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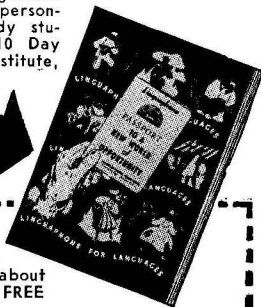
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# EDITORIAL

## NOTHING

## IF NOT PERSONAL



**A** READER who assures me that he never misses any of Damon Knight's book reviews goes on to say, "...but there is one thing that I don't care much for, and that is the way some of these reviewers get personal and downright insulting to the author at times. Mr. Knight is far from the only offender in this respect and I'm sorry to have to add that you have not always been free from this vice when you've reviewed books yourself. I'm in favor of close examination of the subject, but can't we be objective about it?"

The answer is that the critic *cannot* be impersonal and objective.

Near the end of the 19th Century, a now-famous gentleman who was then criticising music and musical performances noted, in part, that the critic "should not know anybody: his hand should be against every man, and every man's hand against his. Artists insatiable by the richest and most frequent doses of praise; entrepreneurs

greedy for advertisement; people without reputations who want to beg or buy them ready made; the rivals of the praised; the friends, relatives, partisans, and patrons of the damned..." all these have a grudge against the critic. And the writer further notes: "People have pointed out evidences of personal feeling in my notices as if they were accusing me of a misdemeanor, not knowing that a criticism written without personal feeling is not worth reading. It is the capacity for making good or bad art a personal matter that makes a man a critic...when people do less than their best, and do that less at once badly and self-complacently, I hate them, loathe them, detest them, long to tear them limb from limb and strew them in gobbets..."

**F**URTHER, he states, "The true critic, I repeat, is the man who becomes your personal enemy on  
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*Having mastered probability lanes, man found an indefinite number of Earths—and everyone could have a planet all to himself, if he wanted. But there was one joker in the deal . . .*

# LIVING SPACE

by ISAAC ASIMOV

illustrated by EMSH

**C**LARENCE RIMBRO had no objections to living in the only house on an uninhabited planet, any more than had any other of Earth's even trillion of inhabitants.

If someone had questioned him concerning possible objections, he would undoubtedly have stared blankly at the questioner. His house was much larger than any house could possibly be on Earth—proper, and much more modern. It had its independent air-supply and water-supply; ample food in its freezing compartments. It was isolated from the lifeless planet on which it was located by a force-field, but the rooms were built about a five-acre farm (under glass, of course)

which, in the planet's beneficent sunlight, grew flowers for pleasure and vegetables for health. It even supported a few chickens. It gave Mrs. Rimbros something to do with herself afternoons, and a place for the two little Rimbros to play when they were tired of indoors.

Furthermore, if one *wanted* to be on Earth-proper; if one insisted on it; if one *had* to have people around, and air one could breathe in the open, or water to swim in—one had only to go out of the front door of the house.

So where was the difficulty?

Remember, too, that on the lifeless planet on which the Rimbros house was located there was complete silence except for the occasional monotonous effects of wind and rain. There was absolute privacy and the feeling of absolute ownership of two hundred million square miles of planetary surface.

**C**LARENCE RIMBROS appreciated all that in his distant way. He was an accountant, skilled in handling very advanced computer models; precise in his manners and clothing; not given much to smiling beneath his thin, well-kept mustache, and properly aware of his own worth.

When he drove from work toward home, he passed the occasional dwelling-place on Earth-proper and he never ceased to stare at them with a certain smugness.

Well, either for business reasons or due to mental perversion, some people simply had to live on Earth-proper. It was too bad for them. After all, Earth-proper's soil had to supply the minerals and basic food supply for all the trillion of inhabitants (in fifty years, it would be two trillion) and space was at a premium. Houses on Earth-proper just *couldn't* be any bigger than that; and people who had to live in them had to adjust to the fact.

Even the process of entering his house had its mild pleasantness. Rimbros would enter the community twist-place to which he was assigned (it looked, as did all such, like a rather stumpy obelisk) and there he would invariably find others waiting to use it. Still more would arrive before he reached the head of the line. It was a sociable time.

"How's your planet?" "How's yours?" The usual small talk. Sometimes someone would be having trouble—machinery breakdowns, or serious weather that would



alter the terrain unfavorably. Not often.

But conversational clichés passed the time; then Rimbrowould be at the head of the line. He would put his key into the slot; the proper combination would be punched; and he would be twisted into a new probability pattern—his own particular probability pattern. This was the one assigned him when he married and became a producing citizen—a probability pattern in which life had never developed on Earth. And twisting to this particular lifeless Earth, he would walk into his own foyer.

Just like that.

**R**IMBROW NEVER worried about being in another probability; why should he? He never gave it any thought. There were an infinite number of possible Earths, and each existed in its own niche, its own probability pattern. Since on a planet such as Earth, there was—according to calculation—about a fifty-fifty chance of life's developing, half of all the possible Earths (still infinite, since half of infinity was infinity) possessed life, and half (still infinite) did not. And living on about three hundred billion families, each with its own beautiful house, powered

by the sun of that probability, and each securely at peace. The number of Earths so occupied grew by millions each day.

And then one day, Rimbrow came home and Sandra (his wife) said to him, as he entered, "There's been the most peculiar noise."

Rimbrow's eyebrows shot up and he looked closely at his wife. Except for a certain restlessness of her thin hands and a pale look about the corners of her tight mouth, she looked normal.

Rimbrow said, still holding his topcoat halfway toward the servette that waited patiently for it, "Noise? What noise? I don't hear anything."

"It's stopped now," Sandra said. "Really; it was like a deep thumping or rumble. You'd hear it a bit, then it would stop. Then you'd hear it a bit, and so on. I've never heard anything like it."

Rimbrow surrendered his coat. "But that's quite impossible."

"I heard it."

"I'll look over the machinery," he mumbled. "Something may be wrong."

**N**OTHING was wrong that his accountant's eyes could discover and, with a shrug, Rimbrow went to supper. He listened to the

serviettes hum busily about their different chores, watched one sweep up the plates and cutlery for disposal and recovery, then said, pursing his lips, "Maybe one of the serviettes is out of order. I'll check them."

"It wasn't anything like that, Clarence."

Rimbro went to bed, without further concern over the matter—and wakened with his wife's hand clutching his shoulder. His hand went automatically to the contact-patch that set the walls glowing. "What's the matter? What time is it?"

She shook her head. "Listen! Listen!"

*Good Lord*, thought Rimbro, *there is a noise*. A definite rumbling; it came and went.

"Earthquake?" he whispered. Such things did happen, of course—though with all the planet to choose from, one could generally count on having avoided the faulted areas.

"All day long?" asked Sandra, fretfully. "I think it's something else." And then she voiced the secret terror of every nervous householder. "I think there's someone on the planet with us. This Earth is inhabited."

Rimbro did the logical things. When morning came,

he took his wife and children to his wife's mother. He himself took a day off, and hurried to the Sector's housing Bureau.

He was quite annoyed at all this.

**B**ILL CHING of the Housing Bureau was short, jovial, and proud of his part-Mongolian ancestry. He believed that probability patterns had solved every last one of humanity's problems. Alec Mishnoff, also of the Housing Bureau, thought probability patterns were a snare into which humanity had been hopelessly tempted. Mishnoff had originally majored in archeology, and had studied a variety of antiquarian subjects, with which his delicately-poised head was still crammed. His face managed to look sensitive—despite overbearing eyebrows—and he lived with a pet notion that so far he had dared tell no one, though preoccupation with it had driven him out of archeology and into Housing.

Ching was fond of saying, "The hell with Malthus!" It was almost a verbal trademark of his, "The hell with Malthus; we can't possibly overpopulate now. However frequently we double and redouble, *Homo sapiens* remains finite in number, and the un-



inhabited Earths remain infinite. And we don't have to put one house on each planet; we can put a hundred, a thousand, a million. Plenty of room and plenty of power from each probability sun."

"More than one on a planet?" said Mishnoff, sourly.

Ching knew exactly what Alec meant. When probability patterns had first been put to use, sole ownership of a planet had been a powerful inducement for early settlers. It appealed to the snob and despot in every one. What man so poor, ran the slogan, as not to have an empire larger than Genghis Khan's? To introduce multiple settling now would outrage everyone.

Ching said, with a shrug, "All right, it would take psychological preparation. So what? That's what it took to start the whole deal in the first place."

"And food?" asked Mishnoff.

"You know we're putting hydroponics works and yeast-plants in other probability-patterns. And if we had to, we could cultivate their soil."

"Wearing space-suits and importing oxygen."

"We could reduce carbon dioxide for oxygen till the plants got going and they'd do the job after that."

"Given a million years."

"Mishnoff, the trouble with you," Ching said, "is that you read too many ancient history books. You're an obstructionist."

CHING WAS too good-natured really to mean that, and Mishnoff continued to read books and to worry. Mishnoff longed for the day he could get up the courage necessary to see the Head of the Section and put right out in plain view—bang, like that—exactly what it was that was troubling him.

But now a Mr. Clarence Rimbrow faced them, perspiring slightly, and toweringly angry at the fact that it had taken him the better part of two days to reach this far into the Bureau.

He reached his exposition's climax by saying, "And I say the planet is inhabited and I don't propose to stand for it."

Having listened to his story in full, Ching tried the soothing approach. He said, "Noise like that is probably just some natural phenomenon."

"What kind of natural phenomenon?" demanded Rimbrow. "I want an investigation. If it's a natural phenomenon, I want to know what kind. I say the place is inhabited; it has life on it, by heaven, and I'm not paying

rent on a planet to share it. And with dinosaurs, from the sound of it."

"Come, Mr. Rimbrow, how long have you lived on your Earth?"

"Fifteen and a half years."

"And has there ever been any evidence of life?"

"There is now, and as a citizen with a production record classified as A-1, I demand an investigation."

"Of course we'll investigate, sir; but we just want to assure you now that everything is all right. Do you realize how carefully we select our probability patterns?"

"I'm an accountant; I have a pretty good idea," said Rimbrow at once.

"Then surely you know our computers cannot fail us. They never pick a probability which has been picked before; they can't possibly. And they're geared to select only probability patterns in which Earth has a carbon dioxide atmosphere, one in which plant life—and therefore animal life—has never developed. Because if plants had evolved, the carbon dioxide would have been reduced to oxygen. Do you understand?"

"I understand it all very well, and I'm not here for lectures," said Rimbrow. "I want an investigation out of

you, and nothing else. It is quite humiliating to think I may be sharing my world—my own world—with something or other; I don't propose to endure it."

"No, of course not," muttered Ching, avoiding Mishnoff's sardonic glance. "We'll be there before night."

**THEY WERE** on their way to the twisting-place with full equipment.

Mishnoff said, "I want to ask you something. Why do you go through that 'There's no need to worry, sir' routine? They always worry, anyway; where does it get you?"

"I've got to try. They *shouldn't* worry," said Mishnoff, petulantly. "Ever hear of a carbon dioxide planet that was inhabited? Besides, Rimbrow is the type that starts rumors; I can spot them. By the time he's through, if he's encouraged, he'll say his sun went nova."

"*That* happens sometimes," said Mishnoff.

"So? One house is wiped out and one family dies. See, you're an obstructionist. In the old times—the times *you* like—if there were a flood in China, or someplace, thousands of people would die. And that's out of a population of a measly billion or two."



Mishnoff muttered, "How do you know the Rimbrow planet doesn't have life on it."

"Carbon dioxide atmosphere."

"But suppose—" It was no use; Mishnoff couldn't say it. He finished, lamely, "Suppose plant and animal life develops that can live on carbon dioxide."

"It's never been observed."

"In an infinite number of worlds, anything can happen." He finished that in a whisper "Everything *must* happen."

"Chances are one in a duodecillion," said Ching, shrugging.

They arrived at the twist-point then, and having utilized the freight-twist for their vehicle (thus sending it into the Rimbrow storage area) they entered the Rimbrow probability pattern themselves. First Ching, then Mishnoff.

"A NICE house," said Ching, with satisfaction. "Very nice model; good taste."

"Hear anything?" asked Mishnoff.

"No."

Ching wandered into the garden. "Hey," he yelled; "Rhode Island Reds."

Mishnoff followed, looking up at the glass roof. The sun looked like the sun of a trillion other Earths.

He said, absently, "There could be plant life, just starting out. The carbon dioxide might just be starting to drop in concentration. The computer would never know."

"And it would take millions of years for animal life to begin, and millions more for it to come out of the sea."

"It doesn't have to follow that pattern."

Ching put an arm about his partner's shoulder. "You brood. Some day, you'll tell me what's really bothering you, instead of just hinting; then we can straighten you out."

Mishnoff shrugged off the encircling arm with an annoyed frown. Ching's tolerance was always hard to bear. He began, "Let's not psychotherapize—" He broke off then whispered, "Listen."

There was a distant rumble. Again.

THEY PLACED the seismograph in the center of the room, and activated the force-field that penetrated downward and bound it rigidly to bed-rock. They watched the quivering needle record the shocks.

Mishnoff said, "Surface waves only; very superficial. It's not underground."

Ching looked a little more dismal, "What is it then?"

"I think," said Mishnoff, "we'd better find out." His face was gray with apprehension. "We'll have to set up a seismograph at another point and get a fix on the focus of disturbance."

"Obviously," said Ching. "I'll go out with the other seismograph; you stay here."

"No," said Mishnoff, with energy. "I'll go out."

Mishnoff felt terrified, but he had no choice. If this were it, he would be prepared; he could get a warning through. Sending out an unsuspecting Ching could be disastrous. Nor could he warn Ching, who would certainly never believe him.

But since Mishnoff was not cast in the heroic mold, he trembled as he got into his oxygen suit and fumbled the disrupter, as he tried to dissolve the force-field locally in order to free the emergency exit.

"Any reason you want to go, particularly?" asked Ching, watching the other's inept manipulations. "I'm willing."

"It's all right. I'm going out," said Mishnoff, out of a dry throat, and stepped into the lock that led out onto the desolate surface of a lifeless Earth. A presumably lifeless Earth.

THE SIGHT was not unfamiliar to Mishnoff; he had seen its like dozens of time. Bare rock, weathered by wind and rain, crusted and powdered with sand in the gullies; a small and noisy brook beating itself against its stony course. All brown and gray. No sign of green; no sound of life.

Yet, the sun was the same; and when night fell, the constellations would be the same.

The situation of the dwelling place was in that region which, on Earth-proper, would be called Labrador. (It was Labrador here, too, really. It had been calculated that in not more than one out of a quadrillion or so Earths were there significant changes in the geological development. The continents were everywhere recognizable down to quite small details.)

Despite the situation and the time of the year, which was October, the temperature was sticky warm due to the hothouse effect of the carbon dioxide in this Earth's dead atmosphere.

From inside his suit, through the transparent visor, Mishnoff watched it all somberly. If the epicenter of the noise were close by, adjusting the second seismograph a mile or so away would be enough for the fix. If it

weren't, they would have to bring in an air-scooter. Well, assume the lesser complication to begin with.

Methodically, he made his way up a rocky hillside. Once at the top, he could choose his spot.

Once at the top, puffing and feeling the heat most unpleasantly, he found he didn't have to.

His heart was pounding so that Mishnoff could scarcely hear his own voice as he yelled into his radio mouthpiece, "Hey, Ching, there's construction going on."

"What?" came back the appalled shout in his ears.

**T**HERE WAS no mistake. Ground was being levelled; machinery was at work; rock was being blasted out.

Mishnoff shouted, "They're blasting. That's the noise."

Ching called back, "But it's impossible. The computer would never pick the same probability pattern twice. *It couldn't.*"

"You don't understand—" began Mishnoff.

But Ching was following his own thought processes. "Get over there, Mishnoff. I'm coming out, too."

"No, damn it; you stay there," cried Mishnoff in alarm. "Keep me in radio con-

tact, and for God's sake, be ready to leave for Earth-proper on wings if I give the word."

"Why?" demanded Ching. "What's going on?"

"I don't know yet," said Mishnoff; "give me a chance to find out."

To his own surprise, he noticed that his teeth were chattering.

Muttering breathless curses at the computer, at probability patterns, and at the insatiable need for living space on the part of a trillion human beings expanding in numbers like a puff of smoke, Mishnoff slithered and slipped down the other side of the slope, setting stones to rolling and rousing peculiar echoes.

**A** MAN came out to meet him, dressed in a gas-tight suit, different in many details from Mishnoff's own, but obviously intended for the same purpose—to lead oxygen to the lungs.

Mishnoff gasped breathlessly into his mouthpiece, "Hold it, Ching; there's a man coming. Keep in touch." Mishnoff felt his heart pump more easily and the bellows of his lungs labor less.

The two men were staring at one another. The other man was blond and craggy of face. The look of surprise about



him was too extreme to be feigned.

He said, in a harsh voice, "*Wer sind Sie? Was machen Sie hier?*"

Mishnoff was thunderstruck. He'd studied ancient German for two years in the days when he expected to be an archeologist; and he followed the comment, despite the fact that the pronunciation was not what he had been taught. The stranger was asking his identity and his business there.

Stupidly, Mishnoff stammered, "*Sprechen Sie Deutsch?*" and then had to mutter reassurance to Ching, whose agitated voice in his earpiece was demanding to know what the gibberish was all about.

The German-speaking one made no direct answer. He repeated, "*Wer sind Sie?*" and added impatiently, "*Hier ist fur ein narrischen Spass kein Zeit.*"

Mishnoff didn't feel like a joke, either—particularly not a foolish one—but he continued, "*Sprechen Sie Planetisch?*"

He did not know the German for "Planetary Standard Language" so he had to guess. Too late, he thought he should have referred to it simply as English.

The other man stared wide-

eyed at him. "*Sind Sie wahnsinnig?*"

Mishnoff was almost willing to settle for that; but in feeble self-defense, he said, "I'm not crazy, damn it. I mean, *Auf der Erde woher Sie ist gekom—*"

He gave it up for lack of German, but the new idea that was rattling inside his skull would not quit its nagging. He had to find some way of testing it. He said, desperately, "*Welches Jahr ist es jetzt?*"

Presumably, the stranger—who was questioning his sanity already—would be convinced of Mishnoff's insanity now that he was being asked what year it was; but that was one question for which Mishnoff had the necessary German.

The other muttered something that sounded suspiciously like good German swearing and then said, "*Es ist doch drei-und-zwanzig vier-und-sechzig, und warum—*"

THE STREAM of German that followed was completely incomprehensible to Mishnoff; but in any case he had had enough for the moment. If he translated the German correctly, the year given him was 2364, which was nearly two thousand

years in the past. How could that be?

He muttered, "*Drei-und-zwanzig vier-und-sechzig?*"

"Ja, ja," said the other, with deep sarcasm. "*Drei-und-zwanzig vier-und-sechzig. Der ganze Jahr lang ist es so gewesen.*"

Mishnoff shrugged. The statement that it had been so all year long was a feeble witticism—even in German—and it gained nothing in translation. He pondered.

But then, the other's ironical tone deepening, the German-speaking one went on. "*Drei-und-zwanzig vier-und-sechzig nach Hitler. Hilft das Ihnen vielleicht? Nach Hitler!*"

Mishnoff yelled with delight. "That does help me. *Es hilft! Horen Sie, bitte—*" He went on in broken German, interspersed with scraps of Planetary. "For heavens sake *um Gottes willen—*"

Making it 2364 after Hitler was different altogether.

He put German together desperately, trying to explain.

The other frowned and grew thoughtful. He lifted his gloved hand to stroke his chin, or make some equivalent gesture, hit the transparent visor that covered his face and left his hand there uselessly, while he thought.

He said, suddenly, "*Ich*

*heiss George Fallenby.*"

To Mishnoff it seemed that the name must be of Anglo-Saxon derivation, although the change in vowel form as pronounced by the other made it seem Teutonic.

"*Guten Tag,*" said Mishnoff, awkwardly, "*Ich heiss Alec Mishnoff,*" and was suddenly aware of the Slavic derivation of his own name.

"*Kommen Sie mit mir, Herr Mishnoff,*" said Fallenby.

Mishnoff followed with a strained smile, muttering into his transmitter. "It's all right Ching; it's all right."

**B**ACK ON Earth-proper, Mishnoff faced the Sector's Bureau head, who had grown old in the Service; whose every gray hair betokened a problem met and solved; and every missing hair a problem averted. He was a cautious man with eyes still bright and teeth that were still his own. His name was Berg.

He shook his head. "And they speak German? But the German you studied was two thousand years old."

"True," said Mishnoff, "but the English that Hemingway used is two thousand years old, and Planetary is close enough for anyone to be able to read it."

"Hmp. And who's this Hitler?"

"He was a sort of tribal chief in ancient times. He led the German tribe in one of the wars of the twentieth century—just about the time the Atomic Age, started, and true history began."

"Before the Devastation, you mean?"

"Right. There were a series of wars then; the Anglo-Saxon countries won out and I suppose that's why the Earth speaks Planetary."

"And if Hitler and his Germans had won out, the world would speak German instead?"

"They have won out on Fallenby's Earth, sir, and they *do* speak German."

"And make their dates 'after Hitler' instead of A.D.?"

"Right. And I suppose there's an Earth in which the Slavic tribes won out and everyone speaks Russian."

"Somehow," said Berg, "it seems to me we should have foreseen it; and yet, as far as I know, no one has. After all, there are an infinite number of inhabited Earths; we can't be the only one that has decided to solve the problem of unlimited population growth by expanding into the worlds of probability."

"Exactly," said Mishnoff, earnestly, "and it seems to me

that—if you think of it—there must be countless inhabited Earths so doing, and there must be many multiple occupations in the three hundred billion Earths we ourselves occupy. The only reason we caught this one is that, by sheer chance, they decided to build within a mile of the dwelling we had placed there. This is something we must check."

"You imply we ought to search all our Earths."

"I do, sir; we've got to make some settlement with other inhabited Earths. After all, there is room for all of us; to expand without agreement may result in all sorts of trouble and conflict."

"Yes," said Berg, thoughtfully; "I agree with you."

CLARENCE RIMBRO stared suspiciously at Berg's old face, creased now into all manner of benevolence. "You're sure now?"

"Absolutely," said the Sector Head, "We're sorry that you've had to accept temporary quarters for the last two weeks—"

"More like three."

"—three weeks, but you will be compensated."

"What was the noise?"

"Purely geological, sir. A rock was delicately balanced and with the wind, it made

occasional contact with the rocks of the hillside. We've removed it and surveyed the area to make certain that nothing similar will occur again."

Rimbrow clutched his hat and said, "Well, thanks for your trouble."

"No thanks necessary, I assure you, Mr. Rimbrow. This is our job."

**R**IMBROW was ushered out. and Berg turned to Mishnoff, who had remained a quiet spectator of this completion of the Rimbrow affair.

Berg said, "The Germans were nice about it, anyway. They admitted we had priority and got off. Room for everybody, they said. Of course, as it turned out, they build any number of dwellings on each unoccupied world. —And now there's the project of surveying our other worlds and making similar agreements with whom-ever we find. It's all strictly confidential, too. It can't be made known to the populace without plenty of preparation. —Still, none of this is what I want to speak to you about."

"Oh?" said Mishnoff. Developments had not noticeably cheered him; his own bogey still concerned him.

Berg smiled at the younger



man. "You understand, Mishnoff, that we in the Bureau—and in the Planetary Government, too—are very appreciative of your quick thinking. of your understanding of the situation. This could have developed into something very tragic, had it not been for you. This appreciation will take some tangible form."

"Thank you, sir."

"But as I said once before, this is something many of us should have thought of. How is it you did? —Now we've gone into your background a little. Your co-worker, Ching.

tells us you have hinted in the past at some serious danger involved in our probability-pattern setup, and that you insisted on going out to meet the Germans—although you were obviously frightened. You were anticipating what you actually found, were you not? How did you do it?"

Mishnoff said, confusedly "No, no. That was not in my mind at all; it came as a surprise. I—"

**S**UDDENLY, he stiffened. Why not now? They were grateful to him. He had proved that he was a man to be taken into account; one unexpected thing had already happened.

He said, firmly, "There's something else."

"Yes?"

(How did one begin?)  
"There's no life in the Solar System other than the life on Earth."

"That's right," said Berg benevolently.

"And computation has it that the probability of developing any form of interstellar travel is so low as to be infinitesimal."

"What are you getting at?"

"That all this is so *in this probability!* But there must be some probability-patterns in which other life *does* exist in the Solar System, or in

which interstellar drives are developed by dwellers in other star systems."

Berg frowned. "Theoretically."

"In one of these probabilities, Earth may be visited by such intelligences. If it were a probability-pattern in which Earth is inhabited, it won't affect us; they'll have no connection with us in Earth-proper. But if it were a probability-pattern in which Earth is uninhabited, and they set up some sort of base, they may find, by happenstance, one of our dwelling places."

"Why ours?" demanded Berg, drily. "Why not a dwelling place of the Germans, for instance?"

"Because we spot our dwellings one to a world. The German Earth doesn't, and probably very few others do. The odds are in favor of us by billions to one. And if extra-terrestrials do find such a dwelling, they'll investigate and find the route to Earth-proper—a highly-developed, rich world."

"Not if we turn off the twisting-place," said Berg.

**O**NCE THEY know that twisting-places exist, they can construct their own," said Mishnoff. "A race intelligent enough to travel



through space could do that; and from the equipment in the dwelling they would take over, they could easily spot our particular probability. —And then how would we handle extra-terrestrials? They're not Germans, or other Earths; they would have alien psychologies and motivations. And we're not even on our guard. We just keep setting up more and more worlds and increasing the chance every day that—"

His voice had risen in excitement and Berg shouted at him, "Nonsense. This is all ridiculous—"

The buzzer sounded and the communiplate brightened, and

showed the face of Ching. Ching's voice said, "I'm sorry to interrupt, but—"

"What is it?" demanded Berg, savagely.

"There's a man here I don't know what to do with. He's drunk or crazy; he complains that his home is surrounded, and that there are things staring through the glass-roof of his garden."

"Things?" cried Mishnoff.

"Purple things with big red veins, three eyes, and some sort of tentacles instead of hair. They have—"

But Mishnoff and Berg didn't hear the rest; they were staring at each other in sick horror.



## NEXT TIME AROUND

"Wouldn't it be nice," Clerk Maxwell wrote, "if we could train a little demon to stand in the window of a house? He could direct the fast-moving molecules inside, giving us heat, and direct the slow-moving ones into, say, the kitchen refrigerator—giving us cold." This is the principle upon which the Semantic Polarizer worked, and you'll find out the details in Frederik Pohl's new story, "Wapshot's Demon."

Sorry about the James Blish story, "Artwork", which was crowded out by the length of the Jones novel, this time; I hope you'll find it was worth waiting for.

*The trouble with the logical-statistical systems is that they can make meaningful predictions only on a group basis. And Society is based upon the needs of the majority, to which the Individual must bow. But what happens when the Individual can make accurate predictions?*

# THE NON - STATISTICAL MAN

NOVEL

by **RAYMOND F. JONES**

*illustrated by KELLY FREAS*

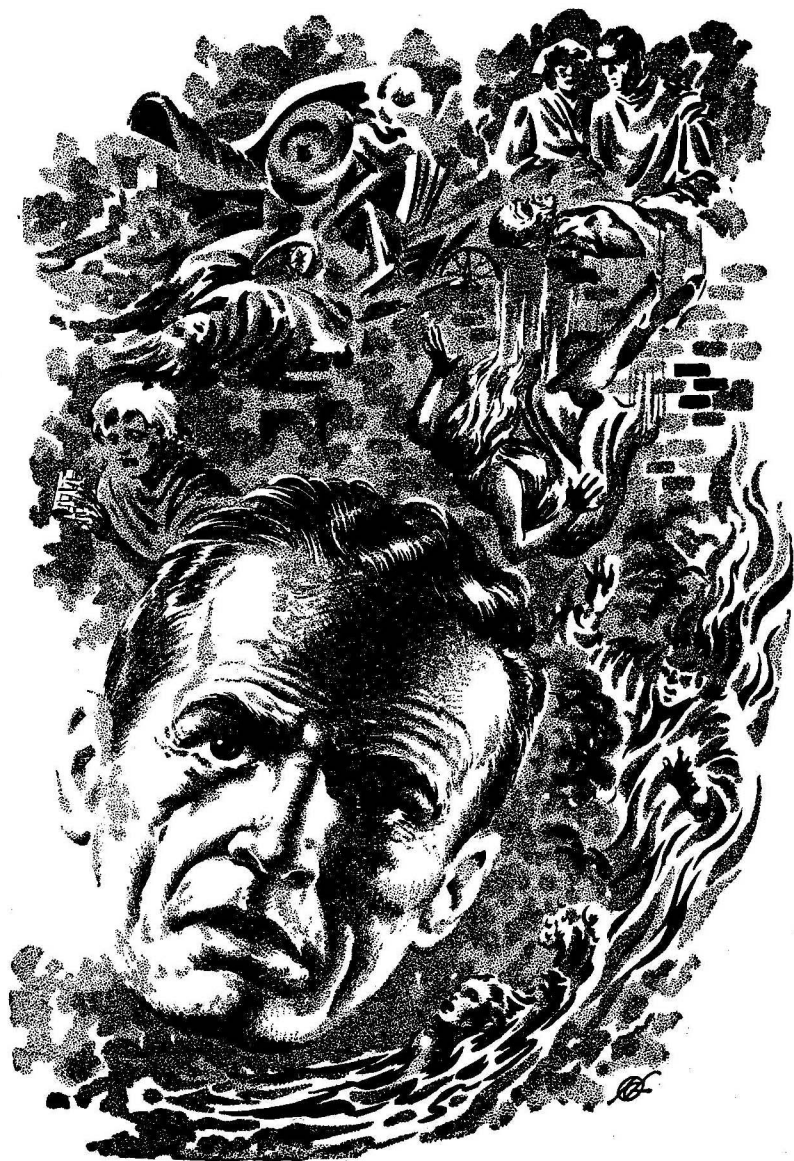
**C**HARLES BASCOMB was a man who loved figures—the genuine, Arabic kind, that is. Not that he didn't adequately appreciate the other kind, too. Mrs. Bascomb was quite good in that department, but Charles had come to take her somewhat for granted after fourteen years of married life—plus three young Bascombs who had taught him what a great obligation can be implied by so small a number.

Bascomb considered himself a realist, and pointed to his passion for figures to prove it. If an opinion were given—whether on the price of hamburger in Denver, or

the difference between the climate of his home town of Landbridge, and that of Los Angeles, California—he demanded figures and odds.

Yet, in his world of endlessly marching columns of black numerals, there was escape, too. It was clean and cold and precise here. The scatterbrained effusions and emotionalism of Sarah Bascomb were lacking. Charles Bascomb loved his wife, but she was scatterbrained. And the utterly irrational demands of the small Bascombs could not penetrate.

