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FULL CYCLE

by Clifford D. Simak

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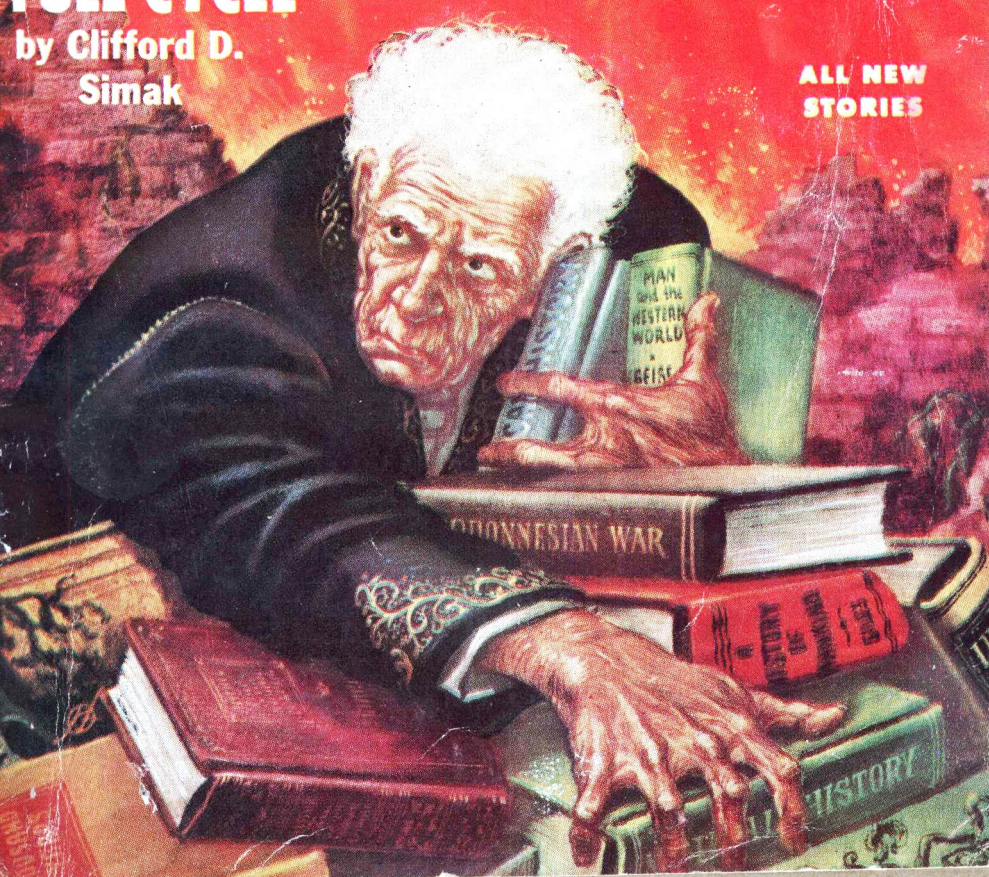

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FEATURE NOVELET

FULL CYCLE

Was Ambrose Wilson a ghost, a relic of the world that had now passed? Was there no place in this neo-culture for a man who had made history his life? Surely, somewhere, there must be a link between yesterday and the tomorrow that was already here.

by CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

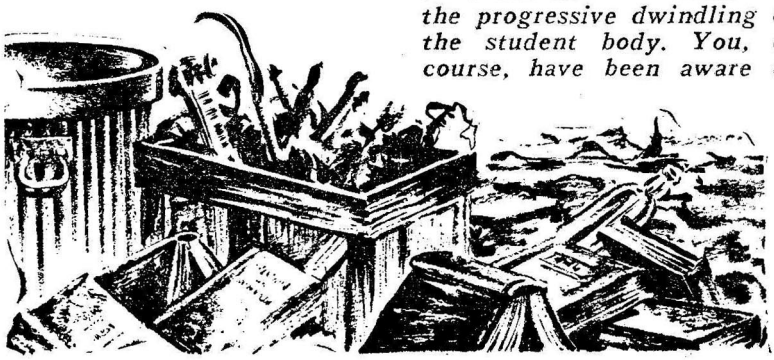
illustrated by Kelly Freas

THE LETTER sent the life of Amby Wilson crashing decorously down about his ears. It was a form affair, with the address typed in with a newer, blacker ribbon; it said:

Dr. Ambrose Wilson,
Department of History

It is with regret that I must inform you the board of regents at their meeting this morning decided the university will cease to function at the end of the present term.

Contributing to the decision were the lack of funds and the progressive dwindling of the student body. You, of course, have been aware of



A few prowlers could occasionally be seen on the silent streets, but Amby looked out upon desertion. This was a ghost city . . .

the situation for some time, but nevertheless...

There was more of it, but Amby didn't read it. What still was left unread, he knew, would be no more than the grossest of platitudes.

It had been bound to happen.

The regents had hung on in the face of monstrous difficulties; the university was virtually deserted. The place that once had rung with life and pulsed with learning was now no better than a ghost school.

As the city was a ghost city.

And I a ghost; thought Amby.

He made an admission to himself, an admission he would not have made a day or hour ago: For thirty years or more he had lived in an unreal and unsubstantial world, clinging to the old, vague way of life as he first had known it. And to make that vague life the more substantial, he had banished to an intellectual outer limbo any valid consideration of the world beyond the city.

And good reason that he should, he thought; good and valid reason. What was outside the city had no link with this world of his. A nomad population—an almost alien people, who had built a neoculture rich in decadence, concocted half of provincialism, half of old folk-tales.

There was nothing there, he thought, of any value to a man like him, nothing worth the consideration of a man like him. Here in this university he had kept alight a feeble glow of the old learning and the old tradition; now the light had flickered out and the learning and tradition would go down into the darkness.

And that, he knew, was no attitude for a historian to take; history was the truth and the seeking after truth. To gloss over, to ignore, to push away an eventful fact—no matter how distasteful—was not the way of history.

Now history had caught up with him and there were two alternatives. He could go out and face the world or he could hide from it. There was no compromise.

Amby picked up the letter between his fingertips, as if it might be something dead and left out in the sun too long. Carefully he dropped it in the wastebasket; then he got his old felt hat and clapped it on his head.

He marched out of the classroom without looking back.

II

WHEN HE got home, a scarecrow was perched on the front steps. When it saw him coming, it pulled itself together and got up. "Evening, Doc," it said.

"Good evening, Jake," said Amby.

"I was just fixing to go fishing," Jake told him.

Amby sat down carefully on the steps and shook his head. "Not tonight; don't feel up to it. They're closing down the university."

Jake sat down beside him and stared across the street at the city wilderness. "I suppose that ain't no big surprise to you."

"I've been expecting it," said Amby. "Nobody attends any more except some *stuffy* kids. All the *nomies* go to their own universities, if that is what they call them. Although to tell you the honest truth, Jake, I can't see how schools like those could give them very much."

"Well, you're fixed all right, I guess," said Jake, consolingly. "You been working all these years; you probably been able to put away a little. Now with me it's different. We been living hand-to-mouth and we always will."

"I'm not too well fixed," said Amby, "but I'll get along somehow. I probably haven't too long left; I'm almost seventy."

"There was a day," said Jake, "when they had a law that paid a man to quit at sixty five. But the *nomies* threw that out, just like they did everything."

He picked up a short length of dead branch and dug absentmindedly at the grass. "I always figured, someday I'd get me enough together so I could buy a trailer. You can't do a thing unless you got a trailer. It does beat all how times can change. I remember when I was a kid it was the man who owned a house that was all set for life. But now a house don't count for nothing. You got to have a trailer."

He got up in sections, stood with his rags fluttering in the wind, looking down at Amby. "You ain't changed your mind about that fishing, Doc?"

"I'm all beat out," said Amby.

"With you not working any more," Jake said, "us two can get in a powerful lot of hunting. The place is full of squirrels and the young rabbits will soon be big enough to eat. This fall there'll be a sight of coons. Now that you ain't working, I'll split the skins with you."

"You still can keep the skins," said Amby.

Jake stuck his thumbs into his waistband and spat upon the ground. "Might just as well spend your time out in the woods as anywhere. Used to be a man could make some money if he was lucky at his prowling, but prowling now is just a waste of time. The places all have been worked over and it's getting so it's downright dangerous to go in-

side of them. You never know when something might give way and come down and hit you or when the floor will drop out from underneath you."

He hitched up his britches. "Remember that time we found the box with all the jewelry in it?"

Amby nodded. "I remember that; you almost got enough to buy the trailer that time."

"Ain't it a fact? It does beat all how a man can fritter cash away. I bought a new gun and a batch of cartridges and some clothes for the family—and God knows, we needed them—and a good supply of grub; and before I knew it there wasn't near enough left over to even think about a trailer. In the old days a man could have bought one on time. All he'd needed would be ten per cent to pay down on it. But you can't do that no more. There aren't even any banks. And no loan companies. Remember, Doc, when the place crawled with loan companies?"

"It all has changed," said Amby. "When I think back it can't seem possible."

But it was, of course.

The city was gone as an institution; the farms had become corporations and people no longer lived in houses—only the *stuffies* and the squatters.

And folks like me, thought Amby.

III

IT WAS a crazy idea—a sign of old age and feeble-mindedness, perhaps. A man of sixty-eight, a man of competence and settled habits, did not go charging off on a wild adventure even if his world had crashed about his ears.

He tried to quit thinking of it, but he couldn't quit. He thought about it all the time that he cooked supper, and while he ate supper, and later when he washed the dishes.

With the dishes done, he went into the living room, carrying the kitchen lamp. He set the lamp on a table beside another lamp and lit the second lamp. *Must be a sign a man's eyes are wearing out,* he thought, *when he needs two lamps to read by.* But kerosene lamps, at best, were poor things; not like electricity.

He picked a book out of the shelves and settled down to read, but he couldn't read; he couldn't keep his mind on what he tried to read. He finally gave it up.

He took one of the lamps, walked to the fireplace and held it high so that the lamplight fell upon the painting there. And he wondered as he

raised the lamp if she would smile at him tonight; he was fairly sure she would, for she was always ready with a tiny smile when he needed it the most.

He wasn't sure at first if she were smiling; then he saw she was, and he stood there looking at her and her smile.

There had been many times of late when he talked with her, for he remembered how ready she had always been to listen to him, how he had talked out his troubles and his triumphs—although, come to think of it, his triumphs had been few.

But he could not talk to her tonight; she would not understand. This world in which he lived without her would seem to her so topsy-turvy as to be past all understanding. And if he tried to talk to her about it, she would be disturbed and troubled and he must not let that happen.

You'd think, he told himself, upbraiding himself, that I'd be content to leave well enough alone. I have a place to hide. I could live out my life in comfort and in safety. And that, he knew, was the way he wanted it to be.

But there was that nagging voice which talked inside his brain: *You have failed your task and failed it willingly You have shut your eyes and failed. You have failed by looking backwards. The true historian does not live in the past alone. He must use the past to understand the present; and he must know them both if he is to see the trend toward the future.*

But I do not want to know the future, said the stubborn Dr. Ambrose Wilson.

And the nagging voice said: *The future is the only thing that is worth the knowing.*

HE STOOD silently, holding the lamp above his head, staring at the painting almost as if he expected it to speak, as if it might give a sign.

There wasn't any sign. There couldn't be a sign, he knew. It was no more than a painting of a woman, dead these thirty years. The sensed nearness, the old sharp memory, the smile upon the lips were in the heart and mind—not in the square of canvas with clever brush strokes that preserved across the years the bright illusion of a loved face.

He lowered the lamp and went back to his chair.

There was so much to say, he thought, and no one to say it to—although the house might listen if he talked to it as an ancient friend. It had been a friend, he thought. It had been lonely often with

her no longer here—but not as lonely in the house as away from it, for the house was a part of her.

He was safe here, safe in this anachronistic house, safe in the abandoned city with its empty buildings; comfortable in this city gone back to wilderness, filled with squirrels and rabbits, colorful and fragrant now with the bloom of gone-wild lilacs and escaped daffodils, prowled by squatters who hunted the thickets of its lawns for game and prowled its crumbling structures to find some salvage they might sell.

Queer, he thought, the concepts upon which a culture might be founded, the fantastic acceptance standards which evolved in each society.

Some forty years ago, the cleavage of the culture had first started; it had not come all at once, but quickly enough so that historically it must be regarded as an abrupt rather than a gradual cleavage.

It had been the Year of Crisis, he remembered, when the drums of fear had thudded through the land and a man had lain in bed, tensed and listening for the coming of the bomb, knowing even as he listened that he'd not hear it if it came.

Fear was the start of it, he thought; and what and where would be the end?

He sat huddled in his chair, cringing from the dark barbarism that lay beyond the city—an old man caught between the future and the past.

IV

JAKE SAID, "She's a beauty, Doc." He got up to walk around it once again.

"Yes, sir," he said, patting it, "She surely is a beauty. I don't think I can rightly say I ever saw a finer trailer. And I've seen lots of them."

"We may be doing a lot of traveling in it," Amby told him. "We want one that will stand up. The roads, I understand, aren't what they used to be. The *nomies* chisel on the road tax, and the government hasn't got much money to keep the roads in shape."

"It won't take long," Jake said confidently. "All we got to do is just kind of look around. In no time at all we'll find a camp that will take us in. Stands to reason there'll be one of them that could find a use for us."

He went over to the trailer and carefully wiped a spot of dust off its shiny surface with his ragged shirt sleeve.

"We ain't none of us scarcely slept a wink since you told

us, Doc. Myrt, she can't understand it; she keeps saying to me, 'Why is Doc taking us along? We ain't got no claim on him; all we been is neighbors.' "

"I'm a bit too old," said Amby, "to do it by myself. I have to have someone along to help out with the driving and the other chores. And you've been looking forward all these years to going trailering."

"That's a fact," admitted Jake. "Doc, you never spoke a truer word. I wanted it so bad I could almost taste it; and by the looks of it, so have all the rest of us. You ought to see the throwing away and packing that's going on over at the house. Myrt is plain beside herself. I tell you, Doc, it ain't no safe place to go until Myrt calms down a bit."

"Maybe I ought to do some packing myself," said Amby. "Not that there's much to do; I'll just leave the most of it behind."

But he didn't stir. He didn't want to face it.

It would be hard to leave his home—although that was old-fogey thinking, for there were no longer any homes. "Home" was a word out of an era left behind. "Home" was another nostalgic word for old men like him to mumble in their dim r e m e m b e r i n g.

"Too bad you weren't here to see the rain dance, Wilson. They put on quite a show."

"Home" was the symbol of a static culture that had failed in the scales of Man's survival. To put down roots, to stay and become encumbered by possessions—not only physical, but mental and traditional as well—was to die. To be mobile and forever poised on the edge of flight, to travel lean and gaunt, to shun encumbrances, was the price of freedom and life.

Full cycle, Amby thought—*we have come full cycle. From tribe to city, now back to tribe again.*

Jake came back from the trailer and sat down again. "Tell me, Doc; tell me honest now—why are you doing it? Not that I ain't glad you are, for otherwise I'd never in all my born days get out of this here rat trap. But I can't somehow get it through my head why you are pulling stakes. You ain't a young man, Doc, and..."

"I know," said Amby; "maybe that's the reason. Not too much time left, and I have to make the best use of it I can."

"You're sitting pretty, Doc, and not a worry in the world. Now that you've retired, you could take it easy and have a lot of fun."

"I've got to find out," said Amby.

"Find out what?"

"I don't know; just what is happening, I guess."

They sat quietly, looking at the trailer in all its shining glory. From some distance down the street came the faint clatter of pots and pans and a suddenly raised voice.

Myrt still was busy packing.

V

THE FIRST evening they stopped at a deserted campsite across the road from an idle factory.

It was an extensive camp and it had the look of being occupied only recently, as if the trailers might have pulled out just a day or two before. There were fresh tire tracks in the dust; scraps of paper still blew about the area, and the ground beneath some of the water faucets still was damp.

Jake and Amby sat in the trailer's shade and looked at the silent buildings just across the road.

"Funny thing," said Jake, "about this place not running. Sign up there says it's a food processing plant. Breakfast food, looks like. Figure maybe it shut down because there wasn't any market for the stuff it makes?"

"That might be it," said

Amby. "But seems there should be a market for breakfast cereal, at least some sort of market for it. Enough to keep it running, although maybe not at full capacity."

"Figure there was some kind of trouble?"

"No sign of it," said Amby. "Looks as if they just up and left."

"There's that big house up on the hill. Look, up thataway..."

"I see it now," said Amby.

"Might be where the *stuffy* lives."

"Could be."

"Wonder what it would be like to be a *stuffy?* Just sit and watch the cash come rolling in. Let other people work for you. Have everything you want. Never want for nothing."

"I imagine," Amby told him, "that the *stuffies* have their troubles, too."

"I'd like to have them kind of troubles. I'd just plumb love to have them kind of troubles for a year or two."

He spat on the ground and hauled himself erect. "Might go out and see if I could get me a rabbit or a squirrel," he said. "You feel like coming with me?"

Amby shook his head. "I'm a little tuckered out."

"Probably won't find nothing anyhow. Close to a camp like this, the game must be all cleaned out."

"After a while," said Amby, "when I'm rested up a bit, I might take a walk."

VI

THE HOUSE was a *stuffy* house, all right. One could almost smell the money of it. It was large and sprawling, very neatly kept, and surrounded by extensive grounds full of flowers and shrubs.

Amby sat down on a stone wall just outside the grounds and looked back the way he'd come. There below him lay the factory and the deserted camping grounds, with his trailer standing alone in the great level, trampled area. The road wound away to a far horizon, white in the summer sun, and there was nothing on it—not a single car or truck or trailer. And that, he thought, was not the way it had been. Once the roads had been crawling with machines.

But this was a different world than the one he'd known. It was a world that he'd ignored for more than thirty years, and it had grown alien in those thirty years. He had shut himself away from it and lost it; now that he sought it once again, he found it puzzling and at times a little terrifying.

A voice spoke behind him. "Good evening, sir."

Amby turned and saw the man—middle-aged or more, and the tweeds and pipe. Almost, he thought, like the age-old tradition of the English country squire.

"Good evening," Amby said. "I hope I'm not intruding."

"Not at all. I saw you camped down there; very glad to have you."

"My partner went out hunting, so I took a walk."

"You folks changing?"

"Changing?"

"Changing camps, I mean. There used to be a lot of it. Not much any more."

"You mean changing from one camp to another?"

"That's it. A process of settling down, I take it. Get dissatisfied with one setup, so go out and hunt another."

"By now," said Amby, "the shakedown period must be almost over. By now each man must have found his place."

The *stuffy* nodded. "Maybe that's the way it is. I don't know too much about it."

"Nor I," Amby told him. "We're just starting out. My university closed down, so I bought a trailer. My next door neighbors came along with me. This is our first day."

"I've often thought," said the man, "that it might be fun to do a little touring. When I was a boy we used to go on long motoring trips and visit different places; but there doesn't seem to be much of that any more. Used to be places where you could stop the night—motels, they called them. And every mile or so there were eating places and service stations where you could buy gasoline. Now the only place where you can get anything to eat, or buy some gas, is at one of the camps; lots of times, I understand, they don't care to sell."

"But we aren't touring. We hope to join a camp."

The *stuffy* stared at him for a moment, then he said: "I wouldn't have thought so, looking at you."

"You don't approve of it?"

"Don't mind me," the *stuffy* said. "Right at this moment, I'm a little sour on them. Just the other morning they all drove out on me. Closed down the plant. Left me sitting here."

He climbed up on the wall and sat down alongside Amby. "They wanted to take me over completely, you understand," he said, settling down to a minute recounting of it. "Under the existing contract they already ran the plant. They bought the raw materials and set up their own work schedules and kept up maintenance. They decided plant operation

policy and set production schedules. I'd have had to ask their permission just to go down there and visit. But it wasn't enough for them. Do you know what they wanted?"

Amby shook his head.

"They wanted to take over marketing. That was all that I had left and they wanted to take that away from me. They were all set to shove me out completely. Pay me a percentage of the profit and cut me out entirely."

"Somehow," Amby said, "that doesn't sound quite fair."

"And when I refused to sign, they just packed up and left."

"A strike?"

"I suppose you could call it that. A most effective one."

"What do you do now?"

"Wait until another camp comes down the road. There'll be one along sometime. They'll see the plant standing idle, and if they're industrial and think they can handle it, they'll come up and see me. Maybe we can make a deal. Even if we can't, there'll be another camp along. There's always floating camps. Either that or swarms."

"Swarms?"

"Like bees, you know. A camp gets overcrowded. Too many to handle the contract that they have. So it up and swarms. Usually a bunch of young folks just starting out in life. A swarm is usually easier to deal with than the floaters. The floaters, often as not, are a bunch of radicals and malcontents who can't get along with anyone, while the youngsters in a swarm are anxious to get started at something of their own."

"That all sounds well enough," said Amby, "but how about the ones who left you? Could they afford just to pull stakes and go?"

"They're loaded," said the *stuffy*. "They worked here almost twenty years. They got a sinking fund that would choke a cow."

"I didn't know," said Amby.

There was so much, he thought, that he didn't know. Not only the thinking and the customs, but even a lot of the terminology was strange.

IT HAD BEEN different in the old days when there'd been a daily press; when a new phrase or a new thought became public property almost overnight; when the forces that shaped one's life were daily spread before one in the black and white of print. But now there were no papers and no television. There still was radio, of course; but radio, he thought,

was a poor medium to keep a man in touch; even so, it was not the kind of radio he'd known and he never listened to it.

There were no papers and no television, and that wasn't all by any means. There was no furniture, for there was no need of furniture in a trailer with everything built in. There were no rugs, no carpeting, no drapes. There were few luxury items, for there was no room for luxury items in the confines of a trailer. There were no formal and no party clothes, for no one in a trailer camp would dress—there was no room for an extensive wardrobe and the close communal life would discourage all formality. Such dress as there might be in a trailer camp undoubtedly would run heavily to sportswear.

There were no banks or insurance firms or loan companies. Social security had gone down the drain. There was no use for banks or loan companies; the credit union setup, dating from the old trade unionism, would have replaced them on a tight communal basis. And an extension of the old union health and welfare fund, once again on a tight communal basis, had replaced any need of social security, governmental welfare aid, or health insurance. And the war chest idea—once again grafted from unionism—had made each trailer camp an independent, self-sufficient governmental unit.

It worked all right, for there was little that a resident of a trailer camp could spend his money on. The old fly-traps of entertainment; the need of expensive dress; the overhead of house furnishings—all had been wiped out. Thrift had become an enforced virtue—enforced by circumstance.

A man didn't even pay taxes any more—not to speak of, anyhow. State and local governments long ago had fallen by the wayside. There remained nothing but the federal government, and even the federal government had lost much of its control—as it must have known it would on that day of forty years ago. All that need now be paid was a trifling defense tax, and a slightly heavier road tax, and the *nomies* screamed loud and lustily against the paying of the road tax.

"It's not like it used to be," said the *stuffy*. "This trade unionism got entirely out of hand."

"It was about all the people had to tie to," Amby told him. "It was the one surviving piece of logic, the one re-

maining solid thing that was left to them. Naturally, they embraced it; it took the place of government."

"The government should have done it differently," said the *stuffy.*

"They might have if we hadn't got so frightened. It was the fear that did it; it would have been all right if we hadn't got afraid."

Said the *stuffy:* "We'd been blown plumb to hell if we hadn't got afraid."

"Maybe so," said Amby. "I can remember how it happened. The order went out to decentralize, and I guess industry must have known a good deal more about what the situation was then the most of us; it got out and scattered, without any argument. Maybe they knew the government wasn't fooling and maybe they had some facts that weren't public knowledge. Although the public facts, as I remember them, ran rather to the grim side."

"I was just in my teens then," said the *stuffy,* "but I remember something of it. Real estate worth nothing. Couldn't sell city property at a fraction of its worth. And the workers couldn't stay there, for their jobs had moved away—away out in the country. Decentralization took in a lot of country. The big plants split up, some of them into a lot of smaller units and there had to be a lot of miles between each unit."

Amby nodded. "So there'd be no target big enough for anyone to waste a bomb on. Make it cost too much to wipe out an industry. Where one bomb would have done the job before, now it would take a hundred."

"I don't know," said the *stuffy,* still unwilling to concede. "Seems to me the government could have handled it a little differently instead of letting the thing run on the way it did."

"I suspect the government had a lot on its mind right then."

"Sure it had, but it had been in the housing business up to its ears before. Building all sorts of low-cost housing projects."

"It had the job of helping industry get those new plants set up. And the trailers solved the housing problem for the moment."

"I suppose," the *stuffy* said, "that was the way it was."

And that, of course, was the way it had been.

THE WORKERS had been forced to follow their jobs

—either follow them or starve. Unable to sell their houses in the cities when the bottom dropped out of the real estate market almost overnight, they compromised on trailers; and around each fractionated industry grew up a trailer camp.

They grew to like the trailer life, perhaps, or they were afraid to build another house for fear the same thing might happen yet again—even if some could afford to build another house, and there were a lot of them who couldn't. Or they may have become disillusioned and disgusted—it did not matter what. But the trailer life had caught on and stayed, and people who were not directly affected by decentralization had gradually drifted into the trailer camps, until even most of the villages stood empty.

The cult of possessions had been foresworn. The tribe sprang up again.

Fear had played its part and freedom—the freedom from possessions, and the freedom to pick up and go without ever looking back—and unionism, too.

For the trailer movement had killed the huge trade union setup. Union bosses and business agents, who had found it easy to control one huge union setup, found it a sheer impossibility to control the hundred scattered units into which each big local had been broken. But within each trailer camp a local brand of unionism had caught on with renewed force and significance. It had served to weld each camp into a solid and cohesive unit. It had made the union a thing close to each family's heart and interest. Unionism, interpreted in the terms of the people and their needs, had provided the tribal pattern needed to make the trailer system work.

"I'll say this much for them," the *stuffy* said. "They were an efficient bunch. They ran the plant better than I could have run it; they watched the costs and they were forever dinging up shortcuts and improvements. During the twenty years they worked here they practically redesigned that plant. That's one of the things they pointed out to me in negotiations. But I told them they'd done it to protect their jobs, and that may have been the thing that made them sore enough to leave."

He tapped his pipe out on the wall. "You know," he said, "I'm not too sure but what I'm right. It'll more than likely take any new gang that moves in a month or so to figure out all the jack-leg

contraptions that this bunch of mine rigged up. All I hope is that they don't start it up too quick and wreck the whole shebang."

He polished the bowl of his pipe abstractedly. "I don't know. I wish I could figure that tribe out—just for my peace of mind, if nothing else. They were good people and mostly sensible. They were hard workers and up to a month ago easy to get along with. They lived normal lives for the most part, but there were things about them I couldn't understand. Like the superstitions that grew up. They'd worked up a sizeable list of taboos, and they were hell on signs of exorcism and placation. Oh, sure, I know we use to do it—cross your fingers and spit over your left shoulder and all that sort of stuff—but with us it was all in fun. It was just horseplay with us. A sort of loving link with a past we were reluctant to give up. But these people, I swear, believed and lived by it."

"That," said Amby, "bears out my own belief that the culture has actually degenerated into the equivalent of tribalism, perhaps further than I thought. Your small, compact, enclosed social groups give rise to that sort of thing. In a more integrated culture, such notions are laughed out of existence; but in protected soil they take root and grow."

"The farm camps are the worst," the *stuffy* told him. "They have rainmaking mumbo-jumbo and crop magic and all the rest of it."

Amby nodded. "That makes sense. There's something about the enigma of the soil and seed that encourages mysticism. Remember the wealth of mythology that grew up around agriculture in prehistoric times—the fertility rites, and the lunar planting tables, and all the other fetishes."

He sat on the stone wall, staring off across the land; out of the dark unknown of the beginning of the race, he seemed to hear the stamp of calloused feet, the ritual chant, the scream of the sacrifice.

VII

THE NEXT DAY, from the top of a high hill, they sighted the farm camp. It was located at the edge of a grove of trees a little distance from a row of elevators, and across the plains that stretched in all directions lay the gold-green fields.

