I insist."

"It is too late to withdraw my services," Baudette said formally, "but I shall be sorry that I allowed my name to become associated with yours. Only with reluctance will I do as you suggest." He walked slowly to Sant Rivier and his waiting seconds. "Gentlemen, my principal — against my earnest advice—proposes that you be reconciled."

"The time to discuss reconciliation is past," Sant Rivier asserted impatiently. "Proceed with the formalities."

Baudette made a heel and toe about-face. "Your offer has been refused," he said to Thelen. "You will remove your coat, please."

Thelen pulled off his coat and handed it to Baudette, and took the hilt of the smallsword Baudette proffered him.

"Would you care for a piece of sugar to keep you in wind during the contest?" Baudette

asked. He showed small interest in what the answer might be.

Thelen shook his head.

"Kindly keep the tip of your weapon pointed at the ground," Baudette rebuked. "Only the lower classes must point it into the air."

Thelen smiled and tilted the blade downward as they walked toward the waiting party.

Sant Rivier had brought a list-marshal, two seconds, and a physician. His blouse was open at the throat and vigorous blond hairs showed at the V of his neck.

The list-marshal intoned the rules that had been agreed on beforehand by the seconds. When neither of the interested parties protested any of them, he raised his hand. "You will cross swords. When I drop my glove you will be prepared to exchange thrusts and to defend yourselves."

Thelen raised his sword and crossed it with that of Sant Rivier. It was so often, he thought, that these exhibitions were decided beforehand by the preponderance of power in the eye, or the hand, or the flexes of one of the opponents. The results proved nothing.

The list-marshal dropped his glove and Sant Rivier thrust swiftly at Thelen's breast. Thelen parried the

blow, and at the next exchange, Sant Rivier pressed more closely and sought to drive Thelen's sword down. Thelen parried each thrust through four exchanges and refused to give ground.

At the fifth exchange, Thelen lowered his guard slightly, allowing Sant Rivier's blade to slip by. He avoided the thrust by drawing his body inward, and in the same movement ran his sword up under Sant Rivier's arm. It penetrated the ribs of his right side and continued almost through the body.

Sant Rivier coughed, and bloody foam came up from his lungs and formed a pink bubble on his lips. His eyes rolled backward, exposing the whites, and he staggered and fell on his back.

The physician hurried forward. "The man is gravely wounded," he said, after a quick glance. He turned to Sant Rivier's chief second. "I suggest you seek an end to the contest."

"My principal being unable to speak for himself," the second addressed Thelen, "I state that he yields, and ask that you spare his life, if you consider you have done enough to satisfy your honor."

He did not wait for Thelen's acceptance. The request was a

formality. Sant Rivier was already dying.

"It is your privilege to confiscate his arms, if you desire," Baudette said.

Thelen shook his head and walked from the scene with bent shoulders.

Baudette lengthened his stride until he reached Thelen's side. "Will you accept my deepest apologies for having doubted your courage?" he asked.

Thelen nodded disinterestedly and walked on.

THAT NIGHT Garlock, Trudy, and Thelen donned garments of the commoners and visited the city. They had not gone far inland before they heard sounds of celebration a few blocks ahead. They hurried forward until they came to a parade of marchers, many of them carrying placards. Thelen read a few: THE SHEPHERD LOVES YOU. GOD AND THE SHEPHERD. THE SHEPHERD WILL LEAD YOU.

He was surprised to notice the eager look on the face of the girl. She seemed to have forgotten that Garlock and Thelen were with her, as she joined the jam of excited marchers without a backward glance. Garlock and Thelen followed quickly.

Several blocks farther on the parade ended in a large building that proved to be an unfurnished and unpartitioned shell of sheet metal.

The crowd milled about for several minutes, but became hushed and still when a large man with a short black beard walked out onto a small stage built against an end wall. He had a big-boned, awkward, almost horsy body, but there was an aura of strength about him that commanded attention. Above his head a banner proclaimed: THE SHEPHERD WATCHES OVER YOU.

Someone cheered and Thelen watched with amusement as the assembled mob milled toward the stage, crying supplications and prayers.

The room was poorly ventilated and Thelen thought he detected a faint odor, apart from that of the close-packed humanity. However, he was unable to identify it. It was an unpleasant odor, yet somehow exhilarating.

He observed the rapt expressions of the faces around him, many of them glistening with oily sweat, and all of them wearing expressions of fanatic expectancy. He smiled ironically. Here, as on the other worlds, the average man was a gullible dupe.

"My friends . . ." The Shep-

herd held his hands extended toward his followers, and Thelen marveled at the strength of tone and timber of the voice that could make itself heard above the babble of the worshippers below.

The crowd was instantly quiet, and Thelen found his attention held just as tightly by the Shepherd as that of any of the others. "Come to me and be comforted," the Shepherd intoned.

Thelen caught the sound of the words that followed, but their meaning was lost to him as he stood in wonder. The Shepherd seemed to have become transfigured in a ring of light that circled his head like a halo. He was the living, breathing personification of a saint.

Something like a miraculous conversion engulfed Thelen then. He found himself listening eagerly to the Shepherd's every word—and loving him. He felt that all his life had been leading up to this minute. Thelen wanted to listen to him, to follow him, and to be with him forever. He felt an inner exultation he had never before known.

He had no recollection later of how long the Shepherd spoke. When the exhortation was over he drifted toward the door with the others, feel-

ing that he had redeemed his soul. He was only vaguely aware of noticing a rougher breed of men, without the fanaticism in their faces, who held their places at the edges of the crowd.

At the door several of these rougher men collected donations of money in small reed baskets. At the time Thelen attached no significance to the fact that he recognized La Beau moving among the collectors, directing them quietly. He knew only that he reached eagerly for his purse. And when he found it gone his only regret was that he would be unable to give his money to further the work of the Shepherd.

He felt a hand pull at his belt and turned to face a faintly smiling Garlock. He led Thelen to a yard in the rear of the huge building and showed him tables that had been set up and food being served to all who wished it. "He feeds hundreds of the hungry every day," Garlock said.

"It is only to be expected," Thelen answered.

"I want to show you something else," Garlock said. He led the way through a back door into the building they had just left. Thelen recognized that they were in a small

room formed by the framework of the stage.

The room was packed with ardent followers of the Shepherd. They were crowded about him, desperately eager to exchange a few words. Their numbers held most of them back.

The Shepherd gave quiet answers to every questioner who could make himself heard, but at each break his attention returned to the woman at his side. And when it did, it was the Shepherd's face that revealed its adoration.

The girl who inspired the adoration was Trudy Gustafson!

GARLOCK and Thelen waited at the edge of the crowd for the Shepherd's followers to thin out, or for Trudy to come to them. "How do you feel now?" Garlock asked, after a few minutes.

"Fine," Thelen answered. "Shouldn't I?"

"Do you still think the Shepherd is the voice of God?"

"He's a great man," Thelen answered, after a moment of thought.

"That he is," Garlock agreed. "But do you still feel as deeply reverent as you did

while you listened to him talk?"

Now that Garlock had mentioned it, Thelen noted that most of his near-worship was gone. "You're trying to tell me something," he said.

Garlock pulled a pair of small filters from his nostrils and held them in the palm of his hand. After a puzzled inspection Thelen caught the inference. "He was using a hypnosis drug!"

"Right. A subtle refinement introduced by the hood, La Beau. His men use the filters also. The Shepherd probably knows nothing about the drug. Incidentally," Garlock paused and reached into a hip pocket, "here is your billfold. I wanted you to feel for yourself the spell the Shepherd casts on the mob, but I didn't want you to add your money to La Beau's loot."

At that moment Thelen spied a familiar face in the crowd. Jo. She had seen him first, and when their glances met she smiled happily and waved to him. Her lips moved, but the din about them was too great for him to hear what she said. They began pushing their way toward each other.

Just as they joined hands the murmur about them changed to a higher pitch. Several women screamed.

Thelen returned and saw gendarmes, armed with their riot clubs, beating their way through the outside doorway.

Thelen and Jo were swept along with the yelling, trampling throng as they crowded through the inside doorway. For a time the jam about them kept back the gendarmes.

They reached the main room of the building and Thelen glimpsed La Beau and several of his henchmen leading the Shepherd toward the far door. He had an instant of shock as he observed the prophet. His face was deathly white, and he had to be held erect by a man on each arm. He was obviously so terrified he was unable to keep his knees from buckling. The man's dash and thunder on the preaching platform was only a veneer; his true character—the weakness and the cowardice—were showing now through the breaks in that thin cover. Thelen shook his head, and returned his attention to his own trouble.

A terrified commoner knocked Jo off balance with his shoulder as he crowded past. Thelen helped her maintain her footing as they ran with the others.

When they reached the doorway they were met by a party of police entering. The

gendarmes seized Thelen and the girl before they could turn, and rushed them outside. There other gendarmes were lined up in a military formation, waiting. All were armed with rifles.

Thelen's captors joined their fellows and they began moving quickly down the street. The crowd regained their courage and surged back to free the dozen prisoners the police had taken. The gendarmes fired into their packed ranks, killing and wounding several dozen. The commoners fell back in dismay, then gathered their courage and moved forward again.

The police unhesitatingly cut them down with another round of shot. They must consider the city's situation desperate, to be displaying such ruthless disregard for the public welfare and reaction.

Soon a passage was cleared in the street and the soldiers marched through. They reached their destination—the mammoth prison near the river—without further obstruction.

Thelen and Jo were thrown into the same cell. They had only a few minutes to talk before a self-important, stout little man bustled nervously into their room. "I am the registrar," he announced in a high

woman's voice. "Listen carefully. Your life will depend on the answer you give to my question. The Shepherd has eluded us. You will tell us the location of his hiding place."

The question left Thelen and the girl without an answer. If the Shepherd had a special place of concealment, they knew nothing about it.