All irrationality was swept aside, and here, and here alone, could be had a clear



view of the real world. It would have been difficult for Bascomb to say, if the question had been put to him, which was the real world and which was fairyland. Mrs. Bascomb and the kids were real enough—in their place—but they couldn't possibly fit in the realm of precise figures, which was the *real* world.

Fortunately, no one ever asked Mr. Bascomb about this, and it was never pushed into his awareness beyond an occasional fuzzy, gnawing feeling that there should be more congruity between these two areas than there was.

**I**T WAS generally quite deliciously satisfying to him to know that he could tell, for example—with almost perfect accuracy—how many of the citizens he passed on the street on the way to the station each night, and how many of these would not be alive by the end of the year. He could tell almost precisely how many would be alive in another five years, provided he had their present ages, of course. He could tell how many would die of diabetes, and heart trouble, and cancer.

There was a satisfaction in knowing these things. There was a satisfaction in his work of assembling such informa-

tion and producing the proper deductions. (He was Chief Statistical Analyst of the New England Mutual Cooperative Insurance Company.) There was a sense of power in it.

But Bascomb believed he was a humble man. The power was in the figures, in the statistical methods which constituted the temple wherein he but served as priest.

At the age of thirty-seven he believed he would serve his god of figures for the remainder of his life. And, certainly, on that morning of April tenth, when one of the Junior Statisticians came to his office, he considered himself safe and secure in the groove he would run in until he himself became a statistic in the Company's books.

**B**ASCOMB looked up and smiled pleasantly as Hadley approached his desk—there was no reason for being otherwise.

"Good morning, Hadley," he said. "You look as if the week-end treated you well. Mrs. Hadley get over her cold all right?"

"She's fine, Mr. Bascomb." Hadley was a youngster, still in his first year of marriage. He shared Bascomb's passion for figures—Arabic—and

hoped to rise high in the firm.

Hadley spread out some long sheets of paper and bent over the desk. "We ran across something interesting last week that I thought I'd like to show you. I've never seen anything like this before."

"What is it?" said Bascomb.

"District reports of claims in Division 3 show some curious anomalies. In the town of Topworth, we had eighteen claims registered on all types of policies and—"

"That is not an unusual number for a town of that size."

"No—but here's the catch. Those policies had been taken out less than six weeks ago, with only two exceptions. Now, here in Burraston we have nine claims—all on policies less than six weeks old, with no exceptions. And in Victorburg—"

"Let me see that!"

Bascomb drew the sheets toward him and adjusted the heavy, shellframed glasses that seemed to grip the sides of his head rather than rest on his ears.

"In Victorburg—t w e n t y seven claims on policies only four weeks old." He ripped the glasses away from his face and looked up. "How large is Victorburg, Hadley?"

"Only thirty-two thousand,

Mr. Bascomb." He waited, knowing he'd said enough for the moment.

**B**ASCOMB bit the tip of the earpiece on his glasses and looked down again. He rustled the wide sheets of paper. "This is one of the strangest things I have seen since I've been in the insurance business," he said. "We know that in statistics we sometimes encounter long runs of an anomolous nature, but three cities like this—"

"There are seven, altogether," said Hadley. "I went back and checked over some of our more recent records in the same district. The other four are less pronounced—six to eight each—but they are there."

"Very strange, to say the least," said Mr. Bascomb mildly now. "I think I'd like very much to follow up the details and see if any explanation can be found—beyond merely assigning it as an unusual run."

"I have all the claim papers on my desk."

"Get me the initial applications also. Was there any consistency shown in the salesmen who wrote the policies?"

"No. About a dozen different salesmen are involved. The only pertinent factor I've found is that in these last



three towns we have new agencies, which have put on a big campaign backed by our national advertising. But that doesn't explain, of course, why they should have written policies on which claims were to be made so quickly."

"No, of course not; get me all the papers available."

**B**ASCOMB spent the rest of the morning computing the normal claims expectancy for each of the towns involved. He figured the probabilities of encountering such runs as had come up; he examined in detail the applications of all the policyholders.

On the death claims there was the usual medical certification showing the applicants to be in acceptable health at time of policy writing. Two had died of polio; one in a car accident; four of coronary trouble—that should have been caught! There were two cancer cases—they should have been found, too. Some of the trouble was evidently in the medical department; he'd see that some overhauling was done there.

But blaming the examiners would not dispose of the whole problem, by any means; the accident and liability claims could not be dismissed so easily. There was only one

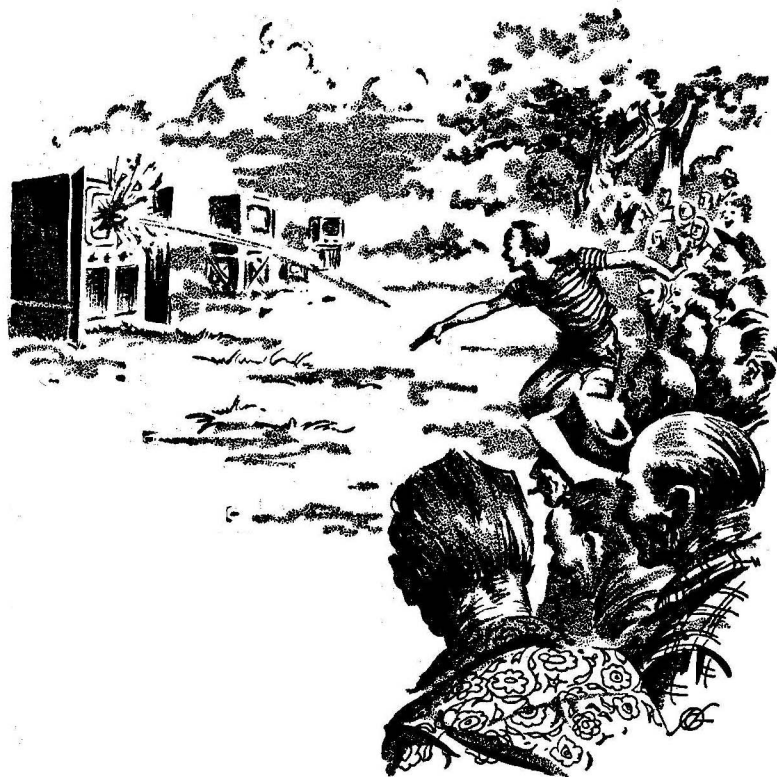
factor of any significance which he was able to discover. Better than ninety percent of the applications had come in through voluntary response to the company's advertising. They hadn't been sold by the usual foot-in-the-door salesman Bascomb so thoroughly disapproved of.

*That* would be worth noting to the sales department!

But, on the other hand, had their advertising suddenly become so much better? He called the advertising manager and asked for copies of whatever displays had been available in the seven towns during the period the policies were sold.

He was interrupted then by some current items that killed the better part of the afternoon. When he finally got around to the advertisements, it was almost time to quit. It would be too rough if he missed the five-seventeen—there would be time enough to get back to this problem tomorrow.

Yet, that would not do, either; there was something too persistently nagging about this, too many "queer" aspects to let the matter alone even overnight. He broke a long standing rule between him and Sarah Bascomb, and stuffed the entire mass of pa-



pers into his briefcase to take home.

**SARAH BASCOMB** was well aware that she didn't live in the same world with her husband, and that made it rather nice, she thought. It would have been exceedingly boring if they *both* talked of nothing but expectancy tables and statistical probabilities,

or the PTA and young Chuck's music lessons.

As it was, she thought they got along fine. She listened with honest attentiveness to Charles' discussions of the ratio of cancer to coronary deaths, and the increase of both over pneumonia and other infectious diseases during the past thirty years. It was so boring as to be absolutely

incredible; but she was thankful that there were men like Charles in the world to take care of these particular things—which had to be taken care of, but which no ordinary person would think of concerning himself with.

She was proud of Charles' ability to deal with such obscure and unpleasant material, and she listened to it because she was in love with him. It didn't occur to her that it was in any way disloyal to feel it was all very stuffy.

In turn, Charles took an active interest in household affairs—and left all the answers up to her, which was the way she liked it. It would have been intolerable if he'd been one of those men who insist on planning the dinner menu, or picking the kids' dentist, or seeing Mr. Salers down the street when Chuck and the Salers kid had an after-school knock-down, drag-out argument.

Sarah was quite willing and able to take care of these items alone. At thirty-five she was a competent, contented, still good-looking suburban housewife without a cloud on the domestic horizon.

But on this particular April tenth she had been a trifle uneasy all day. There was the feeling that momentous

things were about to happen to disturb the complacency of Charles' life and hers. She often had such feelings and Charles told her they were ridiculous; but over the years, Sarah had sort of kept track of them. She'd discovered that these feelings always meant something, one way or another—especially when they were this strong.

So she was not surprised to see the brief case in Charles' hand as she watched him from the kitchen window, coming through the breezeway to the house.

**S**HE TURNED, as if she hadn't seen him, and attended to the noisy sputtering frying of his favorite—liver with onions. She squealed with simulated surprise and pleasure as his arms came about her waist, and he kissed her on the back of the neck.

Then she pretended to notice the bulging briefcase for the first time. "Big business tonight? I thought maybe we could go out to a show at the Centre—?"

Bascomb smiled, shrugged a little, and tossed the briefcase carelessly to a chair across the room. "Nothing very important; just a little problem that came up today—but it can wait. We'll see the show

if you want to. What's on?"

Sarah shook her head. "Nothing in particular; it's not that important. I want you to spend the evening on your problem. That is important. And I want you to tell me all about it."

They settled the problem, as Sarah knew they would, by staying home. And after dinner, she sat very quietly and attentively while Charles tried to explain why it was upsetting to come across such a run of events as had turned up. Try as she would, however, Sarah could not quite grasp the significance of it, or the reason for astonishment.

"You say it might be expected to happen once in a few hundred centuries," she insisted, "so I should think you'd be glad the time is *now*, when you are able to witness it."

**B**ASCOMB smiled with tolerance; there was no use trying to make her understand. "It's just that a fellow doesn't expect to be around for the event," he said. "We talk about it, and use it in our figuring; but we just don't expect to see it."

"That's what makes it all the more exciting!" Sarah's eyes were alight in a way she hoped would make Charles

think she understood what he was talking about.

Then her expression grew more somber. "And I think it's something terribly important, too," she said. "I feel that it's something which could mean a great deal to our future, Charles. I *know* it. Tell me as soon as you find out what it really means."

Bascomb muttered a growl of exasperation in the bottom of his throat. This was the kind of thing that came close to driving him to distraction—Sarah's "feelings" that something-or-other was going to happen, or was especially meaningful.

It gave him the shudders when she started talking that way—because the most damnable part was that she was often right. He had started keeping check on it, out of pure self-defense, a long time ago. Her batting average gave him a queasy feeling in the pit of his stomach.

"There's nothing significant for us in this crazy thing," he said irritably. "It's just a bunch of policies that came up for claim all at once—when our statistical methods gave us no reason to expect it. That's absolutely all; it's ridiculous, darling, to try to read anything more in it."

"You'll tell me, won't you?" Sarah Bascomb said.

CHARLES accomplished nothing toward a solution of the problem that night. At the end of four hours' work, it seemed just as inexplicable as it had when Brooks first mentioned it.

He slept badly, his line of disordered thought alternating between the problem itself and Sarah's irrational interpretation of its significance. In the morning he arose and told himself that it was idiotic to allow a small, routine problem of this kind to get so out of hand.

Only it wasn't small, and it wasn't routine by any means.

As he sipped his coffee across the breakfast table from Sarah, and with the three youngsters beginning to stir noisily overhead, he said cautiously, "I've been thinking that it might almost be worthwhile to have a personal interview with these policy-holders, and see if anything can be deduced from first-hand contact with them. Of course, it's silly to hope for anything definite, but I think maybe I'll do it."

He held his coffee cup poised while he waited for her answer. And now he was the idiot, he thought—as if her opinion could be of any possible significance!

Nevertheless, Bascomb

waited, head cocked to catch the slightest inflection of her voice.

"I think that's the most sensible thing you've done about the whole problem," she said. "After all, who could tell you more about why they bought the policies when they did—and how they came to make claims—than the people themselves?"

That cinched it, and Charles Bascomb fumed at himself for asking the question of Sarah. After all, he'd intended doing just this, anyway, hadn't he? What difference did her uninformed opinion make to him? But then, her comment was a good one; who, indeed, could tell more about the purchase of these policies than the people who'd done the buying?

He called the office and told his assistant, Jarvis, what he was doing and gave him instructions for carrying on.

## II

OF THE SEVEN towns, Victorburg was closest to Landbridge, so Charles Bascomb started for there, feeling unfamiliar in heading the car onto the open highway instead of driving to the station. He congratulated himself that these cases had turned up close to the Home



Office, instead of halfway across the United States; at the same time, Bascomb told himself once more he was a complete idiot for giving the whole thing this much attention.

He reached Victorburg by ten o'clock, and drove at once to the first address on his list. It was a quiet, tree-shaded street that added to the peacefulness of the April morning. He pulled up in front of a neat, white frame house.

Mrs. Davidson; she was the claimant on one of the death cases—Mr. Davidson had died of coronary trouble just three weeks ago. Bascomb wondered if he shouldn't have gone first to one of the lesser claimants. But it was too late, now. A woman working in the garden at the side of the house had seen him; she was looking up. He got out of the car with his briefcase in his hand.

He tipped his hat as he came up. "Mrs. Davidson? I'm a representative of the New England Mutual Cooperative."

The woman's face showed instant dismay. "Oh, dear—I hope there's nothing wrong now. Your payment came through so quickly, and I was able to pay—"

"No, no—there's nothing

wrong," Mr. Bascomb said hastily. "Just a routine check we always make to determine if the policyholder has been entirely satisfied with our service."

"Oh, yes! It's been more than satisfactory," exclaimed Mrs. Davidson. "Your payment came through so promptly, and I don't know what we would have done without it. John went so suddenly, you know. It seems like a miracle that we thought of taking out insurance on him just before it happened. He'd always been so violently opposed to insurance all his life, you know—never would consider it until just now, when it was so badly needed. We didn't know it was going to be needed, of course."

"OF COURSE," said Bascomb. "Our medical examiner passed Mr. Davidson as being in good health at the time of application; otherwise, the policy could not have been issued."

"We share your feelings of gratitude that you were fortunate enough to have the policy in force at the time of Mr. Davidson's illness. And so you feel you are satisfied with the service our company has given you?"

"Indeed I do!"

"It seems strange there was no earlier indication of your husband's condition. Hadn't he ever noticed it before?"

"Never. He was always so strong and healthy; that's why he despised insurance salesmen so—said they always made him feel as if he were going to die next week."

"But he *did* finally change his mind. That is the thing I am most interested in, Mrs. Davidson. You see, we realize we have a service of positive value to offer people; but sometimes, as in the case of your husband, we simply have no means of making them understand it. So naturally, we are most interested to know what finally breaks down a great prejudice against us. You would be doing us a great favor if you could help us in presenting better appeals to other people."

"I see what you mean, but I don't know how I could help you. It just seemed like the thing to do; both John and I felt that way about the same time. It just seemed to be the thing to do."

Mr. Bascomb felt a trifle numb for a moment. There seemed to be a coldness in the air he hadn't noticed before. It was as if Sarah were there, standing in front of him.

"You just *felt* like taking

out some insurance?" he said faintly.

Mrs. Davidson nodded. "I don't suppose that's much help, is it? But it's the best I can do, I'm afraid. Surely you know how those things are, though? You get a hunch something ought to be done, without knowing why. That's the way it was with us. I know it seems silly to most people, but I believe in hunches—don't you, Mr. Bascomb?"

Bascomb felt that he had to get away quickly. He nodded and picked up the briefcase from the grass where he'd dropped it. "Yes, I do," he said, backing toward the street. "Hunches are invaluable—especially in matters of this kind!"

HE DROVE part way around the block, and stopped to consider. He was irritated with himself for his reaction to Mrs. Davidson's talk. What had he expected? A profound self-analysis as to just why she, as a customer of New England, had chosen that particular policy? Or, rather, why her husband had?

He'd probably get even more of the same kind; it's what you had to take when dealing with individuals. That was why statistics had to be invented—because people

were so unstable and irrational, taken one at a time.

Bascomb wished that he could forget the whole thing right now. But he couldn't; his encounter with Mrs. Davidson had only convinced him that there must be an absolutely sound statistical explanation for the run of short policy claims. He started the car and drove to the next address on his list, three blocks away.

**T**HINGS were better here; the customer was a young physician who had just opened up a small, neighborhood clinic. He had made a liability claim when a patient stumbled on a hose lying across the walk.

"I always feel it necessary to be protected this way," he said amiably to Bascomb's question. His name was Dr. Rufus Sherridan. "It's the only sensible way to look at it."

"Absolutely," agreed Bascomb; "it's the thing we've been trying for years to drum into the heads of the public. Be protected. Juries act as if they're crazy nowadays when they hand out somebody else's money in a damage suit."

"As to my making a substantial claim within three weeks of paying my first premium—well, that's why we



have insurance companies, isn't it?" said Dr. Sherridan, smiling. "I was never able to understand the figures and statistics of how you work these things out, but the idea is to spread the risk of such unfortunate coincidences, is it not?"

"That's it exactly," said Mr. Bascomb. "Well, it's been a pleasure to meet you, Doctor." He extended a hand. "I hope you will always find our service as satisfactory as it was this time."

"I'm sure I shall; thank you for calling," said Dr. Sherridan.

Bascomb had hoped to contact all twenty seven cases in Victorburg in one day; by five o'clock, however, he had reached only number eighteen. Most of them had been somewhere between Mrs. Davidson and Dr. Sherridan, and Bascomb was exhausted. He longed for his desk and his figures, the world where he knew what was going on.

NUMBER eighteen turned out to be the worst of all, a considerable number of notches below Mrs. Davidson. She was willing to *talk* for one thing; it took Bascomb almost twenty minutes to get to his critical question.

"Why did we decide at this particular time to buy a poli-

cy with your company?" Her name was Mrs. Harpersvrig, and she had a habit of putting her arms akimbo and fixing him with narrowed eyes, head cocked sharply to one side.

"We knew we were going to need it, Mr. Bascomb. That's why we bought a policy. Oh, I know you'll say a person can't know those things, and it's true for most people. But once you learn how to realize what's the right and proper action to take under any circumstance, it's just like getting a breath of really fresh air for the first time in your life."

Bascomb leaned back on his heels as she edged toward him. "You have come to such an understanding, Mrs. Harpersvrig?" he asked tentatively.

"You bet! And all I can say is, it's wonderful! You don't have to grovel around with your nose in the mud, wondering where you're going and what's going to happen next and what you ought to do about it. You can *do* something about it. Of course, I didn't believe it when Dr. Magruder said it would be that way; but the way this insurance policy paid off convinced me once and for all. I'm glad you called, Mr. Bascomb. I've got to rush now. You can tell your company

we're very happy with their service!"

She banged away and left Mr. Bascomb standing there struggling with his final question: who was Dr. Magruder?

But it was obviously of no importance—probably he was some semi-quack family practitioner in the neighborhood. Bascomb turned and almost fled toward the sanctuary of his car; Mrs. Harpersvirg was the final straw in a day that would exhaust the best of men.

And then, somewhere along the seventy-five mile drive back home, it hit Bascomb like a rabbit punch in a dark alley. The common factor.

**I**N STATISTICS you look for the common factor in order to lump otherwise dissimilar items in a single category. And the common factor here was that each of the policyholders he'd interviewed claimed to have bought in with New England on the basis of a hunch—intuition. From Mrs. Harpersvirg on up to Dr. Sherridan—well, maybe the Doctor could be expected, but certainly none of the others could.

No high pressure sales talk had sold them; they weren't attracted by more than cursory interest in the company's fancy literature and advertising. They had bought simply because they'd felt it the

thing to do; almost every one of them had used nearly those exact words.

Intuition—a random factor that ordinarily made no impression on statistical analysis.

These people were making it work!

Bascomb slowed the car at the impact of the thought. He finally pulled off to the side of the road to check his interview notes. The damning words were repeated in every possible variation, but they were there:

*"We just figured it was time we ought to have some insurance."*

*"It's hard to say—I guess we were just impressed to buy when we did."*

*"I don't know. I felt it was the thing we needed as soon as I heard your company was opening an office here."*

Bascomb closed the book shakily, and resumed driving—slowly. It was tempting to jump to conclusions in a thing like this, but that was absolutely the thing you couldn't do. There was really no basis for assigning a positive correlation between the short policy claims and the intuitive purchasing by the holders. That was the kind of thing on which a man could trip himself up badly; and he certainly wasn't going to fall into the trap on this thing,

Bascomb told himself. It was an interesting coincidence, but pure coincidence nonetheless—a sound, statistically understandable causation would be forthcoming in due time.

With that comforting thought, Bascomb completed the remainder of the trip and reached home.

**S**ARAH WAS waiting anxiously, her supper schedule upset by the uncertainty of his time of arrival. She demanded at once: "Tell me all about it, Charles."

He'd thought he'd brush over it lightly in the telling. Somehow he didn't feel like describing the exhausting details of the interviews with his wife. But within a couple of hours after supper she had it all—through proper questioning, which was one of the skills in which she excelled.

Even down to Dr. Magruder.

"You mean you went away without even asking who he was?" Sarah demanded.

"It wasn't important," said Bascomb, irritated now by the cross-examination. "Besides, she'd already slammed the door in my face."

"You should have found out about him," said Sarah thoughtfully looking across his left shoulder. "I feel there's something important about him. Magruder—I've

heard that name somewhere. Dr. Magruder—"

She went for the paper on the other side of the living room and came back, opening it in front of them. "There!" she said. "I thought I remembered."

Bascomb stared at the four inch, two column advertisement indicated by his wife's Firehouse Red fingernail.

*"Are you a living vegetable—or are you living?" it asked. "If you are dissatisfied with life, let Dr. J. Coleman Magruder show you the way to better health, vitality, and happiness. Half-alive is no better than dead. Hear Dr. Magruder Wednesday night at 8 p.m.—"*

"I guess that takes care of the importance of Dr. Magruder," said Mr. Bascomb with a slight feeling of triumph.

Sarah Bascomb looked thoughtfully at the advertisement for a long time, then slowly closed the paper. "I don't think so," she said finally. "I'll bet that if you go back to every one of those people you talked to today, you'll find they have taken Dr. Magruder's course."

"Nonsense!" Bascomb cried, more sharply than he intended. "That's ridiculous! What grounds have you got for suggesting such a coincidence?"



"It's no coincidence, darling; I'm just sure that's the way it is. What Mrs. Harpers-virg said proves it—"

"It proves no such thing! Just because one flippety female said Magruder—what the devil *did* she say? I've forgotten now, but it doesn't prove all these people fell for this quack's line!"

"Ask them," said Sarah.

HE LEFT Dr. Sherridan until last. After all the rest had confirmed Sarah's hypothesis, Bascomb fought against the final prospect. It was absurd in the extreme even to suppose that Dr. Sherridan had attended quack Magruder's lectures.

But he had to know.

Dr. Sherridan smiled amiably and waved his hand in disparagement of any significance attaching to his enrollment with Dr. Magruder. "It was mostly for laughs," he said; "you know how those things go. You work hard all day without much relief from the constant pressure, and something comes up that tickles your funnybone. You go through with it just for kicks, and find you get a whale of a lift out of it; that's the way it was with this Magruder thing."

"He's a complete phoney, of course, a quack?"

"Oh, naturally, but I went along with it all. I even took

his pills after I had them analyzed and found out they were genuine vitamins with a harmless filler. Pretty low on vitamins, of course."

"He has pills?"

"Yes. Several colors for different days of the week."

"How did you come to—ah, enroll with Magruder in the first place?"

"I FOUND my patients talking about him all the time. He came through here giving his lectures and enrolled most of the females over twenty-five—he's got a good line, and a nice bedside manner—and one half the neurotic males. Big crowd. So I went down to the first one of his second series to see what went on. That's how I got in; it was rather amusing, all told."

"I see. Well, I was just curious. Wife's become interested, and I wondered if it might be something the police ought to know about. Thanks for your time."

"Not at all. You might try signing up yourself, if you feel in need of a laugh."

Before he went back to Landbridge, Bascomb made a check. He didn't want to have Sarah suggesting it first. And he was right; Dr. Magruder had also been to Topworth and Burraston, and all of the four other cities showing insurance claims anomalies.

**H**E CONFESSED this additional information as soon as he got in the house that evening, in order to forestall Sarah. He should have known better than to try.

"Oh, I could have told you last night that I felt Magruder had been to all those towns; but I knew you'd say it was silly. Anyway, I'm glad you found out. I made reservations for both of us for his full course, starting tonight. We'll have to hurry, if we're to get through dinner and everything before we leave."

He tried to assess his feelings as he stood before the mirror later in their bedroom, trying to adjust his tie. Only two days ago, Hadley had shown him an innocent problem concerning claims anomalies. Tonight, as a direct result, he was signed up for a quack health and development course. A kind of foggianness seemed to develop in his mind when Bascomb tried to trace the intervening steps of this cause and effect relationship. It made no sense whatever.

He wasn't quite sure why he didn't put his foot down—even now—and declare the whole thing ridiculous, as it actually was, and refuse to go. It felt almost as if he'd been drawn into a swiftly-moving current from which he didn't have the stamina to withdraw. But that was ridiculous, too;

there was nothing about the whole affair that wasn't.

Except the cold, unavoidable fact that people by the dozen had bought New England policies and made claims a month or two later.

Charles Bascomb had a sense of cold foreboding as he looked at himself in the mirror now.

### III

**T**HE DOCTOR had rented the most plush assembly room in the town's best hotel, and it was filled to the limits of the gray velvet drapes upon its walls. They wouldn't have had a seat at all if Sarah hadn't insisted they hurry.

Charles Bascomb glanced about as he sat down, assessing the crowd who had turned out to hear Magruder. They were easily typed: Ninety percent of them were heavily loaded with psychosomatic ills that had already blossomed into heart trouble, cancer, arthritis, and diabetes in two thirds of them. This year they were here to listen to Magruder. Last year it had been Hongi, or something like that, from India; the year before, the sour cream and road tar molasses man; next year somebody else. Always the same crowd, minus the ones who died in between, augmented by the gullible newcomers—

Bascomb felt sorry for them; he wished he could have taken them to his office and shown them his statistics. There was the record of what would happen to this group—and all the Magruders, Honigis, and sour cream men in creation couldn't change it.

Why was *he* here—when he had claims anomalies to analyze!

A solid round of applause indicated that the performance was about to begin. Somebody had stepped to the platform and was holding a hand up for attention. Bascomb thought this was Magruder, at first—but it turned out to be only the proprietor of the local health food store, who was sponsoring the course and was about to introduce his star.

He took quite a while, but Magruder finally came onstage. This was a shock. Bascomb had been expecting a barrel-chested, big-biceped character of the kind usually photographed in high society surroundings, with his arms carelessly about the waists of a couple of movie star devotees.

Instead, Dr. Magruder was a rather wizened, pinched-up little man of better than fifty. He peered myopically at his audience through broad lenses and began speaking in scratchy tones that grated on the ears.

Bascomb sat up at attention. This was decidedly different from the show he'd expected. Something was definitely not right about Magruder; he just wasn't the type of character to be putting on a show of this kind. Bascomb decided to listen.

**H**E WOULD have been better off if he hadn't, he decided at the end of an hour. With the aid of an incredible pseudo-biochemistry, and large charts that bore no resemblance to any structure in the human body, Dr. Magruder gave out the usual line. He spoke of "corporeal vibrations", the "ethereal stream", the "prescience aura", and a dozen other coined phrases of nonsense. He spoke of the "correlating affinities" which his little colored pills were guaranteed to organize within the body, and of the "cosmic mono-regression" which his set of seventy-five special mental and physical exercises was sure to nullify.

It was sheer gibberish, and the audience ate it up.

Including Sarah.

She beamed happily as she received their copies of the first six of the fabulous exercises and a week's rainbow assortment of pills.

"You aren't going to take

those things, I hope!" Bascomb whispered.

"Of course I am; and so are you. Don't you think it's wonderful that the Doctor has discovered all these things about human beings, that people have been trying to find out for so long?"

"Look, darling—"

"Don't you just *feel* the power in what Dr. Magruder says? Don't you just *know* he's right?"

Bascomb gave up and carried the exercise books and boxes of colored pills to the car, as they broke away from the crowd leaving the assembly room.

Following Sarah's admonition, he took a red and a green pill before going to bed.

**T**HESE claims anomalies did not constitute the first items of interest which young Hadley had brought to Bascomb's attention. Because he hoped to rise high and fast in the firm, Hadley had made an exhaustive study of his associates and superiors. It would have surprised Bascomb to know how full the file was which Hadley kept securely hidden at home, and which described the Bascomb eccentricities and foibles as Hadley saw them.

So in accord with the policy he'd adopted toward Bascomb, Hadley approached the following morning about ten

o'clock—when the morning rush of mail was out of the way—with a news clipping in his hand. "Something curious here," he said. "I wondered if you might have seen it in the paper this morning."

He laid it on the desk and Bascomb frowned at it wordlessly. His cold reception of it gave Hadley a start of fear that he might have misjudged Bascomb's interest in the anomolous, after all.

"At least we can't blame Magruder for that, anyway," Bascomb growled unpleasantly.

"Who, sir?" said Brooks politely.

"Magruder. Oh, hell—I'd forgotten you didn't know anything about *him*. Forget it. Thanks for the clipping."

He turned away to his work, but Hadley stood hesitantly by the desk still. "Did you—were you able to make anything out of the claims anomalies I mentioned the other day?"

"No, nothing!" Bascomb snapped irritably. Hadley fled.

**B**ASCOMB forgot the clipping until he turned back to that side of the desk again fifteen minutes later; his eyes caught it and he read it through once more.

There was a four inch item about a small town in Minnesota that had finally deter-

mined what to do about the TV menace to its children and its culture. On a bright spring Saturday afternoon the citizens had carried their sets down to the town square. There, amid picnic surroundings of fried chicken and peach cobbler, they'd had contests of sorts for various ages—the contests consisting of hurling rocks through twenty-one inch picture tubes from various distances.

Then they'd piled all the sets together and set fire to them. It was reported that there had subsequently been a run on the local library, and that discussion forums and chamber music groups had sprung up all over town.

Bascomb grinned wryly to himself. That was taking the bull—literally!—by the horns and tossing it. He hoped it indicated a trend.

But his statistician's mind veered back to the essential element in the story, the one which had prompted Hadley to cut it out: the anomaly. When umpteen hundreds of thousands of other communities throughout the land darkened their living rooms at sunset to bask in the hypnotic glow of buncombe until bedtime, why had the single town of Myersville reared up on its hind legs and demonstrated independence of national mores?