"Now that's the kind of place I'd like to settle into," said Jake. "Good place to

raise the kids and it stands to reason you wouldn't have to kill yourself with work. They do farming mostly with machinery and you'd just ride around, steering a tractor or a combine or a baler or something of the sort. Good healthful living, too, out in the sun and open air and you'd get to see some country, more than likely. When the harvest is done the whole kit and caboodle would just pull stakes and go somewhere else. Out to the southwest maybe for the lettuce or the other garden stuff, or out to the coast for fruit or maybe even south. I don't know if there's any winter farming in the south. Maybe you know, Doc."

"No, I don't," said Amby.

He sat beside Jake and watched Jake drive; Jake, he admitted to himself, was a fine man at the wheel; a man felt safe and confident with Jake driving. He never went too fast; he took no chances, and he knew how to treat a car.

In the back seat the kids were raising a ruckus, and now Jake turned his attention to them. "If you young'uns don't quiet down, I'm going to stop this here outfit and give you all a hiding. You kids know right well you wouldn't be raising all this rumpus if your Ma was with you instead of back there in the trailer. She'd smack your ears for fair and she'd get you quietened down."

The kids paid no attention, went on with their scuffling.

"I been thinking," Jake said to Amby, his duty as a father now discharged, "that maybe this is the smartest thing you ever done. Maybe you should have done it sooner. Stands to reason an educated man like you won't have no trouble finding a good place in one of these here camps. Ain't likely they got many educated men and there's nothing, I've always said, like an education. Never got one myself and maybe that's why I set such a store by it. One of the things I hated back there in the city was watching them kids run wild without a lick of learning. Myrt and me did the best we could, but neither of us know much more than our ABC's and we weren't proper teachers."

"They probably have schools in all the camps," said Amby. "I've never heard they had, but they have some sort of universities—and before anyone could go to college he'd have to have some sort of elementary education. I rather imagine we'll find the camps equipped with a fair communal program. A camp is a sort of mobile village and

more than likely it would be run like one, with schools and hospitals and churches and all the other things you'd expect to find in towns—although all of them, I imagine, will have certain overtones of trade unionism. Culture is a strange things, Jake, but it usually spells out to pretty much the same in the end result. Differing cultures are no more than different approaches to a common problem."

"I declare," said Jake, "it's a pleasure just to sit here and listen to all that lingo that you throw around. And the beauty of it is you sound just like you know what all them big words mean."

He swung the car off the highway onto the rutted road that ran up to the camp. He slowed to a crawl and they bumped along.

"Look at it," he said. "Ain't it a pretty sight. See all that washing hung out on the lines and those posies growing in the window boxes on the trailers and that little picket fence some of the folks have set up around the trailers, just like the yards back home. I wouldn't be none surprised, Doc, if we find these folks people just like us."

THEY REACHED the camp and swung out of the road, off to one side of the trailers. A crowd of children had gathered and stood watching them. A woman came to the door of one of the trailers and stood, leaning against the doorway, staring at them. Some dogs joined the children and sat down to scratch fleas.

Jake got out of the car. "Hello, kids," he said.

They giggled shyly at him.

Jake's kids piled out of the back seat and stood in a knot beside their father.

Myrt climbed down out of the trailer. She fanned herself with a piece of cardboard. "Well, I never," she declared.

They waited.

Finally an old man came around the end of one of the trailers and walked toward them. The kids parted their ranks to let him through. He walked slowly, with a cane to help him. "Something I can do for you, stranger?"

"We was just looking around," said Jake.

"Look all you want," the oldster told him.

He glanced at Amby, still sitting in the car. "Howdy, oldtimer."

"Howdy," said Amby.

"Looking for anything special, oldtimer?"

"I guess you could say we are looking for a job; we hope to find a camp that will take us on."

The old man shook his head. "We're pretty well full up. But you better talk to the business agent; he's the one to see."

He turned and yelled to the group of staring kids. "You kids go and hunt up Fred."

They scattered like frightened partridges.

"We don't get many folks like you any more," the old man said. "Years ago there were lots of them, just drifting along, looking for whatever they could find. A lot of folks from the smaller towns and a lot of them DF's."

He saw the look of question on Amby's face.

"Displaced farmers," he said. "Ones who couldn't make a go of it and once they took off parity there were a lot of them. Maddest bunch you ever saw. Fighting mad, they were. Had come to count on parity; thought they had it coming to them. Figured the government had done them dirt and I suppose it had. But it did dirt to a lot of the rest of us as well. You couldn't bust things up the way they were busted up without someone getting hurt. And the way things were, you couldn't expect the government to keep on with all their programs. Had to simplify."

Amby nodded in agreement. "You couldn't maintain a top-heavy bureaucracy in a system that had become a technological tribal system."

"I guess you're right," the old man agreed in turn. "So far as the farmers were concerned, it didn't make much difference anyhow. The small land holdings were bound to disappear. The little farmer just couldn't make the grade. Agriculture was on its way toward corporate holdings even before D. C. Machinery was the thing that did it. You couldn't farm without machinery and it didn't pay to buy machinery to handle the few acres on the smaller farms."

HE WALKED closer to the car and stroked one fender with a gnarled hand. "Good car you got here."

"Had it for a long time," Amby told him. "Took good care of it."

The old man brightened. "That's a rule we got around here, too. Everyone has to take good care of everything. Ain't like it was one time when, if you busted something, or it wore out, or you lost it, you could run down the corner and get another one. Pretty good camp that way. Young fellers spend a lot of their spare time dinging up the cars. You should see what they've done to some of them. Yes, sir, there's some of

them cars they've made almost human."

He walked up to the open car window and leaned on the door. "Darn good camp," he said. "Anyway you look at it. We got the neatest crops around; and we take good good care of the soil; and that's worth a lot to the *stuffy* who owns the place. We been coming back to this same place every spring for almost twenty years. If someone beats us here, the *stuffy* won't even talk to them. He always waits for us. There ain't many camps, I can tell you, that can say as much. Of course, in the winter we wander around considerable but that's because we want to. There ain't a winter place we been we couldn't go back to anytime we wanted."

He eyed Amby speculatively. "You wouldn't know nothing about rain-making, now would you?"

"Some years ago I did some reading on what had been done about it," Amby told him. "Cloud seeding, they called it. But I forget what they used. Silver—something. Some kind of chemical."

"I don't know anything about this seeding," the old man said; "and I don't know if they use chemicals or not."

"Of course," he said, anxious not to be misunderstood, "we got a bunch of the finest rain-makers that you ever saw, but in this farming business you can't have too many of them. Better to have one or two too many than one or two too few."

He looked up at the sky. "We don't need no rain right now and it ain't right to use the power, of course, unless you have some need of it. I wish you'd come when we needed rain, for then you could stay over and see the boys in action. They put on quite a show. When they put on a dance everyone turns out to watch."

"I read somewhere once," said Amby, "about the Navahos. Or maybe it was the Hopis..."

But the old man wasn't interested in Navahos or Hopis. "We got a fine crew of green-thumbers, too," he said. "I don't want to sound like bragging, but we got the finest crew..."

The children came charging around the parked trailers, yelling. The old man swung around. "Here comes Fred."

Fred ambled toward them. He was a big man, bareheaded, with an unruly thatch of black hair, bushy eyebrows, a mouthful of white teeth. "Hello, folks," he said. "What can I do for you?"

Jake explained.

FRED SCRATCHED his head, embarrassed and perplexed. "We're full up right now; fact is, we're just on the edge of swarming. I don't see how we can take on another family. Not unless you could offer something special."

"I'm handy at machinery," Jake told him; "I can drive anything."

"We got a lot of drivers. How about repair? Know anything about welding? Can you operate a lathe?"

"Well, no..."

"We have to repair our own machines and keep them in top running shape. Sometimes we have to make parts to replace ones that have been broken. Just can't wait to get replacements from the factory, we're kind of jacks-of-all-trades around here. There's a lot more to it than driving. Anyone can drive. Even the women and the kids."

"Doc here," said Jake, "is an educated man. Was a professor at the university until the university shut down. Maybe you could find some use..."

Fred cheered up. "You don't say. Not agronomy..."

"History," Amby told him, "I don't know anything but history."

"Now that's to bad," said Fred. "We could use an agronomist. We're trying to run some experimental plots, but we don't know too much about it. We don't seem to get nowhere."

The old man said to Amby: "The idea is to develop better strains. It's our stock in trade. One of our bargaining points. Each camp furnishes its own seed and you can get a better deal out of the *stuffy* if you have top-notch strains. We got a good durham, but we're working on corn now. If we could get some that matured ten days sooner, say..."

"It sounds interesting," said Amby, "but I couldn't help you. I don't know a thing about it."

"I'd sure work hard," said Jake, "if you just gave me a chance. You wouldn't find a more willing worker in your entire camp."

"Sorry," the business agent told him. "We all are willing workers. If you're looking for a place your best bet would be a swarm. They might take you in. An old camp like us don't take newcomers as a rule; not unless they got something special."

"Well," said Jake, "I guess that's it."

He opened the door and got into the car. The kids swarmed into the back seat. Myrt climbed back into the trailer.

"Thanks," Jake said to the business agent. "Sorry we took up your time."

He swung the car around and bumped back to the road. He was silent for a long time. Finally he spoke up. "What the hell," he asked, "is an agronomist?"

VIII

THAT WAS the way it was everywhere they went:

—Are you one of these cybernetic fellows? No? Too bad. We sure could use one of those cybernetic jerks.

—Too bad. We could use a chemist. Messing around with fuels. Don't know a thing except what we dig out. One of these days the boys will blow the whole camp plumb to hell.

—Now if you were a lifter. We could use a lifter.

—You know electronics, maybe. No? Too bad.

—History. Afraid we got no use for history.

—You know any medicine? Our Doc is getting old.

—Rocket engineer? We got some ideas. We need a guy like that.

—History? Nope. What would we do with history?

But there was a use for history, Amby told himself. "I know there is a use for it," he said. "It has always been a tool before. Now, suddenly, even in a raw, new society such as this, it could not have lost its purpose."

He lay in his sleeping bag and stared up at the sky.

Back home, he thought, it was already autumn; the leaves were turning and the city, in the blaze of autumn, he recalled, was a place of bleathless beauty.

But here, deep in the south, it still was summer and there was a queer, lethargic feel to the deep green of the foliage and the flinthard blueness of the sky—as if the green and blue were stamped upon the land and would remain forever, a land where change had been outlawed and the matrix of existence had been hardcast beyond any chance of alteration.

The trailer loomed black against the sky; now that Jake and Mryt had quit their mumbling talk inside of it, he could hear the purling of the stream that lay just beyond the campsite. The campfire had died down until it was no more than a hint of rose in the whiteness of the ash, and from the edge of the woods a bird struck up a song—a mocking bird, he thought, although not so sweet a song as he had imagined a mocking bird would sing.

That was the way it was with everything, he thought.

Nothing was the way you imagined it. Most often a thing would be less glamorous and more prosaic than one had imagined it; and then, suddenly, in some unexpected place one would encounter something that would root him in his tracks.

The camps, once he'd seen two or three of them, had fallen into pattern—good solid American, sound business-practice patterns; the peculiarities had ceased to be peculiarities once he had come to understand the reason for them.

Like the weekly military drills, for instance, and the regular war games, with every man-Jack of the camp going through maneuvers or working out in all seriousness, grimly, without any horseplay, a military problem—with the women and the children scattering like coveys of quail to seek out hiding places from imaginary foes.

And that was why, he knew, the federal government could get along on its trifling defense tax. For here, at hand, subject to instantaneous call, was a citizen soldiery that would fight a total, terrible war such as would rip to pieces and hunt down with frontier efficiency and Indian savagery any enemy that might land upon the continent. The federal government maintained the air force, supplied the weapons, conducted the military research and provided the overall command and planning. The people, down to the last and least of them, were the standing army, ready for instant mobilization, trained to hair-trigger readiness, and operative without a dime of federal cost.

It was a setup, he realized now, having seen the war games and the drill, that would give pause to any potential enemy. It was something new in the science of warfare. Here stood a nation that presented no target worth the bomb that might be dropped upon it, fostering no cities to be seized and held, no industries which might be ravaged in their entirety, and with every male inhabitant between the ages of 16 and 70 a ready, willing fighter.

He lay there, pondering the many things he'd seen, the strangely familiar and the unfamiliar.

Like the folkways that had grown up within each camp, compounded of legend, superstition, magic, remembered teachings, minor hero-worship and all the other inevitable odds and ends of close communal living. And the folkways, he realized, were a

part of the fierce, partisan loyalty of each man and woman for their own home camp. Out of this had arisen the fantastic rivalry, hard at times to understand, which existed among the camps, manifesting itself all the way from the bragging of the small fry to the stiff-necked refusal of camp leaders to share their knowledge or their secrets with any other camp. Hard to understand, all of it, until one saw in it the translation of the old, tradition that had been the soul and body of American business practice.

A QUEER layout, thought Dr. Ambrose Wilson, lying in his sleeping bag in the depth of southern night—a queer layout, but a most effective one, and understandable within its terms of reference.

Understandable except for one thing—something on which he could not lay a finger. A feeling, perhaps, rather than a fact—a feeling that somewhere, somehow, underneath this whole new fabric of the neo-gypsy life, lay some new factor, vital and important, that one could sense but could never lay a name to.

He lay there, thinking of that new and vital factor, trying to sift out and winnow the impressions and the clues. But there was nothing tangible; nothing to reach out and grasp; nothing that one could identify. It was like chaff without a single grain, like smoke without a fire—it was something new and, like all the other things, perhaps, entirely understandable within its frame of reference. But where was the reference, he wondered.

They had come down across the land, following the great river, running north to south, and they'd found many camps—crop camps with great acreages of grain and miles of growing corn; industrial camps with smoking chimneys and the clanking of machines; transportation camps with the pools of trucks and the fantastic operation of a vast freightage web; dairy camps with herds of cattle and the creameries and cheese factories where the milk was processed and the droves of hogs that were a sideline to the dairying; chicken camps; truck farming camps; mining camps; road maintenance camps; lumbering camps and all the others. And now and then the floaters and the swarms, wanderers like themselves, looking for a place.

Everywhere they'd gone it had been the same. A chorus

of "too bad" resounding down the land, the swarms of staring children and the scratching dogs and the business agent saying there was nothing.

Some camps had been friendlier than others; in some of these they'd stayed for a day or week to rest up from their travels, to overhaul the motor, to get the kinks out of their legs, to do some visiting.

In those camps he had walked about and talked, sitting in the sun or shade, as the time of day demanded; it had seemed at times he had got to know the people. But always, when it seemed that he had got to know them, he'd sense the subtle strangeness, the nebulous otherness, as if there were someone he could not see sitting in the circle, someone staring at him from some hidden spying spot; and he'd know then that there lay between him and these people a finely-spun fabric of forty years forgotten.

HE LISTENED to their radios, communal versions of the 1960 ham outfits, and heard the ghostly voices come in from other camps, some nearby, some a continent away, a network of weird communication on the village level. Gossip, mostly, but not entirely gossip, for some of it was official messages—the placing of an order for a ton of cheese or a truckload of hay, or the replacement for some broken machine part—or possibly the confirmation of a debt that one camp owed another for some merchandise or product, and oftentimes a strange shuffling of those debts from one camp to another, promise paying promise. And what of it was gossip had a special sense, imprinted with the almost unbelievable pattern of this fantastic culture which over night had walked out of its suburbia to embrace nomadism.

And always there was magic, a strangely gentle magic used for the good of people rather than their hurt. It was, he thought, as if the brownies and the fairies had come back again after their brief banishment from a materialistic world. There were quaint new ceremonies drawing from the quaintness of the old; there were good-luck charms and certain words to say; there was a resurgence of old and simple faith forgotten in the most recent of our yesterdays, an old and simple faith in certain childish things. *And, perhaps,* he thought, *it is well that it is so.*

But the most puzzling of all was the blending of the an-

cient magic and the old beliefs with an interest just as vital in modern technology—cybernetics going hand in hand with the good luck charm, the rain dance and agronomy crouching side by side.

All of it bothered him in more ways than one as he sought an understanding of it, tried to break down the pattern and graph it mentally on a historic chart sheet; for as often as the graph seemed to work out to some sensible system it would be knocked out of kilter by the realization he was working with no more than surface evidence.

There was always something missing—that sensed and vital factor.

They had traveled down the continent to a chorus of "too bad"; Jake, he knew, was a worried man, as he had every right to be. Lying in his sleeping bag night after night, he'd listened to them talking—Jake and Myrt—when the kids had been asleep and he should have been. And while he'd taken care, out of decency, not to be close enough or listen hard enough to catch their actual words, he had gathered from the tones of their mumbling voices what they had talked about.

It was a shame, he thought; Jake's hopes had been so high and his confidence so great. It was a terrible thing, he told himself, to see a man lose his confidence, a little day by day—to see it drain away from him like blood-drip from a wound.

He stirred, settling his body into the sleeping bag, and shut his eyes against the stars. He felt sleep advance upon him like an ancient comforter; and in that hazy moment he had drifted from the world and yet not entirely lost it, he saw once again, idealized and beautiful, the painting that hung above the fireplace, with the lamplight falling on it.

IX

THE TRAILER was gone when he awoke. He did not realize it at first, for he lay warm and comfortable, with the fresh wind of morning at his face, listening to the gladness of the birds from each tree and thicket, and the talking of the brook as it flowed among its pebbles.

He lay thinking how fine it was to be alive and vaguely wondering what the day would bring and thankful that he did not fear to meet it.

It was not until then that he saw the trailer was no longer there; he lay quietly for a moment, uncomprehending, before the force of what had happened slapped him in the face.

The first wave of panic washed over him and swiftly ebbed away—the cold fear of loneness, the panic of desertion—retreating before the dull red glow of anger. He found his clothes inside the sleeping bag and swiftly scrambled out. Sitting on the bag to dress, he took in the scene and tried to reconstruct how it might have happened.

The camp lay just beyond a long dip in the road and he remembered how they had blocked the trailer's wheels against the slope of ground. More than likely Jake had simply taken away the blocks, released the brakes, and rolled down the hill, not starting the motor until well out of hearing.

He got up from the sleeping bag and walked numbly forward. Here were the stones they'd used to block the trailer and there the tracks of the tires straight across the dew.

And something else: Leaning against a tree was the .22 rifle that had been Jake's most prized possession and beside it an old and bulging haversack.

He knelt beside the tree and unstrapped the haversack. There were two cartons of matches, ten boxes of ammunition, his extra clothing, food, cooking and eating utensils, and an old raincoat.

He knelt there, looking at it all spread upon the ground and he felt the burning of the tears just behind his eyelids. Treachery, sure—but not entirely treacherous, for they'd not forgotten him. Thievery and desertion and the worst of bad intentions, yet Jake had left him the rifle that had been his good right arm.

Those mumbled conversations that he had listened to—could they have been plotting rather than just worried talk? And what if he had listened to the words rather than the mumble, what if he had crept and listened and learned what they were planning—what could he have done about it?

He repacked the haversack and carried it and the rifle to his sleeping bag. It would be a lot to carry, but he would take it slow and easy and he would get along. As a matter of fact, he consoled himself, he was not too badly off; he still had his billfold and the money that remained. He wondered, without caring much, how Jake, without a cent,

would get gasoline and food when he needed it.

And he could hear Jake saying, in those mumbled nightly talks: *"It's Doc. That's why they won't take us in. They take one look at him and know the day is not far off when he'll be a welfare charge. They aren't taking on someone who'll be a burden to them in a year or two."*

Or: *"It's Doc, I tell you, Myrt. He flings them big words around and they are scared of him. Figure he won't fit. Figure he is snooty. Now take us. We're common, ordinary folks. They'd take us like a shot if we weren't packing Doc."*

Or: *"Now us, we can do any kind of work, but Doc is specialized. We won't get nothing unless we cut loose from Doc."*

Amby shook his head. It was funny, he thought, to what lengths a man would go once he got desperate enough. Gratitude and honor, even friendship, were frail barriers to the actions of despair.

And I, he asked himself. What do I do now?

Certainly not the first thing that had popped into his head—turning around and heading back for home. That would be impossible; in another month or so, snow would have fallen in the north and he would be unable to get through. If he decided to go home, he'd have to wait till spring.

There was one thing to do—continue southward, traveling as he had been traveling, but at a slower pace. There might even be some merit in it. He would be by himself and would have more time to think. And here was a situation that called for a lot of thinking, a lot of puzzling out. Somewhere, he knew, there had to be an answer and a key to that factor he had sensed within the camps. Once he had that factor, the history graph could be worked out, and he would have done the task he had set out to do.

He left the haversack and rifle on the sleeping bag and walked out to the road. He stood in the middle of it, looking first one way and then the other. It was a long and lonely road and he must travel it as lonely as the road. He'd never had a child, and of recent years he'd scarcely had a friend. Jake, he admitted now, had been his closest friend; but Jake was gone, cut off from him not only by the distance and the winding road, but by this act which now lay between them.

He squared his shoulders, with an outward show of competence and bravery which he

did not feel, and walked back to pick up the sleeping bag, the haversack and rifle.

X

IT WAS A month later that he stumbled on the truckers camp, quite by accident.

It was coming on toward evening; he was on the lookout for a place to spend the night when he approached the intersection and saw the semi-trailer parked there.

A man was squatted beside a newly-lighted campfire, carefully feeding small sticks to the flame. A second man was unpacking what appeared to ge a grub-box. A third was coming out of the woods with a bucket, probably carrying water from a nearby stream.

The man tending the fire saw Amby, and stood up. "Howdy, stranger," he called. "Looking for a place to camp?"

Amby nodded and approached the campfire. He took the haversack and sleeping bag off his shoulder and dropped them to the ground. "I'd be much obliged."

"Glad to have you," said the man. He hunkered down beside the fire again and went on nursing it. "Ordinarily we don't camp out for the night. We just stop long enough to cook a bite to eat, then hit the road again. We got a bunk in the job so one of us can sleep while another drives. Even Tom has got so he's pretty good at driving."

He nodded at the man who had brought in the water. "Tom ain't a trucker. He's a perfesser at a university, on a leave of absence."

Tom grinned across the fire at Amby. "Sabbatical."

"So am I," said Amby. "Mine is permanent."

"But tonight we'll make a night of it," went on the trucker. "I don't like the sound of the motor. She's heating up some, too. We'll have to tear it down."

"Tear it down right here?"

"Why not? Good a place as any."

"But..."

The trucker chuckled. "We'll get along all right. Jim, my helper over there—he's a lifter. He'll just h'ist her out and bring her over to the fire and we'll tear her down."

Amby sat down by the fire. "I'm Amby Wilson," he said. "Just wandering around."

"Rambling far?"

"From up in Minnesota."

"Far piece of walking for a man your age."

"I came part of the way by car."

"Car break down on you?"

"My partner ran off with it."

"Now," the trucker said, judiciously, "that's what I'd call a lousy, lowdown trick."

"Jake didn't mean any harm; he just got panicky."

"You try to track him down?"

"What's the use of trying? There's no way that I can."

"You could get a tracer."

"What's a tracer?"

"Pop," the trucker asked, "where the hell you been?"

And it was a fair question, Amby admitted to himself.

"A tracer," said Tom, "is a telepath. A special kind of telepath. He can track down a mind and find it almost every time. A kind of human bloodhound. It's hard work and there aren't many of them; but as the years go by we hope there will be more—and better."

A tracer is a telepath!

Just like that, without any warning.

A special kind of telepath—as if there might be many other kinds of them.

AMBY SAT hunched before the fire and looked cautiously around to catch the sheltered grin. But they were not grinning; they acted, he thought, as if this matter of a telepath was very commonplace.

Could it be that here, he wondered, within minutes after meeting them, these people had been the first to say the word that made some sense out of the welter of folklore and magic he'd encountered in the camps?

A tracer was a telepath; and a lifter might be a teleporter; and a green-thumber very well might be someone who had an inherent, exaggerated sympathy and understanding for the world of living things.

Was this, then, the missing factor he had sought; the differentness sensed in the camps; the logic behind the rain-makers and all the other mumbo-jumbo that he had thought of as merely incidental to an enclosed social group?

He brought his hands together between his knees, locking his fingers together tightly, to keep from trembling. *Good Lord,* he thought, *if this is it, so many things explained! If this is the answer that I sought, then here is a culture that is unbeatable!*

Tom broke in upon his thinking. "You said you were on a sabbatical as well as I. A permanent one, you said. Are you a school man, too?"

"I was," said Amby, "but the university closed down. It was one of the old universities, and there was no mon-

ey and not many students."

"You're looking for another school post?"

"I'd take anything; it seems that no one wants me."

"The schools are short on men. They would snap you up."

"You mean these trailer universities."

Tom nodded. "That is what I mean."

"You don't think much of them?" the trucker asked, his hackles rising.

"I don't know anything about them."

"They're g o o d as any schools there ever were," the trucker said. "Don't let no one tell you different."

Amby hunched f o r w a r d toward the fire, the many questions, the hope and fear bubbling in his mind. "This t r a c e r business," he said. "You said a tracer was a special kind of telepath. Are there o t h e r s—I mean, are there other posibilities?"

"Some," said Tom. "There seems to be a lot of special talent showing up these days. We catch a lot of them in the universities and we try to train them, but there isn't much that we can do. After all, how could you or I train a telepath? How would you go about it? About the best that we can do is to encourage each one of them to use such talent as he has to the best advantage."

Amby shook his head, confused. "But I don't understand. Why do you have them now when we never used to have them?"

"Perhaps there may have been some of them before D. C. There must have been, for the abilities must have been there, latent, waiting for their chance. But maybe, before this, they never had a chance. Maybe t h e y w e r e—well, killed in the rush. Or the abilities that there were may have been smothered under the leveling influence of the educational system. There may have been some who had the talents, and were afraid to use them for fear of being different in a culture where differentness was something to point a finger at. And being afraid, they suppressed them, until they weren't bothered by them. And there may have been others who used their talents secretly to their own advantage. Can you imagine what a lawyer or a politician or a salesman could have done with telepathy?"

"You believe this?"

"Well, not all of it. But the possibilities exist."

"What do you b e l i e v e, then?"

"Folks are smarter now," the trucker said.

"No, Ray, that isn't it at all. The people are the same. Perhaps there were special talents back before D. C., but I don't think they showed up as often as they show up now. We got rid of a lot of the old restrictions and conventionalities. We threw away a lot of the competition and the pressure when we left the houses, and all the other things we had thought we couldn't get along without. We cut out the complexities. Now no one is breathing down our necks. We don't have to worry so much about keeping up with the man next door—because the man next door has become a friend and is no longer a yardstick of our social and economic station. We aren't trying to pack forty eight hours of living into every twenty-four. Maybe we're giving ourselves the chance to develop what we missed before."

JIM, THE helper, had hung a pot of coffee on a forged stick over the fire and now was cutting meat.

"Pork chops tonight," said Ray, the trucker. "We were passing by a farm camp this morning and there was this pig out in the road and there wasn't nothing I could do..."

"You almost wrecked the truck to get him."

"Now, that's a downright libel," Ray protested. "I did my level best to miss him."

Jim went on cutting chops, throwing them into a big frying pan as he sliced them off.

"If you're looking for a teaching job," said Tom, "all you got to do is go to one of the universities. There are a lot of them. Most of them not large."

"But where do I find them?"

"You'd have to ask around. They moved around a lot. Get tired of one place and go off to another. But you're lucky now. The south is full of them. Go north in the spring, come south in the fall."

The trucker had settled back on his haunches and was building himself a cigaret. He lifted the paper to his mouth and licked it, twirling it in shape. He stuck it in his mouth and it drooped there limply while he hunted for a small twig from the fire to give himself a light.

"Tell you what," he said, "why don't you just come along with us? There's room for everyone. Bound to find a bunch of universities along the way. You can have your pick of them. Or you might take it in your mind to stick with us right out to the coast. Tom is going out there to see some shirt-tail relatives of his."

Tom nodded. "Sure. Why don't you come along."