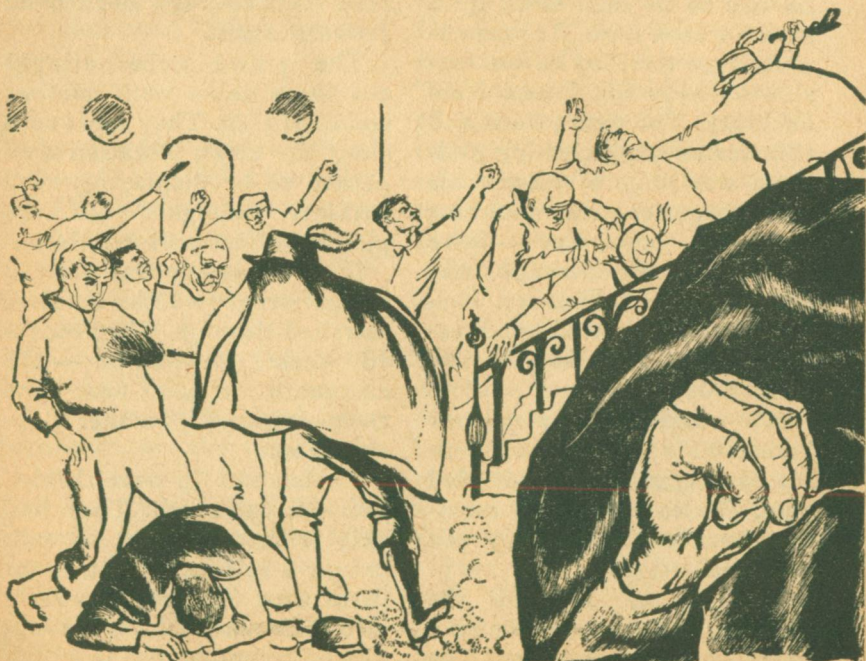
"It is not within my province to give you liberty," the registrar said impatiently, "but I can save you torture, and your life, if you give me the truthful answer."

"We know nothing of the Shepherd's hiding place," Thelen said. The registrar, he observed, was frightened. The man licked his lips nervously as he stood undecided.

"You lie," he decided finally. He turned to a half-dozen gendarmes waiting at the cell door. "Take them to the torture," he said.

CHAPTER V

THELEN and Jo were taken to a larger underground room. Thelen looked quickly





about. In the room was a wooden-frame structure which he recognized as a torture rack, eight earthen jars—two or three quart size—on the floor, several large wooden blocks, a table covered with odds and ends, two heavy chairs, and a black-clothed cadaverish man who was probably the executioner.

The gendarmes bound Thelen's arms and legs in one of the stout chairs and took stations at the room's door.

"You will give the ordeal of the water to the woman," the registrar told the executioner. "Her flesh and mind are softer. She will be more likely to talk. But waste no time."

"She knows nothing," Thelen protested.

"It is immaterial," the registrar said. "If she does not, solicitude for her agony may induce you to speak."

"There's nothing I can tell you either." Thelen knew his protest was in vain.

The registrar ignored him.

The executioner removed Jo's dress and other garments as she stood still and unprotesting. In the dim light of the overhead bulb her flesh appeared white and bloodless. Her eyes had the glazed look of one who has abandoned hope.

When she stood bare the

executioner led her to a huge drum-shaped block and pressed her back against it until her body rested in a half curve. He bound her ankles to two loopholes in a wheel behind the block. Next he fastened her wrists to two rings set in the gray wall. Finally, he gave a quarter turn to the wheel.

Jo cried out sharply as her limbs stretched and the gap between her feet and the wheel was shortened from fourteen to seven inches. *God help you*, Thelen thought, *because I cannot*.

The executioner placed the eight casks of water beside the wooden block. The girl shuddered and made a valiant effort to regain her courage. "Do you expect to put all that inside me?" she asked through fright-stiffened lips. She tried to smile but was unable to manage it.

The executioner's face remained expressionless. He inserted a horn between her teeth and poured into it the first cask of water. When he began pouring from the second the girl refused to swallow and a thin stream ran from her mouth and down her cheek. He held her nostrils until lack of breath forced her to drink the remainder of the water.

She drained the third container and her last shred of courage left her. "I can't stand any more!" she cried.

She drank a fourth and screamed, "I don't know! I don't know! You can kill me and I can't tell you where the Shepherd is!"

After the fifth she screamed again. "My God, they're killing me!"

Beads of moisture gathered together in great oily drops on Thelen's forehead and rolled sluggishly down his face.

After the sixth bucket was forced down Jo's throat, she moaned but said nothing.

During the seventh and eighth she was barely conscious and only writhed and turned, her stomach visibly bloated.

The registrar stepped to her side. "Will you speak now?" he asked.

"What can I tell you?" the girl sobbed without strength.

The executioner gave another quarter turn to the wheel, stretching her body even tighter.

"You are tearing me to pieces," Jo moaned weakly.

The executioner lifted a metal bar from the table at his side and brought it sharply down on the girl's taut forearm. The bone snapped and Jo fainted. When she opened her

eyes again he broke her shinbone.

After the rod shattered the bone of her thigh, the executioner was unable to revive her and the registrar went for a doctor. He pronounced her dead.

THELEN'S turn was next.

This time the registrar did not bother to ask if Thelen would speak first. His face had been pale when he returned with the doctor, and now he kept walking nervously to the cell door and listening. Some of his unrest communicated itself to the executioner, and he went about his work hurriedly and without finesse.

The bonds on Thelen's legs were loosened and the executioner placed each between two planks and drew them together in an iron ring. He drove a metal wedge between the middle planks, and pain starting in the tortured limbs swept up through Thelen's body. His eyesight blurred as the wedge continued its progress, and he closed them, restraining himself from crying out only with the greatest effort.

When the agony in his legs eased from excruciating torture to a numb ache Thelen opened his eyes again and saw

that the executioner had paused in his work, and stood as though listening, his face strained and apprehensive. A moment later a low rumbling sound came from overhead.

"They come!" the little registrar squealed. "Unlock the door," he directed the executioner. "Hurry, you dolt!"

In a brief period of time Thelen was alone.

He waited several uncomfortable minutes, and when his captors did not return, began working at his bonds. All sensation had long ago left his legs.

He was unable to free himself and in desperation began jerking at his arm bands. Abruptly his chair tipped off balance and he crashed to the floor. His temple struck the cement surface with a force that knocked him senseless.

He was not certain how long he lay stunned or unconscious, but when he opened his eyes again two men were bent over him. They removed the planks from his legs and helped him to his feet. However, when they released him he was unable to stand. There was no feeling or strength in his legs as he slumped to the floor. They made several attempts to help him stand, each with the same result. The last time he fell one of the men muttered,

"He is too far gone," and they left him.

THELEN massaged his legs for what must have been hours before he felt a return of feeling. He persisted in his work, and eventually he was able to stand and to walk.

He picked his way through wide open doorways to the ground level. A dead gendarme lay across the threshold of the final exit. Thelen stepped over his body into the street. It was deserted.

Morning, he observed, had already come. From the direction of the river, flames and smoke rose into the sky.

He began walking toward the flames as rapidly as his weakened legs would permit. He passed many dead bodies on the way to the river. Most of them were bodies of commoners, but many were dressed in the black of the gendarmes.

Once a wounded man clutched at his cuff, and when Thelen bent down tried to speak, but his throat only rose and fell, and no sounds came out. The man died as Thelen watched.

He reached the river's edge in time to witness the end of a battle. The quarter-mile strip of water between the

mainland and the Island was cluttered with burning and broken small boats and floating bodies. From the Island a few guns fired spasmodically. As Thelen mingled with the crowd on the shore a plebian with crossed eyes grabbed him by the arm and shouted in his face, "They're running out of ammunition!"

And it seemed that he was right. The guns on the Island were almost silent now. The commoners began pushing off in whatever small boats could still be navigated. Thelen fought his way through the rioters and climbed into an already overcrowded rowboat as it pulled away.

On the Island he found that the guards at the wire fences had not yet run out of small arms ammunition. They held the horde of commoners back at the shoreline.

All through the day Thelen wandered around the barricade, looking for a way through. There was none. When darkness came he found a secluded patch of bush and curled up beneath it. His hunger was a gnawing pain, but his exhausted body soon dropped into a deep slumber. Just before he slept he took a moment to wonder why Roscoe had been so silent this last day. There was a feeling of

something missing, as though a swollen tooth had been removed. Drowsily he touched his temple. For the first time then he noticed that it was swollen to half the size of his hand. It must have happened when his chair in the prison had tipped over. Sleepily he hoped that was the last of Roscoe.

Thelen awoke with the first rays of the morning sun. It had rained during the night and the ground under him had turned to greasy, slippery mud. He was wet, cold, and miserable. Hunger was an empty ache in his stomach. His legs had swollen about the ankles and knees, from their time in the press, and he had difficulty walking. But worst of all was the pain in his head.

His brain felt as though it were being bathed in a great sea of brine. Nausea washed through it, wave after wave, drowning it occasionally in a vast muttering that seemed words, but were not words. An all-engulfing sickness spread to his body and forced him to lie on his back as he gasped for breath.

He must have slept, for the clouded sun was several hours high in the sky when consciousness returned again. His clothes had not dried, but

though the muttering still went on in his brain, the other agonies had ceased. Something had happened to his vision, however. Everything about him appeared thinned and flattened, as though it had lost a dimension. He made a concerted effort to ignore the muted sounds and aborted sight, and succeeded enough to be able to think semi-clearly. He had to reach Garlock if at all possible. In his present condition he was useless alone.

He rose and made his way through the makeshift camps the commoners had set up around the barricade surrounding the homes of the nobility, searching against hope for a way through. He noted that the commoners had lost the enthusiasm of their first storming of the Island. Now most of them stood around in wet groups, looking as though they wished this thing had never started. It would not have taken much to end the revolt right there.

Thelen's hunger forced him at last to stop at one of the soup kitchens that had been set up along the shore. After an hour in a slow-moving line he ate a plate of thin stew and felt slightly better, though still weak, and still terribly sick.

SPORADIC shooting kept up through most of the day, but the plebians were without organization and without much spirit, and made no more attempts to storm the Island defenses.

Shortly after the sun set a loudspeaker began barking for attention from within the barricade. The Regent and State Assembly had agreed to discuss terms of surrender!

Thelen recognized the voice that made the announcement as Garlock's. He and the girl, then, had succeeded in the first step of their carefully planned campaign.

The camps along the shores of the Island became melees of happy shouting commoners. Brush and damaged boats and equipment were gathered into a huge pile and lit, and thousands came from the mainland to join in the dancing and celebration.

However, after the first exuberance had been spent, rumors began spreading through the camps: the nobles were demanding that they be allowed to remain on the Island, unmolested; that a government—of their own members—maintain order until democratic elections could be held; that the surrender offer was merely a trap. The first

joy turned to a savage resentment.

Reading between the lines Thelen realized that the source of the rumors must be La Beau. An orderly surrender would not fit his plans for looting. He was playing a cagy game behind the scenes. If the man could be eliminated. . . . Thelen was too sick to pursue the thought further.