Bascomb didn't know, and he was quite sure he would never find out. His hands too full of Dr. Magruder even to think of tracking down such a remote incident as that in Myersville. But; he repeated fervently to himself, he hoped it was indicative of a trend.

He had reached a standstill in his attempts to analyze the insurance claim anomalies scientifically, according to the principles of statistics; he had to have more data. And while it seemed ridiculous to wait upon Dr. Magruder for that, yet Bascomb had just about decided there was nothing else to do. He knew there could be no connection, but there seemed nowhere else to look for data.

**H** E KNOCKED off a little early for lunch. He had an appointment with an old college friend, Mark Sloane, who had suggested for weeks that they get together when he was in town. He phoned during the morning to announce this was the day.

Bascomb had been close friends with Sloane at one time, and it was nice to see him again—although Sloane had gone into advertising and was now president of his own up and coming firm. That meant they talked of advertising when they got together for lunch.

Sloane greeted Bascomb affably, but there was something lacking, which Bascomb detected at once. They selected a table and Bascomb eyed his friend critically while the menu was being brought.

"You look as if you had a rough trip this time," he said.

"If you only knew!" Sloane fanned the air in mock desperation. "I'm going to tell you about it—maybe you can help me, too. Seems like a statistician could diagnose the corpse better than anyone else, at that."

He launched into his troubles after their orders were brought. "We spent two solid months building up this campaign," he said; "we'd planned to try it in a half dozen Pacific Coast towns and then spread it nationally. We put everything we had into it—all we'd learned in fifteen years of pushing breakfast cereals and cement blocks. And it busted, went completely flat. People walked past the stacks of Singing Suds in the supermarkets as if they'd never heard the name.

"It's all over the trade. In America, *anybody* can sell soap, but Sloane and Franklin couldn't push Singing Suds. Unless we do something quick to show it isn't a habit, the soap company isn't the only one who'll go on the rocks.

"It's got us scared, Charles; I don't mind admitting it. We did everything just right, and it was a bust. Do you think you could do anything to help us find out why?"

**B**ASCOMB leaned back thoughtfully. He had never sympathized particularly with Sloane's endeavors, but he understood what it meant to a man to take a heavy business setback like this.

"I can't do it personally, Mark, but I think somebody in my field could probably do you some good. There are several good men on the West Coast; I'll give you the names of two or three if you like."

"I wish you would," said Sloane morosely. "The worst part of it is not merely people's ignoring our campaign completely, but the fact that they bought wholesale lots of a completely unknown product called Dud's Suds. We tried to figure if the name had anything to do with it, but we couldn't pin it down.

"Dud's Suds, we found out, is put up locally and hasn't spent a nickel for advertising in years. It used to be in the little corner groceries; within the past few weeks, has pushed into the supermarkets—past nice packages like Singing Suds—. It's put up in a repulsive blue, cubical box that any package man

would tell you wouldn't sell in a million years. That's what has us more scared than anything else—the fact that we couldn't buck poor competition like that. We must have done something terribly wrong!"

"Call these men," Bascomb suggested, passing over a slip of paper with a couple of names and addresses on it. "They both have small polling organizations, as well as statistical services. Let them give it a try.

"There's one thing I've been wondering about since you first mentioned this: which is the better of the two soaps—Singing Suds or Dud's Suds?"

Sloane moved his hands disparagingly. "The other people's soap is better—but what's that got to do with it?"

**T**HERE HAD been other times in his life when Charles Bascomb felt this way, and he didn't like it at all. It was a vague, undefinable feeling that things were snowballing on him and he was powerless to do anything about it.

The worst part was in not knowing just *what* was snowballing. He had freely in mind the irritations of the past few days: the short policy claims; the gnawing little news-clipping Hadley showed him, the story of Sloane's ad campaign

that had bungled. But there was something *beyond* these things—yet somehow connected with each one of them—and he didn't know what it was. From a national standpoint, there was no possible connection between these events; yet something nagging faintly in his mind suggested there was.

He grew snappier around the office, and Sarah read the signs and kept quiet around the house. She knew something was bothering Charles, and it was something *big*.

In this mood he went with Sarah to the second of Dr. Magruder's lectures on Saturday night. More intently than before, he listened to the quack doctor. And more than ever, he was convinced that there was something basically wrong in the show Magruder was putting on. The nub of it was that Magruder just didn't have what it took to be this kind of *spieler*. At his age, if he'd been in the racket a long time, he'd have had a smooth, flowing delivery and a patter that would sell corn plasters to a fish.

Instead, Magruder clomped along—almost painfully at times—in his rasping voice. He paused frequently, as if uncertain just how to proceed with the group before him. He was not at all at home in what he was doing. He acted



more like a ready-to-be-retired college professor.

*College professor.*

A small trickle of cold started on the back of Bascomb's neck and moved slowly up to the base of his skull. There was no doubt about it. There was only one place Magruder could have learned a delivery like that: on a college lecture platform.

He sat back during the rest of the discourse, alternately congratulating himself on his astuteness in seeing through Magruder's deception and berating himself for being so impulsive. No self-respecting professor would ever stoop to such jargon.

**A**T THE END of the period, there was a question and answer session. Well-dressed matrons held up their hands without a qualm and asked items like: "If one's corporeal vibrations are out of phase with the ethereal stream, can they be brought back merely through use of exercise Four—or must the medication be relied on also to accomplish this effect?"

Magruder seemed pleased, as if the ladies were really getting his message.

Then, after a dozen of these, Bascomb stood up. "I'd like to ask," he said slowly, "how the reorganization of one's corporeal vibrations affects his need of life insur-

ance—or of any other kind, for that matter."

There was a small titter from somewhere behind him, as if such prosaic matters were beneath consideration in the same breath with corporeal vibrations. But from Magruder there was a sudden, dead stillness. Then he removed his spectacles, wiped them carefully, and peered down at Bascomb as if wanting to fix him indelibly in mind.

"Your question is a little advanced for our present discussion," Magruder finally answered in precise tones; "but for your information I may say that insurance is an excellent form of purchase when one has need of it. Otherwise, it is a waste of funds."

Bascomb nodded profoundly in agreement. "Yes, I would say that it is," he said. "I have another question: would you say that one with properly-phased corporeal vibrations would be likely to spend much time watching television?"

Again Magruder did a faint double-take and peered at Bascomb. "Your question is almost irrelevant," he said, "but not entirely. As with most instruments of mass communication, television finds man in the astonishing position of having vast resources for exchange of in-

telligence—but no intelligence to exchange. Until this situation is corrected I would say the answer to your inquiry is no."

"One more," said Bascomb. "Would you say that such a person would be unyielding to the ordinary advertising appeal?"

"The same answer as to your previous question," said Magruder, "and for essentially the same reason. Now, if we may continue—"

ON MONDAY, without telling anyone—including Sarah—of his intentions, Bascomb hired a firm of private investigators. Within twenty-four hours he had the information he sought. Magruder was indeed a fake; he was actually Emeritus Professor Magruder of Bay City College, a small institution in southern California. He had been head of the psychology department there and had retired two years ago at the age of sixty-five.

Bascomb took the information over the phone and promised to send a check to the investigating firm for their services. He hung up, without being aware of having done so, and continued to stare at the facts he had written down. A nightmare parade seemed to be assembling in the far depths of his mind and was already beginning its

march along the channels of his cortex.

"Both John and I felt this was the time to take out a policy—you never know when you might need it."

But they knew!

"There's something in this that could mean a great deal to our future, Charles." That was Sarah. Did she have any inkling of how much it could mean?

"It was reported that Donny Tompkins won the twelve year olds' slingshot event by putting a rock through a twenty-one inch screen from a distance of one hundred and ten yards."

"It has us scared, Charles. The other people's soap is better, but what has that got to do with it?"

How many more? How many more—in a country as big as the United States? He'd only come across a whisper of the anomaly. What would he find if he really looked—

He put on his hat and went out to get a taxi for Magruder's hotel.

#### IV

THE PROFESSOR greeted Charles Bascomb at the door with an extended hand. With the other he dropped a cigaret into an overflowing ash tray. "I'm glad you finally came," Magruder said. "I waited all

day yesterday for you; I had begun to fear I was anticipating too much."

"It took me that long to run down the dope on you," said Bascomb. He passed into the moderately untidy room with its thick cloud of stale smoke. He opened a window and looked out.

Finally, he turned. "I know who you are, but that's about all. I know you are doing something to the business of my insurance company, but I don't know how. You weren't surprised by my questions about television and advertising, so I must assume you know what I was referring to. I get cold along the back of my neck and down my spine when I think of what I don't know about you.

"I don't believe any of it, of course; it's too fantastic to believe. But here I am. And you were waiting for me. Now it's your turn to talk, Professor."

Magruder smiled and settled back in a chair opposite Bascomb. "You are a blunt man, for a statistician," he said. "I find the uncertainties of their profession ordinarily extends to their common speech."

Bascomb eyed him without answering. Magruder seemed to be musing now on something seen through the windows—but this was the tenth

floor, and there was only sky beyond.

He didn't change the focus of his eyes as he said, "Insurance is actually a most reprehensible business, isn't it, Mr. Bascomb?"

Bascomb decided against rising to the bait.

"Making money from people's certainty of death or misfortune—a ghoulis business. But then, since your own profession assists this traffic in misery, I suppose it is difficult for you to see it. May I ask, Mr. Bascomb, how many of the capsules you have taken and how many hours of the exercises you have performed?"

**B**ASCOMB stirred with vigor for the first time. "That nonsense! Come on, Professor, let's have the genuine story of what you are trying to do. I'm not one of those fat old matrons in your audiences, remember."

"But that *is* the genuine story," said Magruder. "Because I have somewhat disguised it with a bit of mummery, do you suppose the whole thing is trickery?"

"That's what I'm trying to find out. Everything I've heard so far in your lectures is nonsense—and of course the feeble vitamin pills you dish out are of no importance."

"And that is where you are

wrong," said Magruder. "I must ask you to answer my question if you will, please."

"Oh, I've been taking your damned pills!" Bascomb answered irritably. "I have to, to keep peace in the house; you've got my wife thoroughly buffaloed with your double talk. I've been doing the exercises, too. She insists on it every evening."

"Good. Then perhaps you can understand something of what I have to say—although it may be a trifle early for full comprehension.

"Can you imagine what it would be like to live in a world, Mr. Bascomb, where insurance companies were not needed?"

"Certainly not; it's ridiculous to even contemplate. Insurance business provides a sound, social need in spreading the risks of modern living. To destroy the insurance business would once again make the individual the prey of all the unforeseen and uncontrollable forces of nature and our complex civilization, from which he is now protected."

Magruder looked out the window again, as if he had almost forgotten his visitor. Then he said at last, "Doesn't it seem curious to you that modern man, with all his tremendous technological accomplishments, should still be in

such great need of protection from these forces?"

"No," said Bascomb; "biology teaches us that man was forced to develop auxiliary protections because of his inherent physical weakness. That's what's made him great; out of weakness has come his strength."

"**A**ND WHAT basis is there for such a preposterous assumption?" Magruder showed angry excitement for the first time. "How could Man have reached the top of the evolutionary ladder if he dropped his natural, physical protective devices, one by one, as he developed? Can you think of a hypothesis more absurd than this one? Wouldn't he, rather, have accumulated survival instruments instead of dropping them?"

"He did," said Bascomb, "his brain—which enables him to devise any means of protection and development that he needs."

"And that's an improvement, I suppose! A device to manufacture out of crude metal and glass the instruments possessed for fifty to a hundred million years by other species. The swift knows with unerring accuracy the way to go to avoid an oncoming storm, and its temporarily-abandoned young go into hibernation when it

comes. But human beings still don't know which way to duck a hurricane; and the ones caught in it die.

"For fifty million years bats have navigated by sonar. An eel-like fish of the Nile uses true electromagnetic radar. But Man is just now getting around to clumsy mechanical duplicates of these devices. Birds and animals use the polarization of daylight to determine direction and time. Man still hasn't got a really practical device for duplicating this feat.

"The homing ability of the 'lower species' is traditional. We use 'bird-brain' as a term of insult—but it takes quite a few tons of iron and glass even to approach a duplication of the functions of a two or three ounce bird brain."

"Are you suggesting, then," said Bascomb with a superior smile, "that Man should take a backward step and pick up some of the abilities of his distant forebears?"

"Is it anything to boast of that Man lacks the abilities of the lower species?" Magruder snapped. "Actually, they're not lost; Man doesn't have to go back. What I'm suggesting is that he merely bring into full play those abilities he has—for he does indeed stand at the top of the evolutionary ladder!

"Man's homing ability is su-

perior to that of the pigeon, or of the elephant, fish, or bat—which have it in abundance. His natural radar sense excels that of the Nile fish; his sonar is better than that found in bats and rats. And his prescience of disaster far outdistances that of the swift."

"You mean we have all these mechanisms, unused, within the structure of our bodies?"

Magruder shook his head. "No. The mechanisms we see in the lower species are clumsy experimental models. In Man, Nature has installed the final production model which incorporates all the prior successes without their bugs, as I believe an engineer would say it.

"This final production model we call 'intuition.'"

**B**ASCOMB choked; for a moment he felt like laughing out loud. He had a flashing vision of Sarah before him—arms akimbo and lips pressed tightly while she exclaimed, "I don't care what you say, Charles Bascomb, I *know* what's right, and that's the way it's going to be done!"

It made no difference what *it* was. Sarah's feeling of just knowing could be applied to anything.

And then Bascomb had a mental picture, too, of Mrs. Davidson and Mrs. Harpers-

virg, and Dr. Sherridan.

He permitted only a faint smile as he finally answered, "You believe you have tamed man's ability to do things by hunch and guesswork?"

"Unreasonable, isn't it?" said Magruder. "It helps just a little if you use the proper terminology, however. Intuition is a definite, precise faculty of the human organism; evolutionwise, it stands at the peak of all those faculties we have been talking about in the lower species. It supplants them all, and goes beyond anything they can accomplish. And human beings have it. All of them."

"That's a large order of unsubstantiated statements."

Magruder's eyebrows lifted. "I thought I'd given you some rather remarkable evidence in your own field. You want more? Very well, I'll give you the names of an even dozen people in Wallsenburg where I finished a series of lectures last month. They will buy policies—not necessarily with your company—and will make claims within a month. You'll find them, if you check; can I give you any more evidence?"

**B**ASCOMB shifted uncomfortably. "Let's say for the moment that I accept your thesis. Why, then, has intuition—particularly among the

female of the species—become a stock joke? Why have men, generally, never been able to rely on the intuition they're supposed to have? How are you able to do anything about making it usable? Surely, these colored pills, and the nonsense you lecture about—"

"Did you ever watch a person read with his lips moving, forming every word?" said Magruder. "Irritating as the devil, isn't it? You want to tell him to quit flapping his chops—that he can read ten times as fast if he'll go about it right."

"Men don't always choose to use the maximum ability that is in them; the answer to your question is as simple as that. Men decided a long time ago not to use intuitive powers, and employ something else."

"What else?" asked Bascomb.

"Statistics," said Magruder.

Bascomb felt a warm anger rising within him. That was the kind of thing you could expect, he supposed, from a broken down professor turned quack. He forgot his recent interviews for a moment.

"I fail to see any need for an attack on the principles of statistics," he said. "Statistics enable predictions to be made, which would be impossible otherwise."

"Predictions about a

group," said Magruder; "not individuals. Consider your own business. Statistical laws enable the insurance company to function, and make a profit for its shareholders. But *what is the policyholder's position?* Not one damn thing!"

"Think it over; you're not working for the policyholder. He's absolutely defenseless against whatever assessment your statistics tell you is legitimate to levy against him. The individual gets absolutely nothing from your work. The group—the shareholders of the company—are the only ones who benefit."

"I'VE NEVER heard anything quite so ridiculous in my whole life!" said Bascomb heatedly.

"No?" Magruder smiled softly. "Let's consider the alternative situation then—one in which the policyholder is on an even-Stephen basis, so to speak, with the company."

"Suppose he is able to discern—as a number of people you've met recently can do—the precise need for insurance which may come his way. He doesn't need to pay premiums uselessly for twenty or thirty years, and get nothing for them; but when he sees an unavoidable emergency approaching a month or so away, he can take out a policy to

cover it. There's something he can really benefit from!"

"Quite obviously, you don't understand the principles of the insurance business at all," said Bascomb. "It would simply cease to exist if what you described were a widespread possibility."

"Ah, yes," sighed Magruder, "that is quite true. Insurance would become obsolete as an institution, and would be replaced by common sense planning on the part of the individual. Any remnant of the insurance concept would have to be strictly on a loan basis."

"The same fate will be true for numerous other institutions that operate for the group at the expense of the individual—our concept of education, the jury system and criminal punishment. The advertising business as we know it will disappear; mass media of communication will operate only during the infrequent intervals, when there's something to communicate—"

"You speak as if you considered the Group as some all-powerful enemy the individual must combat for his own survival!"

"To a large extent that is true."

"To a greater extent it's absolute nonsense, and the psychiatrists have a word for it."



"Yes," Magruder agreed. "They have a word for nearly everything—I wonder what they will call your bankrupt insurance company."

"I don't consider that my company is in any danger whatever. I am quite certain that, while your hypotheses are very entertaining, I can eventually find a sound statistical explanation for this sudden run of claims on short time policies."

"And for my prediction of an additional dozen?" Magruder spread his hands inquiringly.

**B**ASCOMB didn't answer. Instead he asked, "Why were you expecting me to come to see you? Why did you want me to come?"

"Because I need the understanding of men like you. I need men who know what it's like to be on both sides of the statistical fence, so to speak. I thought you were capable of becoming one."

"I'm sorry you were wrong, and have had to waste much valuable time," said Bascomb. "I must admit that I have a great curiosity about your insistent attack on statistics. You've made no case against it; and certainly it operates well enough—in a society of us non-intuitionists, at least."

"Which is the only place it will work," said Magruder.

"Admittedly, this concept of intuition is so foreign to our present thinking that it appears to be an approach to insanity. We are so accustomed in our culture to the dominance of Society over Individual that we are unable to realize it as unnecessary."

"No historical era can match today's demand by the Individual for security and assurance from sources outside himself; no era can match this one for such complete overshadowing of the Individual by Society, the Nation, the Empire—not even ancient times when slavery was an acceptable culture. The slaves would revolt on occasion; the Individual does not revolt today!"

"And so you envision the ultimate anarchy!" Bascomb exclaimed in astonishment. "The wild lawlessness of the individual supreme, unimpeded by the restrictions of government?"

**"I** HAVE said no such thing," Magruder said angrily. "Man's optimum functioning demands his membership in a group. It's impossible for him to go it alone—on a cultural level, at least. But neither can he function optimally until he invents a society that does not oppress him to its own supposed advantage—until one man's

worth is adequately balanced against that of the entire Society."

"So our Society is the enemy to be fought then?" Bascomb thought he had Magruder's number now, and he was ready to laugh. Being taken in by a mere subversive!

"No." Magruder smiled now as if reading Bascomb's thoughts. "No—Man is his own enemy—by misarrangement. He invented Society, and didn't know he could do so much better; it is up to him to correct his own error."

Bascomb felt a little wave of cold. He spoke with increased care. "So your objective is to destroy Society? That's a trifle ambitious, to say the least. There've been a good many attempts to do that same thing in the past, but it manages to struggle along."

"Shocking thought, is it not?" said Magruder. "Well, fortunately, it's a misconception. My objective is not, of course, to destroy Society, as such, but rather to permit the emergence of a kind of man who will no longer have use for what we call Society."

**"PLEASE** understand, there's nothing sacred whatever in the word or the thing we call Society. It's an invention of mankind—who has as much right to change,

repair, or substitute for it as he has with any of his other inventions. First, there was Man; Society came later. Let's go back and consider the time when there was only Man.

"He was an infant, just learning to read, if you will. And the job was tough, because it required that he be self-taught. He didn't learn the best way; he learned to read by moving his lips, and he never tried seriously to improve upon this.

"To drop the analogy now for the real circumstances: Man found there were numerous ways of solving problems and reaching generalizations about the world around him. He could get his own answer on an individual basis and go ahead and apply it, for one way. But he'd already learned that, on a strictly physical level, there was strength in numbers; so he was suspicious of the solitary approach to anything. He developed the method of comparing proposed solutions to problems with his fellows. Sometimes there was a radical difference—the same problem affected different Individuals in widely varying ways. But it seemed like a good idea to stick together instead of going it alone. Compromises were made; the consensus of opinion was taken, and the

majority decision accepted by all.

"Thus was born Society—and with it the art of statistics, the submergence of the Individual in the Group."

"I don't know where you learned your sociology, Professor—but if anything like the scene you describe actually occurred, that was the birth of Man's triumph over a nature he could not combat singlehanded. It was the birth of his realization that the combined effort of many Individuals can accomplish what none of them can do alone."

"No," said Magruder. "This is not what was born at that time. A concerted attack on Man's problems does not depend on his present Society. Cooperation is more easily obtained through much different instruments.

**“WITHOUT** exerting himself to work out such different instruments, however, Man was forced to cling desperately to the tool of his invention, Society. Inherent within it was the concept that the Individual was a servant of the group. In any question of conflicting welfare the Individual expected automatic defeat; sometimes he has fought against it, but never with any heart or expectancy of winning.

"Statistical methods were

the obvious intellectual tools with which to manipulate and describe Man as he functioned in Society. The Individual was of no import, so why bother devising a means of accommodating him? In writing insurance policies, it is important to you to know only that one out of a certain dozen men will die of cancer. *Which* one is of no concern to you—unless it is yourself or someone for whom you have an affection. In this case, however, you have lost your usefulness to Society as an impartial statistician, and Society will replace you.

"As a method of reasoning, which would fit his Society, Man developed logic—statistical induction of generalizations from many individual instances. It works fine in predicting the characteristics of the group, but no individual instance can be deduced from it.

"But from time to time there have appeared short bursts of a stronger, more subtle, and completely incomprehensible means of reaching a generalization—the one Man by-passed when he invented Society; the non-logical process called intuition.

"Within the framework of our culture it has been impossible to describe, and the conclusions reached could not be

defended in any logical manner acceptable to Society."

**B**ASCOMB shifted uneasily. "And now you have corrected these defects?" he said.

"Yes," said Magruder. "Men can now be taught how to reach generalizations through the method of intuition. And please note that the inductive operation by the intuitive method yields a different type of generalization. The intuitive generalization is of the type of the Natural Law, which, unlike the Statistical Generalization, *does* permit deduction of individual instances.

"The intuitive method, therefore, is the only one that does an individual any good!"

"And you can no doubt *prove* as well as teach what you say," said Bascomb.

Magruder smiled. "The proof, as well as the method, is one which Society is loathe to accept. The pragmatic test—in itself a non-logical method—is the only one applicable. I think, however, it has been applied sufficiently to allow you to reach a conclusion!"

"A man would have to possess a very large dose of sheer faith in order to live by intuition if he could never prove a hypothesis until it had been

tried in actual experience."

"Yes," Magruder nodded soberly. "I would say that faith is a large component of intuition."

"There is only one thing you have left out: the mechanism by which these weird exercises of body and mind, and the little colored pills are supposed to restore one's intuition."

"That, too," said Magruder, "is something which can only be tested pragmatically. You understand, of course, that these methods do not restore anything. *You* have never learned to use intuition in any degree; your wife is considerably more proficient. Yet, comparatively speaking, you are both readers who move your lips. You have to learn to do it by scanning—and the only proof that this is better is in learning it.

**"SO, IF YOU** continue, you will learn how to use your intuitive powers. The little pills contain a shading of vitamins to satisfy those curious enough to analyze them. The active ingredient is the other material which is necessary to subdue the automatic reaction of fear in dropping statistical thinking. This fear is very real and dominating; it says that use of intuition is a defiance of

the billions of a man's fellows who have lived since the beginning of the race. It says they will crush him for daring to step out on his own and be an Individual who does not consult and bow to their wishes.

"Without a proper biochemical compensation of this fear, it would be all but impossible for a man to ever command his intuitive powers. So do not attempt it without use of the pills; it would tear you to pieces."

"And one final question," said Bascomb. "If I were to believe all this, and become one of your men who 'know what it's like to be on both sides of the statistical fence,' what use would you make of me?"

"I would ask you to assist in the spread of these methods, particularly among your own professional group, which is among the strongest fortresses that intuition has to attack. Such attack can best be done by someone from the inside."

"I see." Bascomb rose suddenly and took up his hat. "It has been most entertaining, Professor; many thanks for your time."

"Not at all." Magruder smiled and accompanied him to the door. "I will expect you at the next lecture."

"It is doubtful I will be there," said Bascomb. "Quite doubtful."

## V

BASCOMB had it in mind to return to the office as he left Magruder's hotel room, but once out on the street he knew this was impossible. His brain churned with the impossible mixture of fantasy and faintly-credible truth which Magruder had dispensed.

He turned down the street in the direction away from his up-town office and moved slowly, dimly aware of his surroundings, murmuring apologies to his fellow pedestrians with whom he collided at intervals. Finally, he stopped and found an empty bench in Moller's Park; he sat down, the pigeons clustering expectantly about his feet.

He had nothing to feed them, but their random motion and the sharp whine of their wings served to bring him in closer touch with the present moment.

A decision had to be made and made quickly. There was no use quibbling mentally over what Magruder could or could not do. The critical fact was that he could do *something*. Charles Bascomb had no doubt of this; he simply

could not deny the run of policy claims. How much of all that nonsense about intuition was true Bascomb didn't know; for the moment he didn't care. Magruder was far more than a harmless quack; he was a crank—and a dangerous one at that. If his mysterious doings were extended any further, he could actually undermine the foundations of the nation's insurance business.

He *could*.

And how much more beyond that, Bascomb didn't know; there would be time enough to find out when Magruder was safely stopped.

He considered going to the police with his story, but almost at once the futility of this was obvious. What desk sergeant, detective, or even police chief would listen to such a tale without being tempted to throw *him* behind bars for drunkenness?

Magruder had rightly said the only test of his theories and work was the pragmatic one. And until a person had seen actual results, he would be convinced the whole thing was the product of an active insanity.

There had to be a more indirect method.

AT ONCE, Bascomb thought of his friend,

Hap Johnson, feature writer of the *Courier*; Hap would understand a thing like this. He would take the obvious view, at first, that Bascomb was drunk; but his innate curiosity wouldn't let him stop there. Hap was a solid citizen and a respected newspaperman; but he had just enough yen to be the kind of news hero pictured in the movies to be hooked by something like this. Yes, Hap was the man to see, Bascomb decided as he got up from the park bench.

He found his man slapping a typewriter in a small cubicle located just off the *Courier* city room. The room was full of smoke, the typewriter was very old, and Hap's hat clung to the back of his head at a sharp angle. These were the affectations he allowed himself in deference to the movie idols he realized that no workaday reporter could ever hope to emulate. Otherwise, he was an excellent newsman.

He looked up as Bascomb walked in. "Charley! Don't do a thing like that! The roof braces of this firetrap can't take such a shock. Don't tell me now—you've lost your job; your wife has left you; you owe the company ten thousand dollars you've embezzled—"

Bascomb sat down, pushing Hap back into the chair from which he'd risen. "It's worse," he said. "I want you to do me a favor—and give me some advice."

"The advice is easy," said Hap; "I don't know about the other part."

**S**KETCHILY, then—with-  
out going into Magruder's complex social theories—Bascomb described the professor as a half-baked quack who could really do some of the things he claimed.

"Call it hypnosis, suggestion, or whatever you want to," he said, "Magruder exerts some kind of controlling influence over the people who take his courses. Personally, I think it works through the pills he gives out. Whatever it is, the man is dangerous; he's radical, subversive, and he is somehow able to lead his followers to accomplish what he wants them to do."

"Right now, he seems to be attacking the insurance companies with an eye to bankrupting them. You'll say I'm crazy, but I'm genuinely afraid of what he might be able to do if he was able to expand and make a concentrated attack. You can imagine what the results would be if he actually succeeded—financial chaos. He seems to

think he can do the same kind of trick with the advertising business and other institutions. He's got to be stopped."

Hap Johnson pushed his hat a notch further back on his head and regarded Bascomb thoughtfully. "You're not a drinking man," he said, "and I've never detected signs on insanity before. So it's possible there's something in what you say. But—" he leaned closer in a gesture of secret confidence—"isn't it reasonable to suppose you might have been mistaken about the people you interviewed? Overwork, worry about the guy who's giggling for your job—"

"I'm sure, Hap," said Bascomb. "I've gone over it a hundred times; I've plugged every hole."

Hap drew back. "It's not the kind of thing you could go to the police with—yet they ought to know about it. Here's what we can do: you say Magruder is no M. D., so we ought to be able to get him investigated for prescribing those pills of his—practising medicine without a license."

"I don't know whether that would stop him or not—"

"It might not *stop* him, but it would get him some darned unfavorable publicity, if it's handled right. We could play



it from there. I'll get a ticket to his lecture; you can introduce me, and we'll see what kind of story he gives me."

**B**ASCOMB neglected to tell Sarah anything about his visits with Dr. Magruder and Hap Johnson; but he caught her eyeing him as if she knew all about it, anyway. It gave him the old, familiar, uneasy sensation. He knew she couldn't possibly have learned what he'd done, but she had feelings about things; he wished he dared ask precisely what those feelings were.

On the evening of the next lecture she volunteered the information. Bascomb had just told her about arranging for Hap to go with them.

"That's what I've been feeling!" Sarah exclaimed. "It's been as if tonight were a turning point of some kind. I can't tell whether it's going to be good or bad for us—but it depends on something that's going to happen to Dr. Magruder. And Hap Johnson is responsible! He doesn't want to come to find out what Dr. Magruder teaches; he just wants gossip for that cheap tabloid he works for, and he doesn't care who he hurts in getting it."

"I thought you liked Hap."

"I used to—until he did this to Magruder!"

"He hasn't done *anything* yet," Bascomb reminded her; "so far there's nothing but your own slightly overworking imagination."

Sarah ignored his remark. "Let's not go tonight, Charles. Don't take Hap down there; he'll kill Magruder with what he'll print."

Bascomb felt the perspiration starting under his collar. "Don't be ridiculous, darling; you're imagining things. I've asked Hap along, and he'd think I was crazy if I tried to back out now. Nothing's going to happen; you'll see."

**T**HE EVENING seemed to go smoothly enough in spite of Bascomb's mixed anxieties. He let his attention be held only mildly by Magruder's double-talk, and afterwards, when he went up to introduce Hap Johnson the Professor smiled knowingly. Magruder's face clouded a trifle, however, as he took the reporter's hand, and Bascomb saw a new tension come at the same moment into his wife's expression.