"Ain't like it was in the old days," said the trucker. "My old man was a trucker then. You went hell-for-leather. You didn't stop for nothing—not even to be human. You just kept rolling."

"That was the way with all of us," said Amby.

"Now we take it easy," said the trucker. "We don't get there as fast, but we have a lot more fun and there ain't no one suffering if we're late a day or two."

Jim put the pan of chops on the bed of coals.

"It's a lot easier trucking, too," said Ray, "if you can get a lifter for a helper. Nothing to loading or unloading if you have a lifter. And if you get stuck in the mud, he can push you out. Jim here is the best lifter that I ever saw. He can lift that big job if he has to without any trouble. But you got to keep after him; he's the laziest mortal I ever saw."

Jim went on frying chops.

The trucker flipped the cigaret toward the fire and it landed in the pan of chops. Almost immediately it rose out of them; described a tiny arc and fell into the coals.

Jim said: "Ray, you got to cut out things like that. Watch what you are doing. You wear me out just picking up behind you."

The trucker said to Amby, "How about joining up with us? You'd see a lot of country."

Amby shook his head. "I'll have to think about it."

But he was dissembling. He didn't have to think about it. He knew he wasn't going.

XI

HE STOOD by the dead campfire at the intersection and waved goodbye to them, watching the semi-trailer disappear down the road in the early morning mist.

Then he bent down and picked up the haversack and the sleeping bag and slung them on his shoulder.

He felt within himself a strange urgency—a happy urgency. And it was fine to feel it once again after all these months. Fine again to know he had a job to do.

He stood for a moment, staring around at the camping grounds—the dead ash of the fire, the pile of unused wood, and the great spot on the ground where the grease from the motor of the truck soaked slowly in the soil.

He would not have believed it, he knew, if he had not seen it done—seen Jim lift the mo-

tor from the truck once the bed bolts had been loosened, lift it and guide it to rest beside the fire without once laying hands upon it. Again he had watched the stubborn nuts that defied the wrench turn slowly and reluctantly without a tool upon them, then spin freely to rise free of the thread and deposit themselves neatly in a row.

Once, long ago it seemed, he'd talked with a stuffy who had told him how efficiently a camp had run his plant, complaining all the while of how they'd rejiggered it until it would take any other camp a month at least to figure out the sheer mechanics of it.

Efficient! Good Lord, of course they were efficient! What new methods, what half-guessed new principles, he wondered, may have gone into that rejiggered plant?

All over the country, he wondered, how many new principles and methods might there be at work? But not regarded as new principles by the camps that had worked them out; regarded rather as trade secrets, as powerful points in bargaining, as tribal stock-in-trade. And in the whole country, he wondered, how many new talents might there be, how many applicable variations of those specific talents?

A new culture, he thought —an unbeatable culture if it only knew its strength, if it could be jarred out of its provincialism, if it could strip from its new abilities the veil of superstition. And that last, he knew, might be the toughest job off all; the magic had been used to cloak annoying ignorance and as an explanation for misunderstanding. It offered a simple and an easy explanation, and it might be hard to substitute in its stead the realization that at the moment there could be little actual knowledge and no complete understanding— only an acceptance and a patience against the day when it might be understood.

He walked over to the tree where he had leaned his rifle and picked it up. He swung it almost gayly in his hand and was astonished at the familiarity of it, almost as if it were a part of him, an extension of his hand.

And that was the way it was with these people and the possibilities. They'd gotten so accustomed to the magic, that it had become a part of everyday; they did not see the greatness if it.

THE POSSIBILITIES, once one thought of them, were fantastic. Develop the abilities and within another

hundred years the sputtering radios would be gone, replaced by telepaths who would blanket the nation with a flexible network of communications that never would break down, that would be immune to atmospheric conditions—an intelligent, human system of communication without the inherent limitations of an electronic setup.

The trucks would be gone, too, with relays of teleporters whisking shipments from coast to coast (and all points in between), fast and smooth and without a hitch and, once again, without regard to weather or to road conditions.

And that was only two facets of the picture. What of all the others—the known, the suspected, the now-impossible?

He walked from the campsite out to the road and stood for a moment, wondering. Where was that camp where they had asked if he was a rocket engineer? And where had been the camp that had been in the market for a chemist because the boys were fooling around with fuels? And where, he wondered, would he be able to pick up a lifter? And perhaps a good, all-purpose telepath.

It wasn't much, this thing he had in mind, he admitted to himself. But it was a start. "Give me ten years," he said. "Just ten years is all I ask."

But even if he had no more than two, he had to make a start. For if he made the start, then perhaps there'd be someone who would carry on. Someone had to make a start. Someone like himself, perhaps, who could look upon this neo-tribal world objectively and in the light of the historic past. *And there may not be many of us left,* he thought.

He might have a hard job selling them, he knew, but he thought he knew the pitch.

He set off up the road and he whistled as he went.

It wasn't much, but it would be spectacular if he could accomplish it. Once it had been done, it would be a thing that every camp would spy and scheme and cheat and steal to do.

And it would take something such as that, he knew, to knock some sense into their heads; to make them see the possibilities; to set them to wondering how they might turn to use the other strange abilities which had blossomed here in the soil of a new society.

Now where was that camp where they'd been in need of a rocket engineer?

Up the road somewhere. Up the winding, lonely road

that was no longer lonely.

Just up the road a piece. A hundred miles or two. Or was it more than that?

He jogged along, trying to remember. But it was hard to remember. There had been so many days and so many camps. A landmark, he thought— I was always good at landmarks.

But there had been too many landmarks, too.

XII

HE WANDERED up the road, stopping at the camps and the answer that he got became monotonous.

"Rockets? Hell, no! Who'd fool around with rockets?"

And he wondered: Had there ever been a camp where they'd said they could use a rocket engineer? Who would fool around with rockets? What would be the use of it?

The word went ahead of him, by telepath perhaps, by radio, by fast-running word of mouth, and he found himself a legend. He found them waiting for him, as if they had been expecting him, and they had a standard greeting that soon became a joke.

"You the gent who's looking for the rockets?"

But with their joking and the legend of him, he became one of them; and yet, even in becoming one of them, he still stood apart from them and saw the greatness that they missed, a greatness that they had to—*had to*—be awakened to. And a greatness that mere words and preaching would never make come alive for them.

He sat at the nightly communal gabfests, slept in those trailers that had room for an extra person, and helped at little tasks and listened to the yarning. And in turn did some yarning of his own. Time after time he felt again the strangeness and the otherness; but now that he recognized it, it did not disturb him—and sometimes, looking around the circle, he could spot the one who had it.

Lying in a bunk at night, before he went to sleep, he thought a lot about it and finally it all made sense to him.

These abilities had been with Man always, perhaps even from the caves, but then, as now, Man had not understood the power and so had not followed it. Rather he had followed along another path —ignoring mind for hand— and had built himself a wonderful and impressive and complex culture of machines. He'd built with his hands and with mighty labor the vast, complex machines which did

what he might have done with the power of mind alone had he but chosen to do so. Rather he had hidden the mental power behind semantics of his own devising, and in seeking after intellectual status had laughed into disrepute the very thing he sought.

This thing which had happened, Amby told himself, was no quirk in the development of the race, but as sure and certain as the sun. It was no more than a returning to the path it had been intended all along that Man should follow. After centuries of stumbling, the human race once more was headed right again. And even if there had been no decentralization, no breakup of the culture, it would eventually have happened, for somewhere along the line of technology there must be a breakdown point. Machines could only get so big. There had to be an end somewhere to complexity, be it in machines or living.

Decentralization may have helped a little, might have hurried the process along by a thousand years or so, but that was all it amounted to.

And here once again Man had devised clever words—commonplace words—to dim the brightness of this frightening thing he could not understand. A teleporter was called a lifter; a telepath a tracer or a talker, the ability to follow worldlines a bit into the future was called second sight, while one who practiced it was usually called a peeker. And there were many other abilities, too—unrecognized or little better than half-guessed—all lumped under the general term of magic. But this did not matter greatly. A common and a homey word served just as well as correct terminology, and might even in the end lead to a readier acceptance. The thing that did matter greatly was that this time the abilities not be lost and not be pushed aside. Something would happen, something had to happen, to shock these people into a realization of what they really had.

So he went from camp to camp and now there was no need to ask the question, for the question went before him.

He went along the roads, a legend, and now he heard of another legend, a man who went from camp to camp dispensing medicines and cures.

IT WAS ONLY a rumor at first, heard oftener and oftener; finally he found a camp where the healer had stopped no more than a week before. Sitting around a campfire that evening, he lis-

tened to the wonder of the healer.

"Mrs. Cooper complained for years," an old crone told him. "Was sickly all the time. Kept to her bed for days. Couldn't keep nothing on her stomach. Then she took one bottle of this stuff and you should see her now. Sprightly as a jay."

Across the fire an old man nodded gravely. "I had rheumatiz," he said. "Just couldn't seem to shake it. Misery in my bones all the blessed time. The camp doc, he couldn't do a thing. Got a bottle of this stuff..."

He got up and danced a limber jig to put across his point.

In not one camp, but twenty, the story was the same—of those who left their beds and walked; of miseries disappeared; of complaints gone overnight.

Another one of them, Amby told himself. Another piece of magic. A man with the art of healing at his fingertips. Where would it end, he wondered.

Then he met the healer.

He came on the deserted camp after dusk had fallen. It was just at the hour when the suppers should be over, and the dishes done, and people would be gathering to sit around and talk. But there was not a soul around the trailers—except a dog or two at the garbage cans—and the streets that ran between the trailers echoed in their emptiness.

He stood in the center of the camp, wondering if he should shout to attract attention, but he was afraid to shout. Slowly he wheeled about, watching narrowly for the slightest motion, for the first pinprick of wrongness. It was then he saw the flare of light at the south edge of the camp.

Advancing cautiously toward it, he caught the murmur of the crowd when he was still a good ways off. He hesitated for a moment, doubtful if he should intrude, then went slowly forward.

The crowd, he saw, was gathered at the edge of a grove just beyond the camp. They were squeezed into a close-packed knot before a solitary trailer. The scene was lighted by a half dozen flares thrust into the ground.

A man stood on the steps that led up to the trailer's door, and his voice floated faintly to where Amby stood; but faint as the words might be, there was a familiar pattern to them. Amby stood there, thinking back to boyhood, and a small town he had not thought of for years, and

the sound of banjo music and the running in the streets. It had been exciting, he remembered, and they'd talked of it for days. Old Lady Adams, he remembered, had sworn by the medicine she'd bought, and waited patiently for years for the medicine show to come back to town again so she could get some more. But it never came again.

He walked forward to the edge of the crowd and a woman turned her head to tell him, whispering fiercely, "It's him!", as if it might be the Lord Almighty. Then she went back to listening.

The man on the steps was in full spiel by this time. He didn't talk so loud, but his voice carried and it had a quietness and a pompous, yet human, authority.

"My friends," he was saying, "I'm just an ordinary man. I wouldn't have you think different. I wouldn't want to fool you by saying I was somebody, because in fact I ain't. I don't even talk so good. I ain't much good at grammar. But maybe there are a lot of the rest of you who don't know much grammar, either, and I guess the most of you can understand me; so it'll be all right. I'd like to come right down there in the crowd and talk to each one of you, face to face, but you can hear me better if I stand up here. I'm not trying to put on any airs by standing up here on these steps. I ain't trying to put myself above you.

"Now I've told you that I wouldn't fool you, not even for a minute. I'd rather cut my tongue out and throw it to the hogs than tell you a thing that wasn't true. So I ain't going to make no high-flown claims for this medicine of mine. I'm going to start right out by being honest with you. I'm going to tell you that I ain't even a doctor. I never studied medicine. I don't know a thing about it. I just like to think of myself as a messenger—someone who is carrying good news.

"There's quite a story connected with this medicine and if you'll just hold still for a while I'd like to tell it to you. It goes a long ways back and some of it sounds almost unbelievable, but I wish you would believe me, for every word is true. First, I'll have to tell you about my old grandma. She's been d e a d these many years, God rest her. There never was a finer or a kinder woman and I remember when I was just a lad..."

Amby walked back from the crowd a ways and sat down limply on the ground.

The gall of the guy, he thought, the sheer impertinence!

When it was all over, when the last bottle had been sold, when the people had gone back to the camp and the medicine man was gathering up the flares, Amby rose and walked forward.

"Hello, Jake," he said.

XIII

JAKE SAID, "Well, I tell you, Doc, I was kind of backed against the wall. We was down to nothing. No money for gasoline or grub and begging hadn't been so good. So I got to thinking, sort of desperate like. And I thought that just because a man's been honest all his life doesn't mean he has to keep on being honest. But for the life of me, I couldn't see how I could profit much even from dishonesty, except maybe stealing and that's too dangerous. Although I was ready to do most anything."

"I can believe that," Amby said.

"Aw, Doc," pleaded Jake, "What you keep pouring it on for? There ain't no sense of you staying sore. We was sorry right away we left you; we would have turned around right away and come back again, except that I was scared to. And, anyhow, it worked out all right."

He flipped the wheel a little to miss a rock lying in the road.

"Well, sir," he said, continuing with his story, "it does beat all how things will happen. Just when you figure you are sunk, something will turn up. We stopped along this river, you see, to try to catch some fish and the kids found an old dump there and got rooting around in it, the way kids will, you know. And they found a lot of bottles—four or five dozen of them—all of them alike. I imagine someone had hauled them out long ago and dumped them. I sat looking at those bottles, not having much of anything else to do, and I got to wondering if I had any use for them or if it would be just a waste of space hauling them along. Then all of a sudden it hit me just like that. They were all full of dirt and some of them were chipped, but we got them washed and polished up and..."

"Tell me, what did you put in the bottles?"

"Well, Doc, I tell you honest, I just don't remember what I used for that first batch."

"Nothing medicinal, I take it."

"Doc, I wouldn't have the

slightest notion of what goes into medicine. The only thing to be careful of is not to put in anything that will kill them or make them very sick. But you got to make it unpleasant or they won't think it's any good. Myrt, she fussed some about it to start with, but she's all right now. Especially since people claim the stuff is doing them some good, although how in the world it could I can't rightly figure out. Doc, how in the world could stuff like that be any god at all?"

"It isn't."

"But folks claim it helps. There was this one old geezer..."

"It's conditioned faith," said Amby. "They're living in a world of magic and they're ready to accept almost anything. They practically beg for miracles."

"You mean it's all in their heads?"

"Every bit of it. These people have lost thir sophistication, or you'd never got away with it; they'll accept a thing like that on faith. They drink the stuff and expect so confidently it will help them that it really does. They haven't been battered since they were old enough to notice with high-power advertising claims. They haven't been fooled time after time by product claims. They haven't been gypped and lied to and cajoled and threatened. So they're ready to believe."

"So that's the way it is," said Jake. "I'm glad to know; I worried some about it."

THE KIDS were scuffling in the back seat and Jake chewed them out, but the kids went on scuffling. It was like old times again.

Amby settled back comfortably in the seat, watching the scenery go by. "You're sure you know where this camp is?"

"I can see it, Doc, just like it was yesterday. I remember thinking it was funny those guys would need a rocket engineer."

He looked slantwise at Amby. "How come you're in such a lather to find this camp of theirs?"

"I got an idea," Amby told him.

"You know, Doc, I was thinking now that you're back we might team up together. You with your white hair and that big lingo that you use..."

"Forget it," Amby said.

"There ain't no harm in it," protested Jake. "We'd give them a show. That's what brought them out at first. It ain't like it used to be back before D. C., when there was

television and the movies and baseball games and such. There ain't much entertainment now and they'd come out just to hear us talk."

Amby didn't answer.

It was good to be back again, he thought. He should be sore at Jake, but somehow he couldn't be. They'd all been so glad to see him—even the kids and Myrt—and they were trying so hard to make up for their deserting him.

And they'd do it all over again if the occasion ever arose where they thought it would be to their advantage; but in the meantime they were good people to be with, and they were heading where he'd wanted to go. He was satisfied. He wondered how long he would have had to hunt before he found the rocket camp if Jake had not turned up again. He wondered, vaguely, if he'd ever found it.

"You know," Jake said, "I been thinking it over and I might just run for congress. This medicine business has given me a lot of practice at public speaking and I know just the plank to run on—abolish this here road tax. I never heard anyone in all my life as burned up at anything as these folks are at the road tax."

"You couldn't run for congress," Amby told him. "You aren't a resident of any place. You don't belong to any camp."

"I never thought of that. Maybe I could join up with some camp long enough to..."

"And you can't abolish the road tax if you want to keep the roads."

"Maybe you're right at that, Doc. But it does seem a shame these folks are pestered by the road tax. It sure has them upset."

He squinted at the dials on the instrument panel. "If we don't have any trouble," he said, "We'll be at that camp of yours by tomorrow evening."

XIV

THEY SAID, "It won't work." But that was one of the things he had known they'd say.

"It won't work if you don't co-operate," said Amby. "To do it you need fuel."

"We got fuel."

"Not good enough," said Amby; "not nearly good enough. This camp just down the road is working on some fuels."

"You want us to go down there with our hats in hand and..."

"Not with your hats in

hand. You have something; they have something. Why don't you make a trade?"

They digested that, sitting in a circle under the big oak tree that grew in the center of the camp. He watched them digesting it—the hard and puzzled faces, the shrewd, nineteenth-century Yankee faces, the grease-grimed hands folded in their laps.

All around were the trailers with their windowboxes and their lines of washing, with the women-faces and the children-faces peering out of doors and windows, all being very silent; this was an important council, and they knew their place.

And beyond the trailers the great stacks of the farm machinery plant.

"I tell you, mister," said the business agent. "This rocket business is just a hobby with us. Some of the boys found some books about it and read up a little and got interested. And in a little while the whole camp got interested. We do it like some other camps play baseball or hold shooting matches. We aren't hell-for-leather set on doing something with it. We're just having fun."

"But if you could use the rockets?"

"We ain't prejudiced against using them, but we got to think it through."

"You would need some lifters."

"We've got lifters, mister; we got a lot of them. We pick up all we can. They cut down the operation costs, so we can afford to pay them what they ask. We use a lot of them in the assembly plant."

One of the younger men spoke up. "There's just one thing about it. Can a lifter lift himself?"

"Why couldn't he?"

"Well, you take a piece of pipe. You can pick it up without any trouble, say. But if you stand on it, you can tug your muscles out and you can't even budge it."

"A lifter can lift himself, all right," said the business agent. "We got one fellow in assembly who rides around at work—on the pieces he is lifting. Claims it's faster that way."

"Well, all right, then," said Amby. "Put your lifter in a trailer; he could lift it, couldn't he?"

The business agent nodded. "Easily."

"And handle it? Bring it down again without busting it all up?"

"Sure he could."

"But he couldn't move it far. How far would you say?"

"Five miles, maybe. Maybe

even ten. It looks easy, sure, but there's a lot of work to it."

"But if you put rockets on the trailer, then all the lifter would have to do would be to keep it headed right. How hard would that be?"

"Well, I don't rightly know," the business agent said. "But I think it would be easy. He could keep it up all day."

"And if something happened? If a rocket burned out, say. He could bring it down to earth without smashing anything."

"I would say he could."

"What are we sitting here for, then?"

"Mister," asked the business agent, "what are you getting at?"

"Flying camps," said Amby "Can't you see it, man! Want to move somewhere else, or just go on vacation—why, the whole camp would take to the air and be there in no time."

The business agent rubbed his chin. "I don't say it wouldn't work," he admitted. "My guess is that it would. But why should we bother? If we want to go somewhere else we got all the time there is. We ain't in any hurry."

"Yes," said another man, "just tell us one good reason."

"Why, the road tax," Amby said. "If you didn't use the roads, you wouldn't have to pay the tax."

In the utter silence he looked around the circle, and he knew he had them hooked.

★

NEXT TIME AROUND

R. E. Banks, whose "Ear-Friend" made quite a hit in our March issue, will be back with a yarn dealing with the business aspects of robotics. A different approach, I think, and an amusing tale.

L. Sprague de Camp offers an article more or less in sequel to "Faery Lands Forlorn", dealing with the use of myths as backgrounds for stories, and where authors are likely to look for them.

And it looks as if the cover will be from the feature novel, a powerful one by James Blish.

Damon Knight, incidently, hasn't left us; his reviews were unfortunately crowded out of this issue; but they'll be with us next time.

Out into the vast reaches of space men went, seeking a friend — not a friend in need, but just company. And when they found another race of beings . . .

THE IDEALISTS

by MORTON KLASS

illustrated by ORBAN

FOR HOURS, the somber crowd circling the empty spaceport had been swelling slowly in numbers. Most of them had arrived early, just after dawn; ignoring the cold March gusts and the spatterings of icy rain, they waited silently for the return of the Starship, *Glad Hand.*

The brightly-colored garments, which had given the day of the ship's departure, six months earlier, a festival air, were put away now. Dull, muted capes hung from dejected shoulders as the people stared at the empty ferro-concrete cradle in the center of the field. Eyes flicked up occasionally into the cloudless grey sky, in the direction from which the *Glad Hand* was supposed to come, and then wandered aimlessly back to the packed earth underfoot. The few children present reacted to the funereal atmosphere by standing silently, eyes downcast, at the sides of their parents.

On the field itself, as close to the cradle as safety permitted, the official welcoming committee waited. Central Coordinator Anansi Lee and the nine Regional Coordinators—the same men and women who had sent the *Glad Hand* off on humanity's first interstellar flight with so much hope, so much proud pleasure, six months ago...

The ten members of the committee wore black, less as a symbol of mourning than as an indication of their self-assessed guilt and grief.

Just before noon, the *Glad Hand* materialized high overhead, a black spot which grew rapidly as it spiraled down to its cradle. Apathetically, the

"'Buster' sat by the campfire with us, and it was still hard to realize that we were meeting with the entire community—that, through 'Buster', all the Achateans were with us."

crowd watched it descend. Only a few of the younger children stirred excitedly, and the various recording specialists, grouped behind the welcoming committee, swung their cameras into action and readied the rest of their equipment.

The ferroconcrete cradle shuddered as it received its occupant. For a moment, there was utter silence as the crackling of the spaceship's

arrival died away and five thousand men, women and children gazed at the black teardrop, still incongruously inscribed with the golden letters, *Glad Hand.*

Then the outer lock swung open and four young men, survivors of the expedition, trooped out in single file. Raoul Brevoort, nominal leader of the group, was in the lead, his flaming red hair bared to the wind. He walked toward the committee with firm steps, cradling a large clear crystal ball in his arms with all the infinite tender care a mother would have toward her week-old infant.

Right behind Brevoort walked short, stocky Jake Peri, his arms hanging limply at his sides, his crew-cut bullet head bowed down. Doc Thorvaldsen had been his friend. Doc Thorvaldsen—whose corpse, encased in a shroud of preserving glassite, was being carried by the last two members of the crew; the gangling Hassan twins, Ahmed and Ali.

It had been five weeks since the men of the *Glad Hand* had known natural weather, and six months since they had tasted the air of Earth; yet they were completely oblivious to the biting, importunate March winds. Silent themselves, they marched through the silence to the waiting committee.

A few feet from the ten old men and women in cloaks of mourning, the four stopped. Gently, carefully, the Hassan twins lowered the transparent coffin to the ground, then stood over it, side by side, watchful and patient. Peri stopped when Brevoort stopped. His eyes still downcast, Peri's thoughts were far away.

Raoul Brevoort nodded respectfully to the committee and shifted the crystal ball slightly in his arms. The long lean face beneath the red hair was composed; only the tightness of his lips indicating the churnings of emotion within him.

CENTRAL COORDINATOR Anansi Lee broke the stillness. Her voice—familiar to the world since her first election to her present office ten years before in 2110—carried clearly to all the assembled thousands.

"We received your message a week ago, Raoul. Everyone on Earth rejoices at your safe arrival and mourns with you for the death of your comrade."

She hesitated, and her voice took on a slight tremor. "About the—the Achateans—you're *quite* sure they are *all* dead? Possibly a few survi-

vors—even a tiny handful—"

"We went back immediately," Raoul said flatly. "It was too late. Old and young, they were all dead. Believe me, we searched..."

The dignified woman before Raoul appeared to age visibly. Staring at her, the sorrow and remorse welled up in him until it seemed he would not be able to control himself. He remembered the last time he had seen her, six months ago, when the robe about her shrunken shoulders had been gold and green instead of black.

With her head thrown back, justly proud of what she knew was the greatest moment of her entire coordinatorship, she had made the farewell speech at the departure of the *Glad Hand*. Raoul Brevoort would never forget those words—they had been addressed to him!

"...To turn a dream into reality, that is your mission. For a century and a half, and longer, perhaps, humans have been d r e a m i n g this one dream, and yet it is only recently that we have been able to put it into words.

"Few were aware of it when the first awkward rocketship landed on the moon. For practically no one expected to find life there, so practically no one was disappointed. But Mars—the planet of countless imaginary invaders or wistfully decadent civilization... Mars in actual fact could produce nothing but some apologetic lichens. How enthusiastic could anyone get about lichens?

"And when Venus mocked its fruitful namesake goddess with sterile formaldehyde and barren dust, mankind began to fear. Men donned the finest heat-resistant and radiation-proof a r m o r science could devise, and edged uncomfortably into Mercury's hot-side. If they were very lucky, they obtained specimens of the rare, osmium-based virus.

"Then, the Ganymede Find. A crumbling stone ruin, the size and approximate shape of a small cottage. It might have been built by some extra-terrestrial intelligence. Or it might have been carved by those aimless artists—gravity, vacuum, sun, chance and time. After half a century of unceasing study, no one can really say for sure.

"In all the solar system there was nothing else.

"So the dream was born. Man stared at the stars. How lonely can the universe be? Surely somewhere, in those vast galactic wastes, a race exists, perhaps wiser than humanity or else less advanced, with whom humanity might share the awful burden

of existence. For man is a gregarious animal...

"Earth is in order, now. War, there is reason to hope, has joined cannibalism and the Black Plague in the history books. The deserts are flowering and all the minor human variations are intermingling and producing one stock. True, the planet *is* becoming slightly overcrowded, but that is because everyone is eating better and living longer.

"Man turns to the stars today, for the only two things he needs to make his happiness complete—a bit more living space—and a friend.

"That then is your mission, Raoul Brevoort, Jacob Peri, Igor Thorvaldsen, Ahmed and Ali Hassan. If you can, find us a planet on which humans can live, to which Earthmen may migrate, so that all who want children may have them, and the last thing to be rationed on Earth will be free to all.

"But most of all, if you can do nothing else, find for Earth a living companion—and you will receive the undying gratitude of all mankind."

FIFTH REGIONAL CO-ORDINATOR Mackenzie stepped to the side of the shaken old woman in the black robe, and Raoul Brevoort's mind snapped reluctantly back to the present.

"Then if there is nothing to be done," Mackenzie said gently, "let us drop the topic of the Achateans for the moment."

His eyes rested on the glassite cylinder for a moment. "In your message, Raoul, you stated that Igor Thorvaldsen had committed suicide." Mackenzie's voice had become even more gentle. "What possible reason could he have had? If a mistake has been made—a crime committed—then surely the fault is more ours than his. In all logic, the blame lies more with humanity's immaturity than with us; and we admit we are more to blame than anyone. I should have thought that by this time no one was left in the world who blamed an individual for his errors, instead of the society which had prepared him for his life imperfectly."

Raoul licked dry lips, but before he could speak, Jake Peri's voice was heard, deep and resonant in the silence, and flecked with tragedy.

"Igor Thorvaldsen killed himself because he believed he was unquestionably responsible for the death of an entire race of harmless, intelligent, f r i e n d l y creatures. And he *was* responsible. I

was his friend—and I helped him do it."

There was a moment of shocked silence, and Ahmed Hassan broke it with one of his measured, pedantic little speeches. "That is a triple error, Jake. First—the Achateans committed mass suicide, of their own free will and for reasons best known to themselves. Second—Doc Thorvaldsen had no more to do with it than the rest of us. Third—neither did you."