The next morning the loud-speaker began its work again. The operators—Garlock and others—tried to give their side, offered to begin negotiations and explained that they demanded no prior commitments, but their pleadings were hooted down. At last those inside asked for an audience with the Shepherd. He would be allowed to judge their sincerity.

For a time the people vacillated—the request sounded reasonable—but then hard-faced men, wandering through the camps, whispered that they wanted to capture the Shepherd and put him to death. Without him the nobles figured the commoners would have no one behind whom to rally.

Before noon La Beau played a trump card. The Shepherd made his appearance. A high platform had been erected and equipped with a loud-

speaker. The Shepherd took his place on it, above the crowd. Thelen found a spot near the platform and was able to see and hear him quite clearly.

He noted the prophet's disheveled beard and hair, his red-rimmed eyes, and the pallor of fear on his cheeks. The Lord had a weak vessel here to propagate His word. The man was obviously terrified, once again afraid for his life. He was there from fear, not conviction.

The Shepherd's speech was brief. "The nobles deceive you," he said. "We will not be safe until their blood has washed these sands clean." He spoke as though his words had been carefully rehearsed. He tried to say more, but the words choked in his throat, and he turned and stumbled blindly down the steps of the platform.

La Beau climbed up and took his place. He was coming out into the open at last. That made him vulnerable, Thelen noted, momentarily rising above his personal misery.

"Tonight is the night!" La Beau shouted. "Arm yourselves with any weapons you can find. If you find none, fight with your hands! There must not be an aristocrat alive when tomorrow's sun rises!"

A mighty shout rolled down the beaches.

AFTER La Beau finished speaking, Thelen sat on a nearby rock and let his tired head sink into his hands. This then was the end. Blood would be shed, heavily—on both sides. Alone he could do nothing to prevent it. His mission had been a complete failure.

He heard a low laugh and looked up. The swarthy man facing him was La Beau—and in his hand was a pistol!

"We meet again," La Beau said in his expressionless voice. The man looked tired. Several days' growth of whiskers stood out on his cheeks like small black spikes.

Thelen stood up, but did not speak.

"Shooting a lover of the nobles will be a pleasant diversion," La Beau said conversationally.

Thelen admitted to himself that he was afraid. He knew La Beau intended to kill him—and he did not want to die. The nearness of death chilled his nerves like a submerged frost. He had taken his chances with danger before, and had come near death several times, but the instinct of self-preservation was as strong as ever.

Strangely, the pain in his head seemed to have eased. It was still there, but only as a mild diversion. It seemed to have paused, before the threat to his life, almost as though it were listening and waiting.

He gauged the distance between himself and La Beau. Too far to reach him before he died. He looked quickly in both side directions. There was no escape.

La Beau raised his pistol. In his skull Thelen's brain scurried like a trapped rat. La Beau sighted along the pistol barrel. Thelen's brain shouted in silent protest. La Beau fired.

THELEN was astounded to find himself running. His feet beat against hard pavement, but he had no idea where he was going or where he was. He stopped and looked about him. He was somewhere in the city. He breathed a sigh of relief, then stopped in shocked unbelief at what had happened.

Somehow, somehow, he had moved—in an instant—from the Island to the city. But how had he done it? It took only another flash of thought to know the answer. Roscoe!

Roscoe had teleported him away from the Island at the

exact moment La Beau had fired.

Excitement rode high in Thelen's brain as he sought to establish contact with Roscoe. Nothing. The blow to his temple had destroyed their ability to converse, but something had replaced it. Deep within his brain he felt what he thought of as a flow of power; it was the same muttering that had disturbed him so badly the morning before, but now it was pleasant to experience. He had the feeling that there was a wealth of power there, many facets yet to be discovered.

While his excitement still rode him, Thelen decided to experiment with the teleportation. He had to find out if he could control that new power, or if it operated only when pushed by the threat of acute danger. He thought of the shore of the mainland, opposite the Island, and willed himself to be there.

He stumbled, looked up, and saw the Island across the strip of water. He had succeeded!

Pausing only momentarily, Thelen moved again!

LA BEAU wore a puzzled expression on his face. He had pocketed his gun and was

turning away when Thelen made his reappearance. He cursed and grabbed again for his gun as he spied Thelen standing in front of him.

Thelen grinned mirthlessly and drove his fist into the big man's face.

La Beau's knees sagged. He spread his legs and held himself erect, still tugging at the pistol in his pocket.

Thelen struck again. La Beau sprawled on his back on the ground, the gun flying from his hand.

Thelen stooped and retrieved the gun, and as he would have shot a mad dog, placed a bullet between the struggling man's eyes.

His job was over.

THELEN spent the remainder of the day freeing the Shepherd and guiding him to the safety of Garlock and Trudy and their group. He watched with a mild disgust as the Shepherd lay with his head on the woman's lap, sobbing. Trudy stroked his forehead, her face betraying her love for the weakling.

Thelen knew that everything would soon be resolved for the best now. Trudy and the Shepherd loved each other, and she had enough strength for the both of them.

He would do whatever she directed him to do. The shedding of blood was over.

Somehow, however, Thelen had lost most of his interest in what happened on New France. It was the thing within his head that intrigued him now. There was no knowing just how great the new power he had found might be. Perhaps with it he could perform miracles.

He wondered for a moment if he might not have been turned into a freak; he might have startling new abilities, but how would others react to him? Immediately he realized how absurd he was being. Soon other men would have the same new faculty or facul-

ties. What had happened to him had been accidental, but it would not take long for trained men to discover just what it was that had happened and to duplicate it. Perhaps some day every man would have it. Perhaps he was only the first superman in a race of supermen. Perhaps. . . . The possibilities overwhelmed him.

He had to get back to Earth as soon as possible. The work had to begin.

Thelen felt himself stumble again. He fell to his knees, swore abstractedly, and pulled himself to his feet. He looked around in amazement.

He was in the office of the EIAC—back on Earth!



NEWSSTAND BLUES?

Have you had trouble finding SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURES at your favorite newsstand lately? Or, for that matter, at any newsstand? Well, don't shoot the proprietor—it isn't his fault. The entire magazine distribution business has been in an upset state lately, for various complex reasons. We're doing our best to correct the situation, but we could use some help from you.

If you *have* had trouble finding SFA, drop us a postcard and let us know. Include your name and address, and the name and address of the stand where you usually buy magazines. We'll see that a supply of SFA is rushed to that stand without delay.

Okay? Thanks!

THE BOOK-SPACE

A New Department by Calvin M. Knox

OCCAM'S RAZOR, by David Duncan. Ballantine, 35¢.

This is a crackling good book. Duncan, author of two previous Ballantine novels and eight non-science fiction books, combines his story-telling skill with the speculative ability of the best sf specialist writers, and the result is outstanding.

The scene is Santa Felicia Island, in the very near future—a future tense with the menace of today's explosive world situation. Santa Felicia is a guided-missile base, shrouded by security, from which the United States is planning to launch its first moon-rocket (and hoping to beat out the six or seven other nations known to be on the verge of doing the same).

Psychiatrist Cameron Hume, Duncan's central figure, attends a lecture being given by eccentric mathematician Roger Staghorn; Staghorn is lecturing to a group of potential moon-riders on the theory of minimals, and by way of illustrating the principle of parsimony as applied to rock-

etship orbits is using a complex apparatus for manipulating films of soap-bubble. Something goes wrong—and a gateway between universes is opened, long enough for two alien beings to be drawn through into our world.

From this point David Duncan creates a yarn of steadily rising suspense which never stoops to melodrama and which ends up in a quite overpowering climax guaranteed to delight people who, like me, read or write science fiction in hopes of glimpsing something beyond our reality. (And there is a quite legitimate punch ending in the last couple of paragraphs, too.)

The most startling thing about the book is that Duncan has constructed it out of the materials of a fifth-rate Hollywood science fiction movie. All the cliches are here: the secret rocket base, the mad scientist, the conscientious psychiatrist-hero and the woman who loves him From Afar; there are alien invaders, one a male of awesome strength and the other a woman of surpassing loveliness,

and a romance between Earthman and alien, and mindless military men obstructing the path of knowledge, and an innocent alien being hounded to death, and—oh, dozens more.

But by telling his story simply and unsensationally and by *motivating* every last damned scrap of potential Hollywood cliché until it's perfectly sound fictionally and scientifically, Duncan completely transcends his material. The result is a first-class novel, exciting, thought-provoking, well-written.

Read it.

DDOUBLE STAR, by Robert A. Heinlein. Signet, 35¢.

A reprint of the 1956 *Astounding* serial that captured the "Hugo" award for novel-of-the-year at the New York SF Convention. It's somewhat shorter than Heinlein's usual novel length, and therein lies its chief fault—there isn't enough of it.

Double Star is less a novel than a pseudo-autobiography of The Great Lorenzo, a skillful but seedy actor of the future who is shanghaied into doubling for the galaxy's most important man, and discovers eventually that he must be-

come that man and continue the pretense for the rest of his life.

It's not precisely a new idea in fiction, but it comes alive beautifully in Heinlein's hands. Heinlein rambles on, putting his hero through adventure after adventure in the manner of the picaresque novel, and—likewise in the picaresque fashion—simply shuts off the tap when he grows weary of the joke. The result is fascinating, if a little exasperating; it tends to be sketchy in places, and the story peters out rather than reaches a full stop.

But as usual Heinlein displays superb story-telling ability, and the book is in no place dull. It's a journey, with twists and turns of varying degrees of predictability, and by the time we finish it we've been deep inside the mind of Lorenzo, who takes his place in the all-too-unpopulated gallery of memorable science fiction characters.

THE COSMIC PUPPETS, by Philip K. Dick. Ace Double, 35¢ (with *SARGASSO OF SPACE*, by Andrew North).

This seems to be the month for infusing new life into old clichés. Duncan re-examining

multiple universes, Heinlein and his Lorenzo, and Philip K. Dick, in his fifth Ace novel, looking at the hoary concept of the alien beings who take over a small and ordinary American town.

This one is really a long novelette, not a novel, and it's actually a fantasy and not science fiction. It lacks the complexity and rich intellectual ferment of Dick's four earlier novels. Briefly, it's the story of Ted Barton, who returns to his hometown after a long absence, only to find the whole town altered beyond recognition.

The characteristic Dick virtues are present: the tight, nervous, compelling prose style, the sharp characterization, the startlingly real dialogue, the meticulous development of the unsettling situation. It's a fantasy in the *Unknown* tradition, unfolded with the rigorous logic of the best of that magazine's lead novels, and it makes exciting reading for those who enjoy

an occasional pure fantasy.