Then it was past and Magruder was shaking Hap Johnson's hand cordially, inviting him back, making an offering of a generous sample of his pills and the circulars describing his exercises.

"This will make me a super-

man, huh?" Hap asked dubiously as he accepted the articles and examined them.

"Guaranteed!" Dr. Magruder slapped him on the shoulder and laughed jovially. "It never fails when instructions are followed faithfully. Of course," he added soberly, "I realize you are not sufficiently interested to go along with me to that extent; but I trust that if you write up our little course of lectures here, you will keep in mind that we actually offer nothing at all. Anything that occurs as a result of coming here is due strictly to the student's own efforts."

"If that were true," said the reporter with sudden iciness in his eyes, "it would not be necessary for you to hold lectures at all, would it? The buck isn't passed as easily as all that!"

ON THE way home, Bascomb tried to console his wife; he reminded her repeatedly that nothing had happened to verify her fears. Sarah remained unresponsive, apparently accepting as fact that Magruder's doom was sealed. She felt it, she said.

Bascomb drove carefully, acutely aware of the sense of exhaustion that filled him. It was futile to close his eyes any longer to the fact that

Sarah's feelings' corresponded exactly with Magruder's description of a moderately well-working intuition.

In the early years of their marriage, he'd laughed at her and shrugged off her hunches and lucky guesses; then he'd begun to keep tab—

There was no question about her knowing Hap's purpose in coming to the meeting. Bascomb wondered how much she was aware of his own position. She had nothing, but her intuitive knowledge shown bleakly in her eyes, he thought miserably.

He hadn't quite known, at first, just why he felt it necessary to keep from telling her about his visit with Magruder and Hap. Now he saw the full impossibility of it. Suppose Magruder were right—well, partly right, anyway? Suppose intuition did turn out to be a natural, useful human function that was active in some people and could be developed in others? How could he tell Sarah that Magruder was an evil man—that the faculty she cherished so greatly had to be suppressed with all possible force?

She wouldn't understand that a sizeable number of intuitive people could literally destroy the civilization and institutions that modern man was dependent upon.

Her intuition was too precious a possession for Sarah to ever believe anything evil could be in it, Bascomb thought; she'd turn against him before believing that. This thing had a potential that could destroy his very home if he failed to handle it right!

In his attempts to appease her he was more than usually cooperative that night in doing the routine Magruder prescribed, and in taking the pills. They were brown and orange now.

Sarah's face did not relax its expression of foreboding.

**IT OCCURRED** to Bascomb, as soon as he reached the office the next morning, that applications might now be coming in from the people named by Magruder in their interview. He was right; six of them were in the morning mail.

He had no actual right to enter the applications department and take a look at the papers before they had even begun to be processed. It was no great offense, of course—it wouldn't have been to a man other than the kind Dave Tremayne happened to be. Tremayne was head of the processing department. Another man's casual courtesy was his grudging favor.

Bascomb was well aware of this as he stood with the papers in his hand, scanning them while Tremayne looked on belligerently.

"These will have to be rejected," Bascomb said as mildly as possible. And for a long time afterward he wondered why he actually said it; there would be no great harm to the company in paying off claims of an additional half dozen short-term policy holders. But that thought was utterly foreign to his mind now. He could see no course but the one he was following.

"I thought that was for us to decide," Dave Tremayne snapped; "since when did the Statistical Department take over those duties?"

"I—I happen to know a little about these cases," Bascomb said hesitantly. "Friend of mine is acquainted with the town pretty well. He knows these people and is certain there is something that isn't on the level. This big fire policy for example. Bhuener's Hardware. It's a firetrap; I wouldn't be surprised if you got a claim on it before the month is out—"

Tremayne advanced and took the papers from Bascomb's hand. "You can let us worry about that," he said unpleasantly; "any time I need

help from the figures department I'll let you know."

**H**E SHOULD have known it was worse than useless, Bascomb told himself. He looked at Tremayne and turned away; then he stopped and faced the department head again. "It wouldn't look at all good," he said, "if you got another half dozen claims within a month of granting the policies. Your short-termers are beginning to stick out on the charts."

"What do you mean by that?" Tremayne demanded. But his belligerence had subsided now.

"I'm advising you to turn down those applications," Bascomb said. He walked away to his own department.

It wasn't a logical thing to do, he thought, as he reached his own desk once again. It could cause a lot of trouble either way it fell—whether the prediction turned out right or wrong. And Dave Tremayne was just the kind to milk it for all the trouble it was worth.

He was rather hopeful of hearing something from Johnson regarding the reporter's impressions and plans concerning the campaign against Magruder. But he heard nothing at all that day, nor the next. A sense of loneliness as-

sailed him. He wanted somebody to talk to about this thing, but there was nobody at all to give him companionship under this burden. Sarah continued moody and cool and convinced of the approach of disaster.

## VI

**H**AP JOHNSON called on the succeeding day, and he had news. "This bird is more clever than you've given him credit for!" he said. "It's no wonder the previous chemical analyses showed a harmless filler supporting a few vitamins in his pills."

"What do you mean?" said Bascomb.

"I had five different outfits run tests on these pills before I found the answer. They all gave the same story you already had. Then I asked Joe Archer, who runs toxic checks for the police department, to look at them. He got it in a minute, just by looking at the other guys' results.

"They were right. The pills are about as potent as dried carrots—individually; but put them together in the combinations and succession Magruder prescribes and you've got something!"

"What?" asked Bascomb.

"Joe couldn't give me the

answer to that, but he said it was obvious these chemicals would combine in the body, and with the body chemicals, to form some items only slightly less potent than dynamite."

"We really ought to have a case against Magruder then," said Bascomb. Peculiarly, he thought, there was no sense of elation or triumph at all, now that defeat of his enemy was in sight.

"That's the devil of it," said Hap; "I'm not so sure we have. That's where Magruder has been so clever. The things he has actually been prescribing are inconsequential. I'm not so sure we could pin him down on the basis of the fact that his pills recombine inside the human system to form new and more potent drugs. He could argue he'd never prescribed or administered *those*; and, technically, he'd be right."

"But it would ruin him, even if the courts had to agree with that argument; and that's all I'm interested in," Bascomb replied. "Can't your friend, Archer, give us enough basis for a complaint to the District Attorney?"

"He said it ought to be made known, at any rate. It would help if we could get some witnesses who could swear they'd been injured by

the pills. Why don't you talk to Joe yourself, and see if you can round up any such witnesses? You know who's been taking in these lectures; in the meantime I'll put a gentle word in the paper to start the ball rolling."

**C**HARLES BASCOMB agreed and hung up. From what he'd seen, however, he doubted that it would be possible to get any of Magruder's followers to complain against him. They were a devout bunch—all those he'd seen, anyway.

A doubting weariness came over him again as he sat there staring at the black shape of the telephone. How in Heaven's name had this all begun? How had he become so involved in a senseless, unbelievable tangle like this?

Why was he the only one, out of the hundreds who'd contacted Magruder, who understood the threat of Magruder's work? It was as if the Professor had singled him out, as his greatest potential enemy, to show him exactly what he could do. And Bascomb remembered that Magruder had said this was just what he had done—in order to recruit Bascomb's aid. But surely Magruder hadn't actually believed he'd accept the

validity and desirability of the Professor's work!

That was the dilemma presented by the whole thing. To recognize it as a threat, Magruder's claim had to be accepted as valid. A hundred times a day, Bascomb had to ask himself again if he accepted this. And because of what he had seen, his answer was still a forced, unwilling yes.

And if so incredible a work was valid, could it not function for good instead of harm? This also gnawed unceasingly in Bascomb's mind. But Magruder's own words had answered this. He was out to change the face of society in a destructive manner.

**IT WASN'T** just that he was selfishly thinking of the insurance business, Bascomb reminded himself; Magruder seemed bent on attacking the whole bright world of statistical science, and all the institutions founded upon it.

And this Bascomb could not countenance; his own private world had no other foundation. In statistics a man could know what to expect of the world. Destroy this, put existence on an individual incident basis, and what was left? A nebulous faith in unconfirmed beliefs about how

things *ought* to turn out—

Then he thought again of Sarah and felt lost.

His world had already been shaken too vigorously.

He didn't go to Joe Archer; there seemed to be no point in it yet. He continued with the pills and the exercises, and went to another lecture. There, he looked for possible witnesses against Magruder, and knew that the quest was futile, even before it started. These people *never* turned on their messiahs; even if one failed them, there was always the next season, and the next—

**THAT WAS** the day the first of Hap's articles appeared in the paper. He indicated he was going to do a series analyzing the weird cults and health panaceas and mental improvement fads that proved sucker traps for the sick, neurotic part of the populace which was in need of genuine help.

It began mildly enough, as Johnson had promised; but Bascomb was more than ordinarily amazed at the man's genius, because he could see where Hap was going. He began, not by antagonizing those who were following such phoney panaceas, but by sympathizing thoroughly with

their search for assistance—which was so difficult to find in a brutal civilization that cared only in token measures for the sick or improvident individual.

He promised to follow up with stories of the frauds who preyed upon such people. It was a terrific build-up for the time when he was ready to let go at Magruder. Reading it, Bascomb felt the matter had already passed from his hands. Magruder was at the mercy of Hap Johnson—and the newspaper-reading public.

Bascomb felt later that he should have been prepared for the event that occurred the following day. (He was eventually to do a great deal of Monday morning quarterbacking over this period of his life.) But when he went to the office, he was still pre-possessed of the thought that power to act in the Magruder matter had passed from him.

He was called almost as soon as he arrived to the office of Farnham Sprock, Second Vice-president of New England. Sprock was a small, mealy old man who had been by-passed sometime ago for the top post in the Company. He had been relegated to office administration, even though it was known that all who felt his judgement would suffer for his failure.

**S**PROCK looked at Bascomb through seemingly-dull eyes as the statistician entered the room.

"You sent for me?" Bascomb said, trying to make it as little like a question as possible.

"I've had a most unbelievable complaint about you," said Sprock. "It seems too incredible to even act upon it, to believe that one of our Family would act in such a manner. Yet I am forced to believe that the accusation is well founded.

"I am told that you have assumed to step over the line of your authority in this office, and presume to dictate to your fellow officers in the conduct of their affairs. You have demanded that Mr. Tremayne refuse to act favorably on certain applications, so it is said. Is this true, Mr. Bascomb?"

"Yes." Bascomb nodded his head. And suddenly he felt himself shaking all over; this weazened old fool could actually destroy him if Sprock took it into his silly head. He could deny Charles Bascomb the world of facts and figures and clean, cold statistical reality. Why hadn't he minded his own business?

"Why, Mr. Bascomb?" said Sprock.

Bascomb took a deep breath



and wearily recited the occurrence of the anomalies from beginning to end, leaving out all reference to Magruder, of course.

"All you have said is a matter of serious concern, and one we should well pay attention to," said Sprock. "But it has nothing to do with your presumption in the matter of advising Mr. Tremayne."

"I have said that the policy applications I referred to are of the same class as those previously mentioned; they will also be followed by quick claims."

Sprock rose and came around the side of his desk. "Mr. Bascomb, that is a thing you could not possibly know!"

**S**UDDENLY an old, latent fury seemed to spring alive inside Bascomb's mind. What was this shriveled idiot trying to tell *him*? He knew—he *knew* beyond all question of doubt that what he said was true. It didn't matter that Magruder had predicted it. Magruder had nothing to do with this positive, insistent knowledge that burned in his mind.

He knew, in and of himself, that those policies would turn out as he said. And Sprock telling him he couldn't possibly know—

As suddenly as it had aris-

en, the rage died, and Bascomb found himself smiling at the little man and sensing a strange pity for him.

"I have discovered something new," said Bascomb quietly. "It—it is a recent statistical development on which I have been working for some time. It is a formula that enables me to predict when we are due for a run of policies such as this. They occur every once in a while, you know; my formula tells me that this is ready to occur again."

"I don't believe it!" snapped Sprock; "such a thing is impossible. Why if it were true, it would—it would change the entire aspect of our business. I warn you, Bascomb—and this is the last and only time I will do so—I want no repetition of this kind of occurrence. I will not tolerate it in my organization. A repetition means a complete and permanent severance of your relations with this Company. Do I make myself clear, Bascomb?"

"Yes," said Bascomb. He turned to the door as Sprock dismissed him. But he turned, with his hand on the knob. "I would suggest, however," he said, "that you get a list of those applications from Mr. Tremayne. Within thirty days there will be claims on every one of them!"

BACK AT his desk, Charles Bascomb felt a tremendous sense of release, quite unlike anything he had ever experienced before—an elation at having stood up to Sprock. He had a momentary feeling of not being afraid of Sprock any more—or of New England—or of any other force that might be able to shake him from his niche.

It died in a renewed consternation over what he'd said. Why on Earth had he invented the lie he told Sprock, the lie about a mathematical invention that would predict unfavorable runs? Well, there had to be something to cover his previous statement about knowing positively there would be claims on these particular policies.

And then the full force of what he'd said hit him. He'd said he *knew*. And it was true. He wasn't just taking Magruder's word for it, he *knew*. As if trapped in a corner by a persistent enemy, he tried to evade this sudden fact, to turn his back upon it and refuse to admit all its appalling implications.

But escape was impossible. He sat there, feeling stunned, then slowly embraced the unwanted knowledge.

This was it.

This was intuition.

It was the way Sarah felt,

he supposed—only she felt it on almost any connection. No wonder she thought him a blockhead when he couldn't understand how she could be so sure of a wholly illogical assumption!

It was the way the policyholders felt, too, the ones he'd interviewed. And they had been right.

IT WAS impossible to take up the thread of his work as he had planned it before receiving Sprock's call. He got up and went over to the unabridged dictionary open on its stand in the corner by the window. He turned the pages to *intuition*.

*"Perceived by the mind immediately, or without the intervention of any process of thought,"* he read. In very recent times he would have made an extremely bad pun on that definition.

*"Quick perception of truth, without conscious attention or reasoning—truth obtained by internal apprehension, without the aid of perception or the reasoning powers."*

That last one was closest to it, he thought, but even so, it was extremely deceptive—written by a man who hadn't the faintest concept of intuition. For there could be no obtaining of truth without perception; of that, Bascomb

was quite sure. There had to be contact. He didn't know how he could explain his contact with the matter of the six policies which he knew would shortly have claims on them, but somehow there was contact.

He closed the book. The definitions had been written by a statistician, not an intuitionist, he thought wryly; and that was no help at all.

He took his hat and walked out of the office, leaving word with Miss Pilgrim, his secretary, that he'd be back after lunch.

He had no definite goal in mind. He wanted merely to get away, to try to get some self-evaluation of the thing that had happened. He half expected the experience to dim as he got out into the clear spring air and faced the reality of the city with all its movement and noise and color. But there was no change at all.

**H**E STOPPED at a street corner, waiting for the green light. He drew himself up to full height and sniffed deeply of the air, which was only moderately loaded with carbon monoxide at this time of morning. Why had he let a thing like this shake him so? People had hunches all the time; it was quite an ordi-

nary thing, after all, when you stopped to think about it. He had no reason to feel apologetic, because he'd finally had one for the first time in his life.

But it wasn't any good. He knew he'd have lived out his full fourscore and ten without ever experiencing a genuine hunch, if it hadn't been for Magruder. All his life he'd laughed at hunches, and at the people who depended upon them for important decisions in their lives. Now, with one of his own, he felt like an unlucky prospector who'd sour-graped himself into believing there was no ore—only to come upon the biggest strike of all.

He stopped again in the middle of the block, and stepped back against the store fronts, a sudden new burden upon him. His face paled.

It was his habit to watch the crowds on the streets. Sometimes he counted a hundred of those going past in the opposite direction and estimated with a shallow regret that twenty five of them would feel the death-grip of cancer. As many more would give way to failing hearts. There would be diabetes, infections, and accidents in decreasing proportions.

This always made him a little sad. Now, for the first

time, he recognized how much he'd exulted in this private knowledge, and how superior he'd regarded himself because of it. It had been a power over his fellows—as if he, personally, were responsible for their fate.

With horror, he recognized something new. The passers-by were no longer an amorphous, faceless stream; they had become a procession of *individuals*.

**T**HAT WOMAN in the red coat standing by the baby carriage—

As if in a nightmare, he found himself moving across the sidewalk toward her. "That tumor—" he said in a mild, hesitant voice; "it's so small now, it could probably be removed before metastasis—"

She stared at him in a moment of fright, then reassured herself by a glance at the passers-by. "I don't know you," she said with cold contempt, not at all alarmed.

Bascomb realized in dim horror what he had done. He touched his hatbrim and glanced nervously about. "I beg your pardon," he said, backing away. "You *will* see your doctor, though, won't you—?"

His withdrawal gave her added courage. "I oughta call

a cop! In broad daylight, too. And a woman with a six months old baby—can ya beat that?"

His heart was pounding heavily as Bascomb turned in full retreat. He rounded the corner and stopped in front of a cigar store window, watching the reflections in the glass to make sure he wasn't followed by an angry, insulting policeman.

**W**HEN HE was able to breathe easier, he faced the pedestrians again with the new awareness he possessed of his fellow men. Intuitively, he could correct the crude, statistical knowledge he'd been content with up to now. How ridiculous it was to be content merely with *how many* when it was possible to know *which ones*.

He glanced up sharply to the man standing next to him. The stranger was looking absently at a box of high-priced cigars, but his face was drawn into a warp of indecision.

"It won't work," Bascomb said quietly. It was almost impossible for him to keep from speaking. "The deal is rigged," he said, "and they're waiting for you to walk into the trap."

The man's face paled and then grew scarlet with rage. "What do you know about

it?" he demanded. "Who are you?" He advanced threateningly and Bascomb was sure he'd have laid hands on him if the sidewalk hadn't been crowded.

"I'm a friend," said Bascomb in haste, backing again from this new encounter. "Take my word for it and don't sign the contract."

Then he darted away with a speed that shocked his system. The stranger attempted a short pursuit, but gave it up as ridiculous in the heavy pedestrian traffic. His mind was made up, however; though he would not have admitted it, the fantastic warning had tipped the decision for him.

Bascomb slowed as he found the steps of the Public Library, but he went up, two steps at a time. In the reading room, he settled by the window, keeping an eye open for signs of pursuit.

He had done a foolish thing. He would not pull that kind of stunt again. At least he'd try not to—the sudden impact of this sure, certain *knowing* was difficult to resist.

## VII

FOR ALMOST two hours Charles Bascomb sat there, apparently just staring through the win-

dow. But his mind was burning with the fury of the effort to evaluate the change within himself. He saw all his past life as a dark, empty grayness—a feeble reliance on somebody else, who relied on somebody else—If a man was wrong in statistical Society he could always fall back on his group, his school, "that's what they taught me", his insurance company, "everybody knows that", his firm—the bigger the cushion, the better.

It seemed impossible that that life was only as far away as this very morning, when he'd left the house, and that vision had come within these few hours.

It wasn't that sudden, of course. Magruder's pills and exercises had been working on him for days, now. Perhaps it took something like the encounter with Sprock to jar his intuitive faculty into action. At any rate, he would never be the same again. His life could never be the same.

The most immediate thing he had to take care of was calling off Hap Johnson's newspaper campaign against the Professor. After that, there ~~would~~ be time enough to ~~determine~~ what his relationship with Magruder would be.

But he already had an ink-

ling of what would be necessary.

**H**E FOUND Hap in the *Courier* office looking unchanged from the time of his last visit. The reporter looked up, pleased as he saw Bascomb's face. "Pretty good story to start off with, don't you think?" he said. "The switchboard has taken seventy or eighty calls on it already. Most of them giving us kudos.

"It was a good story," Bascomb said, taking a seat by the worn desk. "It will have to stop, however."

"What—?"

Bascomb nodded. "I have found out something I didn't know before. Magruder is no fake; his stuff works."

"You said that before. The idea was to keep it from working."

"On me, I mean. I've found out how to use it in a different way than Magruder intended; it can be used constructively, not the way Magruder is doing."

Hap frowned in suspicion and puzzlement. "I don't get this," he said. "You mean you want to have things all love and kisses between you and Magruder now, and promote his phoney self-development course instead of fight it?"

Bascomb shook his head. "I

haven't quite figured out what ought to be done about Magruder. He's a crackpot—there seems no getting around that fact. Probably a senile condition; he's retired from the university you know. I suspect the full story is something like this: He stumbled on some bio-chemical concoction that would enormously improve a man's mental abilities—actually induce a genuine intuitive ability. He probably tried to sell his associates and superiors on it and was laughed at for his trouble. That would naturally sour him on all efforts to promote it honestly and professionally, so he became embittered and turned to this self-development business to promote it under cover.

"But with a difference. Where his initial impulse was no doubt to use his discovery for the benefit of mankind, he's now determined to destroy everything he can as a revenge for the rebuff by his colleagues."

"Which is a good enough reason why we should continue to blast him," said Hap.

**B**ASCOMB shook his head. "No; in doing that, we would be running the risk of destroying the discovery itself. We can't take the chance; it's too valuable. The

first thing necessary is to preserve Magruder himself until we can obtain control of his discovery and make sure it will be used properly. Then we can take steps to see that Magruder is prevented from taking out his bitterness against society; it's absolutely necessary to withdraw our attack on Magruder now."

Hap's look of suspicion deepened. "I don't see it. You are only theorizing about Magruder's background; and all I can see is that his system has been pretty effective—in taking you over onto his side! What makes you think that this intuitive thing is all to the good if it's used right—and that you can handle it better than Magruder?"

Bascomb told him about the morning's incidents with Sprock and the strangers on the street. He tried to describe his new outlook on the world.

"O.K. Tell me something about me," said Hap in quick challenge.

"Why, yes—" Bascomb said hesitantly. "You—"

He stopped.

"Go on," said Hap. "Should I take a bus or a taxi home tonight? Will it be safe enough to come to work tomorrow?"

Bascomb tried to speak. Nothing came "There's noth-

ing I can tell you," he said at last. "I haven't got it fully, and in a way I can control all the time. It's just at certain times, and certain circumstances; you've got to understand that, Hap."

"All I can see is that Magruder's got you over on his side. For my book, he's a dangerous charlatan who needs to be stamped out; and that goes double in view of what he's done to you. I don't know how he engineered such a switch, but you aren't the same man I knew a few days ago."

Bascomb tried again, from the beginning. But there was nothing he could say to convince Hap Johnson of his changed point of view—or rather, of the harmlessness of it.

The reporter stood up as Bascomb approached the door to leave. "I'm going to fight Magruder, because I think he's a menace to decent, ordinary-thinking people," he said. "And if you go over to his side, Charley, I'm going to fight you, too."

There was no hint of friendship in his eyes.

"I see," said Bascomb slowly. "Well, thanks, anyway, Hap; maybe we'll get together on this thing before it's over."

**H** HE TRIED to assess Hap Johnson's intense hostil-



ity as he went out to the street again. The more he thought about it, the more incredible it seemed. Hap hadn't even been *that* hostile toward Magruder originally; he'd more or less gone along routinely, seeing Magruder as a crank to be suppressed. Now Bascomb felt that the reporter had become his own personal enemy because of the attempt to call off the campaign. He shook his head and gave up the problem for the present.

His inability to put on a demonstration for Hap troubled him, but he felt his explanation had been right. He had something that was growing within him; it couldn't be forced or pushed. It had to come at its own rate, and he was willing to give it time. But he couldn't afford to be backed into a corner like that again until it was fully matured.

Finally, he wanted desperately to talk to somebody who could understand him. He thought momentarily of Magruder himself, but that was out. He felt that he and the Professor were going to be very bitter enemies over exploitation of intuitive processes, and only one of them could survive that struggle.

There was no one—except Sarah.

HE GLANCED at the clock on the corner. She'd be startled to see him coming home in the middle of the day; and old Sprock would run a fever if he ever found out—perhaps even fire him. Somehow, that was becoming less and less important as the day went on.

Sarah greeted him with a smile, opening the door before he was halfway up the walk. "I thought you'd be on the earlier train," she said.

Bascomb stopped, then smiled back at her; he should have known.

They sat in the living room, and he told her about the events of the morning. He told of the interview with Sprock, and the sudden burst of intuitive knowledge that overwhelmed him. He told of the encounters with the strangers on the street, just as he'd told it to Hap Johnson. And he described the reaction of the reporter.

Sarah listened responsively, as if it were all something she'd heard before and had expected to hear again; but when he was through Bascomb realized that he hadn't come home merely for the purpose of telling her these things. He arose and stood by their modern picture window overlooking the landscaped back yard. There was still a

great deal to say and he wasn't quite sure how to go about it.

"It must be that a statistician is essentially a coward," he said finally. "I've spent my life running—fleeing as hard as I could from contact with individual factors. I don't know why; maybe it was because I felt helpless in the presence of an individual—whether it was a figure or a human being.

"But in dealing with groups, and predicting their behavior—there was power in that!" He turned to Sarah, facing her motionless figure across the room. "Can you understand that, darling? Can you understand what it meant to be able to comprehend a mass of individuals when I was completely frightened by the randomness of a single one?"

"Yes—I can understand it," Sarah said softly.

"**N**OW, IT'S gone," Bascomb went on in a low voice. "The terror of an individual is gone—and so is the sense of power over any group whose action I can predict. It's more than my professional career that's involved; it's the basic postulates of my whole life. I can quit hiding behind my ridiculous little rows of black fig-

ures, my summations, my media, my extremes. I can quit being the absurd fool I have been all my life!"

Sarah shook her head. "If you had been a fool, you would never have been able to see what you have been doing. You have merely gained sight which you never had before—and you mustn't forget that you still live in a world of the blind."

"How close am I?" Bascomb said. "You're so far ahead of me—can you tell me how close I am to getting full use of my intuitive capacity so that I can depend on it?"

Sarah shook her head. "I can't even see the end of the road for myself; sometimes I think there may not be any. It may be like a skill that can grow and increase as long as you live. And I'm not so far ahead of you, either; not really. I never had very much; I was just willing to trust and use what I had. It works that way. The more you use it, the more reliable it becomes."

**H**E CROSSED the room and sat down beside her again. He told her his feeling about Magruder and his theoretical explanation for the Professor's behavior. "Magruder's found something with the potency of atomic energy—and he's using it to

light a bonfire. It has to be taken out of his hands and put to proper use. That's my concern now—but I feel the need of more development for myself before trying to take it away from him."

"I think you're right in wanting to exploit his discovery, but I'm not sure Magruder's activities are entirely in error. After all, he brought it to your attention through these methods."

"Yes, but a direct approach would have been a whole lot more effective; and any good results are only incidental. His basic purpose is destructive. He told me so, himself."

"What are you going to do?"

Bacomb shook his head. "I don't know. I thought maybe you could help me there. I try to think ahead on it, but I get nothing but fog and fuzz. I can't seem to grasp any plan of action for myself. I don't get that intuitive feel about anything except that I must protect Magruder from Hap Johnson right now, in order to save his discovery."

"Later, there can be lectures, courses, a school maybe—not the kind of thing Magruder has been doing, but a straightforward presentation showing what his actual discovery is and what it can do. That's the approach we'll

make, I think."

"But there'll be effects that will startle and shock people—"

"We'll prepare them; we'll lay it on the line and let them know exactly what to expect—not sneak up on them without any warning the way Magruder is doing."

"What about such things as your insurance business? It will be bankrupt in time."

"That's the obvious conclusion, but I don't think it's necessarily the right one—for the simple reason that insurance company people can also have the same advantage."

"IT WOULD be a stalemate then," said Sarah. "People would apply for policies only when they needed them, and the insurance companies would turn them down on the basis of knowing claims would soon be made."

"It would turn into a kind of savings and loan institution," Bascomb answered. "People could plan far enough ahead for coming emergencies. Insurance companies could cover them by accepting savings, and making loans for amounts beyond them—such loans being repayable in some manner. It's the only way it would ever work."

"But so many other things,

too. There'll be the public schools, the courts and juries." She gave a small gasp. "There's Zad Clementi Charles—"

Bascomb's mind shifted to thoughts of the alleged kidnap-murderer, whose trial had been headline news in their town for weeks. "Clementi—?" he said. Then the sad, sure intuitive awareness made itself felt in his mind. "Yeah," he said. "There's Clementi; he didn't do it, but they'll take a vote on it and decide to hang him for it. Twelve good men and true—in the statistical world you can multiply ignorance by a constant and get truth."

Sarah had straightened, her eyes staring through the window to the garden beyond. "We could help," she said in a whisper, "if we knew the right answer—"

Bascomb shook his head. "I can't get it; there's only the fog and fuzz. Have you got it?"

Sarah shook her head bitterly. "No—I don't know how to reach it yet. I wonder if it will be like this always—so many things you know exist, just beyond your fingertips?"

### VIII

**I**N A KIND of fierce desperation, they returned to Magruder's manuals during the following evenings.

They swallowed the green and orange and yellow and brown pills with conscious intensity, as if this would increase the potency of the chemicals.

They attended Magruder's lectures and drank up every precious word he spoke. Bascomb tried to shear through the overburden of wordage and digest the meat; Sarah refused to worry about this, taking it all at face value.

The children had been aware of some kind of strange, extracurricular activity on the part of their parents for some time. Now the sense of intensity grew somewhat frightening to them; but Charles Bascomb was not ready to admit them to an understanding of what was being attempted. He didn't know how he could make them understand fully enough to keep from resenting it. And then at other times, he wondered if they might already understand too well.

His own development progressed at a rate that was pleasing to Bascomb in spite of his impatience. After the first violent shock of becoming aware of intuitive powers, he restrained himself on the streets and on the train and wherever he had casual meeting with hordes of his fellow men. He steeled himself to

walk by men who were dying and to sit near those who were headed for inevitable disaster—disaster and death that might be turned aside by even a small degree of insight.

The revolution in his own life he began to see in appalling proportions. He'd known that changes would be necessary; but the early estimates were revised upward in a continually widening spiral. He began to know periods of genuine fear as he saw the gap widening between the future and the past—but he would not have turned back, even if it were possible.

He had not changed his initial estimate of Magruder's person and methods, or the necessity of restricting his activities, but preservation of the discovery was the all important concern right now; and anything that would lead to this end was fair enough.

**H**HE CALLED at Magruder's hotel two weeks after the discovery of his own rising intuitive powers.

Magruder, by that time, had been brought under indictment for practising medicine without license—as a result of Hap Johnson's articles and a complaint based on Joe Archer's analysis of the colored pills. Skillfully, Hap had

built up a powerful attack against all quacks and charlatans in the health and mental development field; and without leaving his paper open in any way for libel, he had directed public attention and sentiment towards Magruder and his course of lectures.

The Professor opened the door after Bascomb's first knock. "I was waiting for you."