"And if you'd like a fourth error," Ali Hassan added mildly, "I can't see where you're right, Jake, in calling the Achateans intelligent. Intelligence implies some measure of mental stability. Certainly a race which could wipe itself out so casually, for so little reason, can hardly be considered—"

"They were intelligent," Jake Peri interrupted, without belligerence, but with the firmness of a man who knows his opinion has been arrived at logically and after much careful deliberation. "They had good reason—in their own terms—to k i l l themselves. Igor and I, as psychologists, should have anticipated the reason and prevented the tragedy. The rest of you were physical scientists, technicians. The problem was beyond your experience and training. Igor and I, on the other hand—"

"—Were human, like the rest of us," Raoul said patiently. "That—and that alone—was the tragedy. We were human; the Achateans were not."

He turned back to the ten Coordinators. He let his eyes rest on them for a moment, then wander past the bank of recording devices to the respectful, motionless people who circled the field.

"What *were* they like, Raoul?" Central Coordinator Anansi Lee asked, and the young man turned back to her. "If you don't mind talking about it, that is."

RAOUL DID mind, but he could tell, by the way she was leaning forward; by the way the other coordinators crowded closer, by the hushed hopeful whisperings of the crowd, how painfully much everyone on Earth wanted to know about the Achateans.

"It's all on the microtape, of course," he began slowly. "Everything we saw, heard or did in the month we spent on the planet we had named *Fidus Achates*—as well as everything we recorded about the o t h e r—barren—planets we visited. It's all there on the *Glad Hand,* waiting, but, well...

"Achates is the fourth plan-

et of a Sol-type sun—the coordinates, figures, what-not, are all in the records—with approximately Earth-like atmosphere and gravity. A little more oxygen, fewer heavy metals, a bit colder—but since the only continent girdles the equator, that last item works out nicely. Two moons, one about the size of ours, the other very small and very close.

"As for the Achateans themselves, well—they resemble — *resembled*—Australian Koala bears. About the same size, in fact, but with four hairless tentacles instead of forelimbs, and antennae instead of ears. They were friendly, as Jeke said, very friendly—to each other as well as to us."

"Did—did they have a high degree of technology?" Third Regional Director Amadeo asked haltingly.

Raoul shrugged. "Hard to say; the experts will have to figure it out. They lived in villages of plaited grass huts, dome-shaped and very primitively furnished, and they protected themselves against predatory carnivores with short wooden spears."

He paused and stared down at the crystal ball in his arms for a moment. "On the other hand, there were a lot of things—like this, for example—which don't fit the pattern. Mostly, the Achateans appeared to be simple, non-warlike creatures, with little or no technology, who subsisted on the fruits of the one plant they had domesticated. And sometimes...they were something else entirely."

He frowned, trying to put his finger on it.

"They were telepathic, Jake Peri said briefly. "Complete telepaths."

Raoul nodded eagerly. "That's it, of course. Thanks, Jake." He turned back to the Central Coordinator. "Can you possibly imagine what it means to be a completely telepathic being, and, further, to meet up with humans? To absorb the thoughts, suddenly, of a creature who—unlike yourself—has a conscious mind, an unconscious mind? For a man has thoughts which he hides from others, and thoughts which he hides from even himself. And an Achatean could hide nothing...nor could anything be hidden from him. We knew all that—they'd explained it to us from the very beginning. But since we knew the only feelings we all had toward the Achateans were a deep liking and a sincere desire for friendship, why worry about it? We were all averagely normal young men, and any hidden longings or unfulfilled desires they might uncover in the recess-

es of our minds shouldn't be shocking to alien mentalities. We were right about that, as it turned out, but we didn't work out the possibilities carefully enough. But—how could we know? We just forgot about the matter of telepathy—"

"I should have known," Jake Peri murmured: "Doc Thorvaldsen s h o u l d have known."

Raoul Brevoort whirled and put his hand on Peri's arm. He struggled for words which would not come, and finally he turned back to Central Coordinator Anansi Lee. "Will you be the judge?" he asked urgently, and she nodded, her face expressionless.

"This crystal," he said, exhibiting it, "contains the Achateans' last message to us—to all Earth."

The crowd stirred excitedly. "But before you listen to it," Raoul went on, "I want to tell you a story. It won't take long—it's about our last day on Achates...when the Achateans were still alive, that is. May I tell it first?"

Coordinator L e e nodded again.

"It was a sort of sad party. The Achateans were saying goodby to us, and, as it turned out, to themselves," Raoul began...

THE SOFT Achatean twilight was d e e p e n i n g, changing gently into night. It was already becoming too dark for Raoul Brevoort to make out the faces of Ali Hassan and Doc Thorvaldsen on the other side of the flickering campfire. O n l y when an occasional shaft of fire crackled upward, illuminating the deserted clearing, could he see that Ali was still dressing the native fowl he'd shot earlier in the day and that Doc was busily adding to his already huge salad of Achatean greens.

A particularly b r i l l i a n t blaze even made visible a few of the four foot high Achatean huts, scattered haphazardly as they were around the wide clearing and among the trees of the surrounding forest.

Raoul looked down at the diminutive Achatean sitting motionless on the grass beside him. Like a tentacled teddy bear, he thought, amused. The similarity had ocurred to him many times before, and always with the same surge of warmth and affection.

"Aren't any of your people going to join us, Buster—besides yourself, I m e a n?" Raoul asked aloud. He knew the Achatean could not hear the words, interpreting only the thought, but it was more comfortable for a human to

hear the sound of his own voice.

—If I am here, Raoul, then they are here, too. We've explained it to you before—

Raoul nodded. "I know that, Buster. But I thought...when you said we'd all have a party, that everyone in the village would join in. That's the human way."

The musical, other-worldly voice touched at his brain. —It is a pleasant way, I am sure, Raoul, but it is not necessary for us. We can have a thorough feeling of—togetherness—though physically we may be far apart. At the moment, I am in communion with all my people, all over the world—

Raoul wondered, as he had so many times before, at this strange capacity for total mental merging, so complete that every Achatean he met knew him as familiarly as Buster, his constant companion. So complete, in fact, that there were no individual names among the Achateans; and the humans, for their own needs, had to distinguish among them with appellations like Buster, Venus de Milo, Bruin and Junior.

At the same time, the Achateans were not a corporate entity. Buster, here, was a distinct individual, with a noticeably different personality. Furthermore, the Achateans appeared capable of comprehending the human need for mental privacy. Though they admitted that every human thought and emotion was detectable, they responded, courteously, only to thoughts consciously directed to them.

Raoul felt Buster's mind brushing his own again. —Your friends are coming, Raoul. They will be here in a moment—

Apparently Doc and Ali had also received that message. They straightened, glanced up into the darkness overhead, and came around the campfire.

That was another strange thing about Achatean telepathy. Buster could, at will, direct a thought to one or to all the humans...

"How did the trip go, Buster?" Ali inquired, a bit anxiously. "Are Ahmed and Jake all right? Did anything unusual turn up?"

—They are both quite well. I imagine they would rather tell you about their experiences themselves—

There it was again, Raoul told himself. That instinctive delicacy—

A SUDDEN shaking of the ground underfoot and a distant crackling announced the arrival of the *Glad Hand*

in the usual landing place beyond the trees. A few moments later, Ahmed Hassan and Jake Peri emerged from the darkness and joined them at the campfire.

Ali Hassan waved at them excitedly. "Welcome home!" he bellowed; "you fellows hungry?"

Ahmed smiled and nodded emphatically.

"Hungry?" Jake Peri repeated. "I could eat a bear!" He paused, and grinned down at the sitting Achatean. "No offense intended, Buster," he said easily. "No one on Earth actually eats bear meat—it's merely an expression. Not that you Achateans are bears for that matter, either."

—Of course not. Merely a superficial resemblance. I quite understand. And we have similar imaginative expressions in our language. We occasionally say that someone is as aggressive as a carnivore. Naturally, we don't really mean that he is; and we are not referring to civilized, otherworld carnivores like yourselves—

There was a moment of awkward silence. Ail Hassan broke it. He had spitted the bird and set it on forked sticks over a bed of glowing coals. Now he climbed to his feet, wiping his greasy hands on his shirt.

"We've been through all this before," he said casually. "Humans eat meat, while to the Achateans only predators like the native wolf do. On the other hand, Achateans read minds; and that's uncomfortable for humans who are accustomed to the privacy of their own thoughts."

He pushed a charred piece of wood back into the fire with his toe. "So what? The big thing is that both species are civilized enough to accept the other's differences. We've demonstrated that. We all *want* to be friends—that one fact equates with all the conflicts."

Buster's musical voice impinged on their minds— Ali is right, of course. There can be no argument with his last statement—

Raoul sighed quietly. The moment of tension was over, he thought happily. There had been a few others in the past, though not many, and Raoul was always relieved to see them end amicably. Basically Ali Hassan was right, Raoul told himself: if two rational beings really want to be friends, nothing can stop them.

Doc Thorvaldsen was switching the conversation to safer grounds. "Supper will be ready in a few moments," he said. "Meanwhile, tell us about your trip. Find anything unusual?"

Ahmed shrugged. "One end of the continent is pretty much like the other. Came across a small mountain range we hadn't noticed before, and there's definitely a desert to the south-east. Small one, though, and not too barren. The Achateans we met claimed to know us as well as Buster, here, and took us to see some magnificent, fertile land, which they said was ours for the plowing."

Jake Peri picked up the thread. "Flora and fauna same as at this end. Scattered Achatean villages surrounded by their orchards. Occasional wolfpacks which we decimated from the air to protect the villages, and some vermin. We visited some coastal islands, too, incidentally. No Achateans, as we'd been told; lots of birds, and good land."

He stared around the dark, deserted clearing. "I thought you said we were going to have a party tonight, Buster. Where is everyone?"

"At home—attending the party," Doc Thorvaldsen answered, smiling. "Raoul was asking the same question a few minutes ago. I'm surprised at you, though. If Buster is here, the others are here too, aren't they?"

Jake smiled sheepishly, then straightened suddenly, a look of alarm spreading over his face. He pointed.

"I thought I saw something move out there—near Junior's hut. Buster, do you—"

—Thank you, my friend. We've all been aware of it for some time now. A single wolf ...a young one, by its thoughts. Junior will take care of it—

As his thoughts reached them, they saw the Achatean they had named Junior slip out of his hut, a short wooden spear gripped firmly in one tentacle.

THE FIRE blazed upward momentarily, and they saw the wolf. As always, the sight of the beast sent a thrill of horror racing down Raoul's back. The humans had called it a wolf because it resembled one more than it did any other creature on Earth, but the resemblance wasn't a close one. Actually, the wolf-like predator was a distant, distant relative of the intelligent Achatean species, but the antennae were stubby and capable of conveying only the simplest sensory impressions. Instead of Buster's graceful, prehensile tentacles, there were six boneless appendages, on which the creatures loped. But the head was wolf-like.

Raoul stared at the suddenly illuminated head. Firelight glinted on the white canine teeth, on the red deep-set eyes. Soundlessly, the beast

gathered its muscles and sprang at the waiting Achatean.

The pathetic teddy bear shifted its spear and stepped forward to meet the charging monster.

Hardly aware of what he was doing, Raoul clawed for the gun at his side. He brought the barrel down on his arm and fired. A second gunshot echoed his own. The beast twisted in mid-air and fell dead at the feet of the Achatean.

Junior stared down at the dead animal, his spear dangling limply. Then his mental voice, distinguishable somehow from Buster's, touched at Raoul's mind.

—I thank you, Raoul... and you too, Jake. It was good of you to want to protect me—

The little Achatean turned and re-entered his hut, dragging his short spear after him.

Raoul put his gun away, and Jake Peri self-consciously did the same. "Didn't mean to interfere, Buster," Jake began awkwardly.

Buster spoke to all of them. —It was the intelligent thing to do, my friend. Your weapons are much more efficient than ours. Why should one of us be in danger when a human can kill a predator easily and from a distance?

"Exactly!" Doc Thorvaldsen agreed. "It's too bad you can't handle our guns or we'd leave you some. Once we get back to Earth, though, we'll have some designed especially for Achateans. Then you'll be able to handle the beasts by yourselves."

Ahmed walked over to the roasting bird. "The Achateans can have the guns, of course, but they won't really need them. The simplest thing to do is to wipe the wolves out from the air. When the colonists arrive, they'll take care of that."

He poked the bird hungrily. "Ali, when do we eat?"

CENTRAL COORDINATOR Anansi Lee stared at Raoul Brevoort. "And then?" she said.

Raoul smiled wearily. "And then—that's all. We all ate, Buster munching on a pile of native fruit, and we went back to the *Glad Hand* to sleep. Buster said goodbye to all of us. We were to take off at dawn, so he told us we wouldn't be seeing any more Achateans, but that they would be leaving a farewell present for us outside the ship."

He fondled the crystal ball tenderly. "This is it; we found it on the grass near the airlock. Then we took off. We didn't see any Achateans, but

we didn't really look. Anyhow, by then they were all dead. When we were out in space, the crystal activated and we—we found out."

"How did they kill themselves?" Coordinator Mackenzie inquired.

"Remember those spears?" Ali Hassan said curtly.

Silence blanketed the spaceport.

"Well?" Jake Peri demanded, agony in his voice. "Wasn't it obvious? Weren't we fools not to anticipate what was going to happen?"

Central Coordinator Anansi Lee turned to the other nine men and women. For a moment, the ten stared at each other, then she turned back. "No," she said gently, "it is not at all obvious. We can see that there were tensions, problems which, perhaps, you five did not handle in the best way. All that we can see. But...*why did they all commit suicide?*"

Raoul whirled triumphantly. He clutched Jake Peri's shoulder. "You see?" he roared, his voice loud in the stillness. "*They* don't know! How could we?"

Jake stared back at him. "We were there," he said quietly; "that's how."

The two stood there, eyes locked. Third Regional Coordinator Amadeo touched Raoul's arm diffidently. "May we hear the crystal, now?"

Raoul glanced quickly at the stolid Hassan brothers, standing over the glassite coffin, his eyes touched Jake Peri's face and then took in the ten coordinators and the massed silent people. "Of course," he said. "It's a telepathic message, and if everyone here relaxes his mind, I think everyone should receive it."

He stared down at the crystal sphere in his arms. The first time he had activated it by accident, with the casual thought: *I wonder what this ball is for?* Experimentation had proved that any thought, directed at the crystal itself, was sufficient. He thought: *They're all waiting. Do your stuff!*

LIKE FORGOTTEN memories of childhood, the images formed in the minds of all the humans; like faraway music, untraceable yet disturbingly clear, the crystal spoke to them all.

—We greet you, humans, and we wish you well. Do not weep for us; do not mourn; do not feel that you are guilty of anything. Our people are no more; it was cosmically inevitable...let no more humans die for what had to be.

—To you, humans, we

leave the planet you have named Fidus Achates...may you prosper and be happy there as we were. It is a good world, but not big enough for two races as different as our own. For it is not your fault that we resembled the toys of your children, that we were small enough for a human to pick up and toss in the air. It was not your fault that our technology is meagre, that we lived...and were content to live...in what to you could be only primitive huts. To us they were our homes, and we had been proud of them, until you came. Until you came, we had been proud of ourselves.

—The future settlers will come. Perhaps we might have sealed off our planet...the civilized young men promised that colonists would only come if they were welcome. But could we refuse? Though you might be sincere, could we live comfortably, knowing that any time population pressure forced you to renege on your promise, there would be nothing our feeble spears could do to drive you back?

—Besides, we have never used all the arable land of our planet. Probably, we would never have used it, so we could not in all conscience deny it to you, merely because you are ambitious and aggressive and strong, and we are helpless before you.

—But we saw that the colonists would come, and how could they be expected to treat a...a *teddy bear* as an equal? In all friendliness, they would call us Buster and Junior and other names deriving from mildly contemptuous familiarity. Out of the pure kindliness of the strong to the weak, they would build homes for us, give us weapons, or better still, protect us themselves. And these things we would not be able to bear, for until now we have been alone in the universe, and felt pride in ourselves.

—That pride is gone, now, and so there is no longer any reason for us to continue our existence. To you we bequeath ourworld and our share of the universe.

—Humans need the company of others. We were each of us self-sufficient, though closer than humans could ever be. You came seeking a friend ...and we wanted only to be left alone. How could there be anything but tragedy?

—But we did not destroy ourselves merely from fear of what your presence on our planet would do to us. Had we lived on, until your well-meaning efforts destroyed our culture bit by bit, we would have suffered. And you, seeing us suffer, would have suffered, too. Finally, we would have died out, leaving

you nothing but a legacy of guilt.

—This way is better—

THE MUSICAL voice of the crystal ended suddenly, and every human breathed, for the first time in many seconds.

"Who is to say they were wrong?" Central Coordinator Anansi Lee said tremulously. "We wanted to be gregarious with a race of hermits."

She walked over to Jake Peri. "What is the expression the crystal used? 'Cosmic inevitability'. You are very wrong to feel any personal responsibility. There was nothing you could have done —nothing anyone could have done."

Jake Peri's back straightened. She could see the conflict going on within him, and she knew she was winning. Hurriedly, she went on, "The death of the Achateans was inevitable. Igor Thorvaldsen's death was not; let us have no more unnecessary suffering."

The young man raised his eyes to hers. Slowly, he nodded his head, uncertainly at first, and then more surely.

Third Regional Coordinator Amadeo cleared his throat uncomfortably and turned to Raoul. "The—ah, one thing I don't understand is the comment the crystal made about letting no more humans die. How could the Achateans have known..."

For the first time, Raoul smiled. "The Achateans didn't know, of course, until afterwards. I'm afraid you still don't understand; you think this crystal is merely a recording, don't you?"

Coordinator Amadeo nodded, frowning. The other coordinators, surprise on their faces, stared at Raoul.

"We thought so, too," Ali Hassan said, "until the second time it spoke to us."

His brother, Ahmed, put in, "The Achateans were telepathic, remember. They didn't have much in the way of technology, but they had this, any how."

Raoul picked up the thread. "You remember the last thing the crystal said: *'This way is better.'* Well, they wiped themselves out as individuals, but the essence of their group mind remained. That, they deposited in this crystal. As long as the crystal remains unharmed, so will the...the *spirit* of the Achateans."

Carefully, he held the crystal up in his arms, exhibiting it to all the onlookers.

His voice rang out, "You sent the *Glad Hand* out into space to find Earth a friend. Well, here he is—we've brought the friend back with us!"

Editorial

MOTIVE AND CUE

WHY DO writers write? For whom do writers write? The chances are that you may have encountered this question, in one form or another, many times; and you may have read something of the considerable literature on the subject from various schools of psychotherapists, etc. There are probably as many answers as there are answerers, and it's a good bet that almost any one of them have hit upon some pertinent aspect of the "answer" even if none of them have the full, complete, "correct" and final answer. I say it's a good bet since the subject deals with various workings of human behavior and behavior mechanisms which we still are far from understanding fully.

What do we mean by "writers"? Anyone who writes for a living? Well, they would come under the definition—but it would also include people who write in their spare time, accumulating large quantities of manuscripts which are never published, sometimes never submitted anywhere for publication, and sometimes never even shown to anyone.

In the larger sense, this extends beyond fiction, but let's confine ourselves to fiction in general, and science fiction in particular.

There does seem to be one general area of agreement among the many "scientific" psychological investigators into the subject. I say "scientific" in quotes, because psychotherapy etc., is not a science—but the most rational and valuable people working in this field go about their investigations, etc., in a scientific manner; they are not trying to find a simple answer to everything, or a magic touchstone, but seek results which can be duplicated. The goal, of course, is to find a few basic invariants upon which the countless variables of uncountable individuals can be set for illumination. If we have these, and if we agree that writing is a desirable occupation for a certain percentage of endeavor, then we want to be able to help the individual writer when he falls into that occupational malady—very real to him, no matter how it may appear to others—know as "writer's slump". This general agreement mentioned above is that writers write because they cannot help themselves; they must, whether they get paid, or whether the working conditions are agreeable, or whatever. And a second agreement seems to be that the writer writes for himself, first of all.

This second proposition needs a

lot of elaboration, but it can be boiled down to the fact that, when writing, the writer says what he *has* to say—even though he may not be aware of precisely what this is. What he *has* to say is usually a very simple matter complicated by level after level of adjustments to daily living, and defenses against our particular and private fears, so that the basic things are seldom obvious except to trained psychotherapists and students—and not always to them. (Remember—we *all* have adjustments and fears, but most of us have learned how to get along with them and make our way in our society. Those of us who haven't been able to do this—whose adjustments have been of such a nature as to make it impossible for us to get along in the world, as the saying goes—come under the heading of the "mentally ill". The classic example of the poor fellow who imagines himself to be Napoleon Bonaparte may not have actually occurred very often—but when it did, that fellow had made himself an adjustment to "reality" which left him helpless, so far as making his own way went.)

YOU MAY ask why, if a writer writes for himself, anyone else should be interested—or why anyone else can understand them—Well, of course, there are some persons who write in a language so uniquely their own that hardly anyone else can understand them—but such writers are not published, except perhaps in medical journals. Actually, while every human being is unique, he is unique only in the sense that the *precise mixture* of all his physical-mental-psychological-etc., elements cannot be found elsewhere. But the elements themselves are more or less common to all of us. For example, take your favorite jokes. Some people don't understand them; some don't think they're funny; but a fair number laugh heartily. It's something like this with writing, and with an individual's private and personal fears and adjustments. Not the exactly same things, but the same sort of things happen to most of us, where most of us are in a more or less similar environment.

So, while any given writer is writing primarily for himself, out of his own inner necessities, what he has to say is likely to make sense, to strike responsive chords, etc., in other people—an indefinite number of other people—who are enough like him so that they can feel very much like the way he feels, or can derive some feeling from what he writes. Some of this feeling transmitted will be direct emotion; some of it will be emotion derived from a communication of ideas—but one of the differences between fiction and non-fiction is that in fiction the transmission of *feeling* is essential, from writer to reader, through the portrayal of imaginative events and characters. The transmission of ideas and information is a by-product—but in that fiction which creates a lingering or permanent impression upon the reader, the ingredient of idea and information ("true" or otherwise) must be substantial. Where such impression communicates itself to countless of readers through long stretches of time, far beyond the usual lasting time of a book or magazine story's currency, striking readers of later generations, then we have what we call literature.

And one essential difference between science fiction and non-science-fiction is that in science fiction the ideas and information and emotion are necessarily based upon science, exploring beyond

the frontier of the already-established, at the time of writing. Let's examine definition of the term "science" for a moment, as presented in the 1948 edition of the Random House "American College Dictionary". 1. A branch of knowledge or study dealing with a body of facts or truths systematically arranged and showing the operation of general laws: *the mathematical sciences.* 2. Systematic knowledge of the physical or material world. 3. Systematized knowledge in general. 4. Knowledge, as of facts or principles; knowledge gained by systematic study. 5. A particular branch of knowledge. 6. Skill, proficiency.

Now there is no dictionary definition which tells *everything* about the word defined, but it does give us a starting point. And it also gives us as many different ways in which the word is used, generally, as possible—whether or not this includes what some, or many, people consider a mis-use of the word. Definition 5. above, for example, is useful in that it explains how it is that many people call astrology a "science". (There are further definitions, not listed here, which exclude astrology from the category of "science", even though it may be systematic, and may include a body of facts in its systems. One of these further definitions is a requirement of 100% accurate prediction—where the practitioner has mastered the system. Investigation has yet to show that any astrologer has achieved this; therefore the systems cannot be admitted as "science".)

AS I INDICATED above, while the function of non-fiction is to stimulate thought through the direct transmission of information—the communication of feeling being secondary—the function of fiction is to communicate feeling; but the most successful and lingering feeling is achieved in fiction which includes thought-stimulation through ideas and information woven into the story that the author is telling. Actually, we know that thought and feeling cannot be separated into two completely distinct channels; the separation is an artificial one induced by the structure of languages, and it ignores the fact that we respond as a total organism to words and other symbols—not as collection of neatly sealed-off units labelled "thought", "emotion", etc. Yet it remains a fact that some types of reading matter will arouse emotions before we are aware of the think-apparatus going into effect; and others will stir up the grey matter, as it were, before we are aware of how we feel about it.

In science fiction, ideally the aim is to achieve both functions; the emotional impact of the story keeps the reader interested while the intellectual stimulation starts the little grey cells into direct activity. (Now it's true that some readers will be completely delighted with intellectual stimulation—but a story which offers nothing more than this necessarily has a limited appeal.) The best science fiction is that which has what we might call a high thought residue—that is, one which makes the reader ponder about the scientific aspects of the story *after* he has been thoroughly and satisfactorily aroused by a story that completely engaged his attention, as a story, from beginning to end.

In a later issue, we'll try to explore some of the ways in which this desirable end is achieved.

★

Why was it that the native females on this planet suddenly became sterile after humans had been there for awhile?

FEMALE OF THE SPECIES

by CHARLES V. DE VET

illustrated by EMSH

EACH DAY the female found her mate less satisfying; soon she would kill him.

Hegland watched the bird as she spread her vermillion wings out wide and pirouetted coquettishly, keeping her attention all the while on the dun-colored male, who observed her diffidently from the edge of the copse. Apparently she had already chosen her mate's successor.

Behind him Hegland heard the screen door of the cottage open and Karol come out. He didn't turn as she came and stood beside him. For a minute they looked on as the piranya bird strutted, danced, and made tentative advances toward her interested but apprehensive visitor.

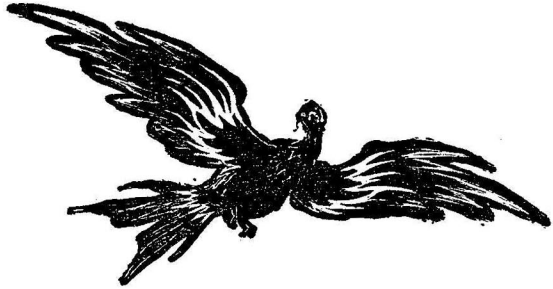
"She's got him," Karol said.

"If she doesn't get too bold," Hegland answered.

"That's right; she must never be too bold at first," Karol agreed. She glanced at Hegland with a trick she had of moving her eyes but not her head. Heyand felt the blood rise slowly into his neck and cheeks.

He knew his obvious discomfort must be apparent to her, and the knowledge was irritating; he tried to cover it now by turning to face her. Karol looked away.

As always she was blonde, and achingly feminine. She was wearing a low-cut sleeveless dress and her feet and legs were bare. The day was hot and a fine sprinkling of perspiration covered the tan of her rounded shoulders and neck like a thin film of oil.



Karol seemed unaware of his gaze and with a deliberate effort Hegland followed her glance to the foot of the porch where the piranya bird's mate drooped dejectedly in the hot sun. He differed from her in being a grayish brown in color, rather than her red, and was only half her size. His flightless wings were mottled a darker brown than the rest of his body.

"The miserable little dupe," Hegland said, directing his sourceless anger at the bird. "Why doesn't he leave her—before it's too late?"

"The fatal feminine allure," Karol answered. Her tone was faintly amused.

The piranya female made one too-aggressive advance, and her suitor fled back into the brush from which he had come. She returned to her brooding mate and began her dance in front of him. He

Karol came out as the piranya bird played the coquette.

sulked for only a short time longer before he began matching her dancing steps.

"The typically predatory female, eh, Ned? Never relinquishes anything—u n t i l she's certain of something better."

"I'd like to kill the little beast." Hegland turned and went into the cottage, letting the screen door slam behind him.

SHORTLY before dusk, as Hegland sat on the porch catching the first of the evening breeze, Bassett returned from the Queeg village. He walked with tired steps and his shoulders drooped dejectedly.

Karol must have heard him coming for she opened the door as he stopped on the steps. "Tired, dear?" she asked.

Bassett nodded and smiled wanly. His blue eyes had lost much of their youthful candor the last few weeks. Karol took his pith helmet and carried it into the cottage; Bassett and Hegland followed.

"Sometimes I think it's a blind chase, Ned," Bassett went to the wash basin in the corner, poured tepid water from a native jug over his hands, and began washing.

"No luck?"

"Nothing." Bassett didn't look at Hegland. His attention was on his wife—twenty years younger than he.