Incidentally, the version of the book that appeared last year in *Satellite Science Fiction* underwent considerable editorial alteration; this appears to be Dick's original un-tailored draft.

On the flip side is a lengthy and colorful epic of interstellar adventure bylined Andrew North—and that's the popular Andre Norton lurking behind the false whiskers. This one concerns Dane Thorson of the space-trader *Solar Queen*, a Free Trader which buys the planet Limbo in a far corner of the galaxy.

It's a wide-ranging yarn in the grand tradition of adventurous science fiction, and the pace never lets up. This reader, for one, enjoyed it thoroughly. And any follower of SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURES or of science fiction adventures who happened to miss the Gnome Press hard-cover edition of several years ago would do well to invest 35¢ in this Ace double.



• The next SFA goes on sale February 6! •

BIG SAM Was My Friend

by HARLAN ELLISON

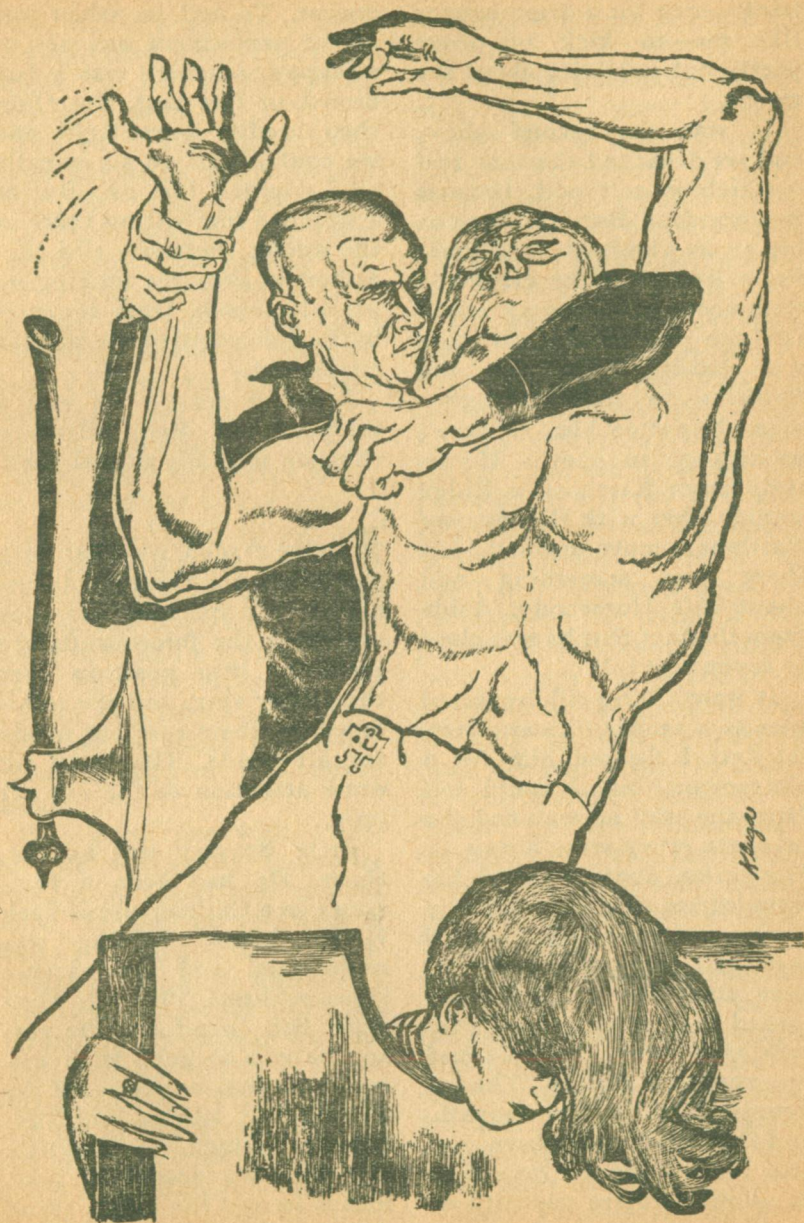
*He was the greatest teleport in any circus—
and his search for a dead girl could have no end....*

Illustrated by Richard Kluga

I GUESS working for a teeper circus ain't the quietest work in the galaxy, but what the hell, it's more than just a buck, and you see a lot of worlds, and there's always enough quail around to keep a guy happy, so why should I kick? By that I mean, so what if things do happen, like what happened to my friend Big Sam out on Giuliu II? So what, you can always find another friend someplace around. But every time I start thinking that way, I kick myself mentally and say, Johnny Lee, you got to stop passing

Sam off like that. He was a good friend. He was a sick man, and he couldn't help what he did, but that's no call to be passin' him off so quick.

Then I'd start to remember the first time I'd ever seen Big Sam. That was outside Shreveport. Not the *old* Shreveport, but the one on Burris, with the greensand hills just beyond in the dusk. We were featuring Dolly Blaze that time. She was a second stage pyrotic with a cute little trick of setting herself on fire, and what with her figure what it was, well, it wasn't much of a



trick—even for a drum-banger like me—to kick up some pretty hot publicity about the circus.

It was the second show, and we'd packed the tent full—which wasn't odd, because two hundred Burrites, each as big as an elephant (and looking a little bit like elephants with those hose noses), crammed our pneumotent till there was hardly room for the hawkers to mill through—when I spotted him. It wasn't so strange to spot a Homebody from Earth on a Ridge world, what with the way we Earthmen move around, but there was something odd about *this* Homebody. Aside from the fact that he was close to seven feet tall.

It wasn't long till I spotted him as a teeper of some sort. At first I figured him for a clairvoyant, but I could tell from the way he watched the acrobats (they were a pair of Hungarian floaters called the Spindotties, and the only way they could have fallen was to lose their teep powers of anti-grav altogether), the way he tensed up when they were making a catch, that he could not read the future. Then I figured him for an empath, and that would have been useless for the circus, except in an administrative capacity of

course. To tell us when one of the performers was sick or unhappy, or there was a bad crowd, or like that. But right then credits were tight and we couldn't afford an empath, so I counted him off. But as I watched him sitting there in the stands, between two big-as-houses Burrites sucking up pink lemonade from squeeze-bulbs, I discounted the empath angle, too.

I didn't realize he was a teleport till Fritz Bravery came on with his animal pack.

IN OUR CIRCUS, we clear both side rings for the central circle when a specialty act goes on. Then the fluorobands are jockeyed into position over the center ring, and the mini-tapes set their reaction music for all bands. That way we draw attention to the big act only.

Fritz Bravery was an old-timer. He had been a lion-tamer in a German circus back Home, before teeping was understood and the various types outlined. That was when Fritz had found out the reason he was so good with animals was that he was what the French had labeled *animaux-voyeur*. Which, in English, the way we accept it now, means he and the beasts think

alike, and he suggests to them and like they just go through hoops if he thinks *jump through a hoop*.

But Fritz was also one of those harkeners after the old days. He thought show biz was dead, nothing but commercial and lowbrow crap left. You know, one of those. And he had lost his wife Gert somewhere between Madison Square Plaza and Burris, and eventually the old joy juice had grabbed him.

That night old Fritz Bravery was juiced to the ears.

You could spot it the moment he got into the ring with the beasts. He was using three big Nubian lions and a puma and a dree and a slygor, those days. Plus one mean bitch of a black panther called Felice, the likes of which for downright cussedness I've never seen.

Old Fritz got with them, and he was shaky from the start. King Groth, who ran the show, looked at me, and I looked at him, and we both thought, *I hope to God Fritz can handle them tonight with his senses all fogged up like that*. But we didn't do anything, because Fritz always had his escape plate ready to lift him over their heads if he got into trouble. And besides, it was his act, we had no right

to cramp it before he'd shown his stuff.

But King murmured in my ear, "Better start looking around for a new cat man, Johnny. Fritz won't be good much longer." I nodded, and felt sort of sad, because Fritz was as good a cat man as we'd ever had with the circus.

The old man went around them, walking backwards, with his lectrowhip snapping and sparking sweetly, and for a while everything was fine. He even had the lions and the puma up in a tricky pyramid, with the black panther about to leap up the backs of the five lions, to take a place at the apex of the pyramid. He pulled off that number pretty well, though one of the lions stumbled as the pyramid was breaking up, and growled at him. We had grown to know the difference between a "show" growl — commanded mentally by Fritz for fright effect in the act—and a real one free of Fritz's control. This one was real. So we knew old Fritz was losing control.

We grew more alert as he herded the lions and the puma into the corner of the force-cage in which he performed his act. It was transparent around the four walls, but there none the less.

Then Fritz—ignoring Fel-

ice, who followed the other Earth-beasts—went to work on the dree. He got her to rotate on all sixteen, and hump, and then turn inside out, which is a pretty spectacular thing, considering a dree's technicolor innards. Then he got it to lift him on one appendage, and place him gently on another, all the way up the length of her body, from appendage to appendage.

Then he worked for a while with the slygor.

It was poisonous, so he donned gloves, and used the sonic-whistle on it since electricity did not affect it in any way. His work with the slygor was fair that night, and for a while we thought he would make it fine. I kept tossing this seven-foot Homebody in the stands a look from time to time, trying to decide what sort of a teep he was, but he was just watching the act, and smiling, and not doing a thing.

Then Fritz went to work on Felice.

She had been invershipped from Earth not more than three weeks before, and the trip through inverspace, coupled with her natural instinctive nastiness, had left her a jangle-nerved, heaped-up body of hate and fury. We had had several close calls with her nipping her feeder-robots, and

I for one didn't like to see Old Fritz in there with her.

But he was determined to break her—showmanship and all that bushwah—so we let him go ahead. After all, he *did* have the escape plate there, which whisks him anti-gravitationally over the heads of the animals should there be trouble.

He picked up his lectro-whip, and moved in on Felice. She sat crouched back on her haunches, waiting him out. He stopped a foot from her, so close he could have stroked her sleek black fur. Then he did a double-movement *crack-crack!* with the lectrowhip, and caught her on the snout with a spark. Felice leaped.

At that precise instant, the most remarkable thing I've ever glommed in all my days as flack for a top, happened. I've never yet been able to figure it out—whether the beasts were actually in mental contact with one another, or it was just chance—but the puma got to its feet and softly padded over to the escape plate—and sat down on it. The lions moved out, and positioned themselves around the force cage. Fritz was hemmed in completely. Then Felice began stalking him.