And suddenly the enormity of his incredible oversight hit Bascomb between the eyes. How could he combat or deceive in any way a man who had the intuitive ability that Magruder must have? It was an impossibility!

How could he have overlooked this simple fact? And yet he had overlooked it completely.

"Are you feeling ill?" Magruder asked solicitously. "Can I get you anything?"

Bascomb shook his head. "I'm all right; just need to sit down. Over here by the window will be all right."

Magruder nodded and escorted him to the chair, then took one for himself. "It's good to see you again. I've been aware of you at the lectures, but you always get away so quickly I don't have a chance to even say hello."

"I've been reading about

your trouble," said Bascomb a little thickly.

"That! It's nothing; it occurs all the time. All I have to do is make a delaying action until I finish the lectures. Then I'll pay my fine and be on my way."

"Do you think you'll get by with a fine?"

MAGRUDER frowned, his wrinkled face contorting like an old apple. "These newspaper articles have a rather unusual skill, coupled with an extraordinary amount of venom. I confess they do worry me, somewhat; you didn't know what you were starting."

Bascomb remained quite still. *Was there anything Magruder didn't know?*

He had admitted worry over the outcome of the indictment, however—as if that were still hidden from him. Bascomb wondered how it could be, what limits there were to intuition, anyway.

Bascomb said carefully, "I've changed my mind since our last meeting."

"I know," Magruder answered almost impatiently.

Bascomb swallowed hard. The only possible direction was straight ahead, regardless of what Magruder "knew".

"Then you must also know

that my own intuition has begun to function," he said. "I didn't understand what you were talking about before; now I do. I want to go along with you."

"I know that, too," Magruder repeated, nodding. "I'll be delighted to have you, of course. There is only one additional item we need mention: the price."

"You said nothing about price."

"When we talked before, you weren't interested enough to warrant my quoting it. But now you need to know that it's going to cost you everything that has value to you as a member of a statistical society. Your present job; your career as a statistician—"

"I expected that."

"Your name; your position in the community; your home—everything, in fact, except your family. You have good fortune, indeed, in your wife."

Bascomb paled. "I don't understand," he murmured.

"You can't; not now. Understanding will come later. The important thing is that you are ready to begin. You value sufficiently the power of intuition to be willing to pay the price of everything Statistical Society offers. There is no doubt about that, is there?"

Bascomb looked across at the enigmatic Professor in staring silence. Nothing in his whole life had prepared him for so fantastic a conversation as this one. What did Magruder mean? How much did he actually know? If he could be so positive about some things, and yet have doubt about others, it was obvious he did not have hundred percent intuition. And one of the things he seemed not to know was Bascomb's own private intentions in this matter. If that were true—and Bascomb felt almost certain of it—then this talk of a fantastic "price" was just that—fantastic.

He had to gamble on it. He nodded his head slowly and said, "There is no doubt about it. I am ready to begin."

"Excellent!" exclaimed Magruder. He got to his feet energetically. "There are a good many things I have to show you. This indictment business is going to interfere considerably, and you can be a great help to me within a short time—"

**H**OURS LATER, Bascomb had a substantial lead in the direction he wanted to go. Magruder gave no sign of doubting Bascomb's good faith, or sensing his real purpose.

He explained the source of his medication—a small private capsule company—and gave Bascomb authority to place orders with a letter of introduction that would validate those orders. He admitted the false front of gobbledygook pseudo-scientific terms in his lectures.

"That's the way it has to be done," he said confidentially. "The public would never swallow the actual facts. They'd rather have corporeal vibrations and ethereal streams, than try to understand that men made a mistake in the dawn of history which we now have to correct."

"But what kind of teaching is that?" Bascomb demanded in spite of himself. "How can they ever learn what intuition really is by such methods?"

Magruder glanced sidewise at him. "How does a baby learn to see, or to smell, or to feel? Intuition's like that. First order functions can't be taught. They are blueprinted in the germ plasm from ages past, and the psyche reads the plans in the dark schoolroom of the womb. There, it learns how to make its own heart beat, and when it comes into the world, how its eyes are to function—and its lungs, stomach, and intuition. No—you don't teach those things."



"But what do you do, then? Something happens—something happened to teach me how to use intuition."

"**D**ID IT? I think not. You learned how yourself—after I assisted in removing some of the obstacles imposed by a Statistical Society. The exercises free the imagery mechanisms of your mind, teach your body that it need not abhor certain inherent functions. The pills react biochemically to inhibit the fear component attached to these functions. A wholly artificial fear, you understand, which has been laboriously attached by Society.

"That is all that is possible to do. Teaching is a greatly over-rated activity. It is obviously nothing more than extracting an agreement—sometimes to good ends, sometimes to bad. But it's always applied to second order effects, the use of a function—not the function itself.

"Self-learned items such as breathing, heart circulation, intuition, artistic creation, and ten thousand others can be suppressed by forces which may be stronger than the urge to live and grow. If the suppression has not already caused the death of the body—or the soul—it may be possible to remove the suppres-

sion, but still the organism must do its own learning in the first order field of living, growing, creating.

"In our activity we do nothing but remove the suppressors."

Bascomb made no comment. He cringed slightly before the Professor's reflection on the many years spent in achieving his place as a scholarly statistician; but it was heavy going following the physiological and psychological theories into which Magruder now plunged. Bascomb tried to stay with it, taking copious notes to refresh his memory and to check against standard texts later.

**W**HEN THE interview was finally over, Bascomb felt he was well on his way. Reaching the street after leaving Magruder's suite, only one puzzle remained to plague his mind insistently.

The price.

Magruder saw disaster ahead for him; but nothing could be clearer than Bascomb's own intuitive knowledge that he was on the right track—and Sarah verified it wholeheartedly.

Could two people, with functioning intuitive powers, get opposing answers to the same problem?

The answer was obviously no—provided there was any validity to intuitive knowledge at all. That left two possibilities: Magruder's intuitive power was less than Bascomb's own; or Magruder had no knowledge whatever of Bascomb's real intentions—and this made the difference in their view of the future.

Bascomb contented himself with this latter answer; he wasn't entirely satisfied with it, but there was no other in sight. And he knew he was right in what he was doing. There was no question of it, no sliver of doubt.

**H**E HAD decided that Hap Johnson's articles could be useful, after all, in keeping Magruder too occupied to pay too close attention to Bascomb's failure to follow instructions—if only it didn't turn heavily against the discovery itself.

Bascomb was thinking this the next morning when he opened the paper and Magruder's picture slapped him in the eye. The Professor had been arrested during the previous afternoon. He had not put up bail—which was set at an unreasonably high fifteen thousand dollars. He was securely in jail.

The news was disconcerting. Bascomb hadn't wanted

anything like this to befall the Professor; yet it put him safely out of the way, and left a free hand to inaugurate a sane program. It would be all to the good as long as it restrained the professor's destructive activities—without destroying his discovery. It seemed to Bascomb a good indicator that he, not the Professor, was right. He had an intuitive feeling that this was so; it meant he had to get started—and quickly.

There was the question of Bascomb's job with New England. At first, he had considered leaving it forthwith—but that was mere crude logic that led to such a conclusion. Intuitively, now, he recognized the necessity of remaining.

First of all, he needed the money it provided. But in addition, the company represented an institution he had come to love; he didn't intend to see it scuttled. The obvious course was to take a hand in the inevitable transition. Men like Sprock would need a great deal of help during that difficult time.

**A**S SOON as he reached the office that morning, Bascomb requested Hadley to make a check on the batch of policies he'd warned Tremayne and Sprock about.

There was no waiting; Hadley had the information already at hand, having started a one man project to discover anomalies.

"Five of those you mentioned have made claims," he said, and was pleased at Bascomb's resulting smile. But on second thought his pleasure turned to wonder. How could Bascomb have known what ones to ask for?

"Get me the papers," said Bascomb; "I want to add them to my study."

He checked them over. It would have been nice if the remaining one had come in, but this was good enough. One death claim; two accidents, and two liabilities. He took the sheaf of papers and walked down the hall to Sprock's office.

The vice-president glanced up belligerently as the secretary ushered Bascomb in. "I was about to call you," he said. He ruffled a handful of papers in front of him and lowered bushy eyebrows. "It's time we did some more talking."

Bascomb's heartbeat quickened a trifle, and then he knew that Sprock already had a report on the claims. He hadn't ignored the prediction, after all!

Smiling, Bascomb took the offered chair. "I think we

both have the same thing in mind," he said.

"All right, talk!" The vice-president commanded.

"I wasn't honest with you when I was here the other day," said Bascomb with deliberation. "I told you I had predicted these claims on the basis of a new mathematical formula I had developed. That wasn't true."

"Then why did you tell me such a cock and bull story!" Sprock roared.

"Because I felt you wouldn't be likely to believe the genuine truth. Now that I have the proof I can tell you. I predicted those claims simply because of the ability—in and of myself, without the help of any formula of any kind—to do so. Such an ability is sometimes called intuition."

"Bascomb, I warned you the last time you were in here—"

"These policy holders have the same kind of ability; that's why they were able to predict their own immediate need of insurance."

**S**PROCK'S face clouded even further; his fist clenched the papers to a wad. "You can't possibly believe I'm going to accept a fool story like that!"

Bascomb waited. He held out the claim papers. "These

must be explained," he said.

Sprock's silence seemed interminable; he was so immobile he seemed scarcely alive. Only the faint movement of his thin chest and the rapid shifting of his cold blue eyes to Bascomb's face and back to the papers betrayed animation.

Finally, he spoke again. "Go on," he said. "I believe you; I have to believe you."

"There'll be thousands of these," said Bascomb. "You are thinking it means the end, if enough people find themselves able to do what these few have done. That's not necessarily true. I—and others like me—can work from this end, detecting such applications.

"But it means that we must have a new policy; this is what I came to see you about. We'll have to issue a policy whose benefits are based on the term which it has run. We'll issue them only to people like these." He patted the pile of claims. "That will show them the system works both ways and will discourage their attempts to bring a run on us; after that, we'll need a new kind of program." In detail, he explained his proposal for a savings and loan system, which would serve the needs of intuitionists and keep the company solvent.

When he was through, Sprock's expression remained unchanged. "I will take your recommendations under advisement," he said. "I'll have to discuss these short claims with our Board. But later, you and I will have much more talking to do about this new-found ability. I think there needs to be considerable explanation about its sudden appearance in epidemic form!"

"Any time that is convenient, sir," said Bascomb, rising. "I can tell you whatever you wish to know about it."

**H**E WAS a trifle disappointed that Sprock did not demand further explanation at the moment but this was overshadowed by his elation at Sprock's unwilling, yet definite acceptance of the reality of intuition. The first great step had been taken.

Later in the day he took a second, smaller step. He called Hadley in and with a confidential air that thrilled the junior statistician he explained about intuition. Hadley took it with difficulty; he was well on the way to solidification in his statistical mold. But when Bascomb offered personally to teach him the methods of intuition, he expressed effusive thanks.

These were beginnings; but

a bold program of expansion was necessary now to take advantage of Magruder's difficulty, and his own possession of the basic data on intuition.

From Magruder's secretary—who was now out of a job and didn't care much about the Professor's affairs in the first place—he obtained a list of those registered for the course of lectures. He prepared a letter explaining that he was in a position to explain Magruder's difficulty with the law and replace the hocus-pocus of his lectures with an honest exposition of the principles of man's intuitional powers and how to attain them.

He prepared a second letter which went to a large, select group of personal friends, business associates, and clients of New England. In this he outlined the occurrence of anomalies in human human wisdom and insight and explained briefly the role of intuition in men's affairs. He invited them to attend a series of discourses and instruction on how to improve their personal intuitive abilities.

**H**E CHANGED the location from Magruder's meeting place in order to eliminate as much as possible

all association with the Professor's quackery and nonsense. He was going to give out the data in a strictly scientific, straight-from-the-shoulder manner that would be bound to appeal to people of intellect and logical thinking. People who could understand the tremendous responsibility toward society, which was involved in obtaining use of the intuitive faculties of the mind. With such a class of people initially in possession of full intuition there would be no risk of the panic and ruin that Magruder's program was deliberately designed to induce.

He felt good about the whole thing; it was intuitively correct. Sarah agreed that it was. Her only worry was in regard to Magruder. "We ought to do something to help," she said. "After all, he's the one responsible for bringing these principles to light. We owe him for that. And those newspaper articles are getting people so inflamed against him that he's liable to get a sentence of twenty years in jail, for things he didn't have the remotest chance of doing."

Bascomb himself was still uncertain about the position of Magruder. It worried him, too; particularly since there was no intuitive insight either

of them could get regarding him.

"After this thing gets rolling," he promised. "I'll have a talk with him and see if something can't be done. I'll see Cummings, the D.A., too. I used to sit next to him at Club."

Bascomb was quite aware that he was going to distribute pills just as Magruder had done, which was the immediate cause of Magruder's arrest. But he knew there was no risk to himself in this. In the Professor's case it had been just an excuse to lay hands on him; with a straightforward approach there would be no such complication.

## IX

**C**HARLES and Sarah Bascomb were elated by the sight of the first night crowd filling up the hall. Logic had told them they were getting a place much too big. But it was just right.

The crowd was divided about equally between Bascomb's friends and business people, and the group from Magruder's course. Bascomb was continually surprised by his own lack of apprehension concerning the reactions of both groups. It would be dif-

ficult to wean Magruder's people away from corporeal vibrations; and he knew the business people would not take kindly to the idea that statistics was a feeble tool to be used only in the absence of a more profound and positive intuition. Yet he felt completely secure in what he was about to do.

The feeling persisted, even when Hap Johnson walked in and took a seat at the rear of the hall. Bascomb admitted to himself he was shaken when he looked out and saw the reporter's entrance. He hadn't invited Hap, and had no idea how he had got wind of the meeting. But it didn't matter, he thought; nothing that the *Courier* might print could possibly alter the intuitive assurance he felt.

He stepped out between the curtains on the platform. He was aware of the stares of surprise, curiosity, challenge, and occasional contempt. He smiled confidently and held up a hand to quiet the perfunctory applause.

"It was probably no small surprise to those of you who know me," he said, "to read my invitation to this gathering. I am gratified that so many of you took the trouble to accept and be here tonight.

"What I have to say will sound strange to all of you.

Some of you will be thoroughly outraged—even as I was when I first encountered this information. I hope no one will be so outraged or disbelieving that he will consider it beneath his dignity to test the validity of these facts for himself—also as I have done.”

**G**INGERLY, then, as if edging carefully into cold, deep water, Bascomb spoke of the historical evidence for the existence of intuition as it might be familiar to his audience. He modified Magruder's exposition considerably, omitting the Professor's far-fetched theories that went back to the dawn of civilization. He reminded his listeners of instances which they could believe, in which intuition had proven superior to all other forms of knowledge as a basis for action.

They listened, but he could see they weren't liking it. Magruder's group was obviously contemptuous of so prosaic a term as intuition; they wanted strong meat—corporeal vibrations. The business people were disgusted; Bascomb could read in their faces the thoughts he himself had had, not so long ago.

Somehow he wasn't getting it over; he was trying to be reasonable and scientific, but

his listeners were cold to his exposition.

“How much would it be worth to know,” he said, “which one out of many possible lines of action was most likely to succeed? How much would it be worth to know which man out of a group could best do a job—or which product out of many thousands was not up to specified quality? You who are executives, personnel managers, quality control experts—what would it be worth to you to have infallible insight in your profession instead of mere assurance that your error will not be greater than a stated amount?”

“Statistics can never give you anything more than this assurance. Intuition, properly applied, can give you positive knowledge.”

**I**N HIS backward-looking moments he never quite understood why he dared the argument he brought up next. Certainly, his planned discourse didn't call for it; but the apathy of the group made him a little desperate, he thought afterward.

“Think of the significance in our judicial processes,” he said. “We never *know* in many instances whether a man is actually guilty of a crime or not. We take a ballot



and vote him guilty or innocent, and our concept of justice and our lust for vengeance are satisfied.

"We have seen in recent days how this functions in our own city. We have voted a man guilty of the worst possible crime. There were good, sound, logical reasons for such a vote. He was a poor, unlettered devil who aroused no one's sympathy, so who could regret if an error were made? Besides, he was the janitor in the apartment house where the victim lived, and she was found stuffed in the furnace to which only he was supposed to have access.

"But I know that Zad Clementi is innocent of this crime!"

**F**OR SHEER emotional reaction, he might as well have set off a charge of dynamite in their midst. There was no physical response, but he felt the hostile flare in their minds like a bright, silent flame.

There was not a man or woman in the audience who didn't believe Zad Clementi was a justly condemned murderer.

Bascomb recognized his error the moment he closed his mouth, and he was appalled. Whatever had caused him to bring up such an argument?

He was acting like a fool, letting their apathy rattle him; where was his intuitive assurance regarding his course of action?

It was there, silent, reassuring, commending him for having done well.

And for the first time since it came, he began to doubt.

He was *not* doing well; he had made a blunder that had alienated his listeners beyond all repair.

But he tried to make repairs. For another full hour he tried valiently to convey something of his own sense of faith in the intuitive powers of Man. With that faith so severely shaken, however, he had no ability to persuade others.

When some of those in the back rows began getting up to leave, he knew his chance was gone.

Not all of them were ready to walk out on him, however. Some wanted to talk it over, and insisted on the scheduled question and answer period. They didn't want to know about the methods of gaining intuitive understanding; they wanted to tell him what they thought about the things he'd already said.

It grew boisterous and vicious; he left the platform in defeat.

AS IF HE had forgotten where he lived, or didn't want to go there, he drove through town and along its outskirts and suburbs in a mazelike pattern. Beside him, Sarah remained silent, waiting for him to be the first to speak.

He did, finally. He said bitterly, "How do you suppose I ever got suckered into a thing like that? I must have been crazy the past few weeks—completely off my nut! Intuition—!"

"You don't believe it's real any more?" asked Sarah quietly.

"As real as it's always been—a chance hunch now and then. With just as much chance of being wrong as right!"

"What about the policies?"

"What about them? I'll find that statistical formula I bragged about to Sprock and explain them! The ones that won't fit—well, the old idea of a hunch is as good as any explanation. I'll buy it. But what a fool Magruder made out of me, with his Yogi tricks and slick performance! I'll bet he isn't even Magruder—"

"What about Myersville?"

"Who knows—it has nothing to do with this."

"And Sloan and his soap failure?"

"He's probably got his trouble ironed out by now."

"And you felt it so strongly yourself—that is was real and this was the way to go."

Bascomb's lips compressed tightly before he answered. "I've seen the same thing in backwoods religious meetings, too."

"I still feel somehow that tonight was not a loss," said Sarah.

"It wasn't," Bascomb answered grimly. "It put me back on the track. What if I'd quit New England first? But there's still Sprock." He grimaced painfully. "Tomorrow I have to see Sprock and do the Most Humble Grand Salaam."

HE NEVER got the chance; he suspected he wouldn't when he saw the paper before breakfast the following morning. The international news was light, and his own picture was on the front page, neatly framed by Magruder's on one side and Zad Clementi's on the other.

The caption declared: "*Mathematician Computes Clementi Innocence.*"

The story described him as a disciple of Magruder, taking over the Professor's work while the latter languished in jail, unable to provide bail on charges of medical practise

without license. It told in great detail and with considerable accuracy the things Bascomb had said about intuition and the possibility of gaining skill in its use.

The story was written by Hap Johnson.

Near the end, Hap said. *"All this reminds your reporter about the old story of the tired balliff who was asked to go out for about the nine hundredth time to get the belaboring jurors something to eat. He's the one, you remember, who came back with eleven meals and a bale of hay."*

*"Well, we can all be thankful that a certain insurance statistician wasn't on the Clementi jury. We've had clean-cut justice done on this case. a thing our courts and the citizens of Landbridge can be proud of. But we'll tell you: if anyone still cares to make a gift of a bale of hay at this particular date, your reporter will see that it's properly delivered."*

It sent a stunning wave of hurt through Bascomb as he read it. Hap Johnson had been his friend. This bitterness was something he did not understand; he gave up trying.

On his desk, when he reached the office, there was a note for him to appear in the office of vice-president

Sprock. Bascomb caught furtive glances of those beyond the glass walls of his office as he read it. Obviously they'd seen the morning papers.

Hadley hadn't, apparently, for he came in brightly, almost on Bascomb's heels. "Here's the last of the policies you asked about, Mr. Bascomb," he said. "Bheuner's Hardware Store. It burned to the ground last night."

That must have been in the second section, which Bascomb hadn't read. He stood staring, long after Hadley had left, at the two papers on his desk: the order from Sprock, and the claim from Bheuner. The hardware man hadn't lost any time, he thought.

But it would do no good to call it to Sprock's attention now; his case was lost, as far as New England was concerned. He left the claim paper on his desk and walked slowly down the hall.

**THE VICE-PRESIDENT** was surprisingly direct and to the point. He outlined briefly the history of the insurance business, particularly that of New England. He dwelt at moderate length on the sacredness of the obligations incurred by the Company in behalf of the Policy-

holders. He went most heavily into the personal qualifications required of the ones chosen to stand vigil over that enduring trust.

But the thing of greatest significance was his parting shot:—"I shall see to it personally, Bascomb, that no firm in this field ever considers your name on its roster without knowing the true facts of your fantastic attempt to besmirch the entire insurance institution in America! Intuition! Good-day, Mr. Bascomb."

He returned along the hall to his own office. Blackballed; he had no doubts that Sprock would and could do it.

He had thirty days coming if he wanted it, but he declined. He told Sprock he'd finish up at once, if that was all right; it was. He turned over his current studies to Wardlaw, Assistant Statistician. He cleaned out his desk and said a stiff goodbye to the office associates who didn't suddenly have to go down the hall for a break as they saw he was about ready.

That was it. He and New England were through. As he turned his back on the building he was aware that this fact had not sunk thoroughly into all his cells. A certain part of him had no doubt that he would be coming this way

again in the morning. It would be a bitter struggle when that certain part attained full awareness.

**S**ARAH WAS not surprised. They had discussed it at breakfast, and she had told him it was going to happen. He had believed her, but hoped for some miracle to prove her wrong—to prove all her intuitive hunches wrong for the rest of their lives.

It wouldn't be bad, however, he told her; he'd start looking in the morning. He might have to go farther away, but there wouldn't be much trouble for a man of his experience. He didn't tell her of Sprock's threat.

He did little the next day except write some letters asking for interviews. He went to a public stenographer in town to do this, and came home early—and the height of thirteen-year-old Mark's wails of rage and discomfort.

These were coming from the direction of the bathroom, where Bascomb found Sarah busy with soap and water and bandages. His oldest boy's eye was tightly closed. Cuts and bruises decorated the rest of his face and his upper torso.

Bascomb wanted to make it light, but he saw Sarah's face

and changed his intended tone. "What was it all about?" he asked evenly.

MARK GLANCED up, hesitant; he turned to his mother. "It's all right," she said grimly.

"Down at school—," said Mark. "All the kids—I told them they couldn't say things like that and tried to make 'em shut up. But I couldn't lick the whole school."

"What were they saying?" Bascomb asked.

"That you are a Communist. They went around singing it kind of: Bascomb's dad's a Red man; that sort of thing. Then Art Slescher wrote on the boards in all the classes before I got there: *Name a dirty Commie*. I got him after school."

Bascomb looked at Sarah. His face blanched. They didn't speak.

Later, when the children were in bed, they tried to talk about it. "We can't go on bucking something like that forever," Sarah said.

"It won't be forever," Bascomb snapped, more irritably than he intended; "I mean, it will die down after while. You know how these newspaper stories go. They pin a guy to the cross with scandal, and in a week even his next door neighbors have forgotten about it."

"Not this." Sarah shook her head. "It hasn't even got a good start it's going to build bigger and bigger. Mark's experience isn't the only one."

"What else?"

"I overheard talk at the store while I was shopping today. Two women on the other side of grocery island. They thought I'd gone away. One mentioned your name. Said her daughter had a friend who'd heard you were caught molesting some high school girls one night—that it was no wonder you were defending a man like Clementi."

BASCOMB buried his face in his hands and groaned with helpless despair and rage "Such a little thing to begin with—! How in Heaven's name did it lead up to this? I hope they hang Magruder!" He looked up. "It's going to be hell to live with while it lasts, but time will make a difference."

"Not in this." Sarah shook her head again; "it will only grow worse."

"Then what are we to do! We've got our home here. It's our community as much as those gossiping old biddies—those mentally twisted kids—"

"It's going to force us out, Charles; we can't live here

any longer. The sooner we prepare to leave, the better we'll be. Put the house up for sale tomorrow!"

Only then, for the first time in many days, did Bascomb remember Magruder's strange words, and it hit him like a blow in the stomach. *"It's going to cost you everything—your present job, your whole career—your good name—your position in the community; your home—"*

Magruder had said that; and every word of it was coming true.

But there was time and a way to save things yet. "We're not moving out before a thing of that kind," he said; "there're ways of licking it."

"At the price of our own destruction!"

"It's always been expensive to fight against insane prejudice, but the world would be a hell of a place to live in if a few of us didn't try."

"Tell Mark to not get involved in any more fistfights; tell him that when the others accuse me of being a Communist, he's to agree. He's to tell them I've got a pipeline straight to Moscow. Krushchev himself appointed me, and I'm planning to wipe out the President and his Cabinet next month."

"Tell the neighborhood biddies the same thing. Walk up

and ask their advice on what to do with a husband you catch every week or two with sixteen-year old girls right in your own house. That'll shut them up after a while.

"And then—we're staying; we're staying right here and we'll find out who did the murder Clementi is accused of. We'll ram it down their throats until it chokes every one of the lying, sadistic gossipers!"

"We have nothing but an intuitive sense about Clementi—and you've rejected that. So possibly the jury was right, after all."

**B**ASCOMB remained staring straight ahead of him to the figured pattern on the opposite wall; it seemed as if he hadn't heard her. Then slowly his lips parted. "No," he said. "I've rejected everything Magruder induced me to believe about intuition, but Clementi's innocence doesn't depend on that. Our feelings about him were merely random chance, let us say, but logic convinces me we were right in that one thing. I've gone back and read the accounts of the trial. The evidence is ridiculous; they haven't given him a chance. And I think it's because there's someone who's being protected."

## X

IT WAS A noble and virtuous gesture. Bascomb felt Sarah would commend him and agree to stick valiantly by him. Instead, she got up and paused in the center of the room. She gave him a single backward, almost-contemptuous look. "You are being an idiotic fool!" she said. "A pebble can't stop a fifty ton boulder rolling down a hill." She strode off in the direction of the bedroom.

A week later, Charles Bascomb was convinced she was right. Mark was in the hospital to get an arm set after it had been broken when the mob piled on him at school. Sarah had been read out of the two ladies clubs she belonged to; and the minister of their Church had informed her he had made different arrangements in the baby-sitting round robin which had been worked out during services. Sarah wouldn't need to bother with it any more.

Bascomb had found his car painted a screaming red—including all the glass—when he got off the train at the end of the week to drive home. The same night their front windows were broken with slingshots; and when they got up, they found a crude ham-

mer and sickle painted on the front door.

In the city he'd not been able to get a single job interview during the entire time.

Bascomb visited the local suburban real estate office in the early morning. By afternoon he had a sale—at a four thousand dollar loss, which the agent assured him was the best he could do in the light of the jinxed condition of the property.

Once agreeing to defeat, it was impossible for Bascomb to get out too soon. He didn't know where they were going, but as soon as all arrangements for storage and forwarding of their personal goods had been made he turned the car west. Slivers of red paint still showed next to the rubber gasket of the windshield; but the new paint job on the car symbolized the only thing he was taking with them, hope.

He didn't know where they were going. He was still stunned by the events of past days. The uncontrolled viciousness and brutality of the attacks against his family were unexplainable. Even the police had expressed apathy toward his complaints. A city had turned against him.

And for what? he asked himself continually, over and over again. There was no ra-



tional explanation. His single statement of defense for Clementi had set it off. But that must be only the trigger. Where was the main explosive force of the catastrophe! He didn't know. All he was sure of was that his townsmen seemed to have suddenly gone insane.

**THEY** CROSSED New York in easy stages, and stopped late that night at a Pennsylvania tourist lodge. Mark's arm was giving him pain. Neither Chuck, nor Darcie, the youngest, lying across his lap asleep, was enjoying the ride. They were running from a terror that wouldn't show its proper face.

It was there that they heard the newscast as they turned on the small radio in the lodge.

*"Police are looking for a once-respected insurance executive now fleeing with his family from the consequences of an incredible wave of criminal attacks. Charles Bascomb—dark green Buick—six girls all under age—license number—"*

"Come on!" said Bascomb. "It must have been on earlier; I noticed the clerk watching closely while I wrote down our license number—"

They turned out of the drive, even as the clerk came

out of the office to witness their unexplained departure. Sarah saw him turn and run inside. "He's phoning the police," she said.

There was no hysteria, or even despair, Bascomb, recalled later as he turned the car onto the highway and kept it moving. A kind of calm seemed to have settled over them all. The children were quiet, and Sarah sat as if she had confidence that Bascomb knew exactly what he was doing.

As if he actually did, he slowed at a dark intersection and turned off on a secondary highway. "We'll have to keep off the main roads," he said. "This one ought to take us where we're going."

No one asked where that was; at the moment Bascomb didn't think to inquire in his own mind just what he meant by his words. He just kept driving. About midnight he pulled up at a small country crossroads community. A single lighted sign: *Hotel* shown in the whole village.

"We'll be all right here," Bascomb said with assurance; "we'll try to get some rest and get out early in the morning."

**THEY** WENT south and west, avoiding the main highways rounding the Michigan shore line. No one viewed

them with any more suspicion than any ordinary family of tourists; no siren-screaming cars rocketed along side them. Just once did they catch a repeat of the news broadcast mentioning the police pursuit.

When Bascomb abruptly turned the car to a northerly course, he had a momentary impulse to stop and check the road map and ask himself why the devil he was heading this way. But he didn't stop; he merely slowed for an instant—then stepped on the gas and settled a little more comfortably behind the wheel. He'd known it all along, of course.

Where else would they be going to Myersville—the town that burned television sets in the square?

**THEY ARRIVED** very late. The headlights of the car showed a neat village of white, green-trimmed houses. There appeared to be only a single hotel, and they drew up before it, after driving the length of the town and returning. As they walked into the small lobby a man got to his feet from a nearby leather chair and advanced with outstretched hand. He was smiling broadly.

"I've been waiting all evening for you," Professor Magruder said.

Sarah Bascomb walked to-

ward him with an answering smile and accepted his hand. But Charles stopped short and stared at the little, wizened man who was at the root of all his troubles.

He'd felt there was safety in their flight west. When Bascomb turned north, he knew he'd been subconsciously aware from the beginning that they'd end up in Myersville.