"Come sit down," Karol said. She filled their plates with a salad of the spaghetti-like native grain, and edible snails which she had gathered at the creek bottom.

After dinner Bassett and Hegland took their chairs out on the porch while Karol did the dishes. Hegland knew that Bassett needed to talk. "I presume none of your feedings are showing any results," he said.

"Not one of them has had the slightest effect. I've tried every kind of food that the Queegs might have gotten from the colonists—u s i n g only one kind for each male and female—and so far there's no sign of any change."

"Yet they did become sterile after we came," Hegland said. "And they return to fertility again after they left us. Something we did, or gave them, must have caused the sterility; but are you certain it was the food?"

"I'm not certain, but what else could it have been?"

"I wish I could tell you. Still—I think you'd be wise to try something else."

"What do you have in mind?"

Hegland had been giving the p r o b l e m considerable thought. "Perhaps it's some form of allergy."

"Not unless it takes a greater number than the three of us to induce it," Bassett answered listlessly; "otherwise our presence here should be showing some results. I'd like a chance to do a dissection on a dead Queeg. I think I could learn something then. But none of them have died since we moved in." He seemed to tire of the subject; Hegland didn't blame him.

"How's your book coming?" Bassett asked.

"It's just about finished. I've divided it into three sections. In the first I tell of the Earth colony landing here on Kronholm, and the early struggles to establish themselves.

"In the second I tell what we've learned about the local flora and fauna, devoting the greater part to the humanoid Queegs. I tell how the low-mentality creatures cooperated with us at first, helping us build homes and bringing us food; how, in turn, we taught them agriculture, and sanitation. Then how they left us when their females became sterile."

"In the part about sanitation did you use the notes I gave you on the trouble we had exterminating the chiggers?" Bassett asked.

"Yes," Hegland answered. "Also, I'm devoting a considerable portion of the last third to your following the Queegs here—after they'd been gone from the coast for about six months—and your finding that they were reproducing normally again. When you find the reason for that lost—and regained—fertility, I'll be able to finish the book."

"*If* I find it," Bassett corrected gloomily.

"I'm sure you will," Hegland said.

The colonists had found the going much rougher without the Queegs to help them; they had sent Bassett to try to convince the natives to return. It all hinged on his finding the cause of their sterility—when they associated with humans. Hegland could see that discouragement, and the rigours of the investigation, had him at the point of exhaustion.

KAROL interrupted Hegland's thoughts by joining them on the porch; she had changed to a freshly-laundered white dress, and washed all traces of makeup from her face. Her blonde hair had been gathered into a "pony tail" and tied at the back of her head with a black ribbon. Hegland noticed how cool and fresh, and young she looked.

Karol placed her chair next to Bassett's and sat down, taking one of his hands in

both hers and placing it in her lap. "You'll solve it, my sweet."

Hegland watched the lines of fatigue disappear from Bassett's face. "Thank you, dear," he answered. "I'm glad *you* believe it." He regarded her gently for a moment. "I should never have brought you here; this is no place for a woman."

"I would never have let you go without me," Karol told him. She leaned over and touched her lips to his cheek.

"If there were any possible way for us to return to the coast," Bassett said, "I'd give this thing up and take you back."

Karol herself, Hegland reflected, had often suggested this—demanded it—in the first month of their stay here. After the initial enthusiasm of seeing herself as the heroic wife of a doctor—going with him into the unknown interior and sharing danger at his side—had faded before the heat and dirt, the odor of the native village, and soon—she had hated the place.

He remembered the innumerable arguments, the several hysterical scenes, before she was convinced that they could never reach the colony through the jungle that separated from the coast. And ... was no chance that the colony copter would pick them up before the end of the agreed-upon year. There had been only enough fuel left for one more trip, and they had wanted to be certain to give Bassett sufficient time to do his job.

KRONHOLM'S abrupt darkness had been with them an hour when they heard footsteps approaching, and Queekong walked into the light of the porch lantern.

Queekong was definitely humanoid: He had two arms, two legs—all short and powerful—and a head with features common to humans. But despite the fact that he could swivel his head a full hundred and eighty degrees Queekong had no shoulders, or neck. Neither had he knees: His hip joints were retractable for walking convenience. His body was covered with a pink down.

The only clothing the native wore was a scarf, a gift from Karol which he wore knotted about his neck and hanging over his chest. Yet, his unclothed body gave Karol no cause for embarrassment; he had none of the human male's physical accouterments.

Queekong stood for a minute gazing up at the three on the proch, his features wearing their perpetual expression

of bovine placidity, his heavy-lidded eyes opening and closing as he pondered what he had to say. Finally it came. "Wife. . . dead."

Bassett stirred wearily. "I'll have to give him a hand," he said to the others. He called down to Queekong. "Will come."

They had had this same experience too often in the past months, since Bassett had induced the native to make his home near theirs, to be alarmed now.

They knew Queekong's wife would not be dead. In his language "pain" and "death" had a difference only of degree, with death being the ultimate stage of pain; he used the same word for both, utilizing inflection to indicate degree.

Now, very probably, one of his wives was having her menstrual period.

Bassett went into the cottage and returned a minute later with a small surgeon's kit. Karol rose to accompany him. Hegland took down the paraffin lantern from its porch hook and led the way.

They followed Queekong to his hut, a natural growth of Kronholm's universal rapid-growing vine that wound about a framework of long poles. It was primitive, but quite weatherproof.

Inside the hut the light of the lantern revealed no furniture. There was nothing except a dirt-packed floor, and eight piles of leaves against the walls. On seven of the piles lay Queekong's wives. There were no children; young natives left their parents soon after they were able to walk, and lived in the jungle. Those that survived to adulthood wandered back and rejoined the tribes.

Six of the wives lay on their sides, watching the party with the same bovine expression that Queekong wore. The only physical difference between them and him, that Hegland had been able to discover, was the heavy sac that hung beneath his chin, and the boil-like eruptions on the backs of the females.

Queekong's seventh wife lay on her stomach, groaning. By the light of the lantern Hegland could see the swollen places on her back, each in a successive stage of development. One of them had grown until the skin s t r e t c h e d tight and glistening, with ugly red and purple streaks making a pattern through the purulent gray matter beneath. He could see, also, a thin red line that crossed the small of her back. This was the mouth of her marsupial pouch, that would open to receive her young when they were born.

BASSETT knelt beside the female and opened his kit. He moistened a wad of cotton wool with alcohol and bathed the festered spot on the native's back. Taking out a small scalpel he ran the blade lightly over the top skin. It parted and a stream of the thick matter flowed out and down the female's side.

Bassett caught the discharge with his wool and gently squeezed the last of the matter out of the sore spot. The female's body relaxed as the pressure eased, and soon she was asleep.

Queekong walked away from them and lay down on his own pile of leaves. His race had no word for thanks, or even any conception of gratitude. If one could—one did; that was all.

"I guess that will do it," Bassett said as they left the hut. "I'll stop in tomorrow to make certain that no infection sets in."

"What a horrible ordeal to have to look forward to all your life," Karol said. She shuddered daintily.

"To them it's normal," Bassett answered. "Their female ova develop on their backs, rather than in the womb, as with humans. If the egg's not fertilized they have the same menstrual periods. However, their suffering is greater than an Earthwoman's during those periods. My being able to hurry the process the way I did saves them a great deal of pain."

"You've never been able to find...how they..." Karol hesitated, prettily confused.

"How they merge the male sperm with the female ovum?" Bassett finished for her. "No. How the actual act of fertilizing the egg is performed is a mystery. I think if we knew that we could find what there is about the humans that causes their sterility. But the Queegs themselves don't know how it is done. We have to keep in mind, of course, that they're not very intelligent."

"Is it possible that Queekong, and the others of his kind, aren't males?" Hegland asked.

They both turned to look at him, Bassett startled.

"What I mean," Hegland said, "is that they might belong to a neuter sex—one that contributes nothing to the reproductive process. And your trying to learn anything, the way you're going at it, might be useless."

Bassett's eyes widened. "I wonder," he said. "I did assume that Queekong's kind were males. But you think otherwise?"

"Well..." Hegland began uncertainly. "I thought, per-

haps, that they might be neuters like drone bees back on Earth. Or that they might function as carriers."

"But then we come to the question: where are the males?" Bassett said.

"Could it be possible that there is no division of the sexes? I believe the word for it is androgynous. Or that the females, as we know them, change sex?"

Bassett shook his head. "Back on the coast we did try isolating a group of females; And after a time they stopped bearing children. So that probably isn't the answer. Some external fertilization of the egg is necessary."

Bassett's shoulders straightened. "I don't want to seem to be ridiculing your suggestions. You've certainly given me something new to think about. I'll start working on it again tomorrow."

THREE DAYS later Bassett awoke Hegland at daylight.

"Queekong was just here," he said. "He tells me that one of the males died in the village about an hour ago. This is my chance to perform an autopsy; I thought you might like to come along and give me a hand."

"I certainly would. The other Queegs aren't likely to object to your operating, are they?"

"I don't believe so. They seem to have no sentimental attachment to their dead."

They had to carry a great deal of equipment, for Bassett wanted to do as complete an autopsy as possible on the spot. "It would have been better if I could have had the body brought to the cottage," he said. "But we don't have the time; putrefacation sets in too fast in this climate."

On the way through the native village Hegland noted that the majority of the females bore children in their marsupial cavities. Tiny heads, or heads and chests, showed over the lips of most of the pouches. The infants were never longer than six inches when they dropped from the hatched ova into the pouches. The pouches exuded a milk-like fluid that nourished them until they were able to walk.

The Queeg females were prolific, but the years the young ones spent in the jungle reduced their numbers to only a small percentage of the original.

They found that the dead Queeg had been carried about a half mile from the village and dropped at the edge of the jungle. The animal and insect life there

would strip his bones clean before nightfall.

When they reached the cadaver, Bassett quickly spread out his equipment on the grass and knelt beside the body. "A rather unhandy way to work, but we don't have much choice." He drew on a pair of plastic rubber gloves. "Be careful not to touch any of the specimens; we don't know what this fellow died from."

Hegland made no reply. Knowing Bassett's habits as he did, he knew Bassett would keep up a running monologue while he worked —but he wanted no answers.

Bassett lifted one arm of the dead Queeg. It bent limply. "No rigor of the muscles. If we're lucky there won't be a complete cell death yet either." He reached for a scalpel. "The sac first."

He cut deeply through the center of the growth under the Queeg's chin and carefully spread out the two halves. Inside were dozens of small pockets, each filled with a near-transparent mucus.

Hegland knew what came next. He set up the microscope and a glass slide. Bassett smiled and nodded his thanks.

He took a smear of the mucus on his scalpel and spread it on the slide. "They're still living," he said, as he peered into the eyepiece of the microscope. "And they're almost certainly male spermatozoe." He wasted no time, but gathered other specimens of the fluid into a sample bottle and sealed it with a rubber cork.

Bringing his scalpel up to the Queeg's head Bassett cut around the inner side of the lower jaw and down the neck at the edge of its sac.

Small globules of milky green blood gathered at the sides of the cut.

Reaching into the opening Bassett pulled out the flesh and tendons inside, cutting further where necessary. He rested the parts gently against the side of the neck and examined the opening with his fingers. "Pharynx, larynx, trachea, esophagus. Hyoid bone. Fauces." He straightened. "All quite similar to a human's. Now to trace the origin of that male spermatozoe."

HE PROBED with his fingers again and found a duct leading from the chin sac into the chest. Here he had to use a small saw, for the gristle was too thick for his knife. "No bone structure, as we know it. Merely a tough cartilage. One lung," he observed, as he spread

back the skin and gristle he had cut.

Using his scalpel again, Bassett cut through the skin down to the groin, laying open the abdominal cavity. "The internal organs are decidedly different from those of a human. And there's no diaphragm separating the chest from the abdomen. Each organ is protected by its individual cartilage wall. Probably a less vulnerable mechanism than our own." He cut through several walls of gristle. "No bladder; intestines perform both functions."

At the top of the abdominal cavity he found a small gland at the end of the duct leading from the sac on the Queeg's neck. He returned to the sac and cut one side away from the neck. When he turned to Hegland a deep frown creased his forehead. "There's no outlet for the sperm," he said, as though not believing his own words. "I was positive it would be the mouth. But there's none; none at all." He paused thoughtfully. "It was physically impossible for him to transmit his sperm!"

Bassett shook his head several times and was still muttering to himself as he returned to his work. He took samples from each of the organs, and the Queeg's flesh, and his blood, and put them in bottles. Hegland labled each bottle with the name Bassett gave him.

Bassett's attention was held for some time by the heart. "Auricles, but only semi-developed ventricles. Venous and arterial circulation would be more or less mixed. That would account for their phlegmatic movements, and, to a great extent, for their limited brain power.

"We'd better check that brain next," he said. He picked up the saw. "We won't bother removing the scalp." He sawed around the skull cap of the dead Queeg and removed the bone, cutting loose the brain attachments that clung to it with his scalpel.

He observed for a moment the brain which he had laid bare before he inserted the fingers of his left hand down the sides and under. Lifting the brain out slowly he cut the nerves at the base of the cavity with the scalpel in his free hand. "I'll have to take more time to examine this later. Hand me that large jar of alcohol, will you, Ned?"

As he spoke Bassett ran a pair of black threads under the gray mass in his hand. He lowered it into the jar Hegland handed him and secured the thread at the sides. The

brain hung suspended in its alcohol bath.

"And that's about as much as we can do here."

AS THEY returned to the clearing about the cottage Bassett and Hegland passed the piranya female and her suitor. She had him completely captivated by now; he stood quietly, still nervous, but allowing her to stroke his head and crest with the bottom of her neck.

"She's a two-timing little brute," Hegland said.

"That she is," Bassett agreed. "I'd like to run her off, but Karol won't let me. She said she needs a pet to keep her mind off the loneliness here. And I suppose she's right; this is a rough life for the poor kid."

Near the porch the female's mate fluttered out of their path, his short wings dragging dispiritedly in the sand.

"He knows what's going to happen to him," Bassett said. "Why doesn't he run away?"

"He can't make himself do it; in his own bird way he loves her."

Bassett shrugged ."He's just stupid."

"I wonder," Hegland demurred.

They had a quick lunch and Bassett rose to return to his specimens.

"I'm bored, Frank," Karol said. "Will you take me for a walk before you start that gruesome work?"

"I don't see how I can. I have to check those specimens before they spoil. Can't you wait until this evening?"

Karol, apparently, was in one of her less reasonable moods. "I'm bored now," she said.

"I wish you'd wait. I have this lead now that could mean the solution to our problem. I might not get the chance again soon."

"Then I'll go alone," Karol said.

"Don't do that," Bassett protested. "It might be dangerous. The big cats don't usually come out of the jungle in the daytime, but you can never be sure."

Karol was stubborn. "I'll take a gun."

"You can't handle a gun well enough to be safe."

"I can take care of myself."

Bassett rose reluctantly. He hesitated, then turned to Hegland. "I suppose you're tired, Ned?"

Hegland looked at Bassett and knew he couldn't refuse. "A walk would do me good."

THERE WAS only one way for them to go: Up the high hill behind the cottage. The jungle was impenetrable, and the village of the

Queegs too crowded and dirty for pleasant strolling.

Karol's melancholy mood left her soon after they started. The effort of picking her way through the boulders and shrubs brought a glow to her cheeks and soon she was breathing deeply, but happy.

They stopped in the middle of the hill to recover their breath. "The air is cleaner up here," Karol said. She stood with her head tilted upward and her chest out, so that her neck arched back and her breasts made a round pressure against her frock. She was breathtakingly lovely, Hegland thought. Like a blonde Greek goddess.

He knew then why she disturbed him so, and why he was so often angry with her. The anger was his defense against admitting that he loved her.

The realization brought a wave of agitation that washed up into his throat and caught at his breath. He felt the palms of his hands grow moist as they longed to stroke that honeyed throat.

Resolutely he fought to keep a tight rein on his emotions. Wiping his hands awkwardly down the sides of his trousers he searched for words that would show his indifference. "You have a nice tan," he heard himself saying, inanely.

Karol opened her red lips in a smile. "I've been sun bathing on the top of the hill, where I can be alone," she said. "I'm done all over."

Hegland felt himself reddening again.

She took his hand in hers and they resumed their climb.

At the top of the hill they stretched out in the shade of a clump of bushes and relaxed. Karol pillowed her face in her arms, while Hegland rested on his side, facing her. He found himself gazing at the soft hair at the nape of her neck, gazing as though it were something different, and precious.

After a time Hegland was certain that Karol slept, but she lifted her head suddenly and shifted her position nearer him. Her face was so close to his that he could see his reflection in her eyes. "I don't love him, Ned," she whispered.

Hegland could think of nothing to answer.

Karol waited.

"You can't be serious," Hegland said, when the silence became strained.

"I'm very serious," Karol insisted; "I never did love him."

"Then why did you marry him?"

"I've almost forgotten now, but I think it was the glamour. Marrying a doctor, one of the important men of the colony,

and all that. It took this trip, where I'd be with him all the time, to make me see my mistake."

"You're in one of your moods," Hegland said. "Tomorrow you'll realize how foolish you're being."

She waved her hand, as though brushing the argument aside. "He's an old man," she said. "He's twenty years older than I am. I'm married to an old man, Ned."

"It's too late to think of that now."

"It's not too late," she said. "I'm not going to let it be too late." She buried her head in her arms and began crying.

Hegland felt a pulse pound at the base of his throat as it quickened with the immediacy of his desire. After a minute he lifted his hands and saw that his fingers were tangled in grass and ruptured roots which he had torn from the ground.

THE SOLUTION to Bassett's problem still evaded him during the following days. He learned little more from his specimens than he had from the actual dissection of the dead Queeg's body, and he had been unable to find any other leads. Each day he seemed to grow more gray, more thin, and more discouraged.

Hegland accompanied him now whereever he went. He did not admit to himself that he did it because he was afraid to be alone in the cottage with Karol.

There had been no change in her actions toward Bassett since their climb of the hill, but that only revealed that she was a good actress. The last day of the week Bassett had some work that detained him in the Queeg village, and he sent Hegland ahead to ask Karol to hold dinner.

Hegland delivered his message; when Karol said nothing, but continued to regard him speculatively, he went outside.

As he wandered about at the side of the cottage he found the small body of the piranya bird's mate laying in a pile of dust. There was blood and the marks of savage bill strokes on the back of his head.

Hegland walked over to the edge of the clearing and looked into the brush where the birds had made their nest. The female and her inamorata were both sleeping. He had his brown head resting on her red wing.

Hegland picked up a large stone from the ground at his feet and dropped it on the female's head. Back at the cottage he dug a shallow

grave and buried the dead mate.

Hegland slept badly the next few nights. He thought of Karol every moment now; he knew, with a calm dismay, that she was in his blood, and that no amount of reasoning could drive her out.

Bassett came in one evening with his face twisted with misery. "Give me a hand, will you, Ned?" he asked as he stripped off his shirt. When he bared his upper torso Hegland saw that it was covered with fierce red swellings.

"I picked up a batch of chiggers," Bassett said.

Chiggers was the name the colonists had given the lice that infested most of the natives. They were larger and more vicious than the Earth vermin. The Queegs had developed an immunity to their bites and weren't bothered much by them; but they had been known to kill a man, when he couldn't rid himself of them soon enough.

Hegland led Bassett into his bedroom and had him strip. He bathed Bassett's body with alcohol, and dabbed on a healing salve. Later he carried the clothes Bassett had worn out on the porch and fumigated them.

IN THE MORNING Bassett had a fever and Karol and Hegland convinced him to stay in bed.

Queekong visited them in the afternoon; another of his wives was having her menstrual period.

Despite the protests of Karol and Hegland, Bassett insisted on going with the native to lance the female's festered ovum. "She's suffering more than I am," he said.

As they couldn't stop him Karol and Hegland went along.

The operation, as before, was simple. On the way back to the cottage Karol gave them the clue that finally solved the riddle of the Queeg's sterility.

"Strange that none of Queekong's wives are bearing young ones," she said. She didn't notice that Bassett stopped walking abruptly. "Usually at least a couple of his wives are carrying children," she went on. "Yet I haven't seen a sign of one in over two weeks."

"We've brought the sterility again!" Bassett exclaimed.

And there was no doubt that he was right. Now they had only to figure what they had done to—or for— Queekong and his family that they had not done for the others.

At first they could think of nothing, even while they knew they had the solution within their grasp. They had

only to fit the facts together.

Karol and Hegland tried to persuade Bassett to return to bed, but he was too excited to listen to them. "I feel it's right in front of me," he said, as he paced the porch. "But what is it? What is it?"

The excitement, added to the fever from the chigger bites, had brought a red flush to Bassett's face. Hegland was afraid that he was over-exerting himself. "You'd better go to bed, Frank; those chigger bites can be pretty rough on you if you don't get the proper rest."

Bassett swung around to face Hegland with his mouth gaping, and his eyes wide and excited. "That's it!" he shouted; "the c h i g g e r s! Don't you see—the chiggers are the carriers! When the colonists first came they fumigated the native village, and deloused the Queegs—doing it as much to protect themselves as to help the Queegs. And we did the same for Queekong and his family; when we killed the chiggers we brought the sterility!"

A weakness of relief seemed to drain the strength from Bassett's legs and he sank into a chair. Karol and Hegland helped him back into bed.

Bassett's fever was worse the next day.

Karol cared for him solicitiously, but one incident puzzled Hegland. He had walked into the bedroom without knocking and surprised her in the act of bending over Bassett. He couldn't see what she was doing, but when she heard the door open she swung around, and for just an instant her face flashed an expression of consternation.

She recovered her poise instantly. "He seemed restless," she said; "I gave him a sleeping powder." She tucked a small bottle which she held in her hand into a pocket of her frock.

Bassett slept most of the afternoon. But toward evening Karol called Hegland and he went into the bedroom to find Bassett sitting up in bed, d e a t h l y pale. "I'm thirsty," Bassett said when he saw Hegland. "Will you give me a glass of water, please?"

Hegland poured a glass full from a pitcher on the stand in the corner and brought it to him.

As Bassett swallowed Hegland saw his back straighten. His throat s w e l l e d and jumped several times as he struggled to keep the water down.

After a minute he was calm again. "Put another blanket on me, will you, Ned?"

Soon Bassett's head began to rock back and forth on his pillow. Abruptly he was sick

again. Hegland ran to bring him a basin and Bassett began a long series of retching and vomiting, alternated by deep graspings for breath. His eyes took on a glisten from the pain he was suffering and an hour later he was no longer rational.

During one of Bassett's quiet spells Hegland spoke to Karol. "This is something more than chigger fever," he said.

"But what can it be?" She had been steady-nerved, and more help to him during this crisis, then he would have expected.

"I wish I knew; but I'm no doctor. We'll just have to give him the best care we can and hope he recovers."

BASSETT died during the night.

Hegland buried him early the next morning because of the heat.

Karol had remained self-composed througout the ordeal; only after it was all over did she lock herself in her bedroom and cry.

The next week both Karol and Hegland were very quiet. They abided by an unspoken agreement not to talk about Bassett, and tried to carry on the same as before. Karol did her housework, while Hegland made an attempt to work on his book. He accomplished very little; and, of course, it wasn't the same with Bassett gone.

All this time something in the back of his mind nudged Hegland's thoughts. It was not until the fourth day, however, that he recognized what it was. He went around to the rear of the cottage and into a tool shed where Bassett had kept most of his equipment and supplies.

He found what he sought in a metal box of fumigants. A small, round bottle, like the one Karol had held in her hand when he surprised her bending over Bassett.

On the bottle was written: *Danger. Poison.*

For some reason that he could not explain to himself Hegland never mentioned the bottle to Karol. And the third week his hunger for her returned. He despised her, hated her—but...

He found her strolling in the front yard. She was wearing a bright red dress. As he came up, she twirled around, making the dress flare out at the hips. "How do I look, Ned?"

Like the female piranya bird, Hegland thought.

He took her in his arms, and...

★

What lies behind myth and legend? How far can we depend upon these wonderful tales for pictures of an actual past?

FAERY LANDS FORLORN

by L. SPRAGUE de CAMP

IN RANGING the borderlands of science, we are always coming upon arguers who use myths and legends to support their ideas. Thus those who proclaim that the earth was once rocked or bumped by a comet (Carli, Donnelly, Zschaetzsch, Velikovski) draw largely upon the catastrophe-legends of the world's many peoples for ammunition. So do the Atlantists, who bolster Plato's synthetic legend with quotations from any other mythologies that seem to serve their turn. So do the seekers after the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel, the diffusionists, and many others.

Nor are scientists and pseudo-scientists alone in exploiting myths. Writers of imaginative fiction use them, too. Back in 1940, Fletcher Pratt and I started a whole cycle of adventure-fantasies based upon Norse myth. (By a coincidence, del Rey had the same idea at the same time. Unluckily for poor Lester, we got our manuscript in first.) Robert E. Howard drew upon the myths of many nations for his gorgeous if wildly anachronistic Hyborian Age, and a couple of years ago there was a veritable plague of stories wherein the hero and heroine turn out in the last paragraph to have been the biblical Adam and Eve.

Now, just what are myths and legends? A primitive form of fiction, as we all know, but what else? Where do they come from? What is their basis of fact, if any? What in the real world corresponds to these "faery lands forlorn"?

The names "myth" and "legend" are usually applied to traditional stories whose authors are not known, which some tribe or people passed around by word of mouth before they learned to write them down. Allegories and fantasies, on the other hand, we think of as tales composed by known writers among a literate people.

These distinctions, however, are not hard and fast. Although we often take it for granted that a myth could not have been composed all at once, but must have been pieced together by relays of bards over a long time, this may not always be true. Very few myths have been observed in the actual making to settle the question. And even a modern writer weaves together incidents from other stories and from real life to knit his narrative, so that all stories are in a sense products of more than one mind.

There are many kinds of myths: creation-myths; catastrophe-myths; culture-hero myths about a demigod who, like Osiris or Moses, taught men their culture; sun-myths, migration-legends, and so on. We often distinguish "myths" from "legends" by saying that the former relate to gods and the latter to mortals, but again the distinction is not clear-cut.

Half a century or more ago, the pioneer mythologists tried to reduce all myths to a single type. Some asserted that all myths were fictionalized history; others, that they were normal fables; others, that they were explanations of natural phenomena. Some said that all mythical heroes were real people; others that they were phallic symbols; others that they were sun-gods. Nowadays most of them seem to agree that there are too many different sorts of myths all to be accounted for by one simple explanation.

Myths may be either homiletic (that is, trying to persuade you to do or believe something) or lusory (meant mainly to entertain). Some simply tell a tale (apologal myths); some explain how things got the way they are (etiological myths); some tell you what happens when you die (eschatological myths). (Some of these recondite terms are already in use; others are my own suggestions.)

While all myths and most legends have supernatural elements, and while the myths of primitives often show a childish irrationality, they still reflect the lives and customs of those who tell them. You do not, for instance, find King Arthur riding an elephant, or the goddess Ishtar driving a dog-sled. In this way the Polynesian myths have to do with the Polynesians' main amusements: war, water-sports, genealogy, and adultery, and the winner of a contest has the privilege of eating the loser. Myths express people's hopes and fears; embody their dreams and complexes; rationalize their customs and rituals; and

comment upon their social organization, class conflicts, and personal frustrations.

PSEUDO - SCIENTISTS and cultists are wont to assure you that all myths are founded on fact, and then to exaggerate the realistic or historical elements in them to support their own theories. But while all fiction (including myths) is in a sense founded on living or antiquated facts, it does not follow that you can reconstruct the fact from the fiction. For example, Sinclair Lewis' novel *"It Can't Happen Here"* is based upon certain facts, but a future historian who tried to reconstruct the history of the twentieth-century United States from that novel alone might be led to think that Windrip the dictator was a real man, whereas Franklin D. Roosevelt was a sun-god or a culture-hero like Prometheus.

Diffusionists also deny primitive men the power of imagination, so that they can affirm that all myths contain a large element of literal truth and that any two similar myths found in different parts of the world must have had a common origin. But the minds of preliterates are much like those of other people, and we have to decide the question of the diffusion or any particular myth on its merits as we do the diffusion of other culture-traits.