It was the most fascinating and horrifying thing I've ever

seen. To witness that big cat, playing footsie with old Fritz. The tamer tried to control her, but even from where we were in the stands we could see the sweat on his face and the dark lines in the completely white of his face. He was scared; he had lost control of them completely. He knew he was dead.

Felice's eyes were two barbs, ready to impale poor old Fritz, and we were so stunned, it all happened so quickly, we just sat there and so help me God, we just *watched!*

I felt like a Roman in the arena.

Felice crouched again, and the muscles in her black shoulders hunched and bunched and tensed, and she sprang full on old Fritz.

He fell down, and her crushing weight landed atop him, and her jaws opened wide, with yellow fangs straining for Fritz Bravery's neck. Her head came up and back, and her throat was stretched tight so the pulse of a vein could be seen, and then the head came down like the blade of a guillotine.

But Fritz wasn't there.

He was sitting up in the stands with the seven-foot Homebody. That was when I knew. Hell, *anybody'd* be able

to tell, by then. He was a teleport. The best kind—an outgoing teleport.

He had teeped Fritz out of the jaws of the black panther.

I looked at King Groth, who was looking from Felice to Fritz and back, and there was amazement on his face.

"We got us a new star act, King," I said, slipping out of my seat. I cocked a thumb at Fritz, who was talking bewilderedly to the seven-foot Homebody. I started threading my way between the elephant-big Burrites, toward Fritz and his savior.

Behind me, I heard King Groth saying, "Go get 'im, boy."

I got him.

Now I won't bother going into the year Big Sam spent with the circus. It was pretty routine. We covered the stardust route from Burris to Lyli A to Crown Colony to Peck's Orchard to Moulton/Xllill (they have a treaty there with the natives, so long as they use both the Homebody and native names for the planet) to Ringaling and right along the Ridge to the new cluster worlds of Dawnsa, Jowlak, Min, Thornwire and Giuliu II. That was where we lost Big Sam. There on Giuliu II.

But to understand what happened, *why* it happened, I'd better tell you about Big Sam. Not just that he was nearly seven feet tall, with a long, horsy face and high cheekbones and dark, sad blues eyes. But *about* him, what he was like.

And this is the best way to tell it:

Sam's act consisted of several parts. For instance, at the beginning, we turned off all the fluorobands. Then three roustabouts clanked out carrying this big pole in their metal arms. They would kick off the cover plate of the hole we had sunk in the floor of the arena or tent, insert the pole in it, and clamp it so it was rigid.

Then one of the roustabouts would switch on the torch-finger of his utility hand and set fire to the pole. We had already doused it in oil, and the thing caught fire up its length, till there was a pillar of fire in the middle of the ring. It was a specially-treated pole, and didn't really burn—though the fire on it was real enough—so we used the same pole over and over.

Then the ringmaster would swoop in on his plate, and his sonic voice would boom out at the audience, "Laydeez and Gentilmenn! I drawww your

attenshuuun to the center ring, where the galaxy's most mystifying, most extraorrrdinary artiste will perform for you. I am proud to present: The Unbelievable Ugo!"

That was Sam.

Then the one spot would go on, like the eye of a god, and pick out Sam, striding across the plastidust. He would be wearing skin-tight black clothing that accentuated his slim build, and high-topped black boots, very soft and with two inch soles to make him seem even taller. And a black cape with a crimson lining.

He would advance to the center of the ring, just beside the burning pole, and raise his arms. A girl wearing spangles and not much else (that was Beatrice, whom I had been dating when she wasn't on her iron filing kick—but that's another story, fortunately) would run out and take his cape, and Ugo, that's Sam, would turn and look at the pole for a long minute.

Then he would take a running leap, hit the pole and start to shinny up. Everyone would shriek. He was being burned to death. Then he was gone.

And a second later, he was at the top of the pole, on the little platform above the

flames. Everyone was astonished. For some reason, they never realize he's a teleport. I guess there are enough teleports around, but most people don't see them as flagrantly displaying their talents as Big Sam did.

For a moment he would poise himself there on toe-tip, as the audios skirled their danger music on all bands; and then, as the drums rolled, Sam would do a neat swan dive off the platform. The shrieking would get even louder then.

He would turn a gainer, a flip, a half-gainer and then—just as it seemed he was about to smash full force into the ground—he disappeared.

And reappeared standing lightly on the balls of his feet, in the same position he had been when he started—his arms were widespread over his head, an enigmatic grin splitting his craggy features.

That was the first part of his act. The applause was always deafening. (And we never had to modify it by taped responses, either.)

To see an almost certain horrible death—you know how crowds all sit on the edges of their seats, *praying* subconsciously for a spectacular accident—and then to be whisked away from it so suddenly

—brought to the edge of tragedy, and then to have their better natures win out, showing them how much nicer they always *knew* they were—that was the supreme thrill.

But it was merely a beginning.

Then Ugo-Sam did juggling. Magnificent juggling with hundreds of knives, and fireballs, and even thousand-pound weights. Moving them all by teleportation. Then he wrestled with the bear, slipping out of the most fearsome grips as easily as a greased fish. Then came the tennis match he played with himself. (He beat himself in straight sets.)

His act was sensational. For on many of the outer Ridge worlds, they had had little or no truck with teleports. So Big Sam was a novelty. And as such, he dragged the credits for us. I played him big.

But there was more to Sam than just the tricks.

WE USED to sit alone at night under a saffron sky, or a mauve sky or an ebony sky, and talk. I liked talking to him, because he wasn't dumb like most of the washed-up and used-up carny creeps we had with us. He had been an educated man, that was ob-

vious, and there was a deep, infinite sadness about him that sometimes made me want to cry, just talking to him there.

I remember the night I found out how sick Big Sam really was. That was on Rore-spokine I, a little plug of a world by all rights we should have avoided; but a combination of low money for pay-checks, repair work for the ships, and general all-around lethargy had set us down on that whistle stop for a three-week set.

Mostly, we just puttered around and killed time resting up till the big six-month tour on Giuliu II.

That night, Big Sam and I lay back with our heads on grassy mounds, staring up at the night that was deep blue with the stars ticking away eternity over us. I looked over at the rough topography of his face, and asked him, "Sam, what the hell is a guy like you doing out on the fly like this?"

His face tightened all over. It was so odd, the way he looked. So tight, like my question had sucked all the life from him.

"I'm looking for a dead girl, JohnnyLee." He always pronounced my name as though it were one word only. His answer didn't sink in for a second.

I didn't want to push, but I felt somehow this was the first opening he had ever given me.

"Oh? How'd that happen?"

"She died a long time ago, Johnny. A long time ago."

His eyes closed. He no longer saw the stars.

I didn't say a word. For a long time, neither did he. Then, when I was starting to fall asleep, and thought he already had, he went on: "Her name was Claire. Nothing very pretentious about her. Simple and clean. I wanted very much to marry her, I don't know why, we were nothing alike. Then one day we were walking, and I don't know what it was—just something, you know—and I teleported away from her. Half a block away. I didn't know then, quite, what I could do. I had never teleported in front of Claire. I suppose it was a shock to her. She was a No-Talent, and it must have shocked her. I could see she was repelled by the idea of it.

"I'd . . . I'd been . . . sleeping with her, Johnny, and I guess it was pretty foreign. Like finding out the guy you'd been making love to was an android or some such. She ran away. I was so shocked at her attitude, I just didn't follow her.

"Then I heard a screech and she screamed, and I teleported to the source of the scream, and she'd been hit by a truck, trying to cross the street. Oh, it wasn't my fault, nothing like that, and no guilt complex or anything, but—well, you know, I had to get away from things. So I took to the fly. Just like that."

He was finished. I said, "Just like that. You ever goin' back, Sam?"

He shook his head. "I don't suppose so. I'll find her someday."

I said, "Huh?"

He glanced over, and there was a hurt in his eyes. "Yeah. I suppose I never told you this. You'll probably think it's a crazy idea; everyone else does. She's in Heaven."

"Nothing crazy about that, Sam," I said, big magnanimous that I was.

"Heaven is out here somewhere."

That stopped it. I was back to "Huh?"

He nodded again. "Out here, on one of those, is Heaven. That's where she is. I'll find her." He waved at the stars overhead. I followed his arm. Up here? Heaven? On an alien world? I didn't say anything.

"Crazy?"

"No, I don't suppose it's any crazier than any other idea

of Heaven or Hell," I replied soberly. It gave me the creeps, frankly.

"I'll find her," he repeated.

"I sure hope so, Sam. I sure hope so."

WE HIT GIULIU II on a Thursday, and a week later, we had a command performance scheduled for the Giuliun royalty. It was quite a deal; once we had performed and pleased the court, our success on Giuliu II was assured. Because they had a real Monarchy-plus set up on that world. And if the court liked us, the high glub-glub or whatever the hell they called the king would send out a proclamation ordering *all* his subjects to attend or suffer some penalty.

We ran through the acts in the palace, which was a great mansion, twice as big as our pneumotent; and I've got to admit, even washed-out Dolly Blaze and Fritz Bravery and the rest were magnificent. But, of course, Sam stole the show. They had never seen a teleport on Giuliu II, and Sam was at his sparkling best.

When it was over, the king and his court invited us to a huge banquet and ceremonial party. They had huge platters of fried and braised meats,

bowls of fruits, tankards of ales and liqueurs that were direct lineal descendants of ambrosia. It was the greatest.

Then they brought on the dancing girls, and they were even better. I spotted one smooth-limbed little number I decided to approach with dalliance in mind, after everyone had settled down a little. The Giuliuns were Homebody type right down to their navels, and she had the cutest little popo I'd seen in months. Beatrice, the girl who assisted Sam, and who I had been shacking with, was eyeing me, and eyeing a handsome brute, all tanned and wearing bronze armor, who was guarding one of the big doors. I decided to let her cheat on me, thus leaving the road clear for the little dancer.

The party was well under way when the king stood up and made some big deal announcement about us being just in time to see the Sacred Virgin Ceremony of Giuliu II, which occurred only once every twenty-five years. He even hinted it had been moved up a few weeks to accommodate us in this hour of circus triumph. We all applauded, and watched as they set up a high platform made of gold.

We were all gathered around at the one end of the

ceremonial hall, with the scaffold of gold at the other. We watched as they set up some sort of chopping block affair on the platform, and put two burning braziers beside it.

It was getting more interesting by the moment. While most of the circus folk were still gorging themselves on the foods and fruits overflowing the table, Sam and I turned full around to watch this.

The king signaled to one of his bully-boys, and the bully-boy swung a long-handled clapper at a tapestry hanging from floor to ceiling beside him. They must have had a gong concealed behind it, because the sound almost deafened me.