But by no twist of backward calculation could he admit that seeing Magruder was anything but an unexpected shock. Magruder was the last person in the world he wanted to meet.

"How did you get here?" he demanded.

"Flew," said Magruder easily. "The judge threw out the charges in the preliminary hearing, and let me go the day you left. I tried to get in touch with you, but you were a little too early for me. I knew I'd find you here."

"And just how did you know that?" Bascomb said belligerently.

Magruder smiled again. "How did you know Myersville was the place to come to?"

He refused to say another word about the subject of their past relationship. While he accompanied them to the dining room, and to a meal

that seemed to have been waiting for them, he told about the town, its peacefulness and opportunity for full living, which he was sure they would enjoy. He spoke of other, incidental, things, but the word intuition was not mentioned that night.

He led them directly to their rooms afterward.

"We have to register," Bascomb explained.

"That has been taken care of," said Magruder. "After all, we run the place."

Bascomb knew by then it would be useless to ask the identity of "we".

**T**HE CHILDREN had never seen the Professor, of course, and had heard his name only when it slipped in their presence. But they struck up an immediate friendship. At the breakfast table the following morning the Professor proved an unexpected adeptness with sleight-of-hand tricks, riddles, and stories that kept the children enthralled.

Bascomb, however, was more absorbed in an inspection of his fellow diners; he was used to seeing occasionally an individual he mentally classified as a "character"—but never in such numbers as this. The hotel seemed to be full of them.

Magruder was watching

him, he discovered after a time. The children and Sarah had turned to their meal, and the Professor said, "That's Shifty you're watching across the room. He's a great man in a pool room. While pool isn't as popular as it once was, he handles dirty pictures, too. That gives him a good following in the highschool crowd, where he specializes in pushing our stuff. The kids think they've been on a genuine reefer jag when they get through."

"I'd like to know what the devil you're talking about," said Bascomb testily.

"Marty, over there, works the racing crowd. He gives them a system that really sends them flipping—but they pick the ponies right too. They wouldn't let go of Marty for all the uranium in Utah.

"Then the fellow next to him is Doc Simmons; he's a chiropractor. Has a nice little practice among neurotic females of the upper bracket in Chicago. Across the table is Doc Bywater—we have a lot of Docs here—who is behind the ads you see in the little magazine sometimes. You know: *cure piles in ten days or your money back. Or: prostrate sufferers, get relief overnight.* That sort of thing. He gives them a dilly of a

routine, and, of course, it works one hundred per cent of the time. He's got a warehouse full of testimonials."

"It makes absolutely no sense at all!" Bascomb exclaimed.

**A**LL RIGHT, then, I'll tell you." Magruder had been eating as he talked; now he arose, finished with breakfast while Bascomb hadn't touched a thing. Bascomb got up with him, however, and went out to the broad porch of the hotel and sat down facing the small unbusy main street of the town.

"Peaceful place, isn't it?" said Magruder. He pointed to a dark spot on the gravel of the town square a block away "That's where they burned the television sets; it must have been quite a show.

"But you wanted to know what this was all about, didn't you? That shouldn't be very hard, actually, because you already know—"

"I don't know a thing!" Bascomb cried. "Who are the 'we' you referred to last night? Who are the people you pointed out in the dining room—what's the meaning of their nonsensical activities?"

"The first thing you need to comprehend," said Magruder slowly and carefully now, "is that intuition does *not*

provide you with a superman intellect in the logical, statistical world you have lived in all your life.

"Intuition is an entirely different breed of cat, a *non*-logical means of arriving at conclusions about the world. Remember that the world and its problems remain the same. Sometimes the answers are the same, too; most of them are considerably better. But the change of method sometimes tends to make the whole picture—the world of your reality, its problems, your personal inter-relations—all of these often look so different that you think you've suddenly dropped down on another world.

"Non-logical has come to be *synonymous* with irrational or crazy;—a piece of sheer propaganda put out by a system struggling tooth and nail, so to speak, to prevent recognition of another and better system. When shifting from one to the other you may be inclined to discount some of the features of the new."

**B**ASCOMB SNORTED in disgust. "If you're trying to tell me I had any sense of intuition at work you can save your breath. The one time I depended on it in full confidence, it nearly de-

stroyed me. It wiped out everything I've built up so far—home, job, community relationship. I'm even wanted by the police, I hear. Heaven only knows how that will turn out!"

"No—I think Charles Bascomb knows that it will turn out all right. The hysteria will pass; the charges will be dropped and forgotten. There will be no continued pursuit and harassment from that quarter.

"I'm quite sure you know also that your intuition did not fail you. It was working accurately to bring you with optimum speed to the new circumstances which will give you maximum satisfaction in life."

"You're crazy! I took your pseudo-scientific nonsense, hook line and sinker, and determined I *would* base a new life on it. My wife agreed with me. Everything went wrong; you evidently know what happened."

"And you recall, also, that I predicted this would be the course of events? It had to be. You were following a strongly-working intuitive faculty, and it was leading you along an optimum path.

"There's one trait of intuition that makes it a little hard for a statistically bred and educated man to stomach.

Intuition is completely ruthless. If reaching a certain goal involves a pathway through beartraps and hellfire, intuition makes no allowances for logical objections to these obstacles. It takes you through; that's what happened in your case."

"I hope you're not trying to tell me it was intuitively desirable that I be run out of town with my reputation destroyed!"

**M**AGRUDER NODDED. "That's exactly the case," he said. "You had accepted your intuitive faculty as a prime motivator at the moment you recognized it actually existed. Not everyone does that, you understand, but you did—hook, line, and sinker, as you say.

"It was therefore very easy for it to assume a very high functioning level, and replace a considerable mass of logical reasoning. But even so, it was still comparatively embryonic in development—with the result that you were somewhat in the position of a man trying to ride two horses wanting to go in opposite directions.

"You permitted intuition to operate, but you tried to evaluate its results logically."

"An intuitionist has no desire for status in the commu-

nity, I suppose! No need for a sound, stable reputation and solid family life!"

Magruder grimaced impatiently. "I suppose it's difficult to shuck off the lifelong habit of trying to generalize from a single specific incident. You'll learn, however—

"Your case has nothing to do with what intuitionists in general desire or do not desire. For you, your intuition determined an optimum course of action with the precision of Natural Law. For *you*, not for anybody else. For *you*."

"Is there any purpose in it that can be understood by my simple logical mind, then?" Bascomb asked bitterly.

"**O**F COURSE. It is simply that you had to be *driven* out of your niche in a statistical society, or you would not have gone. That represents an almost unbelievable reflex activity of the intuition which *cannot* be understood in logical terms. It saw, so to speak, that you were desirous of utilizing intuition; but it also saw that you would never renounce sufficiently the statistical way of life you had built up so solidly. It saw, therefore the necessity of destroying the impediment in order to permit you to realize your ba-

sic intuitive choice of an intuitive life. So it set up the chain of circumstances—it led *you* to set them up—to destroy your position in statistical society, and thereby free you for the fuller life you had already chosen but could not otherwise obtain.

"You'll get used to that kind of operation after while; I'll admit it shakes you pretty hard the first few times it goes into operation!"

"It's absolutely—"

Bascomb didn't finish with the word "insane", which was on the tip of his tongue. He suddenly sat very still, staring across the quiet Main Street of Myersville. In the vault of his mind, a page seemed to have turned, and a previous opacity was flooded with a brilliance of light. He felt a trembling within the fibers of his being, that was at once both a joy and an apprehension.

Every word of Magruder's last statements was true!

**H**E SAW it now—and understood how he could not possibly have seen it before. But something within him was aware—the mysterious, fearful thing men called intuition—

He would *not* have left his niche. He would have done such nonsensical things as

promoting the course he attempted; he would have spoken of his find to his friends and associates.

And he would have backed down whenever their ridicule endangered his association with them. He would have valued his place in the community his security or reputation—everything—above a full exploitation of intuition. He would have remained with New England; he would have remained a Statistical Man.

Something in him saw how it would be. And now he witnessed clearly on the lighted page of his mind the process of that seeing, the intricate course of its illogical flow.

The process that had made him once and for all a Non-Statistical Man.

It would be there again, he knew, doing its work out of sight of his living, reasoning awareness. He'd never doubt or mistrust it again. This was the very quality of faith he'd once suggested to Magruder!

"I wouldn't have left without being driven," he said slowly, his eyes still staring at the buildings on the other side of the street. "I'll never lose faith in my intuition again."

Magruder smiled a bit wistfully. "You'll need it; but you'll doubt the truth of your

statement when intuition leads you through far hotter hells than anything you've seen up to now. And it will. Never doubt *that*!

"But, eventually, you will have a solid faith that can't be shaken by anything you encounter. You'll know by then that intuitive awareness excels crude logic in any basic crisis."

"It seems wrong," said Bascomb dubiously, "the way we've been talking and thinking about it. Like something outside myself, driving, directing and telling me what to do without any volition of my own. It gives me an uncomfortable feeling to think of it that way."

**"IT SHOULD,** because that's not the way to think of it. Intuition is not some mysterious little green man in your skull, giving instructions and keeping back data from you.

"Intuition is *you*—a function of you, just as imagination, logic, or any other functions are. Like the subconscious, it does withhold data from the logic department at times; but that doesn't signify a separate entity by any means.

"The exact nature of intuition is, of course, still a mystery to us. We've only discovered how to restore it



and use it to a degree. And like any other faculty, its operation can be improved and developed. What the top levels may be, we don't know; none of us has reached there, yet.

"You'll find there are some things intuition is not. Basically, it is a means of knowing things as they *do* exist, without particular recourse to the other senses, and relationships as they *are* and can be, without recourse to involved logic. Apart from this, it isn't a means of time travel to know everything that's going to occur in the future down to the end of your life. It *does* involve a considerable amount of prescience of the immediate future; but this fades exponentially as time increases the quantity of interlocking variables. It's one of our most valuable properties, however, and one which we're expanding rapidly.

"Basically, intuition seems to function on the premise of direct contact with the universe. We have to postulate a condition of no distance, and simultaneous contact with all portions of the universe at once, or at least at will. It's very complex, but we think we're on the right track."

"I'll take your word for it," said Bascomb. "One thing I'd like to be able to understand, however, is the viciousness of

the attacks on me back home. There was nothing normal about that; nothing I did could possibly explain it. The police ignored my requests for help, and vandals attacked my family at will. All because I defended an innocent man they wanted to kill!"

"No." Magruder shook his head. "Surely you don't believe the attack was result of your defense of Clementi?"

"What else?"

"That's one thing you *must* know, or one of the basic purposes of your coming has been lost. Look in your own mind and see if another reason is not apparent now."

**B**ASCOMB considered, and the illumination he'd experienced before seemed to burn slowly into brilliance again like a ripening sunburst. "Yes," he said, "I understand. Clementi had nothing to do with it. *They* thought Clementi was the reason; but actually they fought me because of what I'd tried to teach about intuition."

"That was it," said Magruder. "The fury of a statistical society breaking out at the appearance of its more desirable rival. You can't forget, surely, that men have always burned witches, and the few who found wisdom in their words. Prophets have al-

ways paid for their gift with their lives, in one way or another. Logic almost won; witches and prophets are few these days.

"You'll learn even more fully how dependence on Society inhibits a man's intuitive ability. You *have* learned that Society will fight Intuition, tooth and nail; it was absolutely necessary that you learn that lesson well."

"Why?" exclaimed Bascomb. "Wasn't the knowledge available intuitively, without going through this unpleasant experience?"

"DON'T MAKE the mistake of assuming intuitive replaces experience," Magruder said. "If that were true, we could become ascetics and spend our lives atop a high pole contemplating our belly buttons. Intuition serves to guide experience, not replace it. Intuitive knowledge that your neighbors would react as they did would not, of itself, have served to tear you from your statistical environment—without the actual experience of being subject to their reaction. It would have remained an academic matter, a further deterrent to your breaking away.

"Similarly, you might ask, if people can detect their own

need of insurance in advance, can they not change that need entirely? Can't they avoid accidents headed their way? Sometimes they can—if it is appropriate to their total optimum world-experience for them to do so. Other times they can only prepare to meet the experience in an optimum manner."

"But all your lecture students aren't going through what I did!"

"No—you're different because of what you are to become in this field. The others learn how to use it in their private lives, but they don't talk about it; their intuition teaches them how to keep out of such jams. Yours led you to it, because of the lesson you had to learn—because you had to know, first-hand, how your neighbors and friends could turn on you with cold, vicious, savagery because of this thing.

"YOU HAD to see Society mobilizing all the witch burning techniques accumulated over the ages, and realize these still exist; that science has not made them unnecessary, but is sometimes only a milder form of the same thing. You had to know that Society recognizes your possession as a death warrant for itself, that it will fight to

the death for its own survival.

"You had to know how truly Man has become poor, little rich boy, sitting in the midst of his wealth of Christmas gadgetry which has become abundant beyond his capacity to use it; and that inside, a slowly crumbling psyche is leaving him a hollow, eyeless shell which will collapse upon the heap of shining gadgetry when his last internal fires are dead.

"But I say logic *almost* won; the battle isn't quite over. Logic hasn't wholly dispelled the society of witches and prophets and sorcerers and soothsayers. Their company has been considerably augmented since our discovery of processes to restore intuitive faculties in spite of the social pressures against them.

"I started five years ago while still at the University. I recruited slowly and carefully, and all of my original people are still with me. We moved about the country later, working at random, developing our methods, improving our means of contact and sheer existence in a statistical society. You have encountered reports on some of our work, we are only beginning.

**"S**IX MONTHS ago, we decided on the experiment

of taking over a whole community. We chose Myersville because it already had a good stable foundation; you know our results. It's to be our headquarters for some time to come.

"The general public here is not in on the secret of what, precisely, has happened to them, you understand. They are simply aware that they have decided to change their way of life; that they became fed up with the old one and voluntarily decided to improve. It shocks them now when they go away for a visit. But we didn't do this. They did—after having experienced release of some of their intuitive faculties, which led them to cease their slavish dependence on Society.

"That's about the whole story to date. We're trying to recruit stronger men as time goes on. Our survey of your abilities showed you to be one of the strongest."

"How could you know that?" Bascomb demanded abruptly. "I was buried, literally buried—in the statistical mass I called living. Why, Sarah's intuitive bullseyes scared the daylights out of me!"

"We knew that—and we knew why. Your inherent endowment of intuitive faculties is so high that you had to

make a choice very early in life: bury them completely, or risk the terror of complete ostracism by the Society which would regard you as an enemy to its own existence.

"There's nothing shameful about that decision; it's the one the whole race made in the dawn of its life. It was particularly fortunate that you married a woman like Sarah, who already had some understanding and belief in her own intuitive powers. She will be a great help to us, also."

"You seem very sure we

will go along with you!"

"Do you suppose we would have gone to the trouble we did, if we lacked positive, intuitive knowledge of that fact!" Magruder asked in astonishment.

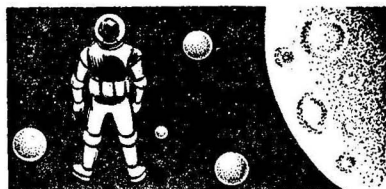
Bascomb smiled in understanding. There was no argument to offer; he knew the Professor was quite correct. He knew it in the most positive way a man can ever gain any knowledge.

He *felt* it was the way things ought to be.



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### "Who Goes There?"

by Randall Garrett

*(who also did the design)*

These parodies are perpetrated in the spirit of good fun, and no offense to either author or story is intended. In all cases, the author has seen the parody, and has approved, between gusts of laughter.

Here's a tale of chilling horror  
For the sort of guy who more or  
Less thinks being an explorer  
Is the kind of life for him.  
If he finds his life a bore, he  
Ought to read this gory story,  
For he'll find exploratory  
Work is really rather grim.

For the story starts by stating  
That some guys investigating

The Antarctic are debating  
On exactly what to do  
With a monster they've found frozen  
Near the campsite they have chosen,  
And the quarrel grows and grows, un-  
Til they're in an awful stew.

There's a guy named Blair who wants to r-  
Eally check up on this monster  
And dissect it. To his conster-  
Nation, everyone's in doubt.  
So, of course, he starts in pleading,  
And the rest of them start heeding  
All his statements, and conceding  
That the Thing should be thawed out.

So they let this Thing of evil  
Start to melt from its primeval  
Sheath of ice; they don't perceive a l-  
Ot of trouble will ensue.  
When the Thing is thawed, it neatly  
Comes to life, and, smiling sweetly,  
It absorbs some men completely,  
Changing them to monsters, too!

Now we reach the story's nub, ill-  
Uminating all the trouble:  
Each new monster is a double  
For the men they each replace.  
Since it seems a man's own mother  
Couldn't tell one from the other,  
These guys all watch one another,  
Each with fear upon his face.

And so then the men are tested  
To see who has been digested,  
And who's been left unmolested.  
But the test don't work! It's hexed!  
So each man just sits there, shrinking

## SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

From the others, madly thinking,  
As he watches with unblinking  
Gaze, and wonders—*Who Goes Next?*

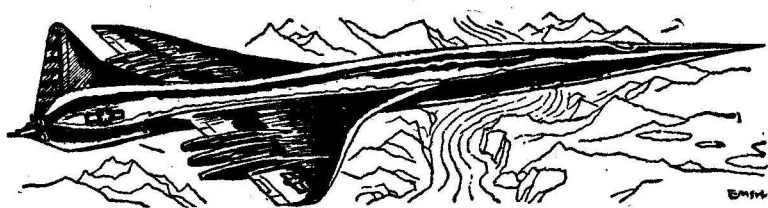
Now, they've found that executing  
Monsters can't be done by shooting;  
They require electrocuting,  
Or cremation with a torch.  
When they find these Things, they grab 'em;  
They don't try to shoot or stab 'em;  
With high-voltage wires, they jab 'em  
'Til their flesh begins to scorch.

So the entire expedition  
Eye each other with suspicion,  
For they're in a bad position,  
And there's no denying *that!*  
Now, to clear this awful scramble,  
The ingenious Mr. Campbell,  
Suddenly, without preamble,  
Pulls a rabbit from the hat.

Here's the way they solve the muddle:  
They discover that a puddle  
Of a pseudo-human's blood'll  
Be a little monster, too!  
With this test for separating  
Men from monsters, without waiting,  
They start right in liquidating  
All the monsters in the crew.

Thus, the story is completed,  
And the awful Thing's defeated,  
But he still was badly treated;  
It's a shame, it seems to me.  
Frozen since the glaciation,  
This poor Thing's extermination  
Is as sad as the cremation  
Of the hapless Sam McGee.





# WITH A DIME ON TOP OF IT

by ALGIS BUDRYS

illustrated by EMSH

*When it comes—if it comes—perhaps it will be something like this...*

**W**ELL, T. C. Norman thought to himself, they waited for it so long, and made so damn many preparations; but when it finally came it caught them flatfooted, like the man in the story about the bear.

He pulled up one side of his face in a wry grin and watched the horizon going up and down as the Air Force helicopter scudded across Missouri.

"Sir?" the pilot said in a tentative voice.

"Call me T. C.," he replied; "I'm just a stinkin' civilian. What's on your mind, son?"

"You just came down from

New York, didn't you?" the pilot asked politely.

"That's right. Flew down from Floyd Bennett Field on the Island."

"How is it up there?"

"It's not too bad," Norman answered carefully. "The Empire State's still up—which is as big a surprise to us as it is to them, I guess. And Holland Tunnel's open. No bridges into Brooklyn, but one of the Battery tubes held," he went on, before he realized that to this boy with the soft Texas accent, what he was saying didn't present any picture at all. What he wanted to know, really, was

how the war was going. "No, it's not too bad, except that nobody in the Air Force knows how to set the fuse on a Hydrogen bomb. Funny isn't it?" he said, knowing that to himself it wasn't funny, it was a fact of life.

"Nobody in the whole Air Force?" The boy was indredulous.

"NOT TOO many—not enough." Berger's face had been very careful when he had handed Norman his release from a minor job at Brookhaven; and the officer from Mitchell Field had been even more careful in his phrasing of the details that led through the tortuous niceties of Martial Law, and National Security Acts, to the inevitable conclusion that Thomas Craig Norman had been requested to give his one life for his country.

Now if they had only waited a month, Norman thought, the Air Force could have trained its own technicians, and I'd be alive day after tomorrow. But maybe it wouldn't have made any difference if they had; maybe there's a colossal system of debits and credits somewhere, and T. C. Norman just got a due bill, and this is only one of hundreds of ways it might have been paid.

This was the extent of his feelings in the matter. He was a man who had long ago learned to systematically fence his emotions away from his mind when necessary.

Remarkable foresight, that, he thought.

THERE WAS some rain coming down on the base, and the helicopter pilot—who was probably the most considerate helicopter pilot Norman had ever seen—edged his way under the B-36J's wing before he opened the hatch for Norman to get out. There was a small group of men beside the bomber's fuselage, and when they saw him one of them came walking toward the helicopter, keeping carefully in the shelter of the wing.

Norman reached back and took out his overnight bag. He moved clear of the rotors and then stood waiting for the man coming to meet him. The helicopter moved out from under the wing and flogged its way back into the rain.

The man who came up to him was wearing a soaked raincoat, and his eyebrows were thick with water. "You're the technician?" he asked.

"That's right, major," Norman replied. The officer took

his hand after inspecting it apparently for weapons.

"You're a civilian?"

"T. C. Norman." Just a little lower than the angels, major? he thought.

"Uh. Well—name's Brook—let's get over there with the rest of them. Crew'll be out of the Ready shack in a minute, now that you're here," the officer said as they walked toward the fuselage. "Don't know why we didn't expect a civilian. Your ground crew loaded the ship when we got the word from Keesler you were coming. They're civilians too," he added aggrievedly.

**STRUCK** by the oblique reference to the bomb, Norman chuckled. "You know, major, you remind me of a man."

"Do I? Who?" Major Brook asked with polite interest.

"This man who went out hunting for bear every season for twenty years," Norman said, watching the major's face. "Well, one day he came running home through the woods in a panic and collapsed on the front porch."

"What had happened to him?"

This is going to be too, too good, Norman thought. "He'd seen a bear."

The major's mouth half opened, then snapped shut. They reached the other men, all of whom resolved themselves into Air Force officers.

"I'm the plumber on this job," Norman said when he saw that Brook was in no mood for introductions. He looked at the group of officers noncommittally.

"The other men the Department sent out just finished—ah—working on the aircraft," a colonel said, apparently reconciled to civilian manners.

You too? thought Norman, and winked at Brook, who was looking at him uneasily and obviously hoping he'd resist this new temptation. The major flushed and looked away.

"You've been briefed?" the colonel went on. Norman nodded.

"How about the escort and refueling, colonel?"

"That's all been arranged," the officer replied, as if it wasn't any of Norman's business to slur the infallibility of Planning.

**THE TECHNICIAN** felt prompted to tell him to relax, but decided against it. "Wouldn't do any good anyway," he muttered.

"Eh?" the colonel said.

"Nothing, colonel, nothing. Just doing a little character

analysis." Let him puzzle over that one.

"Here's your crew," Major Brook said hurriedly. A blue jeep hissed up to the plane on the wet concrete and halted abruptly, the way jeeps always seem to stop. Three men jumped out of it, and two more got off the fenders.

"Can't see why you wanted such a light crew," the colonel said.

"It's enough to fly it, and gunners wouldn't be much help," Norman half-lied, looking at one of the men—a slim, long-legged fellow who was yelling to the jeep's driver.

Looks like a track man, Norman thought. I wonder if he's a track man because he's built for it or because he really likes it.

"Don't forget to ask Peggy to get me a date for Wednesday," the crewman yelled. Norman watched the crewman climb into the ship, and flippancy drained out of him, leaving the consciousness that it had actually been a warning signal from his badly abused nerves. Well, I have a sure cure for nerve disorders, Mr. Norman, he said to himself. Sure, Doctor Norman? Positive, Mr. Norman. He turned to the officers and remembered a line from a war movie.

"Anytime you're ready, gentlemen," he said, and

watched them climb in the jeep that had brought the crew and another one that pulled up on signal. He found himself listening to a wildly inappropriate voice in his mind that kept saying, "How do you know he's a track man?" all the time that the colonel was making motions with his mouth, so he never heard what the colonel said, but just stood there until the two jeeps pulled away, and then climbed into the plane and shut the hatch behind him.

THE CREW was waiting for him in the nose of the ship. He looked back into their curious faces and began to go into the motions he had determined on during the flight from New York to Keesler.

"My name's T. C. Norman," he said. One of the two pilots, the Captain, stuck out his hand.

"Ed Dougevitch. Charlie Jonas, our navigator, and Clint Maneville, radio." The two men said, "how" at the same time. "Jack Yark, sits next to me," Dougevitch went on, and the crew-cut lieutenant added. "And this is Cracker," the pilot finished. The slim man rode in the Flight Engineer's seat. A baseball cap was on the back of his

head, and his face, which was the color of oiled briar, bore a grid of weather wrinkles. He was the oldest man present.

It's only on a dark day, Norman thought, only in the rain, and only from a distance, that he'd look like a track man. "You guys have all been briefed, haven't you?" he said, wishing he didn't sound so much like the colonel, conscious of owing them a debt of which the Briefing Officer had made carefully sure they were unaware. "Being this is a rush job, I just thought I'd make sure," he finished irresolutely, seeing his answer from their faces. "Okay, then, we may as well get rolling."

**W**ATCHING the takeoff procedure, he visualized all the other planes on all the other hidden bases that were spotted around the country. He pictured the carefully coordinated moves that would provide tanker planes at well protected rendezvous, the cautious carriers with their escort fighters that were supposed to take care of opposition, the complex whole of the delicately machined plan that was guaranteed to put seventy-five percent of the planes now trundling into the air over their targets, but

none of this was his responsibility, and beyond this fleeting thought, he let his world contract until the B-36 encompassed it nicely. He had decided that that was what he would do, what he would think, and, as always, he found that this old device blocked off everything that he felt he should have been thinking, but didn't want to.

Afterwards he checked the bomb in the incongruously lightly loaded bomb bay, though he knew the ground crew, which was really a team of scientists, had left nothing undone, and then he piled some parachute packs on the deck and went to sleep.

**W**HEN HE woke up, Cracker was playing a guitar, sitting in front of his instrument panel in a high swinging seat that would have looked like a soda fountain stool if the two ends of the crash belt hadn't been hanging down from the pad. The belt was beating a broken kind of time with its buckles against the metal post that supported the seat. Every time the big plane hit a bump the buckles swung against the post; listening to Cracker's playing, Norman could not decide if he was actually playing in time to the double knocking or whether it was

just coming out that way.

"Hell with it," he said. Cracker looked up from the guitar. He kept moving his hands over the strings.

"Say somethin'?"

"I said to hell with it," Norman replied. His fingers in his pants pocket flipped a dime against the cloth, extracted it from his palm when it bounced back, flipped it again.

Cracker stopped playing. "To hell with what?" he asked with genuine interest. "To hell with this job, or to hell with the Air Force, or to hell with life, or what?"

NORMAN looked at him, wondering what made the crowfooted eyes in the leathery face widen. "Just plain ordinary the hell with it," he said.

"Oh. Say, what's that you're doing?"

"What?"

"That business with the hand in the pocket."

"That?" He glanced down at the pocket. "Matter of fact, I'm flipping a dime."

"Well, what is it, heads or tails?"

"Damned if I know. I never look."

Cracker shrugged.

Now what kind of a conversation was that for a Georgia man to make? Norman

thought. He talks like a character in a lousy movie. I thought these woodsmen were supposed to be the silent type. Hell, he *looks* like a woodsman.

He flipped the dime savagely, and reached his middle finger back into his palm to pull it back into position to be flipped again. "Where're you from, Cracker?" he asked stupidly, waiting for the incredulously scornful look on the man's face.

Cracker looked up casually. "Rockville Center, Long Island. Why?"

It just goes to show you, Norman thought to himself, it really does. "Oh, nothing. I was just wondering," he said, and walked disgustedly up to the front of the plane.

The two pilots sat in their greenhouse, bareheaded and wearing blue Issue jackets.

WHAT HAPPENED to the tailored leather jackets and the silk scarves and green sunglasses? Norman thought. When unification came through, did they march all of the Air Force past a certain point and have them drop the scarves and jackets and glasses in a pile? Was it one big conglomerate pile, or did they separate the stuff? How big was the pile, or how big were the piles? What did

they do with it all, what happened to the hats with the careful thousand-hour crushes? He almost asked them but Cracker began to tug on his guitar again, back in the throat of the plane, and he thought, I've already made an ass of myself one time too many today, so he asked "Where are we?" instead.

"The North of Canada," Lieutenant Yark said.

"Already?"

"Think you'd be in a hurry to get this done," Dougevitch said.

"Not particularly," Norman answered. Boy, you're really on the ball, aren't you? That's twice in ten minutes.

The dime, incredibly, bounced to one side of his palm, slid past it, and settled to the bottom of his pocket. He dug it out, fuming, and went back into the shadowy tube of the plane and went back to sleep again.

Cracker shook him awake. "Chow," he said, bending over Norman, his face hidden in the shadow of the plane's insides.

**THE PSEUDO - SILENT** man, Norman thought. "Thanks," he said. "Where'n hell are we?" He got up off the cluster of chute packs, standing awkwardly on the deck, the outer edges of his

nervous system still asleep, and zipped up his Ike jacket against the chill that the cabin heaters in even this specialized model couldn't hold off entirely.

"'Bout five hours away," Cracker replied, but Norman had something else on his mind. He was thinking about his Ike jacket which wasn't Issue, but a Field Jacket he'd had cut down way the hell back in '45. The jacket was badly worn now, with a button missing on one sleeve, so that he had to fasten that wrist tab on the outside button and unbutton it again every time he took the jacket off. It was his favorite jacket, just the right weight, not too warm, not too cold, and he always wore it.

Obscenity the Ike jacket, he thought. I obscenity in the milk of your Ike jacket which you have always worn, he thought savagely. "How far out d'you say we were?" he asked Cracker.

"Keeryst, I told you—five hours."

"Sorry," he said, "I was thinking about something else."

"Sokay. Come on, Clint's got some coffee and sandwiches."

Norman followed Cracker up to the small galley. The radioman and the navigator,



and Cracker and he stood looking out of the nose of the ship and chewing minced ham sandwiches. A shape moved in the air beside them, and he recognized a Northrup from the escort they had picked up over the Pole.

**T**HE FIGHTER moved away from them in an intercept pattern, and he saw it hung against a cloud before it disappeared.

"Nice looking, ain't it?" Cracker said.