For instance, a group of old-world stories in which a child-hero—Sargon, Moses, Perseus or Romulus—is set adrift in a box or boat upon the water and later rescued, probably have a common origin, since they are found in adjacent areas and are not far separated in time. The same applies to the family of myths in which a chieftain unwittingly slays his only son in a duel, in which some tabu or technicality has prevented either from knowing who the other was; the story takes the form of the tale of Sohrab and Rustam in Iran; of Cuchulainn and Connla in Ireland.

On the other hand it is more likely that the myths from ancient Egypt and modern New Zealand, in which the sky and the earth lie in procreative embrace until one of their children thrusts them apart, were invented separately. For one thing they were told on opposite sides of the earth and were separated by thousands of years in time. For another, there is a significant difference between them: in Egypt, earth was male and heaven female, whereas in New Zealand it was the other way around.

Myths, it seems, are not

handed down from generation to generation for the simple love of historical fact, a quality that is rare in even our supposedly-enlightened culture. People pass them on because they have been found useful as magical spells in controlling supernatural beings; or answering children's questions; or serving as librettos for religious rites; or persuading the average tribesman to honor his priests, obey his chief, and observe the tribal tabus; or simply because they are entertaining and so provide a living for story-tellers.

ONE KIND of myth has been much exploited in arguments about the origins of man and his culture: the catastrophe-myth. And the form of the catastrophe-myth that has most often been put to these uses is the flood-legend.

One reason for this use of flood-legends is not that they are so conspicuous a part of the whole vast body of myths and legends, but that one of them plays such an important part in our own Judaeo-Christian mythological heritage. When mythographers began comparing the myths of the world, they were struck by the flood-legends they found because they already knew one such legend.

This legend takes the following form in *Genesis:* "In the six hundredth year of Noah's life...were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heavens were opened. And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights... And the waters prevailed, and were increased greatly upon the earth... Fifteen cubits upwards did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered... And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground...and Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark. And the waters prevailed upon the earth a hundred and fifty years."

The Greeks also had a recognizably similar tradition that "when Zeus would destroy the men of the Bronze Age, Deukalion by the advice of Prometheus constructed a chest, and having stored it with provisions he embarked upon it with Pyrrha. But Zeus pouring a heavy rain from heaven flooded the greater part of Greece, so that all men were destroyed, except a few who fled to the high mountains in the neighborhood... But Deukalion, floating in the chest over the sea for nine days and as many nights, drifted to Parnassos,

and there, when the rain ceased, he landed and sacrificed to Zeus, the god of Escape."

Other flood-legends also came to the attention of European mythographers during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Thus from India came the story of Manu, warned of the coming flood by a fish whom he had befriended. He built an ark which the fish, now grown to cetacean size, towed to Mount Himalava when the waters receded. The Americas also had many aboriginal flood-legends. The Aztecs, who took a grim view of life, believed in a whole series of calamities, from each of which only one human pair survived. First jaguars ate everybody. Next a hurricane destroyed the world. Then a rain of fire fell. The fourth time there was a flood. The fifth catastrophe, yet to come, will end the world for good and all by earthquake.

From this evidence a lot of people argued that, as flood-legends were world-wide, there must have been a world-wide flood. This, most of them said, must have been the source of the story of Noah's flood, of which the other flood-legends were corruptions. This view comforted those who wished to believe in the literal truth of the Bible, despite the inroads that the young science of geology had been making it into.

There were, however, fatal defects in this reasoning, One was that flood-legends, while widespread, are by no means universal. They are rare in Africa and Polynesia, and altogether absent in Japan and ancient Egypt: Moreover some of those that do exist were not handed down from ancient times among the people who now tell them, but were picked up from Christian missionaries and incorporated into the tribe's own pagan mythos. An example is the Hawaiian tale of the ark in which Nuu (Noah) and his three sons escaped the Flood —notwithstanding that one noted Atlantist, Lewis Spence, cited it in support of his belief in a Pacific Lemuria.

The second flaw is that, even if there were a Flood, the story of Noah is by no means the original and most authentic account of it.

IN 1872 a young bank-note engraver named George Smith, whom the great Sir Henry Rawlinson had persuaded the British Museum to hire as an assistant in the Assyriology Department, was sorting pieces of cuneiform

tablets. These fragments had been sent from Nineveh by Hormuzd Rassam, the first of a long line of distinguished archeologists native to Muslim countries, archeology being the only field in which these lands have made significant contributions to modern science.

Smith was excited to find that these tablets told the story of a Heracleian hero named Gilgamesh (long misread as "Izdubar") whom the Classical writer Aelianus mentioned under the name of "Gilgamos." Smith was even more excited to find, interpolated in this epic, an account of a world-wide Deluge and of a single man who, warned by the gods, escaped it by building an ark.

Smith's announcement of his find caused a good deal of excitement in England. Perhaps the complete account would confirm, or modify, or refute the Noachian story; but in any case, the English wanted to know. The *Daily Telegraph* put up a thousand pounds to send Smith to Nineveh to hunt for the missing fragments. Smith went, found some of them, and a few years later died of disease and overwork while preparing to excavate the rest of Asshurbanipal's library from which the first set of pieces had come.

The story parrallels the Biblical version even more closely than the Greek tale of Deukalion, but is much more colorfully written than either, being a rendition in verse by the Assyrian poet Sin-likhi-unnini. The hero is the pious Utnapishtim of Shurrupak. (At least "Utnapishtim" is one of the several ways the name can be heard.) Utnapishtim tells how, when the gods decided to destroy mankind for its wickedness, a few of them secretly warned him in time for him to make his preparations. Then:

When the first flush of dawn appeared,
There came up from the horizon a black cloud.
Adad thundered within it,
While Nebo and Sharru went before.
They go as messengers over mountain and valley.
Nergal tore away the foundations.
Ninib advances, the storm he makes to descend.
The Annunaki lifted up their torches,
With their brightness they light up the land.
Adad's storm rushed unto heaven.
All light was turned into darkness,

It flooded the land like...
One day the Deluge
Lashed high, the waters covered the mountains,
Like a besom of destruction they brought it upon men,
No man beheld his fellow,
No more were men recognized in heaven...
When the seventh day drew nigh, the tempest spent itself in battle,
Which it had fought like an army.
Then rested the sea, the storm fell asleep, the flood ceased.
I looked upon the sea, there was silence come,
And all mankind was turned to clay.

In due course the flood recedes, Utnapishtim sends out successively a dove, a swallow, and a raven to scout for land. The ark grounds on a mountain, and Utnapishtim sacrifices to the gods.

SINCE SMITH'S day, several other versions have come to light, in Sumerian, Hittite, and Hurrian. The most important of these is a part of a column inscribed with Sumerian cuneiform, dug up at Nippur and published by Poebel in 1914. Part of it reads:

The rain storms, mighty winds all of them, they sent all at once.
The Flood came upon the (surface of the land.)
When for seven days and seven nights
The Flood had ranged over the land,
And the huge boat had been tossed on the great waters by the storms,
The Sun-god appears shedding light on Heaven and on Earth.
Ziusudra made an opening in the side of the great ship.
He let the light of the hero the Sun-god enter in the great ship.
Ziusudra, the king,
Before the Sun-god he bowed his face to the ground.
The king slaughtered an ox, sheep he sacrificed in great numbers.

As *Genesis*, from internal evidence, must have been written after the time of King David (that is, after 1014 B. C.) and the Sumerian story is older than 2000 B. C., it is evident that the story of Noah must be derived from that of Ziusudra and not the other way around.

The archeologist Sir Leonard Woolley thought that the story of Ziusudra was based upon a real flood that inundated about 40,000 square miles in the Euphrates Val-

ley about 5,400 B. C. In 1929, Woolley, digging in the valley, found an eight-foot layer of clay with no human relics in it, below which relic-bearing layers began again. Above the clay the relics were of Sumerian type only; below, of mixed Sumerian and pre-Sumerian type. Sumerian chronicles treat the flood as a historical event, and mention kings and cities that existed before and after it. Woolley deduced that before the flood the Sumerians had invaded the land and built their cities on the higher ground, while the more primitive pre-Sumerhung on in the lowlands. The flood wiped out the pre-Sumerians but left some Sumerian cities standing, and their inhabitants repeopled the whole land.

Later evidence implies that this interpretation is an oversimplification; that there were, instead, a whole series of such floods throughout the fifth and fourth millenia B. C. This brings up another question: Nowadays, though the Tigris is still an unruly stream, her sister the Euphrates is quiet and well-behaved. Whence the change? There are two theories, either or both of which might be true. Some assert that the climate of Iraq has become drier than it was in early Sumerian times. Others say no, the evidence indicates no significant change in climate, but the river has been tamed by bleeding off a large fraction of its water for irrigation.

When the Babylonians replaced the Sumerians, they took over the legend. When Nebuchadrezzar II of Babylon carried off the Hebrews of Judea to captivity in Babylon, in the sixth century B. C., the Hebrews borrowed the story in their turn. Only in a place as flat as the Euphratean plain could anyone suppose that a rise in the level of the water by "fifteen cubits" (less than twenty-five feet) could submerge all the mountains of the world. Finally, about the same time, somebody brought the tale to Greece. In Greek mythology, Ziusudra - Utnapishtim - Noah became Deukalion, though Ziusudra's name survived as that of Deukalion's mythical grandson Xouthos.

Flood-legends, then, are likely to arise in river-valleys where such floods happen; and most early civilizations have such legends because most of them have arisen in river-valleys. In the upper part of its course, where the slope is steep and the current swift, the river picks up silt from the bottom. Then in the

lower part of its course, as it nears the sea, its slope is gentler and its current slower, so that it drops the silt it had picked up. Therefore its bottom in this part gets higher and higher. At last when a rainy spells comes along, the river overflows its banks and sometimes makes a whole new channel in another part of the flood-plain. Men try to keep the river in one place by building up the bank with levees, with the result that the river is raised above the surrounding country, and the flood is that much more destructive when it does come.

A CASUALTY of civilization is literal belief in the myths of the race. But if myths cannot be taken literally, how shall they be interpreted? The devout, alarmed by the finding of obvious errors in their sacred scriptures, have sometimes answered that the myths are allegories by which the gods reveal hidden truths.

As soon as the secular outlook appeared in Classical Greece, people began advancing more rational hypotheses. In the fifth century B. C., Prodikes of Keos said that the gods personified natural phenomena like the sun, the wind, and the sea. I suppose his hypothesis should be called prodicanism. In any case it has been used and abused in modern times. Thus John Fiske, the nineteenth-century American popularizer of science and history, in 1872 brought out his "Myths and Myth Makers" which equated all gods and mythical events with meteorological phenomena.

Then about 300 B. C. the Greek-Siceliot philosopher Euemros of Messana suggested another rationalization. The gods, he said, were merely mortal men whose deeds and powers posterity had exaggerated. The theory became so popular that it was called euhemerism after its founder. Its followers asserted, for instance, that Zeus had been a mere king of Crete, and his smiting of giants with thunderbolts was but a reflection of a struggle in which this king had suppressed an uprising. Modern euhemerists have followed a similar line, insisting that Achilles, Abraham, and other mythological characters must all once have been real people.

In 1936 Lord Raglan published an interesting book, "The Hero", in which he attacked the claims of legends and traditions to any historical foundation at all. Preliterate peoples, he said, never kept records of real events. Therefore King Arthur,

Cuchulainn, Sir John Falstaff, Helen of Troy, and a host of other "quasi-historical characters" were never real people but merely humanized gods. The stories in which they appeared were literary versions of the dramatic rituals which people once acted out as part of their religious observances.

Now, Raglan made some good points. Legendary heroes have no dates as real people do. They talk in verse, stay the same age for decades on end, and perform magical feats. The legends report private conversations that could never have been recorded, and show kings wandering about by themselves in a way that real kings almost never do. Homer's account of the Siege of Troy is impossible because no half-barbarous army like that of the Achaeans could have been kept in the field for a year, let alone ten. The story of Robin Hood consists mainly of anachronisms: He was a longbow expert before the longbow was invented; he led the oppressed Saxons, though he and nearly all his followers had Norman names; he was Earl of Huntington when the title was actually held by the brother of the King of Scotland, and so on.

Raglan concluded that illiterate communities, which have enough to do to keep going without burdening their minds with historical facts, could keep alive the memory of historical events at the most about 150 years. There are reasons for thinking this too short: for instance, some Eskimo tribes are said to have kept alive the memory of visits of Europeans in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries down almost to the present. So perhaps a limit of 400 or 500 years would be nearer the truth. However, Raglan's general thesis, that such word-of-mouth recollections will not be handed down indefinitely but will instead be crowded out in a few centuries by later events, is probably right.

On the other hand, Raglan, in his enthusiasm, committed some major errors. For instance he said that "I can find no evidence that before (Herodotos') time the idea of history ever occurred to anyone." Apparently he never heard of the first Greek historian, Hekataios of Miletos, or of the biblical *Books of Kings*, or of the lost chronicles on which the Egyptian Manetho and the Babylonian Berossos based their histories. While he concedes that the Dietrich of Bern and the Etzel of medieval German legend are

based respectively upon the real Gothic King Theodoric the Great, and Attila the Hun, he says that the resenblance extends to the names only: "they are never represented in the stories as doing anything which they can be supposed to have done in real life." Actually there are many parallels between the real and the fictional characters: Dietrich becomes king of Italy as did Theodoric; Etzel's Huns destroy Gunther and his followers, as the real Huns destroyed the Burgundian kingdom of King Gundicar; and so forth.

IT IS true that the historical content of the legends is small, and that bits of history from many ages and places are all mixed up together in a given legend. In the old English poem "Widsith" a minstrel boasts of having visited the courts of Eormenric (Hermanaric), Guthhere (Gundicar), and Aelfwine (Alboin the Lombard) who lived in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries respectivly. The legend-makers sent Charlemagne on a crusade; surrounded Arthur with knights, several centuries before knighthood was invented; and telescoped several characters into one.

Other legends besides those mentioned have turned out to have a basis, however small, of fact. Homer's King Atreus, the father of Menelaos and Agamemnon, is probably the Atarissiyas, king of the Akhiyavas (Achaeans) mentioned in the royal archives of the Hittites that were dug up several decades ago at Boghaz Keui, Turkey. The legendary Assyrian queen Semiramis is based upon the real princess Sammuramat, the mother of King Adadnirari III and apparently a person of importance—even if she did not build Babylon or invade India, as Greek legends said. The Golden Gyges of Hellenic legend, who owned a ring of invisibility set with a stone from the eye of a dragon, was King Gugu of Lydia whom the Gimirai or Cimmerians defeated and killed. Mopsos the seer, said to have founded Mallos in Cilicia after the fall of Troy, turns out to have been a Hittite king named Mupsh.

Nor do we consider Alexander the Great and Charlemagne myths, just because later romancers sent them places they never went and credited them with feats they never did.

Raglan even thinks that primitives cannot compose their own myths, but must borrow them from more civil-

ized peoples, because, he says: "The savage is interested in nothing which dos not impinge on the senses, and never has a new idea even about the most familiar things."

But many anthropologists who have lived among "savages" tell a quite different story: that they are much like other people with the usual numbers of intelligent and stupid ones, and that the most intelligent do make contributions to the cultures of their various tribes. In fact some of them have been seen making inventions and thinking up new religions. You may have read about the great meteor-fall in Siberia in 1908. Russian scientists did not get around to investigating the matter until after World War I, and when they did they found that the local Tunguz had constructed a new cult around the event, which they interpreted as a visit to earth of the fire-god Adgy.

EVIDENTLY, there is no simple answer to the question of the interpretation of myths. You cannot even guess how much factual history is included in a given myth until you have some solid outside, independent evidence to guide you. Take for example the Minotaur legend.

In Classical times, Crete was a depressed backwater where Dorian landlords brutally bullied their native tenants, a haunt of pirates, and a recruiting-ground for mercenary archers. A whole body of legend hung cloudlike over the rugged island. It was said that once it had been a great sea-power under King Minos, whom Zeus in his bull-form had begotten on Europa. Hephaistos, the smith of the gods, gave Minos a brazen robot named Talos who kept strangers away from Crete by throwing stone at them.

Once Minos prayed to Poseidon to send him a bull from the sea, promising to sacrifice it to the god. Poseidon furnished the bull, but Minos liked it so well that he killed another in its stead. To get even, Poseidon caused Pasiphae, the wife of Minos, to fall in love with the bull. The queen persuaded Daidalos, an Athenian fugitive and a skilled artificer, to arrange a tryst with the animal. Daidalos accordingly disguised Pasiphae as a cow and set her in the meadow, and the bull did what was expected of him.

The result of this physiologically improbable amour was a bull-headed man, Asterios, who became known as the *Minotauros* or Minos-bull. Minos shut up his monstrous stepson in a maze that Daida-

los obligingly built for him. Subsequently Minos warred against Athens because a son of his met his death there, and in the treaty of peace he demanded seven youths and seven maidens a year for Asterios to eat. This went on until Theseus, the great racket-buster of prehistoric Athens, slew the Minotaur with the help of Minos' daughter Ariadne and Daidalos. Theseus then eloped with Ariadne but lost her to the god Dionysos, while Daidalos made his famous flight from Crete with his son Ikaros.

For many centuries scholars tried to guess what historical reality lay behind the Minos-myths, especially the recurrence of the bull-motif. All their guesses went wide of the mark until Evans' excavations, begun about 1895, disclosed a basis for the story: the public spectacles of long-forgotten Minoan Crete in which young men and women performed perilous gymnastics on the horns of live bulls.

EVEN WHEN the information has been entirely inadequate for a final answer, the interpretation of famous myths has sometimes given rise to controversies as bitter as those about who should drop the Bomb on whom, and when. The great quarrel over *Genesis* versus evolution might be classed as one of these; the Homeric controversy certainly should be.

In Classical times everybody took it for granted that the "Iliad" and "Odyssey" had been composed by a blind Ionian poet named Homeros, supposed to have been born in any of a dozen cities any time from 1159 to 685 B. C.—everybody, that is, but a few *chorizontes* or "separatists" like Xenon and Hellanikos who thought that the two poems were by two different authors. There was absolutely no reliable biographical information on Homer, though from Aristotle's time on several writers undertook to fill this gap by inventing spurious life-stories, based partly on conjectures from the poems and partly on sheer romancing.

In the year 1795, Friedrich August Wolf of Halle and Berlin announced an entirely new theory of Homer: that Homer had been neither one man or two, but many. "Homer," he said, was merely a collective name adopted by or applied to a group of poets who composed a series of heroic lays that were not combined into the present epics until the time of Peisistratos, a tyrant of Athens in the sixth century B. C.

The academic world was

greatly startled, and began a war of words that has continued down to the present with no decision in sight. Some stick to the one-Homer view, some believe in two Homers, and some accept an indefinite number. The multiple-Homer scholars (who seem to me at least to have the better of the argument) differ widely as to who wrote which part of the epics and when they were combined into their present form. A few years ago the *American Journal of Archaeology* devoted a special Jumbo-sized issue to the Homeric question, and the various scholars, though polite about their differences, were as far apart as ever.

One of the most eminent of the Wolfians is the venerable British Classical scholar Gilbert Murray. He considers that both poems were composed by a long line of poets, one whom may have been named Homer. They are traditional books dating back to the time when a few bards were the only people who could read and write. Each bard had his own "book": a long roll of papyrus on which poems were scratched one after another without chapter-headings, punctuation, or even divisions between words. Each bard kept his manuscript more or less secret, perhaps letting a colleague copy some of his poems in return for the same favor.

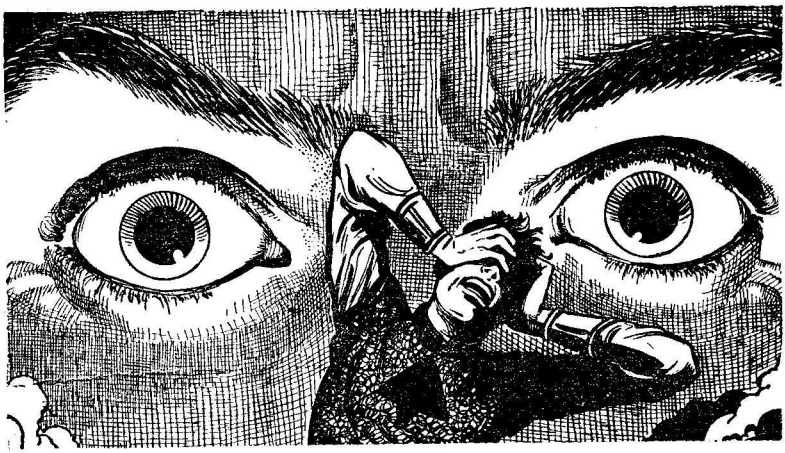
Eventually some of these collections were edited into the modern "Iliad" and "Odyssey", and others into other epic poems based upon the tale of Troy, like the "Sack of Ilion", or poems in other mythological cycles such as the "Argonautika" and the "Herakleia". Of all of these epics, however, only the "Iliad" and "Odyssey" have come down whole, the others existing in the form of fragments and in later plays, poems, and mythological treatises based upon them.

Another Homerist, J. A. Thompson, has a slightly different Wolfian theory: The "Homer" was originally only the traditional author of the "Hymn to Apollo" sung at a yearly festival at Delos. This hymn still exists. The story of Odysseus started in Boeotia in central Greece, where Odysseus was alleged to have been born. People who knew it carried it into southern Greece, adding to it as they went. Odysseus on the way acquired a wife, the Arcadian goddess Penelopeia, and an island kingdom off the west coast of Greece. When the story spread to Delos, poets took to reciting it there, and eventually it became associ-

ated with the Delian hymn and the author of the latter was credited with the former composition as well.

As for the historical element that devout Homerists suppose to underlie the poems, there may well be scraps of history buried in these works; but they are probably so slight and garbled that we cannot filter them out now. Some of Homer's characters like Atreus were no doubt once real people, while others are pure myths. Murray supposed Achilles to be a tribal god, and Raglan suggested that Helen was a fertility-goddess—since if she suffered all the abductions attributed to her she would have been in her eighties when Paris took her to Troy. Perhaps most of Homer's characters combine the name of a real person, the deeds of some real persons and some folk-tale characters, and the attributes of real persons, fictional characters, and gods all rolled up together in various proportions. The exact truth is probably gone beyond any hope of recovery.

Intelligent, benevolent guidance can go just so far...



CROSSROAD

by IRVING COX JR.

HE STAGGERED toward the brush over the seared ground, beating at the fire that smoldered in his clothing. His head rang with the clanging after-effect of concussion; he gasped frantically for cold air.

As he collapsed on the grass, he saw an orange sphere above him, silhouetted against the night sky. From the port, three rays probed into the wreckage. The sphere settled closer. Fur-covered, tentacled things, like enormous spiders, hung from the open hold, pawing through the debris.

He tried to push himself up; he tried to call out, but his throat was constricted in an agony of fiery pain. As he saw the spider aliens, he recalled three names—the Union, the Slithuss, and Men. The fur-covered spiders were somehow associated with the shock of personal failure, an

urgent need to complete a job half-finished, a sense of impending terror.

The terror rode his mind as he sank into unconsciousness.

Three names: it was the only thing he remembered when he opened his eyes again. The Union, the Slithuss, Men. Nothing else.

Who was he? Why was he here? How had he failed? There was something he had to do—do at once—but he couldn't separate that memory from the throbbing pain.

He sat up slowly. His face was burned and streaked with dried blood. His hands were paralyzed, gloved in raw, burned skin. He remembered beating out the fire as the plane crashed.

The plane! He recognized the wreckage scattered over the mountain ridge. He had been flying to—to what? A strange city he had never seen. But he had memorized the details of a mock-up. He knew the streets, the public buildings, the people. He knew their language and their fears.

But why was he here? What was it he had been sent to do in the city? Vague fragments of his orders floated like jumbled wreckage on the chaos of his mind. They had told him to play out some sort of masquerade. Under no circumstances were these people to know his name or origin. He was to be one of them until—

Until what?

He had a job to do. Every hour that passed, brought him closer to failure. The desperate feeling of urgency churned over three names in his mind: the Union, the Slithuss, Men. And those names, detached from meaning, signified only a dreamlike horror.

"Here's one of them—over here. He's alive!"

Men came out of the forest. They put him on a stretcher and carried him to a truck which stood on a nearby road. He tried to talk, but the burned flesh made it impossible for him to move his jaw.

There was a white-uniformed woman inside the van. She gasped when she saw him, and turned her head away.

"It's horrible! The disfigurement—" Then, embarrassed, she apologized, "I'm sorry; I shouldn't have said that."

Very gently she began to rub a cold grease into his skin. It was wrong! She should have used the sanitized skin. He wanted to scream that at her, but the touch of the cold grease sent him back into the well of unconsciousness again.

THE DREAM came then, a swirl of timeless, faceless shapes, caught in a gray nothingness.

"The delicate adjustment of social and applied science must not be disturbed, but their knowledge has brought them to a crossroad; we must see to it they take the right turning."

"The Union will interfere?" He remembered he had asked that question himself, somewhere in a small, transparent-walled room, surrounded by the velvet darkness of outer space.

"Yes, but subtly, Captain."

They had called him "Captain"; it was good to take back that much out of the past.

"But they're a B-culture," he had said. "We've never before—"

"The risk must be taken. The Slithuss have none of our ethical scruples, and they need allies. They've had this planet under observation, just as we have. If the people of this world make the wrong choice now, they'll be ripe for Slithuss conquest. On the other hand, if they choose wisely, they should be ready to make first-contact with the Union in two generations. We mean to—to be sure of them, Captain. Forced social growth, if you like."

"Theoretically, that can't be done."

"That is generally true, Captain; but in this case there are particularly favorable extenuating circumstances. These people bear a striking physical resemblance to your species; they could actually pass for Men. As a matter of fact, that is the word by which they designate themselves, in their own tongue. The nature of their present experiments should be of particular interest to you, Captain, in the light of the history of your own people."

"You mean they've discovered the nuclear fuel?"

"Essentially—but for other purposes. Now, we have enough data to indoctrinate you in their language and basic social techniques. The Watch Service has developed an ingenious method for introducing you into the necessary segment of their culture. For a number of years we've had a brain-disk planted in the mind of one of their leading scientists, a Dr. Othammer. We'll give you hypno-instruction in his thought experience pattern, and the Drama Service can build up your p h y s i c a l resemblance with plastiskin. Othammer periodically travels from place to place by means of their commercial airlines. He has such a trip scheduled for the very near future. We'll grav that ship to one of ours in the Watch Service, temporarly anaesthetize the p e r s o n n e l aboard, and put you in Otham-

mer's place. When your job's finished, we'll bring you home the same way. Othammer will be kept in physio-suspension; he'll never be aware of the substitution. The plan is entirely foolproof."

Foolproof! The dream shattered in pulsing flame and explosion. Something had gone wrong. Something they hadn't even considered in their careful planning. And the new factor changed the whole definition of the problem, gave it its terrifying urgency. But how could he seek the solution to a problem—either new or old—when the problem itself had been burned from his memory?

Once again he remembered the orange sphere which had hung over the wrecked plane. He remembered the fur-covered spiders, and he turned in horror, to bolt out the dream—

TURNED against a white sheet and a soft hand lying on the singed brush of his hair. He opened his eyes upon a narrow world, r i g i d l y framed by the bandages that covered his face. A woman in a white uniform stood beside him. She smiled when she saw that he was awake.

"Good afternoon, Dr. Othammer."

He discovered that he could move his mouth without pain, but his voice was still weak. "Am I—am I all right?"

"Remarkably so. When they first brought you in, I was sure you couldn't survive. But the burns were superficial. Some kind of material—we can't identify what it was—seems to have protected your face and hands."

Some kind of material! It was the plastiskin which had molded his face to resemble Othammer's. Then the masquerade was over. As soon as the bandages were removed, they would know him for an imposter. And it was essential for him to identify and solve his problem before that occurred.