Then the king spoke for a few minutes on the history and traditions of the Sacred Virgin Ceremony. We didn't really listen too closely, mainly because he was speaking so vaguely and the noise from the crowd around us drowned him half-out.

But in a little while we got the impression this was very important stuff to the Giuliuns, and when the king clapped his hands, we turned to the gang, and tried to get them to shut up. Those slobs would rather eat than think.

They didn't shut up till the gong sounded again, but when

the gray-hooded man with the gigantic meat cleaver brought the girl out onto the platform, they all signed off like we'd cut their vocal cords.

She was a magnificently beautiful creature. Her hair was long and blonde, and her body was full and straight. Her eyes the deepest and most lustrous brown I've ever seen.

The executioner—hell yes! that's what he was—helped her over to the block, and her face was very calm. Calm, it seemed, the way someone's face would be if they were dying of cancer, and knew they could do nothing about it. But this young girl wasn't dying of cancer; she was about to have that gray-hooded man chop off her head.

A sacrificial ceremony!

THE HOODED MAN helped her to kneel before the block, and she lay her head in the notch. The executioner pulled her hair away from her neck, gently, and laid it over her left shoulder in a long blonde streamer.

Then he tested his hatchet's edge, and stepped back. He planted his feet wide apart, and swung the axe up. Everyone screamed, and it sounded like a million buzzsaws.

That was when I heard

Sam's muted gurgle. He had been mumbling, there beside me, for over a minute, and I hadn't realized it, I was so engrossed in watching the tableau on the chopping block. Then I heard him mutter, "Claire!"

And I knew there was going to be trouble.

I saw him stand up, out of the corner of my eye, and as the executioner swung the axe up in a two-handed whirl, Sam disappeared from beside me. The next instant, before the hatchet had a chance to fall on that lovely neck, he was there. His arm snaked around the gray-hooded man's neck, and his hand shot out to catch the descending shaft of the axe.

He wrenched the executing tool from the man's hand, and threw it with a spinning clatter to the floor of the chamber far below the pyramid. Then his fist came back and caught the hatchetman across his hidden face. The executioner stumbled, and Sam doubled him over with a belly-blow that made the man scream. Sam straightened him with a right to the tip of the jaw, and the hatchetman went caroming off the pyramid. He landed with a sick thump.

The king was on his feet, livid with rage, and the court

was screaming, "Profanity! Outrage! Transgression!" The king clapped his hands, and a dozen of the tanned bullyboys raced onto the pyramid and grabbed Sam around the waist, the neck, the legs. . . .

Of course he teleported out of their grip. He was back beside me. The King was leaping up and down, screeching at the top of his lungs, for somebody to get that man. Sam stood impassively, waiting. Then King Groth walked over, and said, "Stand still, Sam. Let's find out how much damage you've done."

He went to talk to the other king. Groth was a sharp operator, and if anyone could pour oil on the waters, it was him. We watched as he talked to the king, who was getting more furious and apoplectic by the moment.

"Sam, Sam," I pleaded quietly, "why did you do it? For cripes sake, *why?*"

He looked at me, and said, "This isn't much like Heaven, is it?" Then I knew.

The blonde girl still knelt beside the chopping block. She had not moved, except to raise her head from the notch.

King Groth came back, and his face was gray.

"Sam, they say you have to die."

Big Sam looked at him, and didn't say a word. I don't think he cared, really.

"Look, Sam, we're going to fight this. They can't do it to a Homebody. We can fight it, don't worry."

The king came running over, and started to screech something. "Listen," I piped in, just to stop him, "he is a sick man, he didn't know what he was doing. You have to remember he knows nothing of your local customs."

It didn't make a bit of difference. "He must die. That is the reward for interrupting the Sacred Virgin Ceremony."

We argued and hassled and made a big stink out of it, and I think the only reason we all didn't gallop out of there and pull up stakes was that we were afraid we'd all be held and executed. And there was something else; something I'm ashamed, even today, to say.

I think we were all afraid of losing the business.

THAT'S RIGHT. Pretty disgusting, ain't it? We could have set Dolly Blaze to burning the joint, and we could have escaped. We could have done at least a hundred things to distract the Giuliums. But we were afraid we'd lose the

business, and we were almost willing to let a man die for that.

Finally, though, the king said: "We must leave it to the Sacred Virgin, then. Let her decision be final."

That sat okay with us—we wanted a way out so bad then it didn't matter—and we all looked at Sam. Softly, the hurt came back into his eyes, and a softness surrounded his mouth, and he nodded. "That's fine," he said simply.

We all walked up to the pyramid and looked at her. She was very clean and simple looking. Just the way I'd imagine Sam's Claire might have looked. We all stared at her, and with a sneer, she snarled, "Let him die!"

And that was that.

They took him up to the block, and they took her away, and they shoved Sam's head into the notch. Then someone made the motion that he be hung, because the block was reserved for the Sacred Virgin. So they strung up a rope—right there in that beautiful hall—and they put it around Sam's neck.

And we just watched. Can you understand that? We just stood there and watched as Sam was prepared for hanging. I tried to stop them, fin-

ally. I suppose I came out of my trance. But King Groth and two of the performers grabbed me by the arms, and held me.

"This is their world, Johnny. Let them do what they have to do."

And Sam looked at me, and I could see in his eyes that it didn't matter to him. It was the same hurt, all over again. He had been wrong; he *did* have a hag riding him about Claire's death. This was one way to clear it off.

They yanked on the rope, and Sam went up.

He hardly twisted or kicked or twitched.

I couldn't watch.

Because there were a couple things that made me ill way deep inside. The first was knowing King Groth and the circus, and even myself, had sacrificed this nice, quiet guy for the sake of a credit. And the other thing—the thing that stopped us from *really* trying to help him, I think—was that Sam wanted to die. He could have teeped out of that noose at any moment, but he didn't. He let them lynch him. He had squared away with Claire.

We finished our tour on Giuliu II. Sam had been right: it wasn't much like Heaven.



SYKES

by STANLEY R. LEE

*He was the captain, wasn't he? He
had discovered the planet, hadn't he?
Then what right did they have to take
it away, and deny its very existence?*

Illustrated by John Martinez

THE SHIP turned into light and went a billion miles. The pilot watched his star chart and heated a can of soup. He placed his thumb on Osiris and his forefinger on Alpha Centauri and drew two imaginary lines across the length of the chart. The ship went another billion miles. And still another. The soup was warm.

The pilot poured the soup into a tall glass and sat watching the star chart as the billions of miles ticked away. "A planet is a planet," he said to the empty ship, and his words

rattled off into cold metallic caverns like so many freight cars pulling and pushing, hurrying each other down into a dark hole. "It's not a grape or an apple or a flower. It doesn't ripen and fall to the ground and it doesn't get plucked. It's a planet and it stays a planet."

Who had flown with him that time? There was the geologist and the flight engineer, he remembered, and a young lieutenant who navigated, Pendelton. He was the one who found the planet.



Found it in his own queer, uncalculating way. How? What difference? It was found. Pendelton had said, "There. Go there." And they went there and they found it.

The planet: where had it gone?

And it was *his* planet. All right, Pendelton was navigator, but he, Sykes, was captain. The navigator could say "there" but it was the captain who turned "here" into "there"—if there really was a here and a there in space, a this or a that, if it wasn't all just one big trick done with mirrors. All right. Give Pendelton half the credit. Fine. His and Pendelton's. But where was it? Why hadn't that monolith of a construction rocket found a planet waiting for it; why had it taken the big dive between galaxies and then, where his and Pendelton's planet should be, found nothing but an ebbing, dying sun alone in the sky? Where was the mistake; where?

He sipped the soup and ran his finger across the chart. Wait. Was it a mistake or a blunder? Pendelton was good; he didn't make mistakes. But a blunder? Had he spent the last three years in space looking for a mistake when it was really. . . .

"He divided by pi instead

of multiplying."

He went through the calculations again rapidly and then punched the necessary buttons in the computer. The ship came out of light a year away from a twinned red dwarf. Sykes climbed forward into the dome and released the eye. He turned it away from the dwarf and then waited as the long tube spiraled slowly across the heavens seeking the dim reflection of rock. In five minutes the eye withdrew into the dome.

"He used plus when it should have been minus."

Again the calculations, the buttons. The ship reappeared a quarter of the way across the galaxy. Again the dome, the eye. Nothing.

"A planet is a planet," he said to the star chart. "A planet spins and precesses and nutates. It moves with the galaxy and with its sun inside the galaxy and it turns on its own axis. It goes in so many different directions at one time it's a wonder that gravity can pull off the illusion of solidity. But a planet's a planet!

"He differentiated when he should have integrated. That fool. Pendelton!"

He ran through the calculations wildly and spilled the soup. It ran down over the

small control panel of the rocket and onto the metal floor. He punched the buttons and waited.

The ship came out of light a year away from a twinned red dwarf.

"If you are *that* small," he said, addressing the galaxy, "then where is it, can you tell me that? Where is the planet I walked and slept on, where I drove wooden stakes into the soft black earth and put up a sign with black letters?"

A sign that said:

THE STAR OF AMSTERDAM,

MAY 2, 2002

NICHOLAS SYKES, CAPTAIN

Or for that matter where was Pendelton now, he wondered. Pendelton, who would be an eternal first lieutenant navigating himself to anywhere in the universe but a captaincy. Pendelton, who was a man without ambition and therefore immune to officer club jokes about a missing planet—a planet, they said, which appeared mysteriously one night when Pendelton was up late conjuring in the ship's log and vanished inexplicably because Pendelton hadn't believed in it whereas the captain, who took logs as bibles, did.

"Wait. He reversed his co-

ordinates. He said the *x* axis but he meant the *y*."

The buttons once more; the screaming ride through space as a beam of light, the scream that no one could hear, the scream in fact that wasn't really there. The ship was its own candle lighting its way through the long corridors of space, each drop of wax a billion miles.

The ship had stopped and Sykes had begun to crawl forward again to the dome and the eye, when he fell backward and crashed into the cabinet beneath the star chart. He rubbed his head and sat in a heap, wondering, as the rocket was falling, falling. Falling!

He let himself fall to the control panel and re-applied power, felt the ship climb again. He crawled in beside the eye and looked out through the clear plastic, saw something below him that had gravity and grass, mountain tops and meadows, and the put-and-take of oceans, clouds and rivers. "That's what *planets* are made of!" he shouted, and then circled for a long time watching it.