Americans always build beautiful machines, Norman thought. "Reminds me of a car I had," he said. "A '50 Studey Business Coupe with a '51 Merc grille and Frazer rear fenders. I had a Continental rig on the spare and a folding hard top and windshield I designed myself. You know, I used to park that car in the yard and just walk around it and look at it, sometimes."

"Oh yeah?" Cracker said disinterestedly.

Sixty miles due east of Volgoda, three hundred miles away from Moscow, they began to lose altitude, though they still maintained the decoy course that pointed at Dniepropetrovsk. The fighter opposition, as well as some surprising high-altitude flak, became more serious.

Norman was standing behind Dougevitch when a weird-looking Ilyushin dropped a stick of proximity-fused frag bombs just too far away to do any damage. The pilot jerked back on his wheel suddenly, sending Norman staggering.

Dougevitch cursed, Yark looked up at the Ilyushin, which was being herded away by a Grumman from the carrier that had sneaked into the Barents Sea.

"Do you think they'll try to ram?" Yark said apprehensively. "God, I hope they don't ram. I heard about those crazy sons in the last war, ramming bombers." He turned to Norman. "D'you think they'll ram?"

"Shut up, Jack," Dougevitch said, and the lieutenant looked at him guiltily. Norman shrugged, but the lieutenant was no longer looking at him but was keeping his eyes on the controls.

**N**ORMAN WENT back to Cracker. "Got any more coffee?" he asked.

"Sure. Pour yourself a cup." "I heard you asking your buddy to get you a date for Wednesday," Norman said casually. Cracker looked up from his panel of instruments.

"Yeah, that's right. Why?"

"You're not engaged then,

or have a steady girl or anything?"

"No, I'm kind of a lone wolf, you might say. Most everybody back at the base knows that. Nobody in this crew's married—that's why we were picked for this job, isn't it?" he said frankly.

Norman nodded. "One of the reasons; I just wanted to make sure."

"Why?" Cracker asked. "It's too late to do anything about it anyway. If I was married or anything, I mean." He looked at Norman puzzledly.

"I've always kept my conscience as clean as possible, Cracker," Norman said quietly, put down the empty coffee cup, and walked back to the bomb bay before the other man could say anything. He stopped at the special hatch and plugged into the intercom circuit.

**E**NTER Scientist Norman from Stage Right, he thought. He said, "Norman to crew. I'm going to fuse the bomb. Norman to pilot. Under no circumstances drop to less than five hundred feet. This is an airburst bomb with an altitude fuse," repeating the phrases he'd been taught. What are you, Norman, a man or a phonograph? He unplugged from the intercom

and clambered through the hatch.

The bomb rested on a special rack, and he had to crawl over to it. Crawling, he thought. Here's where you should be thinking immortal thoughts. A man like you, Norman, should have some verbal summation in mind, don't you think? *Do* you think, Norman? Your mind is subdivided into so many compartments. Norman, you're a mental bureaucrat.

His hands went through the delicately intricate motions they had taught him at Brookhaven. The bomb became a living thing. The fuse was set, like the heart of a beast. "The heart of a beast," he repeated to himself. A fine expression, born of conscience and emotion. Forget it.

He began to crawl back to the hatch, then stopped, and, twisting clumsily, took the dime out of his pocket and, reaching back, rested it on top of the bomb. Keep going, Norman. Maybe you'll achieve a Gesture yet.

He crawled out of the hatch and walked over to the navigator's table. "What's our position, Charlie?" he asked.

"We crossed over Yaroslavl a while back. About a hundred miles outside of Moscow, I'd say."

"Okay. Give Dougevitch a course, will you? Time we stopped running around in circles."

WHEN THE navigator had given the pilot his data, Norman plugged into the intercom again. "Norman to pilot. Drop us to ten thousand." He unlocked the switch for the Thiessen bombsight. He put his hand on the red-painted knob in the panel above the navigator's desk. "Norman to pilot. Prepare for automatic control of aircraft." He waited a moment, then, "Relinquish control of aircraft." He closed the switch.

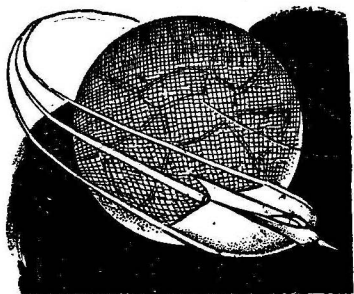
"Okay, boys, you can lock up shop now, the bombsight's flying this crate. Come on back to Jonas's table will you? I've got some news for you." Now that was a hell of a way to put it, wasn't it?

He leaned against the navigator's desk, his eyes going from one face to another.

Cracker looked back at him, and Norman's eternal curiosity got the best of him. "Cracker, what's your name?" he asked surprisingly.

"Bill Kroeher. Why?", and Norman found himself wondering why there were so many people that went around asking questions either with their voices or faces or minds.

"Nothing, Cracker," he said,



patting the pockets of his Ike jacket, his obscenity Ike jacket. "Anybody got a cigarette?" Stall, boy, stall till Doomsday. He took one of Maneville's cigarettes and lit it slowly. He looked at his watch.

"You men thought much about who we're fighting?" he said finally, and watched them look at him strangely. "Chances are, you think we're fighting Russians. Maybe we are, I don't know. But the Upper Echelon isn't fighting Russians, they're fighting Communists, which is something else again, or maybe it isn't, I don't know."

HE STUBBED out the cigarette and took a deep breath. They could all feel the drag of the opening bomb bay doors, and nobody said anything until the lurch came five minutes later.

"There goes the bomb," he

said. "It's an airburst job, like I said, and it's hooked to a small parachute." The other men looked at him in various ways.

"When they briefed me for this job, they were very careful to explain that this bomb can't hit just anywhere," he said rapidly. "It's got to hit the Kremlin dead on, and not some residential area five miles away. It's been aimed by a couple of tons of electronic machinery to make sure of that. But even electronic brains aren't perfect, so we went in low. They were very nice about it when they told me that, and they explained it

had to be done. According to their figures, we just might get away with it." He took another deep breath. "But I've worked on the bombs, and I know we won't. We'll be too close when the bomb goes off."

Their mouths opened, and they prepared to make their individual protests against the immutable.

"You knew it all the time!" Dougevitch yelled.

Yeah, I knew it. "Cracker, do you play your guitar in time to the banging of your crash belt bu—"



## Adventures in Space and Time



*Robert Randall*, a name you'll remember, leads off the issue with a novelet you won't forget—

NO FUTURE IN THIS.



*Robert Abernathy* is author of the story from which Emsh painted the cover —  
ONE OF THEM?



Plus other stories, and our regular features and readers' departments

## SCIENCE FICTION QUARTER LY

*still only 25¢ — May issue now on sale at all stands*

# INSIDE SCIENCE FICTION

Reports and Reminiscences  
by Robert A. Madle

## SCIENCE FICTION SPOTLIGHT

**N**EW<sup>S</sup> AND VIEWS: Although now in his 70's, Hugo Gernsback appears to be just as sprightly as ever so far as unusual ideas are concerned. His latest is a two-wheeled automobile, equipped with a gyroscope. The car, not much more than half as wide as today's average automobile, would be ideal for combatting heavy traffic and parking, and would be extremely economical for salesmen, doctors, and others who do extensive traveling alone. Gernsback's article appeared in *The American Weekly*, November 13, 1955.

These kids really do it up brown! The Chesley Donovan Science Fantasy Foundation (comprised of about eight or ten teenage s-f fans) recently obtained a 17 room mansion near Los Angeles and invited approximately 250 local fan and authors to an all-nite shindig. Among the attendees were

Jerry Bixby, E. E. Evans, Thelma Hamm (Mrs. E. E. Evans), Mari Wolf, and Forry Ackerman. These youngsters sponsored last year's *Westercon* also.

E. E. Smith fans will be delighted to know that Doc will soon devote his energies to full-time writing. At the recent Cleveland World Convention, "Skylark" Smith informed us that he is planning on retiring from his laboratory position in about a year, and will then be able to write many of the stories he's wanted to put down on paper for many years. His first will be a novelization of the "Vortex Blaster" series for Fantasy Press. This will be followed by a Kimball Kinnison novel. And after that—quien sabe? Perhaps even another "Skylark" story might flow from the facile pen of the daddy of the space-opera.

Commander Richard Byrd has been mentioned rather often in the news lately. Which makes quite a propos our recently-acquired

knowledge that Harold June, who was second in command to Byrd during the first Antarctic expedition, wrote science fiction rather extensively between the years 1928-1934. Oldtimers will fondly recall the pseudonym he used—Walter Kateley.

Hugo Gernsback's "Ralph 124C41 Plus" is finally being translated into German. It will appear complete in a future issue of *Utopia*. "Ralph" was originally published in *Modern Electrics* (April 1911—through March 1912), and copped twelve consecutive covers. Gernsback later reprinted it in *Amazing Stories Quarterly* (Winter, 1929). It also appeared in book form in 1925 (Stratford) and again in 1950 (Frederick Fell)... And an Argentine publisher has lined up twenty classics for reprinting, some of them being, "The World Below," "Odd John," "The Martain Chronicles," and "Gravy Planet."

Get your reservations in early for 1956's gigantic science fiction convention. It will be held September 1, 2 and 3, at the Hotel Biltmore, New York City. Arthur C. Clarke will be Guest of Honor, and hundreds of other celebrities will be there, also. \$2 will enroll you as a member, and entitle you to receive all progress reports and other convention news as it happens. Address: 14th World Science Fiction Convention, Box 272, Radio City Station, New York 19, New York.

### COLLECTORS' CORNER

TODAY'S science fiction reader often comes across references to rare and obscure books and magazines. Perhaps he overhears hoary oldtimers at conventions discussing the "good old days," and bandying about legendary titles as if they had been published only yesterday. Maybe he reads an advertisement, placed by a collector, for publications which are only segments of history to him. And, perchance, he may even hear the proprietor of a musty bookshop say, "Yes, I had a couple copies of that magazine sometime back. I remember that the fellow who bought them was a strange-looking guy, with horn-rimmed glasses...."

Well, even though contemporary readers have little chance of obtaining these rarities, it is felt they will be interested in knowing something about them. Therefore, from time to time, this "Collectors' Corner" will appear as part of ISF.

The appearance of Harold Hersey's article in the revival issue of Larry Farsace's *The Golden Atom* makes a discussion of *Miracle Stories* quite opportune. (See "Inside Science Fiction" in May, 1956 *Science Fiction Quarterly* for article on Harold Hersey and *The Golden Atom*.) As long ago as 1935 *Miracle, Science and Fantasy Stories* was advertised in *Wonder Stories* as "The most sought-after items in the field of science fiction collect-

ing." After twenty years they are still as eagerly sought by collectors and connoisseurs.

**T**HERE WERE but two issues of *Miracle Stories*: April-May and June-July, 1931. They were pulp-size, priced at 20¢, the initial issue containing 144 pages and the final issue 128. The cover and illustrations were by the then-unknown Elliott Dold and were excellent examples of mechanistic-imagination. (Dold was later to become *Astounding's* chief artist—1934 through 1938.)

Publisher of the magazine was Harold Hersey, and it was one of the so-called "Red Band" magazines. Elliott Dold and his now-deceased brother, Douglas, apparently handled the editorial aspects and, as a matter of fact, wrote the featured novels. Douglas Dold's "Valley of Sin" led off issue #1, while Elliott's "The Bowl of Death" was the novel in #2.

The magazine was obviously modeled after its contemporary, the Clayton *Astounding Stories*, for the action-adventure type of story was used exclusively. Appearing were such stories as Victor Rousseau's "Outlaws of the Sun," Arthur J. Burks' "Mad Marionettes," John Miller Gregory's "Fish-Men of Arctica," and "Revolt On Inferno," also by Rousseau. The novels by the Dold brothers were, incidentally, their only published s-f stories.

"A big surprise novel" was an-

nounced for the third issue which, of course, never appeared. It was only recently that we were informed by Forrest J. Ackerman that this "surprise" novel was Bob Olsen's "The Ant With A Human Soul," which was eventually printed in *Amazing Stories Quarterly*, Spring-Summer, 1932.

No one seems to know why *Miracle Stories* succumbed after two issues. Quite possibly it was because Hersey's entire chain of magazines rested on shaky foundations and, in fact, soon went under altogether. At any rate, *Miracle* is important in that it introduced, in Elliott Dold, one of the greatest of all sf artists to the field. And, despite its brief tenure, it has established itself as a collectors' item of paramount importance.

## RECOMMENDED FANZINES

**I**NSIDE and **S**CIENCE FICTION **A**DVERTISER (25¢ for a sample, 5 for \$1, from Ron Smith, 611 West 114th Street, Apt. 3d-310, New York 25, New York). Since *Inside* combined with *Science Fiction Advertiser* a year ago, each issue has been an improvement over the preceding one. Right now it is science fiction's leading general-interest fanzine. By "general-interest" we imply that the average s-f reader will find it thoroughly understandable and enjoyable. On the other hand, some fanzines are more personal and intimate and, unless you have been



an active participant in fandom for some time, it is probable that some of the material published in the "inner-circle" fanzines will be meaningless.

Two issues have arrived recently, one consisting of 60 multilithed pages, and the other a few less. Controversy is what Editor Smith features in *Inside*. Right now a battle is raging over "The Strange Business Attitude of the Science Fiction Industry," the title of Sam Moskowitz's timely, hard-hitting article. Sam decries the hard-headedness of certain editors in that they refuse to heed the advice of experts in the field who have only the best interests of s-f at heart. Sam, who has been penning analytical articles concerning modern science fiction for the past few years, has met with many rebuffs. However, recent events in the s-f field are vindicating him. (Many magazines are changing policy from so-called "modern" s-f back to action-adventure, sense-of-wonder type.)

Robert W. Lowndes replies to Moskowitz by agreeing that the sequence of events predicted by Sam *did* ensue, but not necessarily agreeing "modern" s-f precipitated these events. (Low circulation, magazines folding, general lack of interest.) Larry Shaw, editor of the new *Infinity*, agrees with Sam that any editor who ignores, or snubs, criticism offered by an expert in the field, "...is a downright fool." But *Galaxy's* H. L. Gold

(who is *really* Sam's target in his attack on modern s-f) starts off his rebuttal by stating: "The trouble with answering articles like this is that they're such a futile waste of time." At this point the few readers who are neutral shift somewhat in the direction of the Moskowitz point of view.

IN THE subsequent issue there are several other articles inspired by Sam's complaint. James Blish asks just what is this sense of wonder? "...perhaps he (Moskowitz) will explain it to me." Maybe this "sense of wonder" is something intangible, but it certainly doesn't defy explanation. Editor Lowndes does a remarkable job with his February, 1956 *Science Fiction Quarterly* editorial, "Wonderfulness." (Somehow, however, we faintly suspect that Jim could spell out "sense of wonder" or "wonderfulness" himself if he felt so inclined.)

Anyway, all of this is just a sampling of what goes on *Inside*.

**G**RUE (25¢ from Dean A. Grennell, 402 Maple Avenue, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin). Whenever the mailman flips an issue of *Grue* into our mailbox, we immediately grab it, sit down, and read it from cover to cover right then and there. It's that good. Grennell has a devastating sense of humor and, somehow, seems to obtain material for his magazine which compliments his odd personality.

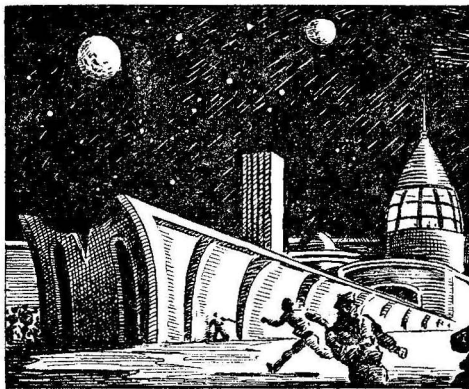
The outstanding article in issue #24 is Grennell's first installment of "The Fallen Mighty," which will recall, one at a time, the old single-character pulp magazines. (Like *Doc Savage*, *G-8 & His Battle Aces*, & *The Shadow*.) This time *Operator 5* is dealt with in detail. Ah! For the glory that was Rome!

Forry Ackerman writes some of the shortest book reviews of all time, and there is a report on German science fiction as well as "Grue's Home Workshop," which, in easy-to-understand language, tells you how to construct a Hand of Glory. All in all, two-bits worth of goodies.

*Fantasy Times* (10¢ for a sample from Fandom House, Box 2331, Paterson 23, New Jersey). FT is s-f's only newspaper, and is

now in its 15th year of publication. Issued twice a month, it gives you the news while it *is* news. This magazine features news on the professional level: lineups of forthcoming issues of s-f magazines; announcements of magazines commencing or ceasing publication; news and gossip columns loaded with interesting items about your favorite writers; scientifilm news; and analytical book reviews. *Fantasy Times* won the coveted "Hugo" at the 1955 World Science Fiction Convention for being voted the best fan magazine. Need we say more?

Fanzines for review are requested. Send them to Robert A. Madle, 1620 Anderson Street, Charlotte, North Carolina.





*Brilliance and ingenuity in attacking a problem aren't always enough.*

# PROJECT FLATTY

by IRVING COX, Jr.

*illustrated by EMSH*

**R**EX FELT vaguely annoyed—without knowing exactly why. There was no reason why he had to do this job; Rex had more important work to finish, though for the moment he had forgotten what that was. They had sent him to stop the

Flatties: that much he was sure of. But why? It was almost too easy; any moron could have done it.

Rex shifted his position to ease the strain on his cramped legs, and he was able to see a long stretch of dirt road which curved past his hiding place. In the distance the lights of the village were reflected from the low-moving clouds in the night sky. The icy mist was thickening. In another ten minutes visibility would be reduced to near zero, but long before that the Flatties would begin their drive against Freeport.

He knew the exact time when they would come; he knew they had to use this road. How he had come by the information he couldn't remember; the two factors were simply limiting elements in the problem.

Flatties? Abruptly that word bothered him. Rex didn't know who they were or what they were. He had a hazy idea that he had invented the word himself, in a totally different context. Now it was like the symbol of an equation; Rex was using *Flatty* to stand for something he couldn't otherwise define.

He was suddenly aware that he had forgotten a great deal; yet that didn't seem to worry him. After the Flatties

were disposed of, everything would straighten itself out when he went back to—to what? To the project? Somehow his phrasing wasn't right.

The idea of the Flatties should have frightened him; he knew he was supposed to be terrified. Yet he was deliberately ruling emotion out of his thinking, as if he were ashamed of it.

**S**UDDENLY, from the direction of the village, Rex heard the throb of many high speed motors. The Flatties were coming; in another three minutes it would all be over. The icy mist began to close down over the country road. Indistinctly Rex saw the huge, tear-shaped trucks. Made of a metal that might have been silver or aluminum, they gleamed with a peculiar iridescence. A wide panel at the front of each vehicle was transparent, but it was too dark for Rex to see any of the drivers. He still did not know who or what the Flatties were.

When the vans were fifty feet away, Rex cried out "Everything all right on your side, Marge?"

"Yes, Dr. Bannard; the lead car's almost over the trigger mine," she answered.

As soon as he had asked the question, Rex remembered

that Marge Laird was hiding across the road. She was his assistant. (On the project? The word still seemed incorrect.) Marge had, naturally been assigned to help him stop the Flatties. But until she spoke to him, Rex had forgotten she was there. More of that annoying amnesia! They must have given him a hypnotic drug so his mind couldn't function normally if he fell into the hands of the Flatties. (*They?*—and whom, exactly, did he mean by that?)

But Rex was sure the precautions were unnecessary; nothing could go wrong now. The first Flatty truck was about to cross the trigger mine and detonate the explosives which Rex and Marge had buried under the gravel surface of the road.

**T**HEN IT happened. The motor of the lead truck roared a little louder, and the glow of the metal brightened. The truck rose three feet in the air, skimmed slowly over the trigger mine, and floated gently back to the road again. As calmly and as matter-of-factly as that, the Flatties ignored the law of gravity.

The crisp, precise, emotionless voice hammered relentlessly at Bannard's mind, *you can't use the familiar tech-*

*niques to solve the problem. Think, Bannard!*

For the first time Rex felt real terror, as each tear-shaped vehicle played leap frog over the detonator mine. A mathematical impossibility; a logical absurdity—yet Rex saw it happen, and saw it with his own eyes.

Across the road Marge Laird was standing and shouting something at him. He couldn't hear what it was, because of the thunder of the Flatty engines, but he saw her face clearly in the glare. Marge wasn't afraid; her expression was unmistakably one of pure triumph. There was only one possible explanation: Marge had become a Flatty. Rex didn't know how it was done—but he knew that was how it always happened—suddenly and without warning.

The only thing he could do now was save himself. He sprang up from his hiding place and began to run blindly through the cold mist away from the road. The sky was pitch dark. He could not be sure of his footing and behind him he could hear Marge giving the alarm. The column of Flatty vans came to a halt; the whine of the big engines died away. For a moment there was silence.

The universe was muffled in thick, cold fog.

HE HEARD steady footsteps, the crunch of heavy bodies pushing through the underbrush. The Flatties were after him; Rex tried to run faster. Stubborn branches ripped at his clothing and lacerated his face and hands. Repeatedly he fell. The ground underfoot turned wet and swampy. The Flatties came closer. Once or twice Rex saw their search beams knifing through the mist; their soundless, efficient weapons tore savagely at the brush. Several times the death blast missed Rex by inches.

Ahead of him he saw the clear, ploughed field of a farm. He staggered toward the drier ground. His heart was pounding and his breath came in painful, burning gasps. Somewhere in the subconscious depths of his mind the voice whispered,

*You're too old for this; you didn't think about that part of it, did you?*

Think about it? What difference would that make? Did he have any choice?"

His vision dimmed in a red haze. He fell. Beneath his clawing hands he felt the ploughed furrows of the farm. The Flatties burst out of the forest. Rex heard

Marge Laird's voice, but he couldn't make out what she was saying.

Vaguely he remembered the Flatties passing him by while he hugged the wet earth. The search clattered away in the darkness and shortly Rex was engulfed again in the thick, timeless fog of silence. He tried to get up, but the strain had exhausted him; his legs refused to move. Half an hour passed, or perhaps longer. Rex lay in a stupor; he remembered the farmer finding him and lugging him to a bedroom in the farmhouse. Rex tried to talk, to gasp out a cry for help, but his voice died in his throat. When his body touched the mattress he slid into unconsciousness...

**T**HERE WAS unconsciousness and the fragmentary awareness of the past, a self that was like the scattered pieces of a puzzle. A disembodied voice said to him, you're our ideal choice, Dr. Bannard. You meet every qualification in training, intelligence, and creative genius; you have none of the inhibitions of tradition which so often hamper other men."

"I don't understand how you can say that."

"This Flatty idea, for one example—pure brilliance!"

"And it means nothing, ex-

cept maybe an overactive imagination."

"We're the judges of that, Bannard. Now remember the conditions: no one knows the enemy is here; you are required to work alone—with Miss Laird's help, of course, if you find a need for it. At the moment, the enemy is isolated in a village near the coast. Your specific problem is to stop them before—"

"I'm allowed to use any facility of science?"

"Anything. It's up to you, Dr. Bannard. Solve the problem any way you can."

"It should be easy. Very easy. That's why I don't see why you picked me—"

"Later on, your self-confidence will prove invaluable. Are you ready, Dr. Bannard?"

"I don't have much choice, do I?"

"None."

And then the dream was gone. Rex Bannard opened his eyes. He was lying on a high bed in a white-walled room, sterile and clean. Somehow it wasn't the sort of room Rex would have expected to find in a farmhouse, and that made him feel a little uneasy. Rex tried to get out of bed, but he was too weak to move. On his arm he saw four small wounds—punctures made by a hypodermic, sealed with a scrap of adhesive—and he realized that

his feeling of euphoria was drug-induced.

**I**T MIGHT be an acceptable, medical treatment, or the farmer could have become a Flatty—like Marge Laird. How was Rex to know? The Flatties—or, rather, the enemy which he symbolized with that term—were invaders of some type. Rex remembered that much out of his jumbled past. The Flatties apparently had a technique for taking over human beings against their will—killing off the human personality and using the body as a shield for themselves. That was what they had done with Marge, of course. He was entirely sure of his reasoning—yet he didn't know where or when he had come by the information.

Abruptly he remembered the job he had to do. It was up to him to stop the Flatties—to prevent the invasion. And it no longer seemed easy. The knife edge of fear stabbed deep into his mind. He realized that the more obvious weapons he might have used were valueless against the technology of the Flatties. Hadn't Rex seen their machines totally ignore the familiar principle of gravity? What else could the enemy do?

For a moment the nagging

fear made Rex feel that he was losing faith in every law of science. And he couldn't let that happen. It was madness. He had to hold fast to what he knew, without that; he was utterly lost.

**F**EAR DROVE him to action. After half a dozen failures, Rex was able to claw aside the white sheet and pull himself up against the headboard of the bed. His head swam when he swung his feet to the floor, but after a time the dizziness passed and he was able to stand.

He heard voices outside. Slowly he crept to the window. It was dawn. Mist lay in ribbons over the fields; the sky blazed red with the light of the rising sun. Directly below his bedroom window Rex saw the farmer and Marge Laird talking together.

"Tell them he's ready any time they want him," the farmer was saying. "Bannard can't get away from here."

"I imagine they'll see him tonight," Marge replied.

Rex heard the farmer chuckle softly. "I dare say they'll be to busy today, Miss Laird—taking over Freeport."

"The infiltration begins at ten."

"Fine. I wish I could see it."

Freeport was the Flatty

target—but Rex remembered that he had known that before. The name was familiar, at least in a vague way. He wasn't quite sure where he had heard it, but that wasn't important. Only one thing mattered: he still had time to save Freeport. He found his clothing in a tiny, white-walled closet and dressed with trembling fingers. The drug the farmer had given him made him feel light-headed, but the throbbing, mounting terror slowly dissipated the sense of giddiness.

It was easy for Rex to escape from the farmhouse—amazingly easy. Did they really want him to get away? Had Marge and the farmer deliberately let him hear what they were saying? It seemed to be so—and that made no sense.

**W**HEN HE came to the country road, he stopped running. He couldn't go any farther, just then. He leaned against a tree trunk; his legs went limp beneath him and he slid weakly to the ground.

In a tiny puddle left by the morning dew he saw his face—thin, haggard, sallow. His hair was crew cut; but lines of worry, etched deep around his eyes, made him look very old. Like a man in his sixties: and Rex knew he was only

thirty-one. He stared hard at the reflection. It was the face of a stranger, the twisted distortion of a nightmare.

Nightmare? Dream? He clutched frantically at what that word implied. It seemed tremendously significant—until a shattering blast of fear washed all rational thought from his mind.

He sprang up and began to run again. The country road, twisting through the forest, suggested a painting by a nineteenth century romantic, moody and sullenly lit with gloom. It had the same museum silence, the same subtle lack of reality. No wind stirred the trees; no bird moved in the branches; no forest animal scurried through the underbrush; and the road was utterly deserted.

Nearly breathless, his heart hammering, Rex forced himself to walk again. He couldn't run any longer, and he realized it was foolish to give way to such headlong terror. He had to conserve his energy; he had plenty of time to work something out before the Flatties attacked Freeport.

**H**E TRIED to evaluate logically everything he knew about the Flatties. First, he was sure they represented an enemy of some



kind. Not a human enemy, either, because their technology derived from no human science. What a non-human enemy might be, however, he refused to visualize, even in the quiet of his own mind. He knew, too, that the Flatties represented something so terrible that military action against them was pointless: all news of the attack had been suppressed. He remembered a phrase he had heard somewhere, "...and you alone can help, Bannard; no other scientist has a chance..." The rest of it was lost in the chaos of his forgotten past.

Scientist! That term clamored for attention. His mind leaped with hope, for he had stumbled upon more of his own identity. He remembered that he was Dr. Rex Bannard, an international authority in his field, the author of a dozen books, the director of a fabulous project in—in what? He fumbled desperately for the pushbutton words, the clues that would unwind the dark thread farther, but he had lost it again.

Then, abruptly, the voice came again, *Apply all the science you know, Bannard. The point is, you need a new science, a new technique, a totally new method...*

He refused to listen because he refused to accept what the

words implied. Rex found himself running again. He didn't know how long he had been streaking down the deserted road. Ahead he saw the church spires of Freeport, and the flowing hills, shimmering like gold in the sunlight. He reached out for the village, as if he could take it in his hands and drag it free from danger. And the muscles in his chest and arms exploded in an agony of exhaustion. The pain lashed at him, dragging him down. Then he was floating, motionless, paralyzed and helpless. He realized, with a kind of detached surprise, that he had collapsed at the side of the road. He felt the fatigue creep through his body. Nothing mattered—not really. He closed his eyes.

WHEN he regained consciousness, he was again in the small, white-walled room, so antiseptically clean. For a moment Rex thought the Flatties had taken him back to the farm. But he raised himself on his elbow and he saw that he was in Freeport—an emergency hospital, probably. Someone had found him by the road and brought him here.

Through the open window he could see the village courthouse and the main street, crowded with shoppers. The

church clock was clearly etched against the blue sky; the hands stood at nine-fifty. In ten minutes the Flatties would make their attack.

Ten minutes! Rex heard, far away, the high whine of the Flatty vans and he tried to drag himself out of bed. Dizziness overcame him and he collapsed, panting, on the floor. He opened his mouth to call for help, and no sound came through his cracked, parched lips.

And if anyone heard him, what could he say? How would he make them believe him, before it was too late? He had been sent alone to stop the Flatties. No one else knew about the invasion. If Rex failed, mankind was lost.

Failed? How could he succeed? What was he supposed to do?

He heard the church clock begin the stately tolling of the hour. The throb of the enemy motors was so much closer the floor beneath Rex began to vibrate. Desperately he reached for the bedside table—reached and missed. When he made a grab for it a second time, the table overturned, spilling the contents of two drawers on the floor.

**A**ND AMONG the litter, Rex saw a pistol. He took it in his fingers; he saw that

the gun was loaded. Painfully he dragged himself toward the open window. He reached for the sill and began to pull himself up. On the walls of his room he saw the darting patterns of blazing light, and he knew the Flatties were using their efficient, silent weapons.

Then the bedroom door swung open. He saw Marge Laird standing in the hall. Marge, a Flatty prisoner, with no surviving trace of her own human personality: she was the full symbol of Bannard's terror. Like a robot she moved toward him. He pointed the pistol at her and pulled the trigger—pulled it twice.

In her forehead and in her neck he saw the two death wounds; for a moment the blood welled out—and that was all. The wounds ejected the lead slugs and became whole again.

Thus Rex saw the second physical impossibility. Like the first, he knew it had to be an illusion, a trick of hypnotic drugs. To save his sanity, Rex held firmly to one conviction: no one could do what he had seen the Flatties do. It was the only logic he believed in. Since what he had seen was impossible, then it followed that he had not seen it. By the same reasoning, it

hadn't really happened; nor did the Flatties exist.