"We've had you under narcotics for three days, Dr. Othammer. Of course, we had no idea at first who you were—not until the Security Guard went through your clothes. When we made the identification—my, you should have seen things begin to hum! Special police, special shipments of plasma. Finally, all the high brass dropped in on us—and you know that's never happened to us, not in this place!—and t h e y ' v e been camping on your doorstep ever since."

While she talked, he pawed through his slim and disorganized store of recollection. The Union and the Slithuss were enemies: that, at least, was clear to him. The Union had sent him to this world to

help these people—to save them from the Slithuss and prepare them for federation with the Union. Very little else was clear. He was supposed to have an emotional interest in these people because they resembled his species. And the resemblance was remarkable; he studied the woman furtively and he could detect no physical difference.

Obviously, too, the problem he had been sent to help them solve was associated with the work of Dr. Othammer. He had no other data, not even the recollection of his own name. It was not much from which to induce a problem and its solution. If he could pry a little into Othammer's status and his work, he might have a clue. Cautiously he asked, "Has anyone come to see me?"

"Are you kidding? I told you, as soon as we let it out that the Great Othammer was the only crash survivor, the whole Top Command—including the General himself—fell on our necks."

"I didn't know I was quite so important."

"And there's a little guy from the lab—say, maybe you want to see him right away."

"Little guy?"

"Dr. Kapper; he says he's your assistant."

"Oh, yes; ask him to come in, please."

Vaguely he remembered Kapper's name; it was a part of the configuration of the Othammer mind-set. Just as vaguely he could identify Kapper's face when the little man sidled into the room.

IMPERIOUSLY Kapper dismissed the woman in white. He came and stood close to the bed, leaning over the wounded man and talking in a guarded whisper. His face was thin and hollow-cheeked. Heavy, black brows arched above his beady eyes. His bushy, graying hair was a tangled, uncombed mass.

"Did you make the contact?" Kapper demanded.

It was a frightening question. Had Kapper and Othammer known the substitution was to be made? If so, they would have been aware of the existence of the Union, and that was quite impossible. Impossible! He knew that, suddenly, and he knew it was the most fundamental part of his own mission.

"Did they come through on the deal?" Kapper repeated.

"They? I don't know—"

"We agreed, Othammer; a fifty-fifty split. If you try to back out, I'll blow this thing so high—"

"Of course I won't back out, but I—I'm a little hazy on the details. You know, the shock of the accident, and so on."

Kapper's lips slid back from his yellow teeth in a sneer. "You always did try to pull a moralistic attitude. You weren't selling out to the enemy. No, not the Great Othammer. You just wanted to give them the technique, so both sides would have the same weapon at the same time. Then neither of us could start the war. All so noble and uplifting! Naturally, if the enemy wanted to give us a small consideration for our trouble— That's what I want, Othammer; where's the money?"

The wounded man tried to make his voice sound casual. "They paid what they agreed, Kapper."

Kapper backed away from the bed, studying the face bandages thoughtfully. He asked, "And you had it safe before the crash?"

The sham Othammer thought he saw a way out of a difficult situation, but he underestimated the possibility of a trap. "As a matter of fact," he said, "I had it on the plane; I'm afraid it's lost."

"You liar!" A hiss of terror gurgled in Kapper's throat. "You—you aren't Othammer. He knew the bonds were to be deposited in— So they pulled this survivor trick to get a confession out of me! Well, brother, you won't live to get your little medal from the Top Command."

Kapper sprang at the wounded man, clawing at the bandages. He resisted weakly. His hands moved awkwardly in the gauze. Needle pain stabbed at his fingertips. He cried out, but his voice was muffled by Kapper's palm.

Then, for a moment, a purple light stabbed into the room. Kapper's body jerked and slumped on the floor.

The wounded man drew a tortured breath. As he relaxed on the pillow, his head moved so that he could see the window. Hanging across the sill was one of the furry spiders from the orange sphere. On multijointed legs the thing moved toward him. It uttered a single word,

"Alark!"

He recognized that as his own name. A new horror seized him. The Slithuss were the enemy; this spider was a Slithuss. The line of reasoning was fuzzy, emotional. The Union, of course, was peopled like himself; the alien was the enemy. Hadn't he seen the orange sphere plow the wreckage of the plane with its ray? The Slithuss had shot the airship from the sky because Alark was aboard; now they had come to finish the job.

Even in that brief paralysis of terror, Alark knew there was something else about the accident, a new factor that altered his original problem

drastically. The realization was on the fringe of his mind, urgent and compelling. It was associated with the orange sphere and the feather burst of fire. The fire! He almost had it. But this new fear of the Slithuss drove another wedge of chaos into his mind.

AS THE SPIDER moved closer, Alark screamed. The furry thing touched the bed. Alark pulled himself back against the pillows, still screaming.

Footsteps pounded in the outer hall. The alien fled back through the window as the bedroom door swung open.

At the same time, Kapper moved drowsily. He clawed at the covers on the bed pulling himself up beside Alark.

The armed guard saw the movement; they saw Alark's terror and they heard his screams. They drew their guns and fired. Kapper died convulsively grasping the bandaged legs of the man he had tried to kill.

Uniformed officers crowded into the room, clustering around the bed. They were all talking at once, expressing condolences, alarm and anger in a clatter of shrill clinches. Only one man—tall, balding, saturnine—seemed to be unaroused. He gestured to the woman in white. She prepared a hyperdermic and slipped the needle into Alark's arm.

He thought she would give him a sedative, but he realized that it was a truth serum. Waves of relaxation surged over his mind and he began to talk. But it was the hypno-induced personality of Dr. Othammer which spilled out the secrets of its soul, not the real Alark. Alark held aloof, inviolate; subjectively two persons shared the mechanism of one mind.

Alark's objective, at the moment, was to get out of the hospital and complete his work before the removal of the bandages gave away the masquerade. It was easy enough to manipulate the Othammer personality, even within the limits imposed by the serum, to achieve that end.

He permitted Othammer to babble the story of Kapper's betrayal, but he took pains to hide Othammer's own guilt. Othammer said glibly that Kapper had tried to murder him when Othammer confronted him with the truth.

"And you're sure," one of the officers asked, "that Kapper actually sold your specifications to the enemy?"

"I've no doubt of it."

"Then you'll have to complete your test model immediately, before they can make the initial tests. We still have the upper hand, if we make it a quick war. Can you work

now, Dr. Othammer, while you're convalescing?"

"I must. In a way, I feel a personal responsibility for what Kapper's done."

Alark was amused at Othammer's facile hypocricy, but apparently it convinced the others. They responded with the tall, grave-faced man who had ordered the truth serum administered. He stood silent at the foot of the bed while they arranged for Othammer's transportation to the laboratory. Gradually the others became aware of his silence, and one by one they became quiet, too, watching him anxiously.

"You're with us, General Vawn?" one of them asked.

"Yes, for the good of the nation. But you realize we're asking Dr. Othammer to risk his chance of recovery." The General's face displayed a suitable pious expression of concern. "I shall stay with you, Doctor; it is the least I can do by way of compensation."

It was a pretty piece of oratory, but the undertone conveyed a subtle meaning that went beyond the simple configuration of words. Alark felt indefinably disturbed. General Vawn was undoubtedly an important man, perhaps the most important in the Top Command; the others, despite the glitter of their decorations, unanimously deferred to his opinion. Yet from the thought-experience pattern of the Othammer personality, Alark drew a vague sense of fear and suppressed hatred for the General. Why? He had no clearer understanding of the relationship between the two men.

A wheel chair was brought into the room. They lifted Alark into it and wrapped blankets around his feet. General Vawn pushed the chair into the hall. The others trailed behind them, a sycophant procession of the high priests of war.

ALARK'S room was on the upper floor of an enormous building. A spiraling incline led to the street. As they descended, Alark saw the wards, long, dismally lighted rooms which seemed to be very crowded. The doors were barred and the outer windows were the narrow slits of prison cells: a peculiar architecture for a hospital building. On the ground level Alark caught a glimpse of the inmates of one ward clearly.

And he gasped involuntarily, in horror. For, dimly visible in the pale blue light, stood six caricatures of man, six grotesque, gargoyle monstrosities.

General Vawn leaned over his shoulder. "You seem startled, Dr. Othammer."

"Those people—they—"

The whisper choked in Alark's throat. He pointed toward the slobbering idiot faces of a two-headed man.

"This is an Isolation Colony, Doctor—rather typical, I'm told. I suppose the nurse didn't think it wise to let you know where you were. So many of us believe the thing is contagious. Surely, you understand, just as any intelligent man would, that it is entirely hereditary."

"Isolation Colony?"

"It was the nearest emergency hospital; they brought you here after the crash. As soon as the Top Command identified you, we demanded a private ward. It was the least we could do; and you couldn't be moved—not then. Forget it, Doctor. You've had an unpleasant shock; we all have, coming here to wait at your bedside. I, myself, never expected to see the inside of an Isolation Colony. But it's over, now, for all of us."

Alark knew he couldn't ask, subtly or directly, for further information. Apparently the Isolation Colony was a commonplace instituion among these people, a hospital scorned and shunned because it served the hopelessly deformed. The casualties of an hereditary accident in plague proportions: was that the problem Alark had been sent to help solve?

Outside the hospital Alark was lifted into a van and propped on a cushioned seat. The General sat beside him as the vehicle moved through the city. It was nearly dusk. Flickering lights flamed on the street corners. Long queues of people stood on the streets in patient lines before the food kitchens. They were quiet, dull-faced, poorly dressed.

Alark saw a small queue of couples waiting outside a low, gray building over which scarlet letters blazed with the words, "Genetic Certification." The General waved his hand toward the tiny throng.

"Certification is the answer," he said. "The Meds report a point two drop in Potentials this year. Of course the birthrate is falling faster, but we knew that would happen when we put a death penalty on non-Certified marriages."

Questions crowded Alark's mind, but he could ask none of them. After a moment, the General added bitterly, "It's very difficult to weed out Potentials now. The doctors let it ride for a century after the atomic war was over. A full century, Othammer! They knew from the beginning what would happen. Not more than four thousand people were affected by the original mutation. If they could have been

isolated at the start—" General Vawn shrugged his shoulders. "I suppose it was necessary for us to face racial catastrophe before the people would permit a strong, unified government to take over. Now we must pay the cost of so much negligence."

Alark grasped just enough of the background to fill in a sketchy explanation, and the truth was appalling. At some time in the distant past the people of this world had used nuclear power for war; a handful of survivors had been genetically affected by radiation. Since then the mutation had spread to millions of people, filling the Isolation Colonies with the deformed; other millions carried the mutation as a recessive characteristic. They would be the ones the General called Potentials. Genetic Certification might weed them out by tracing the minutia of their ancestry, but it would involve perhaps half—or more—of the inhabitants currently classified as physically sound. If the time interval since the first mutant had been long enough, the whole body of people were hopelessly affected.

"Selective breeding," the General mused sourly. "The only sensible solution. But there are mutants among the enemy, just as there are here. We will get nowhere if we solve our part of the problem and not theirs. In another twenty generations, our children would face the same crisis we do today. No, Othammer, we must crush the enemy ruthlessly. We can no longer survive as a divided world. After we've brought them to heel, we can impose our process on all men, everywhere. Our only hope is this weapon of yours, Dr. Othammer. For the first time in history we have world peace within our grasp."

THE GENERAL'S argument was sound. Alark had no doubt whatsoever that he had been sent to help the people of this world achieve unity. But the logic created an enigma in his mind. The Union was unalterably opposed to the use of force for any purpose. Even the Slithuss were held in check by the devious processes of diplomacy, the subtle manipulation of inter-solar economic forces. Why, then, would the Union violate its established ethic simply to rescue a blighted world from the consequences of its own imbecility?

The van passed through a heavily guarded fence and stopped in front of a stone building. General Vawn wheled Alark into a ground floor laboratory. It was after dark; the building was de-

serted. The General closed the laboratory door and locked it. He snapped on a glaring ceiling lamp.

"Your papers, Dr. Othammer, are on your desk—as you left them before the accident." His voice was suddenly cold and hard.

Alark wheeled his chair to the desk. He felt a rising excitement as he examined Othammer's scribbled notations. The scientist had written a part of the familiar formula for hydrogenhelium fuel —or, more exactly, an approximation. This set up, Alark realized, would be very dangerous, disastrously explosive. Othammer's weapon, of course; the thing Alark had been sent to complete.

No, his conclusion was wrong—but he didn't know quite how.

"I said the papers are as you left them," the General repeated.

Alark turned—and faced a gun held steady in the General's hand.

"Now, Dr. Othammer, we'll have the truth. You've fooled the others. I know men better than they do; I wouldn't be the General, otherwise. You left nothing here that Kapper could steal—nothing the enemy would want. If the specifications were sold to the enemy, Othammer, you did it yourself."

"You're accusing me—"

"I said *if*, Othammer. Your plane left our airport here and crashed before it landed elsewhere. The only place, then, where you might have contacted an enemy agent was aboard the plane itself. But you're the only survivor. The weapon, consequently, is still safe."

"In the hospital you gave me truth serum; how could—"

"It's interesting that you know that."

"—how could I have lied?"

"Frankly, I don't know; and it doesn't matter. You'll complete your specifications for me now. We'll have the model tested. We're staying together, you and I, until I'm convinced you've delivered the goods. Afterward—" The General shook his head expressively.

"It is an extremely powerful weapon, General."

"For the first time, a weapon strong enough to give us peace."

"The fire of an exploding sun." Alark's counterargument was instinctive, almost in the nature of a rote response, the result of a lifelong indoctrination in the principles of the Union. "To use such force to destroy men— Have you tried every avenue of negotiation, General? The enemy has the same problem that you—that we face. If we could co-oper-

ate in peace to isolate the mutants—"

"You know the answer to that one, Othammer." General Vawn shifted the gun and moved suddenly closer. "Or do you? I'm beginning to wonder. The enemy are fanatics—at least we call them that; perhaps they apply the same term to us. I wouldn't know; perhaps you do."

"I don't understand what you mean."

"Who are you Othammer? Our man never talked like this—not to me. What happened on the plane?" The General continued to move toward Alark; he backed his chair away until he came up against the laboratory wall. "The enemy shot the plane down, didn't they? Then they put you in Othammer's place so you could come here and sabotage—"

AS THE GENERAL leveled his gun, the purple beam flashed across the room. The General staggered and fell; his weapon dropped from his hand.

Alark saw the spider alien again, clinging to the frame of the window. The Slithuss! Tortured with pain, he slid from his chair and grasped the weapon in his bandaged fingers. The spider waved fur-covered appendages at him. Alark pulled the trigger; the shot went wild and the alien scurried out of the laboratory.

Alark slumped in his chair. His body was bathed in sweat, and his head swam dizzily.

He glanced down at the General. The purple ray temporarily paralyzed; he knew that. He remembered how quickly Dr. Kapper had recovered.

Then Alark had at most a very few minutes in which to complete his work. That came first. His own safety was of secondary importance. He had been sent to help this world and obviously the only contribution he could make would be the completion of Dr. Othammer's weapon.

He took a writing instrument awkwardly in his hand and slowly completed the specifications which had been omitted from Othammer's notes. It was an unusual variant on the fuel formula. Alark had a persistent feeling that he had encountered the same dangerous technique before. Somewhere in an academic setting.

A textbook!

The history of man; the history of Alark's own people. He remembered, then. Long ago, before they created the hydrogen-helium fuel, they had invented the weapon. His people, too, had lived on a disunited world, tormented by war. They had seen the mush-

room clouds of death rise over the debris of their cities. And his people had created mutants, too. They had descended close to the depths of the pit of disaster, and from the agony of death itself, from the bomb that had nearly destroyed their world, they had created—

The synapses clicked and healed in Alark's brain; the fear was conquered by reality. On this world, too, were men. They had followed war to the brink of ultimate oblivion. And these men, like Alark's people, had found the last weapon.

The crossroad.

One variation in the Othammer formula created death; another made the electro-probe, a directed beam of electrons capable of penetrating a single living cell, capable of reorganizing the genetic structure of man. That invention had once saved Alark's people; it would save this world now. The problem was solved, solved without force, solved by the principles of the Union. Alark's job was done.

EAGERLY he wrote the new specifications on the Othammer notes. General Vawn stirred and pulled himself to his feet.

"I don't know what you used on me, Othammer, but—"

"General, I have what you want!" Alark pointed to the papers. "With this you can control all mutations, eliminate all deformities within a generation."

"Your bomb, Othammer—"

"The electro-probe is a variant of the same technique, General Vawn; you won't need the bomb now. It was no solution to your real problem."

"The enemy must be destroyed. After that we can organize the world for the elimination of the Potentials."

The General snatched the papers from the desk.

"Yes, I've shown you how to make the bomb, General, but it has no purpose, now. Can't you understand? The thing you really want is here. Give it to the enemy, too—freely, with no strings attached. Unify your world through good will, not violence. Build instead of destroying."

General Vawn snorted. "Why wouldn't they use this technique to make the bomb and throw it at us?"

"Because their problem is the same as yours. If you have a genuine solution to offer them, the reason for violence ceases to exist."

"You're wonderfully naive, Othammer! In dealing with people, when you have overwhelming power on your side, use it; you won't get a second chance."

"Man always has a second chance General, a third and a fourth; chances as infinite as hope itself." Alark looked up. Far beyond the rim of the horizon he saw the orange sphere. Miles above the ground, it caught the reflection of the setting sun; for a moment the sphere blazed like a scarlet explosion. The similarity nudged the last fragment of his memory back into its proper place.

The forgotten terror; the reason why the plane had crashed in a swirling plume of fire. Alark knew that too. The Union Watch Ship had graved the plane to its hold with no difficulty; the substitution of Alark for Othammer had been made. Then, as the Union ship moved away, the pilot had used the hydrogen-helium power, and the reaction had begun a spontaneous fission of the planetary atmosphere. At a lower level even the emergency dampers could not have prevented a world disaster. As it was, only the plane had been caught in the momentary burst of released sun energy which knifed toward the earth.

Alark knew, then, why the problem had become so terrifyingly urgent. He arose from his wheel chair slowly and stood beside it, clinging weakly to the metal with his bandaged hands. He said very slowly, "You have a choice, General Vawn; your world stands at a crossroad, and apparently the decision is entirely yours. It would be better to lay the alternatives before all your people, to let the entire society—"

"More of your naivete, Othammer?"

WITHOUT turning his head. Alark gestured toward the window. He knew they were waiting. "As you said, General, the power to act is in your hands. I beg you to use it wisely. I have given you the solution to your problem; for it to succeed, you must cooperate with the enemy. And you also have the bomb. I tell you this: if you use the bomb, you will destroy this world, utterly and completely."

The General laughed. "Only the enemy, Othammer."

"And yourselves with him. I've given you both alternatives, General; you must take my word for it that I am telling you the truth. The choice should be made by all men, but if they have voluntarily given you the right to think and to make decisions for them—then they must accept your decision. Decide wisely, General; decide for all men; decide in the name of tomorrow."

Alark gestured. The purple beam flashed for a third time,

and the General fell temporarily paralyzed. Alark stumbled toward the window. The spider aliens reached for him with a dozen furry arms and carried him tenderly to the emergency car waiting on the laboratory roof.

"We probed the wreckage with the finder beam, Captain," the alien explained anxiously.

"I know, but I was hurt and confused; I took you for the Slithuss."

"We realized that when we located you in the hospital."

The alien sealed the cockpit and the car darted across the sky toward the orange sphere of the Union.

"I failed," Alark whispered. "I bungled the job."

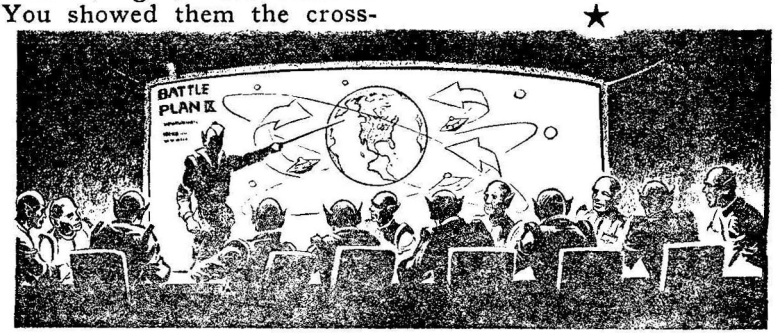
"No, my friend. Men can't be maneuvered like puppets; our original plan was at fault. You couldn't have directed them toward the desirable solution and kept them blind to its alternative. It would have been wrong to have tried it. You showed them the crossroad. They must decide the turning for themselves."

"But I didn't even do that. Only one man knows—one man! And he will make the decision for them all."

"He can do so only because these men chose to give him that power; they voluntarily gave up their individual responsibility to face the crossroad for themselves. They must accept the consequences. This man, perhaps, will remember what you said and think for tomorrow as well as for today."

The car slid into the hold of the sphere. Spider crewmen carried Alark into the tiny infirmary where a nurse stripped off his bandages. She applied sanitized skin to his wounds. They brought him his uniform. He threw off the gown he had been given in the hospital. Idly he traced the blue letters stamped on the cloth, *"Zone B Isolation Colony, Syracuse, N.Y."*

★



Length, width, and thickness are dimensions, and interchangeable; time is regarded as a dimension, too — but of a different order!

TIME'S A GORILLA

by RUSS WINTERBOTHAM

LET ME SAY at the beginning that Gideon Alexander no more traveled in time than anyone else who has lived, for time traveling is simply living. But to explain what happened will involve a great deal of testimony, which I hope I can present so that anyone—be he a scientist or a schoolboy—can understand.

"Let me tell the story, Gid," I said after the episode. "If you tell it yourself, it will simply be laughed at as an impossible fiction. But no one will think that Dr. Joseph R. Bundidge, who deals in inflexible mathematics, would try to wipe his own science off the books."

"All right, Joe," said Gideon. "On one condition; you mustn't intimate that it's time travel, because it wasn't. You must present it as an entirely new conception of time and hyperspace."

That, in the main, was our

agreement. I must point out, however, that I came close to believing that it was time travel—or something along that line—at several stages in the adventure.

Strangely enough it began one hot, August afternoon on the golf course. The game itself was so overshadowed by what happened afterwards that I even forget who won. Gid, Herb Forsythe, who is a real estate man, and Dan Bobbert, who is in insurance, and I had been playing a conversational game. None of us was very good at golf, but we liked to talk.

We discussed sex, politics, God, and business. It was about as rousing a bull session as anyone could have on a day that was too hot for deep thinking.

Finally we got around to science, and in this field Gid and I did most of the talking. Finally Dan said: "I wish you'd come over to the house some night and help my son out in his high school science course, Joe. He asks the damnedest questions."

"Better let his teacher straighten him out," I said. "There's so much in science today that's controversial, I might confuse young Dan, instead of helping him."

"You could at least spend five minutes explaining the Einstein theory to him," said Dan.

Gideon almost choked with laughter. "Five minutes!" he screamed.

"What's so funny about that? Didn't Einstein say that time was a dimension, or something like that?"

Gideon sobered immediately. "Einstein, Minkowski and everyone else notwithstanding, time is not a dimension," he said; "and I can prove it."

I was curious about this statement, but on a golf course with a couple of people who probably thought nine-tenths of science was nutty anyhow, I didn't ask questions. But I filed the statement away in my mind and listened.

"What is a dimension, anyhow?" Gideon asked; being purely rhetorical in his question, he gave the answer. "We say there are three of them, length, breadth and thickness. There are other names such as depth, height, and so on, but there are three for most practical purposes."

He paused and picked up his golf ball. "Now I defy you to tell me which diameter of this ball is length, and which is breadth, and which is thickness!"

"It depends on which way you hold it," said Herb.

"That's right. There's no distinguishable difference, except an arbitrary standard, depending on which way you look at something. You can

substitute the terms, length and breadth and thickness for any dimension and it doesn't make a dime's worth of difference in an object like a golf ball. But you can tell time from any other dimension."

That satisfied Dan and Herb, but it didn't satisfy me. But as I said, this wasn't the time and place—speaking of dimensions—to discuss it.

DAN AND Herb had to hurry back to town on business, and so after we'd showered and dressed, Gid and I had a bottle of beer and I brought up the subject again.

"You're not thinking about revising Einstein are you, Gid?" I asked. Gideon was young, only about thirty, and full of enthusiasm; but he lacked a lot of experience which tells us older people to go slow when you clear ground for a new building.

Gideon laughed. "It's a pet hobby of mine," he said. "People are always coming up with the statement that time is a fourth dimension. Actually no scientific man says that it is. Time can be treated as a dimension in mathematics—but if time *is* a dimension it is altogether different from any other dimension. As I pointed out, the other dimensions are almost identical in physical properties."

"You said 'almost,'" I reminded; "isn't that an understatement?"

"No." Gideon sipped his beer. "There is a difference. I tell you what, Joe. The explanation is long and involved, but extremely fascinating—e s p e c i a l l y to a mathematician like you. Instead of getting ourselves overheated, let's table the matter. The next cool day, drop around to my house and I'll have something to show you."

"Okay," I said. "It's a date." Then I grinned. "One thing that b o t h e r s me though," I said, "is how you can say that time is not a dimension because it is different, and then argue that there are differences in the other dimensions."

"It does sound conflicting," he said with a laugh. "Actually, it isn't. You can examine a Negro, a Mongolian and a Caucasian and determine that, in spite of superficial differences, they're basically the same. But if you try to apply the same yardstick to a gorilla, you'll get into trouble."

"All right," I said. "So time's a gorilla."

MAYBE I was wrong, but at the time I figured

Gideon was just a young fellow with more enthusiasm than stable ideas; I'd almost forgotten our conversation when he brought up the subject again, when I met him on the campus in the fall.

The semester had started, but the football team was going out of town the next weekend, so he invited me over to his place the following Saturday afternoon.

Strangely, I looked forward to the date. Perhaps subconsciously I feared that he might come up with something, and my science of mathematics might become obsolete overnight. However, had I been sensible I could have easily reassured myself that no matter what happens in the other sciences, mathematics is unapt to change much in fundamentals. All mathematics goes back to the fact that normally man has ten digits on his two hands. Even if some mutation changes this, we can hardly conceive of ten being anything else but ten.

But mathematics has come up a long, spiral path. It goes much farther than ten, and it has invaded abstractions such as the square root of minus one, and certain kinds of decimals that can't be explained. And in mathematics we can play around in the fourth dimension—even the fifth and the sixth dimension—without being hauled off to the laughing academy.

The higher you go in mathematics, the stranger the world seems. The stability of figures is not perpetual. There's some strange kind of gravity that makes it impossible to build your cubes and pyraminds and spheres into infinity. Surprisingly enough, you can find one kind of infinity exceeding another kind, and one kind of zero being less than another kind. Laymen find this sort of thing somewhat ridiculous, but a mathematician can talk about it with a straight face.

GIDEON lived in a small house, not far from the campus. A housekeeper came in every morning and straightened up the places that a man finds hard to keep in order; otherwise, Gideon kept house for himself. He did his own cooking, and he had a laboratory fixed up in the basement. I'd seen the lab many times, but since I am a mathematician, my interest in physics is purely academic.

He was waiting for me with a cocktail in his hand as he opened the door. We drank the cocktails—Manhattans, I think, but I've forgotten—then went to his laboratory.

It was well kept from a man's viewpoint. A woman

might have looked with askance at the dust, the oil spots and the worn paint, but a woman's standard of neatness is different from a man's. Everything in the laboratory was in its right place, where Gideon knew where to find it. That's my idea of good housekeeping.

My eyes focussed at once on a complicated piece of apparatus in one corner. I noticed it because it was so different from anything within my experience that my curiosity almost boiled.

It wasn't the vacuum tubes, the wires, the dials and stuff that were mounted on a sort of control box underneath it. It was a sort of shimmering L of iridescence that seemed to hang over it.

"Before we start," Gideon said, "let's review a few facts, just to make sure our minds are synchronized." He motioned to a stool in front of a laboratory bench and while I perched on it, he brought out a wooden box and sat down on top of it.

"When I started out on this thing," he said, gesturing toward the machine, "I shared the popular view that time actually was a dimension. And then I ran into a blind alley when I stumbled onto the argument on the golf-course. Time is easily distinguished from length, breadth and thickness because it is different.