He looked for the original valley where he and the *Star of Amsterdam* and Pendelton had come down, where they had put up the marker. He thought he saw it and landed,

although not with the finesse he had once had. The little rocket fell through the atmosphere on too much power and he had to fight the twisting, hot-tailed ship, harder even than in his first solo from the academy, so that he landed in a swamp hundreds of miles off the mark.

When it was over, he sat before the panel still holding the inert controls, thinking: I'm glad they didn't see *that* one.

The swamp water was calf-high, and he stood for a few moments watching the round ripples travel out from his legs, losing themselves in the trees and moss that hung down like hands dragging in the water. "It's real, Pendelton," he said.

When he checked his range and azimuth, he found that the few seconds of mishandling the controls had cost him three hundred miles; but he looked at the way the rocket sat deeply in the soil, thought again of those few hand-shaking seconds, and said: "I'll walk it."

Rations strapped to his back, he went off to look for the valley and the sign, leaving the rocket behind in the efflorescing, fecund swamp, thinking: *The sign says May 2, 2002, and now it's 2005, but it's*

April and I can do it except that I'll walk into the valley this time instead of landing and turning an acre of it into compost. And I'll write on the sign: "May 2, 2005, Pendelton We Were Right."

HE LOOKED at the orchard and blinked his eyes.

He had waited two days for it to go away, two days of scrambling down a brown mountain, looking over his shoulder occasionally at the purple and red riot that lay spread out as if on a huge green picnic blanket below him. But it did not go away, it was still there, rioting quietly in the kind and intensity of colors that he was not used to seeing in his gray bunk in his gray rocket in black space.

He wiped his glasses and looked again and then took out the map and read where it said "Desert" and looked back to the orchard.

It was like a prism that shattered the hard white sunlight into hues that were each greater than the whole, each one seeming to be the last daub, the last possible mixture squeezed and rubbed on His palette when the Planetmaker stood back from his work and said, "Done."

"After-image persistence," he said, shaking his head. "A mirage impacted on the visual purple and which *should* be decaying logarithmically."

A great pink plum fell off the nearest tree and rolled toward him for a few feet.

He went to it, tiredly, feeling the sag of his large pack of rations, the chaff of the hand computer and compass that hung from his belt and rubbed against his thigh. He stared at the plum for a moment and then moved on without touching it, on into the orchard where leaves and small twigs made soft sounds beneath his feet. He looked at the trees and the globes of fruit that hung from them, not so much fruit as decorations, a fixed gaily colored cosmos that was the reciprocal of space and which was close enough to be touched. Further along his hand absently swung along the top of a bush and picked up six of the reddest berries he'd ever seen. He looked at them, corrugated and dimpled, before flinging them away with a sudden jerk of his hand, but they left a patina of odor behind on his fingers that made his mouth water. He took out the map again and checked it once more. "You're sand," he shouted. "You're a hundred miles of

dunes and dunes are made of sand!"

The orchard exhaled a sweet breath.

"Let me see," he said, wiping the sweat from his face. "We circled the planet twice before landing and that's when we started the map. Then we circled twice more after take-off and that's when we finished the map. And a map is a map! It's a *desert*." He looked around and then smiled through dirt caked lips. "Pendelton, we found a beauty, we did. It has a desert that is benign, a desert that can mold out of sand the most realistic mirage in the galaxies, a desert in short that might as well *be* an orchard for all the difference it makes. Are you real?" he said, looking up to the top of the tallest tree of those around him, to the cluster of maroon fruit tied there on the highest limb.

"An experiment, Pendelton!" He dropped his pack and navigation belt and ran to the base of the tree. "Can I climb a fifty-foot mirage in this great big mirage and eat a cluster of little mirages?" He leaped for the lowest branch and held it, swinging for a moment, testing. Then he hoisted himself up and climbed through the smells and colors until he was on the

last branch that could support his weight. The fruit fell into his hand as he reached up for it and he stood on the high limb with his arm around the trunk munching noisily.

"Pendelton," he said. "You will rove and rove but you will never find a place like this." He spat out a pit and listened as it rustled through the leaves and branches, heard it thump lightly in the grass below. "Damn," he said, in admiration, and wolfed down the rest of the fruit, spitting each pit, surprised each time as it sounded against the ground. "It's consistent. It's rational. It's got laws and it obeys them."

He went back down the tree, carelessly now, forgetting that he was tired, numbed nearly, from the mountain climbing and descending, but he reached the ground safely amidst a shower of fruit that had shaken out of the tree with him. He went through the orchard lightly, leaving his equipment behind, sampling berries and things that tasted like pearpricotts and other things that tasted like apple melons and papaya-loupes. He ate them all rapidly, not noticing the pulp and threads of fruit and juice that ran down off his chin onto his uniform. But he was tired

with a hundred and fifty miles of marching and climbing and he stopped to lean against a tree, munching on a pear.

"It's perfect," he said after a while to the leafy solitude around him. "Better than any *real* pear I've ever had." He looked up through the trees at the attenuated sunlight and felt a cool breeze. "No, that doesn't make sense. If I'm making all of this up it's got to come from my past experiences. Somewhere along the line I ate a pear as good as this one. I'll bet it was the first pear I ever ate and I must have been only four years old or so." He threw the stem and pits away. "I've just finished my first pear."

He walked back through the grass and tree debris to where he had picked the pear. He looked up at the tree and the pears on it and thought: There must be hundreds of them hanging there and every one is that first one, that flawless first. Just as I was the first man to walk this planet. And in its own dark recesses this planet will have its own mirage, created not out of my mind but by its own, from its own experiences, and it will be filled with mirages of me, because I was the first, the first.

"Isn't that right, Pendel-

ton!" he yelled, whirling about at the tree behind him. He thought he could see a leafy arm snapping upwards in salute. "I was the first. You know that. I always left the ship first on landing. And you were right behind me. We walked this planet together, we possessed it." He straightened up. "Lieutenant Pendelton, I order you to tell them." The wind whispered through the trees and shrubs saying "Sir? Sir?"

"You're to return to the DC Officer's Club at once and tell them that Sykes' planet is a reality. Is in fact a part of that same reality their very beers are constructed of. At once, Lieutenant!"

And the wind ran through the orchard again, heels clicking, starched trouser legs rustling, diminishing into the distance.

He sat beneath the tree holding a pear in his hand, nibbling at it. All of a sudden it no longer seemed to be like the other one; it was now a pear, curious only in that it should be found growing here on this planet a galaxy and a half away from where pears were invented, but then not even curious in that respect since it was only acting like copper and iron and silicon which also were found in lone-

ly planets and suns and stars. He dropped the pear and fell asleep, and every now and then during the night a breeze came up and a pear would drop softly to the ground nearby.

HE WAS in his gray bunk in black space, awake, but for some reason his eyes wouldn't open and around him he heard the noises, all the clicks and slams and whistles that, individually, should have been enough to hurl him out of the bunk and stand him on his feet; together they were a nightmare of sounds that meant the reactor was too hot, the computer had given up because it couldn't correct an error, the skin was rent and air was rushing loudly into space. . . . He awoke in morning sunlight and sat up quickly, listening.

A hundred yards away water ran over rocks and splashed cleanly into a pool.

Later he forgot how he stumbled through the orchard following the water sounds. It seemed to him then as though he had awakened one moment and the next was kneeling by the water's edge, staring at a garish reflection that looked just like him. The visual contact with the cold water was fully as chilling as

the tactile would have been, because he saw that the reflection's hair was red and orange and purple and its face was dyed with long pink smears and finger marks. A violet mustache curved down to his chin and two red eyes stared back at him.

"Captain Sykes?" he said to the reflection hoarsely.

He did not drink, although he craved it badly and was actually in the first stages of dehydration from his long hot march and didn't know it. He told himself that it was about time a little discipline was shown on this expedition and staggered back through the trees looking for his scattered equipment. When he returned to the pool he was feeling better, but he did not look at his reflection again until he was standing on the bank, naked, dry and clean and with his uniform spread out to dry on a nearby tree.

"Some mirage," he said, looking around in disgust. He took the map out of his binoculars case and examined it again before tearing it up and dropping the pieces into the still muddied waters of the pool. And now that he knew that the orchard was an orchard and not a desert masquerading as one in his own mind it seemed quite ordinary

and the fruit, the pears, didn't tempt him one bit when he strode out of it a few hours later, his pack sagging heavily against his back and the hand computer and compass chafing against his thigh.

HE WIPED his glasses for the tenth time that morning, putting them on again to peer down into the valley. He gazed between the uneroded escarpments for a long time and shook his head. It was the same. The exact same as the time he and Pendelton had stepped out of the *Amsterdam*. And the others too, but he'd forgotten their names and now it seemed as if it had been only him and Pendelton.

Except that it was in the wrong place.

"Another mistake?" He took out the binoculars and scanned the valley again, seeing that it was all inescapably familiar. The orchard cost me a day, he thought. And two more were spent getting around the canyon. Add one more for not getting as far each day as I originally planned and I ought to be a hundred miles away.

He forgot for a moment that the mistake was benign, since he'd made it now, it was the second of May, and he'd

known the previous night that the best he could do was the sixth. But he hadn't gone more than half a mile on the dawn of his anniversary day when he walked into the valley almost without knowing it, not expecting it to be there. "It can't be, I'm four days away. Pendelton was better than that. Pendelton never made three blunders in one trip in his entire career."

He looked again and swore.

"Lieutenant Pendelton, I ought to have you court-martialed," he shouted down to the trees below him, thinking of the switched coordinates and the orchard where there should have been a desert and now the valley where there should have been a lake if he could remember the details of the map at all now since it must be still floating on the pond that should have been a dune two hundred miles behind him. "This is the sum and substance of dereliction—" He stopped and looked down at his belt, where the compass and hand computer hung. "I withdraw the specification," he said quietly, seeing at once where the fault lay. He unhooked them and tossed them into the bushes, hurrying down into the valley and leaving morning behind for the gray of pre-dawn.

He was halfway down when he first saw a thin column of smoke drifting up off the valley floor and over a stand of trees before him, barely discernible in the mist and shadow. He held his eyes on it while he pulled the binoculars out of their case, and then he focussed the two magnified circles on it, bringing them down toward the trees slowly, tracing the smoke to its source, stopping at the tree line where a small section of chimney protruded.

Pendelton, did you remember?

He unfocussed the glasses and then brought them slowly back in. The chimney formed itself once again out of fuzzy and distorted bricks until it was erect and sharp, peeping out of the trees and sending its smoke up out of the twinned and overlapping circles of vision.