Bannard's fear dissolved. He could no longer resist the clawing waves of emotional exhaustion. And now it didn't matter. He knew the truth; he had found his way out of the labyrinth of terror. Who was the invader?—who were the Flatties? The flimsiest dream shadows. Abstract symbols from an academic pipedream. Rex was entirely certain of that, for he had invented the Flatties himself.

**H**E REMEMBERED exactly when it had happened. He was at the university club with half a dozen colleagues. From the project? (What project? That word still did not ring true, but he convinced himself that was because there were a few minor details he still couldn't remember.)

Like many brilliant thinkers, Rex Bannard had always been impatient with the slow-moving methods of science. "From our earliest infancy," he said, "we're shackled by an orientation which we inherit from the past. Euclidian geometry, Aristotelean logic, Roman law hobble our thinking and limit the area where we permit ourselves to be creative."

"The limitations of Aris-

totle's either-or logic are obvious," someone answered. "But Euclid? How can an elementary and obvious theorem of geometry restrict the creative imagination?"

"By arbitrarily setting up value standards for both architecture and art. Even the most modernistic and non-objective painters fill their introspective canvases with squares, and circles, and triangles. They revolt against what they define as reality, but they never think of revolting against Euclidian lines. Because of Euclid, we think exclusively in terms of three dimensions."

This provoked a ripple of academic laughter, which might have been uproarious except for the restraints imposed by scholarship. "Then you're suggesting, Bannard, that our three-dimensional mathematics is not accurate?"

"Nothing of the sort; it is merely limited. Why stop at three dimensions? A fourth or a fifth—"

**M**ORE laughter—far less restrained.

"Was Einstein amusing," Bannard demanded, "when he proposed that time was another dimension? How can we visualize what he meant while we're still shackled to this three dimensional point of

view? What we need is a totally new kind of education, so our young people can learn to think for themselves. I don't mean an isolated college course, but a series of courses, from kindergarten through the graduate school—courses designed to force us out of this absurd three dimensional thought pattern. We must learn to visualize problems from multiple points of view. We can't do that in terms of Aristotelean logic, for Aristotle gives us no inbetween categories separating his logical extremes. In order to achieve the—well, let's call it the learning environment which is necessary to this new kind of education, we would have to use hypnotic drugs and possibly—”

“You'd actually drug a child's mind, just to make him believe a lot of absurd hocus pocus about fourth dimension?”

“No one is now able to teach a fourth dimensional point of view. To make my idea work, I would reduce the field to two dimensions, a flat universe without thickness, a good math teacher could teach that. The point is, the child must learn to think from the orientation of both two and three dimensions; then, on his own, he could break our cultural shackles

and learn to handle other dimensional realities.”

“Have you gone all the way with this nightmare, Bannard, and invented sham people to fill up your sham world?”

“For a valid learning experience, you have the illusion of reality. Yes, I have thought of people—Flatties, I'd call them. And, to make the problem more acute, I'd picture these Flatties as invaders of...”

**F**LATTIES; invaders! The voices trailed off and the two words turned, like shrill echoes, through Rex Bannard's mind. He had most of the pieces, now. He could put his shattered memory together and make himself an integrated person again.

He opened his eyes. He lay once more in the antiseptic, white-walled room. Earlier that morning he had imagined it the bedroom of a farm; later it was a hospital room in the little village of Freeport. Now he thought he knew the truth: the room was a university laboratory.

Part of the project, of course. The term still didn't ring any bells, but logically nothing else was possible. This was the project—a drug-induced nightmare—and Rex had been the volunteer. An experiment to discover a new

way of thinking, shock treatment to free the human mind from the Euclidian-Aristotelean heritage. Bannard was sorry the experiment had failed.

And it had, obviously. The terror hadn't forced him to find a new way of thinking; instead he had broken free of the hypnotic spell.

MILDLY curious, he began to examine the sterile, white room. If this was a project he had helped set up, the room should be familiar; and it wasn't. There was a single window. It opened on a village square—and the village he recognized. In his hypnotic trance he had called it Freeport.

But the dream had not been real! Neither the town nor the Flatties existed outside his own mind. He couldn't be seeing it now—

Abruptly, booming inside his mind, he heard the familiar voice, the voice which had created and dominated his nightmare.

"You are a brilliant man, Dr. Bannard; you can contrive magnificent subtleties with semantics. You have made just one small mistake: you didn't quite find the correct reality. True, you were part of a project, but the project was ours—not yours. You

were the test case; the fate of mankind was literally in your hands. We reasoned this way: If you could free yourself from your scientific absolutes and solve the problems we created for you, then the earth was too dangerous for us to invade. But instead of solving the problem—or even attempting to solve it—you named us 'Flatties', and then you invented a verbal logic to argue us out of existence. The word, dear doctor, is not the thing it names; but as long as you humans convince yourself that it is, you represent no challenge to us. We can now procede according to our original schedule. You have a nice, clean little world here, Bannard; but unfortunately for you, it's a world we need for ourselves."

Cold with horror—and this was no horror derived from a dream—Rex Bannard jerked upright in the bed. Through the open window he could see the main street of Freeport; and, as he had before, he heard the purr of the approaching enemy machines. He cried out, but no one heard his screams, for the street din was still louder. The soundless, efficient enemy weapons cut ruthlessly into the panicking mob.

*There was nothing wrong with the invention—except that it was about the last thing any Martian could need or want.*

# THE DESSICATOR

by ROBERT SILVERBERG

*illustrated by LUTON*



MIRNISH brought the machine into the other room, where Scrodlee was busily bent over the ledgers, and sadly put it down. "I've finished it," he said. "You can start Promoting."

Scrodlee leaped to his feet. "Antigravity! You have it! A marvelous feat, Mirnish, marvelous! This redeems all of your old blunders."

The inventor sat down heavily and caressed the small green box with his tentacles, looking at it with rue. "No. Not so, Scrodlee; I'm sorry, but I didn't quite invent antigravity this time."

Scrodlee contemplated his partner with a cosmic patience born of long experience. "You finished it, you

say and you were working on antigravity. But you didn't invent antigravity?"

"No."

The Promoter spoke slowly, choosing his words with care. "Then—w h a t—did—you—invent?" He looked expectantly at the other, remembering a long history of Mirnish's inventions.

MIRNISH assumed a humble countenance. "I seem," he said, "to have invented a Dessicator." He waited for Scrodlee's reaction, and it was not long in coming.

"A Dessicator?" the Promoter repeated, standing up and beginning to pace up and down the little room. "That is just in line with some of your

other things. You mean a machine that dries things out, don't you? Just what we've all been waiting for—here on Mars, the driest planet in the Galaxy, if not the Universe, what does Mirnish the inventor invent but a—a *Dessicator!*!”

“I'm sorry, Scrodlee,” Mirnish said; “I was trying to—”

“I know. Forget about it. We're in a pretty bad way and I can't afford to let this go to waste.” He picked up the green box. “We've got an invention here, of a sort; there must be some use for it somewhere.” He pointed to the ledger. “We'll have to make the most of it. And I'm not Scrodlee the Promoter for nothing; if we work it right we can make millions on this thing yet! How does it work?”

“I don't know,” Mirnish said. “I just put it together, using standard coordinates and all, and it—it dessicates. Say, look: perhaps we could go—”

“Some inventor,” Scrodlee interrupted. “First he invents something completely useless, and then he tells me he doesn't know what it is. There are times I doubt my sanity, Mirnish; with all the inventors on this planet, whom do I promote? Mirnish.”

“I'm sorry, Scrodlee. But maybe we could take the Dessicator to—”

“**Q**UIET; I'm thinking. How could we find some use for this thing of yours? Perhaps the Grangs could use it; let me check.” He stretched a tentacle up for a reference book, pulled it down from the shelf, and thumbed rapidly through it. “Umm. Guess not; they prefer to dry their victims themselves. Just as well; I hate dealing with them.”

“Scrodlee.”

“Yes, Mirnish?”

“Shut up. I have an idea I've been trying to slip in here sideways.”

“You have an idea!” Scrodlee laughed. “You have an idea? Well, genius, let's hear it.”

“Look. The Dessicator is worthless on Mars—everything is dessicated enough as it is. But on Earth—why, they're flooded down there. Two thirds of the planet is water! The humidity, the rain, everything—it makes me shudder. It's a miracle they don't drown in their own atmosphere. *There's* a natural market for the Dessicator; they'll snap it up, and we'll be doing a service to Civilization as well.”

Scrodlee's eyes lit up with

a familiar gleam. "You're right. Get your things together, Mirnish; you and I and the Dessicator are going to go to Earth. I'm not Scrodlee the Promoter for nothing!"

**THEY ARRIVED** on Earth in due course, having booked third-class passage on the fourth-class liner *Edworm*. They put down outside the New York spaceport and Scrodlee procured a hotel room in the heart of the sprawling metropolis, grumbling about the outrageous rates.

Some judicious string-pulling, combined with the fact that they were Martians, got them an audience with the President a few days later. Scrodlee had insisted to Mirnish that they should start at the top in their campaign to market the Dessicator.

Scrodlee led the way into the big room, and Mirnish followed, carefully cradling the Dessicator under his end tentacle.

"You have seven minutes," said an officious-looking secretary.

"You're a busy man, Mr. President," Scrodlee said rapidly to the tired-looking chief of state, "but I think we've hit on a device that will turn your country into a Mar—

pardon me, into a Paradise on Earth."

Briefly he explained the purpose and function of the Dessicator. The President examined the green box, turned it upside-down, shook it, covertly photographed it with his wristcam just in case it might prove valuable, and handed it back to Mirnish.

**HE LEANED** back in his chair. "Martian science is indeed a wonderful thing," he pronounced. "Our brothers of the elder planet are skilled in the ways of the universe."

"We realized the importance of the Dessicator immediately," Scrodlee said, "and took it straight to you; we knew you could use it."

"Sorry," said the President. "We can't; we don't have any use for it. If we removed humidity we'd offend a big chunk of farming people. We'd end up having to balance it by seeding clouds to produce rain. Take away one, give the other, where's the percentage?"

Scrodlee frowned. "But Earth is such a *humid* place," he protested; "the Dessicator would remove that excess humidity and make it a livable planet."

"We find it quite livable," the President said curtly. He stood up. "You'd be wise to



keep such opinions to yourself. Mr. Scroggly. I'm afraid I don't have any use for your machine—but as a friendly tip, why not try some other country? Look in on one of the South American countries. It's pretty sticky down there, and maybe you could dry things out a little for them."

A FEW DAYS later found the Martians in a white marble palace which housed the dictator of a small republic whose name Scrodlee never did manage to catch. He explained the Dessicator to the tall, much-decorated dictator, whose name Scrodlee likewise could not make out. he sat in silence, listening to Scrodlee's salespitch, his fingers folded daintily as if in prayer.

"No," he said when Scrodlee finished; "never. Take your machine out of my country immediately."

"You can't use it?" Mirnish asked meekly.

"Certainly not! It would mean my life. Follow this picture, please: humidity goes down, banana crop fails. Banana crop fails, the Norteamericanos do not buy. They do not buy, we have no money. So we raise taxes to support the government. We raise taxes and we have a revolu-

tion and I am hung from lamppost. So I must say no. You would overthrow our entire economy and we cannot allow comfort to come first. It would be nice to have cooler country, but I am much too important to my nation to allow myself to be overthrown so."

Mirnish looked at Scrodlee, who looked back.

"Not at all?"

The dictator mopped some sweat away with an elegant handkerchief. "No; not at all. I suggest you take your invention back to your native planet."

"I guess we'll have to," Mirnish said.

"Maybe one of the neighboring countries—?" Scrodlee suggested.

"I doubt it," the dictator said. "But you may try."

Scrodlee made a farewell gesture and exited, pushing Mirnish in front, wondering where to turn next.

THEY RETURNED to New York after a fruitless visit to the east coast of Africa, where the tribal chieftain regarded them somewhat less than favorably. Disillusioned, they returned to their hotel suite and, tentacles drooping, waited despondently for something to happen.

They stared at the green

box of the Dessicator sitting on the table.

"Let's go back home," Mirnish said. "Why not admit it: I failed; I invented something completely useless. So let's throw it away and I'll get to work on antigravity again."

Scrodlee stiffened with pride. "I'm not giving up so easily. I'm not Scrodlee the Promoter if I'm going to throw away a valuable invention like this; We'll stay here till we sell it."

Scrodlee contacted a few other buyers without success; most people just laughed at the thought of Martians inventing a Dessicator. They never left their apartment, and found it necessary to use the Dessicator at all times in order to maintain a livable atmosphere. A week passed, with Mirnish complaining bitterly about the soup that the atmosphere was—even with the Dessicator in action—and Scrodlee was becoming more and more convinced that he had finally come up with something that defeated his promoting skills.

He was about ready to give in when, one morning, a young man knocked at the door, and, when Mirnish opened it to see who was there, he entered.

"I'm Dennan. Reporter,

*New York Cosmos*. Been some strange stories coming from this place and I want to check. Lord, it's dry in here!"

"It's the action of the Dessicator," Mirnish said. "It keeps us able to breathe." He explained the function of his invention.

Dennan looked hard at the Martian. "So *that's* it! You guys have been causing it after all. People drying up, groceries crumbling, grass turning brown on the penthouse. Excuse me, please." And he dashed out, exiting even more abruptly than he had entered.

"What was all that about?" asked Scrodlee, coming in from the other room. Mirnish told him. "Wonder what it means?"

**THEY FOUND** out the next morning when the *New York Cosmos* dropped through the telechute and into their living-room. Mirnish, who followed the newspapers with considerable interest, unfolded the front strip and began to scan it. Suddenly he gave the equivalent of a whistle and shouted for Scrodlee to come in.

"Look at this!" He held out the paper. The big red headline said:

## MARTIANS PLOT NY DOOM

Underneath it was a story which began:

A daring *Cosmos* reporter yesterday uncovered a Martian plot to turn New York City into a desert. Two Martian agents have established themselves in New York armed with a machine called a Dessicator which is responsible for the present drought and also for the curious reports of "dried-out" people in midtown New York, earlier believed to be a mysterious new epidemic.

The story continued on in that vein for almost two columns.

"Why, they're crazy!" Scrodlee exclaimed.

"They may be right, though," said Mirnish. "I never did test the field of the Dessicator. We may be Dessicating all of Manhattan by leaving the machine on."

**S**UDDENLY a rock came crashing through their window. Scrodlee ran to the broken window, coughing a little at the thick Terran air pouring through, and looked out.

There was a mob milling around the street, shouting

imprecations and waving fists.

"Some inventor," Scrodlee said; "the people of Earth are yelling for our scalps."

"We don't have scalps," Mirnish said.

"Shut up; they want blood. We have to find some way of getting off this crazy planet without touching off another interplanetary war. You and your useless inventions!"

Another rock came hurtling up from below and bounded off the side of the building.

"What are we going to do?" asked Mirnish.

"Sweat it out, I guess; shut off your damned Dessicator, anyway."

**T**HE VISIPHONE chimed. Mirnish ignored it, but Scrodlee ran toward it and snatched it up. Mirnish walked to the window and stared glumly out at the milling mass of people in the street below.

Scrodlee began talking excitedly into the 'phone, and Mirnish watched almost with interest, unable to hear what he was saying because of the noise from the street.

When he hung up he returned to Mirnish with a triumphant look on his face. "What now?" Mirnish asked. "When you deal with Scrodlee, you deal with a

*Promoter,*" he said. "Everything's all right; One of my contacts came through and I sold the Dessicator."

"What? To whom?"

"You'll see. He was the last man on my list, but he wants it. I explained our predicament, and he's going to evacuate us by helicopter and take us to where the Dessicator's going to be installed. We'll be whisked right out from under the nose of that mob down there."

"Let's go up there and get them," a stentorian voice from below roared.

"When's he coming?" Mirnish asked anxiously.

"Any minute now; get your machine packed up, and get ready to leave."

They waited tensely as the yelling of the mob increased. Finally there came a rapping at the window, and they saw a helicopter hovering outside. It drew close and they cautiously opened a window.

"Suppose it's a trap." Mirnish whispered.

"Shut up."

A well-dressed, dignified gentleman came through the window.

"Mr. Henceford?" Scrodlee asked.

"That's right," he said in a deep, rich voice. "Owner and operator of the Universal Vineyards. Your machine is what I've been looking for for years. Looks like I just made it in the proverbial nick, I guess. Get into the copter before this mob breaks loose and we'll fly out to my place and arrange terms."

MIRNISH and Scrodlee returned to Mars the following day, considerably wealthier; Mirnish again set out to conquer gravity, while Scrodlee spurred him on and kept careful watch to see that nothing went wrong this time.

As for the Dessicator, it's now busily employed in the heart of a deserted part of lower Nevada, pouring forth its dessicating rays day and night without end.

Turning grapes into raisins.





# THE LAST WORD



## NOT ALONE

Dear RWL:

Bob Silverberg's letter in the January *Science Fiction Stories* has struck me in a sensitive spot. I, too, had read Eric van Freibaut's letter blaming "fat writers" for a certain decline in the quality of science fiction lately. It was a cruel blow, but I sighed a sigh, and bled quietly in a corner till it healed. Now with the scar new-formed, Silverberg reminds me. True, he defends fat authors and every word he says in the letter strikes me as very valid.

And yet I must defend myself. I'm a science-fiction writer of sorts, and while I hate to say I'm fat, people are always reminding me that I'm rather plump. They even spell it f-a-t, but that's just their bad manners. And what with a caricature of me (among others) appearing on a *Galaxy* cover once, and Sprague de Camp calling me "stocky" in "Science Fiction Handbook", and people seeing me at conventions (and hardly being able to see anyone else, what with my corporation in the way)—everyone must say to himself "Fat writers?

He must mean Asimov."

This puts me in an exposed position. Aren't there any other fat writers to stand staunchly by my side and take the bow with me? There's Randall Garrett and Jim Harmon, but who else? Good God, men, are you all skinny, measly creatures? Is there no one of you fat with good living, sleek with four-figure-checks, greasy with instantaneous acceptances, slobbered over with editorial grins—What, all hungry?

Well, I'm hungry, too. All the time. That's why I'm fat.

Incidentally, do you know why Randy Garrett is fat? You don't? Well figure out the calorie content of a Martini. (Forgive me, Randy.)

ISAAC ASIMOV

*Ah, that lucky lucky Asimov—who can be both fat and hungry at the same time, and possibly for the same reason!*

## DEFENSE

Dear Editor:

Thanks for sending me proofs of the letters from Messers Brown

and Frazier in time to reply in the same issue, if I chose. Lack of time made it impossible to take advantage of your consideration—and, anyway, it's only fair for them to have had an inning all to themselves, as I did myself.

The letters you have run in "The Last Word" so far have answered my objections better than any direct reply could have done. However, on reading the communications you sent me, I spent a little time in the attic rummaging through a pile of old magazines to see if I could find a sample of the type of letter I had in mind when I wrote in objecting to a letter department.

To my embarrassment, I found what I was looking for, found some hair-raising samples of the type of asininity I feared I might encounter in "The Last Word"—but they weren't in the letters (in the issues I uncovered, at least); they were in the editor's comments! Now, I know I've read fan letters as nauseating as the Sergeant Saturn material—but haven't any documentary evidence handy. In any event it no longer matters.

To those readers who did not consider my general observations as personal attacks upon *them*, or their dearest friends, as did Messers Brown and Frazier—to judge by their anguished replies—let me say that I was exercising my franchise as a reader to enter my vote on the subject. It's a relief to find that at least one other reader real-

ized what I was talking about, and that I had grounds for my doubts. The charge of being a "professional fan hater" is one which I must deny (despite the temptation to keep silence and allow the impression to stand), since no one has offered to pay me for such activity and I haven't the time to perform the service gratis.

As for Mr. Frazier's opinions of me, they leave me in a state of indifference bordering on the supernatural; however, Master Ron, let me thank you for a bit of doubtlessly unintended amusement.

LEWIS BARROW

*A letter department in a science fiction magazine is juvenile to a repulsive degree only when the editor wants it that way, or doesn't care, or can't tell the difference.*

WELCOME MAT

Dear RWL:

A Simak lead novelet is always welcome, and "Full Cycle" struck me as being right up there with his best. However, others have probably told you this already. I want to welcome the return of Morton Klass, whose far too infrequent appearances tend to blur the fact that he is a fine writer in his own light, and needn't take a back seat to his brilliant brother, William Tenn. Hope you'll get some more by him soon.

JERRY CANDLER,  
Rangeley, Maine

*I hope so, too.*

## COMEBACK

Dear Editor:

Although I've been an avid reader of science fiction for the greater balance of my life, I've sort of drifted away from it during the past year or so. Today I felt the old addiction nudging me again, so I went out and made a purchase, namely *Science Fiction Stories*.

I've read only Damon Knight and the letters, as of this moment, but felt moved to tell you that this fellow Damon is a demon with the

reviews. I enjoyed them immensely. After finding a reference to him in almost every letter, I realize that my praise is lugging coals to Newcastle, but lug 'em I'm gonna!

I shall go back to reading the stories when I end this letter, and hope that the main course is worthy of the appetiser.

PEGGY KAYE

Hyde Park, Mass.

*Here's hoping, Peggy; and you'll find reviews by Knight in Science Fiction Quarterly and Future Science Fiction, too!*

## Nothing If Not Personal

(continued from page 1)

the sole provocation of a bad performance, and will only be appeased by good performances." And further: "They may feel this to be diabolically unfair to them whenever they have done the very utmost that existing circumstances allowed them; but that does not shake me, since I know that the critic who accepts existing circumstances loses from that moment all his dynamic quality. He stops the clock. His real business is to find fault; to ask for more; to knock his head against stone walls, in the full assurance that three or four good heads will batter down any wall that stands across the world's path. He is no dispenser of justice...to be just to individuals—even if it were possible—would be to sacrifice the end to

the means, which would be profoundly immoral."

It is because he adhered to these principles that George Bernard Shaw's music criticisms make lively reading today, even though we encounter individuals therein who may be no more than names to us. (And often not as clear as that.) And the basic tenets Shaw stated, although he laid them down in reference to music and musical performances, are valid for science fiction performances—books and stories by science fiction authors.

There are critics, then, and there are reviewers; and while every critical performance is a review, few reviews are works of criticism.

If you want reviews, you will find them in the newspapers and

in other magazines; *this* magazine tries to publish criticism.

The purpose of a review is to indicate to the reader the general classification of the book in question; to whom it seems most likely to be of interest; and—except where a given example seems just *too* inept—to help sell books and boost reputations.

The purpose of traditional literary criticism is to assess the worth of a work of fiction, or non-fiction, through: (a) determining the intent of the work; (b) determining to what extent the author has succeeded; (c) noting both failure and success in the performance—and showing, in part, the whys and wherefores of both, and (d) forming a value-judgment on the work as a whole, based upon the findings in (a), (b), and (c).

**D**ETERMINING the intent of the work would seem to be so obvious a requisite of the critic's operation that I needn't mention the point. Yet, an astonishing number of seemingly-literate reviews show that no such attempt has been made by the alleged critic. Pages of eloquence have been written, for example, about Ray Bradbury's contributions to the pages of science fiction magazines; but these adulators obviously have made no effort to find out whether the intent to write science fiction was present—if they have thought of the question at all. Yet, anything

more than a casual reading discloses unimpeachable evidence that Bradbury had no such intent. Science fiction can be based on many things, but not upon ignoring science. (This is quite different from temporary ignorance of specific scientific facts. It isn't that Ray doesn't know that his Mars is scientifically impossible; it is merely that he doesn't care). Few readers who objected to my dissents upon Bradbury's work in the past noted my attempt to distinguish between Bradbury as a skillful writer (which he is) and as a science fiction writer (which he is not).



**I**N SCIENCE FICTION, we are dealing with a particular branch of popular art, mostly written for periodicals which have a short period of distribution and must enjoy quick sales; or presented in books on a trade publisher's lists which, while having a longer cur-



rency than any magazine, are generally not expected to "move" for more than a year or so. (Pocket books are indeterminate; some are displayed year after year, while others disappear from the market almost as quickly as a given issue of a magazine.)

There is, then, a wide variety of intent, ranging from works which try to do no more than tell an interesting story to what science fictionists generally consider the highest form of the art: tell a story that, as Chad Oliver puts it, is capable of making people think—that is "ablaze with ideas, with questions, with philosophical discussions in fictional form", rooted in the frontiers of modern science.

The purpose of determining the intent of a work is not dispensing justice to the author. Nor is it merely to avoid blaming him for failing to do something he had no intention of doing, just as you would not complain that your new car didn't wash laundry well. Rath-

er, it is one of defining and stating standards by which value-judgments will be made. Since we are dealing with art, not science, the facts set forth will be of a different order than those presented as proved and provable by scientists. They will include reports upon what an author said in his story, subject to verification by consulting the text. But criticism consists of the critic's statements about implications and value-judgments derived from these verifiable reports.

Such statements constitute opinions which have force in proportion to the consent of those who read the critic's findings. They are always open to argument and revision—unlike scientific facts which, if factual, remain so regardless of opinion. No one is obliged to agree with or to pay any attention to the critic.

**I**N THIS sense only is the comeback: "Well, one man's opinion is as good as another's," a valid

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one, when an author or reader does not agree with a given critic's judgments. The comeback is valid for the man who makes it; it means that he has not given his personal consent or assent. It is *not* valid in respect to criticism as a whole, which, while admittedly not based upon scientific fact, is nonetheless based upon long-range and wide *areas of agreement*. The task of criticism is to constantly state and define these areas of agreement, and at times to redefine and enlarge them. To the extent that a given critic can illuminate such fundamentals to a reader, he is fulfilling his appointed task; he is increasing that reader's capacity for comprehension and enjoyment. What little the critic takes from the reader through convincing him that what he might formerly have considered as "great" to be of little worth, the critic restores a hundredfold through assisting the reader to discover vistas and values heretofore unknown to him.

There is no question of coercion, for the critic has no way of influencing anyone who is entirely content with his present opinions and does not want to reconsider or change them. Such a person may reject, for example, a critic's statement that Edgar Rice Burroughs' "John Carter" books are utterly worthless as science fiction, although they offer a fair amount of enjoyment as adventure stories. He may also reject the judgment that these books are not "great" adven-

ture tales. But the critic is not writing for this person. If he discusses the John Carter books for the purpose of showing the difference between Burroughs' fantasies and true science fiction, or the difference between enjoyable stories of this kind and "great" adventure tales, then he is writing for those readers who are willing to be shown these differences.

And since Burroughs never intended these stories to be any more than they are, the critic will note this intent and note further that Burroughs achieved his aim; he produced a series of novels which hold the attention of the reader who is willing to entertain the fantasies for the sake of enjoyment. The critic will not abuse the author for his aims, nor disparage his success so long as it is not represented falsely—puffed up as "great art" or "lasting literature" by ignorant and/or malfeasant enthusiasm.

THE CRITIC needs to *understand* existing circumstances even though he should *not* accept them. Existing circumstances in the realm of science fiction writing insure that the overwhelming majority of science fiction produced in any given year will be no more than enjoyable reading, at best. Whether any critic—or all the critics combined—can bring about any change for the better in these circumstances is irrelevant. It is the critic's job to analyze and object to

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existing circumstances in the publishing world which prevent a writer from doing his best work—just as much as it is his job to state mercilessly and clearly when, where, and why an author's latest published work is less than the author is capable of. There's always the possibility that, with sufficient and proper goading, the author will, the next time, achieve the best of which he is capable, despite then-existing circumstances. (If he does, however, the odds are that he won't thank the critic who nagged him into it.)

**W**HILE SHAW concentrates upon the negative aspect of the critic's duties, he does not mean that the critic is not supposed, ever, to like anything or to praise anything. In practice, Shaw does not withhold praise when he is "appeased by a good performance"—nor does any other worthwhile critic. At times, he will brush aside minor faults he admits are present when he feels that a work's

virtues are so strong that the fly-specks on the cathedral windows do not matter.

This may seem strange to readers who are accustomed to see Shaw, Knight, and other critics, bellowing with eloquent fury at what appear to be very inconsequential details. But the critic is constantly trying to educate the audience to the realization of just what type of "trifles" make the difference between perfection and worthlessness, and what type of "trifles" do not mar an achieved *near* perfection. Being human, the critic will be more tolerant with some types of fault than others, and more generous with his tolerance at one time than another.

Fiction is an art-form, not a branch of the sciences; it is a personal matter with the writer. It is also a personal matter with the reader, and the critic *is* a reader.

The critic, then, is *not* a machine designed to find flaws; he is a reader whose tastes and standards are necessarily more discrimi-

nating, because his profession is based upon a wider acquaintance with the field in which he is criticizing—and a more intense study and understanding of that field and of literature in general—than is shared by most of his audience. This, by the way, is a description of the critic which is true by definition, in that the person who does not so qualify is *not* a critic—even though numerous persons call themselves critics, or are represented as critics, who are by no means qualified.

**W**HETHER his qualifications should include creative experience of his own remains a moot question. Ezra Pound, one of the outstanding critics of the century, advised readers and writers: "Until you have made your own survey and your own closer inspection you might at least beware and avoid accepting opinions (1) From men who haven't themselves produced notable work (2) From men who have not themselves taken the risk of printing the results of their own personal inspection and survey, even if they are seriously making one." ("ABC of Reading").

Berlioz, for example, was a perceptive music critic as well as being an outstanding composer. Baudelaire's art criticisms are highly regarded, although he was a poet, not an artist. Shaw, of course, wrote no music. Pound himself wrote notable poetry along with his criticisms. However, the point

seems to be that worthwhile criticism is itself notable—which, of course, it is. As in every other branch of literary pursuit, the indifferent and bad far outweigh the worthwhile in quantity.

**B**UT BECAUSE art is a personal matter, and the critic is devoted to the art in which he operates, he *cannot* be impersonal about it. And I think a final quotation from Shaw will be relevant: "Never in my life have I penned an impartial criticism; and I hope I never may. As long as I have a want, I am partial to the fulfillment of that want, with a view to which I must strive with all my wit to infect everybody else with it."

Thus, the science fiction reader who really cares will feel hurt, insulted, indignant and shocked when he reads a story he considers unworthy of the magazine—and is very likely to write a hot letter to the editor forthwith. Such letters, especially from younger readers, are rather amusing to the more sophisticated members of the audience. But the fact remains that the outraged reader in question has the instincts proper to a critic, even if not the other necessary qualifications. And the older reader who has not gone through such a phase, who has not, in less discreet days, written such letters to an editor, is perhaps more to be pitied than the rash youths are to be censured. R.W.L.





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