"But I remembered some things about atoms. Right-hand and left-hand atoms, and how they seem to do tricks in another dimension. So I set out to find differences in the three dimensions. It wasn't easy." He laughed. "I found some that are exceedingly difficult to explain, because the Fitzgerald contraction has an application in varying dimensions that makes these differences hard to discover."

He reached into a drawer and pulled out a battered notebook.

"Here are the mathematics," he said; "you can read it better than I can explain it."

I glanced over the figures. I'll admit that I didn't check them clear through; it would have taken days to do that. But fundamentally, he had given Euclidean geometry a mortal wound. No one would ever be able to say again that two parallel lines never meet, or repeat any other axiom as such.

He showed, according to his figures, minute differences between pure length, and pure breadth, and pure thickness. Using his figures, it would be possible to sort out the different dimensions of a sphere as easily as one might sort out different

strands of colored yarn.

"Your mathematics seems all right," I said, "but there's a big step between the world of figures and the world of fact."

"I found that out," Gideon said, "when I tried to construct my machine. I called it the Time Meter, simply for want of another name. I think I mentioned before that when I started to work on this thing, I was convinced that Time was a dimension."

He got up off the box and walked over to the machine. I started to follow, but he motioned me back. "High voltage," he said; "you're safer where you are. And I assure you, there's no sleight of hand about what I'm going to show you." He turned and motioned toward the shimmering L. "Does that look strange to you?"

"It certainly does. Somehow, it doesn't look real."

"It's as real as a lightning bolt or a ray of sunshine," said Gideon. "In view of the fact that I'm dealing with some curious dimensions, I had to construct my figures from energy instead of wire, or plastic, or other substances. What you see here seems to be a right angle that glows; actually it's two cubes."

I looked at it. There was nothing cube-like about the business. It was simply two straight lines, joined at a right angle, and I told him so.

He laughed. "Supposing they're two lines, as you say—at least you'll admit they're not parallel."

"From a Euclidean standpoint, they're not because they meet," I said. "But your mathematics sort of upsets that—"

"Euclidean concepts hold true on relatively small surfaces," he said. "These lines are not parallel, and even if they were, you'll have to admit that they meet at one point."

"Unless my eyes deceive me."

"Therefore, two one-dimensional lines can have one point in common. If they were cubes, which you do not admit, they might have a surface in common, or if they were planes, they might have one dimension in common. Is that correct, mathematically?"

"Yes."

"But it is also possible for two cubes to have one dimension in common?"

I could imagine a cube upended on one corner so that a single edge touched the surface of a second cube. So I said: "Yes."

"Even a point in common?"

In this case, a cube would be turned so that one corner touched the surface of the

second cube. I nodded.

"Now in constructing my cubes, which you see simply as single lines, I used three dimensions. But neither cube is made of the same dimensions because I was able from my figures to deduce what qualifications a fourth dimension must have in order to exist.

"Cube No. 1, which is the one you see as a line parallel to the floor, consists of width, thickness and Elsewhere. Elsewhere is the other dimension, since I have discovered that it cannot be time. Cube No. 2, which is the upright line that is visible, consists of length, thickness and Elsewhere. Since they each have two dimensions in common, they are touching on a plane surface."

"But they're not cubes and touch only at a point," I insisted. "My eyes tell me that."

"Your eyes cannot see Elsewhere, and the thickness is the line connecting with Elsewhere in each case, so it cannot be seen beyond a microscopic segment in which it vanishes."

"Then it's a question of whether I should believe my eyes or your logic?"

"No," said Gideon; "believe what I'm about to show you."

HE TURNED a switch on the control panel. There was a hum of electric current and the vacuum tubes glowed. Then he set a stop-watch, which had an unusually large dial which I could read from where I sat, on the panel. He pointed to a button.

"When I press this," he said, "the cubes—or what you see—will disappear because I will have removed one of the dimensions of contact. After that the cubes will exist as twin planes—one being of width and thickness, the other as length and thickness. The question is, therefore, what dimension is Elsewhere? If it is time, the cubes will cease to exist in time and vanish completely. Time will stand still for them, and when they reappear they will be behind us in time and never able to catch up with us. If Elsewhere is not time, they will reappear just as they are now because your mathematics can easily show that a dimension can be removed and replaced without losing the figure, unless time is involved."

"Before you press the button," I asked, "tell me how you know they are cubes? How do you know there is an invisible dimension in their construction?"

"By the same way man has figured out the distance to the moon," said Gideon; "he

knows his mathematics is right."

I resolved then to check his figures.

He pressed the button. The cubes faded from view and the second hand on the stop watch started to move. For twenty seconds the hands moved forward, then Gideon pressed the button again.

Out of nothing came the shimmering light of the iridescent L. But this was not all.

For a single second I thought I saw a face—a human face—a woman's face staring at us from between the divided lines of the L!

I looked quickly at Gideon, but he had turned his head and apparently had not seen her.

"The fourth dimension, couldn't be time," he said, "or the cubes would not reappear."

I was staring at the spot where the apparition had vanished. I raised my hand and pointed. "That face!" I said hoarsely. "Staring at us!"

He turned quickly, and when he turned back he wore a perplexed smile. "You're having hallucinations, Joe," he said; "I don't see any face."

"It's gone now." I described it, tried to convince him of what I saw, but he didn't seem to believe me.

"Next you'll be saying, after the manner of all mystery stories, that I'm fooling around with something we'd be better off leaving alone," he said.

"I'm only telling you what I saw. And I might add, it didn't look dangerous to me; if I were your age, I'd want to see it often."

"You're not too old for ideas along that line," Gideon said. "But to return to our experiment. If the dimension is not time, what is time? Time certainly has dimensional characteristics, but it's still a gorilla. And what is the gorilla of the dimension family? It's the point! The point is the zero dimension; it's a single, spaceless spot. An infinite number of points make a line, an infinite number of lines make a plane, an infinite number of planes make a solid. But how can something of zero size reach to infinity? It's simply because there is no zero any more than there's infinity."

"I have been broke," I said; "I know there's a zero."

"We're not talking about the same things," said Gideon. "You're talking about money; I'm talking about dimensions. And I'm saying, that the reason time can be treated as a dimension is that it is a part of all dimensions, even Elsewhere. It's part of the king-

dom of the dimensions, just as man and the gorilla are both a part of the animal kingdom."

Suddenly the shimmering L seemed to change. The upright arm of the figure seemed to squirm and the lower bar s med to writhe. Then the iridescence seemed to grow and flow outward like a cloud, enveloping Gideon from head to foot. I darted forward, and tried to reach the instrument panel, but something seemed to bar my path. That emanation was as solid as a brick wall.

While I was still screaming, Gideon reappeared. His face was covered with sweat, and he seemed to have difficulty breathing. "You know, Joe," he said, when he caught his breath, "maybe there's no such thing as time travel, but there's certainly going to be such a thing as travel in hyperspace!"

I knew what he was talking about. "Did you see her?"

"I certainly did! And she's got a machine like mine; I'm going back there someday."

You don't have to believe this. I'm only staking my mathematical reputation on it.

★

THE LAST WORD

THIS DEPARTMENT is for you, our readers, and is a vehicle for airing your opinions. We shall publish as many letters in each issue as space allows, and it makes no difference whether they are complimentary, or whether the editor is lambasted for what you think was an error of judgement in selecting stories. If you want to argue with an author, or with other letter-writers, here is an open forum for you

While the editor may comment upon a given opinion, and may express one or two of his own at times, this is your department, and you have the last word. And whether your letter is published or not, rest assured that your opinions are read carefully and taken into consideration. All suggestions for improvement are welcome, and we will follow them wherever feasible.

WITHOUT MALICE

Dear Editor:

Let me say first of all that you have a very fine magazine here. I won't say it is the best because I do not read any of the others; my reading time is limited and *Science Fiction Stories* satisfies my occasional interest in fiction of this type. So long as you keep appearing, and keep up the standard you've set, you'll have me as a customer whether I write in or not.

The occasion for writing now is the little notice that appeared on page 101 of your July issue where you say you are going to start a readers' department publishing letters from readers and, I assume, fans. Now let me assure you that I hold no grudge against science fiction fans and I'm all for their being fans and being devoted to science fiction. Whether they might better spend their time in other activities is not for me to say; at any rate, the newspapers indicate that a lot of youngsters are spending their time in much worse kinds of activity. The science fiction fans may make themselves ridiculous just about every time they get themselves and their doings into print, but at least its healthy hi-jinks. And while the association between my own reading matter and such nonsense may make me wince at times, I'd vote in favor of them if it ever came to a point where a vote was to be taken and mine meant anything.

What I mean is—I've nothing against them so long as I do not have to come into contact with them. Some years back, I read a few issues of another science fiction magazine, whose title I do not recall; I do, however, very well recall the pages in small print in the back devoted to innumerable effusions from these publicity-mad juveniles. The first few were amusing, then it became irritating and finally nauseating. For one letter which showed some semblance of sense and intelligent comment there were ten or more that read like the outpourings of mental cases on a psychiatrist's couch—or am I thinking of psycho-analyst?

Never could get the two differentiated properly.

Apparently these fans know more about writing fiction than authors, more about drawing and painting than artists, more about science than scientists, more about literature than critics, and more about editing and publishing magazines than editors and publishers. Modest little souls that they are, they just know that their half-baked opinions about anything and everything—particularly sex, religion, philosophy and politics—are just what the world is waiting eagerly to hear.

Well, as long as they confine their gush and guff to their own publications, circulated among themselves for their own mutual admiration, I've no kick.

But I shudder at the thought of seeing such drivel contaminating a magazine like *Science Fiction Stories*. I can feel tolerant about a story now and then that I don't like—even one which strikes me as being totally worthless—but not the shrill yammering of adolescents with delusions of being the super race. Please don't do *this* to your faithful readers.

This isn't written for publication, or to see my name in print, but if you want to print it, that's all right. I'm not afraid to sign my name to this and have it run under my name—but kindly omit the address. I haven't the time for extensive correspondence and don't care to waste my time arguing the point. The records speak for themselves.

LEWIS BARROW

Since the editor was once a fan, and had his share of letters in earlier issues of science fiction magazines, we'll keep a discreet silence on this subject.

QUERY

Dear Editor:

I enjoyed the story "Decoy" in the July issue, but there is something strangely familiar about it. I do not mean that I have read this particular story before, but I wonder if Mr. Christopher has written other stories dealing with these same characters, or with the same social setup he uses here.

MARTIN SCHELLENBERG,
Brooklyn, New York

The story you have in mind may be "In The Balance", which appeared in the July 1951 *issue of* Future. *Perhaps some reader can tell us if there have been other stories in this series published in England; I don't know of any here. Christopher is a British author, who has also appeared under the name of C. S. Youd.*

NO MORE TRIAL

Dear Editor:

A heartfelt thanks for changing the type and reverting to double-columns in *Science Fiction Stories*. Actually the small type you use for departments in the Quarterly is easier to read, in double columns, than was the type in the first three bi-monthly issues of SFS. I know that readers who are always asking the editor to do this and that can be a trial, but believe me, it was a trial for this reader at least to read the type in the January, March, and May issues. For one thing, if it didn't print cleanly, the pages looked awfully messy and some pages did come out blurred.

Despite touches of eyestrain, such stories as "The Pattern" by Boyd Ellanby; "The Ear Friend"

by R. E. Banks; "Last Stand" by Algis Budrys; and "Live In Amity" by D. A. Jourdan made it worth the effort—and the other stories weren't bad at all, most of them. But "Perfectly Adjusted" in your July issue was even more delightful for the fact that I had no trouble reading it. Nuff said.

JERRY CANDLER
Rangely, Maine

Our proofreader claimed that the type set straight across the page, as it was in our early issues, was easier to read than double columns, but a number of readers have disagreed. Of course, we listened more closely to the cash customers.

ACCOLADE

Dear Editor:

I knew you couldn't keep a good man down—and the good man this time is RWL himself. I'm referring to your editorial, "Want Ad", and the indication that *Science Fiction Stories* is blossoming out with departments.

By all means, have a letter department, and continue the book reviews. I'd vote against the fan magazine reviews, though, because so many other magazines also have them—besides, Bob Madle does it well enough in the Quarterly, so far as your publications are concerned.

But no one else has *your* editorials, and no other newsstand magazine has Damon Knight's book reviews. Don't let him get away, please!

NAN WARNER
New Canaan, Conn.

Well, the letter department is here; just what comes of it depends upon you readers.

CALLING M. C. PEASE

Dear Editor:

I put down your July issue with a sigh of content and then something struck me—something was missing from this issue. What, I asked myself. Worriedly, I went to my bookshelves and took out my treasured copies of the first five issues and looked through them.

Finally it dawned on me—so obvious that I hadn't noticed it. *There was no story by M. C. Pease in this issue.*

Horrors, good sir, what has happened. Has Mr. Pease stopped writing? Has he met with some ghastly accident?

Of course this is sort of spoofing. I'm sure Mr. Pease doesn't imagine himself to be the greatest author ever, and I'll admit that there are better—but somehow, seeing him on the covers of five successive issues, and reading five stories in succession, all of them good and a couple outstanding—I got the feeling that he "belonged". Your July issue somehow seems incomplete. Let's see—could there be some pages missing from my copy? No—all here.

Well, I just wanted you and Mr. Pease to know that I missed him, and I hope he'll be back soon. "Telestassis", which was the last story of his that I read, had a real punch to it.

LOUISE HUDSON
Bronx, New York

We'll have to send an expedition out for Pease—but perhaps your letter will bring him out of hiding. Next to being published and paid,

writers like best to be missed when they aren't published.

SEQUAL WANTED

Dear Editor:

I vastly enjoyed Dickson's "Perfectly Adjusted", in the July SFS. The main reason I liked it was that the hero wasn't pretty and built like an idealized American. He had faults, was sensitive about his physical imperfections —in short, an altogether believable and human character. I also liked very much the satire inherent in the presentation of the two groups of people on the world where he was forced to land. I only hope that Dickson can be prevailed upon to write a sequal to the story. His adventures on the planet for which he was originally bound would be even more delightful. And four or five of these adventures would make an excellent book. Prod him, RWL, prod him.

RICHARD GEIS
Portland, Oregon

I'd say there was no prod like this kind of letter from a reader; anyone else agree?

"STAHL" ORDERS

Dear Editor:

As one who has recently returned to the United States after a long and extended stay in Europe, I would like to ask a few questions.

The role of science fiction in the reader interest polls seems to have blazed up in a field of national glory and now is sinking down to a matter of a few short flashes of light, and a sodden murmur of grumbles of the "good old days". Let me point out a thing or two before I ask my questions.

When I left the United States to return to Germany, in the "grand old year of 1939", the field of science-fiction was a small and limited field of publishing. The readers were mostly broken into two classes—the solid tried and true "buy anything" type, and the biters and tasters. The latter made up of a few that seemed to come and go. There was little complaint for anything except the demand for more and wider fields. I returned to the fold recently, and there seemed to be a wealth of this type of fiction on the market. I enjoyed each and every magazine and I found little to complain of. Time passed and I noted that every once in a while there was a vacant place on the news stand; one by one the magazines began to drop out of publication. The big question seemed to be, what happened? Did the readers lose interest? Did this type of fiction price itself out of the market?

The detective story was hurled into its place in the American publishing field by the reader interest stirred by World War I, and it maintained itself and became "respectable". Science-fiction had its chance and it seems to have flopped. *"The Death of a Dream"* seems to have arrived in the area of this fiction field.

There are several reasons why. I feel that I might be able to place the finger on one or two of them due to the fact that I was gone so long that, when I returned, the United States as a whole seemed like a different country than the one that I left. During the war, in the German air force we were given at time what were known as *"stahl"* orders. *"Steel,"* orders. In short, they meant two things: these orders would NOT be changed, and they were usually issued for a last ditch stand or "stand fast". Thus we called them

"stahl". This is what has happened to science-fiction for over five years. They have been under (editors & writers) "stahl" orders. They will not accept change. Each editor seems to feel that he has reached the extent of the reader market, and that there are only so many 25 cent pieces and 35 cent buyers to be spread out over a large amount of magazines; thus we must "stand fast". There has even been a seeking on the part of several editors of a return to the "good old days of SF". I am unaware of just what is meant by that.

The inroads made by the social examination type of fiction seems to have convinced a great many editors that that was the only type of story that the reader wished to see on the pages of his magazine. Thus a great many stories were dredged up out of authors' reject files and re-submitted and sold. They were, and are, not good fiction and are being rejected in the most unprofitable place—on the news stand.

The great attention paid to a neat looking magazine seems to have helped place the first of these in a solid position with a large share of the fans. However, it has been some time now since one could pick up a copy of *Astounding* or *Galaxy* and find a "new" type of story. The same story is re-run issue after issue and I find that my own long unslaked thirst for SF coming to a halt with these so-called leaders. The question here seems to be, did the fancy new format demand so much money that they failed to pay the authors a proper sum. Or did it just take up so much of the editors' and publishers' time, that quality came second? The latter, I think.

Space opera (and there is nothing wrong with it) seems to have gone the same way. Same story over and over, attempts to change the format at the expense of the story material and finally out of business. It has become a well-trod path. *Planet Stories* and your magazines have also accepted the "stahl" orders, and in an effort to see the trees in the forest have cut expenses by going on a quarterly, semi-quarterly basis that leaves the customer so confused that he does not know when or where he will see his favorite magazine again.

I realize that a great share of the editors' and publishers' time and concern must be granted to sales figures; and that if these fail to show a proper profit, then there is a reaction and a change of policy somewhere along that magazine's efforts to reach its market. This is plain business and cannot be avoided. There should, however, be some thought granted to an investment along a new and different line. There must be some way of breaking the "stahl" orders that have been issued.

The demand of the editor must cease along certain lines. The criteria for buying or not buying must be changed if the magazines now in the field are to survive. What method must an editor use to select his next batch of material? Not the old *Will it Sell?* method, but a new concept must be examined. Will it sustain its sales over a granted period of time? This also must not be used in grading these stories. Has it a repeatable theme? This must go also.

Authors are pictured in literature as being a hungry lot and I feel that this is good. They seem to be too fat right now. Fat pilots are poor pilots, and make poor killer pilots; I feel that this will also apply to authors. The editors should demand the same from their authors as they would from

a merchant, "Give me new and dependable quality or I lower the price I am willing to pay". I mean that a few new and hungry writers could do a lot for the field in the way of being original. The devil with "name" writers that re-copy their old stuff over and over again; let's see some new names—and, more important, new IDEAS. Original IDEAS.

Your own stable of magazines fall under some of the above comments, as well as your editors. I mean by this that "if the shoe fits..." Your August 1955 issue of *Science Fiction Quarterly* is filled to the brim with "repeats" and reader departments to the skies. It is indicative of the gross attempt to placate, not win, the reader. I am sorry, of course if these comments are harsh; I feel that they are true.

I know that this series of comments is overly long and I did not intend to make them so; but I regret what has been happening to the SF field as a whole, and feel that there is room for comment.

There is one other field that should be examined. I was greatly pleased to find that the paperbound book had developed a large market for the novel, in the field of SF. Lately, there seems to have been some slants of salesmanship brought into this area that are not good. A case in point: recently I found a double story paperbound book. Two new titles and a rather good cover. I bought it. I reached home only to find that I had read both stories under different titles years ago.

There was nothing I could do about it, for down in one section of an inside page were printed the original titles in tiny print. I felt a sense of having been taken for 35 cents in any event. This is one method of sales that the paperbacks have been forced into. Another method is to pile a booklet full of "old masters" and former rejects and then hail it as a new and valuable addition to the field. Even I am beginning to pass those up and I seldom ever pass up any of the material offered.

To sum up, the field needs a rash of new authors and maybe new editors. There has to be some pressure emplaced at certain points by the editors, and this will give best results if placed on the pocketbooks of the writers. The editor must begin and continue a tougher policy of examination for each story. The editor must remember at all times that at the present rate of travel it boils down to either fat writers and hungry editors or vice versa. The demand must be ever and ever for NEW, NEW, NEW material. New authors must not be rejected merely because their names are unknown to the field, nor older hands accepted for the value of their names.

I do not feel that this long letter is too far out of place. I may be wrong, but the cards are as I have called them, I believe. Sorry, if I have crushed any toes or feelings.

ERIC von FREIHAUF
Pullman, Washington

There's a great deal in what you have to say, enough to cause a bit of just discomfort, but some of it is oversimplified. The deadliest "stahl" order in science fiction publishing (except in such few instances where a publication is deliberately slanted for the least discriminating, least intelligent audience) is the deadline. With the best will in the world, the most money to offer, and the corresponding time and ability to work with authors, an editor still has to settle for the best he can get by deadline time. And if a

given editor gives out with paens now and then, in reference to a certain story or author, it's understandable; at last he's got just what he wanted. More often, as with Toscanini in the performance of Beethoven's 9th Symphony that he finally consented to release, the editor has to mutter to himself, "I'm almost satisfied"; sometimes, even while saying sincerely that he uses the best—the best available to him, of course—he can but nod sadly when a perceptive reader points out that the best is none too good.

With pocket books, you have to remember that these are slanted for a much larger audience than that which buy magazines. While a science fiction magazine publisher, these days, would be pleased at a 100,000 *per issue sale, a pocket-book publisher cannot begin to breathe freely under the half-million mark. The vast majority of those who buy the double-books you mention have not read the selections in magazines—and I'd risk a bet that they've never read the science fiction magazines at all, at least prior to picking up the pocket books. We all hope that such introductions will send some more customers looking for magazines.*

WRITERS TO BLAME?

Dear Editor:

I picked up your July issue recently, and was very sorry to see that you, like so many other editors, are blaming the writers for the current slump in science fiction. The little black line on the sales graph begins to take a nose-dive, your bookkeeper starts to write in red ink, and you start to get panicky. Somebody's head will roll for this, you bluster.

And whom do you pick on? The poor writer.

Nertz.

To say that a slump such as the one which is currently hitting science fiction is the fault of one group out of many different groups is sheer idiocy. Admittedly the average story today is a bit lower in quality than it was four or five years ago, but that alone isn't enough to scare away the readers. There must be other contributing factors, don't you think?

I know I do, and I think you editors have had as much, or more, to do with it than the bedraggled writers that you say are at fault. Take Campbell of *Astounding*, for instance. He had said many times that his current editorial policy is to get as many stories as he can which deal with "Psi" and "Esp". To me, this is a lousy idea.

No matter what it is, be it space opera, fantasy tales, doomsday prophecies, religion, or whatever, if you continue to print that same unvarying type of story, time after time after time, people are going to get sick of it.

That's what's wrong with the current crop of science fiction: too many stories are similar. The reader can just about tell how the stories are going to go after reading the opening paragraphs. What science fiction needs now is a little variety.

Variety is what made writers like Bradbury, Farmer, and Matheson popular. When they first began to appear, the style of their tales was so different from any previous writers', that they were automatically sensations.

New, different writers made the science fiction boom in 1950, but they certainly aren't the reason for the slump. They have helped, but then so have the editors, artists, and fans. Everybody is guilty

to a certain degree, and it will take mutual co-operation to stage a science fiction comeback.

Enough of this; let's talk about the July *Science Fiction Stories* a little. I thought it was a pretty good one; nothing overly spectacular, but good solid entertainment. Gordon Dickson's novel, "Perfectly Adjusted" was without doubt one of the *funniest* science fiction yarns that I have read in many a moon. More like this one would suit yours truly just fine.

Tops in the short department were Phillip Dick's "Service Call" and "The Wilhelm Spot" by Les Cole. I was particularly disappointed with Eric Frank Russell's story; it was certainly below his usual high standards. As for "Decoy", well...

I've already told you what I think of your editorial, but I don't want to pass up Damon Knight's book reviews. As per usual, Mr. Knight is a blunt, to-the-point person, and gives a completely impartial review to each and every book he mentions. Congrats to him! (Sure uses up a lot of space for only three books, though.)

Finally, we have the matter of whether or not there should be a letter section in *Science Fiction Stories*. As you can readily see, I'm heartily in favor of one. To my way of thinking, a letter department is one of the most vital parts of any magazine, because it is what gives said magazine its individuality. The personalities and opinions of both readers and editor are brought out in a letter department.

KENT MOOMAW,
Cincinnati, Ohio.

If you'll re-read that editorial carefully, I think you'll find that, although writers were assigned some measure of responsibility for the slump in the quality of current science fiction (and thus with the slump in sales), the lion's share of the blame was directed toward producers who, through ignorance and/or lack of care, demanded inferior goods. Writers cannot be blamed for taking easy money; however, it's the critic's job, when making an analysis to state the case bluntly when he sees that it has happened.

MEDALS FOR KNIGHT

Dear Editor:

Thought your review of Damon Knight's "Hell's Pavement" was first rate, and can quite understand your wanting to have your own say on the novel. It seems appropriate, too, that an editor as literate as yourself should com-

ment on a major work by his magazines' top reviewer. A single remark: Damon himself has intimated that there was no cutting in his mss. by the publisher; aside from that, I concur with your opinions and observations completely.

I liked the looks of the September *Science Fiction Stories* very much; Luros is doing a good job of wrapping up your editorial work. The flat white background used for the Emsh painting is very effective, and the addition of "The Original" to the title should aid newsstand appeal, in its own subtle way. The interiors by Freas were delectable, as always...

It's good to see the departments back so soon, when it looked as though they were to be barred from the magazine for good. And a de Camp article for the next issue! Things are looking up...

I have no particular comment on the fiction, this time. I enjoyed Winterbotham's "Oldest Man in the World" as much for the author's bland insouciance in handling his future society as for his rather feeble twist at the end. I thought "The Three Spacemen" by George Hudson Smith a surprisingly frank and stripped-down retelling of one of the oldest of secret fan daydreams; physical handicaps being as prevalent as they are among fans; aside from that, the story belonged in a fan magazine. I liked Lesser's "Farewell, Mr. Ridley" for the good writing, but found the ending definitely downbeat, inasmuch as I strongly disagree with Mr. Lesser in regard to the virtues of "Appolonian" societies as contrasted to the vices of "Dinoysian" societies. Algis Budrys has a novelet in the July *Astounding* depciting an "Apollonian" Earth as a going concern; I hope Mr. Lesser reads it. Merwin's "Day After Fear" is the best thing in the issue, though lacking any thematic relation to science fiction. I couldn't seem to interest myself in the Dickson novel; perhaps it's the heat.

Hmm, I seem to have had more comments to make than I thought.

Your "Trends in Science Fiction" was engaging and provocative; I was especially delighted with your crack in the concluding sentence of your remarks on Conklin's "Superscience of Man" category. As usual, I find myself in general agreement with you, and look forward to your comments on the sociological science fiction story. Damon's reviews were more than usually interesting to me this time in that he has brought two books to my attention which I had been inclined to overlook as probably unimportant: "The Long Way Back" and "Hole in Heaven", I was surprised to find that he found anything to praise in Finney's "The Body Snatchers", though—I found the novel so unreadable that I had to battle my way through every page in order to review it for *Fantasy Times.*

BILL BLACKBEARD,
Flushing, New York.

You really should try "No More Barriers" again when the weather cools... Space is hereby reserved and the welcome mat rolled out for Milt Lesser, if he want to argue his "Apollonian-Dionysian" society case. And it's a wide-open battle, so any of you readers who want to join the fray are cordially invited to buckle on your armor and charge in. The editor will heckle and count corpses.

★

—Continued from Back Cover

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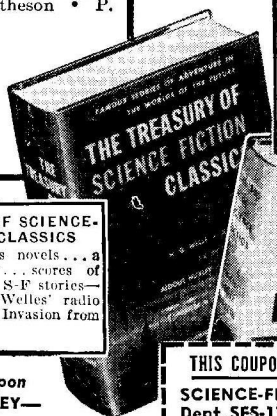

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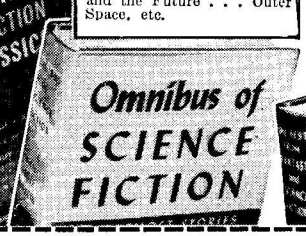

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