Did you wake up one night and see your blunder on the ceiling, carefully worked out anew for you with the x-axis of the universe where it was supposed to be and not masquerading as the y?

He crammed the binoculars back in the case. "You knew it all the time, Lieutenant; you just weren't remembering. And while I was wheeling through space looking for the

mistake, you'd already found it, right there on your own ceiling, six feet away from your nose, which is where most things are if you really look for them."

Sykes hurried down the slope thinking: I may just possibly accept my commission back, provided of course that it includes the *Star of Amsterdam* and retroactive pay for three wasted years. Halfway through the trees he found a dirt road, and a few minutes later he was walking down the quiet empty street of the village just as the sun was rising over the valley walls.

"Houses, roads, garages. Foundry here, church there, schoolyard beyond that." The same, by the plan. The same little village he'd seen in a dozen colony planets. He stopped and looked down to the end of the street where a small green park stood fenced off from the village, the park and the one tree in it set aside and saved by the sentimental bulldozers and graders because of a white sign with black lettering that he and Pendelton had painted and knocked together that day exactly four years ago.

He was tired. The pack was still pressing into the small of his back, and the sun was

high enough now to hit the white paint of the sign causing the letters to blur and run together. He wiped his glasses another time and read it again.

THE STAR OF WICHITA,
JULY 11, 2001
VINTON HONEYCUTT, CAPTAIN

"Honeycutt," he murmured. "I knew a Honeycutt. We had one at the Academy. Never was too good at mathematics, if I remember. Honeycutt, did you leave it behind in another galaxy—your honor, I mean? Did you think you could steal a planet? It's futile, sir; Pendelton has already told everyone that I discovered this planet on the second of May 2002. He realized his mistake, found it on his own ceiling of all places, and now they all know that I was the first man here. Do you understand? The construction people came back because my navigation officer told them about the error. They came back and built this village."

Honeycutt, the sign said, 2001.

"You couldn't have found it a year before me. Do you realize that I've got you? Because when Pendelton and I landed here, here in this very valley, it was empty, not a man, a building, nothing. We put the

sign up that morning in an empty valley. So you can see why the only honorable course open to you is the withdrawal of your claim, the forfeiture of all rights to History and Memory."

Honeycutt, it said. *Honeycutt*.

"Will you listen to me!" he shouted, but he was tired and weak, and he'd been in space too long and for that matter he'd been on land too long, and so it was a weak shout, barely audible down the village street, rousing only a baby who at that moment dropped its bottle onto the wooden floor of its parents' bedroom.

WHEN THE VILLAGERS came out to begin the day's work they found a man in their park, a strange one. No one had ever seen him before, either here or on Earth, although they decided he must have come in the rocket they'd seen weeks before. And they couldn't find any identification

on his body when they cut him down from the tree that stood at the entrance to the small square, nothing other than his name, which was stenciled on his binoculars case.

And at the moment it was a problem because it was a very young colony and had not yet experienced death. Since there was no cemetery they decided to bury him in the park, about thirty feet away from the sign that stood there already, and which was getting weather-worn and would topple after one more hard winter. So after he was buried someone took time out from his job and painted a small white marker to put over the grave. And the marker, made of fibrous, weather-resistant native wood, lasted longer than the sign which had preceded it, longer even than the park, which eventually lost its original identity and became a cemetery. The marker read:

NICHOLAS SYKES,
MAY 2, 2005
HE WAS THE FIRST



• The next SFA goes on sale February 6! •



THE FAN-SPACE

Conducted by Archibald Destiny

THE WAR against Shaw is proceeding nicely. For the second issue in a row, I have managed to squeeze his editorial out of the magazine. This time I have been aided and abetted by Calvin M. Knox and his new book review department—and, incidentally, by Shaw himself, since Shaw gave Knox the job to begin with. But where it will all end I know not, because now LTS is threatening to omit the book-length novel from the April issue in order to have room for his editorial. We'll see. . . .

You'll note that readers' letters are absent this time too, but that's nobody's fault but their own. There were just too few interesting letters to make up the feature. What's the matter—you all asleep?

GOT A LETTER. The letter said:

"1. This is to certify that the following officers have been elected in the World Science Fiction Society, Inc., to serve from November 1, 1957 to October 31, 1958: Anna Sinclare Moffatt, President; Len J. Moffatt, Secretary; Rick Sneary, Treasurer; Stan Woolston, Printing and Publicity; Forrest J. Ackerman, Professional Public Relations; George W. Fields, Fan Public Relations.

"2. This is to certify that the following two Directors were elected to serve from November 1, 1957 to October 31, 1960: Belle C. Dietz; David Neuman.

"3. This is to certify that the 16th Annual World Science Fiction Convention will be held over the Labor Day week end, 1958, at the Alex-

andria Hotel, Los Angeles, California.

"4. Those who wish to join the World Science Fiction Society, Inc. for the current year should send their \$1.00 dues to Len J. Moffatt, 10202 Belcher, Downey, California."

This was on the letterhead of the World Science Fiction Society (Inc.), and was signed by Franklin M. Dietz, Jr., (Recorder - Historian) and George Nims Raybin (Legal Officer). Which makes it all very official and how stuffy can you get? But in spite of the heavily bureaucratic atmosphere, I'm convinced that the boys in California—the ones doing the real work—are going to put on a tremendously enjoyable convention. I'm supporting it all the way, and have already sent them my buck. Go ahead, send yours too—and tell 'em Uncle Archie sent you.

THE PERSONALS have been piling high, so I'll get right to them this time and try to get them all in. . . . The Junior International SF Club consists of about 20 members and a very large number of prospective members. Activities center around a fanzine with a photo-offset cover; a library

consisting of books, magazines and fanzines; manuscript and artwork bureaus; corresponding and tape corresponding. Age limit 20, dues \$1.50; send for application blank from John Thiel, 2934 Wilshire Street, Markham, Illinois. You might also ask John about his own fanzine and the TransContinental Fan Fund; I don't have the latest details on these handy. . . . Thiel's buddy Rich Brown wants fanzines, and is mainly interested in zines with stuff by or about Harlan Ellison, including the zines he edited (well, it takes all kinds). He also wants other fanzines to complete his collection. That's the Rich Brown of 127 Roberts Street, Pasadena 3, California, of course.

Stony Brook Barnes, Route 1, Box 1102, Grants Pass, Oregon, would like to trade sf and fantasy mags. He is mainly interested in *Planet*, *Weird Tales*, *If*, *Other Worlds*, *Imaginative Tales*, and most pulps. Please send a list of what you have to trade and what you want. Stony would also appreciate advice on how to start a fanzine. Anybody? . . . For sale: 400 science fiction and fantasy mags and some pocket books. The mags are from 1948 to the present date, 46 different titles, 30¢

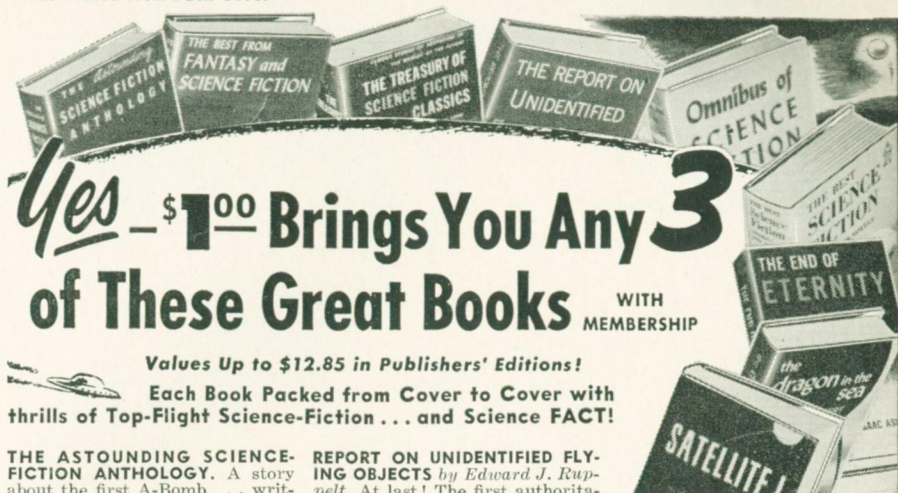
each. First come, first served. Leon Novich, Apartment 5E, 1897 McCarter Highway, Newark 4, New Jersey.

Marvin Wingfield, Jr., 518 Northside Avenue, Richmond 22, Virginia, is taking the plunge into fandom. He's 16 years old, a senior in high school, and likes *Galaxy*, *SFA*, *Astounding*, *Infinity*, *Bradbury*, *Burroughs*, *Haggard*, *Other Worlds*, *Kim Novak*, *Sophia Loren*, *Elvis Presley*, rock 'n' roll, *Fantasy & SF*, the old *Startling* and *Wonder*, long chatty letter columns, *FFM*, book, movie and fanzine reviews, and *Amazing* under RAP. He has a small collection of some 550 mags, books and pb's, and promises to answer all letters on a reasonably semi-intelligent level. . . . Andy Main, Happy Valley School, Ojai, California, has for sale or trade 75 issues of *Junior National History Magazine*, 1950 to 1957. Also one copy of the November, 1945, issue, and the Jan.-Feb., 1929, and Sept.-Oct., 1929, issues of *Natural History*. He will send a complete list to anyone who is interested. He wants various issues of *ASF* (pre-1953), *Infinity*, *F&SF*, *Galaxy*, *Unknown (Worlds)*, *If*, *SF Stories*, *SFQuarterly*, *Future*, *SFA*, "Madge," *Venture*, *FU* and *Mad*.

Raleigh Evans Multog, 7 Greenwood Road, Pikesville 8, Maryland, will welcome correspondence with anyone interested in science fiction, viewcard or playing card exchanging. He'll write to anyone from 12 up to 40 years of age (he's 28). . . . Barbara W. Lex, North Shimerville Road, Clarence, New York, is in the market for copies of the 10¢ *Mad* and numbers 1 to 9 of *Imagination*. . . . Charles W. Moslander, 2 "R" Street, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri, has a complete set of *Astounding* which he will sell to the highest bidder. The set is in excellent condition.



NO FANZINE REVIEWS this issue. I've decided it's impractical to try to keep up with all the zines in the small space I have here, and a simple listing without description seems to serve no useful purpose. So, I'll make a bargain: if you have a zine you want subscribers for, send it to me and I'll subscribe. If you are interested in fanzines but don't know which ones to subscribe to, drop me a line and I'll arrange to get you some sample copies. And if I can help you out with any other fannish problems, let me know. Okay?



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